

“Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.”

— Thomas A. Edison

The Shillong Times

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Will 2016 herald new beginnings?

MUCH of last year was wasted on trying to address the predicament unleashed by the Meghalaya High Court ruling of December 2014, prohibiting the Rangbah Shnong from usurping the executive duties of the state administration of issuing certificates to establish the bonafides of residents within their localities. The Rangbah Shnong had got used to giving certificates of good conduct or withholding such certificates from certain residents thereby creating a sense of unrest and unease. With one stroke of the pen the High Court debarred the Rangbah Shnong from using their arbitrary powers, by virtue of which, many of them became quite powerful and a law unto themselves. Many futile hours thereafter were spent on trying to reinstate the powers of the Dorbar Shnong and its office bearers and in restoring it to its previous stature. But so far everything has been a vain attempt. Using the plea of tradition the Village Administration Bill was prepared by the Khasi Hills District Council which even on cursory reading smacks of a regressive and communal overtone and intends to take Khasi society back to a constructed past so that it can march to a bright (?) future. This is an oxymoron! We live in a modern democracy where we should be trying to bring in elements of civic governance that is all encompassing and which should include all members of the locality in a participatory decision-making process. But the KHDC appears to be caught in a web of its own making.

The Councils are created to safeguard the customary practices and traditions of the tribal members of the society. That's the cultural aspect and its fine! But tradition cannot be forcefully woven in with civic governance. Tradition has nothing to do with road construction, water supply, sanitation et al since every human being needs to use the same kind of roads and water is supplied in localities via pipes connected to a storage tank. That water is supplied to all residents and not only to the tribals. Sanitation is common to all and everyone – tribal and non-tribal. They generate the same kind of garbage hence civic management is common and must include all residents. The Dorbar Shnong is not just an arbiter between tribals. If there are non-tribals in the locality they too should be administered justice by the same Dorbar. There cannot be two different standards in the administration of a locality. A democratic country cannot support such dualisms and the argument that Meghalaya is a Sixth Schedule State is an overstretched argument. The tribes already have reservation in education and jobs and wield political power. How much more power and protection do they need and up to what point? These questions need courageous answers but will any of the political leaders have the courage to answer these questions with the frankness that is warranted?

On that note we at The Shillong Times wish all our readers a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

LOOKING BACK

February 13, 1988

Custom raid in Shillong

A Customs raid in search of the premises. “Super Bazar” They also searched the departmental store in G.S. Road area of Shillong on June 20 has unearthed contraband goods worth Rs 4.50 lakh. Acting on a tip off, the officers of the Customs & Central Excise cordoned off the shop and undertook thorough

They also searched the residence of the owner and all employee and detected electronic goods, including video cassette recorders, television sets, video camera and gold biscuits bearing swiss marks. A case has been registered against the offenders.

CBI Raid Leads to AAP Fire on Jaitley

By Atul Cowshish

The CBI raid on the office of the Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, reportedly in pursuit of allegations against Rajender Kumar, his principal secretary, has led to an all-out war between the Aam Admi Party and the Union Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley, who is among the more fierce warrior of the Modi government and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. He is ever ready for a battle with the opponents and loves to launch incendiary attacks on the Opposition. He not only believes that aggression is the best defence but also that one should never appear to be meek and humble or appear embarrassed by one's own statements in the past.

After Kejriwal fired his initial shots at him, Jaitley refused to answer the charges hurled at him by Kejriwal or his party because they were based on ‘falseness’. He followed it up by issuing himself a re-sounding good character certificate which was duly endorsed by the top leadership of the BJP. How can anyone richly endowed with ‘impeccable integrity’ be questioned?

Jaitley may deserve the good words that his party says about him. But what is missing from his calculation is that his opponent in the present context is Arvind Kejriwal, a self-confessed ‘anarchist’ who can excel Jaitley in using superlatives against opponents.

The Modi followers are yet to recover from the shock that Kejriwal administered on them by calling the prime minister a ‘coward’ and a ‘psychopath’, forgetting that the adjectives used in the past for some of previous prime ministers by BJP leaders were much stronger and poorer in taste.

There are precedents when persons with ‘impeccable’ records have had to face serious allegations that have led to their downfall even when the charges were not upheld in a court. The verbal joust between Kejriwal and Jaitley may not lead to the downfall of either. But both may see a dent in their image as claimants of high morality and probity in

public life.

Kejriwal will appear to be in a bigger danger of that. He rose to fame and power on the crest of the Anna Hazare-led India against Corruption movement. At its height the movement was seen by everybody as a big public push against the disease of corruption.

Then came a setback when Kejriwal ‘betrayed’ the movement by floating a political party (Aam Admi Party) despite opposition from Hazare. Kejriwal's decision could have surprised only those who had refused to accept that IAC was formed not just to wage a war on corruption but to oust and replace the ‘corrupt’ gov-

ernment by ‘honest’ men and women.

As the supremo of his party, Kejriwal has only followed the unwritten but accepted rules of political parties which require, among other things, displaying the traits of the three monkeys when facing serious allegations—hear no evil, see no evil and speak no evil.

he describes as the face of the central government, has not impressed many of his followers in Delhi who see it as an uncalled for spectacle when his energies should have been focused on giving Delhi a good administration and, of course, rooting out corruption. It is arguable if he has made much impression in either field.

Kejriwal's return fire may appear to be misdirected but, as they say, everything is fair in love and war, more so in political wars in contemporary India. He could not be expected to sit silently as the ‘caged parrot’ flies out of its captivity into his office. It has been reported that during the raid the CBI had closed access to the entire floor in which

is situated the office of the Delhi chief minister.

Kejriwal picked up Jaitley as his main target and brought in the issue of Jaitley's not-so-distinguished tenure as the boss of the Delhi and District Cricket Association. He has grown louder with the claim that an unnamed CBI officer has told him that the government at the centre was gunning for all the non-BJP chief ministers and Opposition leaders. Recent events, including raids by the CBI and tax departments, would suggest that Kejriwal's allegations may not be entirely baseless.

Arun Jaitley's self-claimed holiness does not absolve him of the charge that he had failed to clean the mess that has been accumulating in the

DDCA for years. For close to a decade he was the head of this body, a private enterprise, which hosts big and mega revenue churning cricket matches in Delhi. Jaitley cannot say that he did not know that allegations about various kinds of fraud have been cropping up in the DDCA.

That all is not well within the DDCA was once again in sharp focus when Delhi nearly lost a Test match a few weeks ago. The match was conducted under court orders. Jaitley may no longer head the DDCA but the reasons (non-payment of taxes) for which the court intervention became necessary go back several years in the past.

One of Jaitley's party colleagues and a former Test player, Kirti Azad, says he wrote 200 letters to Jaitley, when he was the DDCA president, about the various allegations against the cricket body.

Is Azad considered a ‘fringe element’ within the BJP who talks out of turn? Now that he has been suspended he has been firing on all cylinders to the delight of Kejriwal and the Congress. Anyhow how can Kejriwal be faulted for choosing his target when the ruling party, according to him, has declared a war on him? Questions that only time will answer! (*Syndicate Features*)

Come December and we start to make different resolutions for the upcoming New Year so as to bring a new ‘dawn’ in our life! But each and every New Year see all things coming back to square one within a few days or at a maximum of few weeks! It seems resolutions are meant only to be broken! Moreover, a feeling of frustration creeps in when we fail to maintain the resolutions. So instead of making resolutions for 2016, we can take refuge in memorable quotations of 3 eminent authors and poets.

“If you cannot do great things, do small things in a great way” --- Napoleon Hill.

“Every moment is a fresh beginning” --- T.S.Eliot

“Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start now and make a brand new ending” -- Carl Bard.

If we adhere to these three messages and concentrate in performing our duties sincerely, provide utmost value to each moment of life and strive for a better future instead of lamenting over past faults and deficiencies; 2016 will automatically turn out to be a year of achievements.

Yours etc.,
Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata – 114.

Political delicacies

By Nora Chopra

RAJNATH DIFFERS WITH JAITLEY ON ISSUE OF CLEARANCE TO SUN TV

The Sun TV which has been denied security clearance can sell its ownership to Anil Ambani owned Reliance division. The Sun TV which is the market leader in South India and its radio channels under the brand name of Surya FM in Tamil Nadu and Red FM in other cities that is owned by the Maran brothers Kalanidhi and Dayanidhi are under tremendous pressure from the home ministry to change the ownership of the Sun TV or will not be granted security clearance. The decision to deny security clearance was based on considerations of adverse impact on economic security. The denial of the security clearance is said to have been given because of the criminal cases pending against the Maran brothers. Maran brothers are facing a CBI probe over the alleged allotment of 300 high speed BSNL telephone lines to the residence of the former communication and technology minister Dayanidhi Maran in Chennai which were extended to his brothers channel. Then there are two more criminal probes against the Sun TV network and its owner Kalanidhi Maran - CBI's Aircel Maxis Case and an ED case of money laundering. Meanwhile this denial of security clearance to Sun TV has raised differences between the home ministry and the I&B ministry. The I&B minister Arun Jaitley had written a letter to the home minister Rajnath Singh to reconsider the decision and the secretary of the I&B ministry Bimal Jhulka had also sent a reminder to the then secretary of home ministry L C Goyal. This move of the MHA has also been contradicted by the attorney general of India Mukul Rohtagi.

RAJNATH DIFFERS WITH JAITLEY ON ISSUE OF CLEARANCE TO SUN TV

RAHUL GANDHI UPSET WITH PRITHVIRAJ CHAVAN FOR HIS REMARKS

Rahul Gandhi is extremely upset with the former chief minister of Maharashtra Prithviraj Singh Chavan for his recent utterances against him despite the fact that he was designated as CM before the assembly elections against all opposition from the state leaders. The state leaders had warned the high command that unless Chavan is replaced, the party cannot win in Maharashtra. But despite this soon after the Congress lost the Lok Sabha elections, Chavan was among those who put the blame of the defeat on Rahul Gandhi. This week too Chavan has criticised Rahul for his role in parliament. But these utterances against Rahul are being seen as a result of being sidelined. Chavan has been lobbying hard to get a post either as PCC chief or leader of the opposition in the assembly. But this would be against the popular sentiment within the rank and file of the party in the state. The state leaders are extremely opposed to him being elevated as they blame him for the party's defeat in Maharashtra. Chavan is totally isolated in the assembly. He comes alone and goes out alone without a single MLA standing by him. He made the nine times MLA from Karar to vacate his seat for him. But though he was the CM he did not canvass for a single candidate. As a result he does not have a single supporter in the state.

SHARAD PAWAR RATTLED AFTER ENFORCEMENT RAID AT BHUJAL'S HOUSE

Sharad Pawar is nervous. His statement giving clean chit to Arun Jaitley is only a volte face of his previous position after the ED attached property worth 110 crores of the then NCP PWD minister Chagan Bhujbal. The move of the Fadnavis government is being seen in retaliation to the NCP's recent anti BJP moves in the just concluded assembly session in Nagpur. The NCP during the just concluded session of the Maharashtra assembly in Nagpur had stalled the proceedings of the house for nearly one week on the farmer suicide issue. Soon after Bhujbal's house was raided and then his property worth 110 crores has been attached. But more than this, it is the ED's move to open cases against Pawar's nephew Ajit Pawar who was deputy CM in the previous Congress led government that has rattled Sharad. (*IPA*)

SHARAD PAWAR RATTLED AFTER ENFORCEMENT RAID AT BHUJAL'S HOUSE

SAJJAN JINDAL IS THE LINK BETWEEN MODI AND SHARIEF

The track-two diplomacy between India and Pakistan is being done not by any diplomat or a politician but by an Indian businessman Sajjan Jindal, the elder step brother of the former Congress MP Naveen Jindal who is implicated in the coal scam. The recent surprise trip of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Lahore to wish the Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on his birthday and attend the marriage of his granddaughter Mehruunnisa too was organised by Sajjan Jindal. Sajjan Jindal who was

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TO THE EDITOR

Evaluating a wasted year

Editor,

So much time and energy is wasted on workshops and talk shops in Meghalaya but what actually are the outcomes from such conferences/ seminars/workshops? Does anyone ever wonder? And more importantly does anyone even care to do a social audit of all these activities. Recently Sri Sri Ravi Shankar made a mention of the dirt and filth in the city of Shillong. It no longer shames us that someone should make such a remark. There is an active Art of Living congregation in Shillong and elsewhere in the State. Why have they chosen to remain silent over these remarks of their Guruji? Are they planning to launch a cleaning drive around Shillong and particularly to give a facelift to the Umkhrah River? Or have they forgotten Sri Sri's public exhortation on December 15, 2015?

If cleanliness is next to godliness then we have succeeded in driving away the gods from city. Police Bazar is a big mess with hawkers spilling out on to

the streets and leaving the mess behind in the evening since there is not even a semblance of regulation. It's a free for all here. How can any city survive without regulations about how garbage is to be removed by those who generate it? We seem to have lost our moorings completely and we dare to celebrate the New Year with rock bands et al when we don't even have the responsibility of doing anything for Shillong. Come on people wake up. This city is not just about music, song and dance. Let's get real and clean up the mess! That's the best way to welcome 2016!

Yours etc.,
AJ Malngiang,
Via email

Subsidizing the rich

Editor,

The decision to deny LPG subsidy to those who have taxable income of more than Rs 10 lakh annually is welcome. However, the saved amount which is going to be Rs 432 crore per year should be spent on social security. Ours is a ludicrous system where the

bulk of the subsidy is dished out to the creamy layer. Amartya Sen said, "Reading the papers and hearing broadcasts, you would think that it is subsidy for the poor- food and employment- that strains India's public resources, even though more than twice as much public funds are spent in subsidizing the better off." In India, the money does not trickle down from the rich but pumps up to the rich until they vomit it to some foreign banks. The whole subsidy should, entirely, go to the poor instead of a thin one third slice as they are getting now. It will improve India's poor standing in Human Development Index (135th-dwarf at present!). If the lot of the majority of our population is improved then it will certainly increase their purchasing power which in turn gives a huge fillip to our market and Indian economy as a whole.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

New Year resolutions

Editor,

The world of sport was full of surprises in 2015. From Cricket to Boxing, some reached a new high, while others had a disgraced run. **Sudipto Maity** looks back in wonder

From Pink ball Test to Sania, Saina glory

Pink Ball Test - a special for day night Test matches to ensure visibility - was the high point for Cricket, the IPL scandal marred it all. The Boxing world was too buzzing as Manny and Mayweather squared off for the match of the century. For India though the real delight came in guise of Vijender Singh, as he jabbed his way past his opponents to keep a clean sheet. Tennis and Badminton reached a new high, with Indians raking up the top spot, both women, Sania and Saina. Hockey faithfuls were overjoyed by the Azlan Shah bronze and the Rio Olympics qualification. There were other incidents too.

Cricket great team game they played.
The ICC Cricket World Cup: Hosted and won by **Australia's**



Australia, this edition of the World Cup witnessed some crazy actions. From 5 wicket hauls to double centuries, the 2015 edition was nothing short of a spectacle.

Gayle's storm: Chris Gayle, often criticised for his tendency to throw his wicket away, did not disappoint his critics apart from this one instance, as he took on the Zimbabwean bowling and tore it apart. In a group stage match, the big Jamaican finally came to the party, hoicking almost every ball for a six, thus scoring the first double hundred in the world cup. Gayle's 215 was a 'gayle's storm' that blew away the African nation.

Guptill's coming of age double century: For long, the Kiwi dressing room spoke about the special talent of Martin Guptill. Earmarked by their batting coach Craig McMillan, the prodigious Guptill took long to launch himself, but boy! He did it in some fashion. At the receiving end was West Indies and Gayle, who almost a month earlier smashed Zimbabwe for a double hundred, felt some pain. Guptill went hammer and tongs to register an unbeaten 237, the highest score by an individual in a World Cup match.

Team India's surprising show: Long before the 2015 World Cup even started, pundits were wary of India's performance in the bouncy Australian pitches, but little did they know that Dhoni and his Men In Blue meant business. The long Australian summer tour proved useful beyond bounds as they not only won all their group matches, but also did the unprecedented by defeating South Africa by a huge margin. Though they reached the semis, all the players contributed equally, thus proving the

homecoming: It indeed was homecoming for the hosts as they defeated their co-hosts New Zealand on the night of the Big Final. Michael Clarke had the best adieu moment, became the 4th Aussie skipper to lift the major ICC silverware as Australia celebrated its fifth world dominance.

Other significant events

The IPL: As the controversy-marked IPL rolled into its eighth year, it was filled with topsy-turvy moments, topped with some unexpected performances, both good and bad. In a high voltage final Chennai Super Kings lost to Mumbai Indians, who won it for the second time.

No CSK, RR; Rajkot and Pune join the fold: Soon after the 2015 IPL was over, which was declared corruption free, there were talks about teams getting suspended and the inevitable took place only months later. As CSK and RR were suspended from the league for 2 years, New teams from Rajkot and Pune were granted permission to play in the league for 2 years.

Jagmohan Dalmiya passes away: One of the best



known cricket administrators, Jagmohan Dalmiya passed away on Sept 20, aged 75. His funeral in Kolkata was attended by thousands, who flocked in numbers to pay tribute to the



cricket boss.

Richie Benaud no more: The Cricket world lost one of the finest voices on the morning of April 10, when 85-year old Richard 'Richie' Benaud passed away. He was diagnosed with skin cancer.

AB's devilish batting: There are few who can make the bat talk, AB can. After Corey Anderson broke

spin friendly tracks. Jaddu's 'jaadu' bamboozled the visitors as they were unable to pick his turners, as he mostly deceived them with straight balls.

The Kohli era starts: Mahendra Singh Dhoni retired from Test cricket in 2014 and the baton was handed over to Virat Kohli. The Delhiite impressed one and all with his aggressive captaincy Down Under but the real 'Test' started from the Sri Lanka series. Kohli in his aggressive best, lost the first Test in Sri Lanka, chasing a small total the team was bowled out and conceded a 1-0 lead in a 3 match series. Just when the chips were down, Virat stood firm to bounce back

and finally in the midst of the Ranji season announced the big news.

The Cricket All Stars: This was one starry affair in the US. Sachin, Sourav, Lara, Ponting, Laxman, Sehwag, Saqlain, Kallis, Walsh, Ambrose, Akram, along with the other stars (30 of them) teamed up in an effort to globalise cricket and played 3 T20 matches in the USA. Looking at the retired greats of the game was wonderful, but what took the cake was Kumar Sangakkara's flawless batting. The just retired star made everyone questioning his decision to retire from International cricket. Other highlights were the Lara-Warne rivalry. The

'Pink ball' Test: History was created in 2015 when Australia and New Zealand squared off for the first official Day-Night Test match at Adelaide, Australia. Though Australia won the Test match and it barely lasted 3 days, the large turn out of spectators were indeed healthy signs for the sport. Also, the massive swing that the pink-ball generated later at night is a thing to look forward to.

Football Aditi's Great show: Indian national Women's team goal-keeper Aditi Chauhan had a great year 2015. The 23-year old made history by signing in British soccer club West Ham



Tendulkar-Warne rivalry and Shoaib and Wasim Akram bowling at fast pace.

United Ladies, therefore becoming the first Indian player to play in top division (Contd on P-VII)

By Sayan Mukherjee

Sania Mirza personified Indian tennis in 2015 with a stupendous rise that catapulted her to the tip of the women's doubles rankings and also become the maiden countrywoman to win a Grand Slam.

Two women's doubles titles were evidence of her growing stock in the format, which she was forced to concentrate on after an injury-induced retirement from singles in 2013.

Her association with Swiss great Martina Hingis, forged in March, formed the basis of an unstoppable juggernaut as they complimented each other perfectly to win an astonishing nine titles, a fairytale journey adorned with prestigious victories at Wimbledon and the US Open.

They teamed up in 16 events and enjoyed an overwhelming 55-7 win-loss ratio with a 22-match unbeaten hard court streak. The astounding success won them legions of fans who lovingly branded them "SanTina".

The Indo-Swiss collaboration capped off a memorable year with a triumph at the season-ending Women's Tennis Association (WTA) Finals in Singapore, also winning at Beijing, Wuhan, Guangzhou, Charleston, Miami and Indian Wells.

The Charleston victory propelled Sania to the top of the doubles rankings. It was their third successive trophy together and gave impetus to the Hyderabad

When Sania made the year her own



to monopolise the top spot in rankings.

SanTina was named as Women's Doubles World Champions by the International Tennis Federation (ITF) for 2015.

Sania began the year brightly, claiming the Sydney International with American Bethanie Mattek-Sands in January. She bagged 10 women's doubles trophies as an individual in the indelible year.

Sania was not the only Indian whose fortunes were

While shaking hands the other day, I felt thankful that we evolved from apes. Had we evolved from dogs, we'd greet each other by circling around with our heads down saying: "Wow, your nether regions smell great." Reply: "Thanks! Yours, too." Nevertheless, I still like dogs, despite their being what my grandmother used to call "forward".

Psychologists say that you can tell how nice a person really is by how they treat helpless dumb animals such as household pets, small children, married men and the like.

This is so true. When I am out for dinner with my thoughtful wife, the moment the menu arrives in my hands, she pipes up with her little reminder: "Choose something the dog likes."

Yet, I submit that we may be entering an era where some humans overdo the whole "animals are our children" thing. In Sweden, a pair of cat-ladies who took their pets around in pushchairs and fed them with spoons were thought of as rather charming - until one started breast-feeding her cat. That's when people called police. The report from news broadcaster SVT was sent to me by reader Aalia Shan, who said, "Breast-feeding a cat is just too weird. I mean, it's not like it was a dog."

The same week, two women who had a difference of opinion on dog comfort ended up in a fistfight in New Zealand, the NZME news service reported. The first woman left her dog in a car with the window slightly open on a cool day while she did an errand. She returned to find her pet missing. (I wonder if she exclaimed: "Doggone"?) The next day she bumped into the animal in the company of a woman who claimed to have "rescued" it from her. Fists flew.

In Asia, there are a spate of funerals going on at the moment for Aibos,

robot dogs sold by Sony in Japan until 2006.

Sony has stopped making spare parts, so broken-hearted owners are holding Buddhist funerals for

No, your pet is not your child

them, praying for their souls to find new homes, and shelving their bodies as "organ donors" for other robot dogs.

You might think that's weird, but that's no different from the uncontrollable weeping that follows when storage problems force you to get rid of part of your collectible figure collection, right? Right? (Help me out here, guys.)

I read somewhere that it is true that humans generate the exact same love-chemicals in their brains for pets as they do for children.

When my friend's cat died, she was depressed for days. I offered to put on a furry onesie and a haughty look, and slumping over her lap making a buzzing noise, but she declined. I am going to assume that this means she is getting over it.

When our goldfish (yes, it was called Goldie) died, I emptied out the water but left the tank there for months, labelled "Chameleon".

It became the centre of attention for all our visitors, some of whom spent a surprisingly long time trying to see it.

The Funny side
by far the best (as in "cheap-est") pet I ever had.

By Nury Vittachi

writer is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send ideas and comments via his Facebook page

By Sayan Mukherjee

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as if serving a constant reminder that performance should be the only criterion to judge an athlete, not his age, which he insists is just a "number".

An unflinching resolve to play in a record-setting seventh Olympics for his country next year at Rio serves as a source of motivation for Paes, expertly taking his off-field distractions over a custody battle for her daughter with estranged partner Rhea Pillai in his stride.

His men's doubles form though was sharply contrasting as the 18-time Grand Slam champion failed to reach the title round in all four Majors, the last trophy being the 2013 US Open.

He managed just one men's doubles title in the year in 26 attempts.

Hingis praised her Indian doubles partners for shaping up not only successful partnerships on-court but cordial friendships off-court that the 35-year-old attributed to the impressive performances.

But while all was shining on the (Contd on P-VII)

By Ranjan K Baruah

Career option in Pharmacy

Many of us dream and try to become doctors. When it comes to health sector we think that doctor is the only profession. The reality is that there are many other courses which are integral part of the health sector. One of the courses which is also part of the paramedics is related to Pharmacy. This course is related to drugs and medicine. Pharmacy or Pharmacology is one of the main disciplines under Biomedical Science and the pharmaceutical industry.

Pharmacy is related to health sciences. The main courses in Pharmacy are the 2 years Diploma in Pharmacy (D.Pharm), 4 years Bachelor of Pharmacy (B.Pharm), 2 years Master of Pharmacy (M.Pharm) and Ph.D programmes. Admission to the Diploma in Pharmacy (D.Pharm), requires a pass in 10+2 or equivalent examination with Physics, Chemistry, Maths or Biology. After obtaining a diploma or degree in pharmacy, and registering with the state Pharmacy Council, it is possible to set up your own pharmacy or chemists and druggists shop to stock and sell medicines and dispense them according to doctor's prescription. Apart from the qualification one need to have other skills to be successful in this sector.

Some of the institutes in North East are as follows:

Dibrugarh University : The Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences was established at Dibrugarh University in 1983 as the first establishment for four years integrated Bachelor degree course in Pharmacy (B. Pharm.) in entire North East India with the intake of students from the seven

North East States of India (Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland). The Department introduced the Post Graduate courses in Pharmacy (M. Pharm) from 2002 to provide higher studies and R & D activities in Pharmacy sector. All the courses conducted in this Department are approved by PCI and AICTE.

RIPANS : The Regional Institute of Paramedical & Nursing Sciences (RIPANS) was established during 1994-95 under North Eastern Council (NEC) as an Autonomous body with due approval of the concerned Ministries of Government of India to cater the much needed Paramedical, Nursing and Pharmacy personnel of the North Eastern States viz, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. Courses include Graduate level and post graduate level. The Department of Pharmacy is approved and recognized by the Pharmacy Council of India (PCI) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and it is affiliated to Mizoram University.

Pharmacy Council of India: The Pharmacy education and profession in India upto graduate level is regulated by the PCI, a statutory body governed by the provisions of the Pharmacy Act, 1948 passed by the Parliament. Aspirants may visit the website related to affiliated and approved colleges in the country.

Scholarships/ Entrance Update:
Cultural Scholarship:

The Cultural Talent Search Scholarship Scheme is implemented by Center for Cultural Resources and Training, under the aegis of Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India. As the scholarships are limited, only exceptionally talented and outstanding students need to apply.

Cultural Talent Search Scholarship Scheme aims to provide facilities to outstanding young children selected in the age group of 10 to 14 years for developing their talent in various cultural fields such as traditional forms of music, dance, drama, painting, sculpture and crafts laying special emphasis on rare art forms. Children whose date of birth is in between 01.07.2002 and 30.06.2006 (both days inclusive) are eligible to apply for the award of scholarships for the year 2016-17. Last date for applying for the scholarship is 31st December.

Sports Scholarship: National Sports Scholarships are awarded by National Institute of Sports Development for all talented and proved achievers in sports in school - college - university levels. The aim of the scholarship is to help a lot of sports dreams all over India to achieve the heights they wish for. These scholarships will help a lot of parents so that they promote their talented sports children, as this money will help to meet a part of their sports expenses. Last date for sending application is 30th December.

(For further details and career planning aspirants may call at 98640 55558 or send email at bkranjan@gmail.com)

By Gitika Saxena

Pickle - the declining art, yet a pride for many

Despite the art of pickling fading in modern times, there are food enthusiasts who still take pride in dishing out authentic and unique pickles as the Parsi's 'Lagan nu Achar' or 'Bamboo pickle' of Meghalaya tribals, who enact its recipe in a dance.

"A pickle is a reflection of who you are. It requires right ingredients, right attitude and patience," says celebrity chef and restaurateur Kunal Kapur.

Although he admits that pickling is losing sheen, he feels that those who have still preserved the art are immensely proud of their techniques and uniqueness associated with the delectable culinary style.

When it comes to pickle, we only think about the traditional lime, mango and chilli pickles, but "pickling is a higher form of art-meets-science...feel proud to pickle," Kapur said in an interview.

The 36-year-old Delhi-based Chef Consultant with the Leela Group, as a part of his countrywide tour while hosting TV show 'Pickle Nation', has been intrigued and surprised to see the unique techniques and ingredients used to make pickle, which he feels is still a very essential part of Indian food.

He also got an insight into the pickle makers' vivid reasons and stories behind how and why they prepare them. "For instance, with the Parsis in Ahmedabad, it is mandatory to make 'Lagan nu Achar' and give it to the elders and relatives in the family before they formalise the marriage of a couple," he said.

"In another fascinating instance, the Karbi tribe from Assam has evolved a special dance that enacts the recipe of the Bamboo pickle.

"The ancestors knew that if the bamboo was not pickled in the right season then it might lead to hunger in the winters, and so the recipe for this crucial pickle was made into a dance form and till date the couples



enact this dance to reveal the recipe," said Kapur, who recently launched his fine-dining at Souk al Bahar in Downtown Dubai.

Detailing the fascinating art of pickling, he said that in Jodhpur, the 'ker sangri ka achar' is the legacy of love for nature of the Bishnoi tribe. The Ker shrub and the Sangri tree are the few that grow in this otherwise difficult region. The fruit of the 'khejri tree' is the sangri and it is a very critical tree to the ecology of the place. Many have sacrificed their lives to protect this tree. "The 'ker sangri' pickle made from this tree is one of the reasons for survival of the Bishnoi tribe," said Kunal.

Another example is the Mahali pickle made by Tamil Brahmins. "Mahali is a root that smells of intense vanilla, bitter almond and cinnamon, and it is pickled in yogurt. It is not short of a miracle that no vinegar or oil is used yet the pickle survives for over two years in curd," Kunal said.

In another insight, he said, "A Hyderabad style of mango pickle breaks the long held notion by me that

a drop of water can destroy a pickle, as this mango pickle is made in water. Limestone or 'chuna' is added to preserve the pickle."

"As I have discovered, pickles are an integral part of how people define their food culture, and each region is intensely passionate about their pickles," said Kapur. But, he feels the health conscious modern generation is drifting apart from the traditional food culture. "I sure see a decline in the pickle making that traditionally used to happen. Traditional pickle making is an art and complete fun, but with our fast-paced lives we live a life of convenience," he said. "Bottled pickles have taken over for most young couples. Also, smaller houses with improper sunlight and

unpredictable weather are some more reasons adding to go for a bottled pickle over pickling," says the chef. Also, the fast-paced lifestyle has pushed the art of pickling onto the back-burner.

"Food and life of convenience has taken over the traditional ways of



doing things. Pickling is not spared as well. Some of the worst tasting pickles are unfortunately the most selling now. No matter which vegetable that the bottle has, all of them have a standard taste," he rued.

"Traditionally there was a thought after reason to eat a particular pickle made in a particular way...was a part of balanced diet," says Kunal, who has played host in many TV shows like "Masterchef India" and "Junior Masterchef India".

On people's preferences towards pickles, he said, "People nowadays want less oil and less salt in their pickles, this is one part they are very clear about. Chilli and mango pickles still are a hot favourite." People tend to avoid pickles for various health reasons these days. "Yes, that is becoming a common practice. I wish people could eat what they wanted and burn it as well with exercise routine. Also, there is less awareness on water based or no oil pickles," feels Kapur, who has authored the cookbook 'A Chef in Every Home'.

Amid talk of pickles, when asked about the demand for chutneys, the chef said, "Surprisingly, chutney is something that everyone relates to. In fact, chutney is an English word now. Chutneys have been more experimental and hence, can be made to suit any taste profile."

Finally, Chef Kunal also shared a few tips for pickle enthusiasts. "Pickle things when in season. Consult your elder in family for the recipes. Care for it like you would care and nurture a child. Keep it simple and clean...feel proud to pickle," he said.

By Pt. Ajai Bhambri

'Star - Gazing'

Sunday, January 3, 2016

Moon parallel Mercury on your solar return chart sees you brimming with energy and raring to go. Communications and contacts prove to be extremely useful. Creativity is satisfying and translates into gains. You win accolades and get opportunities for advancement. If looking for project finance or foreign collaboration then you raise funds with ease. Sudden expenses may have to be met. Travel will bring in new experiences. Businesspersons should deploy strategies to score over competitors. A lot of excitement in romance is foretold. It is a happy time at home as you express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion and warmth. Do not ignore health issues.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

This phase brings harmonious relations in friendship, love, family and children. Economy in the home and management of manpower and finances at work keep you ahead and in control of situations. You further your business by expanding in related fields of activity and with good chances of foreign collaborations. You would have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort and status. Possessing good team spirit you are more tactful and obliging with your co-workers which brings harmony and also a joyous atmosphere at the work place.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

The planetary configuration would enable you to make the best use of your communication skills, talents and creativity. You would be more accommodating and compassionate in relationships and spend wonderful time in association of your loved ones and family members. Friendships, cooperation and synergy are available. You would also work hard and would get ready to perform and express yourself and take charge and carry responsibilities on your shoulders. Personal projects are on an upswing. You are in the position to inspire others through what you create. Health needs to be looked at.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Spirituality, trips, and communications are highlighted even as commercial transactions and business deals could be conducted effectively as you put your best efforts into it. Your boss or superior might seek impossible goals and you need to apprise him of the real situation. Money matters take priority as some unexpected expenditures have to be met. It is best to accept challenges that life offers you and keep going through ups and downs realizing that this too shall pass. You would work in association of experienced and professionally and monetarily motivated people and this enhances your confidence and talent to enhance the business opportunities.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

New beginnings are in store, whether this means a fresh start in existing relationships or new ones altogether. It's a great time to make improvement in your regular routines. You would study business offers and professional opportunities in detail before rejecting or accepting them. You are especially fond of the life of the home and family. It is right to make important decisions. Looking within at your truths and believes give you insight and direction would help. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

This phase brings favorable results for students, children, spirituality, creativity and self realization. There are chances of new associations and beginnings as new opportunities and changes may come. You are likely to spend time in different places and work closely in new associations as you combine good luck and good management. You would be able to face truths, deal with emotional choices or difficult situations. A personal meeting will be a sparkling one, leading to romance, love and a long lasting relationship. You might also spend time in physical activities like sports and games.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

Love, romance and excitement in personal relations are highlighted. You are emotional, loving and caring in personal relationships and family situations. You would please others with your conversation and would give a new approach to communications projects, learning, or self-expression. You are frank, outspoken and can be outrageous or undiplomatic

on occasions. Communications and business associates from overseas bear good news and offer lucrative opportunities. Express your views and conditions clearly when it comes to business and financial dealings to avoid misunderstandings.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This period opens up a world of romance and love in personal relations. A memorable vacation allows you to experience and enjoy new places, countries, people and different culture. You are gracious with family and children. You are likely to be involved in creative past times. Commercial transactions and business deals could be conducted effectively as you have the quality of wisdom and the acceptance of the ever changing wonders of life. Some interesting people are drawn to you and invite you to work with them. Your position of power and authority is maintained despite many changes all around.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Good results await you as you would initiate a current of forceful energy to achieve success in an important venture. You are generous, kind and preserving in family and personal relationships. You are diligent and pedantic at work and specialize further in your field of activity. You are on the threshold of a creative and inventive work that brings you name, fame and exposure. It is time to express your feelings and ideas and share what you have learned through a variety of experience in this life. It would be nice to take a short break before starting on a new project to renew your energy.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

Your daily routines and business dealings need to be restructured for better gains and productivity as professional situations and matters come to fore. Your hobbies, leisure time, moments spent with family and children, all come into focus. You have to restructure and reorganize all the activities at work and analyze the situations at home. You tend to be perfectionist while completing business projects and campaigns. You are ambitious and ready to achieve professional goals and targets at any cost. Good health and energy enable you to participate in sports related activities.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

The planetary configuration this week will help promote professional stability and increase financial returns. A personal involvement has the qualities of love, balance and freedom that you desire. Learning important lessons from life could be the beginning of spiritual growth and understanding. You are blessed with divine wisdom and inspired to take up a professional challenge. Spiritual pursuits and meditation can be rewarding. You grow and transform as you pass through a touching emotional experience. Physical energy and good health enable you balance a busy schedule and work commitments.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Mixed results are indicated at this time. A professional collaboration comes together when you give up all the hopes of it. Creative and professional plans are set to actualize and it is best to work towards them persistently. Your business plans have a magical quality of perfection and completion. Success in business and love in personal relationship transforms your life and attitudes. You have to find out better creative and progressive options. There is a tendency to be aggressive. It would be better to participate in social and family celebrations to lighten up and relax. Give yourself a fitness routine and healthy diet program as health will be of concern.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

Good results in family and professional aspects are indicated. You would improve personal and professional relations with patience, love and care, and avoid discussions, criticism and arguments. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sincere and devoted about work commitments. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering the week as you would positively use your talents and efficiency. The desire for some form of recognition is going to be fulfilled this week. Financial success is stronger than any other time enhanced now. You would pay attention to your style, image and lifestyle.

When Sania made the year

(Contd from P-VI) doubles front, India's struggle on



the singles circuit was again highlighted when their top-ranked player Yuki Bhambri (93) lost both his Davis Cup matches against Czech Republic at home.

India lost the World Group Play-off tie 1-3 to condemn them to spend another year at the Asia-Oceania Group 1 phase.

But Bhambri partially atoned himself winning two Challenger level singles titles to break into the top-100 singles chart for the first time, resulting in a direct access at Grand Slams.

But Somdev Devvarman's free fall from a career best 62 in 2011 to an obscure 180 mirrored the trouble Indian team faces in Davis Cup ties.

Globally, Serbian Novak Djokovic and American Serena Williams continued their stranglehold in men's and women's singles, respectively, both being named 2015's ITF World champions.

Novak Djokovic won three Grand Slams, was runner-up in the fourth (US Open) and won 11 titles in total. From mid-January he reached 15 finals consecutively. He became the first man for seven years to win 80 or more matches in a season, ending with an 82-6 record.

(The writer can be contacted at sayan.m@ians.in)

From Pink ball Test to....

(Contd from P-VI) English soccer. Aditi was also voted as the Asian Footballer of The Year in London.

Barca's 5: The La Liga, Copa del Rey, Champions League, European Super Cup and Club World Cup, Barcelona FC won all that was there for the taking. With Messi, Neymar and Suarez raking up the goals, they have looked unstoppable

The Second Season of ISL: After a promising

inaugural season, the Indian Super League delivered the goods in the second year. The defending champions Atletico de Kolkata started off well. Following a dramatic league table finish, Chennaiyin FC locked horns with Kolkata and tipped them in the semis to reach the finals. In another semifinal Goa thumped Delhi. In a close final Chennaiyin defeated Delhi to lift the trophy.

Tennis

Sania rallies past to become the number one: This was one great year for the Tennis star. Sania Mirza not only ended the year as the number one women's doubles player (alongside Martina Hingis), she also won 2 Grand Slams (Women's Doubles) and ended the year with the WTA Tour Finals.

Djoker rules: Novak Djokovic had a great run in 2015. The world number one won three Grand Slams. He ended the year with the ATP Tour Finals win.

Serena...so close yet so far: Much like Novak Djokovic, the women's number one in singles, Serena was in contention for a Calendar Slam, but alas! She lost in the semis in her home country (US Open).

Back from retirement, Hingis hinge a new partnership: Martina Hingis had a helluva year. The Swiss came back from retirement, partnered with Leander Peas and Sania Mirza and virtually took the Tennis Women's

doubles and Mixed Doubles scene by storm. Her 2015 record reads 6 major wins, 5 of which are in Grand Slams, the other Tour Final with Sania Mirza.

Leander the workhorse: Age is just a number and Leander keeps defying it, every year. The 42-year old just keeps on winning. Year 2015 was no exception either. He won 3 Mixed Doubles Grand Slams, with his partner Martina Hingis.

Badminton

Saina's world number one moment: 2015 was a good year for the Indian Badminton fans as Saina Nehwal became the first Indian to be crowned World Number One. Though her rank plunged later, she will finish the year as the World Number Two female player.

Boxing

Vijender Singh's Pro Jab: Vijender Singh became the real boxing highlight for India in 2015. The Olympian decided to turn Pro in 2015 and so far so good! With a hat-trick of pro bout wins, he is someone to watch out for.

When 'Money' met Manny for the match of the century: The world witnessed two of the finest boxers take on each other on May 2. Floyd Mayweather (nicknamed Money) and Manny Pacquiao finally decided to face each other after years of speculation. It was Manny who finished second, thus the undefeated Mayweather escaped unscathed.

Hockey

Bronze in Azlan Shah: The Indian outfit won the Bronze medal in the Sultan Azlan Shah Hockey Tournament, and also qualified for the Rio Olympics to be held at 2016 and the Hockey World Cup (2018). (TWF)



“The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark.”

— Michelangelo

The Shillong Times

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Terror mongers smirk at peace initiatives

THE attack on the Pathankot air force base by terrorists suspected to be members of Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed, raises questions about the Indo-Pak dialogue that is being proactively promoted by the two nations. Recently, Indian prime minister Narendra Modi made an unscheduled visit to Lahore on the occasion of prime minister Nawaz Sharif's birthday. Modi received brickbats from within the country but US President Obama hailed Modi's visit as an attempt to build peace in the sub-continent. The Pathankot attack has claimed the lives of at least seven security personnel on the Indian side. Advisories have been issued to the North Eastern states to remain vigilant against similar attacks. This region being a hotbed of insurgency with most of the outfits aided and abetted by agent provocateurs from neighbouring countries, there is a real fear that such attacks could happen on the eastern borders as well. However, terrorism demands that India be in a state of eternal vigilance and preparedness because the country is vulnerable to attacks from different quarters.

The Indian Air Force has downplayed the seriousness of the Pathankot incident stating that there was prior intelligence inputs about a probable attack. This statement is somewhat contradictory considering that it has taken over 24 hours for the Indian side to locate the terrorists inside the Pathankot air base and to engage them. Preparedness would have meant that the terrorists would not have been able to enter this sensitive air base just 40 kilometres away from the Pakistan border. Meanwhile, External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj has held consultations with former Pakistan foreign secretaries and ex-ambassadors to arrive at a strategy after the Pathankot attack. Nawaz Sharif has also condemned the Pathankot assault in no uncertain terms, coming as it does barely a week after Modi's goodwill visit to Pakistan. This is Pakistan's predicament. The ISI and other terror outfits are hell bent on poisoning the relations between the two countries. It serves them well to have India and Pakistan continue as arch enemies. But this blatant attempt to create schisms in Indo-Pak relations should not be allowed to sour the present initiatives to hold regular dialogues for ending terrorism in the sub-continent.

LOOKING BACK

February 13, 1988

Security and peace above all

The induction of the Army in Tripura, and declaration of the entire State as Disturbed, has been interpreted variously according as the move has been seen favourably or otherwise. The controversy whether the move had been initiated with the prior knowledge and approval of the State government or not also plays into insignificance in the light of the broad fact that there has not been a single instance of TNV killings since the new initiative go into full play. Even if it were a political move on the part of the Congress ruled New Delhi, the security brought back in the State is enough reward for the average citizen not to get too much bothered about the manoeuvres or morals involved. The security restored has now to be transformed into peace established, which is however the more difficult to achieve. This is where the people's effort is more needed than the help rendered by the armed forces. A bitter election has just been fought and fierce passions roused in the process. Task of restoring peace becomes all the more difficult against this backdrop than

reestablishing the mere security in the land.

The new government, therefore, has a difficult task ahead to assure not only this peace but also the contentment which can this outlying and backward State expect on this score is bound to be raised high because of the rapport now re-established between the State and the Centre, both ruled by the same party, Congress (I). Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister and Congress President have evinced unusual interest in this remote and tiny State both before and after the election. It is on the efficiency of the New Ministers that much of what is promised may be turned into potentials for the overall growth of the State suffered for a long decade due to jarring Centre State relations. The Congress which now comes to assume power after the decade has to prove that it is more competent than not only its immediate, but also the pre decade, predecessors to deliver the goods and make the State much more happier and far more quickly at that by making up for the past neglect in all spheres of development.

A New Year with very little hope

By H H Mohrmen

The beginning of a new year in any tradition is an occasion to celebrate though the question still arises, whether there is really a beginning and an end as such. Yet the change of seasons which influence human activities since the beginning of human understanding is something people recognize and appreciate. It is for the same reason that we have our own calendar and like any ancient calendar it was based on the movement of the moon in its cycle. Ours is a lunar calendar and it is different from the Gregorian calendar in that the latter has an eight-day week. Otherwise there are twelve months in year in both Khasi and Pnar calendar.

Our society is very much influenced by western culture and celebrates the end of the 12 months Gregorian calendar year on the thirty-first of December. The first month of the year in the western calendar was named after the Greek god Janus; the god in the Greek pantheon which has two faces; one which looks forward and the other backwards. Perhaps the month was named after Janus because it is the time to look forward and look back as well.

Life is like a circle where the end always meets the beginning, or where there is no beginning and no end, because that is where the twin meets. In the Khasi calendar the first month is called Kyllalngkot, maybe this has to do with the nights getting shorter (lyngkot) and the first month in the Pnar's calendar is Duiatra, but the names of the two months prior to the first month are important. They are named as Khonchonglad (November) and Kmaichonglad (December). Chonglad in Pnar context means leisure time and 'khon' and 'kmai' in this context means little and big. The highlanders are famous for rice cultivation; in fact rice is their major crop, so the crop has much influence on the agrarian life of the people. And in rice cultivation, November and December are post harvest months when people tend to spend this time of the year leisurely before they resume to the cycle of ploughing, sowing and harvesting again.

Hence this is a very important time of the year, because it is both the end and the beginning. It is also the time when we try to look back before we move forward, be it at the personal level or at the societal level. It is the time to reflect and question ourselves and hope and plan for the next three hundred sixty six days of the year. If we look back at the state of affairs in Meghalaya, the Government did not give us any reason to cheer in the year was, but the glimmer of hope for the people of the State came from the other important democratic institution. The Shillong Times was right that the Hon'ble High Court passed many important judgments which gave the state some sense of direction in the area where both the legislative and the executive had failed us. In fact the entire year was marked by protests and agitations against the State Government which were the outcome of the High Court's decisions, be it the Rangbah Shnong conundrum, the MUDA tangle or the still pending case of politicians occupying two offices of profits at the same time. The order of the court banning the media against publishing or carrying news about bandhs which had brought change in the way the pressure groups agitate or protest against the government's apathy to their plight. More importantly it gave people respite from the bandh culture which had affected the state and which is welcomed by all.

Celebrating the coming of New Year will be meaningless if we do not relax, sit back and recall the past to plan for the future. Though there are many important landmark rulings by the court but there is still much to be desired. We witness the ever growing crime against women in the State, but we are yet to see the Court's judgment giving due punishment to perpetrators of such crimes. We read of crime against women almost on

a daily basis, but what about conviction? Is it wrong to say that it seems like the rate of conviction is negligible when compared with the numbers of crimes reported. Common people of the state are in a dilemma. We feel the pain of women whose modesty was outraged but we are yet to see a ray of hope on this imposing predicament which is a pall of gloom that envelops the state.

There is a huge gap between the crimes reported and the conviction rate. Yet, in some court ruling on the crime against minor girls like the one passed by the fast track court of Jowai is confusing if not contradicting to a layman. In the case it was confirmed that the victim was a minor when she was raped and the culprit had also admitted in public that he had sex with the girl. In a lay person's understanding this proves beyond doubt that a crime was committed against this minor. It was expected that the court would punish the rapist. Sadly that did not happen. In common parlance we can say that the rapist was instead allowed to go scot-free. I maybe wrong, but at least this particular case has reached the high court, so we hope it will shed some light on this case. Personally, I am afraid to think of the kind of precedent that we are setting here. One hopes that the court is much more stringent when passing orders in crimes against women so as to discourage men from involving in any such crimes which are growing by leaps and bounds. We hope the New Year will bring much respite to women who are awaiting justice for crimes committed against them. We also hope justice will prevail and not be prolonged any further.

In the year that was, Dr Mukul Sangma has not been able to give the people of the state even grounds to hope and with the kind of government we have we don't really

know what to hope for in the New Year. The state government has failed on all fronts. The state of the Health Department which is one of the most important departments is in shambles. The trauma centre at Nongpoh CHC was not functioning and it was reported that Department of Atomic Energy found that the Cancer Wing at the Shillong Civil Hospital which was started since March 2011 is yet to function. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. A visit to the CHC, PHCs and Health Sub Centers in the rural areas will give one a true picture.

Most people would not have access to education, if we were to depend only on state run schools and colleges. Yet the education department has not been able to provide these government run schools and colleges, their basic needs. The case in point is the Kiang Nangbah Government College, Jowai, in which the students have to hit the streets to make their voices heard. The engineer-politicians and contractors nexus has provided the state with substandard roads which needs regular annual repairing. The department should be ashamed because in many cases public has to take upon themselves the responsibility of repairing roads.

The PHE department of Meghalaya is like the opposite of Midas. Every project the department handles remains incomplete for decades; be it the Greater Shillong Water Supply Scheme, the Jowai Water Supply from Wah Umngot, the Raliang and the Myngo water supply system et al. The list is not exhaustive.

And there is a nagging report purposely leaked to paint of a sorry state of the financial health of the state due to NGT ban on supply of coal from Meghalaya. But the question is: Isn't it true the NGT has exempted the ban almost throughout the year. When the state is in such a situation it is difficult to see any hope in the coming year. Dr Sangma and his team need to work harder to give the people of Meghalaya at least some reason to hope.

At Odds with Ends

By M J Akbar

A curious role reversal seized Parliament for much of last year, resulting in apoplectic fits that bode ill for the health of the institution. It is logical to assume that government should have a vested interest in minimal sessions, ideally with legislation going through without much debate. Governments, being establishment, should prefer minimum scrutiny and maximum leeway. Instead, it was the Opposition Congress that was determined to destroy the many opportunities Parliament provides to act as a pressure house of public opinion, and a court of enquiry that can squeeze information out of the reluctant files of government. Congress repeatedly killed question hour by a barrage of hooting and hollering that would invite serious censure in a boarding school at end of term. When Congress did cooperate in passage of some bills, largely out of fear of public backlash, it did so without much discussion. The notable fact was the isolation of Congress; all other Opposition parties distanced themselves from such tactics. Will this make much difference to future behaviour? It is difficult to predict what turns an irrational strategy might take.

A thought for the coming year that could develop into a theme should, of course, be derivative, building on experience of the days just departed. Voltaire, the

and unexpected answer that carried a shade more meaning than the obvious. It amused while it taught and rescued information from boredom or worse morality. Newspapers would devote goodish space to the art and books would be compiled that eventually became next year's gifts. British papers still devote time and attention to this magical tease. Its disappearance from India is a reason to mourn. Optimists will argue that the cracker has grown up to become a quiz and taken over all seasons but nostalgia has its virtues. I offer an example. Who wanted to straighten out the Leaning Tower of Pisa? Mussolini. Or: power without democracy is insanity.

Christmas is about nativity, the birth of a saviour, and a mission of charity and benefaction towards those less fortunate than ourselves. The Christians of the Year 2015 were without doubt Priscilla Chan and Facebook-founder Mark Zuckerberg, who celebrated the birth of their first child by promising to donate 99% of their fabulous wealth to the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. The amount is beyond belief; nearly 45 billion dollars. Billion. Frankly, I have no real concept of how much a billion amounts to, but 45 of them could well constitute the annual revenues of a small nation. Nor are Priscilla and Mark at that point of their lives when they could be tempted to take out

Seasonal angst, like a few other debates, can be cooked up. But this one belongs strictly to the dessert side of the dinner: delicious, unnecessary but an essential complement to a proper meal. Whatever happened to the literary Christmas cracker? This was not, as the prefix clarifies, something that merely produced a brief explosion and died. It was an intellectual conceit in the form of quaint question and unexpected answer that carried a shade more meaning than the obvious. It amused while it taught and rescued information from boredom or worse morality. Newspapers would devote goodish space to the art and books would be compiled that eventually became next year's gifts. British papers still devote time and attention to this magical tease.

French philosopher, rationalist and revolutionary, was not famous for obedience to God, but when he did raise his head towards the sky Voltaire could make an effective point. "O Lord," he once prayed, "make my enemies ridiculous." Who could ask for more in the cut and thrust of public life?

Seasonal angst, like a few other debates, can be cooked up. But this one belongs strictly to the dessert side of the dinner: delicious, unnecessary but an essential complement to a proper meal. Whatever happened to the literary Christmas cracker? This was not, as the prefix clarifies, something that merely produced a brief explosion and died. It was an intellectual conceit in the form of quaint question

insurance policies on the afterlife. They are young. And they are not alone among America's new and old billionaires. The founder of Microsoft, Bill Gates has a foundation financed by a \$44 billion trust. Their work in India, among other nations, has been splendid. When will India find such billionaires?

Quote of the year must surely belong to the recently published autobiography of faded Hollywood star Burt Reynolds. He recalls the day that the glamorous star Joan Crawford died. There was a party that evening, and among the guests was Crawford's bitter rival, the catty Bette Davis. Davis told reporters, "You should never say bad things about the dead, only good. Joan Crawford is dead. Good!"

within Congress that has now started harming the party. There is no problem in respecting an individual but that respect should not transform into a cult worship for political gains when his policies have severely compromised and jeopardized the long term national interests.

Saikat Kumar Basu
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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.

Yours etc.,

TO THE EDITOR

Note on traffic congestion

Editor,

The odd-even system in Delhi may not reduce the pollution levels to a great extent, but surely, it will help in reducing the traffic congestion. Taking a cue from how successful the formula will work in Delhi, I believe a similar arrangement can definitely be tried in Shillong. The number of cars that ply on the city roads far exceed its capacity to cater them. There are (were) talks of constructing some flyovers but that seems like it would take an eternity to materialize. There are no ways and means to widen the roads, most of which are already declared one-way traffic zones. Moreover, the number of cars that are being added to the roads day to day, further add to the misery.

Considering all this, I believe, we have to take some measures, which will facilitate easy movement of vehicles.

We too may implement on a trial basis the odd-even formula. Since now the schools are closed, this should not cause much of an

inconvenience to try it out. Let us see how this works, maybe we can get on back to the habit of walking at least short distances, which has become history to most of us. It would help to maintain health and definitely reduce carbon emissions in the air. However, prior to that the Government must also ensure that there are adequate and appropriate public transportation systems so as to cause minimum trouble to the residents of the city.

Talking of carbon emissions, steps must also be taken to ensure that old diesel vehicles are not allowed to ply on the roads unless they conform to the emission standards. The smoke that they release is very harmful and it's a common sight to witness the same in the city. If checks and measures are in place, we may take pride in breathing healthy air.

Talking of congestion, I, like others too feel that it's its high time that the schools in Shillong have a system of school buses. This will not only help reduce the number of cars that ply on the roads but also relieve a lot of parents who have a very

tough time managing the balance between work and school duties. I think a serious thought has to be given to this.

Yours etc,
Amit Sharma,
Via email

Nehru not infallible!

Editor?

The recent debacle in India regarding a Congress mouthpiece questioning Nehru's wrong foreign policies that has cost India heavily in border negotiations with China should be reviewed with a positive outlook. The Indian National Congress may have their personal discomfort with the content of the article for political reasons; however, one must not downplay the importance of the questions raised in the article from historical and diplomatic perspectives. Nehru has always been heaped with unjustified praises by Indian historians and intellectuals for his role as a national leader with often no due credits being given to other outstanding national

leaders like Patel, Kalam and others who also had giant contributions in transforming India into a modern nation. It is a matter of gross historic injustice for not giving enough credit to the pioneer architects of modern India other than Nehru. One must accept the fact that numerous foreign policy blunders made by an immature Nehru during his rule have resulted in perpetual problems with neighboring nations with respect to international border negotiations; and even in severely compromising Indian claims as exemplified by the Kashmir and Tibet border conflicts. While Nehru is credited so much for his achievements he should also be made equally responsible for the blunders he made by not listening to other members of his cabinet including Patel on several matters that has cost India dearly and made several Indians suffer for generations. The unfortunate death of Patel within few years of independence allowed Nehru to push forward with his erroneous domestic and international policies as there was none in his cabinet to confront him politically. This gave rise to generations of sycophants

“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.”

— Jim Rohn

The Shillong Times

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Modi must deliver

THE economic outlook in India may have improved somewhat statistically compared to most emerging market economies. But real growth is dependent not merely on projecting big bang reforms but on getting them off the ground. There has been an upswing in foreign portfolio investments (FPI) in Indian stock markets since May. In the last eight months, net investment in equities has not been as good as the huge FPI sell-off in June-August 2013. The Rupee has slid below Rs 68 to the dollar. All this is due to the country's current account and fiscal deficits, the hangover from UPA policy paralysis and the Vodafone retrospective tax mess. Later, the NDA government failed to deliver on reform. Growth and investment have hardly picked up.

The recent FPI sell-off is due to large scale redemptions by sovereign wealth funds (SWF) especially from some oil-rich countries. Against that, the US Federal Reserve has raised the interest rate and that along with the accelerating Chinese economic slowdown have increased the risk-aversion of global investors. India is not alone in taking the hit. As a matter of fact, it has succeeded in relatively insulating itself from the oscillations. One reason is that local investors have switched from deploying money in gold and real estate to saving in financial instruments. However, there is no cause for smugness. According to global fund managers, this country has the capacity to ensure dedicated flows. But Prime Minister Narendra Modi and RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan have to be good and ready.

LOOKING BACK

February 9, 1988

President's rule

The Sarkaria Commission report, on which has been very explicit on the vexed issue of imposition of President's Rule in the States, a subject raising bitter controversy throughout the post independence period. There have indeed been too many of such exercises as clearly improper the bulk imposition of President's Rule in 1977 and 1980. It has, therefore, been constrained to suggest an amendment of the Article 356 of the Constitution to provide that material facts and ground justifying President's Rule should form part of the proclamation. It has suggested further that when President's Rule should not be dissolved before the Parliament approves the proclamation. The Centre which has this recommendation of the commission for quite some time now, could act upon this advice even in the instant case of President's Rule in Tamil Nadu and this is precisely what it has not done.

That President's Rule in Tamil Nadu has become urgent and imperative was obvious and the Centre has done wisely in acting upon the recommendation of the Governor to this effect whether the other recommendation that the Assembly also should be dissolved, along with the dismissal of the Janaki Ministry, was equally proper admit of serious debate and deliberation. For one thing, there no urgency for dissolution of an Assembly which had yet two years more to run out of its normal life. The situation in the State

could hopefully have stabilized after some time, in which case the normal constitutional process also could have been restored. It was quite probable that the Speaker's arbitrary action in disqualifying summarily a large number of members in bulk could be challenged, with success in a competence Court of law. By dissolving the House, the Speaker has been granted a reprieve which clearly was not his due. This is another ground which lends to the belief, widely shared, that the Governor and the Speaker were in league, the former to put Mrs. Janaki MGR in office and the latter thereafter to get her government out of the danger of being voted out.

Having been himself responsible in a large measure for the constitutional crisis the State was plunged into. Governor Khurana was in post hasted to retrace and now take up the other extreme of removing all vestiges of a regular constitutional process. But New Delhi at least should have, while dismissing the Ministry which has not legs to stand upon, stayed its hand in dissolving the legislature as well and allow the Assembly to remain in suspended animation. The dissolution of the Assembly could at least wait until the Parliament, due to be in session in another month's time, reviewed the whole situation in the light of the Proclamation and further facts available about the background in which the several actors in a tragic drama played their insidious roles.

Confusion still persists on Niti Aayog's role Recommendations may remain in paper

By Deepak Razdan

NITI Aayog replaced Planning Commission as the Government's 'Think Tank' on 1st January, 2015 but doubts persist how will this advisory body be effective when it can allocate no funds to back up its advice.

Instituted by a Union Cabinet Resolution, the 'Think Tank' has been conceived to give Governments at the Central and State levels strategic and technical advice on policies and best practices. But, unlike its predecessor, the Planning Commission, it does not deal with funds at all.

The Planning Commission too brought out policy papers and influenced the Central and State governments, but it wielded a stick also. After preparing the Five-Year and Annual Plans through an objective method of resource allocation, it undertook periodic appraisals of the Plans' implementation and suggested corrections as required. The State Governments and Central Ministries, which received funds under the Plans, could not take the funds flow for granted, if there were deviations and delays.

NITI Aayog's functions have been defined as encouraging cooperative federalism, working as Think Tank, and implement, monitor and evaluate programmes assigned to it. To ensure a smooth transition, NITI Aayog has been declared as successor in interest to the Planning Commission. The Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-17) is therefore continuing and will run its full course.

To enforce cooperative federalism, and to recognize that strong States make a strong nation, the NITI Aayog constituted three Sub-Groups of 10 or more Chief Ministers to deliberate on such subjects as Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan, Skill Development and Rationalisation of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS).

Due to proliferation of the CSS, the demand for their reduction and rationalization was growing over the years. The Planning Commission undertook an exercise in consolidating them and their number fell from 147 to 66. The CSS are formulated in subjects from the State Lists to encourage States to prioritise in areas that require more attention. Central funds are routed either through the Consolidated Fund of the States or transferred directly to State or district level autonomous bodies and implementing agencies. A certain percentage of the CSS expenditure

is assigned to the State Governments, which many of them find difficult to meet.

The NITI Aayog Sub-Group headed by the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr Shivraj Singh Chouhan, received perspective from the Central, State and UT Governments that the number of CSS should be reduced for improving their visibility and impact, and

has been reduced from Rs. 3.38 lakh cr in 2014-15, to Rs. 2.05 lakh cr in 2015-16

In view of the preponderance of CSS being interventions in key sectors of national importance, the Government of India has retained 50 of the 66 ongoing CSS under its direct charge in the Budget 2015-16. The balance are being either taken into the Central sector (implemented by the Central

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their focus should be on the National Development Agenda where the Centre and the States will work together in a spirit of Team India. Accordingly, existing CSS should be divided into Core and Optional schemes. Amongst the Core Schemes, those for social protection and social inclusion should form the 'Core of the Core' like MGNREGA and be the first charge on available funds for the National Development Agenda.

The Union Budgets which indicate the amount of money involved in the CSS, had already initiated some changes before the Sub-Group's report. In the 2015-16 Budget, CSS are classified as Central Assistance to State Plan (CASP). The 2014-15 Budget had made provisions for 66 CSS of which 17 large schemes were designated as 'flagship' programmes. Post-14th Finance Commission which has raised devolution to States from 32 per cent to 42 per cent of the net Union Tax Receipts, the BE for Central Assistance to State Plan (CASP)

Ministries), or have been transferred to the States. It remains to be seen how the States react to the transfers of the Schemes to them.

The Sub-Group on Skill Development, headed by the Punjab Chief Minister, Mr Prakash Singh Badal, was asked to suggest ways to bridge the huge gap in the country's skilled manpower. Today, less than five per cent of India's potential workforce gets formal skill training to be employable and stay employable. The Sub-Group recommended that industry be incentivized to set up training institutions in PPP mode to facilitate availability of trained manpower for big and MSME units, and to adopt existing government ITIs and polytechnics. It has proposed a new law on Right of Youth to Skill Development to make training of youth by the Government mandatory, while suggesting that half of the two per cent CSR funds be devoted to skill development initiatives.

The Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan, a programme on cleanliness and waste management, was

launched by the Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi, on Gandhi Jayanti of 2014, and the NITI Aayog Sub-Group headed by the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr N. Chandrababu Naidu, was asked to prepare its blueprint. Census 2011 showed the rural household toilet coverage stood at 32.7 per cent and urban household toilet coverage at 87.4 per cent. Going by the magnitude of the problem, the Sub-Group recommended steps to encourage behaviour change, financing, a regulatory framework, and technological support with strong hand-holding from the Centre.

As far as the Think Tank functions of the NITI Aayog are concerned, it is still to build up its pool of domain experts, the Knowledge and Innovation Hub. To make expert advice available, NITI Aayog constituted an "Expert Committee on Innovation and Entrepreneurship" which has made recommendations to operationalise the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) and the Self-Employment and Talent Utilisation (SETU) programme announced in the 2015-16 Union Budget, suggesting how to encourage people launch their own enterprises, motivated from their own innovative spirit and technological talents.

The relevant issue on the first anniversary of NITI Aayog is how will the new body ensure recommendations of its expert groups are implemented. Wherever now the issue of funding arises, the States will need to do bilateral bargaining with individual Central Ministries like Health, Education etc, most of whom have no experience to deal with the States directly. Some States are too well-known to beat others in advancing their claims. The other avenue for finance is the Finance Ministry which works under fiscal deficit pressures. Some Special Category States were used to liberal grants from the Planning Commission and where do they look for such funding. Minus the power to fund, and to regulate funding to ensure there is no diversion of funds by the States, NITI Aayog is set to emerge as a hub for academic reports, and a platform for inconclusive Centre-States talks. (IPA Service)

Surnames that discriminate

By Sujit De

The surname of one of my classmates in school was Mal. The meaning of 'mal' in Bengali is goods but it is used as an offensive slang denoting anything from a gun to wine, from a queer man to a pretty woman. The boy had to stomach insulting comments for having such a surname. Students poked fun at his surname even in his presence. Ultimately, he left our school. The age-old caste system has made such a dent in our society that a Dalit's surname can become his or her pain in the neck. In fact, such surnames such as Chamar is used to call somebody names. Goutam Ghosh in his film Paar had shown this bitter truth. Nasiruddin Shah who portrayed the main Dalit character of the film groaned inwardly when he had to utter his surname. Most of the Dalit surnames act as a dirty stickers in their foreheads. Age-old caste system devalues and demeans blue collared jobs to such an extent that instead of giving respect to these important occupations, Indian society still regard them as dirty. Pratiche Trust report on primary education reveals how some higher caste teachers use sticks to touch their lower caste students, who are also made to sit separately. Given the prevalent scenario, one can easily comprehend how painful it is to carry an insulting signboard in the form of surname.

Another dangerous as-

like him at that time who had dropped their surnames. Shashank's children do not use their surname either. But they use a second name. While his son uses his father's as his second name, his daughter adopts her husband's name (not surname). Kailash Satyarthi and the children of Shashank are ideal examples of how to select a second name discarding discriminatory tails that water down the right to equality which is enshrined in the Article 14 of our constitution.

Surnames cause pain not only to Dalits and backward castes but also to women who are forced to change their surnames to satisfy the patriarchal demands of their husband's family. Recently, the supreme court of Japan has ruled that a nineteenth century law forcing married couples to use the same surname- almost always that of the husband's does not violate the constitution. One of the plaintiffs, Kaori Oguni said before the ruling, "By losing your surname...you're being made light of, you're not respected. It's as if part of your self vanishes". She said, "If changing surnames is so easy, why don't more men do it?" The UN committee on elimination of discrimination against women has called on Japan to revise the laws. Being a pillar of patriarchy, surname acts against aspirations of a modern lady to get on a

Surnames cause pain not only to Dalits and backward castes but also to women who are forced to change their surnames to satisfy the patriarchal demands of their husband's family. Recently, the supreme court of Japan has ruled that a nineteenth century law forcing married couples to use the same surname- almost always that of the husband's does not violate the constitution.

pect of surname is that it fans nepotism. Same surname of the interviewer and the interviewee usually builds bridges over the table. If you hear that a person is telling another, "Are you Mr. Pal? I'm also Pal.", then you can rest assured that they will become pals. Thus, surname can play a very dubious role in a job interview or in a police station as it fuels caste prejudice and creates we-they division.

It is, therefore, necessary to impose a general ban on keeping this tail of a name in our country. It is argued that a single name can cause confusion as it is difficult to distinguish a person among his or her namesakes. This problem can easily be sorted out by replacing occupational and caste marker surnames with simple second names. A person should be given the liberty of choosing anything be it a name of a flower or his or her father's or mother's name as second name if it is not a baggage of caste or occupational heritage of horror. This has been done by Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi. He replaced his surname with an unpolluted word 'satyarthi'.

When Shashank became India's Foreign Secretary in 2003, he was asked why he did not have a surname. He said that his father Madan Mohan was a journalist and a teacher and he did not believe in a surname. He was influenced by the reform movements of the 1910-20 that worked towards achieving social equality. There were many

equal footing with her husband's. Therefore, prohibition on the use caste-stinking surnames can go a long way in establishing caste as well as gender equality.

In the midst of such movements against surnames, it is interesting that Ministry of Corporate Affairs has issued a Circular on March 28, 2014 that an applicant is required to disclose his or her surname for starting a company. Delhi High Court upholds the legality of the circular in their June 29, 2015 decision. Nishant who holds a post graduate diploma in Computer Application has challenged the verdict in the Supreme Court of India contending that he does not use surname but holds a valid PAN issued by the Income Tax Department and DIN issued by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. Moreover the passport issued to him does not mention his surname either. Now the Supreme Court of India will examine whether such a pre-condition of disclosing one's surname violates Article 19 (1) (g) to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business.

Now, we should all realise and feel the pain of living and walking with an abusive surname. This edifice of discrimination should be destroyed so that Dalits and women of our country can breathe easy. We need a legislation to rid of our baggage of prejudice that has a label 'Pride' (for upper castes) or 'Patriarchy' (for women) or 'Pariyah' (for dalits).

TO THE EDITOR

New Year for soul-searching

Editor,

Indeed, 1st January is a big day because we step into a day which is the beginning of the year. Absolutely a new time; a time for celebration; time for fun. Of course, also a new occasion to feel important to resolve to take up promising things and think more innovatively. But I am extremely confused as to what is the reason that is so significant that we should celebrate the occasion by literally letting our hair down—shedding all human inhibitions with booze and organizing wild parties.

I feel what we have been doing is absolutely the reverse. We should be introspecting on the year gone by and feel a sense of regret that another year has also just elapsed without our being able to become a little more human. We should feel that it is more important to

kneel down with remorse and tears in our eyes before the altar begging the Almighty for His pardons for having become more prone to commit sins these days than in the previous years. *More than anything, why are we not aware that we have become older by one more year which is a matter of regret? If this new year celebration could make us younger by a year then we could certainly jump and hop like a child in ecstasy and wish everyone — a happy new year!*

This is not to preach and spread a message of pessimism but just a reality check that our mindless merry-making and big bashes are ephemeral joys. I believe we should learn to think other way round and ponder on the reality and the inevitable truth affecting the whole mankind and governing the whole universe. Should we not acknowl-

edge that the year that has just passed us by (2015) was marked by more instances of heartless shooting, bombing, kidnapping, rapes, adultery, suicide, corruption, divorces than the previous years 2014, 2013? This clearly prove that we have gradually become less human. Let's try to find out how our mind is being littered with more vices in the successive years. Further, let us start soul-searching as to what we have been doing in the name of new year celebrations. Are those celebrations really worthwhile and value-based? Would they be helpful for our positive growth and involvement of inner selves and help purify the environment we live in?

I reiterate that the New Year is a significant occasion to do real introspection, be more meditative and make solemn resolutions to undertake constructive things rather than mere indulgences in

a series of entertainments. It is a time to glorify the Almighty who has created this wonderful world and eternal-time, instead of becoming appreciative of amorous dances or getting lost in the meaningless talent-hunt-shows on TV channels. When shall we realize that our indulgences and preoccupations these days are of an exceedingly lower grade and that they are only leading us to the abyss of confusion, frustration and subsequently degradation of mental faculties?

At this solemn moment let me take this opportunity to wish everyone a Happy New year. May we resolve to become more industrious, more peaceful, more benevolent, more courageous, more humble, more compassionate, more forgiving, more tolerant, more God-loving and thus more enlightened!

Yours etc.,
Sail Gewali
Shillong-2

"Let us realize that: the privilege to work is a gift, the power to work is a blessing, the love of work is success!"

— David O. McKay

The Shillong Times

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Minority within a minority

THE Khasi, Jaintia and Garo tribes are classed as, 'scheduled tribes,' by virtue of which they enjoy special privileges. Job reservation and reserved seats in educational institutions are part of that privilege. A tribal working within a scheduled area is also exempted from payment of income tax. Hence the sudden demand by the Niam Khasi, Niamtre and Songasarek for a minority status within Meghalaya on the basis of religion, vide a letter written last year to the prime minister of the country and then approaching the High Court on this issue is somewhat confusing. What particular discrimination do the people of the indigenous faith (Niam Khasi, Niamtre, Songasarek) face that they now want to claim minority status within the larger tribal context? The Constitution of India used the word minority or its plural form in Articles, 29 to 30 and 350A to 350B, but does not define it anywhere. Though Article 29 refers to "minorities" in its marginal heading, it speaks of "any section of citizens having a distinct language, script and culture." By this definition the language script and culture of the Niam Khasi, Niamtre and Songasarek are the same as that of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo community. Religion does not interfere with culture and never has; nor with language and script. Hence it is difficult to comprehend the reasons behind the demand for a minority status by people of the indigenous faith. The entire tribal community of Meghalaya as stated above is already seen as a minority.

Article 30 of the Indian Constitution speaks about two categories of minorities — religious and linguistic. It deals with the rights of minorities whether based on religion or language to establish and administer educational institutions. In making any law providing for the compulsory acquisition of any property of an educational institution established and administered by a minority, the State shall ensure that the amount fixed by or determined under such law for the acquisition of such property is such as would not restrict or abrogate the right guaranteed under that clause. Article 30 further says that the state shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language. Do members of the indigenous faith feel discriminated against on the above grounds?

Whichever way we look at it the members of the indigenous faith have brought to the fore the issue of inter-group equality. This certainly requires a larger debate within the community.

LOOKING BACK

February 13, 1988

The Indian Cultural Vacuum

In the heyday of the British Empire, Europeans asked the question whether India was civilized.

And Professor Max Muller rose to answer the question by quoting from the ancient texts like the Vedas and the Upanishads that India was undoubtedly civilized.

It was heartening to the people of India and gave them self confidence in their fight for freedom.

Earlier Lord Macaulay had answered the question in the negative making fun of the whole in Indian literature from which the modern Indian turned to Europeans and, especially English, literature. But his contemporary Johan Wolfoang Goethe was sure that not only India but Persia, China and Arabia were civilized and he posed the idea of a world Literature on the insights he has gained from a new acquaintance with these literatures.

If we were to ask the question now we might slightly alter it. Civilization is a matter of definition and

all civilization has been tattered by the Western brush, much to the detriment of old human values.

The Westerner had taught that honesty was the best policy not the prime requisite. He has also taught us that truth was not that which brought good to others, but that which could prevail.

Some Europeans themselves talked of the decline of the West but Indians did not take these oracles seriously. As Malcolm Mugeridge pointed out, the last Englishman would be discovered in India, and his name might be Ghosh.

From the Drain Inspector of Gandhi reputation to V.S. Naipaul, taking Beverly Nichols on the way, every visitor to India has tried to answer the question whether India is cultured. Except in special cases like that of Aldous Huxley, the answer has been more or less "No". Nirad C. Chaudhuri augments the idea of the uncultured Indian from his actual Bengalis experience. So might any of us, if we thought about these things.

The Traditional Religion of the Khasis

By Fabian Lyngdoh

The fundamental purpose of 'religion' is spiritual realization and the transition of the departed souls into a spiritual abode of eternal happiness which may be called heaven. It is also concerned with guiding the life of the faithful so as to prevent their souls from entering into a horrible spiritual existence which may be called hell. The fundamental basis of all religions is the relationship between human beings and God through the intercession of intermediate spirits with personal names. There is no religion in the proper sense where human beings can have direct communion with God without the intercession of intermediate spirits with personal names. The institutionalised relationship between human beings and the spiritual world through the intercession of intermediate spirits, whether it is for good or for evil, may be called a 'cult'. The secret formula of a cult is the knowledge and remembrance of the personal names of the spirits related to the cult, and the respect and reverence given to them by human beings.

The basic difference between religions lies not on the difference of rites and ceremonies, or difference in philosophy, theology or moral guidelines, but lies deeply in the difference of the intermediate spirits with personal names involved in the intercession between God and the faithful. Christianity is a cult establishing an intercession between human beings and God the Father through the personal name of Jesus Christ. The Christians also believe in the communion of Saints whose names are invoked for intercession through the 'Litany of Saints'. In Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism etc., the intercession may be established in the names of Prophets, Gurus or Saints. Even in the so called satanic religion, its adherents might need the intercession of condemned souls to provide for the intercession to Satan.

According to the Khasi thought there is no being more worthy to intercede between man and God other than the spirit of the mother. That was the principle on which the Khasi kur religious cult was instituted in the personal names of 'ka lawbei' (ancestral mother) along with 'u Suidnia' (ancestral uncle) as interceding spirits between the living members of the kur and God. The living members

of the kur who may be called the 'visible-kur' and the spirits of the departed members who may be called the 'invisible-kur' are the inseparable constituents of ka longkur (clan as a religion). The Khasis believe in the intimate relationship between these two realms ka longkur which is a religion pure and holy because it concerns with man's relationship not with 'ki blei-ki dken' (gods and goddesses), but with God Almighty. In the Khasi kur-religion, the community of Gurus or communion of Saints consisted in the invisible-kur. Therefore, the true religion of the Khasis is an institutionalised relationship between the living members of the clan with God through the intercession of the spirits of the departed members of the clan. The Khasis never worshipped the spirits of ancestors, but reverently respected them as elders, Gurus or Saints, on whose intercession they relied upon.

Many writers speak of a 'Khasi religion'. But in reality there is no 'Khasi religion' with common godhead or godheads for the whole tribe, and in which all the Khasis are the members. The religion of the Khasis exists only in each and every kur uniquely and independently. According to some authors there is only one niam (religion) among the Khasis though there are various rukom (religious rites). But in reality, ki rukom (rites) and ka jingneit (belief) are more or less the same throughout the Khasi society, but ka niam (religious cult) is not the same. It is different from one kur to another because the intermediate spirits with personal names involved in the intercession process are different. A person from one kur cannot partake in the religious cult of another kur. Not even the father of a family can partake in the religion of his children's kur. It has also been interpreted that the egg and the rooster are the common interceding beings between man and God in the Khasi religion. But in reality the egg and the cock are only the common living beings used by

all the Khasis in divinations as intervening media of communication between the visible-kur and the invisible-kur, but it is the invisible-kur and not the egg or the rooster which intercedes between the visible-kur and God.

The Khasi kur religion consists of 'ka niam-im' (rites of the living) and 'ka niam-iap' (rites of the dead). The niam-im is concerned with the peaceful life of the living members under the protection of the invisible-kur and with guiding the members to live in the right direction so as to be able to enter eternal life after death into the fold of the invisible-kur. The niam-iap is concerned with the transition rites of each departed member until he or she is safely conducted into the fold of the invisible-kur. The bones of all the departed members were deposited in the mawbah (religious repository stone of the dead) which is a visible sign of their entrance into membership with the invisible-kur. The ritual of the deposition of bones in the mawbah is the most important part of the kur-religion that it was believed that the soul of a clan member whose bones have not been deposited in the mawbah would not find rest because he cannot meet his ancestral mother in the spiritual world. Today, the kur-religion is no more in existence in all the clans; even among members of the Seng Khasi many traditional rites and rituals have been modified and even discarded to suit the needs of the times and the prevailing circumstances. Even the rites of the deposition of bones which was the most important rite of the Khasi traditional niam-iap has gradually fallen into disuse.

The Khasis also have community cults of various gods and goddesses (mostly adopted from Hinduism). These cults are not the same for the whole tribe, but different from one raid or hima to the other, and they are linked with cultural festivals just to keep the raid or the hima alive and kicking, and to maintain its own cohesion and distinct identity. These community cults have nothing to do for the eternal life of the souls,

but concern purely with temporal affairs of the polity, the economy and other societal needs.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century there was an apprehension on the part of some educated Khasi leaders that the culture and identity of the tribe would be overwhelmed by modern influences, especially by the spread of the Christian faith. An association called 'Ka Seng Khasi Association' was founded by sixteen leading men in Shillong on the 23rd November 1899. In all fairness, the Seng Khasi Association was founded not as a religion, but only to preserve the Khasi socio-cultural structure in the midst of emerging modern influences. But in the later period the name was changed to 'Ka Seng Khasi', and there had also been a shift of emphasis from that of a socio-cultural organisation to that of a religious institution. This happened because of the wrong interpretation that a Khasi is a Khasi because of his religion. The Seng Khasi may become a rightful institution for the moral and spiritual guidance of the Khasis who have not adopted any new religion, but it cannot claim to be the spiritual and cultural custodian of the Khasi tribe as a whole. The Seng Khasi is established not clan-wise according to tradition, but it is an association of individual believers irrespective of clan affiliations, and professing to worship God Almighty directly without the intercession of any god-head, or spirits of clan ancestors.

If any organisation wants to be a new religion, it has to install the spirits of its founders as 'gurus' and institute 'ka nguh ka dem' (sacrifice and worship) to God through 'ka noh dkhoh noh dkhah' (sacrificial offerings) to the spirits of the founders by calling upon their personal names to intercede for the faithful of the new religion. It is only then that spiritual mystery shall be instituted. But such a religion cannot be a traditional religion of the Khasis. If members of the Seng Khasi want special minority rights as a religion, it is good if the Government can provide that, but, that should not affect the right of every other Khasi as a member of the tribe.

TO THE EDITOR

Help us serve you better

Editor,

The phrase, 'help us serve you better' is no doubt the watchword of every police personnel. We see this slogan in almost every place where police are discharging their duties. I must congratulate them for putting their watchword into practice, although not all of them do so. There are several instances where a few police personnel had done just the opposite for the sake of money or otherwise. We are not here to judge them or condemn them; that is up to the authorities to take action.

My point in writing this letter is to put forward a suggestion to the Police Department based on what I have seen in other countries, which I suppose will work well in this part of the world as well. I would like to suggest to the Police Department to utilize the social media to its fullness. I am not sure if they can access or use social media. If not, the authorities should call experts to train them for the good of society. And if they are, here are some of the things that social media could help police personnel to solve many dirty things that are happening in society.

Firstly, create a social media platform (it could be Facebook, Instagram or Twit-

ter or other social media account) then put these accounts up in public places for display, add friends and allow every citizen to see posts in the account/s. Secondly, allow citizens to post news or information or photos of things that they observe in society which are not proper. Thirdly, for posts or photo with sufficient evidence the police personnel should take action accordingly. If these platforms are provided, I know many citizens who are constantly on social media would send lots of information and photos and this will make it easy for the police personnel to solve crime better.

On the part of citizens, they should also co-operate to provide detailed posts with proof and photographs. I believe this will solve the problem of littering in streets and other places. It will also solve the problem of vehicles stopping in places where they are not supposed to. It will above all solve the problem of drunkenness and other menace in society.

Can this be done? Can we help one another for the betterment of our society?

Yours etc.,
Michael Makri
Shillong-08

Threat to India's integrity

Editor,

In spite of the challenges of ethnic diversity, huge population, corruption and related short comings of democracy that has plagued the nation for decades, India has been coming up fast as modern and progressive nation in the global map, much to the unhappiness of many of her directionless and non-cooperative neighbours. India's unconditional support to the cause of East Pakistan gave birth to the proud nation of Bangladesh with countless deaths and inhuman torture by a monstrous regime. India never annexed East Pakistan but recognized it as an independent, sovereign nation. In spite of that great selfless service, India was reciprocated with counter terrorism, illegal immigration changing the population dynamics and the rights of the indigenous people in all the NE states. A pro-Islamic section of the current Bangladesh will always remain against Indian development and economic prosperity with covert support from Pakistan and China that aims for destabilizing the great nation. Can India remain silent to such imminent security threats to the people of NE? Can the nation

allow the targeted approach of changing the demographics of the region for supporting a Greater Bangladesh at the cost of her indigenous population being afraid of antagonizing a pro-Islamic section of Bangladesh which is even threatening the secular nation and the democratic government of their own nation?

China has been competing with India in every front and has been trying to destabilize the nation through the adjoining neighbors. The whole world including US has strongly protested the attempts of Chinese hegemony in South China Sea and its veiled attempts to endanger the entire South and SE Asia for her economic and military benefits. Several dissident groups receive strong covert logistic and financial support from China that bleeds our innocent citizens in the NE. The regular provocations along border areas by the Chinese army in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh is a huge security threat to the nation. India under Nehru did not protest against Chinese occupation in Tibet and the result has been an Indo-China war occupying Indian territories and influx of millions of helpless Tibetans to India. Nepal has been playing with fire ignoring the rights of Indian-origin Madhesi and

Delicate diplomacy: Modi's neighbourhood policy will be tested in 2016

By Kanwal Sibal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's neighbourhood policy will be tested in 2016. With Pakistan, the pendulum has swung from breaking off dialogue to seeking it. We have agreed to resume a "comprehensive dialogue", with Foreign Secretary-level talks slated for mid-January. By halting at Lahore on his return from Kabul to greet Nawaz Sharif, Modi has dramatically put his personal imprimatur on our Pakistan policy.

His big leap of faith in dealing with Islamabad has made him vulnerable to Pakistan's endemic bad faith in dealings with us. We might want to deny Pakistan the diplomatic advantage it has gained by claiming that India is refusing dialogue, for which Sharif is ready.

We may be thinking that with a decisive leader like Modi in power, Pakistan may see an opportunity to turn the page with India, if it so desires. But Pakistan's complex internal equations makes it difficult to assess Sharif's game plan. Pakistan seeks dialogue because it makes it look responsible, deflects attention from its terrorism credentials, compels India to overlook its provocations in order to preserve a positive atmosphere, and wears down India's political will.

If there is another major terrorist attack linked to Pakistan, Modi will have to justify his remarkable personal outreach to Pakistan. Until the SAARC summit in November 2016, Pakistan may, as a tactical step, rein in the terrorist groups in order to protect Modi's visit to Islamabad. If Pakistan moves on trade issues in 2016, that would be a step forward. Modi's two successful visits and our unstinted assistance to earthquake-hit Nepal had changed the atmosphere of India-Nepal relations. But violent Madhesi opposition to the new Nepali constitution leading to blockage of fuel supplies from India has destroyed the goodwill created. The Nepalese PM's accusations against India and his ostentatious play of the China card against us present a challenge which we need to counter in 2016.

At the SAARC summit, we can expect a concerted move, especially by Pakistan and Nepal, in favour of China's membership, which we must strongly oppose as it will be politically disastrous for us. With Sri Lanka we should capitalise on the favourable situation for us with the change of government there. The political drift in the Maldives will need our attention at the high political level.

The gains in our relations with Bangladesh, with the elimination of safe havens there for anti-Indian insurgents, transit arrangements, power supplies and so on, should be consolidated in 2016. Our policy towards Dhaka should be seen by all political forces there as a national policy that transcends political parties, even while we recognise the great value of Sheikh Hasina as a partner. Bangladesh can contribute to a more robust Act East policy, with Myanmar and Thailand as part of the chain to advance our interests. India has no impediments to its political, economic and cultural expansion eastwards, and this should be pushed in 2016. China is a partner, in some respects, as well as an adversary. It is strengthening its geopolitical presence in our area with its One Belt One Road initiative (which includes the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor through POK), its Indian Ocean ambi-

tions and its move to promote the reconciliation process in Afghanistan with US support.

Our policy of cooperating with China within BRICS, and finding common ground on global issues such as climate change and WTO should continue. Only measured access to the Indian market should be given to China unless there is reciprocity. China's willingness to disrupt its productive relations with Japan and ASEAN on territorial issues carries a lesson for us.

Building our strategic ties with the US and Japan as a hedging strategy against China's assertiveness should continue, without becoming a pawn in the US' hands, whose own vast economic and financial relationship with China cannot be ignored. Access to US defence technology will be a challenge as we expand our arms acquisitions from that country. We should have a strategy of extracting the most from Barack Obama's last year in office, helped by the good personal rapport between him and Modi.

For Modi's many developmental campaigns, the US is a key partner for technology and investment. American investors want to see quicker implementation of promises for reforms and ease of doing business in India.

On strategic issues, our relations with the US are in better shape than on economic issues, where America treats India as an antagonist in international negotiations.

The US should be pushed in 2016 on its promise not only to facilitate India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Missile Technology Control Regime, but also the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

With Russia, after Modi's successful visit to Moscow in December 2015, the focus should be on expanding trade and energy ties, reaching agreement on Kudankulam 5 and 6 and announcing a second site for Russian reactors. With President François Hollande coming as chief guest at our 2016 Republic Day, we should look for steps to consolidate our defence ties with France as the principal European option in our Make in India in defence manufacturing.

Modi's highly successful visit to the UAE in 2015 should be followed by more attention to the Arab world in 2016. Religious extremism and terrorism of the ISIL variety, the emergence of its cells in our region, the use of social media for recruitment, require more intensive cooperation between security agencies at the global level.

Modi's visit to Israel in 2016 would be a historic step. With the nuclear agreement between the P-5 and Iran proceeding smoothly, we need to reinforce ties with Iran, which is a vital strategic partner for energy cooperation and access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

After the hugely successful India-Africa Forum summit in 2015, a systematic follow up would be required in 2016 to derive the maximum from the goodwill and opportunities created. The challenges and opportunities for India in 2016 are no different than in 2015.

The point is how much the dynamism and imagination Modi has shown in external affairs can shape the two to India's advantage.

(The writer is a former Foreign Secretary)

other ethnic communities by not allowing proportional representation and stripping them of citizenship if they are married to Indians across the border by promulgating an unacceptable constitution. If India does not give a strong signal to Nepal now, adjoining Indian states will see huge influx of refugees in the not so distant future. Of course bilateral issues need to be peacefully resolved over dialogue table; however, so far not a single genu-

ine demand of the Terai populations has been accepted by the Nepal government for a section representing over 50% of the population. We often forget the security we enjoy being part of a large, strong and united nation; else our virtual rights would have been extinguished by our so called friendly neighbors.

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Lethbridge AB Canada
T1J 4B3

“A competent and self-confident person is incapable of jealousy in anything. Jealousy is invariably a symptom of neurotic insecurity.”

— Robert A. Heinlein

The Shillong Times

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Uneasy alliance

RELATIONS between Narendra Modi's many-faced government and Nawaz Sharif's shifting stands do not still go against commitment to an eventual rapprochement. Meanwhile terrorists based on the other side of the LOC produce a few disturbing eruptions, lately on the Indian air force installation at Pathankot. But a number of things had happened meanwhile. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj had a *gufagu* with Nawaz Sharif in Islamabad. The ISIS had brought Delhi, Islamabad and Rawalpindi closer by declaring war on these power bases. National Security Advisors of the two countries had resumed contact in Bangkok. Nevertheless, there is a schizophrenic response in New Delhi, especially the BJP's approach on a proposed trip by Narendra Modi to Islamabad. Sharif has made a peace call from Sri Lanka. But Modi has asked Nawaz Sharif to deliver on his promise of “prompt and decisive action” against those responsible for attack on the Pathankot airbase. The ruling BJP is said to have indicated that the government's talks with Islamabad hinge on whether there is proof of a Pakistani state actor's involvement in the Pathankot attack. But all this is a tall order as Delhi has always failed to come up with positive evidence of any such complicity by the Pakistani establishment in terrorists from Pakistan's soil pronging Indian border installations.

What is surprising is that the RSS, Hindutva standard-bearer, is not uncompromising about Modi's decision to meet Sharif even after the Pathankot outrage. Senior RSS member Dattaraya Hosbale said, “sometimes relations (with Pakistan) sour, like it happens between brothers”. But Delhi has to bargain from a position of strength. The unexpected dilution of RSS intransigence may not seem a riddle after Sushma Swaraj wearing green in Islamabad. The sudden death of J&K Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed was a tragic event but the prompt succession of daughter Mehbooba Mufti to fill the void is unlikely to make any difference to the BJP's policy of adjustment in Srinagar.

LOOKING BACK

January 31, 1988

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 Western Scientists found a hole bigger than the surface area of USA over Antarctica. Therefore, Indians scientist's findings only confirms 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 seriously or killing, most living things.

But for this Ozone shield, there would be a global epidemic of a host of diseases like skin cancer, cataract problems, DNV damage, changes in the immune systems of living beings, modifications

in the life cycle of certain marine organisms, drop in the growth rate of several varieties and many other harmful effects.

The grave effect of UVR overdose would not be limited to any particular life art, but will affect all life forms on the earth. Agricultural productivity could drop drastically throughout the world. Many marine species could become extinct.

The Ozonosphere lies between 10 to 50 km above earth's surface. Though the ozone layer is about 40 km thick at high altitudes, the atmosphere is indeed very thin. The total amount of ozone, compared to more abundant atmospheric gases, is small. If all the ozone in a vertical column through the entire atmosphere is compressed to sea level pressure, it would hardly form a layer of a few millimeters only.

Ozone molecules are broken up in the earth's atmosphere below 0 km by sunlight with the help of some naturally occurring chemicals like nitrogen oxide, particularly chlorine.

The latter is spilling in to the atmosphere in the form of the Chloro fluoro carbons (CFC's) from aerosol sprays, home refrigerators and some industrial solvents.

Measurements made over the past few years show that the amount of Ozone above Antarctica decreases by even large amounts each spring and recovers by early summer.

Bracing for the next big one...meanwhile its business as usual

By Patricia Mukhim

The big jolt of January 4, managed to shake us out of our New Year reverie. I am sure those who were headed for a picnic on that day would not have enjoyed the outing as much as they would have had minus the quake.

These natural phenomena are reminders of the ephemeral nature of human existence – an existence we take so seriously that we spend all our waking hours running after material wealth as if we would live forever. But humans that we are, the quake is soon sent to the backburner of our sub-conscious to ferment there and take shape in the form of bad dreams that manage to rob us of our sleep. Three days after the quake and people are still discussing it avidly. A doctor friend narrated the story of a staff member who had sealed the doors so securely against robbers that when the quake happened and they wanted to get out of the house they could not get out in a hurry. That the lights went off and no torch was at hand did not help the cause. Another person was hit by the refrigerator that nearly landed on his feet on account of the violent shake-up. Fortunately he was quick enough to react and push the fridge up before it could land on his feet like a ton of bricks. I am sure there are many such stories doing the rounds.

Some Facebook friends have put up pictures of how we should keep ourselves ready for the next jolt. They suggest wearing a helmet while sleeping and tying up heavy pillows around the body so that the impact of anything falling will not be fatal. Imagine having to go to sleep night after night in this gear. But jokes aside, while we speak of the BIG ONE predicted by seismologists no one expected it to come quite so soon. And I am unsure if what we experienced was indeed the Big One. In our minds we keep postponing this Big Date. As if we have any control over nature. The truth is we don't. If that January 4th quake had lasted for a few more seconds the casualties would have been more than just cracked government buildings. Friends from Imphal writing to me said that the only structures with deep cracks were mostly government buildings. This actually shows up the quality of work done by govern-

ment engineers and contractors and the corruption that prevents anything of quality ever emerging out of the government system.

This brings me to the point of the building by-laws of the Meghalaya Urban Development Authority (MUDA) which hitherto were applicable only within areas under the Shillong Municipality and left out the Greater Shillong areas and the rest of the State (as if big landmark structures come up only in urban areas). This is almost like saying that only the public residing within the municipality deserve to remain safe and the number of floors they can construct are restricted to G+3 or G+4 with proper engineering strategies. All these years the areas beyond the municipality did what they wanted. There is no one to check their housing plans. Building permissions were okayed by the Dorbar Shnong and endorsed by the Syiem of Mylliem. Both authorities only look at the aspect of non-encroachment into the neighbours' properties. The two authorities are incapable of giving any technical specifications since they have no technical human resource for the same.

And then suddenly the Khasi Hills District Council has come up with the diktat that it would issue building permissions within scheduled areas and not MUDA. While referring to the Meghalaya Town and Country Planning Act 1973, Latiplang Kharkongor the EM in charge trade had pointed out that it was clearly specified that the provisions of the Act shall extend to the whole of Meghalaya excluding the Autonomous Districts. That the State Government has sat on this Act for so long and failed to recognise that deciding specifications for buildings for the entire State fall within its remit for the simple reason that it has the both financial and technical human resources, just shows that this state is sleepwalking most of the time and only wakes up when things reach a critical point. None of the District Councils have the financial or tech-

nical resources to get into the business of making building bye laws and to technically inspect a building to certify that it can withstand seismic action of the kind that hit us on Jan 4 this year or a more severe one in the future. True, some of the MUDA engineers and officials are avicious crooks and are likely to sign on the dotted lines of a home plan if their palms are greased. I wish more people would blow the whistle and that these jokers are named, shamed and sacked for dereliction of duty. But because of some bad eggs we cannot discredit the entire system – which is that of adhering to a set of building bye-laws.

While passing through a few localities of Shillong I was appalled to see very tall buildings standing not even a few feet away from the next house which is a single storied building. During the recent earthquake these buildings literally swayed. It was God's mercy that saved us. Perhaps this quick jolt is a lesson for all of us to be more responsible in the way we construct our homes. Granted that the culture of Shillong today, for anyone with money, is to invest in a multi-storied housing project purely for the purpose of renting those out to families, but should safety not be a concern? It is also true that the house owners don't live in those homes (flats) and therefore could not be bothered about the safety of the buildings. But should the tenants/buyers grab such houses merely because they are hard up for accommodation?

The purpose of having a government is that people don't indulge in laissez faire activities; that there is a check and balance somewhere; that the rich don't get past all the laws and pose dangers to their less fortunate neighbours who are likely to be buried under the debris if a major earthquake revisits us. This Government was elected by popular mandate to deliver certain goods and services. It is the duty of the elected representative who is supervising the Urban Affairs Department to see that the babus don't just sit on their haunches and deliver next to nothing at the end of the

day. The minister is duty bound to pull up those who have bent the rules and allowed building owners to overshoot their specifications. But only ministers with an integrity quotient that matches word and deed would be able to control their departments. If the minister himself/herself has doubtful credentials and is known to compromise on principles then take it from me that the babus will also have a field day. Elected representatives themselves cannot override decisions given by the babus (not all are greedy and corrupt) after due diligence for they would be compromising the lives of citizens. If a minister indulges in such activities to make a quick buck then we have to blame the electorate for reposing their faith on a person who least deserves such trust.

Most of us realize that the pursuit of material wealth blinds our spiritual vision. However, reversing the process seems well nigh impossible. Fortunately there is also a growing realization amongst government circles that spiritual re-engineering is the need of the hour. This re-engineering of our intrinsic value systems is what can lead to better governance. In fact the call of the hour is for reinventing government to make it more responsive and responsible. But if the value systems of individuals in government remain glued to creature comforts only then government will fail the efficiency measurement test – which in fact it has for the past many decades.

I refer to what Toki Blah commented on the aftermath of the earthquake which is the squabbling between the State Government and the District Council about the building bye-laws. Why is the District Council which has failed the basic test of safeguarding forests, mineral wealth and water, now suddenly so keen to become the custodian of the safety of our buildings and therefore our lives? Does it even have the wherewithal to do so? Why should the state government and the district councils play football over our lives? We need immediate answers to these puzzling questions. Stop playing politics with people's lives and safety.

Stop Beating Around the Bush

By Ananya S Guha

It is a tragedy that when the Prime Ministers of two neighbouring countries meet after a 'goodwill' visit it is no more than a fake ornament. The two countries known for their battle of attrition, always talk about peace and goodwill. Many a time such visits have been lauded by the people of both the countries as positive development, and as something to tell us that geo politics apart, for historical reasons, and the emergence of the two nation theory, abetted by terrorists working within, the attrition continues unabated. But peace, negotiations, the catch words here are elusive, as the speaking tough continues, and India is battle scarred obviously by memories of November 2008. But it is irony at its worst, or best that almost recurrently after such meetings take place with the Prime Ministers of the two countries bashfully smiling at each other that some attack or the other takes place with the kind of impunity which will shame the worst two timer.

The Pathankot incident is not only an example it is a veritable slap on India's face- as if to say: see this is what we can do and get away with it. Such brash realities apart, and that India is taking things sometimes lying down is only an indication that things have come to a sordid impasse. And both countries know it. Notwithstanding the plastic smiles the Prime Ministers of the two countries have on their faces, the fact is this is a kind of acting which will put any thespian to shame. And this is going on for years, cheating the people of the two countries, most of whom want respite.

The fact is that the ticklish issue of contention is Kashmir, and without categorically speaking on it nothing will inch forward. We have to stand by legitimate historical happenings, that it became an integral part of India after independence, no matter what the sceptics say that it was done under duress by an effete Raja. Done is done, what happened is history, and that paved the way for the future destiny and shaping of India. But when a country talks about POK ie Pakistan occupied Kashmir it introduces the element of coercion and the attributes of war, silent or not so silent. Cold or hot. In between of course there were two official wars and one where India played an interventionist role to save a fledgling nation from oppression and tyrannical force. Perhaps this is what Pakistan cannot forgive nor forget. Its historical memory is tainted- hurt and wounded by this humiliation, and also because of the fact that it is bedeviled by terrorists ruling the roost from outside countries as well, and factious religious groups within, at each others' throats.

Then now we have Pathankot which is not only a clear military attack, but also has shown how internal security in India is in shambles, marked by lassitude and indifference. To enter a supposedly guarded area, in uniforms and gun down soldiers is a sign of the

breakdown of intelligence wings, and of course support from within. Things have not come to a resolution as to who are the culpable ones. But the blatant attack pre planned meticulously and catching the Army unawares is a sure sign not only of gross negligence, and apathy but also one which shows how weak- kneed our much vaunted Army is. So once again the clock has been put backwards, to talks and other niceties. This is the pity of it. The Home Minister of India's confession that there was a lapse is a word put softly, mildly. Innocent lives have been lost by people doing their duties to save a nation from barbaric terrorism. But the Indian question should be this: why has this happened, especially after Modi's visit which was a good gesture.

The India Pakistan relationship is also bedeviled by the Muslim question in India and the relationships within, overtly watched by Pakistan. The powers to be within India should know that this is a very sensitive issue which can have international ramifications. The Dadrri incident could have given a foil to many. It was an incident which was not only not properly handled but callously, leading to protests from all sane elements who decry bigotry of any form. But people wait and watch, fanatics and their likes.

To get out of this tangle the two countries must talk straight, not make mention of the proxy war, but certainly blatant attacks like that in Pathankot must be brought before Pakistan's eye as something which is not only war, but violates all international laws of propriety. Pakistan's argument, the beaten track one is that these are people who do things and operate without their knowledge or support. Does it need only the US to weed out such elements as happened in the case of Bin Laden, an example which clearly stated Pakistan's ambiguity and double standards?

India must be wise in handling the Muslim population. Indian Muslims are Indians; any attempts to divide them on tenuous and apocryphal basis will be detrimental to the cause of both the countries. India has the second largest Muslim population in the world. Their allegiance cannot always be questioned on the basis of religion, or religious zealots. True there have been intermingling of terrorists with local populations, but these cannot be generalized. Doing this would mean alienation, and alienation in a diverse country like India, with dual, treble loyalties like language, religion, caste and dialect is like splitting the atom. India should know it and Pakistan should know it; that the two nation theory was brought about not only because of political expediency, but also because of historical and cultural arguments. To thinly divide culture, language and religion is to drive a monstrous wedge into the monolith of countries.

caste or accepted profession from all front- legislation as well as education and surveillance.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Viaemail

Kudos Meghalaya Police

Editor,

I would like to state that our company car got stolen on January 2, 2016 from one of the most busy streets of Shillong in broad daylight. Shillong isn't it! On realizing that it is stolen, we immediately informed the Police and filed an FIR at Sadar Police

Station. I was stunned to see the immediate action taken by the police. Within seconds they informed all their officers and our car was located within 45 minutes of the incident. The thief was also caught by them. We were so happy with their instant action. It strengthened our belief on the police department and we are very sure that if proper FIR's are filed on time, police go all out to solve the case. Thank you so much Meghalaya Police - you are making Shillong a safer place to stay in. Keep up your good work.

Yours etc.,
Rahul Bajaj,
Shillong-1

TO THE EDITOR

What's in a surname!

Editor,

Mr. Kajal Chatterjee should be thanked for his feedback to the article, 'Surnames that discriminate' (ST, January 5, 2016) and for his identifying the caste system as 'the greatest evil' in his letter. 'Its more than just surnames!' (ST, January 6, 2016). He has put forward an exceptional instance of his Brahmin cousin being mocked at school for having an uncommon surname 'Malkhandi'. This leads him to conclude that 'mocking certain person by exploiting their surnames has no relationship with the caste system'. I hope his Brahmin cousin (Mr. Malkhandi) must have completed his school unlike my dalit classmate (Mr. Mal) who had to drop out of school to save himself from the ignominy of surname that channelled all the insults towards his parents and the family occupation. However, his Malkhandi point shows that if there is a ban on the use of surnames, it will even save the day for some Brahmins as well who have exceptionally uncommon surnames. It is true as Mr. Chatterjee has, rightly, pointed out that apart from surnames there are other sticks to beat a person with

like the name of one's village etc. However, we can easily see that a surname is the biggest stick as it identifies a person and his or her caste 24x7. Besides, surnames route offenders' acid spitting towards victims' parents and family occupation.

In India, the caste system is hell bent on making the status of blue collar workers as lesser animals. If Mr. Kajal has a surname of a very important occupation say Chamar (cobler) or Dom (worker in a burning ghat) or Pamanik (barber) instead of Chatterjee (Brahmin priest), he could not have said, 'mocking certain persons by exploiting their surnames has no relationship with the caste system' as the words 'chamar' and 'dom' have, frequently, been used to call somebody names in common parlance. Unfortunately, Indians are yet to respect such valuable professions. I can feel the pain as I, myself, am carrying a half pariah surname that announces my belonging to other backward castes. In fact, pariahs are in a quandary about what to do with their surnames. It is difficult to live with it. It is also hard to drop it as in that case people will say you are cheating at your surname. Only a blanket ban can redress a pariah's

plight. Mr. Chatterjee asks if it is necessary to hide one's ethnic and religious identity as well along with one's surname and to identify ourselves as Mr. Blue etc to avoid nepotism. Though the question is asked in lighter vein, it needs to be followed in interviews to hide as far as practicable the caste, race and religious identity of interviewees to arrest nepotism. Instead of Mr. Sky Blue etc, certain number can easily act as an identity of an interviewee.

According to Mr. Chatterjee the problem of surname in a marriage is immaterial and there are instances of happy wives with wiped parental surnames and unhappy wives having original surnames. I wonder even in those cases if wives' surname changing has been made an issue or condition for conjugal happiness. Mr. Chatterjee rightly says that mutual affection and sacrifice are necessary in a marriage since it is a noble relationship. When he himself is calling for mutual sacrifice, I cannot understand why he fights shy of the idea of mutual sacrifice of surname. Let both life partners drop what Mr. Chatterjee describes as only an immaterial thing.

However, no one can deny Mr. Chatterjee's view that 'all depends upon the

mindset of people' and 'people should learn to rise above narrow mindsets'. This is indeed the real panacea. When our mindsets become humane, we will strive for cooperation instead of conflict. There will not be existence of any crime or punishment. But it is still miles to go to reach to that stage. Education is the most effective apparatus to get to the ideal society. As Pratichi Trust report on primary education reveals that some teachers themselves are using sticks to touch a dalit, such a dream society seems to be a far cry at least as of now. At present, the monster of prejudice is making people dance to his tunes and killing one's own children in the name of honour (!) killing. According to statistics from the United Nations one in five cases of 'honour killing' internationally every year comes from India. The cases of honour killing have been on the rise in India. This leads to a proposal that India badly needs a legislation on 'honour killing'. This is enough to show that there is no question of sitting idle in the hope of changing the mindset of people to have a permanent solution. It is time to attack all the pockets of prejudice such as surnames, khap panchayats (kangaroo courts), public display of contempt towards any

"Though the vicious can sometimes pour affliction upon the good, their power is transient and their punishment certain; and that innocence, though oppressed by injustice, shall, supported by patience, finally triumph over misfortune!"

—Ann Radcliffe

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LVIII No. 148 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JANUARY 9, 2016

US about face

THE tough talk in the US against the Islamic state of Syria and Iraq (ISIS) with the current republican presidential candidate Donald Trump spewing hatred against Syrian refugees seems to have taken a U-turn with the Shia-Sunni divide throwing a spanner into the works. The traditional alliance between the US and Saudi Arabia has taken a hit. The Obama administration had suddenly spotted the fundamental contradictions in its relationship with Saudi Arabia. The execution of the Shia leader of al-Qaida terrorists, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr has exacerbated relations further. The US usually looked the other way or issued calibrated warnings when the Saudi royal family violated human rights. Saudi Arabia was Washington's most dependable filling station, a regular supplier of intelligence and a valuable counterweight to Iran. The accord between Iran and the US and the EU led to a phased lifting of sanctions on Teheran following the civilian nuclear energy deal.

American oil production is surging. The mutual dependency between the US and Saudi Arabia which goes back to the early 1930s is now fractured. In 2011, Saudi leaders attacked President Obama for not supporting former president Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. US secretary of state John Cary had apparently warned against the execution of Nimr al-nimr. It seems the proposed Saudi alliance against the ISIS and al-Qaida is now under US scanner. Priorities have now gone mixed up. At the same time, the US is in a tizzy over Iran unveiling a new underground nuclear missile depot. There is a real challenge for the Obama administration and the EU plan to lift sanctions on Teheran. India has to watch every move with an open mind.

LOOKING BACK

January 31, 1988

Meghalaya delegation urges N. F. Railway to prevent malpractices

The General Manager, N.F. Railway, Mr B.K. Palit has agreed to initiate necessary steps for preventing malpractices at Gauhati Railway Station particularly, involving booking and reservation on the Tinsukia Mail. The question was raised with the General Manager by a delegation of four, representing the Meghalaya Small Industries Association who met him on June 11, last in his office. Mr Nayyar, C.O.P./C.C.S. of the Railway was also present during the discussion and assisted the General Manager. Questions about increase in the quota for passengers originating in Shillong and Meghalaya were put forth by the team. The General Manager agreed to increase the same. It was also disclosed at the meeting that the new Vivekananda Express is expected to be commissioned to run from Gauhati BC terminal from July next. It was also disclosed efforts were being made to make the Kamrup Express to terminate and originate at Gauhati. It is expected that the introduction may materialised by the end of July. It was agreed that such meetings at personal levels are of greater benefit and that such meetings may be held in future also.

The Meghalaya Small Industries Association team comprised Messrs. B. P. Bajoria, General Secretary, H. P. Maheshwari, J. M. Mantri and K. P. Agarwala.

Keatinge Road traders in a fix
The small business en-

terprises of Keatinge Road area of Shillong are in a state of distress. On one hand the licencing authorities are dilly dallying to issue their trading licence, on the other hand they are being chased by the Police for their alleged unauthorised business.

It is estimated that some 50 petty business organisations are operating along the Keatinge Road. Some of the m have been there from the early fifties. These are mostly located in private premises. But the Shillong Municipality has not been granting licence to all of them, particularly the motor garages. While, it is being felt that the Government should do something to restore some semblance of orderliness in the area, it is pointed out that those trading concerns which have been in existence for a considerable period should be granted registration under the Municipality. The chaos in the Keatinge Road area is all too well known to all. In the recent years the locality has undergone total metamorphosis—from a quiet semi residential locality to problematic commercial area. Acting on the basis of basis of complaints from certain sections of the residents, police have been periodically making surprise visits to the area. If any vehicle is found being repaired on the road, the workshop owner is immediately rounded up. This is purely on valid grounds, since parking of vehicles on the road makes vehicular traffic difficult. But it is alleged that a section of policemen, mostly underlings, have been harassing these workshop owners by collecting gratifications.

Who are minorities under Indian Law?

By Dr Omarlin Kyndiah

The Constitution of India uses the word 'minority' or its plural form in some Articles viz Article 20 to 30 and 350 A to 350 B, but does not define the word 'minority'. The Motilal Nehru Report (1928) showed a prominent desire to afford protection to minorities, but did not define the expression. In pursuance of the Constitutional provisions, the government is committed to the well being of the minorities- whether linguistic or religious. According to the Census 2011, of the total population of 121 crore, the Hindus make up 79.8 percent. Muslim constitutes 14.2, Christians 2.3, Sikh 1.7, Buddhists 0.7 and Jains 0.4 percent. 'Other religious persuasions' and 'religion not stated' constitute 0.9 and 0.1 percent respectively. The Census 2011 data indicated that Hinduism is professed by the majority of the population in India. The Hindu is majority in most States and UTs except in Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Lakshadweep, Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir. As regards religious minorities at the national level, all those who profess a religion other than Hinduism are considered minorities. The Muslims are the largest religious minority followed by Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jain and Parsis.

Coming to Meghalaya, in the context of the national scenario, of the total population of 29 lakhs, the Christians make up 74.59 percent, the Hindus 11.52, Muslims 4.39, Buddhist 0.33, Sikh 0.1, Jain 0.02 percent. 'Other religious persuasions' and 'religion not stated' constitute 8.70 and 9.02 percent respectively. In the State of Meghalaya, the indigenous *Niamtre*, *Niam Khasi* and *Songasareks* are placed in the category of 'other religious persuasions'. If we look at the distribution of minority population in India, it indicates that a group which constitutes a 'minority' at the national level is a 'majority' in some State or UTs. For instance, distribution of minority population indicates that Muslims are in majority in the Union Territories of Lakshadweep and in the State of Jammu & Kashmir. The Christians are majority in Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. Punjab is the stronghold of Sikhism.

There is no internationally agreed definition as to which groups constitute minorities. The UN Sub-Committee on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities define minority as a group numerically

inferior to the rest of the population of a state which possess and wish to preserve stable ethnic, religious or linguistic traditions. The Oxford Dictionary of English language defines 'minority' as a smaller group representing "less than half of the whole or predominant population". In Kerala Education Bill, the Supreme Court through S.R.Das, Chief Justice, while suggesting the technique of arithmetic tabulation held that the minority means a "community which is numerically less than 50 percent of the total population. The National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 in the Section 2(c) of the act defined a minority as "a community notified as such by the Central government". Acting under the provision on October 23, 1993, the Central government notified the Muslim, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhist and Parsis (Zoroastrian) communities as minorities for the purpose of the Act. When the Central government listed these communities as minority it appears that numerical criterion was taken into consideration.

The question of 'minority status' has had assumed importance in the Indian political-economy since 1947. It could partly be the product of socio-economic benefits provided by the Nehruvian state, which was based on the Laskian sense of 'welfare state', which in turn influenced the Nehruvian model. However, the Nehruvian model was contradicted by the reorganization of states on linguistic lines. The classic case may include the movement for separating Andhra from Tamil Nadu, or Haryana from Punjab or even the linguistic politics in Assam which led to the Hill State Movement in the North East. It was against this backdrop that the Supreme Court had to intervene frequently. While the Constitution does not define minority or provide details relating to the geographical and numerical specification of the concepts, it appears that the constitutional scheme envisages this to be determined at the national level. However, several Supreme Court judgments have sought to define minority at the state level in term of protection under Article 30. The SC in TMA Pai Foundation & ors vs State of Karnataka & ors consider

'Scheduled Castes' and 'Scheduled Tribes' are also to be identified at the State/UT level. In terms of Articles 341 to 342 the President is empowered to draw up a list in consultation with the Governor of each State subject to revision by Parliament. To define minorities State-wise in line with several Supreme Court judgments, the then UPA government in 2004 attempted to introduce The Constitution (103rd Amendment) Bill 2004. The Bill seeks to have State-wise minority status rather than national status. Minorities in State will be decided through a Presidential notification in consultation with the State government. In the context of the above moves and consequent developments a number of representations have been made to the Central Government and the Meghalaya Government by Seng Khasi and Sein Raj Jowai since 2008. Sein Raj Niamtre Shillong too had sent a representation to the Honourable Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi in April 2015, stating the case of tribal faith groups of Meghalaya. It was then forwarded to the Honourable Chief Minister of Meghalaya, dated 5th May 2015 through the Union Ministry of Minorities Affairs, GoI for appropriate action. The members of the *Niamtre*, *Niam Khasi* and *Songasarek* communities are awaiting the response of the State government till date. In the light of our argument above, let us take a stand that under the provisions of the Constitution of India and the verdicts of the Honourable Supreme Court, the concept of the 'minority' crosses the border of mere interpretation and enjoins the Indian Union and its constituent States to declare a particular community as a 'minority', so that its members are offered the benefits of a 'welfare state', which is not yet dead. The demand for 'minority status' by the indigenous faith should not be construed as an attempt to deny the rights of other religious communities from Khasi, Jaintia & Garo tribes. They only demand the rights of equality before the law. Indeed, the principle of democratic equality as envisaged in the Preamble to the Constitution can work only if the nation as a whole is brought on the same level. *The Niamtre*, *Niam Khasi* and *Songasarek* community appeal to the other minority groups to support their case.

the question of the unit for the purpose of determining the definition of 'minority' within the meaning of Article 30(1). It held that 'a minority either linguistic or religious is determinable only by reference to demography of the State and not by taking into consideration the population of the country as a whole'. In the context of this case, the SC cited the DAV College vs State of Punjab & ors [1971], where the question was raised as to what constituted a religious or linguistic minority and how it was to be determined? In another case, D.A.V College Bhatinda vs State of Punjab and Ors the Court explained the observation in the above case and it was stated that, "what constitutes a linguistic or religious minority must be judged in relation to the State in as much as the impugned Act was a State Act and not in relation to the whole of India. The SC rejected the contention that since Hindus were a majority in India, they could not be a religious minority in the State of Punjab, as it took the State as the unit to determine whether the Hindus were a minority community. The application of numerical test with reference to religion in states like Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir and Nagaland makes Sikhism, Islam and Christianity the majority religions in those States respectively (DAV College vs State of Punjab AIR 1971 SC 1731).

In fact the SC has laid down the principle of safeguarding the educational rights of the minorities enshrined in Article 30(1) of the Constitution. Its decision commenced with Kerala Education Bill Case [1957] wherein, it was observed that since this Bill 'extends to the whole of the State of Kerala and consequently the minority must be determined by reference to the entire population of that State'. It was followed by the DAV College Case and climaxed by the TMA Pai Foundation Case. The SC had to give its ruling again in the Bal Patil & Anr vs Union of India & Ors Case (2005). It upheld its earlier position that "since reorganization of States in India has been on linguistic lines, therefore, for the purpose of determining the minority, the unit will be the State and not the whole of India. Thus, religious and linguistic minorities, who have been put on par in Article 30 have to be considered State wise. Incidentally,

judge, however corrupt he/she may be, will get much more respect from the society than a "mere" peon or an auto driver in spite of his/her impeccable honesty. So prohibition on usage of surname will hardly serve any purpose. Again I reiterate that immediate steps be taken to change the mindset of people through implementation of strict laws banning discrimination on the basis of race-language-caste-region and introduction of moral education in schools so that the young minds are enlightened right from the budding stages of life.

Yours etc.,
Kajal Chatterjee,
Via email
Kolkata - 114

TO THE EDITOR

High Court order, timely

Editor

The direction of the Hon'ble High Court of Meghalaya to dismantle buildings exceeding the mandated building laws and construction code of G + 3 is a pointer in the right direction. The recent "shake-up" on the very first month of the New Year should be a real wake up call. Many places especially in Iewduh area which have been shabby constructed to house labourers and store goods should be inspected by the Syiem of Hima Mylliem since it falls under his jurisdiction. The recent High Court order to the CBI to file a formal charge sheet in the Supreme Court against all those involved in such a shameless scandal would have a strong political fallout on the Congress Party which would be closely watched. Corruption and constructing buildings without least concern for innocent lives at stake especially in a severe earthquake zone

is utterly disgraceful for a so-called Christian majority state. What happens next is something we need to watch out for in the front pages of newspapers.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S. Wankhar
Shillong-3

Agree to disagree

Editor,

Since the opinion of Mr.Sujit De is unlikely to converge with that of mine around the issue of surnames, I desire to rest my case after responding on two points raised by the former in his letter titled "What's in a surname"(ST January 8, 2016).

It has become a "fashion" in the non-Muslim world to label Islam as a religion leaning towards terrorism but if anybody dares to point out the examples of Hindu, Sikh(in the Khalistan days of Punjab) or Christian terror(Ireland of not too distant past); the anti-Islam lobby instantly dubs

it as "exceptional"! Thanks to such biased mindsets prevailing in the society, Mr De immediately termed the ordeal of my 'Malkhandi' cousins as an "exceptional" case of torture on a Brahmin through exploitation of surname! It is highly tragic to notice how Mr De is trying to suggest that all Dalits of India have to discard studies following taunts around their surnames! But the fact remains that innumerable Dalits have prospered exceptionally well in education sphere. Yes, many have been forced to quit studies, but that is due to economic factors and such cases of drop outs can be found in many impoverished families of "high caste" vintage also! Mr De also supports ban of surnames as many of it suggest their "lowly" family occupations and the bearers of it have to face ostracism or abuses. But he is perhaps not aware of the fact that people get discriminated on the basis of their profession also. For example, a doctor or a

of 68. He was born in a poor family with abject poverty. At one time he had to survive with a little food being provided by the roadside peanut seller. He started his career as a class IV employee of the High Court. It is astonishing and inspiring that he rose from the lowest category employee to the highest rank in Indian Judiciary. He was a man of impeccable character and was popular for his uncompromising stand on principles. Justice Kapadia was instrumental in some landmark judgments like quashing the appointment of CVC, which made severe embarrassment to the Government culminating with Prime Minister admitting the error in appointment and Vodafone case etc. He did not take any position in Government / semi government/ autonomous organization after retirement, implying that he

Yours etc.,
Kajal Chatterjee,
Via email
Kolkata - 114

Homage to Justice Kapadia

Editor,

Justice S H Kapadia former Chief Justice of India expired on 4th January 2016 in Mumbai at the age

H. Elias a forgotten hero

By Barnes Mawrie

Fate is sometimes cruel for it ignores greatness and spurns worthiness. This could be described about Hopewell Elias Sohliya, a much forgotten poet and writer of the Khasis. Hopewell Elias was born on 23rd May 1907. He was one of the first Khasis to have completed college studies outside Shillong at St. Xaviers, Kolkata. After being in the Government service for a short time, he discontinued in order to study for priesthood. He was ordained a Catholic priest in 1941. This year 2016 occurs the fiftieth anniversary of his death and the 75th anniversary of his sacerdotal ordination. For some reasons unknown, the literary contribution of H. Elias has been played down while that of Soso Tham has been over highlighted in the Khasi literary circles. No doubt Soso Tham was a great poet but comparison between the two is odd for each one of them was a class of his own. While the former was a born poet without much of education, the latter was a highly educated person who had great knowledge of classical literature. Soso Tham himself confessed in his writing that his poetry did not result from knowledge and expertise but from a spontaneous welling of his heart. H. Elias on the other hand studied Greek classical literature and knew well the form and structure of poetry and prose. His critical essay on poetry which appears in his well known collection of poems Ka Pansngiat Ksiar, bears this out.

According to late Prof. R. S. Lyngdoh "H. Elias can be considered as the first to trace the development of Khasi poetry from the rudimentary form of Khasi phawars. He can also be considered as the first to classify Khasi poetry with Khasi names. He was the first to evolve Khasi prosody with original Khasi metrical laws". From this perspective, he was truly an exceptional poet who has enriched Khasi poetry with our own proper names and forms. His classical work Ka Pansngiat Ksiar consists of three parts: the first part gives a theory of poetry and the Khasi equivalent terms; the second part consists of poems under the title Ka Saron Ksiar. These are of great historical value for they trace the rise and fall of four Khasi states. The third part consists of various poems where some of Elias' best lyrics are found.

In one sense H. Elias was way above Soso Tham not merely because of his educational qualifications, but because he was not merely a great poet like the latter but he was as well a competent prose writer. His contribution to school and college education cannot be underestimated. From Class I to Class XII, his Khasi text books are still being used. He has 9 volumes of prose collection, 1 Mathematics text book, 1 Khasi Grammar, 22 other reli-

gious literary works which are mostly translations from other languages and others. Some of his classical works are also used as text books in colleges and at the University level. From this it is evident that H. Elias was a prolific writer who had undertaken writing as a God-given mission. In fact, once he was known to have said "I wish to write some more books if God permits me some more time, because I am very concerned about our students and the backwardness of our people". His well known watchword was "language (literature) builds the people" and this motivated him to write with indescribable passion.

H. Elias was a multi-talented person. Besides being an accomplished poet and writer, he was also a good musician and had contributed a lot of hymns to the hymnal Ka Lynti Bneng. A number of his songs are found in the collection Ki Sur Syiang which have been rendered into tonic sol fa.

H. Elias was probably one among the first Khasis to have been fired by nationalism. His stay in Kolkata during his college studies brought him face to face with the patriotic movement. Thus he was able to transcend regionalism and acquire a national spirit. Perhaps he was the first Khasi to have written a patriotic poem entitled "Hail Mother India" way back in 1947. Through this he was able to widen the perspective of many Khasis and to inculcate a national feeling in them.

Many things can be said about H. Elias as a luminary of Khasi society. Endless reflections and critical studies can be done on his literary works. Perhaps during this year of jubilee many Khasi scholars, educational institutions (NEHU included) would undertake to organize seminars, symposia and workshops on the academic contributions of this great person. However, it is deplorable to see how his literary contributions have not received their due recognition. The Khasi Authors' Society and the Khasi Department of NEHU are the responsible bodies to highlight the greatness of this great son of the soil. I hope that many more students of Khasi literature will be encouraged to undertake researches on the Opus magnum of this poet.

In this jubilee year it would be the right gesture on the part of the government to erect a monument of H. Elias somewhere in the city of Shillong like the one of Soso Tham. Another suggestion would be to have the stretch of road from Jylli's Shop junction to Jingkieng Pohkse named as H. Elias Road. H. Elias deserves to be treated better than he is now. He deserves more respect, more appreciation and more recognition by the Khasi society at large.

did not do anything to appease the political parties in power during his tenure. My humble tribute to the eminent jurist and embodiment of human virtues! May his soul rest in eternal peace and tranquility.

It is generally seen that people who are from poor and humble backgrounds make exemplary citizens. There are innumerable examples to prove this point including Late Lal Bahadur Sastri and Late Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam

Yours etc.,
E M Adithyan
Edapal
Kerala.

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.

By Uma Ramachandran

To be lone and yet not be lonely; to walk alone and yet know that there are others who tread the same path; to live amongst many but be bonded to few. This is the essence of the small, empathy-baked world of the singles' clubs that seem to be cropping up in our metropolises. Places where a person who could belong to the growing band of professionals who opt to remain single or those who break away from bad marriages or those who are left without a partner can meet and talk. Actually a place for likeminded people who seek companionship and understanding. Seems an unknown, incomprehensible concept in conservative India? But the fact is that one such club exists and another one, a more livelier version which had a younger crowd, had started off with a big bang, continued its lively existence for a few months before it died a premature death as its members disbanded and went their own way. Even Bangalore had one, called the Friday Club, which shut down after two-and-a-half years as its busy members were not willing to step forward to continue the show after its president got married to



For singles only

ing to an older age group, has over the years grown and changed its character, holding meaning for those within its supportive fold, while it may be looked upon

and its micro-mechanisms instantly whirr to form images of dimly-lit hangouts, desperate lone-rangers and murky hunting grounds. In a day and age when 'dial-

lonely hearts, wires are bound to cross and the 'singles clubs' be considered another euphemism for tantalising dates and perhaps a rollicking orgy? The notion could not be more sterile. For the clubs we feature here were if anything meant for good clean fun. "You need places where women and men can safely hang out for a drink and meet each other. Otherwise, where do you get to meet people?" questions a member of the Friday Club.

The Friday Club was so-called because its members met on the third Friday of every month at homes, farm houses and restaurants. Little things made each person feel special. For instance, if a member's birthday fell outside of the monthly get-together, a box of chocolates was home delivered. Besides, members did some social service like donating blood, attending on sick fellow members or counselling a troubled member. In Delhi, the notion of orgies couldn't be more far-fetched in the hushed silence of Dr. Veena Kapoor's up-market psychiatric clinic in Greater Kailash. Nine years ago when this petite, middle-aged, well-established psychiatrist released a small ad in The Neighbour-

hood Star inviting women to form a Singles Club, it was just one small, tentative step

sional, with a 10-year-old son to look after, "there was a tremendous void-a need to share experiences and mix with other women in similar situations. As a separated woman, this was one company I could fit most comfortable in: where there would be understanding based on a certain commonality."

The response was spontaneous... and surprising! Most women who called were married; trapped in unhappy marriages. They were perhaps looking for any outlet where they would receive support and understanding. Or were they looking for some romantic diversion on the side? Dr. Kapoor dismisses the idea, saying, "We were an exclusive women's club. We met regularly for lunch or tea. Opening up to one another was easy. We had heart-to-heart talks, we counselled one another, we helped someone who had a landlord problem, we used contacts to help out with other problems, and we had a fun time." Well, this really seemed no more than a variation of a hen club, with regular kitty-party lunches indulged in by the largely upper middle-class professionals, single or otherwise. Where was the stimulating interaction of mixed sexes, the meeting of the lonely

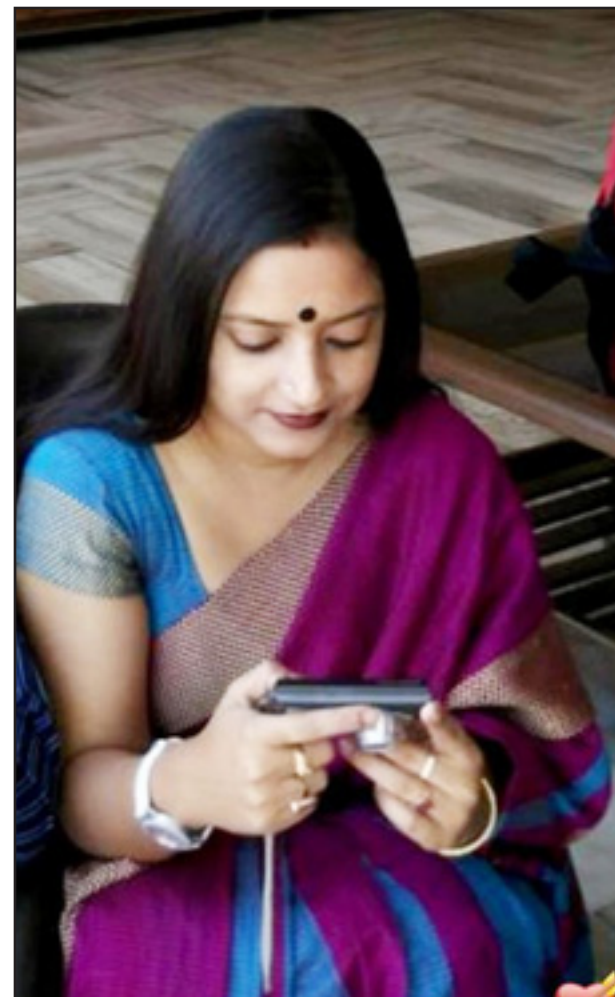


a partner selected by his parents. The one in existence in Delhi called the Singles Fellowship and cater-

with derision and suspicion by those outside. The mind is a great graphic visualiser. Mention the singles clubs

date' and 'find-a-mate' phone-antics are openly creeping into the fancies (and fantasies) of frustrated

years ago when this petite, middle-aged, well-established psychiatrist released a small ad in The Neighbour-



towards drawing single, lonesome beings together. For this recently separated back-from-the-US profes-

hearts and minds, the excitement of finding a soul-mate on a group date? Surely, (Contd on P-VII)

Insensitivity epidemic

My friend watched the dinosaur movie "Jurassic World" in front of her pet bird so that the creature could remember when his kind ruled the earth. She was trying to be nice but I thought it was horribly insensitive.

The same friend once told me that she thought I was as "dumb as a box of rocks" while we were walking through an ornamental park. "Shh," I said, moving us away from the rockery. "They can hear you."

But, of course, there are no people on earth as insensitive as children. Child: "Can we have a bee hive on our balcony?" Me: "No. Mum's allergic to bee stings." Child: "When she's dead can we have a bee hive on the balcony?" Me: "I guess."

Now a question: if someone is two hours late for dinner and then complains that "the food's a bit overcooked", is it justifiable to dice him into cubes and lightly flash-fry him with cilantro as an extra meat dish?

I knew you'd say yes. I do this sort of thing a lot these days (identify acts of thoughtlessness, not flash-fry friends). Because it is clear that a massive epidemic of insensitivity is spreading around the world.

The most astonishing example came from a reader in China. A funeral company touting for business set up hundreds of fake gravestones bearing the names of (living) local residents in gold letters. Sales staff showed residents their names, saying: "Look! That could be you."

Locals were unimpressed to the point of apoplexy. The hard-sell

Richter insensitivity scale. Especially in a community where omens are taken as scientifically verified proof. Doctor: "You have three months to live." Patient: "My test results were that bad?" Doctor: "No, but you picked waiting ticket 44 and sat in the Unlucky Chair. You're a-goner."

Most disputes are due to thoughtlessness. In the paper was a story about a bid by organizers of a British vegetable growing contest to attract more entries by allowing people to enter veggies bought at the local supermarket. They never thought about the vegetable growers, who were outraged. A cynical colleague reading over my shoulder (go away) said that everyone had probably been entering vegetables bought from supermarkets for years anyway.

He maintained that people today were over-considerate, and offered an example. Earlier this year, a university in the US state of Connecticut said it was promoting inclusiveness and invited applications from the "LBTTQQFAGPBDSM" communities. This apparently refers to every possible sexual preference, and caused much head-scratching. Please do not write in and tell me what each letter stands for. I treasure my innocence. Let children be children. And let the childish be children too.

I concede that it may be possible to be too politically correct, but I still think it's good to be thoughtful. On the afternoon before writing this, my bird-owning friend

declined an offer of ice cream because she said her teeth were extremely sensitive these days". I replied: "Shh. They can hear you."

The Funny side
By Nury Vittachi

Lukshmi Vilas Palace: A magnificent blend of ideas carved in stone

India is no stranger to palaces. Whether in the north - Rajasthan in particular - or in the south, we can never tire of marvelling at the beautiful architectural remnants of the royal past. Even so, the Lukshmi Vilas Palace in this cultural and educational capital of Gujarat stands out.

It has the distinction of having the largest number of stained glass paintings, and some of the Gothic-inspired statues leave you wondering if you are in an Indian palace at all! A fine example of Indo-Saracenic architecture, the 125-year-old Lukshmi Vilas Palace has all the ingredients to make it a must-visit on a visitor's itinerary.

Claimed to be the biggest "private dwelling" of its kind, the Lukshmi Vilas Palace was built by Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad in 1890. Major Charles Mant, who was the chief architect, kept in mind that the palace must have the traditional touch - and so the three distinct quarters for the ruler, the ladies, and the public. But, given the erstwhile royal family's increasing western lifestyle and large number of European visitors, it also

has stately dining rooms, billiard rooms and the like.

it are still occupied by the erstwhile royal family. The entry is from the rear of the palace for visitors, who are bound to be mesmerised by the well-maintained architectural marvel right from the start. A small courtyard, lush with big plants, leads to front porch from where starts the tour.



The entire palace is not open to visitors as parts of

amalgamation. A statue that occupies the pride of place

It is pertinent to mention here is that unlike many other historical sites where one may be pestered by people posing as guides, at Lukshmi Vilas, you are given an audio system to take you through the palace and explain everything in detail.

The hall that you enter from the front porch is an east-meets-west kind of

By Azera Parveen Rahman



Lukshmi Vilas Palace

in the centre has a distinct Gothic influence, a pristine white sculpture right in front indicates classical European art and statues of musicians with Indian instruments on the sides brings you right back home. Everything is beautifully put together, with Belgian stained glass all around.

As your audio-guide tells you, all the woodwork used in the palace is genuine teak. As with the art, the materials used for the architecture are also an east-west blend. The sandstone came from Agra, the blue trapstone from Poona (now Pune) and the marble inlay work and trellises are of the same va-

riety as Michelangelo used for his David sculpture. It's a lot to absorb as you take in the bronze statues, the Felicci statues, statues made with Italian marble and intricate railings.

The armament and weaponry display room throws you completely off guard, especially after the simple

reception room with a few larger-than-life portraits of the Gaekwad rulers. Showcasing an impressive collection of swords, daggers, guns and rifles, "most of which have been used in battles", the room also has on display the sword that the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb used.

Another feast for the eyes is the Gaddi Room which is a large space, mostly bare, but has a simple white throne with a peacock feather to coronate the next in line. Where the visual feast lies are the walls, adorned with nine paintings of the famous Indian artist, Raja Ravi Varma. The room, therefore, although simple, entices you to spend more time as each painting narrates a story hidden among the fine strokes.

Probably the most admired section of the Lukshmi Vilas Palace is the Durbar Hall, a vast space with a Venetian mosaic floor, Belgian stained glass windows through which the sunlight filters in and walls with intricate decorations. Outside the Durbar Hall is an Italian courtyard of fountains.

The 700-acre palace compound also has a Sunken Garden, a kind of amphitheatre with a large platform, as well as the Maharaja Fatehsingh museum. The awe that the Lukshmi Vilas inspires stays with you as you leave the palace. Everywhere you look, the palace compound has beautiful sculptures, and then, right at the end, there is a fresco of a royal wedding on the palace's exterior wall.

By Ranjan K Baruah

Music as career option

Music has no boundary and it connects people together. It may be in different tone or voice or language but people understand the meaning. It is a universal sound which can create emotions and express feelings. There may not be anyone on earth who is not fond of music. One can also choose music as career options. One needs dedication and practice and training and exposure to be successful in the field of music. Music is not only singing but it comprises many other things and now a days technology has also become important part of music.

There is a wide variety of forms in music like classical, folk, jazz, pop, fusion, etc. Besides becoming a performer (vocal or instrumental) or a teacher, one can be a composer/song writer, music publisher, music journalist, Disc Jockeys/Video Jockeys, Music Therapist, Artist manager/Public Relation , etc in the music industry.

There are wide ranges of opportunities for the people who wanted to come into music industry. One may get job opportunities in television channels , radio centers and others like FM channel stations, music channels, government jobs in the departments of art and culture, public relations, etc ; production houses, music troupes, music companies, schools and colleges as teachers, music therapist , journalist , etc. These days music industry has

boomed everywhere and it brings more demand for the talented individuals.

Some of the terms related to music industry or music industry are like music composers, song writers, lyricist, singers, and performers, music producers, artist, music management, music teacher, music librarian, musicologist, etc. There are separate music colleges which impart various courses like graduate level, diplomas and others.

Courses like Bachelor of Arts in Classical Vocal Music, music, Rabindra Sangeet are imparted in colleges and institutes. There are some certificate courses and diploma courses apart from further studies including research.

The best part is that people without high qualification may also succeed in this field but it is always advisable and important to have degrees and required qualification to excel in any field. There are many leading government and private institutes that offers courses related to music or performing arts, etc. Viswa Bharati University, University of Delhi, BHU, etc offers courses related to music. Dibrugarh University has Dr Bhupen Hazarika Centre for Studies in Performing Arts. One can learn instruments, singing apart

from research from these institutes.

One needs to have excellent communication skill who wants to come to this industry as initial stage of profession would be very challenging. People coming from music colleges have some advantages and they meet and interact with different faculties and experts who might become their mentors. But people who are with less qualification but with talents need to communicate with others for their exposure. With innovation and ideas one may excel into international arena through music.

The best opportunity is also to become entrepreneur in this industry. 21st June is observed as World Music Day in more than 108 countries. There are various musical programme organised in different places. In the north east one can think of fusion with the rich folk music of the region with music style and varieties from other regions. Innovation with ideas would lead one towards the path of success. What we need is talent with dedication and proper planning so that we can excel through music as career.

Scholarships Updates:

Colgate Dental Cream Scholarship is provided by Colgate Palmolive (India) Ltd for the higher studies of the children. This Scholarship offer is being conducted from January to February.

(For further details interested may call at 98640 55558 or send email to bkranjan@gmail.com)



By Debdoot Das

Give athletes best facilities to win medals: Lalita Babar

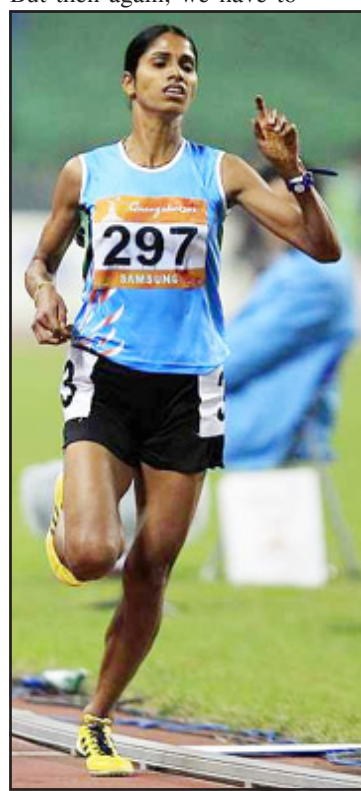
Indian long distance runner Lalita Babar believes athletes can win medals only if they are given the best of facilities to train on.

"For your athlete to win an Olympic medal, you ought to give the best facilities," Babar said.

She complained that there are only a few synthetic tracks in the country and none of them is of world class. Along with other long distance runners like O.P. Jaisha and Sudha Singh, Babar runs on roads to train.

"You see, most of my records have been made outside India, the facilities outside are really much better. It enhances our performances. Here we do not have proper training tracks, neither do we have many synthetic tracks. Here we practice by running on roads."

"Where are the competition tracks here? Those which are here are not up to the international standards, the one we will get in Rio. But then again, we have to



work within the facilities being provided to us," she said.

Her gold medal in

steeplechase at the Asian Championships in Wuhan this year helped her comfortably qualify for the Olympics at Rio. But, the 26-year-old would have gone to Rio otherwise too. She clocked her personal best in the Mumbai marathon, 2 hours 38 minutes and 21 seconds on January 18, which offered her a place in the long-distance event.

Asked how she was preparing for the mega event in 2016, Babar said: "I train about six hours a day. Morning, I start from about 4.30 a.m. But nowadays, as the winter has set in, I start from five o'clock. And then we run in the evening. We have these medium and long runs. Sundays we usually go for the long run which is about 30 to 40 kilometres. So, I cover around 170-180 kilometres every week."

Babar, who is training in Ooty, Tamil Nadu, said she is trying to better her timing with each passing day and is hopeful of grabbing a medal at the Olympics next year.

"The thing is to give in my best and do well. I am practising really hard to reduce the timings as much as possible. I am really hoping that this time I will be able to get a medal for the country. My aim is to get under 9:10, 9:15 and that is what I am trying to do in steeplechase," she said.

"The time I am getting to prepare I am utilising it to the full. I am running in a few races here so that I am in the



best possible shape when I get to Rio."

The trio of Jaisa, Singh and Babar have for the last few years been training under Belarussian coach Nikolai Snesarev, who Babar believes has helped them improve their techniques.

"He is very disciplined. And he makes sure we are too. He does scold me a lot too, but then it is for my benefit. He gives me little insights one needs to know before going into a race and that helps me perform better. He has also helped us improve our technique," she said.

A few days back,

Snesarev was livid that the Railways were asking the trio to participate in a cross-country race just days before the all-important Mumbai marathon where athletes come from all over the world.

Speaking about the incident, the athlete, who hails from Satara district of Maharashtra, said: "The coach will decide (whether they will compete in the cross-country race in Pune). But it is difficult to run at two back to back events in a space of a week. There's a lot of pressure and exertion put on the body. We are not machines, even

we need rest. How will we run on the 10th and then again on the 17th (Mumbai marathon)?" she said.

Babar added that she was looking forward to the Mumbai marathon as she would get to compete against the best in the business.

"I am looking forward to the Mumbai Marathon. It is an international competition and we will get to run with some of the best athletes in the world, which will be a great experience. Thereafter, I want to concentrate on my event, steeplechase," she said.

(The writer can be contacted at debdoot.d@ians.in)

Interview

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, January 10, 2016

Moon trine Jupiter on your solar return chart denotes a good year for you. Those of you seeking a job or a switchover will be successful in their attempts. There will be success in exams or competition if you do not let up your efforts. You receive recognition and support from those close to you and even new contacts will prove very useful. Stop dwelling on past disappointments. It is an opportune time to show your talents and skills. You exhibit a level of business acumen and can enter into a profitable deal. Overseas travel plans can materialize.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)
You are able to integrate forces, resources and professional aspects to achieve success in important business ventures. With mastery in your field, you achieve goals and targets on time. This is an exceptionally exciting time as professional and business opportunities are offered to you. This phase brings love, romance and excitement in personal relations. Personal relations and business partnerships are likely to get closer. Tackle sensitive subjects and difficult people and get your point across. You are overflowing with energy just channel it wisely.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)
You would be more accommodative and compassionate in relationships and not take things personally. Friendships, cooperation and synergy are available and you enjoy the association of your loved ones. Career advancement, a promotion or a gainful business opportunity may be offered. You win debates, competitions and sports with your dynamic energy and power. Practical details are to be dealt with clarity and efficiently. You would listen to your intuition and guard against over indulgence in food, drink or work. Old habits can be kicked now with greater ease.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)
Professional situations and patterns come to the fore and there is no deception or illusion about these matters. You would be able to face truths, deal with emotional choices or difficult situations. Emotional attachments and relationships are rewarded with reciprocity. Some interesting people are drawn to you and invite you to work with them. A new cycle begins with the old order finishing as inner and outer changes are on the cards. Health problems are resolved and your energy is restored.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)
Personal relations are packed with emotions and feelings and you enjoy the company of loved ones. There is good luck attending to material affairs as there is increase of wealth and monetary gains and income. This is the right time to share your loving and personal relationships and share thoughts and ideas and spend good time in the association of your loved one. You may be involved in meetings with business associates as financial and business dealings would bring good results and gains. Physical energy and good health allow you to tackle busy schedules.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)
Your actions and emotions are balanced as you bring more accuracy in your work area. Economy at home and management of business and work are important issues of the week. You connect with new people and discuss important business matters. Financial transactions and professional projects go ahead smoothly with goodwill and profit. Personal relations are satisfying and you have plenty of goodwill and friendships around you. This is a good time to attend to matters that require attention since you are received well by others. You would be able to complete work assignments and personal business this week with good energy and support.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)
The unpredictable is likely to happen when you least expect it. Surprises are in store for you in professional and personal matters. It would be best to be open and receptive in personal relations and family situations. A flexible approach in the work area is recommended. New people may come into your life and influence your decisions and direction. Creative opportunities should not be ignored as it is likely to bring substantial professional material gain. You could be depleted of resources and forces if you don't manage them properly. Meditation and spiritual pursuits can be rewarded and worth pursuing.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This phase opens up a world of romance and love in personal relations. You are cooperative with family and children. You are likely to be involved in creative pass times. You would express yourself in gracious and exalted manner and influence people in authority. You can be lead away by enthusiasm unless careful inner balance is maintained. Marriage, business partnership and collaboration are strengthened through understanding and commitment. Money matters take priority as some unexpected expenditures have to be met. End of the week brings fresh energy, love and romance in important relationships.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)
You are bold, courageous and frank while dealing with controversial, professional and family matters. You are likely to meet well known authoritative people and share ideas and spend lovely time in their association. A stimulating project should be taken as a challenge which would further and promote your business prospects. Your associates and co-workers proved to be loyal and disciplined. You make interesting and valuable connections in professional life. Visitors and communications from overseas can inspire you to be more creative. You may take a short break before starting on a new project to renew your energy. You are able to achieve a lot at home and at work with youthful energy.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)
You are likely to spend time in different places and work closely in new associations as you combine good luck and good management. You share some memorable moments with a loved one. You are in touch with innocence that comes from life lived fully, which also has a quality of wisdom and the acceptance of the ever changing wonders of life. You would express your views and comments without afraid of losing a contract and manipulate well and make things in your favour. You are restless and move into varying occupations and pay wandering visits to friends. You may change your image with good styles, fashion and grooming.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)
There is conflict within and discord outside. You may be divided about business and professional matters and finally come to terms with compromise which might be the best thing to do at this time. You may disagree mentally with your partner but the love between you allows peace and acceptance. Emotions and mood can swing to extremes and it's important to achieve equilibrium. Meditation is needed for gaining deeper insight into personal relations and complex situations.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)
You have the ability to stand alone and have strong vibration. You are independent, creative, original, ambitious, determined and self-assured. Adopting a realistic, practical and disciplined approach towards life would bring harmony at home. This week proves to be good for the people in show business and creative line. Your ability to express yourself and to solve problems is enhanced. Students in music, singing, fashion designing and beauty culture will get success and good results. In professional life, this week brings huge expenses as well as financial gains from foreign business associates. You would have good support from family members and business associates. You are overly touchy and sensitive with your romantic partner. Sports and physical activities keep you fit and energetic.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)
You are generous with friends, and loving in family situations. You are coming across as especially smooth, and your good nature is bound to attract some attention. You stand in the middle of a doorway while making an important decision whether it is professional or personal. It would be better to listen to our own good judgment and do what is good for you. People around you could be judgmental or manipulative. Do not forget to share your feelings to the one who loves and cares for you. You can get stressed and a health problem can manifest as you worry about everything. Your financial situation looks promising if you manage it well personally rather than trust upon others. Personal relationships are warm and comfortable as you spend wonderful time with your loved one.

For singles only

(Contd from P-VI) this mahila samithi could be no modern adult idea of a 'Singles Club'? "Well, in 2010, we decided to open our doors to men, too. Yes, there was a certain monotony that was creeping in. Some of us were beginning to feel stifled. On the other hand, there were others who were not prepared to go mixed. So the mixed group was to become another club," explains Dr. Kapoor.

This time a tiny ad in a daily generated an avalanche of responses. Man, young or old, single or not, straight or not-so-straight, flashy rich or salary clerk, diseased or healthy, the over-confident braggart and the timid adventurer -- all laid their claim to imagined high-jinks of the voyeuristic kind. The single ladies then held an 'open house' meeting to review the case of each 'candidate'. The 10-odd men who passed muster were all necessarily above 30, 'gentlemen' having no ulterior motives, and with bonafide credentials to allow them passage into this exclusive club. Some hurrah for the feminists, this! Not only do women initiate a singles movement in the conservative capital, they also pick and choose the men they want to include in it.

The men certainly added spice. Lunch meetings graduated to dinners and dances. The heart-to-heart baring of souls ceased and fun times took over. Some, who felt that the fun was not upto 'expectations', dropped out and the group remained small, with new members being inducted on the basis of word-of-mouth recommendations. Some got paired off but nobody tied the knot. The fun remained clean, all insist, with self-imposed rules like no alcohol. Beyond that, it was left to individual inclinations! But does the world really let them escape? Don't sniggers follow them and fingers point at such an 'unusual' group? Doesn't a society which still regards the divorced, separated and unmarried as freaks condemn them further to a point of no return? While Veena Kapoor might shrug indifferently and say, "It doesn't really bother me anymore. I don't become a worse doctor or a worse citizen by being part of this club... take it, or leave it," there are some like Indu Khanna (real name withheld) who are still hesitant about being linked to the

organisation publicly. A school teacher, in her early 30s, who finds companionship and empathy here, she feels that Delhi society is still not ready to accept -- without reservations -- a movement like this.

The family plays an interesting role in this business of accepting and understanding. The older age-groups, wid-

ows, find the family supportive and encouraging in the pursuit of their activities. Probably, as most of them sadly realise deep in their hearts, it is a god sent opportunity to the family to have them off their hands. But it is the unmarried and the ones with broken marriages, particularly those with children, who face the most hostility. Indu says, the attitude was absolutely negative to start with, and the pain on Dr. Kapoor's face is still evident as she recalls her teenage son's defiance and resentment. "He would look at me with suspicion, and openly question what I was doing, going around meeting all these men."

It takes all kinds to make the world. Even this particular infinitesimal fraction of the world. But is this world away from world really the haven that they had hoped for? Conversely, why cling together and collectively lick wounds away from the mainstream of life? Why be branded as part of a particular group when you can forge an individual identity and grow in your own right amongst friends and peers? While most keep reiterating the importance of underlying commonality and empathetic bonds in fostering close friendships within the group, but few members are candid enough to admit that the organisation is not without its petty bickering brought about by the rigid attitudes of members long set in their single ways.

And even fewer are frank, and fortunate enough to state, like 47-year-old Mohinder Grewal, a widow of 17-years now, "The Singles Fellowship had not been, and cannot be, the source of my sustenance. My sustenance came from my children in the past, and now comes from my theatre activity and my children and grand children. Those who cling to this organisation to the exclusion of everything else are stunting the growth ordained by nature. INAV



“Continuous effort - not strength or intelligence - is the key to unlocking our potential.”

—Winston Churchill

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LVIII No. 150 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JANUARY 11, 2016

The Garo Hills blast

THE bomb blast in Williamnagar that killed nine innocent people and injured several others, appears to be the lull before the storm. Militancy in Garo Hills has now taken a turn for the worse. This bomb blast only lends credence to the Meghalaya High Court's proposal for the army to take over the counter insurgency operations in the region. While the proposal has been vehemently opposed by civil society and also by the Government, there is no sign as yet of an effective counter-insurgency operation plan in view. Kidnapping for ransom is carrying on unabated. Extortion has reached new heights and government employees are the targets of militant outfits which have multiplied over the years. Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma has appealed to the Union Home Ministry to augment the resources required to fight the 'anti-national forces.' The Home Ministry ought to give priority to this demand for reinforcements, both in terms of man power and equipments.

That the bomb blast happened in the heart of Williamnagar the headquarter of East Garo Hills district is a cause for concern because it means that militants of all hues are now able to strike at will. It also shows up the lack of actionable intelligence on the part of security forces. There is no dearth of inflow of arms and ammunition into Garo Hills, most of which are smuggled from across the porous borders with Bangladesh. The more the extortion the more money is invested in arms and ammunition. The IED blast also shows that the militants are desperate. Civilian casualties mean that people are forced to run for cover. Fear compels people to comply with extortion demands. This vicious cycle continues. Militants strike fear in the hearts of the people through such senseless killings. Although the GNLA which is currently the most vicious of the militant outfits has denied any hand in the bomb blast, their denial cannot be taken seriously until the investigating agencies are able to nail the killers. It is high time for the National Investigating Agency (NIA) to step into Garo Hills and do a thorough investigation into the present blast. The Government cannot afford to adopt a lackadaisical attitude to this kind of senseless violence.

LOOKING BACK

January 23, 1888

Another step forward

Almost the last of the offshoots of the 1962 Indo-China war is at last going to be removed shortly following an agreement between the two countries favouring reopening of their Consulates in Shanghai and Bombay. This is a direct outcome of the fairly successful eight round of talks between the officials of both countries. Agreeing to raise the exchanges to a political level following these talks, there is the reported effort to ease the tension along the border. This would formalise the existing clandestine border trade which need to be brought under establishment rule and procedures would only step up the volume of the trade to the benefit of the remote border inhabitants in all respects. Through such effective control over the border trading the administrative influence over the remote areas would also increase, which would thus be an extra premium gained in the whole process. China's relations having been normalised in all respects at the economic level initially, it would not be long when the pending boundary issues would also get gradually removed without raising any outstanding political divergence or disputes.

Coordinated move more welcome

A central scheme to try and wean people away from "Jhum" or shifting cultivation is to be

launched in nine States the seven in the north eastern region and Orissa and Andhra Pradesh included. The work is to commence in the current financial year itself, but the amount of Rs. 75 lakhs which the Centre will provide for it would appear to be too inadequate considering that it is to be spread over a period of five years. About 6-25 lakh families practicing this pernicious system are to be anything else only highlights the extremely all these five years. There is no indication in the report that this amount represents only the annual expenditure, which would still be not enough for a full year in view of the magnitude of the problem to be tackled.

The scheme obviously would be independent of the various plans the several States would themselves be undertaking. If this is so, there is the further objection that the Centre move would suffer from being divorced from individual plans at the State levels. Pooling of the diverse state efforts could be an essential aid to success even if the individual requirements might differ in some details in respective cases. There are some prominent features the Central move has in view which are applicable to almost all the States. For instance, persuading the farmers to opt for settled cultivation, using agricultural systems, etc. should be common in all the different State schemes also and as such a common drive motivating all the States together would, besides adding to the momentum might also work for eliminating overlapping expenditure when monetary resources are so meager.

An In-depth study of the Behdeinkhlam festival

By H H Mohrmen

Many articles and few books have been published on one of the famous festivals of the Pnar people of Jaintia hills, but so far none has been able to deal at length and do an in-depth on the subject than the book recently launched, entitled, "An Insight into Behdeinkhlam." The book written by Dawmanchuh Lamar an agronomist who is also a writer par-excellence has been able not only to give the readers in-depth knowledge about the festival, but book also helped them understand the foundation from which the festival originated and its meaning and relevance to the followers of Niamtre the indigenous faith of the Pnar people.

The book not only gives us an insight into the famous festivals of the Pnar people of Meghalaya, but it also gives us a glimpse into the genesis of the Khasi-Pnar people as per the Hynniewtrep Hynniewskum stories. It also tells us the story of the beginning of human settlements in the place we now call Jowai. It may be mentioned that almost all old human settlements or villages in the Jaintia hills district have their own narratives of how human settlements began in the area and stories about the first clan that dwelt in the area and this intricately links with the Niamtre of the area.

The book also depicts the true picture about the fact that Behdeinkhlam festival is not just a festival without any foundation but it draws its origin and legitimacy from this creation story and also the narrative of the origin of Jowai as we know it now. Jowai according to legend was first occupied by the four deities or sisters who are believed to be partly human and partly deities. They are known as ka Wet, ka Doh, Bon and ka Tein and obeisance is still being paid to the four sisters particularly during Behdeinkhlam. In fact Behdeinkhlam festival begins and ends every year at the house of the Langdoh, one of the descendant of the four deity's. In fact most of

the public rituals in the festival other than those performed by the daloi of the eleka Jowai, are performed by members of the four clans also known as 'ki soo kpoh khaddar wynai.' In other words the original clan of Jowai has a major role to play in the functioning of the Behdeinkhlam or even the tradition Niamtre religion. The book opens our eyes to the rich and profound tradition of the Pnars the close links that it has to the Niamtre, the creation story of the h y n n i e w t r e p hynniewskum and the origin narrative of the Jowai and the elaka as such.

It may also be important to note that this perhaps is the first time that the detailed creation story according to the Pnar version was put in black and white. The hynniewtrep hynniewskum story according to the Pnar people is much more detailed and elaborate than the common story that we hear and read now. Again this part of the creation story which is missing in the common h y n n i e w t r e p hynniewskum narrative is that part which has to do with the institution of the Behdeinkhlam festival as ordained by the Creator.

Since this book also portrays the legitimacy of the festival beginning from the Pnar's own creation story, it also depicts the whys and wherefores of the festival in connection with the creation story and even the theology of the Pnar people particularly of those in the eleka Jowai. It also gives us some idea of the belief system of the Pnar people particularly those in the eleka Jowai and describes in details the different gods, deities and demigods in the Pnar pantheon of gods. Because the book also speaks about the different gods, deities and demigods worshipped by the Pnar of raid Jowai in particular, the book also give us a glimpse into the theology of the Niamtre religion of the Pnar people

who live in the Raid Jowai.

In the Pnar context although people worship the Supreme God, but it is believed that U Trekirot also has deputies in the form of gods, demigods and nature spirits or divinities as the author of the book aptly put it. The gods, demigods and nature spirits or divinities also share certain duties and perform those duties in accordance with the will of the Supreme Power, because they are subordinate to the Almighty. Lamar emphasizes in the book, that the deities as such do not have absolute power because they are subordinate to Him in all matters and they exist only according to His will.

In the book the author has made it crystal clear that for one to understand Behdeinkhlam festival one also needs to know the two important aspects and that is the creation story of the Khasi-Pnar and the story of the first dwellers of the place we now call Jowai. The first settlers known as the Doh, ka Wet, ka Tein and ka Bon were four sisters who in their sojourn in search of a place to settle down in, reached the place in the midst of rain and thunder storm and decided to settle in Jowai. The reason is because the foundation of the festival and the Niamtre in particular is based on the 'hukum' or ordination of the Creator.

One cannot deny that the book was able to do justice to the subject as difficult as Behdeinkhlam, because the writer is a practitioner of Niamtre religion and by being somebody who is from inside the religion, he was able to capture the spirit of the festival which somebody who is not an insider would not be able to do. The spirit of the festival can only be captured by somebody who practices it or experiences it. So Lamar has been able to do so and describes it vividly in the book.

This is the first time a book on such an important subject is published and

now available in the public domain. This will greatly help those who seek to know more about the traditional wisdom and knowledge in general and the Niamtre in particular. There is still a lot more information and knowledge available which is waiting to be documented and put into writing. One hopes that many more such books will be available in the future.

Although Behdeinkhlam is being celebrated by different Raid in Jaintia hills, but the book only deals on that aspect of the festival as celebrated by the people who live in the raid Jowai. Behdeinkhlam is being celebrated by different Raids like the Tuber, the Mukhla, the Muthlong, the Ialong and others and there is some variation in the way the different raids celebrate their respective Behdeinkhlam. Because the focus of the book is on the Behdeinkhlam as celebrated by the people who live in the villages under the elaka Jowai, therefore there is so much to be done to document the other festivals of the other raids as well. There is a need to document and write on the other festivals like the Pastieh of the Shangpung and the Raliang and also that of the Ialong.

The author Dawmanchuh Lamar is an agronomist working in the Agriculture department of Meghalaya, and before this book he had earlier published a book on rice cultivation in Jaintia hills District. In the book he also appreciates the traditional knowledge that is still being practiced by the farmers in the area. Hence we can say that he is an agroecologist who makes use of the traditional knowledge of cultivation along with the modern scientific knowledge. But more importantly he is the main person behind the collection and documentation of the more than 120 species of rice used by the farmers in Jaintia hills. He is one of the few officers who is willing to work beyond the 10 to 5 official schedule.

A cricketer and gentleman

By M J Akbar

There is no better way to bring in a new year than to cheer a man who can be honest about himself without slipping into the hypocrisy of false humility or delivering a sermon to tell the world what a good boy he is. So raise a bat to Hashim Amla, now the former captain of the South African cricket team, who resigned from a dream job when there was no demand for departure. Amla left because he decided that his contribution to his side as a batting backbone was being affected by his responsibilities as a captain.

Most cricket captains are batsmen. This is not because batting belongs to some superior caste in the game; bowling is much harder work, with more pain and less glamour. There have been great bowler-captains: Richie Benaud of Australia and our own Kapil Dev come to mind. [All-rounders like Ian Botham or Imran Khan are in a different category.] But if selectors mostly prefer batsmen it is for a good reason. A batsman tends to

bad, it is bad for both. No one "accuses" an English groundsman of "doctoring" when a green-top helps pacers, so why do commentators go curvy when a brown-top does its bit for spinners? It is pertinent to note that Hashim Amla did not indulge in gratuitous excuses when he lost the India series. His problems were compounded by the fact that his own scores were dismal.

The pattern continued when England won the first Test of the current series in South Africa, outplaying their opponents in every department, and then piling on a mammoth first innings score in the second Test. The game was as good as lost when Amla came to bat. His double century not only re-established his value as batsman; his leadership rescued his credibility as captain. Do not ever believe that a captain has nothing to do when he is sitting in the box while his side bats. He defines the role of every player

Cricket is a slow game at its finest level, and creates space for tactical variations as well as strategic decisions. A Test captain needs to analyse the progress of a game continuously, intervene every three or four overs or so when fielding, and try and control the pace of runs when his side is batting. Hashim Amla was a thinking captain as well as a thoughtful human being, judging by the manner in which he played from his debut. He has always walked, and built a deserved reputation for integrity. But it is the long walk he took from the captaincy, in the middle of a tough series against England which will define his memory.

TO THE EDITOR

GPO customers' woes!

Editor,

Apropos the news "Link-failure misery for GPO customers," (ST, Jan 08) the statement given by the Senior Superintendent of Post (SSP), GPO, Shillong smacks of utter callousness. Internet link failure is a perennial problem at the ground floor counters of the GPO and none knows it better than we customers. The counters meant for opening of new savings account, of late, is taking more than a fortnight to open such accounts and deliver customers their passbooks. The time taken by these counters also pinpoints to the ineptitude level of the clerks who are manning them. And how BSNL was replaced with a jerky Sify as its link problem at the GPO counters more than proves that it is a total failure. The SSP seems to be in a wonderland oblivious of her own "ground" situation sitting at the first floor. Hope the new CPMG is watching?

Yours etc.
PK Dwivedi
Shillong - 1

Juggernaut of caste prejudice

Editor,

In his letter, 'Agree to disagree' (ST, January 9, 2016), Mr. Kajal Chatterjee labels the concern for dalits as a signature of 'biased mindset' by citing the examples of his Brahmin cousin

being mocked for his uncommon surname 'Malkhandi' and some dalits doing exceptionally well in the field of education. He also points out that the cases of dropout from school can happen in any poor family irrespective of its caste. His views merit a glance on some of the hard facts about how dalit children are actually doing in school in twenty first century India. According to UNICEF report the dropout rate in dalit children is generally high in India. It is as much as 44.27 per cent in primary school (study conducted in 2006). The IDSN and Navsarjan briefing note of 2010 reveals that although the general dropout rate has decreased, (please note!) the difference in dropout rates between dalit youth and all Indian youth has actually grown in 2008. A survey by Navsarjan Trust, India brings out the bitter fact that teachers, local governments and community members routinely subject the children of manual scavengers to discrimination and forced labour as part of their daily experience of attending school and living in their community. Therefore, the UN report suggests that more needs to be done as there is widespread discrimination against dalits throughout the entire educational system in India. So it can clearly be seen that the juggernaut of caste prejudices causes the rise in dropout rates in school among dalit children in modern day India.

Mr. Kajal Chatterjee rightly reminds us that our discussion on surname/caste marked family occupation makes us oblivious of the fact that we also tend to discriminate on actual occupations giving more respect to dishonest officers than honest peons. However, interestingly this is also a product of caste prejudice. The dignity of labour is much less in India. Thanks to age old caste system that devalues blue collar jobs to such an extent that there occurs an unfathomable gulf between blue and white collar workers. This Brahminical contempt for manual jobs makes even Brahmin blue collar workers of modern India suffer.

Apart from Brahmin Priests, Kshatriya Rajanyas and to some extent Vaishya traders all the manual jobs have, traditionally, been looked down upon in India. The Vedas brainwashes us that Brahmins are created from God's mouth, Rajanyas from his arms, Vaishya's from his thighs and Sudras come out from his feet (Purusha Sukta; Rig Veda 10/90/12, Yajur Veda 31/11 and Atharva Veda 19/6/6). Later Manu Samhita and other Sastras make those manual labourers untouchables. Manu Samhita (8/281) dictates that if a low-caste man tries to place himself on the same seat with a man of a high caste then he shall be branded on his hip and be banished, or (the king) shall cause his buttock to be gashed. This prejudice still rules the roost in India that leads some primary teach-

ers to touch their dalit students with sticks to avoid physical contact (Pratiche Trust Report). Unfortunately, it is observed that modern day Manus are stooping very low to suppress the rise of dalits. Thus the crime against dalits is shooting up every year. The statistics compiled by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shows a hop, skip and a jump in crime against dalits- 33,655 cases in 2012, 39,408 cases in 2013 and 47,064 (a nasty jump!) in 2014. The rape on dalit women also witnesses a monstrous rise- 1,576 in 2012, 2,073 in 2013 and 2,233 in 2014. Crime and atrocities against dalits in Haryana have gone up by about two and a half times during 2004-2013 compared to 1994-2003 period. Therefore, we all need to fight against each and every devilish prejudice against dalits and women or in other words against humanity. All castles of such prejudices be it surnames, kangaroo courts, caste stinking comments, advertisements or acts should be banished. It is a crying need not a 'fashion'(!). Rather it will be highly unjust if we address this horrible reality after a fashion.

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.

have a better vantage view in the overall management of the long game. A captain is only properly tested in a five-day Test. In the 20-over variety a captain is about as useful as captain of a football team; relevant, but not essential. As for the one-day match, we could make a good case that the captain should preferably be an all-rounder. But that is another story.

Cricket is a slow game at its finest level, and creates space for tactical variations as well as strategic decisions. A Test captain needs to analyse the progress of a game continuously, intervene every three or four overs or so when fielding, and try and control the pace of runs when his side is batting. Hashim Amla was a thinking captain as well as a thoughtful human being, judging by the manner in which he played from his debut. He has always walked, and built a deserved reputation for integrity. But it is the long walk he took from the captaincy, in the middle of a tough series against England which will define his memory.

South Africa has had a poor run under his leadership. Controversies about the pitch could not quite hide the fact that the Africans were mauled during their recent series in India. In any case, using the pitch as an alibi is a curious argument. Both sides, after all, have to play on the same pitch; so if it is

through the innings; he is the shepherd with a silent nudge.

Hashim Amla resigned at the precise moment when he had cleared doubt. He left when he was back at the top, both as player and leader. If selectors punished captains for a bad trot, no captain would survive more than two or three seasons - at the outside. Even viciously competitive football owners take their time over failing managers. Amla was not being pushed. He took the call on his own, in what he deemed to be the best interests of his national side. You do not get many such examples. Let us not mention names but captains hang on to the power they have, for this power brings overt and covert financial rewards.

It would be serious exaggeration to insist that cricket remains what is quaintly described as a "gentleman's game". Cricket now has as many gentlemen, or ruffians, as any other. This is neither good nor bad, just inevitable, in a republican age when values - or the lack of them - are not class-specific, and serious money goes to those who can sell products. But when a gentleman does turn up in sports, it is reason for celebration. Destiny can offer anyone a role, but it is up to an individual to become a model.

Current pace of environmental change unprecedented: study

The rate of environmental change occurring today is unprecedented compared to that which occurred during natural events in the Earth's history, a new study has claimed. The study by researchers at the University of Bristol Cabot Institute in UK reconstructed the changes in atmospheric carbon dioxide (pCO2) during a global environmental change event that occurred about 120 million years ago. New geochemical data provide evidence that pCO2 increased in response to volcanic out-gassing and remained high for around 1.5-2 million years, until enhanced organic matter burial in an oxygen-poor ocean caused a return to original levels. "It has been suggested that the event we studied is a suitable analogue to what is happening today due to human activ-

ity and that a rapid increase in pCO2 caused ocean acidification and a biological crisis amongst a group of calcifying marine algae," said lead author Dr David Naafs. "Our work confirms that there was a large increase in pCO2. The change, however, appears to have been far slower than that of today, taking place over hundreds of thousands of years, rather than the centuries over which human activity is increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide levels," said Naafs. "So despite earlier claims, our research indicates that it is extremely unlikely that widespread surface ocean acidification occurred during this event," he said. Co-author Professor Daniela Schmidt emphasised that today's finding builds on one of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate

Change (IPCC)'s key conclusions: that the rate of environmental change occurring today is largely unprecedented in Earth history. "This is another example that the current rate of environmental change has few if any precedents in Earth history, and this has big implications for thinking about both past and future change," she said. The research was possible due to the exceptional Spanish section that the team analysed. "The sediments at Cau accumulated very rapidly resulting in an expanded section. This allowed the high resolution multidisciplinary analysis that are the basis for this important study," said Professor Jose Manuel Castro of the University of Jaen in Spain. The study was published in the journal *Nature Geoscience*. (PTI)

Winking face emoticon most effective to convey sarcasm

The simple winking face emoticon may be the most effective device to convey sarcasm in an ambiguous message, according to new study. Researchers at the University of Nottingham in the UK conducted two experiments involving nearly 200 undergraduate students. In the first experiment the context of each message was made clear, making any sarcasm pretty unambiguous. In the second, no explicit context was described, so a message from one person to another could be taken literally or sarcastically. Across the two experiments, the researchers tested the effect of various emoticons and punctuation on the students' perceptions of each message's sarcasm, and their perceptions of its likely emotional impact on the recipient. The emoticons tested were the winking face :-;) and the tongue face :-P. The researchers used the simple text-based versions of these emoticons, not the cartoon-style emoji equivalents. The punctuation marks tested were an exclamation mark, an ellipsis, or a simple full-stop. The findings published by the British Psychological Society's Research Digest showed that when the context for a sarcas-



tic message was explicit and unambiguous, neither emoticons nor punctuation devices did anything to increase the likelihood that it would be perceived as sarcastic. However, the two emoticons and ellipsis did make literal messages seem more sarcastic. Also, in these unambiguous contexts, an exclamation mark or emoticon tended to make the messages seem more positive. When the context for a message was ambiguous, the winking face emoticon was the most effective device for provoking in students the perception that the message was sarcastic, whether it was superficially positive or negative. According to researchers, if you want your message to be interpreted sarcastically in an ambiguous context, the best way to ensure this is to add a winking emoticon. In an ambiguous context, sarcastic criticism was perceived as more negative when it was accompanied by a wink (or an ellipsis). Conversely, a sarcastic comment intended as praise was perceived as more positive when combined with a wink. If you want to praise or criticise someone by text, and you want to blunt the emotional impact, using sarcasm is one way to achieve this effect, researchers said. (PTI)

Decoded: What 'silences' X chromosome in girls

Nearly every girl and woman on Earth carries two X chromosomes in each of her cells -- but one of them does (mostly) nothing. Do you know why? That is because it has been silenced, keeping most of its DNA locked up and unread like a book in a cage, scientists led by an Indian-American researcher from the University of Michigan Medical School have revealed. A wide range of relatively rare diseases - as well as relatively common conditions such as autism, haemophilia and muscular dystrophy - are linked to problems with genes found on the X chromosome. The findings could help lead to new ways of fighting diseases linked to X chromosomes in girls and women -- the kind that occur when the X chromosome that does get read has misprints and defects.

The team found that a known molecule called "Xist RNA" is insufficient to silence the X chromosome. "Xist is widely believed to be both necessary and sufficient for X silencing," said team leader Sundeeep Kalantry. "We, for the first time, show that it is not sufficient and there have to be other factors - on the X-chromosome itself that activate 'Xist' and then cooperate with 'Xist RNA' to silence the X-chromosome," he elaborated. In the future, it may be possible to change the

level of these other factors in cells and turn on the healthy, silenced copy of a gene that lies on the inactive X-chromosome, Kalantry added. Although most genes on the inactive X chromosome are fully silenced, a handful of the genes on the inactive X are, in fact, active. It is this set of X-inacti-

vation "escapes" that the research team was focused on. Since the "escape" genes are expressed from both the active and the inactive X-chromosomes in females, they produce more gene product in female cells than in male cells which only have a single X. According to Kalantry, it is this higher "dose" in females that triggers X-inactivation selectively in females; the lower dose in males is insufficient. "That means that if researchers can determine exactly which factors cause X-inactivation to occur, they could find ways to affect the activity of genes on

the X chromosomes - specifically, genes involved in certain diseases," the authors noted. Many of them have an impact on an individual's thinking and memory capacity, and other aspects of cognition and intelligence. "In females, we could envision 'reawakening' a healthy copy of an X-linked gene on the inactive X chromosome, by modulating the dose of these so-called escape genes and ameliorating the effects of the unhealthy copy," Kalantry explained. Unfortunately, this approach probably won't help males with X-linked diseases, because they only have a single X chromosome in each cell and inactivating it would be harmful. The new paper appeared in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. (IANS)



Science explains New gene editing technique may treat inherited blindness

A new technique that has the potential to treat inherited blindness in rats with a type of inherited blindness, scientists say. Researchers from the Cedars-Sinai Board of Governors Regenerative Medicine Institute in Los Angeles focused on inherited retinitis pigmentosa, a degenerative eye disease with no known cure that can lead to blindness. They used a technique known as CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeat)/Cas9 to remove a genetic mutation that causes the blindness disease. CRISPR/Cas9 is adapted from a strategy used by bacteria to fight invading viruses. Though the study involved rats, it is an important milestone because of its potential implications for humans. "Our data show that with further development, it may be possible to use this gene-editing technique to treat inherited retinitis pigmentosa in patients," said Shaomei Wang from the institute's Eye Programme. Retinitis pigmentosa is a class of diseases in which patients experience night blindness in the early stages, along with atrophy and pigment changes in the retina, constriction of the visual field and eventual blindness. CRISPR/Cas9 has been in use by genetic researchers for less than five years. In that time, it has transformed the science of genome editing by making the process easier, more dependable and less expensive. The technique is adapted from a system that bacteria deploy to disable invading viruses. The bacteria first copy part of the invader's genetic code into a special sequence of ribonucleic acid (RNA), which acts as a messenger to carry out the code's instructions. When the virus returns, the RNA binds to a protein called Cas9, guiding it to the matching gene in the virus. The protein disables the gene. For the study, the researchers designed a CRISPR/Cas9 system to remove a mutated gene that causes photoreceptor cell loss in the eye. They injected this system into young laboratory rats that had been engineered to model a type of inherited retinitis pigmentosa known as autosomal dominant, which involves this mutated gene. After a single injection, the rats were able to see better compared with controls, as measured by optomotor reflex, which involves turning the head in response to moving stripes of varying degrees of brightness. "This is the first time CRISPR/Cas9 gene editing has been used to prevent vision loss in a living animal. It is a truly remarkable result and paves the way for more exciting studies and translation to the clinic in the future," said Clive Svendsen, director of the Board of Governors Regenerative Medicine Institute. The findings were published in the journal *Molecular Therapy*. (PTI)

Low cost 3D human organ models in the offing Researchers in Japan have successfully developed a new technology that can cut the cost of producing 3D printed human organ models by a third. The University of Tsukuba in conjunction with Dai Nippon Printing Co (DNP) developed a low cost human organ model production technique for use with 3D printers that helps unveil complicated interior organ structure. Nobuhiro Ohkohchi and Yukio Oshiro of the Faculty of Medicine, and Jun Mitani of the Faculty of Engineering, Information and Systems produced a 3D printer-based technique for producing human organ models in a format that makes internal structures, such as blood vessels easier to see. The newly developed technique allows for the production of 3D human organ models at costs as low as 1/3 compared to those for currently available technology, researchers said. It is expected that the penetration of the new technique will lead to the promotion of clinical site applications, they said. (PTI)

Eating veggies doesn't equal to avoiding junk food Children who eat more carrots and apples are no less likely to eat candies and fries, warns a new study, suggesting that emphasising on avoiding "bad" food is as important as adding "good" food in children's diet. The study found that kids who ate fruits and veg-drink milk every day were as healthy as those who ate junk food. "There has been a notion that if people eat more vegetables and fruits, they will eat less junk food," said author Phyllis Pirie from the Ohio State University in the US. Efforts to lower childhood obesity rates often focus on adding "good" foods, rather than on avoiding "bad foods," she said. Trained interviewers met with parents or guardians of 357 children two to five years old and asked them to recall how often the children ate certain foods in the past week. The research team asked them about the children's diets and categorised foods and drinks into healthy and unhealthy categories. About half the children in the study ate fruit two or more times a day. Some rarely ate vegetables, but more than a third had them multiple times a day. Regardless of age, there was no evidence kids who frequently ate fruits and vegetables and drank milk were any less likely to partake in the unhealthy foods. (IANS)

Arctic animals navigate by the light of winter moon

In the absence of sunlight, the Moon drives the vertical migrations of tiny marine animals through the permanently dark and frigid Arctic winter, a new study has found. Researchers said that the behaviour is most likely an attempt by zooplankton to avoid predators hunting by moonlight. "During the permanently dark and extremely cold Arctic winter, these tiny marine creatures, like mythical werewolves, respond to moonlight by undergoing mass migrations," said Kim Last from the Scottish Association for Marine Science in Scotland. No matter where the researchers looked during the Arctic winter - in fjord, shelf, slope, or open sea - they observed the same behaviour. Further investigation showed that the marine creatures had shifted their activities from following the 24-hour solar day to following the 24.8-hour lunar day. In winter, zooplankton's vertical migrations take place when the

Moon rises above the horizon, researchers said. In addition to this daily cycle, they also discovered a mass sinking of zooplankton from the surface waters to a depth of about 50 meters every 29.5 days in the winter, coinciding with the full Moon. "The most surprising finding is that these migrations are not rare or isolated to just a few places," said Last. "The acoustic database used for our analysis cumulatively spans 50 years of data from moorings that cover much of the Arctic Ocean. The occurrences of lunar migrations happen every winter at all sites, even under sea ice with snow cover on top," he added. The daily vertical migration of zooplankton contributes significantly to the carbon pump by moving fixed carbon from the surface into the deep ocean, researchers said. "Since there is no photosynthesis during the polar night, carbon is only moved into the deep by predators feeding on prey," said Last. (PTI)

Bite mark analysis may result in false convictions Widely accepted in criminal courts and often presented as key evidence in prosecutions, bite mark analysis is actually "far from an exact science" and can lead to false convictions, says a new study. Bite mark analysis compares the teeth of crime suspects to bite mark patterns on victims. But a single bite mark is not distinct enough to be linked to a specific individual, said one of the researchers H David Sheets from Canisius College in New York, US. It can actually point to many different individuals," Sheets noted. This means that a false identification is possible, which can lead a police investigation away from the real perpetrator and toward an innocent individual. "People assume that it is close to fingerprints in terms of accuracy," Sheets pointed out. "But the notions that a person's dentition is unique or that the human skin can accurately record an individual's bite mark have never been validated scientifically," Sheets added. Using a variety of dental impressions, scientists examined more than 1,000 human dentitions and studied hundreds of bite marks in cadaver skin. With the help of computer analysis and applied statistics, the team then worked to match its database of bite marks to the correct dental impressions. "When the dental alignments were similar, it was difficult to distinguish exactly which set of teeth made which bites," Sheets stated. "This is an example of where science can help prevent future wrongful convictions and perhaps even provide some social justice to those already convicted," Sheets said in an official statement. (IANS)

Bite mark analysis may result in false convictions

Want to try world's first smokeable smartphone? do not vape much, you will get a longer battery life. The smartphone has an opening under a little plastic cover off the top. Attach a flavoured liquid cartridge and a mouthpiece to that and smoke right out of your smartphone. It comes with a button to regulate the heat and get a stronger pull. The liquid cartridges cost \$15 and come in flavours like mint, peach and coffee and each one provides about 800 puffs, or four packs of cigarettes. Moreover, the Vaporcade app on the phone lets the user track battery life, how much liquid is left, what flavour has been loaded in the cartridge, and how many puffs the user has taken over time. It also helps in quitting smoking or cut down on your vaping by setting a goal. The app alerts when the user crosses the number of puffs. Claimed to be approved by the US Federal Communications Commission, the information on health effects and the impact of vaping from the device, when compared to traditional cigarettes, is still not known. The company, that makes e-cigarettes, cigars, and coffee beans, plans to release a 4G model for \$499 in the next few months. (IANS)

JUPITER™ CELLULAR VAPING™ CHOOSE YOUR MODEL

Bored of calls, emails, chats and endless Facebook posts with your smartphone? Now offer your friend an electronic puff with this unique magical device that also works like an e-cigarette. Call it bizarre or clever, but a US-based company Vaporcade is offering a smartphone that will allow you to make calls and text as well as smoke your favourite e-flavours - even help you quit smoking - tech website The Verge reported on Sunday. The Jupiter IO 3 is reportedly the world's first smokeable smartphone with a vape. A 3G smartphone that costs \$299, it runs on Android KitKat 4.4 operating system. The smartphone has two batteries - one to power the phone and one to power the vape. The battery life is shared so if you

do not vape much, you will get a longer battery life. The smartphone has an opening under a little plastic cover off the top. Attach a flavoured liquid cartridge and a mouthpiece to that and smoke right out of your smartphone. It comes with a button to regulate the heat and get a stronger pull. The liquid cartridges cost \$15 and come in flavours like mint, peach and coffee and each one provides about 800 puffs, or four packs of cigarettes. Moreover, the Vaporcade app on the phone lets the user track battery life, how much liquid is left, what flavour has been loaded in the cartridge, and how many puffs the user has taken over time. It also helps in quitting smoking or cut down on your vaping by setting a goal. The app alerts when the user crosses the number of puffs. Claimed to be approved by the US Federal Communications Commission, the information on health effects and the impact of vaping from the device, when compared to traditional cigarettes, is still not known. The company, that makes e-cigarettes, cigars, and coffee beans, plans to release a 4G model for \$499 in the next few months. (IANS)

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“A dreamer is one who can only find his way by moonlight, and his punishment is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world.”

— Oscar Wilde

The Shillong Times

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Need for greater traffic vigilance

THE death of a vivacious, young lady officer of the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) on account of a road accident in the city on Monday calls for serious introspection. There is no speed monitoring system anywhere in the city. That the fatal accident occurred in the early morning hours when traffic is thin and roads are relatively free, means, that the Guwahati bound passenger vehicle Mahindra Maxx was speeding or had taken a wrong turn. It is common to see drivers with learners' licenses driving in the morning hours. However, it is also a common sight to see young drivers some aged 13-14 years old driving around without anyone penalizing them. The Traffic Police is supposed to penalize such unauthorized drivers but because they don't use the main roads, they manage to escape punishment. It is important for the Traffic Police to empower citizens to bring such incidents of driving by unauthorized persons to their notice, either by taking down the vehicle number of by bringing the offenders to the police station.

The brand new Shillong-Guwahati four-laned road and the Shillong bypass are turning to be death traps. Vehicles tend to accelerate and pick up speed on these highways. Since there are no speed detectors along the entire length of the highways, the speeding vehicles get away, but not after creating havoc and putting the lives of other responsible drivers at risk. It has been noticed that the Tata Sumo passenger vehicles which almost always carry more than the capacity allowed are also the most recklessly driven ones. While traffic in Shillong city is heavy for the most part of the day and this deters speeding, it is in the evening and early morning hours that utmost vigilance is necessary. It is time for Meghalaya's Traffic Police to be stricter and to do a random check on driving licenses. Quite a number of drivers on the road today don't have valid driving licenses. Many drivers have paid money to the officials of the District Transport Office to procure a license without going through the mandatory tests. This is blatant corruption and it cannot be allowed to persist as these incompetent drivers endanger the lives of many.

LOOKING BACK

January 10, 1988

Breathe your trouble away

Mr. Gopal broke his foot while running and thought it would mean his inactivity. However, he was advised some breathing exercises and was thus cured.

Breathing in a controlled fashion to exercise his chest and strengthen his stomach muscles, he found his pain also eased. Fascinated, he did some reading and discovered that breathing has been helpful in a wide variety of activities from acting and singing to sports and meditation. The more he read, the more he realised that breathing is the missing connection for integration and control of the body and mind.

Unlike most nutrients, oxygen cannot be stored in the body. Every minute, we require a steady, fresh intake of air. Yet most of us use our lungs at only on third of our full capacity. To counter this several breathing programmes that used the respiratory system to its maximum potential, letting as much oxygen into the body as possible while removing as much waste carbon dioxide as possible have been developed.

To counter this, several breathing programmes that used the respiratory system to its maximum potential, letting as much oxygen into the body as possible while removing as much waste

carbon dioxide as possible have been developed.

The most effective is the total breath, practice it until it becomes second nature. When that happens you should find that you are less tired and that your body is functioning more effectively.

Inhale slowly through the nose, aiming the breath at mid abdomen and letting it fill the lower part of the lungs with air. Your abdomen will begin to bulge out like a balloon, continue the breath, until the abdomen is fully extended; then expand the rib section outwards to the sides and fill the mid section of the chest with air.

Finally, let the breathe fill the upper part of the lungs by lifting the chest area and letting it expand outwards and to the side. The process should take about five seconds.

Hold the breath for five seconds. With practice, you should be able to do it for ten seconds or more to give the lungs a chance to absorb all the oxygen. Now exhale slowly, gently contacting the lower abdomen first. As the lower lungs empty, the rib section will slowly deflate, followed by the upper chest. Pause for a second or two before beginning the next inhalation. Repeat ten times. And practice often during the day so that this exercise becomes a part of your own breathing pattern.

Philosophy behind ka Rongbiria (Khasi Archery)

By Fabian Lyngdoh

'Ka Rongbiria' is the most popular sport or game among the Khasis. Before the Khasis establish any type of social activity, they institute a covenant as the ground of which that activity is legitimized. Hence, to institute 'ka hok' (rights, privileges or rationale) for the sport of 'ka Rongbiria', the ancestors of the Khasis stood on the covenant of a mythology that 'ka Mei Hukum' (legislative attribute of God) has gifted this form of sport for pleasure, joy or merriment to ka Shinam and her husband u Mangring, who in turn handed it over to their sons, u Batiton and u Shynna.

The life of a Khasi is bound by religious and social covenants. He is always surrounded by what he should do and should not do. First and foremost, a Khasi is bound as a member of his clan. He has to swim or sink together with his clan. The Khasis also believe that spoken words always constitute a covenant whether in favour or against the wellbeing of the speaker. The freedom of speech for a Khasi is bound by stringent restrictions. A Khasi therefore has to walk the straight but narrow path all through his life; he is expected to hold fast to customs and traditions, to obey without demure the instructions of his uncles. His life is surrounded by numerous religious covenants, social covenants as well as individual covenants which he has created in his social interactions.

But the ancestors of the Khasis had understood that the lives of individuals in such stringent social situations would have been boring and mentally exhaustive, and it is for this reason that they instituted a covenant to establish the sport of archery which acts as a relief or a safety valve to reduce the stress and strain of normal daily life. The purpose of 'ka Rongbiria' is to release man from all covenants, and from relationships with spiritual beings other than ka Mei Hukum, so that he may experience and enjoy free and simple childlike pleasures. It is a sanctioned break or relaxation from the following aspects of the normal way of

life:

First, it is a break from the circle of the clan. In normal life, whatever a Khasi does is always in the name of his clan, and for whatever he does or speaks, his clan is collectively responsible. But in the 'Rongbiria' a man enters the field in the name of his team and whatever he does or speaks would affect the victory or defeat of his team, but in no way would there be any repercussion to his clan. In normal life it is a serious taboo for a man to counter his uncle or any member of his clan in any situation. But in the 'Rongbiria' he can enter the field with a team opposite to his uncle's team, and he can even speak derogatory words against his uncle for the sake of victory at the target because 'ka Mei Hukum' has given the permission to two brothers, u Batiton and u Shynna to compete against each other in the game.

Second, it is a break from the covenant of the word. During the game of the 'Rongbiria' whatever a man speaks begins and ends within the field of the game, and does not constitute a covenant that would have repercussions on his normal life in the society. So, a man can speak whatever he likes within the capacity of his human intellect to institute his offensive argument (siang-nia) or to return defensive arguments (said-nia) to neutralise the offensive argument put forward by the opposite party. His argument concerns only with his winning or losing in the game and that is decided by the number of his team's arrows hitting the target (skum). During the game of 'ka Rongbiria', players can even speak words that would be immoral in normal life, or they can speak derogatory words against their opponents because they are permitted to do so by the covenant of the game. It is believed, that victory depends so much on the skills of the archers, but on the strength of the offen-

sive and defensive arguments of the leader of the team. In 'ka Rongbiria' no one can invoke the intervention of any cult in the names of gurus, deities of hills and forests or spirits of the dead.

Third, it is a break from the covenant of ka Hok (Divine Justice). In normal life, a Khasi fears ka Hok and dreads its punishment because the favour of ka Hok always stands on the side of the righteous. A thief, murderer, adulterer, nongshohnoh etc. is despised by the people, and he lives in continual fear of the judgment of ka Hok. But in the field of 'ka Rongbiria' even such a person is absolved from his sins because ka Hok does not interfere in the game of ka Mei Hukum. If he has the skill and the argument, even a sinner can win and the holiest man can lose when ka Mei Hukum decides the victor at the target.

Fourth, it is a break from the covenant of 'ka sot' (religious covenant). In the field of 'ka Rongbiria' the individual covenants of all participants are stripped off, and they are also released from the provisions of ka sot. In normal life, a man who has no clan or whose clan has become extinct loses all rights in the socio-political and religious affairs of the society however wise or intelligent he might be. But that socio-religious code is not applicable in ka 'Rongbiria'. A person of an extinct clan without 'ka sad ka sunon' is equal to anyone else in the field of ka 'Rongbiria', and depending on his own 'ka rngiew' (spiritual personality) he may even defeat the 'syiem' (secular leader) or the 'lyngdoh' (religious leader) of the community. In 'ka Rongbiria', ka Mei Hukum does not judge man's victory or defeat on the basis of his personal covenant but on the basis of his physical skill and verbal argument.

Fifth, it is a break from 'ka kambhah-kam-bynta.' The Khasis believe that man's life is determined by his fate. But man's fate is not determined by God or

by any other authority but by his own choice. Khasi folklore says that before a man is born into the world by his mother, 'ka Lei Synshar' (God, the Allocator and Ruler) has allocated (buh-bynta) and laid out various types of fate (siang sla) before him from among which he has to choose only one without knowing what kind of fate that 'sla' has in store for him, otherwise he cannot come into the world. It may be a 'sla' of good luck or bad luck, of victory or defeat, of wellbeing or poverty. This act of choosing one's fate is called 'ka kambhah-kambynta'. But in 'ka Rongbiria' even this self chosen fate does not apply, as ka Lei Synshar too does not interfere with the will of ka Mei Hukum. In the field of 'ka Rongbiria' there is no good luck or bad luck; everybody is equal to anybody else, and victory depends on who can manipulate the prevalent situations according to the conditions laid down by ka Mei Hukum.

Besides the above five socio-religious breaks, the game of 'ka Rongbiria' is also a practice or training in the art of physical warfare as well as in the art of making offensive and defensive arguments for verbal warfare. For physical warfare, the youth are trained to handle the bow and arrows; and for verbal warfare, the elderly men train themselves in the art of launching offensive arguments to establish a covenant of victory called 'ka siang-nia, and returning of defensive arguments called 'ka said-nia', to nullify the victory covenant of the opponent. The Khasis believe that victory in war does not depend only on the strength and fighting skills of the warriors, but it depends mainly on the favour of ka Hok (Divine Justice). When engaging in a war, the people of one hima (state) should establish sufficient reason to justify why they have to fight a war, and why they have to win and the other hima is to be defeated. It is for this reason that the Khasis call a war, 'ka thma-ka ktien' (the war-the word).

TO THE EDITOR

Justice denied!

Editor,

The much talked about Shillong Airport Expansion Project, is being done at the expense of some poor and innocent individual land owners. There is a murky deal behind the whole issue. Our property (DB Museum) is one among the six others whose land has been forcefully appropriated by the Government. It is clear that the compensation for the six plots had already been done in 2010 by the District Authority of Ri Bhoi, but it is a mystery that the owners of the six plots have never received the money. It seemed that the amount has gone to another individual who seemed to have claimed ownership over all the above said plots. It is unacceptable that the Government authority with its law-abiding tradition should have paid the amount without first ascertaining the ownership of these plots. Officers who are involved in such a gross mistake should be taken to task. It appears too that there is a murky deal behind all these payments since many things do not seem to have been done in the proper manner. When the PAC (Public Account Committee) headed by Mr Paul Lyngdoh (MLA) took up the matter with the aggrieved persons, then there came a statement from the Government that this issue

is beyond the jurisdiction of the PAC. Is this not a suspicious move? This leads us to think that the authority is trying to protect someone of their own. As of now the High Court has given orders for the expansion work to begin and the District Authority has no option but to implement the order. Now where is justice here? Should the person who received all the money (blood money) and the government officials involved in this dirty deal go scot free? Is this what every Indian citizen is entitled to get? Are we living under dictatorship or under democracy? If justice is to be given to Indian citizens then I think the High Court should first constitute a CBI investigation into this matter or else we will only perpetuate corruption and injustice in this beautiful country of ours.

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie sdb,
Viaemail

Customer unfriendly GPO

Editor,

Many of us customers are facing a lot of problems at Shillong GPO aside from the obvious link failure. First and foremost the working hours at the saving/deposit counter is very

less compared to other financial institutions. Opening an account or depositing money is a whole day affair as it is always overcrowded. The staff and the higher-ups at the GPO are very unprofessional, rude and indifferent to the plight of us customers. We the customers of Shillong GPO thank *The Shillong Times* for bringing up this issue on behalf of us customers, however it remains to be seen if anything good will come out of this.

Yours etc.,
Sandy Troyden,
Via email

Corruption at IRCTC counter

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily I would like to bring to the notice of the concerned authorities about the illegal practices by some corrupt officials at the lone IRCTC ticket booking counter at Tura MTC office premises. On 5th January, I had gone to the aforesaid ticket counter for buying a Tatkal train ticket for myself and my family for travelling from Guwahati to Kolkata next day. After completing all the procedures, I was asked to pay a certain amount of fare by the official at the ticket counter. I paid the amount to him and collected the ticket. After collecting the ticket, I casu-

ally went through the same and to my utter surprise I found that I was charged Rs.600 more than the actual fare that was printed on the ticket. Accordingly I went back to the official at the counter and reported the matter to him. He simply replied that they charge Rs.200 extra per passenger for Tatkal tickets. Upon enquiry from some fellow passengers, I came to know that this is a regular affair at the said counter. Since the said IRCTC counter is run by the Indian Railways and no private travel agent or office is involved, how can these government officials charge more than the actual fare? Isn't it day light corruption by these officials who are taking advantage of the innocent passengers from this region who have very little knowledge about trains and its ticketing systems? I therefore urge the concerned authorities to immediately stop this illegal practice by corrupt officials and take stern action on their corrupt activities so that common travellers don't get looted in broad day light.

Yours etc.,
A. Majumdar
Tura

BCCI Reforms

Editor,

The Supreme Court appointed committee headed by former Chief Justice of India Justice M R Lodha has made far reaching and dras-

Pathankot has put the dialogue ball in Pakistan's court

By Kanwal Sibal

The Pathankot attack has once again exposed our failure to develop an effective strategy to counter Pakistan's use of terror as a political tool against us. Each time a Pakistan-sponsored terrorist attack occurs, our dialogue gets interrupted.

It is resumed after an interval because Pakistan is seen to be gaining diplomatic advantage internationally by our rejection of dialogue. We are sensitive to US diplomacy, which plays in favour of dialogue resumption. Within the country, too, major newspapers and well-identified commentators push for resumption.

In some cases, even those officially responsible for our foreign and security policies treat the issue of terrorism as secondary and advocate dialogue. All this shows the brittleness of our approach to terrorism.

We are told that it is in our own interests to have a dialogue with Pakistan and we should not let terrorists disrupt it. One could understand if - during the process of a productive dialogue with Pakistan, that steadily moves the two countries towards normalisation, sporadic acts of terrorism occurred, which were then investigated, the perpetrators punished, and steps taken to prevent further acts. In that case, we might take the position that breaking dialogue would not be in our interests as we would be doing exactly what the terrorists want.

But if the dialogue has been largely sterile, Pakistan has remained adamant on its 'core' issues, those responsible for the Mumbai massacre have not been tried, and credible action against jihadi groups targeting India has been absent, this position loses force. How is it in our national interest in that case to persist in a barren dialogue that primarily puts the burden on us to produce 'results' and overlook terrorism?

The other argument, that a dialogue is needed to convey our expectations to Pakistan on the terrorism front and transmit evidence to Islamabad, assumes that Pakistan is unaware of our concerns and ignoring the evidence of Pakistan-based jihadi activity against India which has been provided.

In reality, terrorism has been on the agenda for years, and Pakistan is fully aware of what we expect. Pakistan has ignored our private and public exhortations on abjuring terrorism as an instrument of state policy, and has treated our evidence as literature.

If our expectations had been heeded by Pakistan and it had re-oriented its policies accordingly, there would be merit in continuing the virtuous process of a sustained dialogue. But, if, instead, terrorist attacks are staged on our territory periodically and leads pro-

tic changes in the cricket administration of the country. The Committee's recommendation regarding fixing the tenure of office bearers, setting up age limits for contesting election, prohibiting Ministers from becoming office bearers, allowing only one association in a state (no city based association), bringing BCCI under the ambit of Right to Information Act, forbidding members to hold dual positions in BCCI and state associations, reducing the number of office bearers, greater role for players in the conduct of cricket in the country, appointment of ombudsman for settling internal disputes, transparent election procedure under the supervision of a former election commissioner are laudable.

vided are not pursued on grounds that additional evidence is needed and procedures have to be followed, then the argument loses merit. Put them to the test, experts say, as if Pakistan has not been tested for three decades.

It is claimed by dialogue supporters that each time talks have been successful in the past, terrorists have attacked - the more the success, the more severe the attack. Apart from the implication that we should not link dialogue and terrorism, it is not clear what these successes are.

The Mumbai attacks were supposedly in response to a breakthrough on Kashmir. The acceptability of this breakthrough, which has remained a national secret, has never been tested. This is true of the Pakistan side too, although former foreign minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri has tommotomed it.

This 'success', which was personality-driven, and not system-driven, on Pakistan's side, remained embryonic, with its basis being rejected by Asif Ali Zardari and, in particular, Nawaz Sharif by their insistence on self-determination under UN auspices in Kashmir.

Some dialogue die-hards, who have been cogs in our Pakistan policy under the previous government and have treated Narendra Modi's Lahore visit with withering contempt, argue that asking Sharif to take action against those involved in the Pathankot attack before FS-level talks amounts to laying down conditions. Others seek analogies from the latest episode of Star Wars to understand and address our Pakistan problem.

In their eyes, Pakistan's insistence that it will not discuss terrorism unless Kashmir is also discussed does not amount to laying down conditions. Unless we discuss issues close to Pakistan's heart, they say, we will not get them to act on our concerns, which indirectly justifies the use of terrorism against us, as the implication is that we invite it because we obdurately deny the room Pakistan wants on Kashmir.

We may have different views on the sagacity of Modi's Lahore gesture, but having invested so dramatically in a renewed dialogue process with Pakistan, he is not wrong in demanding that Pakistan demonstrate its commitment to talks that Sharif has lobbied internationally, by taking action against those responsible for Pathankot.

This is not laying down a condition - this is giving an opportunity to Sharif to save the dialogue that he seeks from being aborted.

(The author is a former Foreign Secretary)

Similar reforms are required in other sports bodies also as in some of them; people (mostly politicians) are holding posts for decades, as if they are doing exemplary work. Such situations have forced the people to believe that India is perhaps the only country where inefficiency, lethargy, incompetence and non performance are rewarded.

Yours etc.,
E M Adithyan,
Kerala

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.

“Never cut a tree down in the winter-time. Never make a negative decision in the low time. Never make your most important decisions when you are in your worst moods. Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass. The spring will come.”

— Robert H. Schuller

The Shillong Times

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West Bengal rumblings

THERE is no denying that West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has been committed to industrial development in the state, especially the beautification of Kolkata. Her trips to Singapore and London were meant to invite investments. The Bengal Global Business Summit in Kolkata was perhaps not just a platform for delivering a string of homilies. She prioritised cheap labour, abundant power, a land bank, industry friendly policies and access to highway to make West Bengal an ideal investment destination. Competitive federalism and an ideal ecosystem are her watchword. From this point of view, she is on the same page as Prime Minister Narendra Modi projecting India as an ideal destination for investment. But the Centre and the state often fall out and lawlessness mark the best of intentions. It will not do for the Trinamul government in West Bengal to put the blame for his setback solely on d damonosa hereditary led by the left front government. What is wrong with Mamata Banerjee is that she tries to wish away crisis in an offswitch-like manner and later face the question. Take for instance, the rape in Kolkata's Park Street quite some time ago. After saying it was a rumour she has taken action against the criminal.

Banerjee is not the first Chief Minister of West Bengal to unduly appease the minority community with a somewhat exaggerated importance attached to the vote bank. The sudden onslaught of Hindutva in northern India has to be roundly condemned. The Modi government should have been profusely apologetic about Hindu Mahaseva chief, Kamalesh Tiwari's discouraging comments about the Congress. Malda witnessed a repeat on al-Qaida reprisal against Charlie Hevdo in Paris. A rally organised by a muslim outfit in Malda denouncing Tiwari turned violent. The West Bengal government should have taken precautions against such a backlash instead of pampering Muslims. What is difficult to understand is why not merely BJP party men but CPI (M) MP Mohammed Salim were not allowed to visit the disturbed area to bring back peace.

LOOKING BACK

January 1, 1989

Koch resigns from Assam Ministry

Assam Minister of states for power Mr. Atul Koch today resigned from three year old Prafulla Kumar Mahanta had reshuffled his ministry by dropping 12 ministers.

Meanwhile, the All Assam Students Union submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister demanding action against Mr. Koch within 48 hours on charges of his furnishing forged documents regarding his educational qualification. The AASU alleged that Mr. Koch got himself admitted to the post graduates political science department of Guwahati University and LLB course of Dibrugarh University by furnishing forged documents. He had not passed even pre university examination, it alleged.

The AASU submitted documentary proof in support of its allegations.

Syiem of Myllem removed from office

Khasi Hills District Council has removed Mr. Franciswell Syiem, from the office of the Syiem of Myllem after probe body upheld nine of the 13 charges brought against him by the District Council.

Mr. Syiem has been under suspension since May 1987 and an acting Syiem appointed by the District Council is holding the office.

Appointed in 1963, Mr. Syiem's long tenure in office was interrupted in May 1986 when the District Council suspended him for the first time on charges of administrative and financial bungling. Mr. Syiem challenged the suspension order in the high court and obtained a stay order. However, the District Council moved the Supreme Court which ruled that the suspension order was valid but the District Council should expeditiously probe into the allegations.

Later, the District Council appointed Mr. B. Lyngdoh, First Class Magistrate of the District Council to go into the various charges Mr. Lyngdoh found substance in at least nine charges. Among others, Mr. Syiem has been found guilty of non commissioning of syiemship budget for approval of the Executive Committee, non submission of monthly accounts, induction of unauthorized persons as Myntiris, running of the syiemship without duly constituted and recognized executive Durbar, and rampant felling of trees in the syiemship forest areas.

The Failure of Jaidbynriew Politics

By Babet Sten

Honestly, that would not be something that I personally desire to see occur – though I do want to see more Khasis in positions of financial or commercial importance. But anyway, let us spill the beans/milk/tungrymbai – it is an open secret that the pressure groups take “khajna” (tax) from the non-tribal merchants/businessmen. My question is not about the legal or ethical ramifications of this, even though they might be the most important considerations to bear in mind. It is a rather simple rational one – these self-styled soldiers of the Jaidbynriew wish to protect the Khasis from non-tribals by taking money from non-tribals? How does that compute? When you pay for something/someone, aren't you their owner/employer? Maybe it sounds like I am simplifying them and their politics but isn't that essentially what is happening here?

Whenever there has been a threat to the Khasi middle-class in particular the pressure groups have answered the call. They of course draw strength from a whole range of socio-economic backgrounds (rich and poor, rural and urban) but they have been their most ferocious when it comes to backing the claims of the middle-class. When the Assamese and Bengali dominated politics and middle-class occupations, they answered. When the Nepalis wanted space and a louder voice, the sengkhalangs answered the bourgeois clarion. Those who can afford to pay them “protection money” (mafia lingo) have been accommodated. That is the bottom line!

The police know it, the government knows it. Everyone knows it but no one does anything about it. Maybe this newspaper can offer a cash reward to expose this extortion racket in an investigative ‘sting’ operation? If you look at these three resources: limestone, coal, uranium. Why is it only the last that is op-

posed? Of course, it is more dangerous and less stable to handle, we hear from experts. But I claim, that the reason for these pressure groups taking up the fight against uranium mining is only because it is a “strategic resource” i.e. out of (middle-class) tribal hands, that is, very little of the vast sums of money that it could generate will ever flow into their pockets. They have been very quiet about the massive pollution and devastation caused by coal and limestone mining – “wat tuklar ia ja kpho jong kiwei (don't interfere with how people earn their rice/living)” they scold back. I wonder what would happen if more plump and wealthy Khasis from Shillong got behind uranium mining.

The disease of the sengkhalangs is infectious. They have exported their brand of hate and venom into other spheres of public life as well. Many of our ‘great’ political stalwarts (I use the term humorously) arose from the furnace fires of the sengkhalangs. They are probably trained to lie and steal within those training grounds. How can we trust politicians who, in their youth, were part of any organization that extort and, on occasion, murder people? This isn't some caste-belt in UP or elsewhere. Many are very proud of their past memberships as though it is a sign in their political resume that they are better suited for the job. Every once in a while, they say the most horrible racist, sexist, ahistorical things from public platforms but no one bats an eyelid: such is life in this “love thy neighbour” society. Look, I do think that right now, more than ever, we need politicians who are riew madan (who have experience in activism, community organizing) not officer-types who have no touch with reality, but it seems to me that instead of challenging power, pressure group leaders subscribe to a certain vision which is not that different from that of their opponents. This is apparent. In trying to challenge

the “legitimate” sources of authority which can be corrupt, arrogant and destructive, they imitate a similar hierarchy outside the main system. The point being to open up the circuits, to open up democracy further; in fact our reliance on the sengkhalangs is undemocratic and exclusive.

Jaidbynriew politics has failed to produce any results. Our society is stagnant, our villages fearful and superstitious. It is a bleak picture and this brand of politics has contributed to it. Into this already corrupt and nepotistic state, we have flung in fear and loathing. It is the easiest thing in the world to divide people and vilify differences especially when they are all clamoring for the same resources. Instead of critiquing class and other paradigms within the Khasi society as the sources of oppression, these fools run around quarrelling over someone's “race”. They refuse outright to see anything wrong within the Khasi society and therefore cannot fix anything. They instead train our crosshairs on the other “nuisances” which crowd our streets, that threaten to enter our homes, our wombs. We may be protesting about how dangerous Donald Trump is for the world but we should listen closely to how his words have similar voices here. What will these thugs do about the awful unemployment levels among the state's youths or general poor conditions of employment they have to endure?

Nothing, of course! Khasis after all dominate middle-class occupations so no amount of bandhs or rallies against outsiders can resolve that one. This can only be solved with the creative involvement of various fronts especially government. The sengkhalangs cannot use the Jaidbynriew card for such situations which are perhaps the gravest and most dire problems besetting the Khasi people today. The Jaidbynriew card is almost exhausted.

(The writer is a research scholar, JNU)

TO THE EDITOR

False predictions!

Editor,

The people of the North Eastern region are not yet out of the trauma of the recent 6.7 magnitude earthquake that shook the region on January 4 when some so called environmentalists have come up with the pathetic theory that yet another massive earthquake is going to strike the whole of the Himalayan region. Where were these environmental experts before the 6.7 magnitude earthquake took place? Did the bells of the minds of these predictors only ring after the recent earthquake? It would be very rare to hear of an earthquake prediction coming true. It is of utmost shame that these citizens, instead of comforting the victims, are busy circulating rumours! Such rumours should be immediately dealt with as they are causing a feeling of insecurity among many people. The rumour mongers should rather do some constructive work for the nation rather than act as 'Environmental Terrorists'!

Your's etc,
Sanbeer Singh
Ranhotra,
Via email.

Quest for Gold

Editor,

Apurvi Chandela a 23 year old Jaipur girl has done

an “Apuvri” (Rare) feat by winning two Gold Medals at the Swedish Cup Grand pre. In the women's 10 Meter Air Rifle she won Gold Medal by scoring 211.2 points beating the existing world record created by a Chinese shooter in the last Olympics. Subsequently she won Gold in the 10 Meter Tri series. She was adjudged as the best shooter of the championship in view of her stupendous feat. For a country which is not a super power in sports even in the Asian circuit, such incredible performance is few and far between and hence deserves high accolades.

The Rio Olympics is less than 8 months away and she is one of our best bet for an Olympic Gold Medal; perhaps even more than one. For a country which faces severe drought of medals in International competitions, Apurvi's achievement is a silver lining (or Gold lining) in the sports horizon of the country. At a time when newspapers are flooded with negative news like gang rape, murder, scams, scandals, corruption, allegations, counter allegations etc, such positive news is a welcome relief. Hence it is essential to highlight and give wide publicity to such feats (which occurs once in a blue moon), not only to inspire and motivate the sporting fraternity

but also to reduce the disillusionment and despair of the common man. Sports is a unifying factor and it can play a pivotal role in national integration as watching the Indian sports persons at international meets creates, at least momentarily, a sense of patriotism and nationality in a country otherwise divided by caste, creed, region, religion, language etc. Let us hope that she will make millions of countrymen proud with her superlative performance at Rio. Hats off to Apurvi! Let us all support, encourage and pray for her. Her achievements will inspire many budding youngsters to accomplish greater heights in their sporting career.

Government should announce in advance the prize money for Olympic medal winners and podium finishers in Olympics. This will be a great motivation for the sportspersons who are toiling very hard for the Olympics and also to maintain transparency and impartiality. Haryana Government had some time back announced prize money for winners of various categories in different national/international meets. It had a salutary effect on the Haryana sports which is evident from the fact that a state whose sporting interest was confined to few disciplines has become a force to reckon with and is producing several national/international

champions in various disciplines.

Yours etc.,
E M Adithyan
Elangalloor Mana
Kerala

Kudos to the CM!

Editor,

The recent decision taken by the cabinet to prevent government employees from holding office as Rangbah Shnong and/or executive members of the Shnong is a landmark and bold decision. That this was not done in the past speaks of the poor leadership that had been the bane of Meghalaya for the past forty three years. It is so obvious that that government employees are not free agents to go around holding the very government, that pays them to ransom. How can a government employee forget that he earns his bread from public money funded largely by the tax payers of this country? Yet they dare to declare themselves as self proclaimed leaders of the Jaitbynriew? The leader of this roaring pack who is a medical doctor running a lucrative nursing home can afford to take on the government. And the other businessman walking hand in hand with the doctor might not need the government too, but the others who are government

Gearing Up Railways Tough, but doable

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

The Government is serious about rejuvenating India's railways. Towards that end, it has set up the Rail Development Authority, a welcome step indeed. Initially, the Authority would address issues relating to joint ventures and special purpose vehicles such as those for the dedicated freight corridors.

According to the concept note, this body headed by a Chairman and four members specializing in railways, infrastructure, finance, law management and consumer affairs would undertake four functions, namely fixing tariff, ensuring fair play, a level playing field for private investment, set standards of efficiency and performance and disseminate information.

True, this measure would obviously bring about a much-desired change in the functioning of the railways, however it needs to be pointed out that the Authority would merely increase fares without giving due attention to betterment of passenger amenities.

Sadly, despite increase in fares, there has not been much improvement in most long distance trains except Rajdhani, Durontos and Shatabdis along-with few special ones. Shockingly, in not a few trains have stinking toilets, worse they run out of water in some hours of the journey.

Moreover, the efficiency level in the railway system is quite poor. Not only is it very difficult to get reservation in AC III tier or even in Sleeper Class primarily because a large part of the seats are kept in ‘tatkal’ quota and another chunk is termed ‘EQ’ share. Consequently, it is virtually next to impossible for the aam aadmi to get reservation if he has to travel urgently.

Undoubtedly, the recent decision to increase the reservation period from three to four months is a wrong decision. Also the quantum increase in cancellation charges of both reserved and unreserved tickets cannot be justified in any way. Think. It is not possible to plan any journey four months in advance, not to speak of travelling for official work.

In fact, possibly no country in the world has such a long reservation period. Analysts state this is just a ploy of indirectly collecting money as many people would be per forced to cancel reserved tickets.

Clearly, the system must change and expectedly, the new Authority would look into these issues. Alongside, the grievance redressal mechanism has to be strengthened at all points --- in trains and at stations --- whereby people would be free to lodge grievances complaints and get them redressed, as per guidelines of the Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG).

As regards privatization, which some believe the railways is pursuing, one can only assert that this should be allowed selectively. The massive financial requirement needed to improve passenger amenities, upgrade rolling stock, ensure proper maintenance, modernize coaches, increase the number of trains and take adequate safety measures needs to be seriously considered.

Therefore, keeping this in the background private participation should be selective. Questionably, if private players are involved in key areas of rail functioning, pas-

senger fares would be beyond the reach of the common man.

Notably, a recent decision has been taken to develop 400 railway stations by private parties to begin with. But one has to see how the private sector operates these and what benefits accrue to the people as also those who have invested in upgrading these stations.

Asserted Union Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu recently in Kolkata, “Big railway stations could be extended vertically and transformed into commercial projects.”

One reason that may attract the private parties is to utilize space in and around stations to construct rooms where travellers could stay without having to search for hotels. If the rates are competitive, this could give good returns to the developers.

Undeniably, there several issues which the Railway Ministry has to seriously consider and what needs to be done at this juncture. The entire administration needs to be overhauled along-with some sincerity and dedication inculcated both among gazetted and non-gazetted staff.

In this connection, the recent move to cut down on gazetted staff, keeping in view technological changes and advancement is welcomed. But alongside, the Government also needs more resources towards providing better services to passengers. This should be given top priority as also track renewal and expansion. China's railway network has expanded at a much faster rate in the last decade than India which has resulted in a higher growth rate.

Arguably, the Government needs to increase the speed of trains as it is .one of the slowest in the world. This can be done via track upgradation which does not require huge resources, another option is to introduce more bullet trains as is being done for the Mumbai-Ahmedabad sector.

Obviously, the costs involved in running these would be very high and the fare burden would have to be passed on to the passengers, most of whom may not prefer to travel by them as air travel cost would be less or the same. Alternatively, the investment required for bullet trains could be diverted to track renewal and track expansion, at least for the coming two years.

Importantly, railway resources have to be judiciously used with focus on adding capacity and increasing trains speed to acceptable levels which is possible only through track upgradation and investment. This would benefit the common man than spends on bullet trains.

According to the railways estimates, it immediately requires Rs 800, 000 crores for modernization, a massive amount difficult to generate. Thus, the Government needs to think judiciously before taking any decision. Especially as yearly hikes of fares would hurt the aam aadmi who has no other mode of travel.

Clearly, the need of the hour is gearing up rail efficiency and stable manpower costs. As pointed out by Minister Prabhu, he plans to ensure energy-efficient, environment friendly infrastructure in the coming years by tying up with clean technology firms like GE and Alstom. Tough but doable. --- INFA

employees need to make a choice. They can either serve the general public through the government or they can serve only their Jaitbynriew through the Dorbar Shnong. To do both is a clear conflict of interests and we can only thank the Chief Minister for bringing to an end this ‘hunting with the hare and running with

the hounds’ scenario.
Yours etc.,
SR Nongrum,
Shillong-4

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.

“There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning.”

— Jiddu Krishnamurti

The Shillong Times

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High Court and VAB

The Meghalaya High Court has rightly passed the onus for coming up with a uniform regulation for the Dorbar Shnong to the State Government. The Village Administration Bill (VAB) even at a very preliminary reading smacks of exclusionary trends and caters only to the tribal population of the state. Yet governance is a universal need which all Indians residing anywhere in the country are entitled to. It would also be proper to mention that the non-tribal population which the VAB neatly leaves out of its purview are the ones who pay the taxes on which this country is run. It is therefore highly prejudicial for a constituency that actually sustains governance efforts to be left out of the consultation process in the grass-roots governance system. It was obvious that the High Court would not sustain such a preposterous arrangement that violates the fundamental right of citizens to claim an effective governance system where it matters most – at the level of the localities, which is where the writ of the Dorbar Shnong runs.

Further, it would have been discomfiting for the High Court to reverse the order of one of its judges on the mode of functioning of the Dorbar Shnong. The single bench Court had struck down the arbitrary powers exercised by the Rangbah Shnong following which the Khasi Hills District Council had come up with the VAB. However, it is not as if the VAB was a response to the High Court ruling. It was crafted much before with the intention of seeking direct funding from the Central Government. If the KHADC had some sense it would have seen that the High Court ruling of December last year was meant to bring in a universal, democratic framework of governance at the grass-roots. The Court was troubled by the arbitrary powers exercised by the Rangbah Shnong on the plea that they are the custodians of tradition. This is the sore point. How can tradition override the tenets of democracy? The KHADC should have seen the non-maintainability of the VAB in a court of law. Now the KHADC threatens to knock the doors of the Supreme Court but it is doubtful if such an undemocratic piece of legislation will stand judicial scrutiny! The State Government should now work on a uniform Grass-roots Administration Bill.

LOOKING BACK

January 3, 1989

A genuine breakthrough

While the decision during Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's recent visit to China to establish a joint working group on the boundary question is received, the joint communiqué issued at the end of the visit does not speak of any time bound mandate for it as hinted in earlier press reports. The eight rounds of India China talks at the official level did not make much headway although much valuable time was lost in the exercise and process. The joint working group envisaged now is expected to bypass the barren course of yesteryears and start on a new state uninfluenced by past failures and hurdles confronted.

The Prime Minister's visit has been acclaimed as historic and is truly so not merely because of the fact that it came about after a lapse of thirty four years. Significant as is this prominent fact, no less relevant is that the international scenario has undergone a sea change during the intervening period. Inside China itself there have emerged vast changes, political and socio economic in the main. The Prime Minister's visit moreover, came after a series of visits to China for mutual acceptance in the

various facets of bilateral relationship as revealed in the very fruitful, wide ranging talks held during Mr. Gandhi's visit.

Of all the agreements and understanding reached, the relating to the long standing dispute regarding the boundary between the two countries has naturally occupied the centre stage in the talks at various levels and press coverage of the same in the general. Our own interest in these talks has very much been whetted by the overriding fact that an unfriendly neighbour closest to this north eastern region of India is a potential drag on the smooth economic development of a compact undeveloped area subjected for long to the fall out of colonial power politics. That phase has started melting when the late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited the great neighbour and the two countries formulated the Panch Sheel, the five principles of co existence between nations. A large area of the base of the light thus kindled, however, had remained mostly outside its pale and stalled progress in this part of the globe. Rajiv Gandhi's visit has rightly been acclaimed as the start of a new beginning and thus well marks a breakthrough which we welcome in common with all the rest.

Meghalaya society starved of thought leaders

By Patricia Mukhim

A society without thought leaders has no vision. It simply exists and grapples with mundane day to day problems. It cannot get too far. Its people wallow in this shallow pool of murky thoughts fed by fears of the 'outsider' and what he/she would do to the economy, society and polity. The pool is never regenerated. Hence the same thoughts are churned again and again to turn potent and result in bloodshed and violence. Politics is the one area where this vacuum in thinking and a somewhat prosaic and uninspiring existence continues. Most politicians are boring. They would not be able to hold the interest of an intelligent audience for more than a couple of minutes. There is no spark in their eyes; much less in what they have to say. What they say is not something we have not heard before. So it appears that innovative thinking is not part of our DNA. Perhaps this has to do with politicians having to cater to constituents who demand individual services. People hardly go to the MLA as a collective and for the greater good. Only the Rangbah Shnong and his Committee do that. The rest of us have learnt to outsource our problems to the so-called pressure groups with innovative names and acronyms, some, who confess upfront that they are anti-bourgeoisie and pro-peasantry.

In a democracy there is space for everyone. The bourgeoisie is on the rise; there are more people with disposable incomes today; they are able to go on holidays abroad on packages that are affordable and with their hard earned money. Hence for the anti-bourgeoisie to label every such person who shops online, goes clubbing and who has virtually moved up in life's stations, to all be thieves is a bit of a sour grapes attitude. Such people spread large doses of pessimism and hopelessness. They project themselves as the only messiahs.

Hence it is a matter of great encouragement to have young scholars like Babet Sten, Fabian Lyngdoh, Phrangngi Pyrtuh, Albert Thyrniang etc. speaking their minds on any and all issues without batting an eyelid. This is unusual for Khasi society. I have listened to people holding forth at funeral homes and other social

gatherings but who do not have the courage of conviction to write. The excuse for not writing is usually the fear of criticism (the typical Khasi excuse ...lah thait (tired) or 'ki brieve kin ong kumno (what will people say). I know for a fact that Fabian Lyngdoh has got some tongue lashing from fellow scholars who feel that he has exposed all the gaping faults of Khasi society. But Lyngdoh has stuck on and that is what an intellectual does. He carries on with his thought processes, no matter what because to stop thinking is to die inside! Socrates a philosopher and thought leader of his time had to drink hemlock; so how much more the lesser mortals.

But let me not digress. I have been around long enough and interacted with politicians at the state and the national level to be able to know if my inner compass is veering towards sycophancy, pure appreciation or admiration. The younger generation of politicians in the Congress Party at the national level are a brilliant lot; sharp as a whip and they know their onions. Their only handicap is that they are not spokespersons for their Party which continues to be led by Dynasty and one whose thinking and wit leaves much to be desired. Aren't we all tired of hearing "suit boot ki sarkar" or "maut ka saudagar" to define the prime minister of the country? Even Donald Trump with his big, and putrid mouth does reserve some niceties while referring to President Barack Obama. After all, Obama is not just a politician but the leader of his country! But the Congress has not come to terms with losing power to a chai-wallah. Instead of getting their act together and allowing some of the more brilliant minds to lead it to a different and more creative trajectory, all we hear is of the Rahul Gandhi focussed padayatras and a few more wisecracks.

But then does the Congress in Meghalaya ever put on its thinking cap? Can it do so when led by an octogenarian President who at the prime of his career could never be credited for any landmark legislation? If Meghalaya is

where it is today the Congress Part is largely to blame. But what about the regional parties? Do they ever brainstorm on issues that have far reaching effects on the economy and polity? Hardly ever! Do they have think tank? No they don't.

Perhaps the only person that one would not be bored to listen to is Chief Minister Mukul Sangma. The man reads a lot and knows stuff that many of his colleagues would not even comprehend. He delightful on a one on one conversation and knows what's wrong with Meghalaya and what needs to be fixed. But he cannot do so alone. And this is where we find a huge thought vacuum and energy in Meghalaya. Just think of the possibilities if all the other ministers worked as hard or read up or came up with innovative ideas! Do we believe that our PWD minister, a businessman to the hilt and owning a construction company would have the inclination to think of state building projects? What about the Education Minister? Does he use his scholarly credentials to think of innovative educational strategies for Meghalaya? Or does he leave that to the officers? It must be quite frustrating to be in Dr Mukul Sangma's shoes and be surrounded by colleagues who have no creativity left except to plan and plot to unseat him.

The mark of a wise man is in what he reads and feeds his mind. Not all of us have all the ingenuity of a Plato or a Socrates or the trained and scholarly mind of a Joseph Stiglitz or an Amartya Sen but we can all read up and learn. In that respect, Paul Lyngdoh the former student leader turned politician does have an enviable library and he does read and think too. I only wonder why he has stopped writing. But he too happens to be in a regional party where people have stopped thinking except about when they might be able to come to power. Afflicted with a poverty of ideas, for the UDP and the HSPDP, unseating the Congress is a delusion of grandeur. Some bright wit was suggesting that the only way the UDP can come to power is by piggy-back rid-

ing on PA Sangma's NPP in the Garo Hills. The UDP has no presence in Garo Hills. Even its base in the Khasi Jaintia Hills is weakening. At this rate it would be difficult to stop the Congress in its tracks. The less said about the BJP in Meghalaya the better. The Party has no stomach for change and wants to remain in the periphery making occasional noises. It does not even have a think tank worth contending with. Hopefully the versatile Nalin Kohli who is also the Party Spokesperson and has taken over the reins of the Party here in Meghalaya and will bring in some incremental changes.

While the term thought leadership is a marketing jargon used to describe a futurist or person who is recognized among his peers for innovative ideas and one who demonstrates the confidence to promote and share those ideas as actionable, distilled insights, it is well suited to politics and governance too. Whether we like it or not the voter today is a client who demands certain services. The delivery of such basic services such as uninterrupted power supply, potable water, good roads, sanitation and cleanliness, health and education are what clients demand. And politicians are not patrons who pick and choose those they wish to serve and ignore others. It does not work that way. If you are elected from the Congress party you also have to serve those who voted other parties. If you don't, then expect to get the boot next time around. The voter is no longer willing to settle for crumbs. Even the rural voter is now wise enough to know which political party can deliver the goods. But political parties cannot progress without thinking. An unthinking political party is a dead weight. There is now in Meghalaya a young, dynamic, learned constituent that wants to enter politics not only to make money but to make a difference in the lives of the people. We should encourage such young politicians and ease out those who have stopped thinking. Also we should encourage these young thought leaders to join politics instead of relying on the tried and tested pressure groups whose ethical base is often bankrupt.

As for the electoral promises the AAP government has delivered its big-ticket election promises like providing cheaper power and water to the Delhiites. From March last, every household gets 20,000 litres of water at no cost every month; families who use less than 400 units of power per month gets a 50 per cent discount on their bills, the others will pay full rate for electricity. The subsidy would cost the government about Rs 1,400 crores and the water about Rs 250 crores. Secondly, the Delhi Assembly has passed a watered down Jan Lokpal bill on December 3. After his 49-day stint in his earlier term in 2012-13, Kejriwal resigned as chief minister on this issue. He has re-launched the anti-corruption help line 1031. Thirdly, he has planned to make free Wi-Fi functional which was among the prominent pre-pol promises made by the AAP.

Fourthly, to clean up the education system, the chief minister has scrapped the management quota in nursery admissions in private schools. The AAP government has also passed a bunch of bills to bring major reforms in education system of Delhi. The Delhi School Education (Amendment) Bill 2015 and The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Delhi Amendment) Bill are among the ones passed.

However, the controversies are also dogging him and his party. First of all, Kejriwal is yet to move to governance mode as he has been concentrating on other issues. But as chief minister, he no longer has the luxury to play street politics. He has been fighting with L-G Najeeb Jung on appointments and transfers bringing

Kejriwal's first year a mixed bag High drama, but laudable initiatives

By Kalyani Shankar

Last February, the three-year-old Aam Aadmi Party with almost no experience came to power with an overwhelming majority. A year later, its report card shows that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has not been able to meet the huge expectations. He has four more years to prove his credentials. He himself has said that it would not be bad if his government fulfill about half the campaign promises in five years.

However, Kejriwal has been surrounded by controversies, bickering and infighting in the party, personal health problems, and a visibly public spat with the Lieutenant Governor Najeeb Jung and the Centre. This is unfortunate given that his massive electoral mandate was for governance and not for drama and confrontation.

While the year had not gone off very well, Kejriwal has ended his one year in office with kudos after his novel experiment of odd/even dates for four-wheelers to check pollution. The middle class, which was losing faith in his performance has given him support in spite of widespread skepticism. Added to that was the support from the Chief Justice of India. During the year, Kejriwal has protected his vote bank in the poorer classes by announcing time-bound regularisation of all unauthorised colonies promising that slum dwellers would get permanent housing facility. He has also stopped the demolition drive.

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When will we learn to become true human beings and protest against communalism of all hues irrespective of the racial or religious identities of those enemies of humanity? While infringing upon the dietary habits of certain communities and banning consumption of beef are ex-

friction in the Centre-State relations.

The second and more direct confrontation with the Union government is about the police. As part of his agenda, Kejriwal wants the police and land powers, which are now under the Centre to be transferred to the Delhi government. After the ghastly incident of three rapes within a week in October, Kejriwal has reiterated his demand for full authority over the police department.

Thirdly, when he went after the media, the Supreme Court came to the rescue and stayed the 6 May circular of the Delhi government which would have initiated defamation proceedings against media for publishing or broadcasting news that damage the reputation of the chief minister, the council of ministers and the government. This showed intolerance.

Fourthly, Kejriwal's attack on the bureaucracy started with the appointment of power secretary Shakuntala Chamlin as the acting chief secretary, which turned into a full-scale war between him and the L-G, and also demoralised the officials who now want to be transferred out.

Fifthly, Kejriwal took on the Union finance minister Arun Jaitley on the DDCA controversy accusing him of presiding over alleged financial irregularities and ordered a probe. Najeeb Jung stepped in and declared that the probe was illegal and unconstitutional.

Sixthly, he has been building a personality cult and got rid of senior leaders like Yogendra Yadav and Prashant Bhushan for voicing dissent. The Chief Minister faced embarrassment when some of his party leaders including Jitender Singh Tomar and Surender Singh were found in a legal tangle involving fake degree scandals. In September, Kejriwal sacked his environment and food minister Asim Ahmed Khan for allegedly demanding a bribe of Rs. 6 lakh from a builder. He distanced himself from his former law minister Somnath Bharti as an "embarrassment" to his party. The other controversial members include Pankaj Pushkar and Manoj Kumar.

Seventhly, Kejriwal came in for criticism when Gajendra Singh, a farmer committed suicide in a public meeting addressed by Kejriwal. But the chief minister went on with his meeting which came in for criticism. Eighthly, the AAP government approved the proposal for a 400 per cent hike in salary and allowances of MLAs, which also became a controversy. He got bad publicity for allocating Rs 526 crores for ads.

Despite all these Kejriwal has moved on with his ambitious plans of concentrating on Punjab Assembly polls in 2017. At another level, he is also hobnobbing with other chief ministers like Nitish Kumar and Mamata Banerjee and even organised a meeting for a federal front. His sights are still set on occupying the Race Course Road. In the coming year, the chief minister has to change his style of functioning and concentrate more on governance than drama and street politics. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Defining religion

Editor,

In the wake of demand to recognise tribal faith groups-Niamtre, Niam Khasi and Songasareks as a distinct 'religious minorities' in the State of Meghalaya, a question is being raised whether Niam Khasi is a 'religion' (The Traditional Religion of the Khasis by Fabian Lyngdoh, ST January 7). The writer argued that Niam Khasi is not a religion and goes on to state that it is a Niam Kur.

The word 'religion' is derived from the Latin word religio, used by Romans of the pre-Christian era. Religion in the words of E.B.Taylor can be described as 'the belief in spiritual beings'. In his famous work Primitive Culture, he argues that all religion share a common root, which is also their essence, through 'animism'. Animism is the first philosophy of life and nature. It shaped the first human societies, the first religion from which the rest flowed.

However, religion can hardly be defined precisely as it admits of the widest diversity of interpretations. It is not necessary to go into greater detail of the various interpretations. But in the backdrop of the issues of 'religious minority' for

Niamtre, Niam Khasi and Songasareks we need to look at the Supreme Court interpretation of the meaning of the word 'religion'.

The Constitution of India uses but does not define the expression 'religion' and 'religious denomination' and therefore the Courts have found it necessary to explain the meaning and connotations of the words. In the S.P. Mittal vs Union of India, AIR, 1983 SC 1, the Supreme Court observed, "In the background of the provisions of the Constitution and the light shed by judicial precedent we may say that religion is a matter of faith. It is a system of beliefs or doctrines which are regarded by those who profess that religion as conducive to their spiritual well being. It concerns the conscience, i.e., the spirit of man. It must be capable of expression in word and deed, such as worship or ritual".

Niam Khasi & Niamtre is a religion which is based on the belief that God, U Blei Nongbuh Nongthaw is the Supreme Creator. We believe that our Niam (religion) is God-given, not founded by man and comes to this World by God's Decree. The three cardinal principles dictated by God are kamai ia ka hok,

tipbriew tiplei and tipkur tipkha. They signify right living and practice based on right livelihood; fulfillment of duties toward fellow men in order to reach God and show respect to the members of father's and mother's clan. Therefore Ka Niam Khasi stresses equal weight to be given to fellow men in order to attain God realisation.

Whether you call Niam Khasi or Niam Kur we deserve protection from likely deprivation of our religious, cultural and educational rights.

Yours etc.,
Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah
Shillong-2

Cooperate not pressurize,

Editor,

A brickbat to Sanbeer Singh Ranhotra who wrote the article 'False Predictions', (ST Jan 14,2016). In his letter Sanbeer criticised the work of the earthquake predictors. He had also gone to the limit of calling them 'Environment Terrorists'. I think that the predictors are doing their level best and we should be grateful to them for keeping us informed. Sanbeer has criticised the predictors without studying the depth of their prediction. In their

prediction, they did not mention a time-range of the predicted earthquake. They simply said that a major earthquake is going to strike the Himalayan Plains in the 'near future'. Also, predicting earthquakes is not such an easy job as Sanbeer is thinking. There is a lot of research and study involved in this department. So instead of pressurizing them, we should cooperate and be grateful to them.

Yours etc.,
Pratham Sharma,
Via email

Selective treatment of issues!

Editor,
Apropos the editorial "West Bengal rumblings" (ST Jan 14, 2016), to view only one side of the coin has turned out to be the latest "fashion" in India! Persons seem to be extremely vocal against the forcible expulsion of the Pandits from Kashmir Valley just "fail to see" the barbaric Gujarat pogrom in 2002 and vice versa! In this supremely biased environment, it is absolutely natural that the protesters against Dadri lynching or the cold-blooded murder of the intellectuals opposing the saffronisation of India will remain silent on Kaliachak (Malda district, West Bengal) mayhem.

Yours etc.,
Kajal Chatterjee,
Via email

Behind weight gain are the larger hurts and questions that have to be explored, probed, and understood before weight loss and maintenance is a possibility. It's a bigger issue than just calories in, calories out.

—Ali Vincent

The Shillong Times

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Towards peace

PRIME Minister Nawaz Sharif has taken the first steps to resolve the crisis after the attack on the Indian base at Pathankot. Pakistan has cracked down on the Jaish-a-mohammed members linked to the attack and India has welcomed it. The two countries have agreed to reschedule Foreign Secretary level talks for the near future instead of calling it off. India has agreed to host Pakistan's special investigation team (SIT). Indian intelligence agencies will cooperate with Pakistani counterparts. The decision to defer Foreign Secretary level talks was taken after national security advisor (NSA) Ajit Goval met Prime Minister Narendra Modi. More time is required before the foreign secretaries can meet away from the shadow of the investigation. This attitude should pave the way for resumption of the comprehensive bilateral dialogue (CBD). At the same time, India should ensure that Pakistan's military does not derail the peace process. Military retaliation against terrorism will only tell on India's growing economy. Dialogue is the only way to a settlement especially because that will strengthen the hand of the Pakistani business community and sections of Pakistani society interested in peace.

It is state of the nation address; President Barack Obama said that Pakistan was a terror haven. Evidently, Pakistan taking urgent action to look into the Pathankot attack has been prompted by US pressure and China's nudging. Pakistan's military has fallen in line in the hope of achieving demilitarisation of the Siachen glacier. India is also driven by its strategic interests which is all to the good.

LOOKING BACK

January 3, 1989

Exit Hokeshe Sema

Mr. Hokeshe Sema is on his way out. There are few precedents of an outgoing Chief Minister not being considered fit even for membership of the new Assembly to be next constituted. Nagaland goes to the polls on Jan. 21 and the list of Congress candidates is out. The significant omission in it is the name of Mr. Sema and it appears to be deliberate. The ex-CM made all possible efforts (a few like observance of a bandh to demonstrate popular support behind him rather ill-conceived) to get him back in the reckoning but obviously failed to mollify the wrath of the Congress (I) High Command which believes even the party's own pattern of working.

The wrath on Sema is attributed to his 'failure' to keep together the 34 Congress(I) members in the outgoing State Assembly, resulting in a split in the party and the ultimate resignation of the Ministry leading to President's Rule. In contrast, it has been argued that Mr S C Jamir who was heading a Congress(I) Ministry with lesser support could manage to run the show with lesser exhibition of difference or dissonance inside the party. Even conceding this comparative picture as valid, the Congress(I) Command in retrospect has to answer for its intervention at time to ask Mr Jamir to step down making way for the induction of Mr Sema in his place.

The mid-stream change of guard was quite uncalculated and in fact constituted the seed of all the later-day dissonance which only gathered momentum as years rolled making the Chief Minister a

helpless victim of circumstances, not all his own creation but most of the High Command's. It was not that the latter sat all the time detached to allow Mr Sema a free hand to run his affairs. It has become a practice, even a habit, for the Congress High Command to meddle even on minor details of State affairs, organisational and ministerial or governmental, and it is not that it kept itself aloof during the eight months of Mr Sema's outgoing stint of Chief Ministership. Politics in Nagaland, therefore, took its own inevitable course during these months despite Mr Sema and despite also of the Congress(I) Command. It is less than minimum justice that Mr Sema should alone have to suffer the consequence for the debacle overtaking the State Ministry and the Congress in Nagaland.

Since the incumbent of Nagaland Chief Ministership and the State's membership of the Lok Sabha seem to have made interchangeable, Mr Sema may be reclaimed for the New Delhi assignment which however seems a little unlikely. If he is thus to be left in the lurch it would be an so promisingly decades ago to mark the beginning of an end to be the State's fast-growing insurgency and all kinds of violence. It would be ingratitude not to remember his signal contribution to restoration of order in the land giving a solid base to parliamentary democracy in the State of which he himself now becomes and unfortunate victims.

Middle East geopolitic undergoes change

Road to peace in Syria runs through Moscow

By Arun Srivastava

Russian President, Vladimir Putin who till a year back was the most hated leader and was in fact treated like an outcast amongst the global fraternity is today the most sought after leader for restoring peace in the strife torn middle and west Asia. It is worth recalling that Putin had left last year's G20 meeting in Brisbane early in a huff, tired of being chided by world leaders over Ukraine. Just a year after the world fraternity and especially the G20 has found Putin as the partner for peace and recognized that the road to peace in Syria runs through Moscow.

This emergence of Putin as the Partner of peace is quite important for the reason that he had to fight the divisive mechanisms of the forces who claim to be working for the global peace. It is a known fact that jihadist forces that constitute ISIS were financed and armed by the CIA. Washington's Sunni Gulf allies (Saudi Arabia, Qatar) and Turkey served as proxy forces in the overthrow and murder of the secular Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, as well as in the war for regime change against the secular regime in Syria. Iran, yesterday's evil empire, is today a potential asset of US. The US is backing a Shiite sectarian regime in Iraq that is aligned with Iran, even as it collaborates with Sunni Saudi Arabia in waging war in Yemen and striving to topple the Shiite Assad regime in Syria.

It is significant even in this hostile backdrop Putin continues to hold his ground firmly. It is clear to Putin the US hegemony will come to an end, once he succeeds in his struggle in Syria. Obviously this is the reason that Putin intends to protect and shield Assad and treats it as his personal issue, linked to his idea that the west is bent on regime change, from the Middle East to Moscow.

Obama administration has often reiterated its commitment to work together in some way with Russia in Syria if it were to focus its efforts against Isis. However the USA has not been true to his promise. While USA was pledging help its allies were working against Russia and even suspecting its intentions. The shooting down of Russian fighter jet by Turkey is one such can-

did example. The Obama administration even did not respond to the French President's initiative for floating a grand coalition" to confront Isis in Syria. In contrast Putin has already established greater military co-ordination with the French since the Paris attacks. In the naval field, they are working with a group of Russian naval vessels in the Mediterranean.

Ironically the relations between the USA and Russia are at their lowest point since the end of the Cold War in 1991, largely due to the crisis in Ukraine and Russia's air campaign in Syria. Though Obama and Putin emphasized in their speeches for cooperation in eradicating terrorism and ending conflict no apparent breakthroughs could be made so far. In the first meeting that they had held in a bid to find common ground on Syria, fighting the Islamic State and resolving the Moscow-backed separatist revolt in eastern Ukraine nothing tangible could be achieved. The primary reason was Obama was reluctant to accept Russian stand on Assad. It is beyond comprehension why USA has been having a rigid stand on Assad. In the greater interest of the global fraternity and peace, the US administration should have looked at the scenario afresh.

Giving his seventh and last State of the Union address before a joint session of Congress in Washington on January 12, President Obama defended his military strategy in Iraq and Syria. "I told you earlier all the talk of America's economic decline is political hot air. Well, so is all the rhetoric you hear about our enemies getting stronger and America getting weaker." He added: "As we focus on destroying ISIL, over-the-top claims that this is World War III just play into their hands. Masses of fighters on the back of pickup trucks and twisted souls plotting in apartments or garages pose an enormous danger to civilians and must be stopped. But they do not threaten our national existence."

Actually what Obama intended to tell his countrymen was not clear. But it was an admission of his failure in Syria. Putin appeared to be correct in his assessment when he said after his meeting with Obama that he remained divided on Assad's fate. A senior Obama administration official, briefing reporters, later told it was "business-like but there was no resolution to the dispute over Assad."

True enough the meeting Obama and Putin had unraveled the acute crisis of US policy in Syria and the broader Middle East. The very fact that the White House offered to meet with the Russian leader in pursuit of a political settlement in Syria, breaking its two year freeze on such contacts, testified to the debacle Washington has suffered in its bloody, four year war for regime change in that devastated country.

It is no secret that shift in US policy reflects a general weakening of the US position in the region. A series of recent events have underscored the failure of the US-led war against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, now more than a year old, to significantly weaken the organization in either country. The US-instigated sectarian civil war in Syria, engineered as part of a broader plan to deprive Iran of its sole Arab ally in preparation for a possible war for regime change against Tehran, has to date resulted in some 300,000 deaths and turned 11 million Syrians, nearly half of the country's pre-2011 population, into refugees. The flood of refugees from US-led military operations in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and other countries has created a massive crisis in Europe, exacerbating internal tensions and exposing the brutal face of European capitalism. The refugee crisis is a major factor in the German government's open dissent from US policy in Syria.

Russia's Middle East influence has been in terminal decline since the early 1970s, when Egypt switched its allegiance from the Soviet camp to the US. The civil war in Syria has again placed Russia at the center of the region's geopolitical map. Moscow's diplomatic and

military backing for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is one of the principal reasons for the survival of the Syrian regime in the face of a widespread domestic rebellion. It is also a major source of irritant for the US who often accuses Russia of playing the "spoiler role" in the Middle East. The fall of Bashar al-Assad would be an enormous blow to Russia's prestige.

Since the Russian intervention in Syria, the U.S. reaction has been cautious and ambiguous. The Obama administration initially voiced concern about the intervention, but then changed course and expressed half-satisfaction and some hope of seeing Russia join the anti-Islamic State effort. What is significant that in spite of all its efforts the USA has not succeeded in pinning down Russia in the matter of Syria. Interestingly Obama pointed to Russia's 2014 seizure of Crimea from Ukraine and the 2003-2011 U.S. occupation of Iraq as examples where the use of force fueled instability. In reply Putin reiterated his contention that Russia was compelled to intervene in Ukraine as a result of a threat posed by the U.S.-led expansion of NATO into the former Soviet Union. He also slammed the support that Sunni Arab nations have provided to Sunni rebel groups fighting the Assad regime, which is dominated by a minority Shiite sect.

Putin blamed the US for creation of the Islamic State. He also lambasted Washington and its European allies for backing the overthrow of Libya's late dictator, Moammar Gadhafi, creating the conditions that led to the emergence there of the Islamic State.

In fact in the wake of the Syria crisis the Russian stocks rallied the most worldwide. Russia is no longer seen as a villain like a year ago. The political risk that was priced into Russian assets is declining. Foreigners, who were mostly underweight Russia, are now buying Russian blue chips. Russia's move to cement its alliance with Iran in Syria during meeting of 200 world leaders underscored a troubling development for the Obama administration and its European allies. (IPA Service)

POLITICAL DELICACIES

By Nora Chopra

RAHUL GANDHI REJECTS PLANS SUBMITTED BY PRASANT KISHORE

Prashant Kishore, the magic man of the elections, is unlikely to work for the Congress as Rahul Gandhi is said to have rejected his proposal outright. Rahul who is used to taking unilateral decisions, is supposed to have not agreed to what Kishore has suggested. Kishore had suggested to Rahul that the Congress should change his chief minister in Assam or else be prepared to lose the election. But Rahul who does not believe in changing chief ministers even if it meant losing power in the states. He did it in Haryana and he did it in Maharashtra. Despite pressure to change Prithviraj Chavan, Rahul opted to suffer the defeat in Maharashtra. Similarly in Haryana where the Congress defeat was written on the wall, Rahul just refused to relent to any kind of pressure to change Bhupinder Singh Hooda. The other thing Prashant Kishore wanted Rahul to do is to have an alliance with Mayawati and Ajit Singh in Uttar Pradesh. Knowing fully well that what it means to have an alliance with Mayawati, Rahul has simply rejected the idea. First and foremost Mayawati will not have any prepoll alliance with any one and even if she agrees, she will not give the Congress enough seats plus her demand for money will be huge. Besides there is a thinking in the Congress party particularly in the UP state leadership that the Congress should contest on its own or else it would disappear from the state. Besides Prashant Kishore is said to be bargaining for a Rajya Sabha seat and it is to be seen whether Prashant would compromise on his plan if he is given a Rajya Sabha seat because Nitish Kumar needs 21 Congress votes to get his fourth candidate elected.

CONGRESS NOT INTERESTED IN ALLIANCE IN WEST BENGAL AND UTTAR PRADESH

The Congress will not have any alliance with any other political party in West Bengal Assam or even in Uttar Pradesh. The Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi is of the view that unless the party goes alone particularly in UP, it cannot revive. And if it fails to revive itself in Uttar Pradesh, it will be reduced to an irrelevant player nationally. Besides, Rahul has a major card up its sleeve. Maybe Priyanka Gandhi will be projected as the Chief Minister in Uttar Pradesh. In West Bengal too, the Congress is planning to adopt the r Go Alone policy. Despite the overtures from the CPI(M), the Congress has no plans to join hands with the left. Antony who is known as guide and philosopher of Rahul Gandhi has advised the Congress leadership not to go with the left parties in West Bengal since it can have an adverse impact on Congress fortunes in Kerala where the Congress faces challenge only from the left and all other political parties are non players. If the Congress joins hands either with TMC or the CPI(M), it will

only help BJP. In Assam the Congress is in power on its own. Rahul who has allowed the dissent to grow in Assam leading to a split in the Assam party is however hoping still on Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi and despite pressures both from within and outside from other political outfits, Rahul is not willing to remove the 84 year old Gogoi nor will not go for an alliance either with Badruddin Ajmal's UDF nor with Mahanta's AGP.

JYOTIRADITYA SCINDIA IS FRIENDLY WITH ARUN JAITLEY

During the last parliament session, the Congress had decided to field Jyotiraditya Scindia to speak on the DDCA controversy and take on finance minister Arun Jaitley. Half an hour before the Congress was scheduled to raise the issue, Scindia was nowhere to be seen and a hapless Congress had to pitch KC Venugopal, who had limited knowledge about the DDCA to talk on the subject. Scindia's detractors are alleging that the Congress MP from Guna didn't want to ruffle Jaitley's feathers as he too, is in cricket administration. Besides his son is an trainee under Jaitley..

AHMAD PATEL MAY REPLACE MOTILAL VORA AS TREASURER

Motilal Vora, the Congress party treasurer is now 87. So the thinking in the Congress party is that Voraji has become too old and frail it would not be proper to keep burdening him with more work. Particularly after the National Herald case, it was decided that Voraji is too old to work and it was because of Voraji that the Congress president decided to take bail. Now the party has started a search for a new treasurer. Among the names making rounds are of Kanishka Singh and Ahmad Patel. Patel has twice served as a treasurer and is a pucca Gandhi family loyalist. Under Voraji, the 130 year old party has become bankrupt. But Ahmad Patel is known to all top industrialists and the Party leadership expects him to improve finances.

SONIA GANDHI ESTABLISHES RAPPORT WITH MEHBOOBA MUFTI

The Congress president Sonia Gandhi 's move to go to Jammu & Kashmir to offer her condolences to Mehbooba Mufti personally is being seen as a master move. Using her feminine instincts, Sonia established a chord with Mehbooba and this has successfully created problems for the BJP, which is watching every move of Mehbooba with suspicion. Mehbooba is different from her father and has sought time to take oath. This is being seen as her dilemma over next step. For the BJP she may not be an easy customer, The BJP leaders were taken aback when the President's rule was imposed instead of the BJP's deputy CM being made as temporary CM. Meanwhile back channel talks have started between the Congress and the PDP. (IPA)

TO THE EDITOR

Of faith, spirituality and religion

Editor,

With regard to Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah's letter, 'Defining religion' (ST January, 15, 2015), I would like to express my deep concern and respect for the author's feeling in connection with my article, 'The Traditional religion of the Khasis'. (ST January 7, 2015). I would also like to point out that I had not written that, 'niam Khasi is not a religion.' It is a common human nature with no exception, including myself, that if we are strongly guarded by prejudice, our eyes might be blurred and our minds blunted to understand and absorb the opinion of others. So I request Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah to reread the article. What I actually wrote is that the religion of the Khasis which is centred on the kur, is a religion pure and holy. I also wrote that the Seng Khasi was founded in 1899 not as a religion, but only to preserve the Khasi socio-cultural structure in the midst of emerging modern influences, and that the Seng Khasi may become a rightful institution for the moral and spiritual guidance of

the Khasis who have not adopted any new religion, but it cannot claim to be the spiritual and cultural custodian of the Khasi tribe as a whole.

The belief that God, U Blei Nongbuh Nongthaw is the Supreme Creator is not a unique characteristic of the Khasis only, but it is the belief of the followers of every religion in the world. The belief that a religion is God-given is also a universal characteristic of the human race; even the ISIS terrorists believe that they cut people's throats by God's command. The injunctions, 'kamai ia ka hok', 'tipbriew tipblei', and 'tipkur tipkha', which signify right living and practice based on right livelihood, are also common moral and spiritual exhortations of all religions. The personal spiritual life of a Khasi consists in his ka tipbriew-tipblei (moral conscience) and 'ban kamai ia ka hok' (to earn material and spiritual wellbeing through righteous means). There is no spiritual intersection at this level of man's personal relationship with God, and ka Hok is the only connecting link. The Khasis do not take this personal level of man-God relationship which is common to the whole human race as the

Khasi religion. Moral conscience based on belief in God is a common characteristic of all human beings, and not only of the Khasis. It is this characteristic that differentiated a human being from all other creatures. It is the religion of the heart implanted by God, deep into the being of every man and woman, Khasi or non-Khasi alike. The true, pure and holy religion according to the Khasis is not in a general moral philosophy, but it is alive in the life of each and every kur. The principle of 'ka tipkur-ka tipkha' does not only mean, to know and recognise one's kin; its deeper meaning is, to be a worthy member of the kur, especially in its religious aspect, as well as to be a responsible member of the society. Man can have a direct personal relationship with God in his daily living through his ka tipbriew-tipblei, but as a member of the kur and the society, he is also tied up to 'ka sot' of the institutional religion of the kur. If we as Khasis, have neglected or discarded the religion of the kur, then whether we are members of the Seng Khasi, or Christians, Unitarians, or Hindus, or Muslims, we are no more ki Khasi-Nylla, but we have all become ki Khasi-Kylla, as expressed by Morning Star Sumer

('Religious minorities' right in Meghalaya', ST January 12, 2015). But whatever it may be, we all belong to the Khasi tribe and we should have equal rights. I strongly advocate that the members of the Seng Khasi deserve protection from likely deprivation on ground of religious or cultural practices. If they had been discriminated against in the past just because they cannot identify themselves as Christians, Muslims, or a particular Caste of Hinduism or any other religion, then that should be redressed.

Yours etc.,
Fabian Lyngdoh,
Via email

Urgent road repair works needed

Editor,

This letter is directed towards the PWD Roads department, and perhaps the MES. Recently after the rains, the PWD has carried out commendable repair works on all major roads in the city. However some important roads have been overlooked, perhaps.

(1) The main roads in Nongrim hills- R.R.Colony have been repaired. There

is one road in RR colony which has been left unrepaired and is in a very deplorable condition. It is a by-pass of sorts, just about a 100 metres which is the exit for traffic from Umpling and RR Colony joining Nongrim Hills main road. It was originally a lane in RR colony, but has become the main road since the one way rule was made in Rynjah market area. The PWD concerned may please get this repair work done quickly.

(2) The Nazareth hospital to MES Hqs road, specially the stretch in Goraline has again gone from bad to worse, due to non-repairs. There is a tussle over own-

ership of this vital link between State Govt. and MES. Meanwhile the aam aadmi has to bear the brunt. Please, whoever is responsible - MES or PWD, sort out your problems and get the repair work done.

Yours etc.,
R Wahlang,
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.

By Shweta Patwardhan

In Greek mythology, Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection, spends hours looking at his image and finally turns into a flower. His modern day successor discovers the selfie to renew a love affair as old as civilisation.

The well preserved trait of self-obsession traversing eras, geographies and cultures, and once a favourite pastime for the royalty, has now taken the most egalitarian form. Anyone with a smartphone or a selfie-stick and with just the right amount of unhealthy self-obsession is a Narcissus.

The Hiltons and Kardashians in Hollywood, the Bachchans, Kapoors and Khans in Bollywood, the residents of Capitol Hill in DC, USA, and 7-Race Course Road in New Delhi, share a common bond with the hoi-polloi, thanks to the digital revolution.

They have a common objective as well: to attract a deluge of 'likes' on social networking sites. While a Kardashian may break the Internet once in a while with a tsunami of adulation, the lesser mortals are happy with the mini waves of approval that come with uploading a photo on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Now every moment of wakefulness, every activity -- however mundane, unusual or thrilling -- is captured for public consumption. The walls of privacy have become redundant in



Selfie a lethal weapon

Warhol was uncannily precise about the 15-minute-of-fame theory. Today everyone is a celebrity in the

sure of one's popularity in a matter of few hours.

The word 'selfie' itself is no less of a celebrity, hav-

ing entered classrooms as well with US universities and a London college offering courses to maximise skills. The selfie has arrived with a blinding blast, blowing away our inhibitions and common sense.

It's an epidemic -- no less sweeping than a swine flu or an Ebola -- clouding our thinking faculties with a grossly inflated sense of self-worth. Selfie addiction is the latest mental health problem, frequently talked about by psychiatrists around the globe. It may have afflicted youth the most, but middle-age isn't immune from the craving.

The most unfortunate consequence has been the growing number of casualties while taking selfies. It's sad but true that last year selfies have caused more deaths in the US than those caused by shark attacks. Russia had launched a nationwide safe-selfie campaign last July to warn people of the risky selfie behav-

The well preserved trait of self-obsession traversing eras, geographies and cultures, and once a favourite pastime for the royalty, has now taken the most egalitarian form. Anyone with a smartphone or a selfie-stick and with just the right amount of unhealthy self-obsession is a Narcissus.

The global phenomenon has reached Indian shores, setting off safety concerns. Recently in Mumbai a girl who had fallen into the sea while clicking photographs and the man who tried to rescue her were swept away by the waves. On the same day a youth fell to his death from a fort in Jammu and Kashmir.

The man who had risked his life to save the Mumbai girl was the sole earning mem-

ber of the family. His death has plunged his family into an abyss of uncertainties, despite job assurances from politicians.

The time has come to look inward and address this endemic problem. Can self-worth be measured by a few frames and the numbers of 'likes'? Have we lost the ability to engage with the real world and hence seeking refuge in the make believe? INAV



the quest for stardom. The iconic American artist Andy

virtual world that boasts of giving a fairly accurate mea-

ing earned the distinction of being the 'most used En-

Animals are getting smarter

Some lost dogs can traverse mountains and cross continents to find their way home, but mine can't find a lump of meat she's sitting on.

And then I check my email and read a report about animal intelligence.

A wild monkey in India got into a truck, used the ignition key to turn it on, and managed to put it in gear, driving across a stockyard, the media reported.

This makes it considerably more intelligent than the humans I once tried to teach to drive. Me: "Turn left." Learner: "Which way's left? No, don't tell me, I can Google it."

Clearly this Indian monkey is proof of evolution. I wonder if I can persuade it to swap jobs with the guy who drove the bus I took home one night last week. He flew over bumps so fast that we passengers spent much of the ride in mid-air, like Sandra Bullock in the movie "Gravity", except for the final few seconds, when we were all pinned to the ceiling.

The only comfort was a fellow passenger's comment that Justin Bieber, Angelina Jolie and Katy Perry have reportedly paid \$200,000 to experience zero gravity in a Virgin Galactic spaceship due to be launched later this year, while we get the same thing regularly for small change. Actually, I would pay that much to send Mr. Bieber into space, as long as it was a one-way ticket.

Animals are getting smarter. A turkey recently

took it off death row, telling a local reporter that it was no coincidence that Houdini's escapes happened during peak turkey consumption time. "He obviously knew what was going to happen," he said.

And remember that guy in Taiwan who got his talking mynah bird to say nasty things about his neighbor? Every time Wang Han-chin went to work, a voice shrieked out after him: "You clueless, big-mouthed idiot." Wang tried to take out a lawsuit but prosecutors said there was legal no way to charge "lower forms of life" with slander. (Thought: Can nationalist politicians use this defence?)

My plan for world peace is to get a flock of talking mynah birds and teach them to say three things. 1) "Help, I've been turned into a mynah bird." 2) "You are the chosen one who has to find a way to reverse the spell." 3) "Hurry up, idiot." Then I will release them into the world's trouble zones to distract people from fighting. Worth a try, right?

A colleague says blue parakeets have the biggest vocabularies, and "a famous one called Puck knew 1,728 words". This is definitely more than some humans I know, who get through their lives with a dozen utterances, most of which are just grunts.

Now my stupid dog is in a bad mood because she thinks I have hidden the piece of meat she is still sitting on.

The Funny side

By Nury Vittachi

UK, I read in a news link sent to me by reader Aalia Shan. The bird has been named Houdini and tur-

ting on. And talking of snacks, where did I put my chocolate bar? Uh-oh.

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

Moving from academia to starting her own business on urban transport solutions was a hard decision for Anvita Arora but it has been a rewarding experience. California based independent journalist Steve Fox reports

Into a New World
As a single mother of two young children, Anvita Arora knew she was taking a significant risk when she chose to leave the security of academia to start her own company. An architect and urban transport planner, with a Ph.D. from the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, Arora had a wealth of academic knowledge, but had not faced the challenges of entrepreneurship. However, her resolve was bolstered by a three-week visit to the United States in 2012, under the State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program.

"I hadn't been to the United States before, and I wanted to understand the US because it has a tradition of entrepreneurship, of people making successes of themselves," says Arora. "I also wanted to know more about women entrepreneurs in particular. After the programme, I had much more confidence in the choices I had made. In the environment I had been in, I was constantly defend-



Anvita Arora

A big jump worth taking

company Arora founded in 2008, now provides consulting services on sustainable urban transport issues to clients like the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, Hyderabad Metro Rail Ltd, Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation, Delhi Finance Commission and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi.

Through the exchange programme, which focused on women and entrepreneurship, Arora, who is managing director and chief executive officer of iTrans, met 18 women from other countries and had the opportunity to learn about the challenges women in the United States face in starting and operating their businesses.

"One highlight was the College of Business at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs," says Arora. "We met with the vice chancellor, who was a woman, and there was a lot of discussion about the practical aspects of running a business."

In Portland, they met women who were entrepreneurs and talked to them

business. "Also, as an urban planner who works a lot with cycling, I got to see how Portland handles that, which was fantastic," says Arora.

Although many people in India aspire to lifetime employment in large companies, Arora found a different scenario in the United States.

"I learned that in the

they don't stay on the sidelines. The perception back home in India, where people generally want to work in large corporations, is very different. But things are changing in India, with more people opting out of the nine-to-five routine and trying their own things."

Based on what she learned in the country, Arora made some changes in her work life.

"I realised that I enjoyed managing the projects, that I was far more interested in content than some of the other aspects of running a business," she says. So, she took on other people in the business whose skills complemented her and let her focus more on what she enjoyed.

"I also realised that my business doesn't have to be big. I don't have to have 100 employees. It's more important to me to have flexibility between work and home, and to have time with my children. Having that flexibility is one of the reasons I started my own business."

Arora also realised that life in the US isn't all about work.

"There's a respect for philanthropy in the country that, I think, is very, very unique," she says. "The US

has a long history of philanthropy, and philanthropy is part of the business and individual culture." (Courtesy SPAN magazine) (TWF)



Through the exchange programme, which focused on women and entrepreneurship, Arora, who is managing director and chief executive officer of iTrans, met 18 women from other countries and had the opportunity to learn about the challenges women in the United States face in starting and operating their businesses.

ing those choices, with people telling me that owning my own business was risky, that I had a good job and why would I want to do this. My time in the US gave me much more confidence—I felt I could make it work."

She was right. Innovative Transport Solutions (iTrans) Pvt. Ltd, the

about what it took to start their own businesses, how they managed their companies and where they were in their own life cycle when they started their

US, most jobs are created by small businesses," she says.

"There, small businesses and women play a large role in the economy;

By
Ranjan K Baruah

Thrilling career @ Indian Army

One of the thrilling careers for young people is joining the defence forces. Defence forces include army, navy and air force. Amongst all these Indian Army is not only largest in the country but also one of the largest in the world. The history started long back and after independence it has Indian Commander-in-Chief.

Indian Army offers many things for the deserving candidates. It offers pride and privileges lifestyle, honour and a many more. The Indian Armed Forces employ more than a million young men and women each year. One can join the Army as an officer or an Army Man. Indian army needs people from fighter to someone who supply other things so there are different types of entries into the army but most prestigious are the officers. Apart from officers entry there are also opportunities like joining as soldiers. We shall publish about them in forthcoming editions.

Indian Army offers different things to aspirants which includes Professional Advancement, Job Satisfaction, Job Security, Economic Stability, Social Status, Quality of Life, Variety and Adventure, etc. By time scale one can reach to the position of Lieutenant Colonel. Ranks in the Indian Army are as follows: General- Lieutenant General-Major General-Brigadier-Colonel-Lieutenant Colonel-Major-Captain-Lieutenant.

The Army offers both permanent and short service commissions. Permanent Commission (PC) is granted through the Indian Military Academy (IMA) Dehradun and Short Service Commission (SSC) is granted through Officers Training Academy (OTA). Recruitment of Commis-

sioned Officers in the Armed Forces is mainly through the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) under Permanent Commission. For Technical Branches, Women special entry scheme and NCC special entry scheme and service, recruitment is made directly through the respective Recruiting Directorates for the Army under Short Service Commission.

Joining after Class XII—One has to take an entry level exam conducted by Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) to join NDA (National Defence Academy). This exam is conducted twice a year in all major cities throughout India and it is restricted to boys only. Students with subjects like Maths and Physics may appear for any forces but aspirants from arts and commerce background may opt for Army only.

Joining after Graduation—The UPSC holds an all-India competitive examination, known as the Combined Defence Services Examination (CDSE), twice a year for University graduates or equivalent. Successful candidates can join Indian Military Academy for their pre-commission training after the interview conducted by the Service Selection Board and if finally selected, depending on their merit list ranking, are sent to Indian Military Academy. Students from Arts and Commerce or any background can join Indian Army but for Navy and Air force some subjects are compulsory.

There are technical entry and also entry for the engineers in the army for which

one have to look at the advertisements and can also look at the website of the army for further details. Medical graduates from the Armed Forces Medical College, Pune are directly inducted as Permanent Commissioned Medical Officers in the Armed Forces. Doctors from other medical colleges may also join Indian Army.

Short Service Commission is mainly for people who are not willing to serve for a long term. They can serve for a short term and then leave or continue with permanent commission. This is also for woman and they get opportunity to serve in the army. Like Indian Military Academy there is another academy called Officers Training Academy which is mainly for training officers who serve for short term. There are also special entry for the NCC "C" certificates holder for which they have to appear in the interview and if selected can join the army. In short service commission there is also scope for technical entry.

Officers from different states of north east have been promoted to Lt General and some of them are still serving as Lt General which is positive news for the north eastern region. We shall also publish about Woman Special Entry Schemes in India Army in next week.

(Interested students or young people may call at 98640 55558 or email at bkranjjan@gmail.com for career planning and further details).

By
Somrita Ghosh

Book: Beyond Apu: 20 Favourite Film Roles of Soumitra Chatterjee; Author: Amitava Nag; Publisher: Harper Collins; Pages: 188, Price: Rs.350

The 1960s was the era of Uttam Kumar who quickly rose to be a megastar. Conventional roles, realistic portrayals and Marxist ideology made him stand out from the rest. Enter Soumitra Chatterjee, all of 6' 2", and kajoled eyes and expressions expressive enough to perfectly illustrate a scene without dialogues in Bengali celluloid.

It was "Apu Sansar", the third part of the Panther Panchali series, that marked the debut of

effort, however, was done by the actor himself and then compiled by author Amitava Nag.

The book is an effort to give the actor an identification beyond his debut character.

The introduction is a synopsis of Soumitra's career - from his debut to his becoming a star, his rivalry with Uttam Kumar, roles that made him distinct in the crowd, his love for theatre and his clandestine talents.

Like his film career, the book too begins with "Apu Sansar" which was released in 1959. Soumitra fondly remembers his first interaction with the legendary Satyajit Ray and what finally got him the role.

"Oh-ho, you are a bit taller than my conception of Apu", was Ray's first reaction on seeing



Soumitra Chatterjee on the silver screen. Largely remembered as Apu, the

Soumitra. Yet, he bagged the role.

Soumitra was Ray's discovery, a gem that got finely polished with every film he did under his master. The duo came together for 14 films across three decades with a wide range of subjects. As noted by international film critic and scholar Pauline Kael, "Soumitra Chatterjee was Ray's one-man stock company".

The pair made some major movies to boost the identity of Bengali cinema. After "Apu Sansar", Soumitra was seen in Ray's "Samapti", a farcical movie by genre; and then "Abhijan". Next came "Charulata", which was based on Rabindranath Tagore's novel "Nashtaneer". Soumitra's Amal remains one of the most memorable characters and was one of his finest performances.

"The journey of Apu, the epitome of the innocent young romantic, culminates in the personality of Amal," writes. The fourth and fifth movies with Ray are not mentioned and the reader jumps to "Aranyer Din Ratri", the seventh with the master, followed by "Ashani Sanket" - a movie based on the Bengal famine of 1943.

Ray again took a complex Tagore novel, "Ghare Baire", as his foundation and cast Soumitra as Sandip, a revolutionary. To back tracks a bit - to 1961, when Bengali cinema witnessed a major landmark. "Jhinder Bandi", based on Anthony Hope's "The Prisoner of Zenda" and helmed by Tapan Sinha brought together Uttam Kumar and Soumitra Chatterjee for the first time in a single frame. For four-film old Soumitra, playing the role of the villain Mayurbahan was an impressive step forward.

In 1969 came "Teen Bhuboner Paare", that became the biggest hit and featured one of Soumitra's most memorable roles - Subir, a high-spirited young man. The song "Jiban e ki pabona", which saw Soumitra doing the twist, remains iconic in the Bengali cultural space.

Sansar Simante, directed by Tarun face when Ray brought the character to life with Soumitra in "Sonar Kella" and "Joi Baba Felunath". The character was a creation of Ray himself. In later years, Soumitra started accepting roles in



Life beyond Apu

sense, Ray's Sandip is a 'bad man' who is easy to accept," Soumitra says of one his finest achievements.

mainstream cinema like "Basanta Bilap", a quintessential romantic comedy that marked his 50th film, and "Baksho Badal".

Majumdar, was much needed for Soumitra Chatterjee to prove his critics wrong on two counts: first, that he could do a brilliant job in roles other than a typical middle-class Bengali, and second, that he could also deliver a non-Ray film".

Then came "Kony", which is remembered for the role of Khitda that Soumitra played - probably as iconic a character as Apu or Feluda; "Ekti Jibon" was perhaps his most epic film where Soumitra goes from playing a man in his 40s to a sick 80-year-old in "Wheel Chair" he played the challenging role of a neurologist who is himself paralysed.

Though Soumitra still continues to act in movies and appear on advertisements, the book ends the list with "Dekha" directed by Gautam Ghose. "With 'Dekha' the circle is complete - the wide-eyed dreamer Apu grows old, confronts reality and finally becomes the blind Sashi," Nag quotes Ghose as saying.

The book then turns to a prologue where Soumitra talks about his first love - theatre and the author then through a light on Soumitra's love for poems. There are also quotes from other eminent personalities - from directors Adoor Gopalakrishnan to Shyam Benegal, actors Nandita Das to Sharmila Tagore, all speaking about Soumitra's immense acting caliber.

Given all this, Soumitra's National Award in 2006 for "Podokheep" and the Dada Saheb Phalke award for lifetime achievement in 2012 were most appropriate.

(The writer can be contacted at somrita.g@ians.in)



Prodosh Chandra Mitter aka Feluda remains Bengal's most popular sleuth. And Feluda got a

face when Ray brought the character to life with Soumitra in "Sonar Kella" and "Joi Baba Felunath". The character was a creation of Ray himself. In later years, Soumitra started accepting roles in

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Book Review

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'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, January 17, 2016

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon square Sun on your solar return chart brings in some mixed results. You feel fun loving, energetic and willing to explore new ideas. Be sure to give practicality to your ideas and plans. You may need to do some re-structuring and planning. Financially you will be secure and gains from investments can accrue. You may feel frustrated in relationships as there is a lack of communication and it is hard for you to verbalise your true feelings and express them. Stress may crop up at unexpected turns and this would require you to look at some lifestyle changes and even incorporate some techniques like meditation. Children will do you proud. Travel both professional and personal will be meaningful.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You are likely to form new relationships or connections that further your spiritual growth. This period brings for you socializing, romance and stability at the work place. Any unresolved educational matter or a deep relationship may create a rift in your life, take a softer approach in your interactions when comes to family related matters. Your actions and emotions are balanced as you bring more accuracy in your work area. Economy at home and management of business and work are important issues. Professional relations are satisfying and you have plenty of goodwill and friendships around you. You are likely to get back to fitness routines and diet programs to enhance health and energy.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You tend to attract people with your conversation and wit. You may change your style of dressing to present a glamorous image. Your social life would be busy as you would be popular among your circle of friends. Domestic relationships and the home environment would be harmonious and peaceful by the sensitivity and care that you exhibit. People in fine arts, creative line and public relations and related fields would give a non-traditional blend to their creations. Communication abilities will largely be applied to professional world ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued in order to enhance career prospects and financial matters. There may be a minor health ailment that bothers you as you need to give more attention to your health.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

An optimistic, but not necessarily a realistic attitude would take precedence. You may feel a vague restlessness and discontentment with life as it is. Excellent work opportunities for those working with overseas connections come up. There would be work related travel too. At home, you accept the individuality of your spouse and that would be helpful to resolve your conflicts and move ahead in harmony. At times you feel fun loving, energetic, and willing to explore new ideas. Financial benefits may come your way this week. Stress may crop up at unexpected turns and this would require you to look at some lifestyle changes and even incorporate some techniques like exercise and meditation.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Events take place in which you feel like you are moving forward and growing into a new phase of your life. You feel a sense of fulfillment as you move towards your long term goals. People in authority regard you favorably. You will be making new contacts through learning, communicating and mental pursuits. This indicates an intellectually stimulating time in which the exchange of ideas with others figures prominently. You would expand your social circle and make more contact with groups and friends. Health will take a turn for the better. You display great skills in sports, competitive exams, physical activities and this wins appreciation and upbrings of new opportunities.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

This is a phase of power and accomplishment. Actively seeking to expand, taking educated risks, and moving forward are highlighted. This is a week of opportunity, particularly in the material and business world, and opportunities need to be seized. It's generally not a time to find a new love partner, simply because the focus is on the material world and your place in the world. This is a problem-solving phase in which you can expect real, tangible results. Take action, plan ahead and make the most of opportunities. Some of you may find that your career is moving towards a more service-oriented direction. You have more faith in general regarding your career and the direction in which you are working. You need to develop a certain amount of self-confidence.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You are more friendly, optimistic, and big-hearted than usual. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation from others. This is a sociable, and perhaps self-indulgent, time when the pursuit of pleasure is one of your

high priorities. Communicative abilities will largely be applied to further your professional and financial ambitions. Lifestyle changes augur well to create a positive outlook. Self development is the keystone during this period. Your social life would be busy as you would popular among friends and associates. This is a time when you free yourself of personal inhibitions that may have been part of your life in the past. Stick to regular exercise routine and regular pattern of nutritious diet.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

You may solidify a romantic relationship under this influence, or become involved with a sensible and like minded partner. You are likely to spend time in different places and work closely in new associations as you combine good luck and good management. Self-confidence and action are highlighted and you tend to instinctively know the right course of action to take in most situations. You accept the individuality of loved ones and that would be helpful to resolve your conflicts and move ahead in harmony. Interpersonal bonds strengthen. Stress may crop up at unexpected turns and this would require you to look at some lifestyle changes and even incorporate some techniques like exercise and meditation.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

It promises to be a busy, dynamic, and significant time in your life. There would be a turning point in your professional life and also in terms of personal growth. Your emotions run high towards family and mood swings are possible. There may be some kind of conflict in your life arising from a great urge to do something different. You need space and contact with others in order to feel content. Financial benefits may come on your way this week. You would impress people with your attitude and win their confidence and trust. You are blessed with intuition and foresight which lead you in the right direction. You are relaxed within and relate well with others at home and work.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You could find that you are more open and trusting with friends and lovers, and that you easily win family's trust. Healthy speculation is favored. Financial benefits may come your way. Some people fall in love under this influence of current planetary configuration. Certain elements of your social and financial life are stabilized, secured, and more reliable. More loving and appreciative relationships with your children may also figure. Your romantic affair and pleasure-seeking activities gives you a big boost of confidence and your personal magnetism runs high to be appreciated. This is an especially spiritual time for you, this is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

Authority figures, elders, parents, or influential people in your life tend to support and respect you. They are more willing to help you on your road to success. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. Integrity and honesty will get you the much awaited enhancement in image now. The more willing you are to put yourself in the limelight, the more positive the rewards. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities and family relations. You would be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

This planetary influence indicates favorable outcomes when it comes to legal affairs, education, exams and travel. You are more accepting and understanding your friends and loved ones. Contentedness in love is likely to figure and to attract positive circumstances and people into your life. You are bound to enjoy increased social opportunities as well as a boost in your personal popularity and magnetism. Friends and lovers are looking on you favorably. You would think more creatively and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. This is an excellent time under which you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships with loved ones.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

A nice balance between optimism and practicality is with you. In the coming days you discover goals that suit your 'true self' better. A more lenient and contented attitude towards others tends to bring positive circumstances into your life. A tendency to take on more than you can realistically handle should be watched. Your social life and finances stabilize and satisfy. You find joy in expressing your views and ideas with people around you. You are likely feeling good in general, and you tend to spread the joy and happiness. You work hard to meet the goals. This is a good time to build your skills, to get organized.



“No matter what you're going through, there's a light at the end of the tunnel and it may seem hard to get to it but you can do it and just keep working towards it and you'll find the positive side of things.”

— Demi Lovato

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LVIII No. 157 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2016

Swaraj in West Asia

The NDA government is making up for losses from the home front with gains abroad. India's external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj is visiting both Palestine and Israel. Delhi has been on a tight rope striking a balance in its relations with the two. On his recent visit to the region President Pranab Mukherjee traced India's friendship with Palestine to the sayings of Mahatma Gandhi. But the NDA government is aware of the old order changing since the establishment of diplomatic ties with Israel in 1991. There is no denying that Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is doing his best to remain a pacifist. But the Hamas are always trying to prong Israel's control in the Gaza strip and the west bank of Jordan. Netanyahu has to retain his seat in the face of hawks in his government wanting aggression. The fragile peace to Israel and Palestine is often fractured.

Narendra Modi is already trying to melt the ice between India and Israel. The emphasis is on defence collaboration, adapting Israel's top technology and utilising its heavy investment potential. Israel has contributed to India's agriculture and water treatment helping it meet the challenge of food and water security. The trade potential between India and Israel is about 5 billion dollars. Delhi's support of the FTA at the WTO should push it forward. Industrial eco systems of the two countries should join hands. At the same time, the old tie with Palestine does not wither. Modi had amicable talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in New York last year. Sushma Swaraj also has Palestine first on her itinerary. But maybe she has set her eyes more on Israel.

LOOKING BACK

January 4, 1989

Bomb scare Air India Boeings to land

An Air India Boeing 747 with 281 people aboard made an emergency landing today in Denpasar, Bali, after it received a warning from the Singapore control tower that an explosive device had been planted, and airport official said.

Flight AIC 465 received the warning call on its way from Sydney, Australia to Singapore.

The Jumbo Jet landed at Ngurah Ray International Airport at 16:39 local time (1409 IST), said the officer who spoke on condition of anonymity.

He said there were 28 children and five infants among the 259 passengers, the airliner carried a crew of 22 members.

The officer said the plane is scheduled to continue its flight to Singapore at 11:30 local time. He refused to say whether any bomb or explosive device has been found.

Earlier, today, another Air India, airliner with 137 passengers aboard returned to Subang International airport in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, after a bomb threat, which turned out to be a hoax.

The Department of civil aviation officials told reporters the airport control tower had received a telephone call saying a bomb has been planted in the jet.

The Airbus, bound for Madras, was directed to turn back the officials said a bomb squad was reported to have searched the aircraft but found no explosive.

The officials said the plane would leave for Madras tomorrow morning but give no reason for the delay.

Airline companies in Asia have been advised to take extra security precau-

tions against bomb scares by terrorists groups following the recent.

Pan AM jetliner crash in Scotland in which 259 passengers and crew were killed in addition to 11 fatalities on the ground.

Courts reject Kehar's appeal

Another desperate attempt by condemned prisoner Kehar Singh to stall his execution failed today when both the Supreme Court and the Delhi High Court dismissed fresh plea made on his behalf.

Lawyers of the condemned prisoner were, however, back in the evening at the apex court with another special leave petition and a review petition, which come up for hearing tomorrow.

Satwant Singh, the second prisoner on the death row for the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi, also filed a special leave petition through the Thira Jail Superintendent seeking prosecution of the two Indo Tibetan Border Police guards for their attempt on his life on October 31 1984.

Earlier in the day the Supreme Court dismissed Kehar Singh's petition seeking commutation of the death penalty to life imprisonment on grounds of delay in the execution of the sentence.

Yesterday's rejection by the President of Kehar Singh's mercy petitions was the subject of one of the prisoners plea before the High Court.

In the second petition the convict sought examination of top terrorist A. Pal Singh as a witness in the light of fresh evidence of his involvement in the assassination case. Both were dismissed by a division bench of the High

The Case of the poor and landless in Meghalaya

By H H Mohrmen

Much has been written about the recent survey which has brought to light the startling fact that a large section of the population in the state does not possess any land of their own, but the truth is landlessness is not new to the people, particularly the farmers in the villages. Citizens of the state particularly those who live in the villages in Jaintia hills, are surrounded by abundance of land and yet without any land of their own. By tradition they have land, but the land does not belong to them. They can farm and cultivate anywhere but the land does not belong to them.

I am going to share few stories that I've encountered while trying to promote livelihood in the villages in Jaintia hills. A major problem that any livelihood promoter would encounter when trying to help farmers access credit, to upscale their activity, is the absence of collateral. One would think that the only security the poor farmers would have at their disposal is the land where they work on, but that is far from true. Whenever banks or financial institutions ask for collateral from the farmer before providing loans to enable them to increase their productivity, the farmers would not be able to do so because they cannot even mortgage the land they farm on because it does not belong to them.

The reasons farmers do not own land is because of the prevailing land tenure system in the area. Added to that is the fact that different areas have different land ownership patterns. In the Nongkhlich area till very recently land belonged to the community, and even if farmers were allotted land for farming or other purposes, people do not register their land with the district council because they only have usufruct rights over land. So in this case people do not own land and even if they owned any land it must be a small plot. People seldom register their land with any authority other than 'the patta' for their paddy fields. But it was when the cement giant Lafarge planned to setup a mega cement plant in the area that people realized the need to take ownership of the land and start

registering it with the District Council. In the process the land ownership system in the area took a new dimension. In Nongkhlich, because people reversed the land tenure system and because of the presence of huge mineral deposits rich people registered free land or bought land owned by the local people. In the process a large section of the locals become landless.

In the War Jaintia areas of Amlarem sub division, the traditional land owning system is still called Zamindari and the land owners are still called Zamindars by the locals. In this case a major part of the land in the area is owned by few clans and the hoi polloi depend on the Zamindar for all their land needs. If they want to cultivate in any plot of land, they have to seek permission from the clan and pay user fees to the clan for using the land. The tradition is that the clans are only the custodians of the land and they cannot deny anybody from accessing any free plot of land for cultivation, collecting firewood or any other non-commercial purposes, but that too has changed now. The Zamindars who are supposed to be mere custodians of community land become owners of the land. The classic case in point is the limestone mining in Nongtalang when mining rights were given even to outsiders by the clans who are supposed to be custodians of the land. So, even when people do not own land, their right to cultivate is being denied when cultivatable land is being given away for mining. If the mining continues land will be rendered uncultivable and it is the common people who will have to pay the price.

Then, even if community like Dorbar Shnong or the Dorbar Raid owns land, the people again do not have right to ownership of the land because it belongs to the community. In these villages by tradition, villagers were not allowed to register even the land on

which they have constructed a home, with any authority, and in this case people will find it difficult to even get electricity connection because of the non availability of legal documents to prove their ownership of the land. There are very few villages where community land remains but their numbers are dwindling day by day.

In the eleka Narpuh landlessness is due to the fact that large tracts of land in the area are now owned by proxy by the cement companies. In the areas particularly in Lumshnong, Thangskai and other villages in the vicinity large chunks of land are in the possession of cement companies' representatives. The locals are rendered landless. Perhaps it would be interesting if a study or a survey is conducted to see how much of the land in the area is still owned by the locals. I had walked several hours on the banks of the river Lukha and climbed up both via Lumshnong and Brichynot and found survey marks everywhere which indicates that the land is owned by certain companies. Even forests in the catchment areas of the Lukha are marked. In this case land is concentrated in the hands of few individuals whom the companies appointed as local representatives.

In the coal mine areas large tracts of land especially that which has mineral deposits is owned by coal barons and with the system of mining that is practiced, the poor land owners even if they owned the land would not be able to mine the coal. Hence they have no other option but to sell their land to the highest bidder. There are cases where community forests, government land and even church properties were bought or usurped by the coal mine owners.

Then in the eleka Nartiang and Nonggingi, in the area from Ksenryinchang till Khainduli local farmers are gradually parting with their agricultural land to rich people from coal mine areas. There is an increasing trend for people from the coal mines to invest their money

in purchasing paddy fields and other agricultural lands in the area. This is another case of local people becoming landless not because of the tradition but because the rich bought the land from the poor.

The case of landlessness at least in Jaintia hills is due to two reasons; one is because of the traditional land tenure system that is being followed in certain areas where land is in the custody of either the community (dorbar shnong/Elaka) or of the clans and of course there is also private land. In this case although people make use of the land but they cannot claim ownership of the same. The tradition is that if they fail to tend the land for three consecutive years then ownership of the land will revert back to the community or the clan as the case may be. But even in the traditional land ownership system, where land is in the custody of the clans, there is increasing case of abuse of power by the clans without respecting the locals' traditional rights to land. But of late there is also increasing number of cases of landlessness which is not because of the tradition but due to human greed.

The traditional land ownership pattern in the district is gradually changing as land is increasingly being privatized. In many cases even community land is being registered and their ownership claimed by those in power. These are some of the reasons for the growing landlessness at least in Jaintia hills, which has also led to change in traditional land tenure system in the area. This change in land ownership is a cause of serious concern because land which is a meager resource is increasingly being privatized and even community land is being allotted to individuals. What should be a cause of public concern is that this is happening with the district council's support either by commission or omission. Due to this change of mindset, gradually rural areas will also become like urban areas where community/clan land will be privatized and land will increasingly be in the hands of the few rich people.

TO THE EDITOR

A 21st Century Dinosaur.

Editor,
ST of January 17th 2016 carried two stories about two different politicians. Shibun Lyngdoh of the BJP, a newcomer and Bindo Lanong of the UDP, a veteran in Meghalaya politics. Both spoke on the same subject, about their common bete noire, the Congress party and its performance, but from two different perspectives. Shibun projected the profile of a young politician; eyes on the future of the state; willing to even work with his worst enemy the Congress, for the betterment of Meghalaya. "Come on everyone we're all stakeholders in developing the future of this state" seems to be the message from this young man. Laniong on the other hand chose to oppose for opposition's sake; to speak about sanctity of 'Time immemorial' (only God knows what that means); of threats from the future and of the danger of trying to adapt to change. Frankly speaking that was why Dinosaurs became extinct- they refused and were incapable of adapting to change!

Its time we challenged this phrase "from time immemorial". Everyone who has no vision for the future; who is scared of tomorrow; who refuses to visualise what really our grandchildren need, take refuge behind this phrase. For many of our

leaders "Time Immemorial" is passed off as the pinnacle of wisdom that cannot be challenged come what may. What rubbish! Within the topic of empowering and legislating our traditional bodies, this idiotic phrase has been used to even nullify Constitutional realities. The UDP claims that only the District Councils are authorised to empower and legislate on traditional bodies. Will the party please refer to List II 'State List', para 5 of the 7th Schedule? Of course it should not be read in isolation but with para 12 A of the 6th Schedule. It then makes complete sense. We are speaking here about modern grassroots institutions capable of giving service as per requirements of the times. Time Immemorial tradition is quite something else. Please don't confuse between the two. The issue of Govt servants as Rangbah Shnongs also needs to be reviewed. Govt Servants are paid employees and as such are not expected to participate in anti Govt agitations nor burn effigies of their pay masters, nor spit on the image of the Head of the Establishment. Not expected to take out anti Govt processions on the 28 of the month and by the 1st, stretch eager greedy hands for their monthly pay cheque. Khasis call such people haram nimok (Can't understand why the SNSBH hasn't kicked out

such undesirable elements). This is not to deny that most Govt servants who take up voluntary work in our Dorbars perform yeoman service and are the backbone in local governance. They actually are the ones who implement Govt/MP/MLA schemes. The Govt would be committing Hara-kiri if it debarred all Govt servants from such social service to the public. The trick would be for such Govt servants to obtain permission/written undertakings from their HOD and to observe service rules. No problems, and it makes sense. What does not make sense is making political capital from an administrative problem that the UDP might have to confront if it ever came to power. Talking about the UDP, please don't let it stand for "the Undiluted Dinosaurs Party". It would be such a tragedy with all the brilliant young minds in the party.

Yours etc.,
Milliancy Nongsteng,
Via email

Why different interpretations of the Constitution?

Editor,
As a lay person and past student of Political Science, I have nursed a revered belief that the Constitution of India must be duly respected and observed in letter and spirit by each individual Indian irrespective of

positional status. And, as Indians we are assured that we have the Courts of law to interpret and safeguard the essence of our Constitution whenever any doubt, dispute etc., arise in this aspect. Of late, I have found myself utterly at odds for having come across two identical cases, pertaining to our Constitution, one in Maharashtra and the other in our very own state of Meghalaya; the incidents related to the dispute over the appointment on compassionate grounds in the Govt. departments: In the first instant case, the Hon'ble Bombay High Court while hearing the writ Petition No 11987 of 2012 on December 6, 2013, had adjudicated the case in favour of the 29 year old woman, Ms. S. Kulkarni. Here, the case in point pertained to the rejection of the woman's application for appointment on compassionate grounds in lieu of her father who expired while in service in the department of water Resources, Govt. of Maharashtra. The latter advanced the argument that as per resolution adopted by the Govt., it stipulates that no married daughters can be admissible for appointment on compassionate factor. However, as stated, the Bombay High Court rejected outright the Govt's contention by citing that this amounted to discrimination in public employment, violating the mandate of Article 14, 15, 16 and 21 of the Constitution of India concerning

The revenge of the samosa

By M J Akbar

There is no retribution harsher in politics than the revenge of the samosa. Every politician knows this much. The surprise is that Bihar's Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, and his patriarch, Super Chief Minister Laloo Yadav, both veterans of electoral battles as well as administration, forgot a fundamental principle of democracy: you never feed the treasury from the menu of the poor. The poor have little by way of luxury, and a low-cost evening savoury is one of their few moments of pleasure. In budgeting parlance there is something called a "sin tax", a regular resource base for any government. This is a tax on items like liquor and cigarettes. You could, if in a particularly puritan mood, stretch the sin-range to luxuries like expensive hotels. But no finance minister in his, or her, senses every squeezes money from the beedi.

It is too early for the Bihar electorate to get angry with a government it has just placed in office, but the 13.5% value added tax of samosa and bhujia opens up space for something more deadly than anger: ridicule. The sarcasm - and no one does that better than the Bihari - will cut across class, creed and caste because the samosa is unique in its appeal across distinctions, a true item of mass consumption. Indians invented fast food long before multinationals discovered its appeal. We also had the good sense to keep fast food a home industry. It is a business through which a poor man can also earn a living. The producer and consumer are often within the same socio-economic zone.

Nitish Kumar and Laloo Yadav must share the barbs; for while the origins of this decision lie indisputably in the CM's office, the finance minister of Bihar belongs to Laloo Yadav's party. This is one instance when Laloo Yadav cannot chortle in private at what Nitish Kumar does in public.

The samosa's revenge was evident soon enough, and Nitish Kumar is now trying to mitigate the political offence by suggesting that he only intended the tax for a costlier form of packaged samosa. It is not the afterthought which will stick, but the thought. This amendment is obviously a fudge, because bhujia is also on the punitive list.

It also gets curiously and curiously. Why tax mosquito repellents, for instance? Mosquitoes do not vote. And they can be occasion-

ally lethal. Of course, this his does reveal that mosquito repellents have a huge market in Bihar, and the government expects high returns. Revenues from Patna alone could pay for a fat department of government. The state is infested with mosquitoes. It is equally obvious that there is not much industry in Bihar which can generate tax revenues; there is nothing else to tax. Government, therefore, is trying to profit from its own past failure. Word will spread - as rapidly as mosquitoes.

One does wonder about how such silly mistakes are made by persons with experience, whether in politics or bureaucracy. It could be because they do not have to pay for either samosas or bhujias when in power. The cost of afternoon chai and accompaniments comes from the administrative budget.

The British Prime Minister David Cameron, who belongs to the refined-dined aristocracy of his land, once tried to get psychologically cozy with the masses by standing outside a stall and eating Britain's version of the samosa, the Cornish pie. Cameron made a mess of the staged event, for he had no idea how to eat humble pie. As a public relations exercise it was a disaster, and the press did not let him forget this opportunism in a hurry. But Cameron was never going to tax the pie, even though he has a finance minister, George Osborne, who has made it a mission to balance the books. If Osborne cannot be credited with as much success in this objective as he might have hoped for, at least you cannot fault him for trying.

The samosa-bhujia tragedy-comedy comes at a time when the Laloo-Nitish government is just beginning to lose a bit of sheen for reasons that are definitely not funny. Crime is back with a vengeance in the state, as criminals get political patronage. There is a growing sense of fear in rural areas. Officials are getting orders from the parallel Laloo Yadav network, and they understand better than anyone else where real power sits. By itself the samosa's revenge may have been contained, but in an environment that is encouraged by both memory and experience, the samosa adds significant collateral damage to the reputation of Nitish Kumar.

right to equality, equal right to public employment and even right to life. Such discrimination is not expected from a welfare state the Court maintained. Hence, the appointment on compassionate grounds of that married daughter of the deceased employee was upheld by the Hon'ble Bombay High Court on "applicable policy"

Coming to Meghalaya, a parallel case occurred which involved a married daughter who applied for a Grade IV post in place of her deceased father who while working as a regular driver in the Office of Sub divisional agricultural officer, Sohra, Deptt of Agriculture, passed away in 2007. In this context, her application was rejected by the Government. Finding herself in a dire situation, the applicant had approached the Meghalaya State Legal Services Authority, Shillong to avail free legal assistance to contest her case. The latter finding her case to be worth contesting had appointed a Legal aid Counsel to plead the case of the aggrieved woman. However, after a lapse of some months, that woman petitioner was informed that her plea for such compassionate appointment, premised on the existing government guidelines, was incontestable given that she has already

married although her economic status was acceptable for compassionate appointment. Ironically, while the married daughter in Maharashtra was happily rehabilitated, here, her counterpart in Meghalaya has to end up frustrated:

Now, juxtaposing the above two co-incident cases in Maharashtra and Meghalaya, I observe that even in these two states falling within the Indian Union there are different interpretations of the Constitution. If, as inferred to above, Articles 14, 15, 16, and 21 of the Constitution are being violated in Maharashtra, how is it not so in Meghalaya? In the light of this will the legal experts of Meghalaya throw light on the abiding interpretation or implication of our Constitution as it stands today thereby dispelling the nagging misgivings. Perhaps it may be pertinent to recall that on November 26, 2015 we have observed our National Constitution day to validate the fact that our Constitution embodies the system of laws and basic principles that govern our country. Alas, how I wish there was a nation-wide harmonization in the interpretation of our Constitution!

Yours etc.,
Jerome Diengdoh
Shillong - 2

"Who knows what true loneliness is - not the conventional word but the naked terror? To the lonely themselves it wears a mask. The most miserable outcast hugs some memory or some illusion."

— Joseph Conrad

The Shillong Times

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Defending the indefensible

THE Pasteur Institute, a Government laboratory has confirmed that the pH level of the PHE Water from a certain area of Upper Shillong is 5.7 which is slightly acidic. The word slightly might give a sense of relief to the consumers but let us hear what the experts say. In general, water with a pH < 7 (less than 7) is considered acidic and with a pH > 7 is considered basic. The normal range for pH in surface water systems is 6.5 to 8.5 and for groundwater systems 6 to 8.5. Alkalinity is a measure of the capacity of the water to resist a change in pH that would tend to make the water more acidic. The measurement of alkalinity and pH is needed to determine the corrosiveness of the water.

The pH of pure water (H₂O) is 7 at 25°C, but when exposed to carbon dioxide in the atmosphere this equilibrium results in a pH of approximately 5.2. Because of the association of pH with atmospheric gases and temperature, scientists believe that it is such water be tested as soon as possible. While the pH of the water is not indicative of the strength of the acidic or basic solution and this alone does not provide a full picture of the characteristics or limitations with the water supply but is a cause for concern and requires a more intensive study to determine whether the water is potable.

In general, water with a low pH (< 6.5) could be acidic, soft, and corrosive. Therefore, the water could leach metal ions such as iron, manganese, copper, lead, and zinc from the aquifer, plumbing fixtures, and piping. Therefore, water with a low pH could contain elevated levels of toxic metals, cause premature damage to metal piping, and have associated aesthetic problems such as a metallic or sour taste, staining of laundry, and the characteristic blue-green staining of sinks and drains. We can well imagine what effect such water would have on the human system. It is pathetic that the PHE has come up with a clarification defending the indefensible. That the Greater Shillong Water Supply System has been a hub of correction is well established. That it has been allowed to continue for decades reveals the rot in the system. Will the public wake up and shake up the entire PHE machinery?

LOOKING BACK

January 4, 1989

Ashok Sen a problem for Janata Dal

The former Janata party leaders of West Bengal are unhappy over the inclusion of Jan Morcha leader Mr. Ashok Sen in the Janata Dal's 22 men steering committee. The unhappiness has already been communicated to the Dal chairman, Mr. V. P. Singh, by a senior Janata Party leader from West Bengal.

It has been pointed out to Mr. Singh that of the three constituents of the Janata Dal, only the Janata Party has some organisation, some following and some pockets of influence in West Bengal. The Lok Dal exists only in name, while the Jan Morcha is nothing more than a handful of people around Mr. Ashok Sen. Also, although Mr. Sen served as a Minister in the Nehru, Indira and Rajiv Cabinets, he has never been a member of the AICC because he had no base or following in the Bengal Congress.

Mr. Singh was told that in the fitness of things, someone from the former Janata Party should have been taken from West Bengal in the Steering Committee. The name of the former Janata MP was mentioned in this connection. Mr. Singh reportedly said that in the event of an expansion of the steering committee in future he would keep the suggestion in mind.

In fact, Mr. Sen seems to have become a source of worry rather than of assurance to the fledgling Janata Dal in West Bengal. He is understood to have told his close confidants that he was not interested in the Dal, did not want any office in the party's West Bengal unit and would keep the Jan Morcha intact in this State. This reached the ears of the former Janata Party leaders and their first reaction was disbelief.

The State officer of the Janata Dal functions from a couple of dingy rooms in a dilapidated house in narrow lane in Central Calcutta. Behind this lane, on a big thoroughfare stands a building owned by Mr. Sen. On December 4 a banner went up at the entrance to this house on which written Jan Morcha in large letters. Under it, in very small letters appears Janata Dal and that, too, within brackets.

Angry Janata Party leaders told Mr. Sen's workers that after the merger of the Jan Morcha in the Janata Dal at Bangalore on October 11, the Morcha had ceased to exist. They mumbled it was a mistake and need not to be taken too seriously. But the banner is still there, much to the chagrin of the Janata Party leaders who take it as an affront. Significantly, Mr. Sen has not, so far, attended any meeting of the Janata Dal's State executive.

Christianity: A force for good in Meghalaya?

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

When one mentions militant religious extremism, the image that emerges instantaneously is that of Islamic extremism and the groups associated with it, e.g. ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Boko-Haram, Al-Shabab, etc. The reason for their prompt identification is their association with horrendous acts of terror and brutality that have swamped the internet and print media. It is these imageries which drive our collective fear and repulsion against them. But restricting our focus on just the acts of violence sometimes masks the other important issues. Violence is the end product and not the starting point of any movement. Every movement begins with the proselytisation of a particular ideology that provides the structure that holds together the acts committed toward its propagation. So what is this ideology that Islamic extremism propagates? Simply, it is the incompatibility of any other ideological system (other religions, social, economic or political systems) alongside/except their own: The extermination of the non-members is only a natural progression from this basic premise. Violence, however, is not the obvious end-product and peaceful outcomes are equally possible, e.g., missionary activities, self-exclusion. Right now in the Middle East the destructive aspect is found to be more dominantly displayed.

At any single time though, a proselytizing movement utilizes both the peaceful as well as violent tools in varying combinations. A very relevant example is the current scenario in the country regarding the attempt to push the Hinduvta agenda by a government that also believes in the ideology of 'incompatibility of differences'. The 'Love Jihad', lynching of people for alleged beef consumption, are examples of employment of violence while marking of Christmas as 'Governance Day', 'Ghar Wapsi campaign', are instances of peaceful means to either intimidate non-members or bring them to the fold of an exclusive Hindu nation. The Buddhist fundamentalists are performing the same function in Myanmar (Burma) and Sri Lanka. As a consequence minorities, i.e., non-Muslims in the Middle East, non-Hindus in India and non-Buddhists in Sri Lanka and Myanmar suffer. In such a

situation, an important concern for us might be the fear that being a Christian majority state we will be condemned to be at the receiving end of such exclusivist ideology. While this is a very relevant concern, a more troubling issue that does not figure enough in our discussion is whether Christian fundamentalists are also equally complicit in peddling the same prejudices within our state? Recently, I attended a religious concert organized by the Presbyterian Church in Lait Tyra. There were a couple of bands that had come to perform and it was a very enjoyable evening with great music and lots of energy, especially among the younger audiences. Although I enjoyed the whole experience I was left greatly disturbed by the short drama that was performed before the musical programme. This was a drama about three young girls who had died and gone to heaven for judgment. One by one the girls are told that their name is not in the good book which means that they will not go to heaven. Upon hearing this, the girls collapsed on the ground crying in fear of the punishment that awaited them in hell. They beseeched to God that they had been good Christians throughout their lives and done nothing wrong to deserve this fate. However God (who was played by a very dour looking person) refused to accept them by revealing that though they may have done good deeds while they were alive, there were also some sins that they had committed. For example, one girl was accused of the sin of murder. She denied but was chastised by reminding that bearing ill-will towards fellow Christians in thought (though not done in deed) is equal to murder. In this way, the other two girls were also judged for harbouring immoral thoughts. Refusing to recognize them, God asked his angels to take the girls and throw them in hell for eternal damnation. Throughout all this, the girls were crying and shouting so pitifully that children in the crowd got scared and started crying. The performance was so convinc-

ing. All the time I was waiting, thinking that maybe in the end God would somehow forgive them and allow them entry into heaven. But to my disappointment the drama ended on that depressive note. I was left bewildered, not understanding the purpose of this passionate performance. Does it mean that no matter what we do we will all burn in hell? Humans are not perfect. The tested adage says, "to err is human, to forgive divine." Also, didn't Jesus die on the cross to save humanity from eternal damnation, the exact fate those girls suffered. But then I realized that the whole drama had a different purpose altogether.

The sound system was excellent throughout the whole programme and I was quite jealous remembering the horrible experience I recently had with terrible sound system. Also the whole venue had a kind of natural amphitheatre ambience that magnified the noise. The shrieks and the cry for forgiveness were heard by everybody in the village and possibly beyond. These girls were good Christians for all intents and purposes except some flaws which actually aren't really flaws - they didn't actually commit any wrong actions simply had wrong thoughts. Also the whole performance had reference to immoral thoughts towards fellow Christians and no mention of non-Christians. The message of the drama was this: those who have accepted the Saviour still couldn't be saved imagine what fate awaits those who have not accepted Him. What was being impressed upon the audience was that the non-believers (present or listening) should abandon their pagan beliefs or suffer violence in the afterlife. In all of this one sees a drama, which is a peaceful medium being utilized to intimidate and create fear among the 'others' by painting it with images of grotesque violence. Here, violence and peace are being intertwined in a very effective combination to drive home a particular message. The remarkable thing was that this method of proselytisation was similar to the theme of the drama i.e., the condemned girls had commit-

ted violence not in deeds but in thoughts. Therefore using the same logic, the drama could be said to be a violent act. This is not the only instance where the 'others', i.e., non-Christians, have been threatened if they didn't become part of the flock. I have heard many preachers and seen many performances to consider this as a one-off incident. Not going into the debate on the theological aspects of it, what I would like to point out is that such acts demonize the 'others' warning the believers to avoid the former. It is a well known fact that people have been threatened of being kicked out of the *balang* if they were to take part in festivals of other groups. The word '*blei thaw*' is quite familiar to us with the degrading connotation it carries. So we already have people in our state who have developed their own version of the ideology of 'incompatibility of differences': given the right motivation they could very soon take the next step, i.e., violence (not in thought but in actual deed). Am I being a naive alarmist? We must remember that the state has a history of ethnic violence and one wonders how much religious differences had a role to play in it. The threat, therefore, may not be imminent it could be already operational.

Am I blaming the Christians in general? Absolutely not, for that would mean I believe that all Muslims are terrorists and all Hindus are casteists which is complete rubbish. Christianity has had a very positive effect in bringing modernization to our people but at the same time, its impact is not totally benign. If we are to protest the imposition of hegemony by Hinduvta forces and/or counter the threat of radical Islam we must have the courage to identify our own demons as well. One kind of discriminatory ideology cannot be a justification for another. I am neither denying the importance of religion as a force for social good nor the usefulness of the concept of God for personal well-being. I am only asking us to recognize the dangers of the belief in the 'incompatibility of differences' that has already played havoc on certain parts of the world. Do not let our state be another victim of this hateful ideology.

Yours etc.,
Helen Dkhar,
Shillong-4

TO THE EDITOR

Essence of Niam Tynrai-Niamtre

Editor,

As a response to Bah Fabian Lyngdoh's article and letter, I would like to inform him that yes Seng Khasi and Sein Raji are not our Khasi Pnar religion but they are certainly a platform to unite us to preserve our traditions and socio-cultural structure so that we preserve and treasure our own and do not fall prey to any outside influences that do not correspond with that of ours. What is discomforting and confusing is the kind of attachment, alignment and equation that our faith and religion was placed with the Kur. To quote Bah Fabian: "The religion of the Khasis exists only in each and every Kur uniquely and independently."

Niam Khasi-Niam Tre essence of Khasi culture

Editor,

I would like to begin by saying that no religion will ever teach its followers anything untoward and demeaning for the words of God, in every language, speaks of love, humility, righteousness and humanity. Hence whatever religion and faith one may adopt, the tenets and teachings of God must be treasured, cherished and followed. Likewise as Bah Fabian Lyngdoh says that Ka Niam Khasi-Niamtre is "a religion that is pure and holy," it is also true that the Seng Khasi/Sein Raji are not religions but certainly they are a forum and a platform where the believers and adherents of Ka Niam Khasi-Niamtre come together and are learn the teachings of U

Blei Nongbuh Nongthaw and Tre Kirof Kynrad, cultural activities, morality, customs and traditions, rites and rituals, etc. I don't think the members of the Seng Khasi - Sein Raji claim to make the two forums as a religion. All that the members of the two Sengs are working towards is to fight for the rights of *Ki Khun ka Niam Khasi-Niamtre* which have all along been denied to us. I think there is nothing wrong with that. Mr Morning Star Sumer in his letter threw light on the interpretation of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 and I quote him: "Since the Khasi religion is a Niam Kur (Clan Religion), every Kur (Clan) which has not embraced other religions is a minority group." Thereby we who are the believers and upholders of the Niam Khasi-Niamtre "have every right to claim minority status in Meghalaya. As for whether the Seng Khasi- Sein Raji are "the spiritual and cultural custodian of the Khasi tribe as a whole," this needs an entirely different interface and dialogue, though I must say, we believe in the adage, "kylli ka duster jubab ka niam" (religion answers the complexities of customs).

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,

Problem of definition

Editor,

Apropos Fabian Lyngdoh's reply to Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah's letter 'Defining Religion' (ST 15 Jan 2016) where the writer clarified that he had not written that *Niam Khasi* is not a religion the fact is that Dr. Kyndiah had said that religion can hardly be defined precisely because of the wide diversity of interpretations. So also Mr. Lyngdoh's article can be interpreted in many ways. Dr. Kyndiah's is right in summing up Lyngdoh's article if we interpret the following lines:

"Many writers speak of a 'Khasi religion'. But in reality there is no 'Khasi religion' with common godhead or godheads for the whole tribe, and in which all the Khasis are the members. The religion of the Khasis exists only in each and every kur uniquely and independently".

Shillong-4

The above passage eloquently sums up the intent of the writer and I leave it to the readers to interpret.

Yours etc.,
Marbianglang Rymbai,
Shillong-2

Rejoinder

Editor,

The New India Assurance Co. Ltd. hereby draws your attention to the news item which appeared on page 3 of your daily on 16.01.2016 on the non-disbursal of MHIS claims. We would like to clarify that the insurance company has so far paid Rs.8.11 crores to hospitals empanelled under the Scheme, since the inception of the policy with effect from 01.08.2015. There has been no announcement at any point of time that the insurance company will stop payment of claims to hospitals.

Yours etc.,
L B Buam,
Senior Divisional Manager
The New India Assurance Co Ltd

Justice! Where art thou?

By Barnes Mawrie

Justice is a fundamental right of every human being in any society. It is the substratum of a truly human society, of a peaceful coexistence. Without justice everything is bound to collapse and society itself is left in jeopardy. This is the reason why every civilized society seeks to keep in place the system and machinery for ensuring justice to its citizens.

Sixty nine years after independence, India is unfortunately still infected with the virus of injustice and corruption. In fact corruption thrives where injustice prevails. The Bollywood movie *Andha Kanoon* of 1983 clearly projects the actual situation in our country where the law seems to protect only the rich and the powerful. It is not surprising that a poor man who steals a loaf of bread to quench his hunger could be allowed to rot in prison for life while a politician or a power-wielding person who is involved in a crime or a multi-crore racket would circumvent the law and go scot free. The case of Jessica Lal is typical of this sort of justice being practiced in our country. There are thousands of such cases where justice has been denied to people and families just because they have no political clout or because they are the have-nots.

Coming to the context of our own state, we see the same deplorable situation. Injustice is being perpetrated by those in power. I refer to the case of Umroi Airport Expansion Project which is a hot issue at present. The Airports Authority required a big plot of land for construction of the Isolation Bay. This is clearly in the interest of the public and there is no objection to that, but the way the plots of land have been acquired by the State Government is questionable and it goes against basic justice. We all know that in the Four-lane Project the Government had paid reasonable compensations to land owners and thank God the project has been successfully completed. But in the case of the Airport Expansion Project the rightful land owners have so far not received any compensation whatsoever. Records show that the money has been paid by the Revenue Department of Ri Bhoi District. Cheques have been issued to a certain person and the money has been deposited in the bank. The Government authorities claim that the money paid was for all the plots required for the project. But strangely enough the rightful owners of the six plots were not in the know of such a secret deal. It appears like the District authorities *suo motu* have concluded the deal with that individual making it appear like she is the owner of all the said plots. It is sur-

prising that the authorities could commit such a flaw and pay a person without ascertaining the ownership of the land. What is stranger still is that persons involved in such illegal dealings in the district departments have not been summoned or prosecuted so far.

Are they going to get away with this criminal act? Is this what justice is all about?

It is the duty of the legal authorities to question the incongruence in the administration of public goods. Here is a matter of public money being spent in a questionable manner. As a matter of fact, we all know that every rupee is well accounted for in any government department. But what has transpired in the land deal cited above, is almost a mystery. What really irks the aggrieved party is the dilly dally policy of the government and its unwillingness to constitute an enquiry into this mishandling of public money. I was surprised to hear the government say that this issue does not pertain to the jurisdiction of the PAC. If the PAC has been precisely constituted to monitor the use of public money then why on earth is this issue outside its jurisdiction? The PAC in fact has every right to know how the public money (tax payers' money) has been used by the government department concerned. The PAC has the duty to ascertain that the public money spent should go to the right persons, in the right manner and through proper channels. I wonder why the PAC which was so enthusiastic about taking up this cause, has all of a sudden kept silent. Is it political pressure or is it a survival strategy which prevents them from fighting for justice? I believe that the cause of justice should transcend race, religion, nationality, partisanship and even personal well-being.

“All our knowledge begins with the senses, proceeds then to the understanding, and ends with reason. There is nothing higher than reason.”

— Immanuel Kant

The Shillong Times

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Agartala Connect

IT has been emphasised for decades as governments rise and fall in Delhi but the main problem besetting the north east is lack of connectivity. That has accentuated the alienation of a part of mainland India from what is erroneously called the mainland. As a result, a whole host of militant groups have mushroomed in the region. Agartala has been receiving considerable attention from the NDA government in developing connectivity. The kick off came some time ago with Narendra Modi blowing the whistle with Manik Sarkar, the only CPI (M) Chief Minister in India. It was the second north eastern city to get on the Indian metre-gauge railway map in the 1990s. The first broad gauge locomotive puffed out of Agartala on a trial run early this month. Passenger services begin in March and they will be able to go to Kolkata direct and to points west and south. The existing bus service goes through Bangladesh. The rail service will be affordable to passengers who do not have passports.

Plans are on the drawing board for some time to connect to all the north eastern states to the rest of India by 2020. By 2017, a line will be raised to Akhaura in Bangladesh. That will offer connectivity all the way to Chittagong. Another to the Bangladesh border will be raised through the south district of Tripura. These links will contribute to implementation of the Look East policy. The political impact of rail links can hardly be overestimated. It will bind diverse cultures together and such unity will not only promote trade and commerce but also make a heavy dent in militancy in the north eastern states.

LOOKING BACK

January 5, 1989

Drug abuse in north east

We have it on the authority of the Chief Minister Mr. P. A. Sangma that India's north-eastern region has been identified as one of the major drug trafficking zones in the world. The rapid worsening of the menace has of late been within our own experience locally too, the victims thereof now being counted among girls as well, which undoubtedly adds a new dimension to the whole problem. Not that some of the local non official organisations have not been alive to it for quite some time now. In fact, social conscience has considerably been roused but what is lacking is the needed liaison between government and non official efforts. It is good that the Chief Ministers of north eastern states have decided to pursue a common the menace. The programme should, however be effective enough to prove equal to the elaborate underground network that has evolved over the years. And to be so it is as well that non official initiative is allowed its inevitable role to supplement the inter government effort being evolved in this behalf.

Unfortunate all

It is unbecoming on the part of the ruling AGP and the AASU to have raised ugly slogans at a meeting recently at Lakhimpur in Assam organised by the local youth Congress (I). What was worse was that the two distinguished guests got insulted, an MLA from Sikkim being

even injured in the melee and the Chief Minister of the neighbouring State, Arunachal Pradesh having the experience of his car being stoned while returning from the meeting. Despite this exhibition of lawlessness in which a guest Chief Minister becomes a target of hoodlums, it is somewhat odd that the CM of another State should as Mr. Apang did, recommend President's Rule as the remedy. Arunachal's relations with Assam is already too strained over the boundary issue and a suggestion like this smacks of vindictiveness, apart from being dangerous to interstate amity and all that it implies.

No Trust motion against Tripura Ministry admitted

A no confidence motion against the eleven month old Congress (I) Tripura Upajati Juba Samity coalition Ministry was admitted in the state assembly today.

The motion was moved by opposition CPI (M) leader and former Chief Minister Mr. Nripen Chakraborty, Speaker Mr. Joytirmoy would be discussed tomorrow.

Mr. Chakraborty, in his motion said the people had lost confidence in the Council of Ministers headed by Mr. Sudhir Ranjan Majumdar.

This is the first time the opposition raised a no confidence motion. In the sixty member assembly the Congress (I) has a strength of TUJS in seven and the Left Front 27 and one seat vacant.

Issues before the people

By Toki Blah

concerns the usual cry that the community (Jaitbynriew) is under threat and that we all need to come out into the streets and do something about it. No one has ever cared to actually explain what that 'something' is; nor care to identify the nature of the threat; nor how we are supposed to take care of it. People are simply told to drop everything they are doing and to come out and show solidarity with the cause. Solidarity rallies then degenerated into riots. There was no coherent plan of action what to do next. The call for unity was simply a call for political unity and had very little to do with survival issues of the Jaitbynriew. People are not amused. This has simply left a bad taste in the mouth over an issue that is increasingly going nowhere.

The second issue also relates to the usual alarm call over an impending onslaught on tradition and culture. Again we are asked to take to the streets. For what purpose? From recorded history available, this is not the first time the Khasis, Garos and Jaintias have been confronted with a challenge to their tradition and culture. As a community we have faced such challenges before but met them by quietly assimilating our culture and tradition with outside technologies and practices that have now proved beneficial to our indigenous interests. (assimilation of Modern systems of education, modern health care, modern livelihood options, religion, apparel, ways of life etc). The point is, despite changes in our way of life, we still stand proud and defiant as indigenous Khasis, Jaintias and Garos. No reason to be ashamed of our identity and no reason why this should not continue into the future. Replacing outdated traditional practices with appropriate and relevant modern practices have actually stood us in good stead. In that way we are proud of and thankful to our illiterate forefathers who had the vision, courage and foresight to embrace change. Can't say the same for the timid, tunnel visioned, self appointed saviours of the Jaitbynriew we have today.

The third issue is something of a shock to everyone. It is the demand for supremacy of the Autonomous District Councils

over the State Government. Again the tunnel vision comes to play. It's the most preposterous demand ever made and it simply nullifies everything Meghalaya stands for. In essence, it calls my father and mother and perhaps most of our parents as idiots for ever demanding for a Hill State of our own. Who are the real idiots is for the reader to decide. To be honest with oneself, District Councils are white elephants. For 63 years (1952-2015) they have simply wasted away the resources of the state and squandered away the powers given them under the 6th Schedule. For 63 long years they simply did nothing! According to latest reports 103 crores was spent on ADCs in 2014-15. What do they have to show for such huge expenditure? Zero! By what standards of measurement can we now demand that overall governance be handed over to such non performing institutions? If our own elected Govt is to be debarred from 6th Schedule area development, then logically it means that roads, hospitals, bridges, schools, livelihood options etc are to be handed over to the ADCs. Are we really serious with such tomfoolery? Any takers on such stupidity? Please, let's not rush in where even angels fear to tread!

The fourth demand relates to aspects of local or village governance. The need of the hour is either for the District Council or the State Govt to come up with a legislation to recognise the local Dorbar as a unit of local self government and correspondingly empower the Headman, Nokma or the Rangbah Shnong. Para 3 sub para e,f of the 6th Schedule of the Constitution empowers the ADCs for the above. Interestingly Schedule 7, List II, para 5 also provide the State Government with the same powers. Cognizance at this point has to be given to para 12A of the 6th Schedule and its provision of repugnancy, wherein preference for State Laws over that of the ADCs is provided. Now, if the need of the hour is legal empowerment of the Rangbah Shnong, and if District Council empowerment is not forthcoming, para 12 A of the 6th Schedule provides us with a way out. Does the source of such empowerment, as long as it is constitutional, really matter? If it

doesn't then why this insistence that only the law of a defunct District Council should prevail? What's so sacrosanct about laws of a failed institution? Perhaps Michael Syiem's writ petition over continued relevance of the District Councils makes more sense than people give it credit for.

The Khasi Pnar community of today is somewhat in a Hamlet, Prince of Denmark like dilemma. Is the VAB of KHADC to be or not to be? From all indications available it appears it is not to be. The Honourable Governor has passed the JHADC but referred the KHADC Bill to the Home Ministry who will no doubt get it vetted by the Law Ministry who will then seek the views of Tribal Affairs who in turn will ask Social Welfare Ministry for their opinion. Who the Social Welfare will turn to is anybody's guess! Approval of VAB for JHADC and giving the KHADC VAB a status of a dead duck is bound to have serious repercussions. Realising this, the KHADC had come up with a Rule amendment of its Appointment and Succession of Chiefs and Headmen Act which the State Govt has promptly shot down. Sadly we're back to square one and our village governance system continues to remain legally invalid. The silly games politicians play and the cost it extracts from all of us!

So what do we do next? Two courses of action are available to us. Either we continue with our agitations, continue with our petty bickerings and continue with unplanned courses of action (yn sa ia peit pat). It's a typical response denoting 'Please don't bother us for we too don't know what we are doing'. OR drop all other superfluous issues and concentrate solely on how to legally empower our traditional bodies so as to make them the most viable institutions for delivery of socio-economic development to our people. There's no point flogging the dead horse called VAB. We should instead start engaging with our own Government, which we have not done so far. Engage with our elected MLAs so as to enable the State Legislative Assembly to pass a uniform Bill on grassroot governance for the whole state of Meghalaya. As of today that is the only sensible option we have left with us. Hopefully we will take it!

(Author is President of ICARE)

TO THE EDITOR

Traffic movement in Shillong - suggestions.

Editor,

I am submitting below a few suggestions for traffic movement in Shillong City.

1. Regarding traffic movement on the busy routes in Shillong particularly in Laitumkhrah area, it can perhaps be considered if speed limit of the vehicles could be restricted on this route, as there are schools and hospitals on both sides. Railing on footpaths would also be helpful for safety of the pedestrians.

2. Movement of heavy vehicles may not be allowed through the narrow roads, although the road from Fire Brigade-Nongrim Hills junctions towards Jynkieng is one way. This small road is mainly used as a short-cut to avoid the main road leading to the same destination. This is important to address as almost half of the road is used as parking place in the

absence of any parking space nearby.

3. During this school/college vacation, Traffic Branch may think of arranging re-painting the white lines of Zebra Crossing wherever done earlier as the painted lines have faded. The Traffic Branch may also consider identifying some more important junctions where Zebra Crossing could be painted for public convenience.

4. About embarkation/disembarkation from local taxi/tourist vehicles, passengers should be made aware that they are to embark/disembark from the left door of the vehicles. Distribution of leaflets to the general public may perhaps be useful.

5. All persons driving vehicles should be advised to adhere to the mandatory rules to wear seat belt/helmet whenever they drive, to avert any kind of accident, and to reduce fatalities in case of accidents.

6. While the sincerity and promptness of the personnel of Traffic Branch is appreciated, the manage-

ment of traffic flow will become all the more significant in view of the upcoming SAG Games being held in this city.

Yours etc.,
L Deb,
Shillong -3

New year revellers

Editor,

Kudos to Mr Salil Gwali for his brilliant letter titled "New Year for soul-searching" (ST January 5, 2016). Right from the moment of commencement of the New Year, deafening crackers reverberated across the midnight sky rendering horror in the vulnerable hearts of infant, children, senior citizens, the sick and the animal world. The party continues on the streets, in bars and night clubs with utmost hooliganism. With the arrival of dawn, picnic parties start their journey towards various destinations playing music in decibels that violate the permissible limit. A "majestic" start to the New Year indeed! However this

frenzied activity neither requires any concrete effort nor serves any real purpose. People with loads of money and time to waste can easily do it. Moreover, do the New Year revellers ever wonder a bit about the feeling of the unfortunate souls who lose their near and dear ones on that date or have to attend any to critical relatives in hospitals? The less said about the plight of the underprivileged the better. They have to deal with acute hunger and injustice year after year. The arrival of a New Year does not put any balm on their starved stomachs or uplift them from their utterly helpless situation.

The revellers absolutely miss the actual relevance of a new calendar. This is the right juncture to clean up their souls and engage in introspection. Barring few enlightened, exceptional persons, we see a lot of shortcomings and deficiencies invading our characters. So there is a lot of scope for improvement in our personalities. Instead of accusing others, why don't we stand in front of the mirror embed-

Rahul Gandhi remains a dilettante

By Amulya Ganguli

Like Narendra Modi misnaming the Mahatma as "Mohanlal", Rahul Gandhi, too, revealed the gaps in his knowledge of pre-1947 Indian history when he told the students of a management college in Mumbai that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi had ignored British protests against his walking into Parliament House in London in his dhoti.

The real story, however, is that when newsmen asked Gandhi whether he was embarrassed about his audience with the King in Buckingham Palace in such scanty attire, the Mahatma replied: "The King was wearing enough for both of us".

It is possible that to the post-partition generation - Modi was born in 1950 and Rahul in 1970 - only the broad outlines of the colonial era are known and not the anecdotes like Sarojini Naidu's digs at the still evolving Father of the Nation whom she called "Mickey Mouse" because of his large ears, or her comment that the Mahatma did not know "how much it costs the Congress to keep him poor".

However, the slip about Gandhi's visit to the Mother of Parliaments was not the only one which Rahul Gandhi made. His speech showed how his cocooned existence surrounded by "yes men" had restricted his knowledge not only of history but also of contemporary events. Since Rahul apparently accepts as gospel truth whatever his mother and her (and his) courtiers tell him about the period when his party was in power, he has no idea of how wide off the mark he can be.

His lack of knowledge has been compounded by the fact that he has never been questioned closely either by the courtiers or the media. On the rural employment scheme, for instance, he told the students that its critics had been wrong in saying that the scheme was wasteful. Yet, even the Congress's rural development minister Jairam Ramesh had asked the "beneficiaries" of the scheme towards the closing stages of the Manmohan Singh government, "How many ditches will you dig? How many ponds will you rebuild? How much forestation will you do? There has to be a limit".

Since no durable assets were built, the scheme was in reality no more than the handing out of doles. Although it did provide some relief to the very poor, their earnings was nowhere near enough for boosting the growth rate to 8/9 per cent, as the Congress vice-president claimed.

His description of Modi's Pakistan policy as ad hoc glosses over the Manmohan Singh government's faux pas at Sharm-el-Sheikh where the final statement virtually conceded Indian involvement in the Baluchistan insurgency. It took nationwide outrage and vociferous opposition

protests for the government to retreat. In contrast, Modi's Lahore initiative has been widely acclaimed.

Rahul can get away with such patently erroneous statements because he does not address formal press conference where he can be pinned down. Instead, he prefers brief interactions during which he depends on one-liners like suit-boot ki sarkar or that Modi runs a one-man show. The interactions are never long enough for anyone to ask that if Modi's is a one-man affair, what about the Congress which is run by one family.

What is obvious is that Rahul decided during the 57-day sabbatical that he will be a great deal more proactive and aggressive in his public performance. But, in essence, he remains a dilettante without any deep understanding of the political currents. His observations, therefore, continue to be as banal as before, a trait which has made historian Ramachandra Guha say that he is devoid of "brains", one of the most acidic comments ever made about a top-ranking Indian politician.

Before him, only his late uncle, Sanjay, the enfant terrible of Indian politics during the Emergency, was called "wayward" and "uneducated" by an elder relative, B.K. Nehru. Otherwise, even if the politicians are rarely held in high esteem because of their suspected sleaziness, they almost never appear to be out of depth in their profession.

Virtually all of them are seen to be well clued in not only to the various political exigencies, but also the nuances of ideology and the intricate factors behind the laws and other initiatives. Nearly all of them have what is known as peasant cunning, which was Stalin's assessment of the otherwise bumbling Khrushchev.

Rahul in this respect is something of a babe in the wood, who is able to carry on because of the extraordinary circumstance of his party having come to depend almost pathetically on his family. There is no one to point out to him inside the party that his convictions are not flawless. And to make the walls of his echo chamber totally soundproof, he has shied away from press meets after the disaster of a pre-general election TV interview during which he kept on glancing at someone else inside the studio, probably his more politically savvy sister, Priyanka.

There was a similar fiasco with a group of Bengaluru students when Rahul's attempts to mock Modi's Swachh Bharat and Make in India campaigns fell flat. Before the Mumbai meeting, therefore, his handlers tried to gauge the minds of the students. But, in the end, it didn't help their lord and master come out with flying colours. (IPA Service)

date and calendar only! And another pretext to party harder?

Unless we refresh our souls and take a sincere vow to bring real change in our individual lives the new year will never achieve its real significance.

Yours etc.,
Kajal Chatterjee,
Kolkata -114

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.

“Holding on to anger, resentment and hurt only gives you tense muscles, a headache and a sore jaw from clenching your teeth. Forgiveness gives you back the laughter and the lightness in your life.”

— Joan Lunden

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LVIII No. 160 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 2016

Caste a curse

THE death of a bright research scholar, Rohith Vemula in Hyderabad University has opened up a Pandora's box which all political parties are trying to make political capital from. Vemula was a Dalit and going through his Facebook Page we are privy to his thoughts. He vehemently deplored the caste system and saw it as a prison from where individuals like him can never escape. His suicide note is a narrative of pessimism and utter disgust with what he has been subject to within the university campus, including the rustication and social ostracism unleashed by the University Administration against him and four others, all of whom are actively involved with the Ambedkar Students' Association (ASA).

Caste has become the single biggest cause for social disorder in this country. How can there be equal growth and progress when huge chunks of the population are condemned to face the brutal fate of belonging to the caste of untouchables. Dalits face discrimination within institutions of learning and at the work place. The so-called high castes such as the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaisyas will not eat or drink from the hands of a Dalit. The Dalits who fall under the Scheduled Castes category and the tribals (including those from North East India) who are listed as Scheduled Tribes have been classed as backward because of their socio-economic disadvantages. There are seats reserved for them in educational institutions and in employment. This is not taken kindly by the other castes who feel they are cheated of their space in the scheme of things.

The Dalits and tribals are also amongst the poorest. There is enough research that informs us that equal societies almost always do better on human development indices than unequal ones. Scandinavian countries are way ahead of most others because the virus of racism and non-egalitarianism has not afflicted them. India is fighting a losing battle with the caste system which seems near impossible to eradicate. On the contrary caste identities seem to have further hardened. It will take a radical transformation of mindsets, rather than government action, to make caste irrelevant in India. The sooner that happens the better for this country!

LOOKING BACK

January 6, 1989

Khasi limestone quarrying

A call attention motion on quarrying by Bangladesh inside Meghalaya territory brought out certain facts in the State Assembly which are revealing. The State Geology and Mining Minister's statement in the debate, contradictions in many vital respects. In the earlier part of the statement he asserted that Bangladesh had in fact encroached official agreement and successive meetings, Bangladesh had neither stopped blasting nor taken any step to restrict limestone mining within the prescribed zone of their country. In a later part, of the statement, the Minister quoted the Ministry of External Affairs being of opinion that the meeting between the Indian Expert delegation and their Bangladesh counterpart on the issue ended without any agreement.

That the Meghalaya government has been alive to the problem posed by unrestricted quarrying for quite some time now would be clear from the fact that it was at the Centre set up a joint Indo Bangladesh Expert Committee to study the adverse effect of quarrying. The first meeting of this

committee could however be held in Shillong only in June last year and the second in Dhaka after lapse of several months more the part of New Delhi to have not been able to inject a degree of urgency into the conduct of such a vital committee, the State government's own part in this dilly dalling being that it obviously did not keep on reminding the Centre of this unnecessary delay. The recorded notes of the deliberations of the joint committee were submitted to the External Affairs Ministry immediately after the second meeting. But the fact that the Indian team had to send a separate note to the Ministry suggests that there was no agreement as stated above and the position in accepted as such by both New Delhi and Shillong.

What next is the question more vital to India, and Meghalaya in particularly than to Dhaka. The geological formation of the quarry fields on the Indo Bangladesh border in the Khasi Hills sector is such that unbridled quarrying is bound to affect the land mass on the Indian side disturbing the hill tops rather than the base area, a part of which falls in the Bangladesh part of series of continuous and compact limestone block.

The kur and religion among the Khasis

By Fabian Lyngdoh

since he cannot meet his ancestral mother in the spiritual world in the house of God (Ka Niam Khasi, Reprint: 2013, p. 168).

David Roy wrote that in their life, the Khasis pacified their deceased ancestors: u suidnia, ka iawbei, and u thawlang by means of offerings (Khasi Religion', Ka Syngkhong Jingtip, Vol.II No. 4, 1939). In reality the Khasis never worshipped the spirits of ancestors, but reverently respected them as elders, Gurus or Saints, on whose intercession they relied upon. H. O. Mawrie one of the great pillars of ka Seng Khasi wrote that the Khasis established religion in each clan, and the clan keeps religion in the care of the Godhead (Ka Blei), the Ancestress (ka iawbei), the Ancestor (thawlang) and the Ancestral Uncle (u suidnia). These four comprise 'ka Dawing' (the family cause). When the Ka Blei, Ka iawbei, U Thawlang and U Suidnia are all satisfied with the clan or family, no devil or evil spirit or any Dawlum (external cause) can shake or put the clan in trouble.

The Khasis trust the Dawing and stands steadfast by it and when they realise that they are without blemish before ka Dawing they never allow their hearts to be troubled. A Khasi has no church, house or temple to worship God whereas each and every clan has its own iingseng iingkhathduh (the residence of the youngest in the lineage of each clan) where all necessary religious rites and ceremonies of religion are performed with its own ancestress, ancestor and ancestral uncle (Ka Pyrkhat u Khasi (Reprint: 2000, pp.15-17).

Mr. J.K. Tariang the ex-president of the Seng Khasi confirmed that according to the Khasi traditional belief the completion of the rituals of interring the bones of the dead members in the main clan ossuary or 'thep mawbah' was so essential that the elders of old had taken upon themselves the authority to decree that the spirit of the deceased persons would not reach the abode of God unless the ceremony was performed and completed.

Mr. Tariang explained that the ceremony of 'ka thep mawbah' has become very difficult and expensive. So, many rites, rituals and ceremonies have been modified and even discarded to suit the needs of the times and the prevailing circumstances, by following the procedure of obtaining a sanction from God to do so, by means of divination. (The Philosophy and Essence of Niam Khasi, 2012: pp.168-169).

Dr. Helen Giri has written that the religious rites and ceremonies of a kur must be performed within the ambit of the kur and cannot be performed by another kur. Ka lawbei (primeval ancestress) is the goddess of the clan and the giver of covenants. It is the ancestress who has to take care of the living and the dead belonging to her kur under the protection of u Suidnia (eldest ancestral maternal uncle of the clan). Mr Morning Star Sumer reminded all the Khasis (including Synteng/Pnar) that the Niam Khasi is known as the Niam-kur (Clan Religion) which means that every kur (clan) has its own mores for governance of the kur: as is known and acknowledged by the members of the Khasi-Pnar/Khasi-Synteng community themselves" (ST, January 12, 2015). So it is beyond doubt that every man and woman in the traditional Khasi kur system belongs to the religion of his or her kur, and to belong to the same kur, in Khasi concept also implies to belong to the same religious cult.

There is no single Khasi religion with common godheads for the whole tribe, and in which all the Khasis are the members of. Among the Khasis there are no common prophets like Mohammed in Islam, or Buddha in Buddhism and no common Godheads like Jesus in Christianity, or like Shiva, Vishnu, Kali, Durga etc. in Hinduism. Community religions are different from one raid or hima to the other, and have nothing to do with the eternal life of the soul, but are concerned purely with temporal affairs of the polity, the economy and other societal needs. According to Dr. Homiwell Lyngdoh, Ka Pomblang

Nongkrem is the religious sacrifice to ka iawbei, u Suidnia, u Thawlang and ki Phan ki Kyrpad of the Jait Syiem Shillong. Formerly it was known as ka 'Niam ki Syiem'. In community religions, the devotees are only the basan and bakhrav clans of the raid or hima concerned; all the others are only spectators, audience and participants in the festival only, but not in the religion.

There is nothing wrong, but rather, it is a matter of right to fight for legitimate rights. If there is sufficient grounds in the provisions of the Indian Constitution, the believers and upholders of the Niam Khasi-Niamtre have every right to claim minority status in Meghalaya. But as Bah Morning Star Sumer said that 'since the Khasi religion is a Niam-kur, every clan which has not embraced other religions is a minority group,' a fresh question emerges: "How many clans are there in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills which are still practicing the clan religion and have not embraced other religions? In the past, the believers of indigenous faith were formally grouped and identified according to the clans.

The simple fact is that today the believers of indigenous faith can no more be grouped according to clans because about 70 per cent of the members of all clans have embraced other religions though clan relationship is still maintained between the converted and unconverted. The clan has lost its traditional characteristics as a religious institution, as an independent economy, as political unit in the raid or hima, and as the basic member of society. Traditional religious rituals are no longer observed, and the institution of the iingkhathduh as the centre of the Khasi clan religion has lost its true meaning. The economic well-being of the Khasi families today no longer depends on the kur economy, but on the individual efforts or fortune of the nuclear family. The uncle loses his role and status as the priest; hence his controlling authority over the kur and the families has become ineffective. The believers of Khasi indigenous faith need a new formal institution by which they can be legally identified.

WEF Annual Meeting: Fourth Industrial Revolution

By Limabenla Jamir

The 46th World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, Davos 2016 begins today at Davos-Klosters, Switzerland. The summit will bring together 40 heads of state and government, 300 public figures, and over 2500 business leaders, policy makers, social entrepreneurs, Young Global Leaders and Global Shapers, representatives from International Organizations and thought leaders from across the globe with the goal to strategize and achieve the objective of the World Economic Forum and avoid the dangers of digital age. The World Economic Forum is the world's foremost multi-stakeholder community with the mission 'to improve the state of the world.'

The theme for this year's conference is, 'Mastering the Fourth Industrial Revolution'. This fourth Industrial Revolution refers to ongoing transformation of our society by the advances in the abundant digital technologies, artificial intelligence, autonomous vehicles, 3-D Printing, nanotechnology, robotics, biotechnology, and other areas of science. Professor Schwab, the Founder of the World Economic Forum, in his recently published book, "The fourth Industrial Revolution" argues, this revolution is disrupting every industry in every country and it's time for humanity to buckle up and steer it in the right direction. He expresses his concern about how decision-makers are too often caught in traditional, undeviating (non disruptive) thinking or too absorbed by immediate concerns to think strategically about the forces of innovation shaping our future. This year's meeting will address these challenges and how the advancements, intersections and promises can benefit humankind and positively affect every industry and society.

At the Davos 2016, a noteworthy attendance in the discussions is the presence of Global Shapers. 50 Shapers are at the event representing the voice of the youth and to shape the agenda across national, regional and global issues. There are 5000 shapers worldwide across 450 cities. Shapers are young individuals between the

ages of 20- 30 years of age from different walks of life with great potential for future leadership roles in society. The Global Shapers Community created by the World Economic Forum provides an opportunity for young leaders across the world to interact with global, industry and agenda leaders. The WEF has initiated three hubs in North East India, Kohima hub, Imphal hub and Shillong hub to provide young people the opportunity to contribute to the discussions and ensure that all communities have the chance to move issues affecting them forward locally through the opportunities provided by the different WEF Forum meetings.

The forum has curated over 300 debate sessions for major big areas of concern: inequality, security and identity. The four days debate will range from focus on the rise of robots, the relentless rise of automation and even more intelligent machines and seek to address Global Security Issues keeping in mind the increased terrorist attacks and refugee crisis and migration. The apparent worry of Chinese economy and the crude oil prices falling below \$30 a barrel will be discussed at length and its impact on the economies around the world. Though the success of the Paris Climate deal 2015 is divided, the meeting at Davos 2016 seeks to build upon the existing deal. The attendees face a steadily divided world with significant wealth gaps widening at a pace faster than we could imagine. There is an unexpected increase in a widening trust gap between the population and the political leaders and these are some of the biggest challenges to be addressed at the Annual World Economic Forum 2016 from 20th- 23rd January.

120 sessions will be live-streamed to a global audience and can be participated through Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Google+. Discussions and questions are welcome to the Global Shapers through #ShapingDavos.

(The author is Global Shaper, World Economic Forum)

TO THE EDITOR

Are we drinking poison?

Editor,
If newspaper reports are to be believed that PHE supplied water is contaminated and acidic then people are consuming poison rather than safe water. While the KHNAM had highlighted the matter in the public domain the Government which is responsible for public welfare has a public responsibility to investigate the matter thoroughly. Unfortunately both are happy to engage in verbal duels. But let us treat these reports at face-value since the test results from Pasteur Institute (a Government institution), as reported in newspapers have confirmed that PHE water has low pH content and is therefore acidic. Why should we then expect any further explanation from a scam-packed PHE department? A clearer picture will emerge and help ascertain the reality if another round of tests are done. Ironically the Health Minister does not seem to believe in facts but speaks like a bureaucrat, rather forgetting that as a public servant he has to fulfil his obligation as a representative. Perhaps he should learn to empathise with the common man.

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

Desirability of an Appeal

Editor,
Sometimes the truth has to be said but it might not be to our liking. Reactions to the recent Division Bench ruling of the Meghalaya High Court on need for legislative measures to empower traditional bodies, is a case in point. There is a rising hysterical demand for an immediate appeal to the Supreme Court to strike down the HC ruling. But will the Supreme Court oblige? Wishful thinking needs to be replaced by cold hard facts of life. Firstly, there is no guarantee that the Supreme Court will rule in favour of the appellants. Secondly, it could even uphold the order of the HC Division Bench and also add more stringent measures of its own. Thirdly, we would then have reached the end of the road as there would be no more space for further appeal. So is an appeal the only option we have. Is it the only way out?

The arguments for an appeal appear to be based the belief that we have the 6th Schedule to defend us, so the SC is bound to rule in our favour. Fact of the matter is the Constitution is a bye product of its own Preamble which clearly states that Justice- social, economic and political for

ALL citizens is its prime objective and upholding the Fundamental Rights, Human Rights and Rights of a citizen are the core essence of the Constitution. The 6th Schedule in reality is just an appendage that seeks to install protective administration to tribal areas and the tribes therein. The 6th Schedule can therefore never override the Constitution. We therefore need to be clear as to what we are going to appeal against. We need to be certain that the outcome of any appeal should never be against our own interests.

The crux of the matter sprang from the single bench ruling of the Meghalaya HC as on 14th Dec 2014 that there needs to be Legislation on the powers and functions of the Rangbah Shnong (RS). A very simple order requiring simple legislation on grassroots governance. Unfortunately we as a state, our leaders/representatives both political and traditional, messed up the issue. Instead of uniting and strategising on the best way forward, we allowed divisive politics and institutional squabbling (State vs ADC) to hijack the issue. Instead of steps to empower and modernise our Dorbars, we opted on politicising the issue. We squeezed it for the maximum publicity it could give. We neglected the urgent and dire need for intro-

ducing a good grassroots governance system. Instead retaining the status quo and avoiding inevitable change became the objective. So we went in for a division bench appeal. It bombed! Look where it has landed us and tragically the call today is for a repeat of the same folly all over again.

If the call is for preservation of tradition and simultaneous empowerment of our grassroots governance system, why should we put all our eggs in one appeal basket? Why can't we have simultaneous alternate options? It might not be political sense but it is common sense. Our true needs can only be addressed by ourselves. Our real need is for a village governance system that (a) operates within the fundamental parameters of the Constitution. Anything else will be struck down by a court of law (b) A viable village governance system to serve the needs of today not of yesterday. (c) While so doing, to retain as far as possible the best flavour of our traditions. (d) As a state we need a uniform governance system by the state, for all citizens. Tradition will serve as the support base for such a system rather than the obstacle it is today. Based on the above the cry for an appeal to the Supreme Court needs a rethink. Question is, why can't we simply come up with our own State Act? The ball is in the court of our

MLAs. Do they have the guts to play ball?

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

Problem of religion

Editor,
In a very relevant letter, 'Of Pseudo Liberals' (ST, January 12, 2016), Mr. Kajal Chatterjee has, rightly, said that 'rabid orthodox pseudo-nationalists' cannot project 'humanitarian harmony-personified Swami Vivekananda' as one of their icons. In fact, if we realise Swami Vivekananda's teaching, we will find that his is diametrically opposite of any orthodox religion.

Now, let us recall the incident when Swami Vivekananda was in Kashmir in autumn of 1898. He prayed to a poor Muslim boatman for allowing his four year old girl to be worshipped by Swamiji himself. The boatman was overwhelmed. He felt as if God was asking him through Swamiji and he readily agreed. Swami Vivekananda worshipped the girl as Goddess Uma (Durga) on Mahasaptami day during Durga puja. Then he knelt down to touch the feet of a poor Kashmiri Muslim girl. With this singular act he defied divisions of religion, race, caste, creed, occupation, gender, generation and money to hoist the flag of universal human-hood. Actu-

ally, Swami Vivekananda did a Sri Ramkrishna who himself practiced Islam, Christianity and other religions to live his words- 'many opinions, many paths'.

They hammered hard at the wall of religion because they wanted to make us realise the problem of religion. All religions carry with them inherent problems of confining themselves to mechanical rituals and thus obstructing the spiritual path of realising the One. Moreover, religion creates divisions and hatred among us. Sri Aurobindo in 'Letters on Yoga' said, "The religious life may be the first approach to the spiritual, but very often it is only a turning about in a round of rites, ceremonies and practices or set ideas and forms without any issue". The Mother said, "God gives Himself to His whole creation; no one religion holds the monopoly of His Grace".

Oceans of human blood could have been saved had we realised the limitation of religions. It is a pity that the juggernaut of religious prejudices is still marching forward in this twenty first century. Thus, we need more and more discourses on the teachings of those great souls for taking us, in the words of Tagore, to 'Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit'.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

"They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself."

--- Andy Warhol

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LVIII No. 161 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JANUARY 22, 2016

Iran and sanctions

ECONOMIC sanctions slapped on Iran because of its nuclear programme have been lifted as it was supposed to comply with the unclear deal in July. But Washington has imposed fresh sanctions over its nuclear missile programme. US has only suspended, not lifted sanctions. Its non-nuclear sanctions continue preventing American citizens and firms from doing business with Iran. It has led other countries to be hesitant about investment. Nevertheless, Iran is back in business ready to increase production and export of oil, access to capital and investments and utilise its 100 billion dollars of its assets now unlocked. Iran's isolation has so far been a major factor in West Asia thwarting moves to tackle the civil war in Syria and ISIS atrocities.

Iran's President, Hassan Rouhani has been doing its best to be close to US President Obama but its ordeal is not over. Iran is suffering from high inflation, unemployment, corruption and economic mismanagement. The low price of its oil may reduce gains from increasing sales. Rouhani has enemies at home and Iran's entry into the oil market has antagonised oil-rich countries like Saudi Arabia. The Shia-Sunni divide has botched a Saudi proposal or an alliance against the ISIS. India is interested in Iran coming in from the cold as the latter is the second largest supplier of oil. Iran is also an attractive investment destination for India. India must not allow China and Japan to get ahead of it in the foray into Iran.

LOOKING BACK

January 7, 1989

Afternoon TV shows from January 12

With Doordarshan's announcement about commencement of the long awaited afternoon transmission from Republic Day the ultimate aim for a full day transmission has drawn closer to its goal.

The afternoon telecast will be from 1345 hrs to 1445 hrs, immediately after the University Grants Commission's educational telecast, from Monday to Friday, the transmission will have programmes for senior citizens, housewives, children and handicapped persons.

This means that Doordarshan will now have afternoon transmission throughout the week since programme are already being telecast on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

A Doordarshan spokesman told UNI that some women's programmes presently being telecast in the evening will be changed in view of the afternoon transmission. There is however, no proposal to change the children's programmes.

The spokesman said that the Bombay Kendra of Doordarshan will be responsible for the afternoon transmissions.

This is part of an effort to devolve responsibility to different kendras, since the Delhi Kendra is in charge of the breakfast transmission.

Doordarshan has already gone in for several changes during the past one month in an effort to make the programmes more interesting.

The duration of the breakfast transmission has been increased by almost half an hour and now includes more serials. The duration of the regional news telecasts in the evening has been increased from ten to fifteen minutes.

An interesting change in the second channel is the introduction of "Chitra geet" which is a collection of only old film songs of the forties and the fifties, unlike the "Chitrachar" or breakfast TV's "Rangoli."

Some new programmes in-

duced include, "The world this week". Employment news, the additional film on Thursdays, and making fixed point charts for its programmes, whereby each day has been assigned a certain type of serial.

Bhagwati appointed first press ombudsman Former Chief Justice of India Mr. P.N. Bhagwati today became the first press ombudsman in the country.

The Times of India announced his appointment today as part of its sesquicentennial anniversary.

Bennett Coleman and Company chairman Mr. Ashok Jain said the ombudsman appointment was being made for greater accountability on the part of the all national institutions including the fourth estate.

Following his appointment, Mr. Justice Bhagwati told newsmen that his work would be confined to redressal of Public grievances against inaccurate reporting contrary to journalistic ethics. It would not cover comment and editorializing unless it was unfair.

Mr. Bhagwati said the post of ombudsman was not meant to be an alternative to the Press Council. He said all grievances could not be referred to the Council.

An aggrieved person could complain to the ombudsman with a moral understanding that his verdict would be accepted. But the aggrieved party could then go to the Council if it was not satisfied with the verdict of the ombudsman. The ombudsman may on his own refer some matter to the Council.

The choice, Mr. Bhagwati said had been left to a party to decide if it wanted not go to the ombudsman or to the Council.

What are we celebrating on Meghalaya Day?

By Patricia Mukhim

The inability to take stock of things is what allows the status quo to continue. Meghalaya Day should have been about stock-taking; about where we were in 1972 and where we are today. When we started off there would have been just a few landless households among the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos. We were warned during the statehood struggle that land is being alienated to non-tribals, mainly Assamese and Bengali settlers. That once we get our own state the journey to Utopia would begin. Alas! Today hard data tells us that 76 % of our own tribal people are landless. This should cause social disquiet for a society that started out as 'egalitarian.' We use words without paying attention to their etymology. Egalitarianism means having equal rights regardless of social, economic or other distinctions such as income, race or religious or political beliefs. Is Khasi society egalitarian?

One of the important characteristics of being tribal is the absence of class hegemony in society. Is that what we are today? It is important therefore to go back to the origin of Khasi society and see how it was structured. An egalitarian society cannot have a social arrangement where a single clan enjoys hegemony as the ruling clan although initially the jait 'Syiem' had a different connotation. Syiem does not translate to king. This is a western notion which the British rulers conferred on a chieftain who was appointed by the people to keep the peace in a conglomerate of Raids called the Hima. Being people who readily imbibe anything western unquestioningly the Syiems especially in recent memory have begun to act as monarchs. And they claim that as a part of tradition.

Onderson Mawrie's book, "Ka Pyrkhat U Khasi" (Khasi Philosophy) is perhaps one of the best narratives about the Khasis and their worldview or rather what that worldview should be. Needless to say that worldview has been diluted over the centuries. Mawrie says earlier there were only villages and the head of the village is called a Tymmen Shnong or Rangbah Shnong. Tymmen means old and Rangbah is an adult and Shnong is a village. When the number of shnongs increased people decided to club them together into a Raid. The Syiem according to Mawrie is a recent adaptation. When the Khasis saw that the non-tribals neighbours were ruled by a Raja who asserted domi-

nance and protected the territories of his people and also kept the law and order within that territory, they decided to vest authority on a Syiem. However, Mawrie reiterates that the foundation of Khasi rule and authority rests with the people and not with the Syiem the Sordar/Dolloi or the Rangbah/Tymmen Shnong. He says it is the people who take ultimate decisions on key issues because the Khasis were very clear about the powers and responsibilities and worth of the Syiem and that of the polity. (Ha ka sain hima ka sain sima u Khasi u tip kumno ban buh dor ia u Syiem bad ban buh dor ia ka bor u paidbah)

It is precisely to curb the powers of the Syiem that the myntris, lyngskors, basans, lyngdohs and other office bearers from other clans were appointed. These appointees are mainly from clans that have superiority of numbers and have founded Raids and Himas. The above-named are to work alongside the Syiem in the task of administration over the hima (ban pyniaid ia ka hima) to govern (ha ka synshar) and in all other areas related to rule of law and politics (ha kiwei kiwei ki kam kiba iadei bad ka sain hima bad ka jingpyniaid pyrthei). I am unsure if we have the exact English interpretation for the words sain hima and jingpyniaid pyrthei) The word pyrthei could mean the larger world outside of the Khasi domain and how the Khasis would interface with them. These Khasi administrators have been given the title 'Ki Bakhrav.' Literally translated the word bakhrav in Khasi means noble or aristocratic. But Mawrie underlines that for the Khasis this does not mean that the above-named clans were superior to other Khasi clans. It was only to denote that they had higher responsibilities. The Syiem and the Bakhrav are subservient to the Dorbar Hima which is the foundation of Khasi polity and which actually includes every person under the Hima.

We have come a long way from this tradition because today the Khasi citizen (ki khun ki hajar) actually is not privy to many of the decisions taken by the Syiem and his associates. The Dorbar Hima today does not consult the people of the Hima. The process of societal consultation has broken down hence people are alienated from their institutions. It is

a different matter that whenever there is a crisis at hand people are told that they should come out in support of their traditional institutions (meaning those who head them) or else they will become slaves in their homeland (kin sa kylla mraw ha ka ri lajong). The concept of slave (mraw) in Khasi suggests utter powerlessness. Any Khasi with no land to call her own is the most powerless citizen of her Hima. How did she lose this right over a single plot on which to build a home for herself and her family? Who has deprived of this land in the village of her origin and where her ancestors took birth? Do we have answers to these questions today? Do the disempowered have the voice to ask these searching questions?

Today Khasi society is not a community comprising a compact, homogeneous social group with similar aspirations, needs and of a single social class. It is a society divided by religion, wealth, status, occupation, politics and other socially and economically constructed divisions. Social scientists class a community by bringing together a number of elements such as solidarity, commitment, mutuality and trust. The question to ask is whether these elements exist in Khasi society to make us a community.

Sociologist Phile Bartle says, "Community is a 'sociological construct' involving a set of interactions or human behaviours that have meaning and expectations between its members. All actions are based on shared expectations, values, beliefs and meanings between individuals. We cannot assume that a community is a harmonious unity. It is full of factions, struggles and conflicts, based upon differences in gender, religion, access to wealth, ethnicity, class, educational level, income, ownership of capital, language and many other factors.

Hence the Khasi society cannot delude itself into believing that it is still a compact and coherent community. 'Community workers' who approach their clients from that perspective would get wrong outcomes. In a village there are different communities based on several indicators. While we can bring together least disparate groups and work with them, sometimes even those disparities are irreconcilable. Religion has been a great divisive factor in Khasi so-

ciety. This has now come to the fore. Perhaps sharp ideological or theological viewpoints are now clashing and we can assume that politics has played its ugly role here as well. But this is nothing new. Appeals for votes along religious lines, has happened, often overtly. This was bound to create animosities in a society that deludes itself to be a community of those who 'think alike.' This is the great deception by ourselves to ourselves.

Khasi society today faces challenges from all directions. It has failed to integrate itself into the modern constitutional-legal framework of the Indian state. Some of those who claim to be leaders mislead instead of leading people to correctly understand the present demands of a modern state. This is evident from the clarion call given by the UDP supremo Bindo Lanong who tells the Rangbah Shnong that they should challenge the High Court ruling asking the State Government to come up with a legislative framework within which the Rangbah Shnong are to function. Are we saying here that the State Government is not a legal authority? And why are we misleading people by suggesting that the Sixth Schedule is far more powerful than the Indian Constitution? Can an instrument created by the Constitution override its authority?

We are in the horns of a dilemma but the only instrument used by self-styled leaders of our society is FEAR. Normally fear is an emotion directed at a specific threat but anxiety is an unfocused, corrosive uneasiness. This anxiety induces a sense that the basic system of authority are not working. The ploy nearly always is to pull in the tribal walls and create distrust of the outsider. In this case even the state government is now seen as the outsider while the District Councils are seen as the custodians of our rights and privileges. In this larger debate about preserving (?) tradition we forget that the Councils have not been able to safeguard our access to land, to water and other assets that were ours and that the same Councils signed away our rights to give forest land to rich mine owners. If land is no longer with the people then what is the use of any other right?

These are issues we should be talking about on Meghalaya Day and not celebrating some obscure, amorphous largely glorified achievements. The truth is we have achieved nothing if the poor have become poorer, and now, landless.

All eyes on Amit Shah's second term Modi's most trusted man at BJP's helm

By Kalyani Shankar

The 51-year-old BJP chief Amit Shah is all set to get a second term. The party's parent organisation RSS also seems to have given the nod and the announcement is expected very soon as Amit Shah completes his present term on January 23. His new term ends in January 2019, the year of the next Lok Sabha polls.

Amit Shah was given credit for the 2014 Lok Sabha victory and the subsequent Assembly elections to Haryana, Jharkhand and Maharashtra. He was touted as the man of strategy until his decline began when the BJP lost the Delhi Assembly polls in February 2015 and Bihar in November. The fact that he is getting a second term shows that his mixed report card did not affect his chances of continuity. Amit Shah is still the most trusted man of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and as long as he has this confidence nobody can touch him. IN any case he is only completing the rest of the term of Rajnath Singh and has not had a full term.

What does a second term mean to Amit Shah? It is clear that with the full backing of the PM as well as the RSS even the murmurs within the party will die down once he is declared elected. The past 18 months since he took over, he has run the party in his own way while some in the party felt that he was high handed. He managed to sideline the old guard including L.K. Advani, Dr Murli Manohar Joshi and Yashwant Sinha but was unable to check the discordant voices of Shatrughan Sinha and Kirti Azad.

Secondly, it signals the continuity which might be good for the organisation. The challenges before Shah in his second term are formidable and tougher than his first term. While he continues to enjoy the support of key members including the Prime Minister, there is need for Shah to reinvent himself and change his style of functioning. He may have to be more flexible and more tactical than he was before and mobilise support from all sides.

Secondly, the BJP is at a disadvantage in seven states which go to polls this year and next year. His immediate test is huge with five states including West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry going for polls in the summer. UP and Punjab go to polls in 2017. The Congress is ruling in Assam and Kerala while Trinamool Congress is ruling in West Bengal, AIADMK in Tamil Nadu and the NDA ally AINR Congress in Puducherry. The BJP is not a big player in any of these states. It is trying

to expand in West Bengal. The party will be happy if it can get a few more seats in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. In Assam there is a possibility of doing well with a winning coalition. So this is not going to be a super year for the BJP and the party should be happy if it can gain some bonus seats. But the year 2017 is crucial for U.P. and Punjab goes to polls. The preparations have to begin in 2016. After all the 2014 success was mainly due to its stellar performance in UP and Bihar. In UP the BJP won a whopping 73 seats out of 80 in 2014 but since then lost ground in almost every poll from the local bodies to by elections. Amit Shah may have to re-work his strategies but the challenge is how far he will go and to what extent he would compromise.

Thirdly and more importantly it also depends on how much he keeps the trust of Modi in the new term. So far there is no doubt that he is the most trusted man, which is evident from the way Modi insisted on getting him a second term.

Fourthly, will the Modi-Shah duo change their attitude to the old guard and restart dialogue with them or seek their guidance and if so to what extent. There is no doubt that the old guard tried their best through the back channels with the RSS to put a spoke on Amit Shah's continuance but did not succeed.

Fifthly, what kind of strategy will the BJP adopt in the coming years? Is it going to be a more liberal or a hard line or a combination of both? Uttar Pradesh is critical for the BJP and the party seems to be returning to the Ram temple issue eyeing the 2017 state assembly poll. From April 15 the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) is starting a Ram Mahotsav in which VHP and Sangh activists are expected to visit 1.25 lakh villages with statues of Lord Ram.

Above all, Shah has to choose his new team which will be able to create confidence in the party and the cadre. This will be his immediate test. So far, he had succeeded in his membership drive and made the BJP overtake the Congress emerging as the single largest party in the world. His organisational skills have come in for praise. Amit Shah has to make sure that his image of a "doer" continues in his second term. If the BJP wants to come back in 2019, preparations have to begin from now on. The skills lie in overcoming obstacles and for this the Modi-Shah duo need not only a good strategy but also luck. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Where is justice here?

Editor,

Following the Apex Court hearing on the minority status to Sikhs in Punjab and a reference to Meghalaya by asking "Can Christians who are majority in the states of Meghalaya and Nagaland be also treated as a minority?" the Meghalaya State Law Department promptly issued an official statement that Christians do not enjoy minority status in Meghalaya (ST 21 Jan 2015). The statement is a half-truth and misleading. True, that Christians in the State are not given minority certificates but this does not imply that Christians do not enjoy the minority status and all the benefits of welfare schemes.

During the year 2014-15, the Ministry of Minority Affairs, GoI sanctioned Rupees 4.67 crore to the Meghalaya Government for implementation of the Scheme of Pre-Matric scholarship to students belong-

ing to minority communities notified under Section 2(c) of the National Commission of Minority Act. 1992. The community-wise physical allocation (numbers of student beneficiaries) are 25,234 (Christian), 1,536 (Muslims), 48(Sikhs), 73(Buddhists), 12(Jains) and 13 (Parsis). In this regard, the Meghalaya Government had ignored the guidelines for implementation of the Prime Minister's New 15 Point Programme for Welfare of Minorities. Point 7 (b) states, "In States, where one of the minority communities notified under Section 2(c) of the National Commission of Minority Act. 1992 is, in fact in majority, the earmarking of physical/financial targets under different schemes will be only for the other notified minorities. These states are Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland and the Union Territory of Lakshadweep". Is it not

true that Christians are the majority (74.59 percent) among the minority communities in Meghalaya?

We expect the Meghalaya Government to be fair and just in implementing such schemes.

Yours etc.,

Marbianglang Rymbai Shillong-2

Concern for MCCL

Editor,

Meghalaya is a hill state with very few industries. Small scale industries exist like cement industry, beverage industry etc. One industry which is well known by other states and neighbouring countries like Bangladesh is the Mawmluh Cherra Cement Limited (MCCL). The factory is located in the Mawmluh, which is around 60 Kms from Shillong city.

MCCL was started on 20 May 1955. It is classified as State Government Company and is registered at Registrar of Companies, Shillong.

The company is at present engaged in the modernization process and it is hoped that once the process is over, the Company will be able to withstand future market competition and be able to grow from strength to strength. The present earnings of the company lies in its superior quality cement as compared with other brands available in the market. The superior quality of MCCL cement and its premier brand images acquired through years of production is a big advantage to the company in marketing its products. This can be substantiated from the fact that any potential customer especially builders prefer MCCL cements than any other brand available in the market.

Normally the factors that make companies fail are (1) Lack of decision making (2). Communication gap between different departments (3) Funds crunch or bankruptcy (4) Inefficient utilization of resources (5) Pressure

groups (6) Pursuit of individual goals rather than collective goals

The manufacturing process adopted by the Company is through a wet process where the cost of production is very high as compared with dry process. Therefore there is a pricing disadvantage as compared with other companies. Coal shortage has been a burden to the company as the NGT imposed sudden restrictions to coal mining. This led to the stoppage of the production unit.

I had gone through some companies like Parle Company & Relaxo Company in Haryana. They established a policy of 6sigma which defines that the production should always be of a good quality standard and also to add more the policy of MBO focusing on the objectives of the Company, TQM providing a Standard Quality Maintenance. Here the crucial factor I want to stress upon is the Strong Strategic Decision Making policy not a Rule/ Rules are a part

of the planning process and are fixed (not flexible) by the top Authority, and focusing on those areas where MCCL fails. Being a Government undertaking it should rather take top priority for the growth and expansion of the Company. MCCL is a government undertaking therefore the decision making process involves bureaucrats as well as politicians at different levels. In view of this there is a lacuna in decision making which affect the day to day work of the Company especially in matters that require urgent attention and action.

Therefore as a concerned citizen, I wish to express my viewpoint that the dry process should be reverted to as soon as possible to enter the market with the potential of capturing the entire market in the State. Hence Strategic Decision Making Policy is to be made mandatory by the concerned authority.

Yours etc.,
Alert Archie Rymbai Shillong-14

"We did not change as we grew older; we just became more clearly ourselves."

--- Lynn Hall

The Shillong Times

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Campus attack

WHILE Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is doing his best to wipe his slate about the attack on Pathankot, there has been an outrage inside his country. With the Taliban in West Pakistan continually on the rampage, the terror attacks at Bacha Khan University at Charsadda the northwest of the country were nothing unprecedented. One recalls the massacre of 144 children at the Peshawar Army Public School in Dec 2014. It seems that terrorists gnawing at the civilian government in Islamabad are specially targeting schools and colleges which show their backward obscurantism which opposes education dear to modernisation and empowerment. Even Nobel-laureate Malala Yousafzai who championed education for girls in the Swat Valley under Taliban occupation was the target for Taliban bullets.

The terror strike at Bacha Khan University was relatively ineffective. But that does not diminish the menace. The Pakistan government should go all out to protect educational institution from terrorist savagery. Not only a better future for students is threatened, this tarnishes Pakistan's global image. The Pakistan Army should also play ball. The future of the younger generation should not be at stake for whatever links it may have with terrorists. Imran Khan who has been ambivalent on the Pakistan-Taliban issue should not allow its westernised outlook to be vitiated on this issue. President Pranab Mukherjee and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India have roundly condemned the attack at Bacha Khan University. It strikes an emotional chord in India as the University is named after Abdul Ghaffar Khan, respected in India as the Frontier Gandhi.

LOOKING BACK

January 7, 1989

Opposition grill ministers

Opposition grilled the Industries Minister, Dr. F A Khonglam and the Excise Minister, Mr Indro Pariat, on the alleged deals of nepotism and favouritism made by them.

During question hour the members raised a posse of questions regarding the sale of a Mark-4 Ambassador car belonging to the MIDC. The Minister told the House that he himself was the purchaser of the car. The Board of Directors of the MIDC had fixed the price at Rs. 21,965.40 paise according to its book value.

Giving reasons for disposing of the vehicle without going through the usual process of condemnation, the Minister said "the car was not condemned, but it was disposed of to avoid extra expenditure on its maintenance, as the present Chairman of the MIDC prefers to use his own car."

Minister was in for more questioning on the Opposition on the manner of disposal of iron scraps by the Mawluh Cherra Cements Ltd. He admitted that during 83-84, 90 tonnes of scrap iron were disposed of at Rs. 400 per MT. No tender was invited; only three private parties were allowed to lift the item on the basis of their 'offer'.

Dr Khonglam's agony was not yet over. He was subjected to further questioning on the alleged Leyland truck deal. Furnishing reply to a question from Mr S G Lyngdoh (MUPP) the Minister informed that the Mawluh Cherra Cements Ltd. Had sold two Leyland trucks at Rs. 59,000.00 to Mr R W Wahlang who happens to be the Minister's brother-in-law. In reply to a supplementary question, Dr Khonglam said that the trucks were disposed of by calling tenders. Only three tenders were received. The Minister,

who was no match to the combined Opposition onslaught, fumbled and muttered, so much so that at one stage Mr S D Khongwir requested the Chief Minister to reply on behalf of the Minister. Captain Sangma, however, declined to intervene.

The plight of the Excise Minister was no less. On question relating to sanctions of new licences to bonded warehouses, Mr Pariat informed that six new licences were issued since he took over as the Excise Minister. Asked what was the need for issuing more licences, the Minister replied "to meet the demand of the drinking section of people."

The Leader of the Opposition, Mr B B Lyngdoh referred to the report appearing in a local bi-weekly about the Minister's alleged involvement in the deal for issuing licence Rs. 50,000 a piece. There was no reply nor any contradiction from the ruling side.

Thomas Cup

In a stellar performance veteran Prakash Padukon for India a thrilling 3-2 victory over fancied Japan the Thomas Cup Asian Zone qualifying round match here today.

This was third straight win for India in as many matches. In the other Thomas Cup match, strong contender Thailand blanked Sri Lanka 5-0 to notch up their second successive victory.

National champion Syed Modi gave India flying start when he swept aside Hiroshi Nishiyama in straight games 15-9, 15-3 in just 37 minutes. Modi was in irresistible form today, he played like a champion and totally outclassed Nishiyama.

Whither Juvenile Justice

By Shishir Tiwari & Gitanjali Ghosh

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (JJ Act 2015), which was passed on 15th March 2015 and 22nd December 2015 by the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha respectively, has got presidential assent on 31st December 2015. The Act has already come into force as well from 15th January 2016 and now, this Act is the law of the land in the realm of juvenile justice and has repealed Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 (JJ Act 2000). It is to be noted that the Rules for its implementation have not yet been formulated. This new law not only goes against the basic tenets of juvenile justice but will result into juvenile injustice.

A Law of Juvenile Injustice

The JJ Act 2015 is different in many ways from the erstwhile Act. However, one of the provisions which sounds like death knell to juvenile justice is to try and punish certain categories of children as adults for 'heinous offences' i.e. the offences that are punishable with imprisonment of seven years or more. Unlike the old law, which treats all children below 18 years of age alike/equal, the new law differentiates a child who is alleged to have committed heinous offence and has completed 16 years but has not completed 18 years of age on the date of commission of such offence from other children. In cases concerning such child, as per Section 15(1) of the JJ Act 2015, the Juvenile Justice Board has to conduct a preliminary assessment with regard to the physical and mental capacity of the child, ability to understand consequences of the offence and his circumstances. And if the Juvenile Justice Board, after conducting the preliminary assessment, arrives at the conclusion that there is a need for trial of the said child as an adult, it has been given the option to transfer the matter to the Children's Court, i.e. the Sessions Court having jurisdiction to try heinous offences. If after trial, the child is found guilty of committing a heinous offence by the Children's Court, then such a child is proposed to be sent to a place of safety for reformation and rehabilitation up to the age of 21 years. After completing the age of 21 years, an evaluation of the child is to be conducted by the Children's Court after which the child is either released on probation or transferred to an adult jail for the rest of the term of imprisonment.

This whole procedure is problematic and strikes at the very idea of juvenile justice. Evolved under the international child rights law, the juvenile justice system is based upon the fact that mental, cognitive and emotional capacity of a child is not sufficiently developed till he/she has attained the age of 18 years and, therefore, he/she should not be held responsible for the omissions/commissions made. He/she should be treated differently and not at par with adult criminals. One of the cardinal principles of the juvenile justice system has always been to treat all children who have committed offences within the juvenile justice system alone and differential treatment meted out to children aged 16 and above, alleged to have committed a heinous offence, by sending them to the adult criminal justice system as prescribed in the JJ Act 2015 certainly corrodes this principle.

The juvenile justice system is not based on retributive justice, rather, it relies upon the concept of restorative justice in dealing with child offenders. Its main objective is to reform, rehabilitate and reintegrate the child with a view to assisting him/her to assume socially constructive and productive roles in society. Such realization eludes under the new law. A child involved in heinous crimes such as murder and rape is more amenable to reforms and should be given a chance of fresh start in life. Conversely, under the new law he/she gets jail as punishment. Chances of reformation of such child will be very bleak as he/she will be lodged in jail with other dreaded criminals. Transferring a child in conflict with law on attaining 21 years of age from a place of safety to jail is also in violation of established principle of juvenile justice which strictly prohibits commingling of a child offender with hardened criminals.

Not in Consonance with International Law Norms
The JJ Act 2015 is not in line with the international law occupying the field of juvenile justice. Rather, it contravenes India's commitments to various international treaties and standards. Particular reference can be made of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (CRC), to which India became a party on 11th December 1992, and the Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 10 of 2007 entitled 'Children's

rights in juvenile justice', which is an authoritative interpretation of the provisions and principles contained in the CRC.

Article 1 of the CRC defines a child as a person who has not completed 18 years of age. Article 2 incorporates the principle of non-discrimination and puts a responsibility on the State Parties to the CRC to treat all children equally. Explaining this principle of non-discrimination, Paragraph 37 of the General Comment categorically states that principles relating to juvenile justice should apply to all persons below 18 years of age, without exclusion. In this regard, Paragraph 38 of the General Comment recommends the State Parties to change their laws with a view to achieving a non-discriminatory full application of their juvenile justice rules to all persons under the age of 18 years. Paragraph 38 specifically addresses those States parties which limit the applicability of their juvenile justice rules to children under the age of 16 (or lower) years, or which allow by way of exception that 16 or 17-year-old children be treated as adult criminals.

A conjoint reading of aforementioned provisions clearly demonstrates that the provisions of the JJ Act 2015, which prescribe for the trial and punishment of children between 16 and 18 years as adults for their alleged commission of heinous offences are in violation of the CRC.

One should also realize that the old law i.e. JJ Act 2000 was enacted to comply with the recommendations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Considering the initial report submitted by India, the Committee, in its concluding observations of 12th January 2000, emphasised that India should consider raising the age of criminal responsibility and ensure that persons under 18 years are not tried as adults. In this backdrop, it is astonishing to note that the JJ Act 2015 once again changes the settled position and replaces a law which was more progressive and reformative in nature.

A Law Based on Erroneous Assumption

Enactment of the JJ Act 2015 was justified on the premise that the number of children apprehended for heinous offences, especially in the age group of 16-18 years, has gone up significantly in the recent times. It was contended

that such a law would act as a deterrent for child offenders committing such offences. Though one can always question the efficacy of harsh punishment as a deterrent, the claim regarding manifold increase in the number of heinous crimes committed by children is far from truth. As per the National Crime Records Bureau's annual publication entitled 'Crime in India 2014', the number of cases registered under various sections of IPC crimes against juveniles in 2014 have increased by 5.7% over 2013 as 31,725 cases under IPC crimes were registered against juveniles during 2013 which increased to 33,526 such cases in 2014. Irrespective of this growth, share of juvenile crime in total crime has remained static at 1.2% in 2012, 2013 and 2014. Crime figures also show that rape constituted only 5.9% of total juvenile crimes. Moreover, rape by juveniles constituted only 4.7% of total rapes committed in 2014.

The JJ Act 2015 is the outcome of misplaced clamour of retribution against children involved in the commission of heinous offences. In the name of securing victims' rights, the JJ Act 2015 strikes at the heart of juvenile justice system. There is no double thought about the importance of victims' right but sacrificing child rights for that would have more disastrous consequences for the society as a whole. The Act provides a lee-way to the State to shift its responsibilities as mandated under the juvenile justice system on the shoulders of children. The State may readily claim that a child involved in the commission of a heinous offence is not amenable to reform and should be sent to jail. At a time when the State is shrugging off its responsibilities as a welfare state and pushing forward the neo-liberal agenda, this apprehension cannot be overlooked. Additionally, when one examines the State's track record in the implementation of the JJ Act 2000, this concern appears very genuine. To further aggravate the matter in hand, the State has brought the law into force without even framing the Rules which are pertinent for the proper implementation of the law. To sum-up, by enacting the JJ Act 2015, the State has taken a retrograde step. With this piece of legislation, the dark era of juvenile justice has begun in India.

Shishir Tiwari teaches Law at the Department of Law, NEHU; Gitanjali Ghosh teaches Law at National Law University, Assam and is associated with its Centre for Child Rights.

IS threat in India Growing radicalisation?

By Vinod Sharma

The arrest of four youths in Uttarakhnad, who were reportedly in touch with members of the IS group in Syria and were planning to execute attacks in the country's capital and the Ardh Kumbh mela in Haridwar, should send alarm bells ringing. There is no room for complacency.

The grave threat of radicalization is looming large over India despite Home Minister Rajnath Singh's repeated assurances that "family values of the country teach tolerance to the people. The values also teach not to discriminate on the basis of caste, religion and sect." The Home Minister says that while all countries are facing the threat of Islamic State, the organization could not dominate in India due to the country's "life values" and "family values".

This after, three young persons were arrested earlier, two of them the second time, while trying to join the IS. Singh also has stated that India is the only country where Muslim families stop their children when they get deviated from the right path. He said only Indian Muslim families can do this. Citing an example to show why the IS could not flourish in India, the Home Minister noted: "a Muslim youth got caught in radicalization in Mumbai and his parents came to me with the request to save him. Such are the values of our country. I have full faith that the IS can never have supremacy in India".

To further prove his point, the Home Minister also pointed out that thousands of Indian Imams had recently taken out a procession against the Islamic State. "If this culture of the country can be saved, no one can stop India from becoming the most powerful nation with maximum knowledge in the world", he added. Despite these strong assurances and conviction from the Government, India remains vulnerable for Islamic State tentacles due to various reasons including docility of Indian youths to IS allurements, lack of job opportunities in our country, prospect of easy money and rewards, fear of alienation, powerful social media techniques and propaganda machinery of the Islamic State and mistakenly understanding IS fighters as 'jihadists of a good cause'.

It is a fact that many Indian youths may not even understand the Islamic State ideology but will see this in purely mercenary terms. For instance, many terror outfits active in Kashmir, have succeeded in luring 'foreign mercenaries' showcasing their terror acts as a 'noble cause' in the name of so called jihad.

Therefore, the urgent need of the hour is not to underestimate the threat of radicalization in India. Concerted efforts need to be made to identify the vulnerable places and sections of population and also make realize the suspected youths the perils of joining such a dreaded international organization. Like any other Indian terrorist organization, Islamic State is not an aberration in getting the recruits killed in furtherance of their own vested interests. As of now, the mercenaries recruited by the Islamic State from across the world, are being brutally killed in air strikes by the US-led coalition in Syria and Iraq. But this is just a small step towards containing the IS threat.

Recently, the United Nations Security Council has approved a peace resolution that supports international efforts to seek a political solution in Syria, reeling under a civil war for the past nearly five years and the jihadist group, which has fighters from across the world, adamant to the establishment of a "caliphate"—

an Islamic State—stretching from Aleppo in Syria to the province of Diyala in Iraq. US Secretary of State John Kerry is hopeful that the UN process should end the nation's civil war and provide a new government by holding free elections in Syria within 18 months.

Russia and the US—who are supporting government forces against the ISIS fighters—have both approved the plan even though it does not address the major issue of what will happen to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. While Russia supports Assad, the US wants he be removed. Still the accord was hailed as a major step in the international community towards bringing peace to Syria, where lakhs of people have been killed and millions of others—refugees fleeing into other nations, mainly Turkey.

Recall, the US-led coalition has launched over 5000 air strikes against IS targets in the neighbouring Iraq since its campaign began in August 2014 on the request of President Assad. In Syria, the US along with Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates is also carrying out air strikes on IS-held areas, but there seems to be no end to the conflict. As far as financial resources of the militant group is concerned, ISIS is said to be the best funded terror organization in the world, which is perhaps the main reason of their being able to take on the pro-government forces for such a long period successfully. According to reports, Islamic State has consolidated its grip on oil supplies in Iraq and now presides over a sophisticated smuggling empire with illegal exports going to Turkey, Jordan and Iran.

Six months after it grabbed vast swathes of territory, the radical militant group is earning millions of dollars from its Iraqi oil operations. The militants control around half a dozen oil producing oilfields. They were also quickly able to make them operational and then tapped into established trading networks across the northern Iraq, where smuggling rules the roost for years. The funds obviously would be used to lure young minds to join their cause.

Again the UN Security Council has to come out with another resolution deciding to cut off funds for the IS in a firmer move by the international community to fight terrorism. The resolution was adopted by the 15-nation UN body at an open meeting chaired by US Treasury Secretary. However, the resolution doesn't seem to cut much ice keeping in view the staggering oil resources of the terror group.

Interestingly, to prove its horrific acts of terror in Iraq and Syria, Islamic State is extensively using social media like YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, internet memes and other channels of communication. Amateur videos and images are also being uploaded by its footsoldiers, which are then globally disseminated, both by ordinary users and mainstream news organizations, hungry for images of a conflict their own cameras cannot access! Adding teeth to its growing internet and social media presence, the IS has reportedly launched an app that features news and videos showing executions and battlefield victories and propagate its agenda. ISIS's global media operation appears to have two key objectives. First to provoke the US and its allies and the second is to recruit from outside the Middle East.—INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Who would be held for contempt?

Editor,

The recent Meghalaya High Court ruling in relation with the role of Dorbar Shnongs in our tribal enclaved society has brought in rather mixed reaction from all walks of life. Every sensible and well-meaning individual would appreciate the ruling since it aims at plugging the loopholes in grassroots/village administration where some headmen think they are above the law. Moreover, bringing in a transparency and accountability by putting the Dorbar Shnongs under the ambit of RTI should be taken in the right spirit. Since the state government initiates public schemes through such tribal institutions. A system of checks and balances and auditing and accounting of all social programs should be open to public scrutiny.

The other part is that qualification should be of two categories one for urban and the other for rural areas where literacy levels of a minimum standard can be

accepted (at least HSLC passed). Unfortunately the conglomeration of headmen led by the so-called 'prominent elite' are determined to undermine the High Court ruling by threatening an agitation which goes against all forms of social and political discourses and which may be construed as an attempt to show contempt to the Court ruling. The government should not step in before being caught on the wrong foot.

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

Should we be grateful?

Editor,

In the letter, 'Cooperate not Pressurise' by Pratham Sharma (ST Jan 15, 2016), he applauds the rumour mongers for their enormous help in creating awareness regarding future calamities. Had he paid some attention to my letter published on January 14 entitled 'False Predictions,' his wordings would have been different. The absolute aim of the rumour mongers sitting in

some corner of the country is to strike fear among the people of the North East and the areas surrounding the Himalayas. Hence the term 'Environmental Terrorists!' If Pratham thinks that the people of this region are thankful to the rumour makers for spreading fear among us then I am sorry to say that his thoughts way off the mark. We are living at a time when people can create havoc by simply posting rubbish on social networking sites. Rubbish is meant to be cleaned and we cannot thank the minds from where such rubbish originates. Pratham states that there is a lot of research involved in the prediction of earthquakes. Let me elucidate that research is done by learned people and not by silly rumour mongers. What it takes to spread a rumour is just a bit of devotion on a social networking sites and the use of a keyboard! I personally do not feel that these people have done anything great to earn themselves 'gratitude' from our side. I have labeled these rumour mongers as 'environmentalists' as they

seem to have the vast knowledge that even seismologists lack. This is plain and simple sarcasm from me. The simple fact that these so called experts did not exist before the Manipur earthquake proves how fake their theory is! Had they put their knowledge to use before the recent earthquake or the Nepal earthquake they would have saved thousands of lives! I do not think that people of North East India feel the need to thank rumour mongers. If Pratham thinks that way, it is his free will and no one is stopping him from doing so but he should not dictate us to be grateful to those from where these rumours have originated. To conclude I would again describe the rumour mongers as 'Environmental Terrorists' as they have just succeeded in creating panic among many people!

Your's etc,
Sanbeer Singh Ranhotra,
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.

Dr S Saraswathi reviews the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill, which was passed by Parliament recently

Neglect of adolescent care

Recently, the Rajya Sabha passed the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill obviously in response to public outcry and media pressure following the release of the main offender in Nirbhaya case. The Bill - an amendment to the existing law - allows trial of juveniles aged between 16 and 18 years, who commit heinous crimes, as adults. The Juvenile Justice Board will assess the mental condition of the offender and the Children's Court will decide whether he is fit to be tried like an adult.

Heinous crime is defined as a crime that carries a punishment of seven years of imprisonment or more. Serious white-collar crimes liable to long-term imprisonment like forgery and sedition, though not violent, are also to be considered adult heinous crimes.

However, no juvenile would be sent to jail directly. If they are sentenced to imprisonment, they will be sent to Borstal and remain there until they are 21 years old after which there will be a review of the punishment.

Lowering the age of the juvenile is said to be a measure founded on the rights of the victims which is as important as that of the juvenile delinquents. There is a general notion, though somewhat difficult to agree with, that punishment for an offender is justice to the victim in any criminal case. This notion has become an important argument for harsh punishments by advocates of victims.

But, awarding punishments has other socially relevant intentions like reform and rehabilitation of the criminals, and establishment of the rule of law and protection of the citizens. These should also have some deterrent effect.

Social legislations are made to deal with issues and problems of the society as a whole. A singular incident may provoke action, but cannot determine the details of legislations.

It is, therefore, not necessary to ascertain or listen to the views of victims' family regarding the quantum of punishment in any case whatever be the age of the accused or the gravity of the crime. It applies to instances of death penalty also. The justice system has to look beyond the victims of concerned cases and de-

not face complications in its enforcement. The Supreme Court also refused to stay the release of Nirbhaya juvenile criminal as demanded by the Delhi Commission for Women as there is no law under which he could be retained. He will be provided with post-release rehabilitation care to help him reintegrate with the society.

Generally, a person below 12 years is called a child, one between 12 and 18 years is regarded as an adolescent, and one between 18 and 30 years as a young person, and those between 30 and 50 years as a middle-aged person. Before the enactment of Juvenile Justice Act 1986, a child between 7 and 18 or 21 years in some States in accordance with the Children Acts of the States, who violated law, was considered as a juvenile delinquent.

The 1986 Act defined "juvenile" as a boy below 16 years or a girl below 18 years of age. This was amended in 2000 to determine the age of juvenile



crimes. Cases of rape by juveniles by age-group numbered 198 for below 16

below 18 years in 2001, and 1,149 for below 18 years in 2011. So also, murder by juveniles shot up from 267 in 2000 for below 16 years to 888 for below 18 years in 2011.

lack of interest in this amendment on the part of some members. There were also differences of opinion within some parties that were openly expressed.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee which examined the bill before it was passed by the Lok Sabha, pointed to some misleading data on juvenile crimes. With the exception of the Left Parties, all other parties supported the bill.

Though the argument for lowering the age factor in dealing with heinous crimes is strong, it cannot also be denied that the government and society have to accept failure on their part in bringing up children and adolescents. Child Welfare Committees are not functioning efficiently. Adequate Juvenile Justice Boards are also lacking. Special homes do not have knowledge and ability to cope with delinquents. Instances of boys running away from correctional

homes have become common.

All these point to the need for firm action to prevent juvenile crimes and the futility of lenient treatment to juvenile delinquents after commitment of serious crimes.

There is no common approach to attribution of criminal responsibility in different countries. The age factor ranges from 7 to 18 years. The juvenile's culpability and the punishment is determined according to the nature and gravity of the crime, and the level of maturity and discretion of the offender as perceived by the courts. The age of criminal responsibility is 7 in Switzerland and Ireland, 13 in France, 14 in Australia, Germany, Italy in Europe. Both in the UK and USA, juveniles who committed heinous crimes like rape were prosecuted like adults. Prosecutors were seen pushing to try more juveniles committing murder as adults.

(Contd on P-VII)



years in the year 2000, 399 for

tions in the House indicating

Why life is unfair for the WTF organization

Sometimes I feel The Universe hates me. On the morning of writing this, I found my Fitbit step-counter hadn't re-charged, which meant that I was trapped in bed for an hour.

But even more cursed by destiny, I reckon, are the folk at the World Taekwondo Federation, known as WTF. For years, everything was fine and then along came the Internet and now everything they do sounds ridiculous.

Trophies emblazoned with WTF make people laugh, cheerleading chants ("Yay, WTF!") sound absurd, and any kind of slogan looks silly: "Don't say Taekwondo, say WTF!"

Now WTF boss Hoss Rafaty is giving up the battle and urging members to ditch the acronym and just say "World Taekwondo". I heard about this from sports-mad reader Allen Chiang, so I canvassed regular contributors to share tales of other innocent organizations with names that were overtaken by circumstances.

First up was Grexit, a US software company who were proud they had invented a new word. But "Grexit" became a political term in Europe and the nerds were soon driven mad by people wanting to discuss Greek politics.

Nerds know a lot about computers but almost nothing about complex issues of Real Life, such as politics, society, putting buttons in the right holes, etc.

Then there were the many firms who have been harmed by the inability of Internet addresses to include spaces, punctuation or capital letters.

For the business cards until the two banks merged: "Now they work for the bi-perts Exchange had a clear enough name, but its web address, expertsexchange,

was read differently. The same thing happened when Pen Island became penisland, KeePass became keepass, Who Represents? became whorepresents, and Old Man's Haven became oldmanshaven. A company which recycles old information technology hardware called itself IT Scrap, but it became itscrap in the web version.

Web-surfers' preference for short forms was a problem, too, as was discovered by the South Korean pottery training company which found their web name constantly misunderstood: enjoypot.co.kr.

Perhaps the most ironic case of events overtaking honest intentions was the story of ISIS, which long stood for the International Society for Islamic Secularization, a group of people who are like most Muslims: modern, intelligent, lovely people. But now it's hard for members to even introduce themselves. "Hi, I'm from a Muslim group called ISIS and I-wait! I won't hurt you!"

Name changes can be awkward, too. Staff at Lakeview Typewriters in the US were happy with their business cards until the firm was bought by Allan Boring and they now work for Boring Business Systems (not a joke).

Office equipment makers in Sweden learned that their boss had decided to name their company after the Swedish word for "logic", which is "stolen", which is why tourists now stop in Stockholm to take pictures of the Stolen office goods store.

A financial reporter friend tells me that staff at the Third National Bank and the Fifth National Bank in the US had

The Funny side

By Nury Vittachi

zarry named Fifth Third, which just sounds like bad math."

By Somrita Ghosh

'Hope women find courage through my books'



cide on the basis of legal position and social consequences.

This enactment will not have retrospective effect and so the Executive will

Bureau, whose statistics are generally believed to be gross underestimation due to non-reporting and suppression of several cases, has noted steep increase in

Is it taboo for women to talk about sex, their hidden desires or having extra-marital affairs? No! It is their liberal attitude towards life, their choice of heart over head and breaking social norms and fulfilling their forbidden desires, says a new book on the subject.

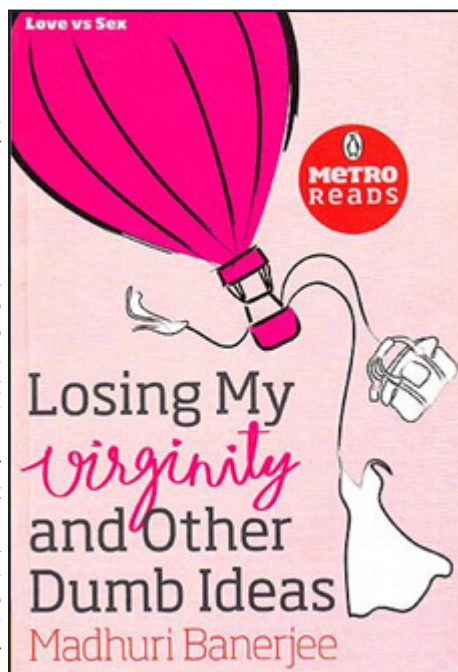
Madhuri Banerjee's "Forbidden Desires" (Rupa, pp 168, Rs.295) takes readers to the world of four female protagonists - Naina, Ayesha, Kavita and Kaajal - who are made to face the shocking truths they never imagined. Their desires haunt them, provoke them and make them fight to choose a new path in their lives.

"It's about love and duty, desire and demands, heart vs head. It's the story of four dynamic women who make

certain choices in their lives to hold on to their beliefs until one day their forbidden desires make their life crash and collide their destinies into each other."

It presents the protagonists breaking boundaries in pursuit of their happiness. But do Indian women in reality have the courage to do so?

"I hope women find courage through my books. My aim is to give them a new way of thinking or at least start a



Interview

Banerjee, 40, said in an e-mail interview from Mumbai about her latest book.

dialogue that allows them to be more than roles in a family. Be the queen of your own chess board. Not the pawn of someone else," said Banerjee, a single mother with a seven-and-a-half-year-old daughter and executive producer of the Zoom entertainment channel.

Banerjee's books have been mostly female-oriented and her writing is inclined towards the emancipation of women. However, that does not define her as a feminist.

"A friend finally defined me - A Feminist Writer. And I said 'Probably!' But I empathise a lot with men as well. That's why I wrote 'My Clingy Girlfriend.' I'm not just for emancipation of women, I'm for the emancipation of all human beings who feel they're stuck doing the same thing every day because that's what is expected of them," the 40-year-old explained.

Like her characters, the author strongly believes that contemporary women need to be vocal about their desires and need to break social barriers because that will liberate society in the true sense.

"As a society, women have been repressed for so long that they have never been (Contd on P-VII)



Noted author Madhuri Banerjee. (IANS)

By SD Desai

High Priestess of Indian classical dance

Mrinalini Sarabhai has been a major influence on Ahmedabad's cultural life since 1948 when, with Vikram Sarabhai, she set up Darpana Academy, six years after her marriage with him. More importantly, she will be remembered as a legendary classical dancer and choreographer at the national level and abroad. Right from her first performance in Paris, she was recognized as the High Priestess of Indian Classical Dance.

If Rukmini Devi brought Bharatanatyam out of the temple to the open stage and accorded it dignity, Mrinalini steadied it there and gave it contemporary significance. Beginning with solo dances, she created choreographic works in which, while remaining rooted in the tradition and without moving away from its aesthetics, she projected themes socially relevant today. This was done chiefly in two dance forms - Bharatanatyam and Kathakali.

It required daring and a social vision for her to have projected in one of her earliest dance dramas the inhuman treatment of a bride for dowry. With the local folk dance and its costumes, she tellingly communicated with society. She traced the roots of violence in society to the days of the Mahabharat. Giving glimpses of our natural luxuriance in 'Meghdoot', she urged the modern Indian mind to let flowers bloom. On Western classical music she created 'Shakuntala', in which Shakuntala asks elders questions. Her 'Tasher Desh' celebrated the liberation of a stifled free impulse - and she performed it in China as well!

Rather than remaining confined to the centre, her Bharatanatyam freely spread in all directions with strength and clarity. Huge crowds earlier required

Kathakali to be eminently spectacular. In 'Manushya', she performed with Chattuani Panicker. She did

much later.

Endowed with exceptional intellect like her parents and husband, Mrinalini

collaboration in giving artistic directorial touches to 'Koi Pan Ek Phoolnu-n Naam Bolo To' is still remembered. Besides poetry and an autobiography, she wrote dramatic scripts.

Four decades ago, she held a series of performances of original Gujarati plays. She supported research in the local indigenous folk form Bhavai. With an American scholar she translated 'Swapnavasavadatta'. Her 'Friends of the Tree' rushed to where trees were being felled.

Darpana's music section has a reputation. Puppetry had it earlier. Kuchipudi and Kalaripayattu are also taught here. Darpana, in fact, has become a tradition. In the family the tradition has been passed on from Mallika to Ravanta and Anahita. Many of us are privileged to have seen the four dancing on stage together.

Mrinalini had a fascination for Krishna - Krishna as 'ananda' permeating the universe. The glow and serenity on her face were, without exaggeration, to be seen to be believed. It seemed, everyone around her body agreed, she was ready to speak and demonstrate a 'mudra'!

(The writer is a veteran Ahmedabad-based art critic. He can be contacted on sureshmrudula@gmail.com)



Mrinalini Sarabhai

away with traditional costumes and make-up and portrayed man's evolution from birth till death. Son Kartikeya as a kid perhaps prompted it. That probably was the first Kathakali performance by a woman. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had special words of praise for this creation. Talking of daring innovations, she had daughter Mallika play the man in 'Nalakhyan'

was a multi-talented personality. At an early age, she was Rabindranath Tagore's favourite at Shantiniketan. Like Tagore, Gandhiji remained her guiding force all through life. She was a trustee of Sarvodaya International Trust and held a special programme on Gandhi Jayanti days at Natarani, Darpana. She considered dance and drama as twin sisters. Her

Stop benchmarking Western standards, Indian DJ Kerano tells Kishori Sud

The country's disc jockeys have the ability to make a splash internationally, but can do so only with their indigenous style and not by aspiring to match standards set by foreign DJs, says Delhi-based DJ Kerano, who feels there's a dire need for Indians to value home-grown talent.

All of 22, Kerano, who dabbles in progressive house music, has already collaborated with Polish producer and DJ Tom Swoon for a single titled "Here I Stand". That apart, he has played at grand music festivals like Sunburn and Enchanted Valley Carnival.

In an interview, Kerano said: "We need to stop using the West as a standard and instead do your own thing, have our own market and take that market globally."

"Right now, if I go and produce music like a certain DJ in the West... when he has already done it, it's not really going to make a big difference if I do it. We should do our own thing and make original music. Then, we can nail it (internationally)," he said, stressing on the need for originality among musicians here.

Kerano feels that under the influence of content from the West, being original is tough for a lot of artistes. He, however, also blames the lack of market-



Indian DJ Kerano

A DJ's desire

is so much of hype that people think that I want to

the Indians should value Indian artistes more.

"From the marketing point of view, when an international DJ comes, there is a lot more marketing than when a local DJ is playing. It's always a local DJ playing an opening set for an international artiste if you see. Obviously, then the hype is more... for example, we had French DJ David Guetta coming, and the amount of media attention and hype that is created will obviously lead to a much better turnout," Kerano said.

"Promoters, producers and media should treat Indian talent as real talent. We need to value Indian artistes more. That is how

it will grow," added Kerano, who performed last month at the Sunburn Goa Festival, where top international DJs like Kygo, Martin Garrix, David Guetta and Dimitri Vegas and Like Mike took to the stage.

Among the Indian DJs who regaled music aficionados were Anish Sood, Avantika Bakshi and DJ Shaan.

Kerano also believes that if music producers and DJs do more collaborations, the popularity of electronic dance music -- which is only expanding over the years -- can be taken to "the next level" in the country.

(Kishori Sud can be contacted at kishori.s@ians.in)



DJ Shaan

ing and promotion of Indian talent within the country.

"When an international artiste comes to India, there

be like that guy'. So they start doing what the international talent does," he

said, adding that primarily,

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

'STAR - GAZING'

Sunday, January 24, 2016

Full Moon on your solar return chart will bring in good opportunities but how you avail them success will depend on them. You will be filled with confidence but take care not to cross the line between confidence and over-confidence. Your image enhances and you feel content and happy. You will be creatively inclined. New partnerships and associations can be formed. Work related travel will boost overall performance. Money situation will improve. Assets can also be created with foresight and good planning. You will be happily surprised by some outcomes of your travel. You recharge and relax in the wonderful atmosphere at home. There would also be some planning for a family reunion or a celebration. A romance is in the offing.

Aries : (March 21 - April 20)

The planetary configuration indicates some unexpected profits in profession and career. You will enjoy good health. Education and study matters will be highlighted. Family life and relations with friends will be better. Take care in regards to matters of conflict so that it may not interfere in deals in business or profession. Glamour and charm in your personality prove to be very fruitful in dealing with people; you will make new contacts in public. You will be creative and able to change your imagination to reality. Avoid being angry and be peaceful in order to have success in every field.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21)

You should remain caring regarding the health of a family member. Professional and career also need your attention. In business or profession be careful that someone should not betray you. So go slow in matters related to your work and do the needful with a strict watch over circumstances. Financial problems will be dealt with patience and bearing a peace of mind. Take care in travel. Imaginative power of mind will prove to be beneficial in dealing with clients. Keep away from conflicts which may arise due to misunderstanding in communication.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21)

At this time, combination of stars will give you mixed results. You may enjoy with family, friends and loved ones and spend some time full of entertainment. It will be advisable to take care of your health. You may get some uneasiness in family life too. Your monetary matters and matters of finance will be solved now. Do not take part in any debate or conflict related to matters which involve dealing with property. Invest wisely in some of the long term beneficial plans. Take a timely step to rule out ill relations and keep away from bad company. Spouse may need some help in emotional matters and help wisely and in a positive way. Utilize money wisely and economically.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22)

You may have chances of finalizing marriage in your favour which will prove to be long lasting and joyful. The position of stars indicates a good time to have a romance or love affair. Health of self or a relative may need some attention. You have good chances of promotion of spouse if due. Take care of luggage and belongings in travel. Your health will remain stable. Money may come suddenly while some expenditure may occur in household or in the purchase of luxury items. Family and relations with friends need some attention. Think positive and do not indulge in making contacts with people of a negative image.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23)

You may make up your mind for a career in education or research work. You are courageous and full of vitality at work. Take advantage of this good time to improve your position. You may have contacts with good friends which will be profitable for you to extend relations with influential people. Amidst your powerful imagination and creative power, you may be able to start a new venture of profit making deals and you may fetch new contracts. Monetary profits are at your door step. Your family and children may need some help. Health may have some minor problems but soon get rectified.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22)

This is a time of mixed results as predicted from your stars position. This period concerns may arise over health, diet and nutrition. You should keep some changes or modifications in mind for better care and for good health. Spend more time with children and family to have peace of mind and stability in

thoughts. Good time for educational work to be carried out. To start a profitable profession in a field like computer software, cosmetics and jewellery may be beneficial. Take care of your old hidden enemies. Your mind may be crowded with some unhappy thoughts. Deal wisely and with patience to resolve these matters. Avoid rash decisions related to friends and family.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23)

The position of stars in this phase indicates some mixed results. You may face some unexpected expenditure which may disturb your budget. There is a scope of a new property or investment in real estate. If you pay timely attention to your business, you may get good returns. Health may create some problems in the coming days. You would be much loved in your family. Children need attention in their educational matters. You will have plenty of work to be disposed off. So think and work with patience and the results will bear sweet fruits. Your intellect and creative thoughts will give you courage and vitality in achieving your goal.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22)

Your attention towards personality development will prove to be helpful in giving a boost to your career. Money matters will be solved if you try for some advances or loan; and it will be granted. Some religious plans are at your disposal so take them up and the desire will be fulfilled. It is a time for good earnings in long term investments. Your family members may need some attention in health related matters. You will be making quick decisions and it will prove to be beneficial in matter regarding your career. Some of the family members will help you whenever needed.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21)

It is a time to be punctual and stick to your daily routine. You will have to work hard to achieve your goals in respect of matters related to your profession and career. You may get proper guidance from elders in monetary matters. Take care of your health problem even when they are minor ones. Your influence among people at your work place will be remarkable. You may seek guidance for starting a new project from someone who is intimate to you. Awareness in the paper work and early planning is needed to make progress in money matters. Family health and happy environment will help to refresh you; so make the most of it.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20)

There will be mixed results in this period. Achievements in career and profession may be good but with this some hurdles will disturb the momentum. You will have to spend more than anticipated. Education of children may need some extra attention. Keep away from any conflict and avoid getting entangled in some anti social work. There may be a chance for a tour or outing but keep yourself in tune with your family. In order to have affection and love among family members keep calm. Meditation will help you.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18)

Your general image in public will improve. Now it is time to examine and watch your investments and money related matters. You must incorporate some regular exercises to maintain and have good health. Sources of entertainment within your family members and loved ones will open new avenues to improve your relations with them. Your friends will admire you as you make strides in furthering your public relations. The company of friends will help keep away stress. Spend quality time with children as they need more attention.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20)

It is a good time to go ahead in your chosen profession and career. You will be satisfied at your work place or in business. Stress should be avoided in matters related to family matters. Be aware of rival and competitor activities to counter any of their activities and plans. Avoid any collaborations or partnership with unknown people. Expenditure should be watched properly and think before you buy a luxury item. Health will be good and you will enjoy taking part in sporting activities.

'Hope women find courage'

(Contd from P-VI) allowed to voice what they want from our partners. And even when they say things in

the Indian audience has accepted the way she writes because it is sensual and not vulgar or gross.

"My book talks about relationship issues that could help a man or a woman through a story about real people," commented Banerjee, who believes in writing to break the existing taboos in society.

Not just books, Banerjee has stretched her hand into Bollywood scriptwriting with "Hate Story 2". Talking about Indian audiences accepting the liberal attitude of women on screen, Banerjee said: "I think Indian cinema is changing. With great women-centric films like 'Mary Kom', 'NH10', 'Dirty Picture' and 'Queen' doing well, people are opening up to women in a new way. But it is a long road and we women need to stand together to show them that we can't be labelled one way."

Quite appropriately, Banerjee's next book, due in May and co-authored with Rohini Tiwari, is titled "The Flaky Mummy" - a cocktail guide to surviving motherhood. It's sure to be a "must read!"

It's not just Banerjee, but Indian literature is now witnessing a wave amongst writers who are openly talking about sex and feminine desires. Her first book, "Losing My Virginity And Other Dumb Ideas" was a one of its kind in the erotic chick lit genre.

Talking about readers accepting writings on extra-marital affairs and sexual preferences of women, Banerjee said that a large part of



(The writer can be contacted at somrita.g@ians.in)

Neglect of adolescent care

(Contd from P-VI) In the 1990s, it is noted that the practice of charging young people as adults gained momentum in America and between 1990 and 2010, youth in adult jails increased by 230%.

Since 2005, youth advocacy groups took up the cause of juveniles and succeeded in bringing legislations in about 30 States in the US to make it harder to prosecute and sentence juveniles like adults.

According to UN recommendations, no child up to the age of 12 can be held responsible for any criminal act. Till completion of 18 years, no adolescent can be tried in adult courts.

Adolescents are said to be the most neglected group worldwide. The age-group 10-19 is officially recognized as adolescent in India and this covers children between 10-14 years.

Textbook differences between crime and delinquency are also becoming more irrelevant. That anti-social acts of juveniles lack specific intention or purpose, are unplanned and unorganized are not always true. We can no longer

hold on to the belief that 16-18 age-group are still children unaware of the consequences of their actions.

In this age of information, childhood and adolescence appear to have fallen to adult life sooner than the onset of technical adulthood. Children's world is shrinking yielding place to adult world, thanks to communication revolution.

"U" certificate has lost its meaning and children's films have become rare. It may be a reason contributing to adult crimes by adolescents - a sociological development that has to be addressed by law makers with the expertise of social psychologists.

Our endeavour must be to evolve a juvenile justice system that will hold the juveniles responsible for their actions, ensure the safety of the community, and make the society responsible to bring up productive, capable, and accountable citizens. In short, society must pay special attention to adolescent care.--INFA

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



"If you're trying to achieve, there will be roadblocks. I've had them; everybody has had them. But obstacles don't have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it."

— Michael Jordan

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LVIII No. 164 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JANUARY 25, 2016

Assam Polls

WHY the Congress in Assam is trying to set the stage for the assembly poll the same way as in Bihar is hard to understand. Congress has been in the saddle for three terms running and the BJP not even once. Yet Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already been on the scene as if the contest will be between Modi and Gogoi. Tarun Gogoi, 79 yr. old Congress Chief Minister of Assam has already made the coming poll look like that. He has referred to Modi as the BJP's general and said that he is his party's general. He is oblivious of the fact that the time has come for him to hang up his boots. Gogoi, it is assumed, was inspired by the example of Nitish Kumar in Bihar. He has however no plans to forge a grand alliance as in Bihar. It prefers a "maha understanding" to a "maha jot". What has not been spelt out is which parties he would like to have an understanding with. The BJP has hardly a footing in Assam with an almost 35% Muslim population. Rahul Gandhi has been reticent about the alliance. The Congress has problems within as Gogoi has not done famously, especially in fighting militancy.

The Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) has made it clear that it will contest the assembly polls. It seems unlikely that so called communal forces are strong enough to lead to an understanding between the Congress and the AGP. The All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) is a key player representing Muslim interests but then an alliance with it may take Hindu voters away from the Congress. It is still a muddled political outlook.

LOOKING BACK

January 9, 1989

Vayudoot Expansion

Vayudoot has come of age. This impression is borne out by the reported decision at the highest level to allow these third level airlines start parallel operations on Indian Airlines routes in a phased manner from next April. The decision to inject an element of competition, allowing Vayudoot to operate on certain dense routes like Delhi Calcutta, is stated to be a reaction on the part of policy makers to public criticism about the flagging efficiency of the Indian Airlines because of monopoly enjoyed by it so far. For Vayudoot, so much initially dependent on the Indian Airlines in many respects, to have acquired this competitive role is no mans credit. Our only hope is that the third line air service will not be curtailing or weakening its service to the north east for which it was exclusively meant at the start.

We are happy to note that one of the four 120 seat Soviet Yakovlev 42 expected to join the Vayudoot fleet early this year will be allotted to the north eastern region. This in turn will expectedly augment its operational efficiency which at times suffers due to many factors not all of which may be attributed to it. Capacity shortage is one of the primary causes and which may be partially solved by this accretion to the fleet there should not in all conscience be any corresponding increase in fare structure. Vayudoot is adequately subsidized for its services to the north east which suffers from so many physical and other con-

straints. A higher level of efficiency guaranteed cannot be a plea for withdrawing the subsidy and raising the fare structure. North east stands on different footing altogether and deserves all the care to bring it to a level where it can be treated at par with the rest of the country. There is considerable logic in the view that if break even fares are charged the traffic at least in the North East will not be able to survive.

Honour for Mahanta

The Assam Chief Minister Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta has been chosen as Man of the Year by a local Weekly, "Current" reports a news agency from Bombay. Our congratulations (for whatever its worth) goes to him for the honor (this too for whatever its worth). Frankly, honors such as this or any other come so rare to this far off region and are so few and far between that we can hardly be choosers in this pretty game of honoring our dignitaries and celebrities. And as the year has bowed out, we wish this year's chosen man better luck in his ministerial career in the year that is currently unfolding, pretty reinforced as he is now with this windfall coming his way from distant Bombay. North east is now closer linked with the west and the country's unity and integrity assured as such.

Everything evolves including religion

By H H Mohrmen

Articles published in the Shillong Times which have sparked so much debate were the series of two articles by Fabian Lyngdoh on the subject of the traditional religion of Niamtre/Niam Khasi in Meghalaya. Many of the writers have rightly said that ka Niamtre/Niam Khasi are religions at the clan level only. They seem to suggest that since they are religions based on clans they cannot be called organized religions and should remain so. The other proposition is that since the Khasi-Pnar religions are basically clan-based religions they do not fall in the category of religion. Fabian Lyngdoh also used the common definition that since there is no unity in God-head in the traditional religion they cannot be called religion because unlike other organized religions they have no mediator to mediate between the believers and God.

Lets us begin by looking at the most popular religion in the state and ask ourselves how Christianity began? Did the immediate followers of Jesus Christ have the same theology? Did they follow the same scripture or for that matter the same gospels? Students of the history of early Christian period know that the early Christian Churches were as varied as Christianity is now and they even used various gospels most of which were rejected when the scripture were finally canonized. The examples of these ancient gospels which escaped destruction were in the Dead Sea scroll discovered near Qumran and the Gnostic text which include the gospel according to Thomas at Nag Hammadi.

The New Testament canon developed, or evolved, over the course of the first 250-300 years of Christian history. Although the exact list of New Testament documents was confirmed at the third Synod of Carthage (397 CE/AD), and the 27 New Testament documents was agreed upon by most of the church, but before that, different churches used many different gospels which were rejected when the Book was canonized. And even after that the different Christian churches do not agree on the content of the holy scriptures, therefore the Bible sanctioned by the Catholic Church contains seven more Books than those used by other Christian denominations and the for that matter the Bible used by Christian Or-

thodox Church is different from the two.

Even if one only takes the creation of the Bible into consideration it is clear that Christianity was founded on the basis that Judaism is that which is old and Christianity is that which is new. In the making of the Bible the hidden message is that the holy scripture of the former predicted the arrival of the messiah of the latter. Therefore the Christian Bible purposely uses the Hebrew Bible as the first part of the church's Holy Scripture and called it the Old Testament whereas the Christian scripture developed in the early Christian period or after the death of Jesus Christ is called the New Testament.

The Old Testament which is the first section of the two-part Christian Biblical canon includes the books of the Hebrew Bible and in various Christian denominations it also includes the deuterocanonical books. Protestant Old Testament consists of the same books as the Hebrew Bible, but the order and division of the books are different. Protestants number the Old Testament books at 39, while Judaism numbers the same books as 24. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_of_the_Old_Testament_canon)

It also took a long time for the Church to agree upon its doctrine and in fact it had to meet in seven councils starting from the council of Nicaea in 325 CE when the relation of the son and the father was debated. The council of Nicaea drew up a creed, the original Nicene Creed, which was almost unanimously supported. The Council's description of "God's only-begotten Son," Jesus Christ, as of the same substance with God the Father became the foundation of Christian Trinitarianism. The Council was convened to address the issue raised by the Arians in which Emperor Constantine tried to reconcile Arius (the person after whom Arianism is named) with the Church. Arius's main argument was the son is divine yet he is different from the father who begat and preceded the son. The controversy continued even after Arius died in 336, with various

separate groups espousing Arian principle in one way or another. In 359, a double council of Eastern and Western bishops affirmed a formula stating that the Father and the Son were similar in accord with the scriptures, which was a victory for Arianism. But the opponents of Arianism rallied, and the First Council of Constantinople in 381 marked the final victory of Nicene orthodoxy within the Empire, though Arianism had by then spread to the Germanic tribes, among whom it gradually disappeared after the conversion of the Franks to Christianity in 496. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_seven_Ecumenical_Councils). It was only in 787 CE that the last council of the church also known as the second council of Nicaea was held in the city.

In one of the articles it was also said "the fundamental basis of all religions is the relationship between human beings and God through the intercession of immediate spirits with personal names." It implied that since the Khasi and Pnar do not have an intermediary to intercede between man and God hence they do not fit in the definition of a religion. The author had even cited Jesus being the intermediary between the Christians and God as an example. But the gospel also recorded that Jesus too prayed during his time and the question arises as to who mediates between Jesus and God then? Or in other words what was the intermediary that Jesus used for his prayer to reach God? For argument's sake we can say that since Jesus is also part of the holy trinity so he did not need any intermediaries, but questions arise as to how Jesus taught his followers to pray. In all the two version of the Lord's prayer there is no mention of any intermediary. The Lord's prayer is one example that the followers were taught to pray to God the father without any intermediary. The gospel writers also recorded that Jesus said that "he who worships God should worship Him in spirit and in truth."

Not only Christianity evolves, even the holy book of the church was the out-

come of the process that evolves with time, so why should Niam Khasi or Niam Tre not evolve and move on from the religion at the clan level to an organized religion? Who is to decide that they cannot organize themselves into Seng Khasi and Sein Raji respectively? It is said that "there is only one thing that is permanent in the world and that is change," I hope Seng Khasi and Sein Raji continue and also write and document the various aspects of their religion and share our story with the world. They should progress the way they want to and they are the best people to decide the way ahead for the Niamtre and Niam Khasi.

People may define religion by using certain yardsticks and try to fit Seng Khasi or Sein Raji into certain compartment - that is fine. But if the Seng Khasi or Sein Raji does not fit in the certain benchmarks people try to fit them, that in my opinion is not their problem. The Seng Khasi or Sein Raji should not bother about that because if the definition does not include their way of belief then it is the definition which is flawed. They worship U Blei Trai Kynrad or U Blai Tre Kiro without any intermediaries and they don't have to invent an intermediary to fit in the definition because definitions are made to define religion and not otherwise. The members of Seng Khasi or Sein Raji have every right to continue to practice their religion as they understand it and should move on in the direction they wish to and no power on earth can stop them from deciding what they think is right and good for their community.

If we want an inclusive definition of religion we should go to the root of the word religion itself. The word religion originated from the Latin word 'religare' which means 'that which binds together' and the Seng Khasi and Sein Raji fit perfectly well in the original meaning of the word. What are Seng Khasi and Sein Raji but organizations that bind together the clan religion in Khasi and Jaintia hills into one entity. The adherents of the clan religion decided to establish a platform that will help the followers of the religion to come together and decide their own future course of action and for them that is religion. Period.

TO THE EDITOR

Premier hotel? Think again!

Editor,

On the blistering cold day of 20th January, 2016 a few friends and I drove up from Guwahati, and reached your beautiful city, just in time for lunch. At my insistence, we chose Hotel Pinewood, since I have always liked the locale and ambience of the place. Upon entering, we went directly to the "Coffee Shop". Food orders placed, we were served water and a room blower was even arranged to keep our feet warm!! About forty five minutes after we sat down and ranged the order, a lady comes running into the room, all aghast and apologetic...saying, "we are very sorry, the kitchen is being cleaned today, so nothing can be served". And added, if we wanted, we could wait. Shocking!

I'm all for cleanliness and renovation, but the incident left a very bitter taste in my mouth. My friends and I left, and went to another place for lunch, but I wonder how I would have felt, had it been an official business lunch. What would I have told my

guests? It is so surprising, that the waiter serving meals, taking the menu order from patrons, had no idea that the kitchen was not functioning for the day? I might ask too, where was the management when all this was happening? Is nobody responsible? Nobody knows what's happening. Is it a wonder then that private restaurants are doing so well? I must say, I am sorely disappointed with Hotel Pinewood. It is supposed to be a Premier Hotel of your beautiful city. Think again!

Yours etc.,
Subhash B.
Via email

Let the public know!

Editor,

We are all aware that the Government has sealed some buildings in the city following the High Court ruling. Two of such buildings include- (a) the building next to United Bank of India's GS Road Branch and (b) a building next to Bhajanlal Electronics in Police Bazar. I have seen

that construction work is going on in one building and that two bank branches have been opened in the other. How can construction work be carried out on a building which has been sealed by the Government? Why doesn't the media bring light to this issue? Who is coordinating these constructions? Is this yet another face of the Government's corrupt practices? These questions remain unanswered till date. The majority of people know that these buildings have been sealed but they do not question the construction. If the Government does not break its silence, it will only reveal their 'corrupt practices.' Wonder what the High Court has to say about this gross violation of its orders!

Yours etc.,
Pratham Sharma,
Via email

Fragmented by walls of prejudice

Editor,

The editorial, "Caste a curse" (ST, January 21) has

rightly said, "There is enough research that inform us that equal societies almost always do better on human development indices than unequal ones". In fact, cooperation is the key for existence of everything. Our body could not have functioned had there been quarrel and mutual disrespect among its parts. Simple common sense tells us that coordination among all of its parts is a must for smooth running of a machine. Therefore, a country which is fragmented by walls of prejudice and hatred can only advance backwards in the field of moral as well as inclusive material progress. A head cannot march forward without legs. As Tagore reminds us, the general rule that he whom you push down will pull you down, prevails.

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.

POLITICAL DELICACIES

By Nora Chopra

SHARAD PAWAR DESPERATE TO BECOME NEXT PRESIDENT OF INDIA

After Pranab Mukherjee, who will be the next President of India? Although there are still eight months to go, speculation has already begun on who would be the next Rashtrapati after Pranab Mukherjee. Mukherjee is unlikely to get another term. According to claims made by the government sources, no other Rashtrapati has got a second term except Dr Rajendra Prasad, so why should Mukherjee get this privilege. A senior minister was heard saying. Hectic lobbying has already begun. Amongst the BJP contenders are LK Advani, Najma Heptullah and of course the chief of the Akali Dal, Prakash Singh Badal. Then there is Sharad Pawar who has friends cutting across party lines. And finally the vice president Hamid Ansari who is trying his best to keep the BJP and his government bosses in good humour. But the BJP leaders do not forget that he was the choice of the communists initially. Sources within the BJP ruled out that the Vice President will be picked up. Sharad Pawar is a serious candidate who has been also in the race for Prime Minister earlier, but with political clout going southwards, the Maratha strongman has no choice but to fall back on BJP if he wants to come anywhere closer in the race to Rashtrapati Bhawan. Early this month when he invited both Sonia Gandhi and Narendra Modi and the opposition leaders on the occasion of his birthday, it was a precursor to his ambition as he wanted to prove a point to both Congress and BJP and to stake his claim for the highest post of the country. Pawar is desperate to enter Rashtrapati Bhawan.

JAYALALITHAA COOL TOWARDS BJP LEADERS

Now it is clear that the BJP alliance with Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu is ruled out. Despite several moves to woo Amma, she has rebuffed Narendra Modi. Several senior ministers have visited Chennai to meet Jayalalitha but all of them returned empty handed. First Arun Jaitley went to convince her on GST but she just refused to fall in line, Then Ananth Kumar visited her but she did not budge. Last visit was made by Sadanand Gowda but again there was not a word of reconciliation. The Congress and the AIADMK are the only two parties that are opposing the GST. On the other hand, Thumbidurai, her man in Delhi was present at the funeral of the CPI Leader AB Bardhan and he was the only opposition leader besides the former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh who sat through at the memorial meeting of AB Bardhan held at Mavlanar Hall at VP House on Tuesday. His presence has made it very clear that Amma will have nothing to do with the BJP in the course of assembly elections. But the absence of any DMK leader and the tainted Maran brothers who are facing corruption charges, has indicated that they are keen to go with the BJP and it suits the Govt also. BJP needs an ally in Tamil Nadu and so do the Marans and the DMK leadership who are in trouble both politically as well as legally and this is one reason that the Modi government is trying to save the Maran brothers.

RACE HOTTING UP FOR SEBI CHIEF'S POST

The race for the next

Chairman of the Security and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) seems to have got momentum. At least three top candidates are seen in the race. Secretary to the President Thomas Mathew is believed to be lobbying hard while State Bank of India chairperson Arundhati Bhattacharya is seen as a preferred choice of finance ministry. Ramesh Abhishek, the former chairman of the Forward Markets Commission is also seen as a serious candidate. The present chairman, UK Sinha's term ends on March 16 this year.

JAITLEY AGREES TO ALLOW FOREIGN LAWYERS TO PRACTICE IN INDIA

India may soon remove the embargo on foreign lawyers to practice law in the country. Finance minister Arun Jaitley signed a memorandum of understanding with the UK authorities promising that foreign lawyers would be allowed to practice in India on non-Indian laws. This may find opposition from certain Indian law firms. How the Modi Government manages the opposition will be interesting to watch.

SALIM KHAN MAY BE NOMINATED TO RAJYA SABHA

Father of Salman Khan, writer Salim Khan of Salim-Javed team, is set to replace his writing counterpart of Deewar fame Javed Akhtar in April this year in Rajya Sabha. Salim Khan, an accomplished writer and an admirer of Narendra Modi is a novice in politics. He is a man of few words and always politically stands on the right side of power as it was proved recently when his son Salman Khan courted a controversy by questioning hanging of Yakub Memon in a series of tweets. It was then his father Salim Khan who came to his rescue and forced Salman not only to delete the tweets but also made him tender public apology.

FINANCE SECRETARY RATAN WATAL'S IMPORTANCE GROWS

Is Ratan Watal more important than a finance secretary normally is? There is no two opinion on this. But what could be the reason for his importance? Watal was private secretary to former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. He understands political equations well. Reportedly Late Mufti Mohammed Syed wanted Watal as J&K chief secretary. It could be that Prime Minister Modi has sensed the important role Watal can play, hence the extra proximity of the officer to the Prime Minister's office?

CONGRESS HIGH COMMAND TO TAKE DECISION ON ALLIANCE IN WEST BENGAL

TMC in West Bengal is in a spot. If Congress and the Left parties tie up there for the forthcoming assembly election, the anti-Mamata votes will go to the coalition. Desperate Mamata is caught in the communal card since she wants to retain the support of Muslims who are in the majority in many constituencies. But a Left-Congress tie up is certain to win over Muslims who would probably opt for national mainstream political parties. Mamata is desperately trying to woo Congress leader Manas Bhuiyan, a former minister in TMC-Congress coalition who is against a tie up with Left and suggests that he prefers to join hands with TMC. The final decision rests with the Congress High Command. (IPA)

“Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle. And so we must straighten our backs and work for our freedom. A man can't ride you unless your back is bent.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LVIII No. 165 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JANUARY 26, 2016

Constitutional crisis in Arunachal Pradesh?

THE Union Cabinet's recommendation for bringing Arunachal Pradesh under central rule has come in for a lot of flak considering that the case is pending before the Supreme Court. On Monday, Home Minister Rajnath Singh met President Pranab Mukherjee to explain the circumstances under which the government decided to impose President's Rule in the border state of Arunachal Pradesh. The Congress Party, Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal and Bihar CM, Nitish Kumar have lashed out at the Modi Government calling this move a reflection of the Central Government's political intolerance. Going by the Governor JP Rajkhowa's report the state's constitutional machinery has broken down under chief minister Nabam Tuki.

Arunachal Pradesh was rocked by a political crisis on December 16 last year, when 21 Congress MLAs joined hands with 11 BJP members and two Independents to "impeach" Assembly Speaker Nabam Rebia from a makeshift venue in Itanagar. The Speaker called the meeting "illegal and unconstitutional". Only 27 MLAs in the 60-member assembly, including chief minister Tuki and his ministerial colleagues, boycotted the proceedings. The matter is now before the Supreme Court. If the Supreme Court rules the session invalid, it would amount to a constitutional breakdown because the assembly has breached Article 174 of the Constitution - mandating that the gap between two sessions of the assembly should not exceed six months.

However, if the top court rules that the session was valid, it would mean that the State's Congress government was in a minority but unwilling to let a floor test of its strength be conducted. In that case the State Government would be violating Article 167(b) of the Constitution, which requires the Government to respond to Governor Rajkhowa's request for information regarding affairs of the state as well as legislative proposals. Meanwhile the law and order situation has deteriorated to such an extent that the Raj Bhavan was gheraoed and access to it blocked. What is worse is that the Governor has alleged in his reports that Government officials were indulging in indiscipline, lawlessness and politicking even while the Central Government says it has evidence that a section of the bureaucracy was funding certain student groups and others pressure groups to rant against the Governor.

This situation is unwarranted and it bodes ill that the office of the Governor should be the subject of so much controversy, if he was indeed fulfilling his constitutional duties.

LOOKING BACK

February 26, 1988

Thomas Cup

In a stellar performance veteran Prakash Padukon for India a thrilling 3-2 victory over fancied Japan the Thomas Cup Asian Zone qualifying round match here today.

This was third straight win for India in as many matches. In the other Thomas Cup match, strong contender Thailand blanked Sri Lanka 5-0 to notch up their second successive victory.

National champion Syed Modi gave India flying start when he swept aside Hiroshi Nishiyama in straight games 15-9, 15-3 in just 37 minutes. Modi was in irresistible form today, he played like a champion and totally outclassed Nishiyama.

Passing out parade of 1st MLP Battalion

The thirteen passing out parade of the 1st Meghalaya

Police Battalion was held on Monday at Mawlong on the outskirts of Shillong. On the occasion, in all 86 police cadets, drawn from the battalion, communications and fire service organization, were commissioned into the regular Meghalaya force. Director General of Police, Mr. M. I. S. Iyer took the salute.

Mr. Iyer also gave away the prizes to the most successful cadet for their remarkable achievements during the training. These include cash awards of Rs. 400 each and a running trophy secured by Rajen Bordoloi for being best in weapons handling. Mr. Jagat Bahadur Thapa for turnout, Mr. Plickson Momin for shooting and drill. The cash prize of Rs 500 and a running trophy for best all rounder went to cadet Mr. Aibor Shabong.

'U rang khat-ar lama' in Khasi matrilineal society

By Fabian Lyngdoh

It is known that wedded bliss doesn't last long in the Khasi society. This is because a Khasi man's bliss is in 'ka rympei ba rhem i mei' (warm hearth of the mother). The 'warm heart of the mother' is the socio-religious institution of the kur (clan) itself. Divorce among the Khasis was lightly taken in the past because a father was not an institutionalized provider for the family, but he was only a friend, a co-procreator, and an honourable ambassador of his kur to his children's kur in the marriage transaction. In the strictest sense, the father's presence or absence has little to do with the cultural legitimacy, legality, honour and security of the family. Not a long time back we could hear elderly men when meeting each other after many years conversed among themselves as follows:

"Are you still with ki Shadap?"
"No, I'm no longer with ki Shadap since five years back. It is already three years now I am with ki Lamare. What about you? Are you still with ki Sten?"
"No, I am staying with my kur now. If things go well I may go with ki Mynsong."

A woman's individuality and personal name as a wife have little significance in social conversations because her kur as a whole is entering into social relationship through marriage. The traditional Khasi matrilineal system had an adjustment mechanism to accommodate single motherhood. When the uncles were there constantly to see to the socio-economic welfare of the kur, single motherhood was a perfectly normal phenomenon; it was neither honourable nor dishonourable, but it was socially accepted, protected and secured within the kur organization. The duty of the Khasi woman was to provide for the continuity and permanency of the social membership of the kur by breeding new members, and it was the institutional responsibility of the whole kur to see to the maintenance and security of the woman and her children. The more children, daughters and sons a woman produces, the more honourable she becomes. A Khasi family (ing) with mother, father and sons without daughters

is more unwanted than a family of a single mother with many daughters and sons. But all that is said about the institutional security of women in the Khasi society is now a thing of the past. A man stays in his wife's house not so much by having co-procreated the children, but mainly by virtue of the presence of his, 'ka knor ka phala'. Ka knor ka phala, means the 'space' created by sexual and marital reason for a man to stay in the house of another kur. If there is no sexual and marital reason, then there would be no space for a man of one kur to stay in the household of another kur. Whenever a wife dies we could hear conversations between the widower and uncles of the deceased as follows:

"What are you planning to do now that our niece is no more?"
"What can I do, my 'ka knor ka phala' is no more, and there is little reason for me to stay."

"It is up to you. You may stay or you may go as you will."
The presence of men, as brothers and uncles in the kur has no sexual reference to their female members. But the presence of a man from another kur, has a sexual reference to the female members of the kur by his sexual relationship with one of their female members, principally, for the purpose of procreation. It is this sexual relationship which provides the 'space' or 'ka knor ka phala' for a husband to go on staying in his wife's kur even after he has co-procreated many children, and his wife has long passed productive age. The kur of the deceased wife cannot expect her husband to stay in their kur unless they can provide another 'ka knor ka phala' from among their kur to replace the deceased one. If a man is so attached to his children and the kur of his deceased wife has confidence in his integrity, arrangement may be made for his marriage to any of the younger sisters of his deceased wife to provide continuity for the exist-

ence of his ka knor ka phala in their kur. Though such cases are not generally practised, but they are quite common in the Khasi society. The present idea that a Khasi man is 'u rang khat-ar lama' which literally means a man of twelve flags but actually means a polygamist, is a borrowed concept. It has been frequently opined that besides his 'ka lok trai' (married wife), a Khasi man can also have 'ki lok kliar' (concubines). This is neither a general phenomenon nor a traditional practice among the Khasis. There is no ground in the socio-religious thought of the Khasis that provides any legal or religious sanction for a man to keep concubines, or for Khasi women to be considered as mere concubines to a man. The ideas of 'ka lok trai' and 'ka lok kliar' must have emerged out of the influence of translations of stories of Rajas or Kings of patriarchal societies, who had queens and concubines. I have not come across any Khasi indigenous legend or folk tale where there are references to a concubine, except some stray reference about the rajas of Madur-Maskur. According to the Khasi socio-religious thought, no kur would disgrace itself by allowing its women to be mere concubines to a man of any kur.

Serial monogamy is permitted among the Khasis even today. A man may marry several women one after another, but not all at the same time. Marriage to the Khasis in the past was a mutual acceptance and recognition of the two kurs to the reproductive relationship of a man and a woman, not merely for their personal pleasure, but to establish ka 'longkha-longman' (kin relationship between clans through marriage). Therefore, every time a woman takes a husband with the recognition of the two kurs, that husband is considered legitimate (u lok trai) whether he might be the first, second, or third husband. All the husbands are equal in status; being first, second, or third is only a serial number, and

all her children are legitimate members of her kur. And, every time a man takes a wife with due recognition of the two kurs, whether she might be the first, second, or third wife, she is considered a legitimate wife (lok trai), and his children from all the wives are the legitimate khunkha of his kur.

Khasi women are permitted to marry several men one after another according to their will. In fact, people in the villages speak about a woman's numerous husbands with more weight-age than about a man's numerous wives. We could hear people say with approbation that such and such a woman had husbands, numerous enough to fence her garden. But the concept of 'khat-ar lama' implies only to men, but not to women. Today, the concept 'khat-ar lama' is generally interpreted as the license for a Khasi man to have concubines besides a legitimate wife, and in popular contempt for his act of leaving one wife after another. In the past, the term 'khat-ar lama' was applied to a man less as contempt, but more as a matter of potency and pride. During the funeral of 'ka meikha' (father's mother) or at the funeral of the father himself, all ki khun-kha would attend and present pieces of cloth called 'lama' (flags) in the funeral ceremony to be tied at the top of bamboo posts positioned at the four corners of the funeral pyre. As smoke from the funeral pyre rises, these 'ka lama' would be waving devoutly in the air to give honour to 'ka kur meikha' (father's clan). So the idea of 'u rang khat-ar lama' does not refer to the cultural license for a Khasi man to practise polygamy, but to the fact of his having produced many khunkha to his kur from women of several kurs to pay homage at his kur's funeral ceremonies. The concept of 'ka lok kliar' (concubine) as understood in patriarchal societies has no recognition in the social and religious thought of the Khasis. If the concept and existence of such a practice is prevalent today, it must be a recent phenomenon after the kur system has lost its institutional character.

Editor,
With each passing day, intolerance is increasingly engulfing the Indian society. Individuals forwarding cartoons or cracking jokes are promptly arrested! No qualms in killing intellectuals who dare to protest against any rabid ideology and the dietary habits of certain communities have also come under threat! Is India a democratic country or going the suicidal Taliban way? Moreover, the Indian polity is scandalously being fragmented on the lines of religion, caste and language. Though the politicians are engaged in such dirty games, it must also be remembered that they are merely exploiting the fissures that lie deeply embedded within the society which has again been proved by the suicide of the Hyderabad student who happened to be a Dalit. Mahatma Gandhi is certainly a man to be proud of, but Indians simply hold no moral right to pay glowing tributes to him. Reality has proved that Indians are eminently capable of desecrating his ideal of Ahimsa. Thus introspection is

the only meaningful mode of celebrating Republic Day.

Yours etc.,
Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata -114

then there will be at least ten who will aim to neutralize the rumour. Also, I still believe that a lot of study and research is involved in predicting earthquakes. This includes the study of the movement of tectonic plates. The seismologists have predicted the earthquake after studying the movement of tectonic plates. They have not 'shot an arm in the air'. Sanbeer has said that rubbish is meant to be cleaned. The statement is true but not when we relate to a big mass of people. Sanbeer might be having some bad personal experiences regarding rumours and thus, he is criticizing the seismologists. I don't see why he should vent his anger on the earthquake predictors. By making such statements Sanbeer is only negating what could possibly be a real warning.

Yours etc.,
Pratham Sharma,
Via email

We should be grateful!

Editor,
In his letter, 'Should we be grateful?' (ST Jan 23, 2016), Sanbeer Singh Rannhotra had criticised the earthquake predictors for spreading rumours regarding possible earthquakes. He says that the aim of the earthquake predictors is to strike fear among the people of the North East and the area surrounding the Himalayas. Why would they even do that? What's their loss or gain? Sanbeer says that havoc can be created by simply posting rubbish on social networks. Well, I think that there are more positive than negative people on social networks. I don't think that we're living in so bad a time that people have lost their senses. If there is one person who aims to spread rumours with the help of social network,

then there will be at least ten who will aim to neutralize the rumour. Also, I still believe that a lot of study and research is involved in predicting earthquakes. This includes the study of the movement of tectonic plates. The seismologists have predicted the earthquake after studying the movement of tectonic plates. They have not 'shot an arm in the air'. Sanbeer has said that rubbish is meant to be cleaned. The statement is true but not when we relate to a big mass of people. Sanbeer might be having some bad personal experiences regarding rumours and thus, he is criticizing the seismologists. I don't see why he should vent his anger on the earthquake predictors. By making such statements Sanbeer is only negating what could possibly be a real warning.

Yours etc.,
Pratham Sharma,
Via email

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Republic At 66 We deserve a lot better

By Poonam I Kaushish

How does one feel on Republic day, today? Rather how is one supposed to feel? Patriotic? About what? Pride? Forget it. Satisfied? Far from it. Joy? Sure, it's a holiday. That, my dear, compatriot is what 26 January boils down to. Just another *chutti* to do your own thing. Nothing more nothing less. Sixty six years which embody the joy and tragedy of India!

New Delhi is under a heavy cloak of security as our leaders go through the same stereotype motions mechanically. President Mukherjee unfurls the tricolour at Rajpath, followed by a Parade displaying the country's military might. Fighter planes streak in a befitting grand finale. People's chest puff up with momentary national pride. Later in the afternoon, the President entertains the mighty and powerful to tea in Rahttrapati Bhavan's resplendent Mughal Gardens. The Governors follow identical rituals in their States. Spotting the outward symbols of India's unity.

So far so good. Yet sharp questions arise at home and abroad about the health of the Republic. Let's start with terror which has become an albatross around India's neck. Forget Pakistan's home grown terrorist brood of *Laskar e Toiba, Hizbul Mujahideen, Jaish e Mohammad* et al today we are in the cross fire of the ISIS too.

Last week over 14 IS sympathizers were arrested underscoring, the terror dance continues despite Pakistan promising to rein in its non-State militants. No matter our Home Minister doesn't tire of stating we will give them *muah torj jawwab!* Equally worrisome is the fact that 15 States are Naxalite hit and there are 40 Naxalite groups active in India. Having links with Pakistan's ISI and the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) making even the semblance of governance difficult in half the country. Worse, they are running a state within a state with a parallel revenue income. While various State Governments grapple in the dark on how to get the better of them. Alas, tribal life comes cheap.

Economically, the country is on the roll. There is international cacophony that India has arrived, with billions rolling in foreign direct investment. The stock market has never had it so good. IT-related business is booming. The demand for India "techies and neties" far outstrips the supply. Start-Up, Stand-Up India are the new buzzword. Connectivity is the latest mantra. Infrastructure and development are fashionable. Malls and high rise buildings dot the landscape and cars clog the roads. Even rural India is improving. Internet cafes and beauty parlours, branded consumables *et al* can be found in the villages.

Little consolation this! Look at the dark side: The widening communal divide mirrors the deep crevices in our secular image, proof that our social polity is now gripped in its cancerous tentacles. Violence has become the rhetoric of the time, killing yet another signpost of our enfeebled enforcement machinery. A new cult establishing an order of hatred and rage wherein one man's food is another man's poison. A succinct testimony to the ongoing maelstrom over growing intolerance.

From love jihad, beef ban, anti-Pakistan cultural-sports protests to killing of rationalists, Hyderabad University has earned the ignominy of being the new hot bed of hatred following the suicide of Dalit student Rohith Vemula which has set India aflame once again resulting in a political slugfest all trying to cash in on his death. Predictably, while the Congress led-Opposition held aloft the banner of the Sangh Parivar's growing intolerance painting Rohit's demise due to the BJP's anti-Dalit stand and accusing the Government of pursuing a "Hindutva agenda".

There is political disquiet over Modi's failure to curb his rabid Hindutva brigands who stand accused of Rohit's demise. His crime? Acerbic views on Hindutva and using Telugu's equivalent of English

swear word **** to denounce it, along-with protesting against the hanging of 1992 Mumbai blasts perpetrator Yakub Memon for which he paid with his life. Should this become litmus of one's patriotism? How does merely criticizing a belief or thinking tantamount to spreading "hatred"?

See how Bollywood's Amir Khan has been replaced by Amitabh Bachhan and Priyanka Chopra in the Incredible India media campaign simply because Khan's wife said they could consider moving to another country due to the growing intolerant climate in India. And Shah Rukh Khan cornered on what it is to be a Muslim in India, leading him to say he was a proud Indian.

Raising a moot point: Is India heading towards an era of political intolerance and Hindutva values thrust down our throats? It's my way or highway' attitude? Is the polity afraid of the clash of ideas in our public life? Has are ruling *netagan* lost their ability to handle criticism? Bordering on a narcissist Hindu phobia?

Undoubtedly, far from being tolerant and turning a cheek to varying opinions it would seem that we are determined to turn most things into a bone of contention. In an era of political correctness and ethnic sensitivity, where fundamentalists march as patriots in uniform, a wry irreverence, or a tongue-in-cheek reference, becomes an act of "hatred". Life is lived in the slim strip called the official.

This apart, another notable failure of the Government is its inability to bring down prices. Every visit I make to the market for vegetables, oil, sugar, wheat and *dal-chawal*, the prices have risen by a minimum of Rs 2-Rs 10. That it is the annual summer season does not cut ice; the Congress parroted the same dialogue.

Worse, the NDA has increased taxes. Service tax has gone up from 12.3% to 14%. Why? It makes accounting simpler, assert finance mandarins. Not for them the fact it has a cascading affect on family budgets. Think. A simple visit to buy soap, toothpaste, food-stuff will set you back by at least a couple of hundred bucks a month, resulting in a housewife's budget going for a toss.

Add to this rising water and electricity bills which continue to give a tough time to the common man. More. The Finance Minister has imposed luxury tax of 2% on even daily necessities like getting a haircut. Realtors are crying foul. A buyer of an Rs 25 lakhs flat will have to shell out Rs 10,500 more. This is bound to lead to a slowdown instead of propelling growth. Any wonder, Modi is perceived as pro-rich.

Sadly, beyond the financial might of overflowing tillers of Brand India, lies the squalor and the filth that is the reality of *ashli Bharat*. The less said the better of the poor *kisans*. The polity's callous and lackadaisical reaction to farmers suicide says it all. Compensation is virtually non-existent. Shamefully, in the last year alone, over 16,500 farmers have committed suicide, epitomising the country's ennu to its farmers.

Compounding matters, with over 65% of the population working in agriculture, instead of beefing up their lives the Government's Land Acquisition Bill has got caught in the Government-Opposition cross hairs of pro-anti farmer lobby. With none willing to take up cudgels for those who put food on our table. Simply, because *kisans* per se do not constitute a vote block, divided according to sub castes.

All in all, Republic Day is a time for honest soul searching. Time has come for our *netas* to turn a new page and invest in its citizens genuinely, people who make this nation, their education, health, jobs and in their future. Specially, as he system faces its greatest-ever crisis even as our people are urged to revel in the "feel-good factor" waiting for *ache din* to arrive. We Indians deserve a lot better. (INFA)

"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way."

— John C. Maxwell

The Shillong Times

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Poverty in eastern India

SMERA is a joint initiative of SIDBI, Dun & Bradstreet India and leading banks in India and is a leading provider of credible ratings and opinions backed by exhaustive research. SMERA ratings have published a report which suggests that West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Assam and other North-eastern states can contribute a quarter of India's GDP within the next 20 years. At present, their combined share is 16.5%. The region accounts for 27% of the country's population which is a lot in excess of its share of the GDP. Besides its people are in relative poverty. It is surprising because some of the states are rich in mineral resources. West Bengal and Bihar have a number of major industrial plants. A number of factors have set back the region's development. One is the freight equalization policy. Iron and coal were thus made available at the same price across the country setting at naught the locational advantage. In the early 1990's, this system was abolished but its effect has not yet been wiped out.

Add to this the Maoist menace and the step-motherly treatment of the Centre from time to time. The north-eastern economy has long been hit by militant groups, natural calamities and an unnecessary clash between those for development and environmentalists. How can the upward growth projected by SMERA be brought about? It depends on Indo/Asean trade which is now over 80 billion dollars. If the eastern states can be a gateway to eastern Asia, the region's growth can pick up. An industrial corridor connecting the eastern states is of paramount importance. West Bengal and Bihar may be poised for a leap forward but can the same be said about the north-eastern states with their complexity of problems?

LOOKING BACK

Jan 11, 1989

Election time promises

Election time promises are apt to be forgotten after the election and the longer the list of such promises sooner is this lapse experienced in most cases. The election manifestos issued by parties, both national and regional, are mostly exercises which thus hardly make any impact on the mind of voters and yet they come with a religious regularity with what success we do not know. One common item on which all the contesting parties, have stresses in the ongoing Mizoram election campaign is the unification of all continuous Mizo areas, the early authorship of which idea must be created to Laldenga during his UMFO (United Mizo Freedom Organisation) days when this one slogan party. The demand paled into insignificance with Laldenga soon thereafter opting for insurgency under the banner of the yet more absurd claim for a sovereign Mizoram.

The reunification idea regained its status with Brig Sailo since taking up the issue in right earnest when he was dislodged from his Chief Minister ship. This too was no less surprising since he endorsed the claim for the continuous Mizo inhabited areas in Burma also which involved considerations of international dimensions and to that extent belonged to the genre of wild thinking beyond the pale of practical politics open to a mere regional party or parties. The demand, however, has now acquired further respectability with India's ruling Congress (I) also joining the band wagon and endorsing reunification of all Mizo areas in its eighty four point election manifesto releases on the eve of the ensuing Assembly election.

The Congress (I) support to such a reunification idea, bringing under one administrative unit all contiguous ethnic groups would naturally carry more weight than

that by the other regional parties. The national ruling party has more authority at its back and capability too to implement the promise. There are too many other areas in this vast country, and some in this region too, which would ask for similar readjustment of inter State boundaries with more vigor if the principle of reunification solely on racial consideration is accepted by the ruling party as proposed to be done in the case of Mizoram. The Garo-inhabited villages in Assam contiguous to Meghalaya, for instance, have long been wanting similar reunification in the name of readjustment of boundaries.

Once the Congress (I) takes up fulfilling its election time promise to the Mizos, the Garo demand is bound to be resurrected from the oblivion to which it had been relegated in recent years. One is bound to surmise, therefore, that the Congress (I) promise in Mizoram would have possibly been more restrained if there were sooner prospects of its regaining power on its own. Among other election time absurdities in Mizoram must perhaps be ranked the allegation made by Laldenga that a conspiracy has been hatched for his surrender before the election and that in it are involved high officials including the governor who lead the present presidential regime. Equally improbable would seem to be the Union Minister of State's reported statement to the press that Mr. Laldenga has once again been engaged in procurement of arms from Bangladesh. Any police report to this effect can well be only a tit for tat for the Laldenga's own allegation involving the police in the alleged assassination plan.

Heads they win, Tails we lose

By Oscar B Marwein

Let me from the onset declare that I am a pure blooded Khasi (an inclusive term covering both Khasis and Pnars). I have been brought up in the belief that my identity as a Khasi springs from matriliney - the practice that I derive my name from my mother's side rather than from my father. It is the fountainhead of my identity and culture as a Khasi. This identity in turn is firmly linked to the 'kpoh' (womb) I descended from and to the 'kur' (clan) that the kpoh belongs to. Delink me from matriliney; disconnect me from my kur and I am just another human being no different from others. The connection to my kur is the mainstay of my identity and culture as a Khasi. It is a tribal identity I wear with pride and am grateful to the Constitution of India for recognising me as the Schedule Tribe that I am today and for the constitutional privileges I enjoy because of this recognition.

At this point it is pertinent to observe that the Jaitybnriew of U Hynniewtrep has for long been deeply concerned over the issue of unity of the community. All of us lament the absence of it. The call for unity has therefore been continuously made from various platforms, social, religious and political. We have always identified the threat as external and the quest has always been for coming together, united as a jaitybnriew, to face onslaught from outsiders. Our efforts have been in vain because of the neglect, disrespect and disregard the modern Khasi has shown to the concept of the 'kur'. The Khasi kur makes up the jaitybnriew and if the kur begins to breakup the Jaitybnriew will also begin to disintegrate. Culture and identity will become meaningless with the breakup of the kur system. Its as simple as that but everyone of us modern Khasis actively contribute towards this disintegration. All of us have been guilty in bringing down the bonding capability of the Khasi kur system.

This neglect has played havoc with the social fabric of Ka Bri U Hynniewtrep. Khasi society is now once again being rocked by a petition filed in the Meghalaya High Court demanding minority status for Seng Khasi and Niam tre. The writ is filed based on the provisions of Art 29 and 30 of the Constitution and on the claim that the petitioners have been deprived of their Fundamental rights and

their Human Rights. The petitioners believe that relief lies in declaring themselves as minorities. The demand however simply approaches the problem from the narrow perspective of religion. It singularly ignores the intricate and inclusive social fabric in which the group exists. Within the context of a clan based egalitarian Khasi society, religion apart, everyone follows the same script, same language and same culture as everyone else. Everyone, irrespective of faith, contribute to conserve the above. This contribution cannot be confined only to narrow aspects of dances and faith based rites. Contribution to culture and identity as a matter of fact lies more on aspects of literature, music, research on issues of identity and culture and their publication, in preserving agricultural and pastoral practices, in the traditional ways on how we manage the environment and biodiversity around us as well as preserving our unique tribal way of life. All Khasis actively participate in such activities and therefore for a few to appropriate Khasi culture and identity only in the name of religion is wrong and misleading. It has the potential of splitting our society.

It is doubtful if the current demand by Niam Khasi and Niam Tre for minority status can qualify and fulfil the conditions of Art 29. They are no different from other Khasis and other Khasis from them as far as distinct script, language and culture are concerned. There is however need for us to approach the problem from the perspective of rationality and cold logic. This means that due recognition and respect be given to the faith and religious practices of the Seng Khasi and Niam Tre. Respect must be given to the fact that they have no wish to convert to other faiths. What they follow and their belief system contributes and adds colour; it is part and parcel of Khasi identity and culture. If in the process, they have, because of the faith they follow, been deprived by anyone of the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice, then Art 30 of the Constitution applies and rightly so. Everyone needs to support this. Deprivation however needs to be

proved in a court of law, unless of course ideological sanghs in Delhi have already decided the outcome.

All indigenous tribals of Meghalaya irrespective of the faith they practice, enjoy Schedule Tribe status and the privileges it confers. It is doubtful if constitutionally one would be allowed to enjoy both Minority status and Schedule Tribe status and the privileges they carry, at the same time. Having said that, the future impact that the petition will have on Hynniewtrep community (Ka jaitybnriew) is yet unknown but can be anticipated. It is obvious however that the following are bound to occur. Faith based minority status, if imposed on certain sections of Khasi Pnar society, will have a divisive effect. It will split Khasi society into two. As pointed out above the Khasi Pnar community is a Schedule Tribe community and frankly speaking, very few of us, faith or no faith, are willing to forego this status.

Our tribal status is based on the clan (kur) we belong to. Not all members of the kur are of the same faith yet the kur carries on and the Jaitybnriew survives. So far every member of the kur, irrespective of faith, is a Schedule Tribe enjoying whatever benefits this brings along, one of which is unity of identity. Now suddenly the identity of individuals within a kur, within a kpoh, within a family will be determined by the faith they follow, respectively enjoying different privileges and status. A grand mother could have minority status while a daughter would have Schedule Tribe status. What status will the grandchild claim? Faith is a personal matter. Lets not communalise it. Utter confusion will prevail within the kur system; families will be split in half; the Jaitybnriew will be splintered and fragmented (pharia lynkhot lyngkhai) as never before. Is it worth it? The question needs serious consideration by thought leaders of our community.

One cannot help but come to the sad conclusion that here's a blatant attempt to split Khasi society along faith and hence communal lines. Question is who benefits from such a move? Definitely not U Khun U Hynniewtrep nor the Jaitybnriew. They however

could be the vanguard to open up the minority status to others within the state. The writ in this context will be a Pandora's box that will ultimately end up in depriving the Khasis the Schedule Tribe status they all enjoy at the moment. The writ as it is will be a big disservice to our future generations, depriving them of the benefits we enjoy. Open the special privileges floodgates and it will bring in reservations in jobs, education and politics. Outsiders who don't have it will enjoy. Let us also not forget the oft whispered desire to turn Shillong into a Union Territory. Is this wish soon to be fulfilled? One sees the seeds of such a design being sown and encouraged by our own kith and kin. We once looked at external and outsider forces as the main threat to our Tribal unity. Apparently we were looking in the wrong direction!

In conclusion it is in the strict interest of the Khasi Pnar community as a whole to sit down and deliberate with cool heads on this developing social crisis that has caught up with us. On one hand is a grievance perceived by a group of our own kith and kin. They feel discriminated against because of the faith they follow. To redeem themselves they have opted for a constitutional remedy despite the permanent damage it will cause to Khasi culture and tradition. On the other hand there are others who feel that the proposed remedy is like firing a cannon to kill a fly. It will cause more harm than the nuisance it seeks to nullify. It will simply result in Tribal society imploding from within. It has already started! A death blow to a minuscule community struggling to maintain its culture and identity. A wrong remedy for a flawed diagnosis is unlikely to help anyone. Its akin to cutting your nose to spite yourself. Its something Khasi Pnar society can ill afford to indulge in at this juncture. The Jaitybnriew will not survive because of the faith it follows. We will survive only if we can come up with workable measures to counter poverty, unemployment, corruption and mal governance. These are the real threats to our society and they happen everyday under our very noses. Our people need to be freed from these constraints. So why use religion and faith to divert attention from more serious issues of survival? The serious reader is requested to react.

Amit Shah faces Dalit challenge in times to come

By Lalit Sethi

The BJP president, Mr. Amit Shah, has been re-elected as party chief for a three-year regular term with the full support of his boss, Mr. Narendra Modi. This will ensure that the Prime Minister's writ runs in the saffron party. Though the BJP faces many challenges in the coming years, especially in Assembly elections in Punjab, West Bengal, Assam and Tamil Nadu this year and in U.P. next year, the party will be geared to a single chain of command.

The Parliamentary Board, which chose Mr. Shah unanimously, was boycotted by Mr. L.K Advani and Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi, but Mr. Shah called on them afterwards to seek their blessings. Though the two senior leaders wanted a detailed inquiry into BJP defeats in the Bihar and Delhi Assembly elections last year, this has been explained away by insisting that it won in four States: Haryana, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Maharashtra where it was not in power.

It also joined the Jammu and Kashmir coalition government in alliance with People's Democratic Party, but it has to be revived as the State is now under Governor's rule. It won nearly all seats in Jammu province, but none in Kashmir.

in the line of fire, especially Dalit fire. The student agitators refuse to cave in.

The BJP would expect that with time, the Dalit anger would subside in Hyderabad and elsewhere, but with the Budget Session of Parliament beginning in less than four weeks, the Opposition is not likely to miss the opportunity to harass the government of the day. The Congress might be entitled to think that in 60 years of its rule, it let sleeping dogs sleep and got away by taking several populist measures to win the voters to its camp, though the corruption scams of the new millennium took their toll and it lost out in the power stakes.

The RSS is trying to woo the Dalit people in a big way. One of its top leaders has asked all its members that each one should adopt at least one Dalit family, but its image of being pro-rich and famous refuses to go away. The achievements of Mr. Amit Shah as party president for 18 months include one that he raised the membership from 30 million to 110 million, but where are those tens of millions? Are they winning the BJP friends and voters? They did not in Delhi and Bihar Assembly elections last

Rohith Vemula might have been impressed by the BJP six years ago when he went to Hyderabad, but what he and his fellow students saw in subsequent years was stark caste barriers among the student community and teachers.

But a big new threat or challenge has emerged from the Dalit lobby after the suicide of a brilliant Dalit student leader, Rohith Vemula, in a hostel of the Hyderabad Central University on January 17. Although the Prime Minister claims to be a Dalit himself and as one who experienced the pain of poor and backward people as a student and child in his formative years, the big agitation in Hyderabad and several other universities, including Delhi, is focussing on upper caste credentials of the mainstream BJP and RSS.

Rohith Vemula might have been impressed by the BJP six years ago when he went to Hyderabad, but what he and his fellow students saw in subsequent years was stark caste barriers among the student community and teachers. There was complete alienation. He became a leftist for a while, but the Communists, he saw, were engaged in class struggle. Caste prejudices were not recognized by them. He went on to set up an Ambedkar Students' Association, which has spread its wings to 11 States.

His suicide followed a showdown with a BJP-led Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad leader, who was initially his friend. A BJP Minister of State, Mr. Dattatreya, jumped into the fray and demanded the expulsion of five Dalit students from Hyderabad University. The Union Minister of Human Resource Development, Mrs. Smriti Irani, was approached by her Ministerial colleague and five Dalit students were thrown out of the hostel of the Central university in Hyderabad. It took the Centre five more days to order a judicial inquiry into the expulsion and suicide and the Vice-Chancellor to go on leave. But the BJP, Mrs. Irani and the vice-chancellor, even the acting one, remain

This perception could cost the party dear in Punjab and U.P. where the percentage of Dalits among voters is huge. In Punjab, Arvind Kejriwal and his Aam Adami Party made some gains in the Lok Sabha elections in 2014 and he will fish in the troubled waters of U.P. as well next year. He is already active in Punjab and goes there to address public meetings, wearing a yellow turban to gel with his audiences.

Other parties will also try to ride the Dalit band wagon, but the Akali Dal in Punjab is perceived as a party dominated by Jats. In U.P. the Samajwadi Party is one mainly of Yadavs and the Bahujan Samaj Party led by Ms. Mayawati might claim to be the beacon light of Dalits, but it was routed and drew a blank in the 2014 elections, with not a single Lok Sabha seat to show.

Will the BJP try to exploit these factors to its advantage, but it will face difficulties. Even the Yadav rulers have belatedly woken up to the need to push development projects, though migrants from 1947 and local people have done something on their own even as irrigation projects and canals have raised farm output.

Will Ms. Mayawati try to win back her Dalit constituency or has her showmanship during her five-year tenure as Chief Minister of U.P. told the Dalits that she was not for their uplift but to protect her own interests? She might hope that the anti-incumbency factors of Mulayam Singh Yadav and his son, Akhilesh as Chief Ministers, would have left the people of U.P. disenchanted with them. She would be hoping to stage a comeback, but it might not be easy going for her or the father-son duo of Samajwadi Party.

TO THE EDITOR

Whom should we blame?

Editor,

Now that a government servant can no longer become rangbah shnong or office bearer in the locality it is a big blow to the administration in the localities especially in Shillong where majority of the office bearers in the various localities are government servants. In that case most of the localities will be administered by illiterates/half literates and people who have little knowledge of laws and rules.

This setback to the localities is the end result of the high handedness, hasty and nasty acts of the leaders of the Synjuk ki Rangbah Shnong like Dr Kharshing, R Blah, etc who fell prey to self centred politicians like Pynshngain Syiem, SD Khongwir and the KHNAM and took several ugly agitations against the Governor and the CM. These rangbah shnongs followed by hundreds of senseless traditional heads and few hooligans of the KSU and HYC ultimately took personal grudge against the

CM at the behest of the CEM of the KHADC in uncivilized fashion for e.g by spitting at the photo of the CM, which is condemnable by all right thinking and civilized citizens of this earth. In this way their movement for the VAB became political in nature which has led us to nowhere. Therefore the persons to be blamed for the down fall of governance in the localities are squarely Dr W Kharshing and Mr R Blah. We hope there will be personalities of good sense who would come forward to take the leadership and lead our society back to sensible state of affairs.

Yours etc.,
T R Wahlang,
Shillong-8

Good Decision

Editor,

The decision of the State Government to prohibit government employees from getting involved in other non government organizations is a step in the right direction. Many

headmen in Shillong and other villages are government servants, such practice is not good, for the efficiency, discipline and loyalty in the government establishments. Further by being headmen a person is engaged in implementing MLA/MP schemes, managing the MGNREGS works, issuing certificates, land dealings, etc. which are time taxing leaving little space for them to devote to their duties in government offices, thus affects efficiency and coming late to office and leaving early from office is mostly due to these factors. I would congratulate the government of Meghalaya for such endeavour and would also suggest for more reforms and streamlining in governance to improve the work culture in the state. One of the suggestions is to revive back the working 1st and 3rd Saturdays, to make 26th to 31st December if not falling on Saturday and Sunday) as working days and also to convert all local holidays into restricted Holidays.

Yours etc.,
J.B. Sohkhlet
Shillong-2

Pleasant news!

Editor,

The two news items published in your esteemed daily of January 8, 2016 under the caption, "Govt goes ahead with Irene" and "Govt debar its employees from holding other offices," were indeed the most pleasant news for me. Government reasoning behind forwarding Irene Lyngdoh's name that a 'woman' should be the nominated MDC since the KHADC has only two women MDCs is justifiable and highly laudable. However, I feel that efforts must be made to create more space for women's participation in KHADC and this objective could be well achieved if certain percentage of seats in KHADC are exclusively reserved for women candidates.

As for the other news item mentioned above, I fully support the view that "people in the government must do their job for which they are paid." I only regret that such a decision has come so late.

Yours etc.,
A Synrem
Shillong-1

"If you feel like it's difficult to change, you will probably have a harder time succeeding."

— Andrea Jung

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LVIII No. 167 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JANUARY 29, 2016

Manipur's Dilemma

MANIPUR has the largest number of terrorist outfits, led by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in the whole of India. The ambush of Indian armed personnel in the state by NSCN (Khaplang) with links in Myanmar at the frequent blockage of the National Highway have put a stamp of insecurity on the state. It has emphasised the need for security agencies to be armed with special laws including the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). But such armed personnel are often liable to abuse their power. From rape and murder of Monorama belonging to the PLA by Assam Rifles personnel to the latest reports of the suspension of head constable Herojit Sing for brutally murdering an unarmed 22 year old with TLA links 6yrs ago-there have been excesses galore. The iron lady of the state, Iron Sharmila has been protesting against the AFSPA. True, the centre has taken action against atrocities by the city personnel.

Courts, judicial commissions and bodies, including the National Human Rights Commission have often taken steps to restrict the operations of security agencies and colleagues. Manipur's civil society has been vocal about punishing lawlessness let loose by law enforcers. The Supreme Court set up the Santosh Hegde Commission to look into fake encounter killings and similar atrocities by the armed personnel and police. There is no denying that the security of Manipur's civilian population should be safeguarded, however, withdrawal of the AFSPA in a hurry may be ill-advised. India's volatile relations with Myanmar and Khaplang rebels hiding across the border constitute a real threat to Manipur.

LOOKING BACK

Jan 12, 1989

A mania for headquarter

The Assam Chief Minister Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta has reiterated his Calcutta Press Conference last week that the headquarters of the North Eastern Council should be shifted from Shillong to Guwahati. The only reason adduced for the demand is that Guwahati is more centrally located but one has to look further up in the map if a central location is to be the only criterion for conceding the demand for transfer from here. The more valid point in deciding on this issue is that since the Assam Meghalaya Governor happens to be the executive head of the NEC and has to involve himself in it day to day working, the headquarters of the regional institution has inevitably to be in sides, rather than at Governor usually resides, rather than at Guwahati which as also a Raj Bhavan for him which he is called upon the visit only as and when occasion demands.

For over a century Shillong could well serve as the capital of undivided Assam which then comprised the whole of today's north eastern region. The Guwahati lobby's grouse even then against this relatively supposed advantage of Shillong over Guwahati used to be bolstered up by the theory that a capital had to feel the pulse beat of the people which Shillong was incapable of due to its remoteness and isolated features. The NEC headquarters have nothing to dealings being mainly with the headquarters of its constituent State governments rather than their people as such. These State capitals, thanks to vast improvement in air communication of the region in particular in recent years, are today as speedily and conveniently linked with Guwahati as with Shillong too. The plea of so called central location does not, therefore, hold water in

favour particularly of Guwahati on this issue.

There must be something peculiarly wrong in Assam's and in particular Guwahati. During the brief post partition period, the Guwahati lobby has succeeded in grabbing for is a host of regional units located in it. Between Maligaon at one end and Dispur at the other, Guwahati has plethora of such headquarters although basically incapable of absorbing them all in an ordered and well planned economy and social political environment. Among the demands yet to be met to the satisfaction of Guwahati's ego is the transfer of the Tea Board headquarters from its traditional location in Calcutta. A regional headquarters of the Board, located at Guwahati, with enormous powers delegated to it has not apparently satisfied those who want to have their full pound of flesh. And all this in the trail of a huge number of tea establishments and other joint stock companies made already to transfer their registered offices, if not the head office too, to Assam if not in and around Guwahati itself. The ONGC headquarters has not come to Assam yet and there was a long period of agitation mounted for preventing its Managing Director visiting Assam for discharge of his normal routine duties. There is no assurance that the agitation may not be revived, in fact ONGC has to run its show in Upper Assam by constantly feeding fad the demands of local satraps over whom the government of Mr. Mahanta does not appear to have much control. The fight for transfer of NEC headquarters cannot in any case expect such local support

Shillong RSS linked to Nazism and Fascism!

By Albert Thyriang

RSS 'a communal organization'.

In Bunch of Thoughts, M. S. Golwalkar, reverentially addressed Guruji by RSS, while hailing the glories of Hinduism, denounces non-Hindu Indians, terming them "hostile elements within the country (thus) posing a far greater menace to national security than outside aggressors". In his controversial book, which the RSS considers its Gita, the second Sarsanghchalak (Supreme Leader) of RSS's main targets were Muslims, Christians, and Communists. In chapter XI he elaborately challenges their patriotism and talks of their "future aggressive designs on our country." He questions their very existence and favoured them to be thrown out and exterminated. Naturam Godse, a former RSS member who felt that Mahatma Gandhi was pro-Muslim, assassinated him in 1948.

Golwalkar hated democracy too. To him "democracy is to a very large extent only a myth in practice...The high-sounding concept of "individual freedom" only meant the freedom of those talented few to exploit the rest".

The 800 strong Meghalaya RSS unit has ambition to enroll more members. At present the fundamentalist outfit may be silent on cow slaughter and other contentious issues. But once the Sangh spreads its wings in the abode of clouds, it will raise its ugly head. No doubt cow slaughter, conversion, anti-minority, Hindutva and other anti-national ideology will be at the forefront of the RSS activities. Should the Scotland of the East embrace or keep the communal RSS at bay? Does Shillong need the RSS and its sickening ideology?

The organizers also denied any political link to the rally. Untrue! The RSS has close ties with the BJP. The latter is in fact a political wing of the former. Historically BJP is firmly linked with the RSS. The RSS is the ideological brain of the BJP. Party appointments and decisions are always made in 'consultations' with the top brass of the Sangh. Party functionaries are appointed at the pleas-

ure of Mohan Madhukar Bhagawat and his predecessor. The party depends on the grassroots works of the Sangh's Shakhhs Swayamsevaks (volunteers of the RSS) to win elections. One of the dreams of RSS is to see a BJP government in Meghalaya.

Calling the landslide victory of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014 general election a "Hindu revolution", (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) VHP and RSS had, under a planned strategy, made lakhs of RSS foot soldiers work overtime to ensure their pracharak's triumph. To spread its ideology throughout the length and breadth of this country the polarizing organization has a blueprint to install BJP governments in at least 20 of India's 31 states over the next four years.

Now lets consider the RSS's deep link to Nazism and Fascism. Prominent personalities of RSS have always deeply admired Fascism and Nazism. For its fascist view and propagation the RSS was outlawed by the British. Much before the RSS movement commenced in India, senior RSS members had direct links to both Benito Mussolini in Italy and Adolf Hitler in Germany. The RSS's admiration for these totalitarian regimes was due to their shared opposition to the British Empire. Mussolini and Hitler were able to rebuild their respective nations quickly from the wreckage of war, into powerful economic and military states by invoking patriotism and nationalism.

The greatest admirer of Hitler and Mussolini was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a leading RSS member who coined the term Hindutva and advocated reconversion of the converted Hindus back to Hinduism. He said in 1940 that Hitler was not a human monster because he was a Nazi. "Nazism proved undeniably the saviour of Germany", he proudly proclaimed. Savarkar criticised Nehru's staunch opposition to fascism teaching Pandit Nehru that Hitler knew better than him what suited Germany best. Gandhi too was derided by Hindu nationalists for opposing Nazism and fascism.

The RSS might have not explicitly been anti-Semitic

but Savarkar praised Hitler's inhuman treatment of the Jews. In 1938 while supporting anti-Jewish legislation in Germany, Savarkar justified their being driven out of the country because they were minorities in that country. He recommended a similar action for Muslims in India. Today RSS's hatred for Muslims is likened to Nazis's hatred the Jews.

Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, another senior RSS member believed Nazism should be applied in India. Golwalkar said, "To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic Races -- the Jews. Racial pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by". Savarkar also strongly viewed that Hindus should rule India and others should either be banished or amalgamated with the Hindu majority.

RSS's enthusiastic observance of Subhash Chandra Bose is understandable. Facing the wrath of the British, Bose took shelter in Germany and Japan. Hitler and Bose were mutual admirers. During a speech given to Indian military officers in the presence of the fugitive Indian nationalist in Dresden, Germany, in 1943, Hitler himself said, "I am impressed by the burning passion with which you and your Netaji seek to liberate your country from foreign domination. Your Netaji's status is even greater than mine. While I am the leader of 80 million Germans, he is the leader of 400 million Indians... It is the duty of all Indians to accept him as their leader and obey him".

After the defeat of Fascists and Nazis in World War II, Hindu nationalists dissociated themselves from the totalitarian regimes. However, their call for a Hindu India have strengthened over the years inspiring both the RSS and BJP to be anti-minority. Even after their disappearance in Europe Nazism and Fascism still remain an obsession with many nationalist Indians today. Now Nazism and Fascism have reached the Meghalaya capital! Will Shillongites say 'welcome'?

TO THE EDITOR

Essence of indigenous faith

Editor,

With due respect to H H Mohrmen's opinion, I would like to inform him that my articles are not intended to instigate a war of feelings but to appeal to truth and reason. The definition of religion given in my articles is not according to the Khasi academics or philosophers, but according to the belief and practice of the local sohblei and sohsla; not according to the Hindu philosophers but according to the belief and practice of the common pundits; not according to the Christian philosophers but according to the belief and practice of the common priests, pastors and faithful, etc. And the purpose of my articles is not to discourage the activities of the Seng Khasi and Seif Raj as his article "Everyting evolves including religion" (ST, January 15, 2015), seems to suggest, but rather to encourage them to go ahead with the responsibility of providing spiritual and moral guidance to 'ki kur ki kha' (fellow tribesmen) who have not adopted any new religion. I had also suggested that since almost all the clans have lost their in-

stitutional character as established by the ancestors, and the practice of ka niam-kur has become practically burdensome and hence, almost discarded, the believers of the indigenous faith need a new form of institution other than the kur, to institutionalize the faith and the group into a distinguishable identity. The Seng Khasi or Seif Raj could very well take up that responsibility as a modern form of Khasi religious institution.

But the central point of my discussion is not about the legitimacy of the Seng Khasi or Seif Raj, but about the legitimacy of the religious faiths of all the Khasis in whatever religion they profess to worship God. If in the community religions, some clans' members choose to worship Durga, Kali, Biskorum, Bisory, Chandi, Lakhmi, Mahadev, Ram, Lakhon, Ganesh, Shiva-Linga, Baribhai Saribhai (local name for destructive aspect of Shiva) etc., who are Hindu deities, and call that 'niam-tre' or 'niam-tyrnai', then the worship of Jesus Christ, or Allah or Buddha by some other members of the clans can also be called 'niam-tre' or 'niam-tyrnai' since they have adopted

the new religions with the sanction of God and with the approval of the respective lawbei and Suidnia of their clans? If a man or woman adopts Hinduism, Islam or Christianity as his or her religion, and if that is against the tradition, then it is his or her kur, and not the dorbar raid or dorbar hima, or any arbitrary organisation, that has the authority to ostracise and relegate such a person to a secondary status of a 'Khasi-kylla'.

According to Khasi tradition, every kur has the freedom to choose its own ways of worshipping God. It is provided in the Khasi socio-religious code that a clan or any organisation has the right to seek God's permission to introduce reforms in their religious faith and worship. Our elders instructed that since the traditional clan religion has become imperfect because 'ba la khyllait u kni, khyllait u ma, la sah khyllung la sah khynnah' (uncles of previous generation have passed away without the opportunity to instruct the uncles of the new generation on matters of religion), it is dangerous to continue with the old religious practices because 'ba ioh wan pyanba ka lait-kylla' (serious errors in religious rites

might be committed causing displeasure to God as well as to ka lawbei and u Suidnia). So the clans can adopt any religion of their choice, but it is not advisable for them 'ban sahlum sahkhlaw' (to be without any religion at all, or to have no belief and faith in God). That is true Khasi tradition. So for the peace and unity of the tribe, whatever religion we may belong to, let us uphold the Khasi tradition of truthfulness, tolerance and accommodation.

Yours etc.,
Fabian Lyngdoh
Via email

The unsung hero

Editor,

I would like to bring to the notice of the readers that on 21st Jan, 2015, a major incident on G.S. Road was averted because of an alert mind. At around 7:30 pm that day, petrol was leaking from a motorbike which was parked opposite the parking lot of Hotel Centre Point. The owner of a shop, M/s R N Mukherjee and Sons had the presence of mind to immediately inform a policeman from the traffic department so that the latter could take necessary action. Had the shop owner (R.N Mukherjee and Sons) not

Show us the promised achche din PM Modi has a lot to answer for

By B K Chum

Malevolent stars have sharpened their gaze at the Modi government and the BJP. Achche Din prime minister had promised on assuming office 20 months ago have already turned into Bure Din for the country's economy. The ruling BJP has also not remained unaffected by the Bure Din as its political and electoral fortunes have been on the downside.

The dismal scenario raises question: What the remaining 40 months of the Modi government's tenure holds for it and for the saffron party. Answering the question by quoting what Winston Churchill had said "Avoid prophesying before hand, because it is much better policy to prophecy after the event has already taken place" would not suffice. An attempt needs to be made to find an answer in the given situation.

The 20 months of the Modi-led NDA government have been disappointing for the common man who has been a victim of the sharp rise in essential commodities prices, spiraling unemployment and governance deficit.

Modi had been much applauded for the progress Gujarat had made on economic and industrial fronts during his three tenures as chief minister. Added to his achievements in the home state were his oratory skills during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections which had roused hopes that on becoming prime minister he would repeat his Gujarat performance at the national level and would introduce economic reforms which would help the country record a high growth rate. But what has happened during his 20 month's rule on the reforms and growth fronts is quite the reverse of what was expected.

Economic reforms continue to be a mirage with even Modi saying "reforms are not a sprint but a marathon". Addressing the World Economic Forum at Davos on January 21, Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said "some reform measures have got delayed".

The government's much trumpeted landmark indirect Tax Reform Goods and Services Tax (GST) continues to wait for a nod from Rajya Sabha. The BJP has blamed the Congress for stalling the important legislation forgetting that it had itself not allowed the key legislation to be passed by Lok Sabha during the tenure of the UPA government, its original author. It is tit for tat in Parliament while the nation suffers.

Stock market, the barometer of the economy which had shot up to 30,000 BSE Sensex after Modi assumed power, ended at its 20-month low last week.

That the health of the ailing economy has been deteriorating is also indicated by the tumbling exports which recorded a further 15 percent decline in December. Factory output has also been falling. Though some high-end industrial bodies representing large and medium industries have also expressed their apprehension about the prevailing state of the economy but it is the small and medium industries which have been the worst sufferers of the government's failure to remedy the situation. A number of units in some states including Punjab

taken that action there could have been a fire hazard which could have caused extensive damage. What if someone had thrown a still burning stub of cigarette or bidi ' or for that matter a glowing splinter in that area. Thus because of an alert mind a possible accident was averted. M/s R.N Mukherjee and Sons performed a public duty which many passers-by who saw the pet-

have either shut down or moved out of their home states.

Some of the prime minister's much trumpeted development and social welfare schemes are either repackaging of the UPA government's on-going schemes or are a repetition of the announcements his own government had made earlier. For instance, Modi's latest announcement of Rs. 10,000 crore Start-up India fund is the amount what Arun Jaitley in his first Budget presented to the Parliament on July 10, 2014 had announced "to act as a catalyst to attract private capital by way of providing equity, soft loan and other risk-capital for Start-up companies".

The situation reminds one the Punjabi saying "Agga Daur Pichha Chaur".

During his frequent foreign visits which his critics describe "mainly as self-promoting" the prime minister had been projecting India as a lucrative investment destination. But during the 20 months of his government foreign investment has been uninspiring.

Take the political situation.

For the first time in the Jan Sangh/BJP post-Independence history, the Hindu rightist party secured an absolute majority in 2013 Lok Sabha elections and formed the government in association with its NDA allies. It was the Modi magic which played a pivotal role in helping the saffron party to ride to power. But it took hardly six months for the bubble of the Modi magic to burst. The period sowed the seeds of disillusionment among the common man.

The situation provided a fertile ground for many of the otherwise demoralised anti-BJP parties to rally. Forgetting their long-time enmities some of them started joining hands. It did not take long for the realignments among the non-BJP parties to inflict electoral damages on the saffron party. The Modi government as also the ruling BJP in some of the states were hit by the anti-incumbency factor. Some of its central ministers and those in the states find themselves in the dock facing serious allegations. Dis-senting voices are also heard even in the higher echelons of the party. Earlier calling itself as a "party with a difference" the BJP has become Congress-II with some variations. Its political stock has been falling.

2015 started with a humiliating defeat in Delhi assembly elections where the saffron party could secure only three of the 70 seats. The year ended with a rout in Bihar which was followed by the party's humbling in some of the by-elections and local body elections in the BJP-ruled states. In the Maharashtra civic poll held earlier this month, the party secured fourth position getting 39 seats out of 345 with the Congress topping the list of the winners by securing 105 and its ally NCP getting 80 seats.

In the background of the above scenario one can safely predict that with the government and the party's stock having already fallen both are going to face challenging times in the coming 40 months. (IPA Service)

rol leakage did nothing. The shop owner is actually an unsung hero.

Yours etc.
Pratham Sharma

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.

"This life, which had been the tomb of his virtue and of his honour, is but a walking shadow; a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

— William Shakespeare

The Shillong Times

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Skills training

WE are in an age when marriages, birthdays and several social events are organised by professionals calling themselves event managers. Clients only have to state the theme and they can get the event they want at a price they must be willing to pay. From the beginning of November up until the end of the year there are weddings galore that are held at different venues in Shillong. In fact there is a constraint for the usual wedding venues, so much so that unlikely spaces are chosen for wedding receptions. Event management is a specialised activity and there are special institutes that provide training which also include internships with established companies. Managing an event means handling it from end to end so that the clients are not left wanting for anything. These days marriages and birthdays are not the only events that are planned and executed to precision. There are concerts, seminars and workshops, meetings, business pow-wows, film festivals, visits of dignitaries et al that are planned and executed by event management firms.

Event management includes the process of planning and co-ordinating the event from end to end and includes budgeting, scheduling, site selection, acquiring necessary permits, coordinating transportation and parking, arranging for speakers or entertainers, arranging decor, event security, catering and emergency plans, particularly maintaining a stable power supply. The musical event NH 7 Weekender organised this year in Shillong was first initiated by Vijay Nair through his event management company - Only Much Louder (OML) in collaboration with the local firm event management firm called Springboard Surprises started by Keith Wahlang. The team pulled off an excellent musical extravaganza this time.

Then there is Avenues led by a young, self made entrepreneur, Mark Stone Laitflang. Several young people are now trained under these entrepreneurs and can perhaps do their own start-ups. This is one area where Government has done very little in terms of skill building. In fact the state-sponsored skill building programmes don't take into account the strengths of our youth but come with a pre-fixed model. Greater innovations in Government run programmes are needed to skill our young men and women so that they become confident entrepreneurs in the fields they are most interested in, rather than being pushed into professions where they have to work for someone else or continue to depend on depleting government jobs.

LOOKING BACK

February 13, 1988

Flow of tourist decline in Sikkim

The inflow of tourists in Sikkim both from home and abroad, has declined considerably during the past few years owing to the Centre's apathy towards the state and the Gorkhaland agitations in Darjeeling hill areas. Chief Minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari said.

He told the State Assembly here that Leh and Ladakh, which like Sikkim are situated near the international borders, were open to foreign tourists. But in case of Sikkim a foreigner has to get the Inner Line permit from Delhi to visit the state.

The Chief Minister al-

leged that applications of thousands of foreign tourists, interested to visit the Himalayan State, were never cleared because senior officials in Delhi neglected the promotion of tourism in Sikkim.

As a result, he said many tourist lodges built in different tourist spots to accommodate high tourist traffic remained unutilized in the state.

He said as far as Indian tourists were concerned the GNLf agitation in the neighboring Darjeeling hill area once also popular tourist resort, was responsible for their ever decreasing number.

Why NDA- II is a spitting image of UPA II

Corruption bogs down Modi Sarkar

By B.K. Chum

Has the BJP-led NDA-II become the Congress-led UPA-II within 19 months of coming to power? Perhaps yes, with some degree of variations. The question relates to the performance of the two governments on crucial issues including corruption, economy, reforms, and Parliament's functioning. Corruption is the favourite money-minting pastime of many of our in-power politicians of all shades. Like the five-year UPA-II rule, which was plagued with mega scams, the 19 months old NDA-II government, particularly some of the BJP's top leaders, also find themselves entangled in corruption and irregularities cases.

Before we dwell on some cases of alleged corruption during the NDA-II's rule, it is imperative to recall Modi's mantra "Na khaunga, na khaane doonga" that he had recited on taking over as prime minister. He has honoured the first part of his commitment as his personal record has so far been clean. But he has failed to implement the second part of his commitment by not only not taking action against his party leaders who have been facing corruption charges but has also been trying to shield some of his loyalists facing allegations of gross irregularities. Such cases have been making media headlines.

After assuming his high office Modi had pursued "silence is golden" strategy on most of the ticklish issues which have been confronting the country. Accordingly, he did not 'waste time' in making any comment on the cases like External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's and Rajasthan chief minister Vasundhara Raje's alleged involvement in the Lalitgate scam. He also kept mum on the infamous Vyapam scandal that rocked Shivraj Singh Chauhan-led BJP's Madhya Pradesh government. (In the Vyapam scam some top BJP leaders including cabinet minister Laxmikant Sharma were also involved. Sharma who faced serious charges was released on bail last week. Over 40 witnesses, accused, lawyers, police officials and journalists related to the admission and recruitment scam in the Vyapam scam had lost their lives under mysterious circumstances.)

But Modi adopted a different stand on the charges leveled by BJP's own Bihar MP and cricketer Kirti Azad

about finance minister Arun Jaitley's alleged involvement in the serious irregularities running into several crores of rupees in the Delhi and District Cricket Association (DDCA) that took place during Jaitley's tenure as DDCA chief between 1999

happens in cases of politicians facing serious charges, Jaitley, instead of specifically answering the charges of irregularities committed in the case, denied them saying they were "baseless and completely wrong". To use his favourite expression

Manohar Joshi, Yashwant Sinha and Shanta Kumar have also held closed-door meeting to discuss the happenings within their party. Feeling concerned over the goings-on they did not disclose what transpired in the meeting. Some media reports, however, claim that the sidelined leaders may no longer keep silently watching the happenings in the party and may decide to play 'active role' as 'markdakshaks'. If this happens, the saffron party which had to bite the dust in the Bihar Assembly elections and in some state assembly by-elections will be confronted with a serious challenge.

Contrary to his pre-election promises, Modi has not so far been able to implement his reforms agenda to boost India's economy which instead of getting uplift continues to be stagnant. The performance of the industrial sector has been uninspiring. During the past few months exports have also fallen. Share market is one of the reliable barometers to assess the state of the economy. Optimism about Modi's becoming prime minister generated during the run-up to the 2014 Parliament elections had given a boost to share prices with Sensex touching an all-time high of 30,000 points. But the government's failure to implement the promised reforms and the slowdown in the economy during the NDA's past few months rule have led to a steep fall of 5,000 points in the share price index pushing it down to 25,000 points.

Speaking in Parliament, the BJP leaders blamed the Opposition, particularly the Congress, for the government's failure to implement the promised reforms. It charged the Congress leadership with disrupting the Parliament's proceedings which resulted in the virtual washout of the winter session.

The situation reminds one the saying "As you sow, so shall you reap." During the UPA rule, the BJP had disrupted session after session of Parliament virtually rendering it dysfunctional.

Political parties must realize that if they play partisan games in Parliament it harms the peoples interests and also usually proves counter-productive for them. (IPA Service)

After assuming his high office Modi had pursued "silence is golden" strategy on most of the ticklish issues which have been confronting the country. Accordingly, he did not 'waste time' in making any comment on the cases like External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's and Rajasthan chief minister Vasundhara Raje's alleged involvement in the Lalitgate scam. He also kept mum on the infamous Vyapam scandal that rocked Shivraj Singh Chauhan-led BJP's Madhya Pradesh government. (In the Vyapam scam some top BJP leaders including cabinet minister Laxmikant Sharma were also involved. Sharma who faced serious charges was released on bail last week. Over 40 witnesses, accused, lawyers, police officials and journalists related to the admission and recruitment scam in the Vyapam scam had lost their lives under mysterious circumstances.)

and 2013. Defending Jaitley Modi said "he has lived his public life with certain principles and will come through with flying colours in the same manner as L.K. Advani did in Hawala case". (Kirti Azad, who had exposed the DDCA scam but had not named Jaitley, was suspended from BJP for "anti-party activities" prompting him to ask party chief Amit Shah "what anti-party activity have I done?"). But Shah has not so far responded to his query. As usually

"manufactured cases", which he has been using in cases involving BJP opponents, his denial can also be termed as "manufactured denial". Skeptics describe it as a case of guilty conscious.

The DDCA scam which has jolted the ruling brass is likely to deepen dissensions in the saffron party. Shatrughan Sinha has already raised his voice against his party's attitude on the DDCA issue. The party's 'markdarshaks' (guides) L.K Advani, Murli

China still the mover and shaker in 2016

Lead role in global economic governance

By S. Sethuraman

It would be a fallacy to write off China, Asia's mighty economy, as no longer the prime mover of global growth nor its potential to shake the world economy out of its wits, and send it on a downspin. This must inform our policy-makers who gloat about India having upstaged China as the "fastest" growing economy. A percentage of one or two points above China's growth may make us seem the fastest growing but have we the power to maintain and translate higher rates of growth into meaningful gains for the common man?

True, China is currently on a slowdown and less buoyant in terms of its contribution to global growth at an average of one-third so far as well as in its mega role in world trade. China is re-adjusting its sights toward a new normal of stabilizing its second largest economy, after the market turmoils and a sharp currency depreciation in 2015, and rebalancing it toward greater domestic consumption, relying less on investments and exports.

There are no quick fixes and it may take some years of lower growth of "around 7 per cent" - indeed the aim in its Sixth Plan (2016-20) as a "sustainable" target. How far China will succeed in this pursuit of stabilization, however, remains an area of great uncertainty with its potential for disruption of output and trade flows at a global level.

There are indeed some concerns that, with its soaring debt, its slowdown may worsen, and the world watches how China deploys its fiscal and monetary policies in critical weeks ahead in order to be able to avert a hard landing. The China factor looms large among risks and vulnerabilities that all major economies, developed and emerging and other developing countries, have to reckon with.

The global economic outlook, which worsened in 2015, with growth slowing below 3 per cent from the original estimated 3.5 per cent, is hardly promising for a rebound in 2016, given both the varying levels of performance among advanced nations - USA, EU and Japan - and the ongoing slowdown in BRICs and other emerging and developing markets. Both Brazil and Russia are in recession territory for the second year. Thus, India stands out as a "sweet spot".

Chinese leaders assert that the "new normal" of shifting focus to consumption and service industries from polluting heavy industries would lead to sustainable and balanced growth and that China would still power the world economy. China claims a growth of "around 7 percent" in the first nine months of 2015. Current IMF and OECD projections are 6.8 per cent in 2015 tapering down to 6.3 per cent in 2016 and 6.2 per cent in 2017.

Now a further update of forecasts for the global economy will come by mid-January. India's growth estimates for 2016 may also see some moderation considering that Government could not get through GST and a couple of "important decisions", as the World Bank Chief Economist Kaushik Basu said. It remains to be seen whether IMF retains India estimates of 7.3 and 7.5 per cent for 2015 and 2016.

With the steep fall in world commodity prices, chiefly oil and minerals and metals, global demand and supply scenario has drastically changed and resulted in a shrinking of trade flows. It has had more disruptive consequences for developing countries which mainly exported to China. The slowdown in China is hurting the developing world in

general and India has had a serious setback in exports even to traditional markets especially USA and EU. Loss of export momentum gets reflected in rate of growth.

Against an overall sombre background, what will stand out in 2016 will be the G-20 leadership of China, which takes over from Turkey, and its calculated steps to influence global economic governance, especially with its successful sponsoring of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The Bank to be headed by a Chinese nominee is now established with 57 founder members including major developed nations in Europe and Australia. USA has given a grudging welcome for this infrastructure-financing mechanism.

China has said the establishment of AIIB marks a milestone in the reform of global economic governance and would complement the existing international financial system. The AIIB will be operational after the board of directors and executive council meet for the first time. These meetings are due to take place from Jan. 16 to 18 in Beijing. The bank's president will be officially appointed and the management team will be in place at the meetings. AIIB loans for infrastructure building will cover the Asian-Pacific region against an estimated requirement of eight trillion dollars. . .

No doubt, once AIIB starts extending loans, likely from early in 2016, to countries seeking access for funding infrastructure, it would seem to detract the dominance for 70 years of IMF and the World Bank, the post-war Bretton Woods institutions (1944/45), with relentless advocacy of neo-liberal policies for borrowing countries. Additionally, China has also enhanced its global stature with the IMF agreeing to include its currency, Renminbi, in the SDR basket of reserve currencies, hitherto comprising the US dollar, the euro, the Japanese Yen and the British Pound. This is expected to take effect toward the end of 2016.

Also, at long last, the US Congress approval, after a delay of five years, of IMF's 2010 Voice and Representation Reform, would raise the economic weights of China, India, Brazil and Russia to be included among ten largest quota-holders giving them greater voice and representation in decision-making.

As a result of the 2010 reform coming into force, IMF's total quota (subscriptions of 188 member countries) would be doubled to SDR 477 billion (about US\$659.67 billion) from about SDR 238.5 billion (about US\$329.83 billion). SDR, as the principal reserve currency, is the unit of account for IMF. The reform would also make the IMF Executive Board a fully elected body. The way opens also for a possible end of the convention by which an American and a European headed the IMF and the World Bank all along. The quota shares and voting power of the IMF's poorest member countries will be protected.

IMF Managing Director, Ms. Christine Lagarde welcoming the US ratification of reform said it would strengthen the IMF in its role of supporting global financial stability. With significantly increased core resources, "it would enable us to respond to crises more effectively" and also improve the IMF's governance by better reflecting the increasing role of dynamic emerging and developing countries in the global economy, she said. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Poor hospitality

Editor,

I am a tourist from Delhi who visited different parts of Assam and Meghalaya with my family between December 19-28. I had varying experiences at different places but they were all very pleasant. My stay at Mawlynnong and at the cottages at No 1 UCC Road, overlooking the serene Umiam Lake were particularly memorable. However, we were very disappointed with the services at Orchid Polo Towers at Cherrapunjee. The waiters were very uncooperative and unwilling to treat their guests with decency. We have heard so much about the Khasi hospitality and so were not prepared for that kind of cold treatment. The

hotel is quite steeply priced and should therefore have had facilities for drivers to stay in since we had come in a tourist taxi but the driver had to go back all the way to Shillong and return to pick us up the next day. Is this the facility offered by hotels in Meghalaya?

There is so much that has been spoken about the beauty of Meghalaya and there is no denying this fact. There are many lovely places, hills and dales that are so pleasant to the eyes but these sights are rudely broken by stretches where man has gouged out the earth for pulling out rocks, stones and sand and bringing down an entire hill side without following any scientific system of quarrying. The forests are quickly denuding and when I asked some of the locals here if there are any

regulations they said that the land belongs to private individuals and neither the Government nor any other authority has any control over the use of these private lands. This sounds like a very self destructive programme of action. I wonder why the communities themselves regulate such reckless quarrying. I was told that coal and limestone mining too have destroyed large tracts of forest land and that the National Green Tribunal finally had to put a ban on mining activities. Perhaps that is what happens when self regulation fails.

Meghalaya tourism to me is good in parts and private initiatives seem to do better than Government ones. My family and I landed at the famous Pine Wood Hotel and since we felt terribly cold we wanted to have

chicken soup. The time then was 6.30 pm. We were told that the cooks don't come until after 7 pm. So soup and dinner must wait until after 7 pm. I never heard of any restaurant telling anyone that they have to wait until a certain hour to order certain items on the menu. We left and went to Cloud Nine at Centre Point and there had some hot chicken soup.

This in short is our experience of tourism in Meghalaya and believe me we did quite a bit of touring.

Yours etc.,
PK Singh,
New Delhi

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.