

"All things are artificial, for nature is the art of God."

—Thomas Browne

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Regurgitating the emergency

EMERGENCY was, without doubt, a dark period in the history of Indian democracy. Understandably, the Congress does not think so, while the rest of the political establishments subscribe to this theory. The arguments are never-ending, as is seen during its anniversary some half a century later. The abrupt declaration of Emergency by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on June 25, 1975, had stunned the nation. The backdrop was a popular anti-establishment uprising with Sarvodaya leader Jayaprakash Narayan at its head. A Gandhian who never hankered after power or positions, he enjoyed huge mass adulation and support. The student community across universities erupted in his support, which added weight to the opposition movement.

Indira Gandhi had won a lot of admiration after the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971. But that made her autocratic and her son Sanjay Gandhi emerged as an 'extra-constitutional' authority. All these powered the movement against her. An Allahabad High Court order disqualifying her as an MP following a case filed by Socialist leader Raj Narain after the Parliament elections, was the last straw on the struggling camel's back. Emergency was the answer to all these in one go. The advice to Indira Gandhi about this constitutional provision was believed to have been given by then West Bengal chief minister Siddharth Shankar Ray. The emergency period saw the complete suspension of people's liberties, freedom of media and political activities. Many opposition leaders were put behind the bars. The end came after 21 months, in March, 1977, with parliament polls followed by the ouster of Indira Gandhi from power and installation of a Janata Party government led by Morarji Desai. But this government was short-lived. Desai quit office in July 1979 and Indira Gandhi and her party returned to power in 1980 with a clear majority. This is another curious matter; meaning, the people of this country refused to paint her as a monster.

The fact of the matter is that the Emergency period was noted for its orderly conduct of government affairs by and large. Trains ran on time and officials reached office on time and did their work; there were no bribes; streets were free of demonstrators. The general public experienced a fear of the unknown, but their life carried on without interruptions. Excesses, mainly at the behest of Sanjay Gandhi, did take place in matters like forced family planning campaigns to control child birth, which meant herding people to health camps to forcibly sterilize them in UP etc. This period also saw massive demolition of slums from central Delhi areas, as part of a cleanliness and beautification drive. Despite these, large sections of people believed that it was the right dose; an occasional shock treatment to a nation of wayward politicians and footloose activists.

Letters to the Editor

Behdienkhlam Festival: celebrating end of sowing season

Editor, "Behdienkhlam" is the largest festival of the practitioners of the 'Niam Tre' religion and is dedicated to a good harvest and a year of plenty. The biggest Behdienkhlam festivities can be experienced by Pnar people both in West Jaintia Hills and East Jaintia Hills.

'Behdienkhlam' is made up of the following three words: 'Beh' meaning 'to get rid of', 'Dien' meaning 'wood or log', and 'Khlam' meaning 'plague.' Taken together, the word means 'to get rid of the plague.' It's primarily held before the rainy season, at the end of the sowing season.

There are many ceremonies and rituals leading up for many days to the final Behdienkhlam 'procession'. It begins sometimes in the month of Wisu (March) with "Thoh Langdoh" and series of religious ceremonies. One of the biggest sacrifice is 'Kha Pyrthad', the god of thunder which is usually offered a pig (khon Hati patcha). It also involves the erection of the trunks or 'Khong' in each locality. During this festival it also involves beating of homes with long bamboo sticks to drive away evil spirits that cause disease and misfortune. Offerings called "ka Siang ka Pha" are also made to ancestors and clans. The Daloi, or chief religious figures of the community, conduct prayers and other rituals. And the most vibrant part of this festival is the

'rath' or 'rot,' tall structures made of bamboo decorated with coloured paper, tinsel, symbols, and messages that each village creates. A group of young men carry the raths to the 'Aitnar' or sacred pool and throw them by the side of it.

Further, during this festival a game similar to football using a wooden ball called 'Dad-Lawakor' is also played. The winners are said to gain special blessings from the gods for the coming months. Everyone also participates enthusiastically in singing and folk dancing. The whole festival is a testament to the valuable connection between man and nature, which the people of Jaintia continue to celebrate year after year. Through this letter I would like to convey my best wishes to the people of Meghalaya on the harvest festival of Behdienkhlam ('Behdienkhlam Wa Suk Wa Kmen iaphi Waroh).

Yours etc.,
Iahmi Khyriem
Via email

America deserves better

Editor, The debate between former president Trump (a convicted felon) and President Biden on June 27, 2024 has been widely seen as a disaster -- by both domestic and European commentators. Of course, they do not consult the views of the global south.

All niceties regarding ageism were brushed aside in the concerns about Mr. Biden's age. Going by style and appearances, Mr. Trump seemed to be the better candidate. But should style over-

Many articles have been written about Behdienkhlam, but it is not possible to describe the different facets of this great festival in one article or even in a single one book. Many a times the festival is described merely by explaining the name - Behdienkhlam. In Khasi Pnar vocabulary, the word khlam is used to describe a contagious illness which affects a large number of people and has the potential to kill many. It's akin to the plague or pestilence or a disease killing large numbers of people at once.

According to the understanding of the Pnar elders, khlam is airborne or is transmitted from the air but they also believe that it is caused by bad spirits. According to the Pnar belief system, there are two different kinds of khlam, one which affects humans and the other which attacks only domesticated animals. Till date every once in a while, khlam occurs in the village and sweeps all the domesticated animals. As such people experience khlam regularly almost on an annual basis. This is just one description of the festival but an in-depth study of the festival will help one understand the other salient features of the festival.

It is connected to the agrarian culture of the people

The Pnar like those in any agrarian culture are influenced by their farming season and their festivals revolve around those farming activities. Hence, the larger part of the festival also has to do with their farming practices. The Pnar not only practice wetland cultivation but they also have many varieties of rice which prove that they are much ahead of their neighbouring communities when it comes to rice cultivation. Behdienkhlam therefore, has a very strong link with the farming practices of the people.

Certain rituals performed in preparation of Behdienkhlam are intricately linked to agriculture. The significance of thoh langdoh is that only after the ritual is performed can people start planting cucumber, pumpkins, beans and various types of vegetables and it is only after another ceremony ka chat thoh is performed, that farmers can start tilling their paddy fields. The last public celebration of Behdienkhlam is ka Dat-

lawakor and it is also related to rice cultivation.

So Behdienkhlam is not merely about the plague but it testifies to the fact that the Pnar of Jaintia were the first tribe in the region to improve their farming practices to a more developed wetland and rain-fed cultivation. Other festivals are either related to sowing or harvesting but Behdienkhlam though connected to agriculture, is more than just about the farming practices of the people.

Ancestor veneration

In Jowai, the three days and four nights annual Behdienkhlam festival always starts with the tradition of offering food to the ancestors. This is called ka Siang ka pha or ka Siang ka phur. The festival officially begins on the sixth day ka Pynsiñ of the eight day-week on the traditional calendar of the Pnar. It started with some clans performing the feast of offering food to the dead which is a mark of respect and gratitude to the ancestors, the forebearers of the clan and the tradition.

In the Khasi Pnar concept of the afterlife, departed souls reside with the Creator and eat betel nuts in the courtyard or corridor of his abode. Ki synggia ki saret or the spirit of the death descend down to the worldly realm every year to partake in the feast provided by the descendants. The offering is to propitiate the departed souls. Ka Siang ka pha is celebrated by every clan except when there is sickness in the family or if death has just occurred in the family. The family which had just met with bereavement does not perform the offerings because ka siang ka pha has already been offered to the departed souls as part of the last rites of a person.

A testimony to the principle of respecting the paternal family

Ka siang ka pha begins with family informing the children of their maternal uncles or their cousins (ki khon kha) about the preparation for the offerings to the ancestors. The khon kha offers money pyn-nam as a token of respect, love and affection to their paternal family. This also has a link with one of the cardinal principle of the Khasi Pnar known as ka tip kur tip kha, respect for one's family from both the

mother's and father's side. Hence respect for one's paternal relation goes beyond the worldly realm. But not all clans perform their offering to the death on pynsiñ. There are also clans which perform ka siang ka pha on muchai or Hat, or even on Khyllaw and some offer even on Musiang the day before the last day of the festival.

In the Pnar clan system, a man in spite of being married and having moved with his wife and children, if and when the man dies the dead body of the deceased is carried to his clan's ancestral house called i kmal iung or iungblai. All the funeral rites are performed in his maternal family home and even the charred bones of the deceased are placed in moityllein the clan's repository stone or osuary. Again, this also has a connection with ka tip kur tip kha one of the cardinal principles of the Khasi Pnar.

Since the offering is for all the departed souls, all kind of foods are placed in brass plates and it must always be in odd numbers five, seven or nine. Care is also being taken that favourite food of the deceased is placed as part of the offering which could be anything from fruits, cigarette or even alcohol.

Rekindling the human connection with the deities

Of course, preparation for the annual Behdienkhlam festival starts from the month of March but the immediate rituals and sacrifices that precede the designated days of the festival are the khia khang performed on Muchai, the first day after the market day of the week before Behdienkhlam and the khia pyrthad sacrifice to the thunder god on the Mulong the seventh day of the same week. The main part of the festival is the council of the four high priests of the four raids, the raid Jowai, raid Tuber, raid Chyrmang and lalong.

The other significance of the festival is it is also a time to rekindle the connection between humans and God and all the deities and divinities. It is the time when the community invokes God and these deities ki Soo duar Soo luti, the four guardian angels, u blai pyrthad the Thunder god to protect them from plague or

pestilence and it is for this reason that the festival is called Behdienkhlam.

It also tells us about migration

Behdienkhlam is also like a homecoming of the people of the different raids to the place of their origin. Since time immemorial, people originated from Jowai, Tuber, lalong migrated to different parts of the district in search of livelihoods. Once a year, these people would join their brethren on the last day of the Behdienkhlam which culminates at their respective place of origin.

People who were originally from the raid but have migrated to ki ryngkaw para or other regions revisit their place of origin during Behdienkhlam. They make it a point to once a year come back to the place of their origin and take part in the celebration, hence in some ways it is also like a homecoming to their ancestral land and to touch base with the Beiramaw from the people from the raid who migrated to other parts of the district or the state. In the Behdienkhlam of the raid Jowai, people of Jowai origin living in Shillong and Ummulong joined in the last day of the festival and bring their raths as a mark of respect. The most significance of the festival is that it is a covenant between man and God.

Fulfillment of the covenant

It goes back to the genesis of the Hynñew Trep when the God and his realm parted ways with the earthly beings, but before that the celestial realm and the Earth were connected to the divine. In the Khasi tradition it is believed to be via 'u Diengiei' (the Diengiei tree) and amongst the Pnar ka tangnoop ka tang jri. Before they parted ways, God made a covenant that henceforth the divine realm will be beyond human reach but humans can reach out to the divine only through prayers, sacrifices and oblations, but U Trekrod will visit the earthly beings once a year. Humans on the other hand have to organize a festival befitting the honour of God to welcome Him and that is how the four days and three nights of the Behdienkhlam came into being. The Behdienkhlam is a fulfillment of the covenant between humans and God. (Mohrmen, HH (2021) Cultural History of Jaintia Hills in Stories, Stones and Traditions).

Lok Sabha Speaker has to function impartially in interests of vibrant democracy

Opposition voices on major issues have to be given adequate scope to be heard

By Harihar Swarup

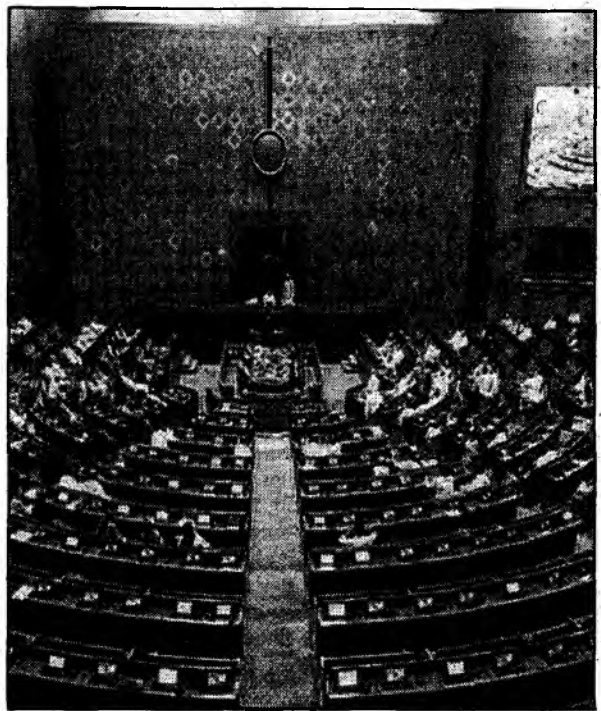
A contested election for the post of Lok Sabha Speaker is a sign of a broadening divide between the treasury and opposition benches. Before Independence contests for the position of president (equivalent of modern-day speaker) were quite common. In the first election in 1925, Vithal Bhai Patel defeated his government nominee by two votes. He went on to lay the institutional foundations for the independence of the Speaker's office.

The next exciting contest was in 1946. In this election, the colonial government thought its nominee would win. But to its surprise, its supporting members cross

by any party in the matter of his election, whether in the Constituency or in the house, so long as he wishes to continue as Speaker".

He championed this issue in parliamentary forums and pushed it with the Congress party. The party, however, felt that "this was not a feasible proposition for the present in view of other political parties being involved in the question. "Since then the practice has been that political parties come to a consensus, and the Speaker is usually elected from the majority party.

Part of the consensus-building exercise is that the post of Deputy Speaker



voted, leading to G V Mavalankar's election by a margin of three votes. Government was incensed and wanted to examine the ballot papers to identify which of its members had voted Mavalankar. Anticipating such an eventually Assembly secretary destroyed the ballot papers.

In a parliamentary democracy where the Government is answerable to the

often goes to the Opposition party/parties.

Over the years, the job of the Speaker has become more complex and contentious. His responsibility is to conduct the proceedings of the House on the colonial principle that Government will decide agenda for the debate in the national legislature. The rules of both the houses of Parliament also prescribe that Government business also takes priority. As if this were not enough in 1985, the anti-defection law gave Speakers the power to decide on the party whip and for anti-party activities. They could now make or break parties and ruling governments."

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legislature, a non-partisan speaker is critical. It's one of the most challenging offices. It combines constitutional responsibility with a political milestone. When the electoral verdict is that of a majority government, the Speaker has to ensure adequate space for minority voices and not allow the government to ride roughshod over them.

In a coalition scenario, speakers are under pressure from their party to secure government's continuity and ensure the passage of its legislative business. Speakers have to walk a fine line, where they are not with any side but belong to the entire house. In both these situations, the Speaker must ensure that the House fulfills the Constitutional mandate of a deliberative legislature.

In 1952, when Mavalankar became the Speaker of the first Lok Sabha, he started the convention to ensure Speaker's impartiality. In his acceptance speech as Speaker, he highlighted the British convention about Speakership, "the principle of which is that, once a Speaker, he is not opposed

prescribe that Government business also takes priority. As if this were not enough in 1985, the anti-defection law gave Speakers the power to decide on the party whip and for anti-party activities. They could now make or break parties and ruling governments."

Some of these structural issues have become more prominent now. They have led to successive governments shying away from uncomfortable debates in Parliament, and ministers are requesting the Speaker to exercise his/her discretion in fast-tracking government business by allocating limited space for Opposition. As a result inadequate scrutiny of government bills by parliamentary committees have become a bone of contention between Government and the Opposition benches. The Speaker's decisions in state assemblies under anti-defection laws have also tainted the office. There is apprehension that some of the unhealthy practices in states might find their way to Parliament. (IPA Service)

for shoddy work must be blacklisted. The cost for reevaluation must be recompensed by the Board when the evaluation had been done irresponsibly and a mental trauma is inflicted upon the students who were forced to get their papers re-evaluated in the first place, because of unprofessional correction of their examination papers.

When was the last time that MBOSE conducted a workshop for its evaluators and help them to hone their skills as assessments are constantly being altered or modified? Accountability by any authority is a must and it that authority must be held accountable whenever it falls short.

Yours etc.,
Tyrone Patrick D'Brass
Tura

From poetic to horror scene

Editor, My friend asked me to wait and began searching his bag. As he had returned from Darjeeling, I guessed that he might have had something for me. Then he flashed out a book and said, "This is for you." It was 'Train to Darjeeling & Other Railway Tales' by Sanjoy Mookherjee. I felt glad that he took the trouble of buying a book for me in the midst of his family tour.

After returning home, I opened the first chapter of the book under the headline: 'Indian Railways - A Lifelong Romance'. In the first line, the author said, "My love for Railways began when I was quite young, maybe when I had just turned five." I could easily relate my childhood

fascination for a moving train in the first chapter of the book.

I closed the book and started thinking about my childhood association with rail. I had a special liking for a window seat. It was like watching a 3D movie through a TV shaped rectangular window and hearing the background music of hawkers' call, people's chatter and the lullaby of chug chug tune with a questioning horn.

But that romance has now been replaced by trauma, thanks to multiple train accidents one after another. Manoj Dey, who was travelling with his wife and four-year-old daughter in the Kanchenjunga Express, told a reporter after the train reached Sealdah station that he would never take his child on a train again.

He was in the middle berth of an AC 3-tier coach at the time the train got hit from behind by a goods train near Rangapani railway station on June 17. He said, "The coach was shaking as the train continued to move for a few seconds after an ear-shattering noise. My first reaction was to reach out to my daughter and wife. My heart stopped beating for a couple of seconds until I saw them." He reiterated, "Next time, I will try to book plane tickets even if they are costlier. Especially if my daughter is travelling with us."

In the last decade, glamorous train projects have been given priority, even at the cost of safety. Train Collision Avoidance System, which was later renamed as Kavach, is an automatic train protection system that helps prevent collisions if two trains are on the same tracks. Had it been in place, it would have

saved the collisions between Kanchenjunga Express and the goods train. Senior railway officials said that a field trial was started for Kavach in 2016.

But this life saving device has so far been placed in only a little over 2 per cent of railway tracks in eight years after its field trials! Railway officials said that the reason is high cost and technical challenges. The cost is a factor when it comes to enhancing safety and saving human lives. But cost is not a factor for a glamorous bullet train project!

An RTI reply says that of 1,27,644 sanctioned posts of loco pilots and assistant loco pilots, 18,766 - nearly 15 per cent - were vacant as of March 1 this year. Train drivers are now forced to work extra shifts.

Three major train accidents took place within a span of just one year - in Odisha's Balasore on June 2, 2023, in Andhra Pradesh's Vizianagaram, on October 29, 2023, and near Rangapani railway station, West Bengal on June 17, this year.

How the little girl who travelled with her parents in Kanchenjunga Express would react now to the iconic poetic scene in Satyajit Ray's film Pather Panchali (Song of the Road) where Apu and Durga saw a train for the first time? I think it would be like a horror scene for her.

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.

*"Victory has a thousand fathers,
but defeat is an orphan."*
— John F. Kennedy

The Shillong Times

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Studied silence of TMC

AFTER the Lok Sabha election results on June 4, leaders of political parties that won the Shillong and Tura seats – namely the Voice of Peoples’ Party (VPP) and Congress respectively were quick to update the public on the reasons why they won and what they intend to do henceforth as representatives of the people in Parliament. The UDP too, despite losing the game did speak to the media and give reasons for why their candidate lost out. The one party that maintained and continues to maintain a studied silence is the Trinamool Congress.

The fact that the TMC could not field a candidate from the Shillong seat meant that there were no takers for the Party ticket, or if there were contenders, they were not winnable candidates. The TMC put up Zenith Sangma from the Tura seat but he managed to poll a mere 48,709 votes out of the total of 6,74,056 votes polled or just 7.23 % of the vote share. Saleng Sangma of the Congress polled 3,83,919 votes or 56% of the vote share. Agatha Sangma of the NPP managed 2,28 678 votes which is 33.93% of the vote share. It would appear therefore that the TMC has lost its support base in Garo Hills. This was bound to happen since the West Bengal based party never really had roots in Meghalaya. The few MLAs that won the Assembly elections in 2023 did so on their own personal charisma. Dr Mukul Sangma is a tall leader from the Garo Hills and a former Chief Minister and was expected to be able to carry the weight of the Party in Garo Hills. But in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, the TMC State President, Charles Pyngrope has not been visible or audible. He is the lone MLA from the TMC from the Khasi-Jaintia Hills region. The other four are from Garo Hills. It is almost as if the TMC in this region is a lost cause.

Congress Party leaders have now publicly declared that they are ready to welcome back those that have left the Party, including Dr Mukul Sangma provided they continue to believe and invest in its philosophy. This can be seen as an open invitation to all former Congress members that had left the Party in a huff after the High Command appointed former Lok Sabha MP, Vincent Pala as the President. Pala has since lost his seat to the up and coming VPP whose candidate won with over 3.71 lakh votes. The TMC with its rapidly dwindling support is no match to fight either the Congress, the VPP or even the NPP in the next Assembly election in 2028. Rumours were doing the rounds that Dr Mukul Sangma might join the BJP and that he had been receiving feelers from the saffron party. Dr Sangma had hotly contested these rumours but he has to take a call sooner than later. Politics after all is a game of opportunities.

Draining the Swamp

By Kittor H. Blah

The title of this article is inspired by a 1996 book written by Harvey Francis Barnard, ‘Draining the Swamp- Monetary & Fiscal Policy Reform.’ What is the ‘swamp’ in the context of monetary reforms? To put it plainly and simply, the swamp is the rising public debt, rising fiscal deficit, bloated government budget, rising taxation, rising inflation, a currency that is collapsing and cycles of recession. Draining this swamp then means a need to reform and revamp the whole monetary system. A new theory of money is the need of the hour. Let us look at inflation as the first feature of our current monetary system. Inflation is best defined as the decrease in value of money because of an increase in the amount of money in the economy. Since inflation erodes the value of our deposits, it is the number one enemy of every citizen. Also since inflation is caused by an increase in the amount of money, therefore money creation is the most crucial aspect of the monetary system.

The basic and misconceived belief is that the government creates money. But government created money comprises a very insignificant part of the total money creation in the country. This is the minting of coins which is why coins have the words ‘Bharat Sarkar’ or ‘Government of India’ on them. The proper answer would be that the Reserve Bank of India creates money, which is why every currency note has the words ‘Guaranteed by the Government of India.’ Currency notes are not government money, but they are bank notes which are only guaranteed as legal tender by the Government of India. What is the difference between these two kinds of currency? Coins are permanent money, in that they are created and circulated permanently in the economy. Currency notes or bank notes, on the other hand, are not permanent money, any more than a personal loan is permanent money. A loan has to be repaid, and that is the nature of the Central Bank’s currency notes. In other words, this money is debt. It has to be repaid and it bears interest. It is this very system of money creation that necessitates fiscal deficit. Why? Because since money is created as debt, then the repayment of that debt will always exceed the amount of money available in the economy because of the added interest on that debt.

Moreover, since money is created as debt, then even if only the principal of that debt were to be repaid, there would be a constriction in the flow of money in the economy, which would decrease economic activity, causing a recession. Now, even when the government raises funds from the market, that money must still be repaid with interest or at a premium, which makes it necessary for the government to always go back to borrowing from the Central Bank. When the government reduces the fiscal deficit through increase in taxation, this decreases the immediate purchasing power of the citizens, which is like fast-track inflation and is extremely unpopular. Therefore, the government always has to resort to borrowing.

There is a third aspect of money creation that is mostly overlooked, and this is where most of the money in the economy actually comes from, and that is through commercial banks. There is a misconception that banks give loans out of deposits. If this were strictly so, then every increase in loans and advances should reflect a corresponding decrease in deposits in the books of the bank. The reality is that banks actually create money through loans because the loans created by a bank automatically become deposits once the money is spent by the borrowers and deposited at the payees’ bank accounts. Now, when you consider that banks only need to keep a small percentage of deposits as reserves (cash reserve ratio & statutory reserve ratio), you can see how money is created exponentially by the banking system. If you suppose that the reserve requirement for banks is 20%, then from a pool of deposits of Rs. 100 the bank can give out loans of Rs. 80 which then becomes deposit money when it is spent by the borrower and deposited at the payee’s bank accounts. From this newly created deposit of Rs. 80 the bank can give out loans of Rs. 64, which then become new deposit money at the payee’s bank account. Out of the original pool of deposits of Rs. 100 we now have a pool of deposits worth Rs. 244. If you continue the process, you will eventually have created almost Rs. 500 of deposit money from an original deposit money of Rs. 100.

This way of money creation by the commercial banks through this minimum reserve system is what creates most of the money in the economy. And since this money is also created by debt, this has the same characteristics as the money created by the Central Bank, i.e. it is not permanent but has to be repaid and it bears interest. Again, just like the Government’s public debt, the repayment of this commercial debt will always exceed the amount of money available in the economy because of the added interest on that debt. Again, just like public debt, even if only the principal of this commercial debt were to be repaid, there would be a constriction in the flow of money, which would decrease economic activity, causing a recession. Now, even when the government raises funds from the market, that money must still be repaid with interest or at a premium, which makes it necessary for the government to always go back to borrowing from the Central Bank. When the government reduces the fiscal deficit through increase in taxation, this decreases the immediate purchasing power of the citizens, which is like fast-track inflation and is extremely unpopular. Therefore, the government always has to resort to borrowing.

So, the swamp is caused by the two main ways of money creation – government borrowing from the Central Bank and private commercial loans. Since all government and private spending is ultimately rooted in these two ways of money creation, we can conclude that all economic activities are ultimately rooted in debt, and not just the economic activity of the person who is the immediate borrower. Therefore, all economic growth is driven by debt. If there is no debt, there is no money because money is debt. Since this debt cannot be repaid without constricting the flow of money, therefore this system necessitates perpetual borrowing. And since this debt incurs interest, the public debt and fiscal deficit will continue to increase in perpetuity as the Government will never be able to meet its spending simply by increasing taxation and borrowing from the market. In fact, the Government spent 20% of its expenditure in 2021 on paying just the interest on public debt alone, and in 2023, this had increased to 25%. Government spending on servicing just the interest on its public debt exceeds its spending on other critical areas such as education and health care. And since the National Debt comprises mostly internal debt and only around 10% is external debt, this speaks volumes on the need to reform our monetary system and monetary theory.

Apart from inflation, the rising public debt, the rising fiscal deficit, the rising amount of taxation, the rising expenditure on interest payments, which all lead to a collapsing currency, there is also the problem of business cycles of booms and busts. When the quantity of money is increased through the debt based system of money creation, there is an economic boom which may be caused by speculative investments, price bubbles created by loans, and general economic activities. But since this money is not permanent, this growth requires a constant flow of new debt. Once commercial debt or public debt is restricted, this economic growth is also constricted, which results in an economic bust. Thus, this system of money creation allows for business cycles of booms and busts. In fact, it allows for manufactured cycles of booms and busts, and manufactured recession.

The last and most critical problem with the current monetary system is that it creates inequality on the basis of access to credit. Why are there corporations that are deemed “too big to fail?” First, these are banks whose loans and NPA’s are so high that if they were to fail, they would fail to make good on their payment of depositors’ money and cause a cash crisis, otherwise known as a run on the bank. This is caused by the minimum reserve system, where only a fraction of the deposits are ever kept as reserves and the rest is loaned out. Then there are also giant corporations that have access to a large amount of the credit that if they were to default on their debt, they would burden the banking system with huge NPA’s, and cause a banking crisis.

If both these banks and corporations were to fail, then it would wipe out a large chunk of the depositors’ money. Our current monetary system puts the security of the citizens’ deposits at the mercy of banks and corporations. Therefore, they cannot fail, and are re-financed, and the cycle continues in perpetuity. Since big corporations and big government are also bedfellows, this leaves the citizens of this Republic as hapless victims of the borrowing habits of the government and corporations. In fact, I have a strong suspicion that Demonetization was done in order to increase deposits in the banking system in order to meet the Modi Government’s capital requirements which were necessary to increase flow of credit and to conform to Basel 3 norms. This may be why ‘no frills accounts’ quickly became minimum balance accounts.

Just as America exports inflation to the rest of the world, big government spending and corporate borrowing is spreading inflation in the country today. But while countries can mitigate the dollar through de-dollarization, Indian citizens cannot circumvent the loss of value of the national currency and the loss of security of their deposits. So, in order to secure the future of this Republic and its citizens, there must be a total revamp of our monetary system and monetary theory.

Most tax drivers charge an exorbitant amount which sometimes is equivalent to our taxi fares to Guwahati airport. The Government of Meghalaya should think of regular bus facilities from the airport at regular intervals which shall benefit many. Another issue is that there are no flights in the evening from Kolkata. As mentioned in the news, most of the flights are in the forenoon or early afternoons. Therefore, someone who wants to catch an evening flight is unable to do so. Moreover, most of the trains coming from South India arrive around noon. It would be very helpful if the airlines can think of providing a late evening flight to Shillong and back. There are no flights from Shillong on Sundays. Introduction of more flights including on Sundays will be a blessing for many travellers, who want to avoid the travel to Guwahati.

Yours etc.,
Thrumen Sangma,
Via email

citizens that the Expert Committee constituted by the Government which is led by trusted legal luminary, Justice (Retired) M C Garg and his team will not be influenced by the political parties and social organizations but keep in perspective the peaceful co-existence of the indigenous tribes of Meghalaya in particular and all the bonafide citizens of Meghalaya in general. A just and fair recommendation is of paramount importance for the smooth journey of Meghalaya as was, as is and will also be in the near future.

Yours etc.,
Thrumen Sangma,
Via email

Taxis fleeing passengers from Umroi airport

Editor
This is with reference to the news about having more flights from Umroi Airport including on Sundays. It is always a pleasure to fly into Shillong via Kolkata. But the major issue that plagues the passenger is the heavy burden in travelling to and fro from Umroi Airport.

Jasprit Bumrah:
Reminiscing the making of
a World Cup Champion

By Deepal Trivedi

My knowledge of cricket is zero. I know Virat Kohli as Anushka’s husband. He is so pleasant and I like it when he tries to dance.

But this story is about my hero. One day in December 1993, when my salary was less than Rs 800 a month, my best friend and next door neighbour compelled me to take leave. She was expecting her child. I must have been 22-23 years old then. I spent most of that day at a hospital in Paldi area that December in Ahmedabad. My friend Daljit’s husband, Jasbir had stepped out for a few minutes when the nurse shouted our names and later put a baby in my shaky hands.

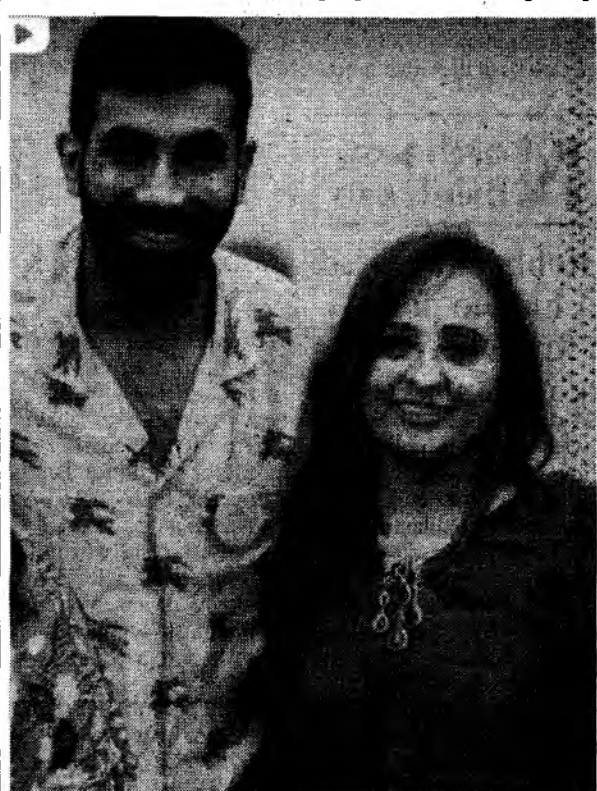
That was the first time I touched a new born baby. All I remember was that the baby was lanky. He was trying to smile but he really didn’t. The nurse said he was a boy. He was thin and weak. And the doctor soon took charge. My friend Daljit was very happy. I was already a

accompanied by his mother. A diffident little boy, he was hiding behind her dupatta. He wanted a wind-cheater. That’s my only gift to him. I spent Diwali, Christmas and my birthday without a new kurta. But his wind-cheater gave me the feeling that I was wearing a Rajdeep Ranawat or a Manish Malhotra outfit.

Unlike his sister, he was a shy, reticent child. Today he is a legend. To add more to his achievements, that momentous night he played a crucial role in winning the Cricket World Cup for us. Every Indian must be proud of him and learn from him. His humility has remained unchanged.

That shy, little boy is Jasprit Bumrah. I have tried to watch one match of his at his mother’s insistence but I walked off half way because I just don’t understand cricket.

I have written this long post to emphasise that young people should never give up



godmother to her daughter Juhika.

This is like a Bollywood film. Gujarat Chief minister Chimanlal Patel had

because God never gives up on us.

I am so fortunate to have been the first to hold Jasprit in my hands. That moment

“As next door neighbours we shared everything. I didn’t own a phone, fridge or even a bed! We shared a wall and Daljit’s house was my haven. Sadly, Daljit’s husband, Jasbir passed away too soon. Life changed. We were left without hope. That whole month, I handled the kids. I read to them. The boy was never interested in reading or listening to stories and started playing with his cheap stupid, plastic ball.”

passed away. In the next two months, I became a political reporter, got a small raise and bought some ice cream that we shared.

As next door neighbours we shared everything. I didn’t own a phone, fridge or even a bed! We shared a wall and Daljit’s house was my haven. Sadly, Daljit’s husband, Jasbir passed away too soon. Life changed. We were left without hope. That whole month, I handled the kids. I read to them. The boy was never interested in reading or listening to stories and started playing with his cheap stupid, plastic ball.

While baby-sitting I sometimes ate up the biscuits belonging to the kids because I was starving. Yes, we starved; we struggled; we cried; we fought on and lived life. Juhika, the daughter whose godmother I was and who is the most beautiful child I had ever seen, gave me hope with her smile and a tight hug. She continues to give me that passionate hug. But the boy’s struggles had only just begun. We could hardly afford him a packet of Amul Dairy milk or any milk. We were all busy struggling to meet ends as he was growing up. His mother worked at least 16-18 hours a day.

I recall once when I got some increments, I visited Westside, the most posh store I then knew, to buy a kurta for myself. Jasprit was there. He must have been 8 years old and he was

often gives me hope to face life as and when I face difficult situations. His mother Daljit is of course solely responsible for raising such wonderfully resilient kids.

Some months ago, Jasprit’s beautiful wife Sanjana served us lunch with grace, class, humility and elegance. A point to note! Today that little baby Jasprit who I once held in my hands has his own baby, Angad! And of course, Angad is much more handsome than Jasprit was!

I hardly write personal posts but I wanted to this time because I don’t want anyone in life to lose hope. Each time we are disillusioned in life, think of Jasprit Bumrah. Think of his struggles, and how God has helped him. God will help all of us but first we have to help ourselves.

Please join me in congratulating my baby Jasprit Bumrah for the World Cup victory. From an obscure area and school in Ahmedabad, he has made all of us proud. I thank his mother Daljit and sister Juhika for shaping him up to become a World Champion. His wife Sanjana is of course his soulmate.

Sorry Jasprit, I didn’t watch the match but I love you!

#JaspritBumrah
#WorldCupFinal #worldcup2024

(The writer is founder-editor CEO of VibesOfIndia a news portal and is based in Ahmedabad)

Letters to the Editor

Traffic Police-
the unsung
heroes

Editor,
The Meghalaya Traffic Police work tirelessly come rain or shine; hell or highwater but their work goes unnoticed by the masses. Traffic Police deserve gratitude and respect for managing the unruly traffic of this city and the whole state. I wish to give special thanks to the state traffic personnel who were engaged in clearing the traffic jam that occurred in the NH44 Shillong-Jowai Road on Sunday evening (June 30, 2024) despite the relentlessly heavy rains. Traffic jams can only be avoided if we citizens abide by the traffic rules and remain in line without unnecessarily overtaking. This will reduce the traffic jam and prevent a jam from happening in the first place. Overtaking only worsens the work of the Traffic Police. To the hardworking State Traffic Police department we thank you for your sincerity towards your duties and even at the eleventh hour.

Yours etc.,
Manpura Roy Lyndem,
Via email

Revisiting the
Emergency

Editor
Thank you for your Editorial, “Regurgitating the Emergency,” (TST, July 1, 2024). I remember the day Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay were defeated in the polls. I was a young college student and my hero was Jayprakash Narayan. He represented something so decent, so refined, and courageous. I remember the jubilation on the streets of Delhi as we got news of the defeat of Mrs. Gandhi and her son. This proved that the Indian voter values freedom more than anything else.

Yours etc.,
Deepa Majumdar,
Via email

Expert
Committee on
Reservation
must rise to the
occasion

Editor,
The world famous “Abode of clouds,” a 52-year old tiny

beautiful state of Meghalaya, also called the Scotland of the East, is inhabited not only by the indigenous tribes of Garo, Khasi and Jaintia peoples. There are other tribes like Mikirs, Rabhas, Hajongs and smaller sub-tribes such as Dalu and Mishings have also co-existed since time immemorial. Long before the State of Meghalaya came into being, a sizable population from the mainland of India mostly from Bengal and Bihar and other North Eastern States have familiarised themselves with the indigenous people and they have been carrying on trade and commerce for a long time. So, the state is not the exclusive domain of the hill tribes only as we think it to be. The non-tribal settlers joined hands while sloganeering during the Hill State movement under the pioneering patriotic tribal leaders whose names have been written in the hearts of the contemporary citizens.

From the beginning of the journey of Meghalaya, a question of equitable distribution of opportunity in matters of jobs and services was debated in the State Legislature by some leaders from amongst the indigenous people as it was seen that there is disproportionate

representation in the Meghalaya Secretariat and in all the government establishments at the district level. Taking into consideration various factors such as availability of educational institutes at all levels, trade and commerce, road transport communications, economic backwardness, the Meghalaya Job Reservation Policy, 1972 was legislated and became the law of the land with provisions of 40:40:5:15 per cent to uplift all citizens in the state of Meghalaya which ensures peaceful co-existence and because of which it has continued till date, although the policy was never implemented in letter and spirit as envisaged by the visionary leaders.

Many social organizations, political parties, individuals have aired their views for and against the proposed review of the Meghalaya Job Reservation Policy. If the competent authority calls for the recruitment records of the MPSC for the last 50 years or even for the last 20 years for fair assessment, it will reveal the true figures which cannot be denied by applying any method of calculations either by percentage or arithmetic or logical applications.

There is high hope among

"If you find a path with no obstacles,
it probably doesn't lead anywhere."

— Frank A. Clark

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JULY 3, 2024

Speedy governance

AFTER the five-year lull, Parliament is back into full-throated activity. The opposition benches that were dispirited in the last term have turned active, and are taking on the government from day-one with a new frenzy. Rahul Gandhi, who took up position as the Leader of Opposition, has made a speech that enthused the party leadership and the INDI Alliance for both its tone and tenor. He and the Congress are gripped by a new-found confidence as the party managed to win around a hundred seats this time, a sizable strength in the Lok Sabha. This was followed by Rahul Gandhi being appointed Leader of the Opposition a status that had eluded the party for the past two terms. This augurs well for democracy as a strong opposition is as important as a strong government. This strength should however not be misused. A sense of responsibility should guide the opposition to raise the quality of discussions and avoid disruption of the proceedings in the House. Even the legislation of a new set of criminal laws, implemented from July 1, was passed in the last parliament amid huge disruptions, suspension of opposition MPs and without discussions. The result: it has its flaws.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is obviously a tamed leader by virtue of the dressing down he and his party got from the voters, reducing the BJP's strength from 303 to 240, forcing it to form the government with the able help from three major political establishments. His promise, by way of reply to the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, is that his new government would work with three times the speed and strength of the last governance and produce three times more results. The sentiment is well-appreciated as he might appear to have wasted precious time without solid actions and dragged on his promises. The lukewarm response that he got from the people this time was proof that they were not enthused by his performance. In the absence of a credible alternative, they nevertheless gave him and the BJP another chance. Modi, as he courses ahead in his third term, would do well to harp less on religion – which he invoked during his present speech in parliament too, both in place and out of place. His over-emphasis on Ayodhya as PM, in the last term, failed to draw more votes for himself and his party even in Ayodhya and the hotbed of UP as a whole too. Today people are more concerned about their daily bread and butter. The PM has rightly noted that "our campaign to lift 25 crore people out of poverty brought us blessings during the elections." Less emphasis on religion and more work to uplift the masses and speed up progress of the nation, from him, will be appreciated especially by India's burgeoning youth population.

VPP's foray into parliament: Challenges and opportunities ahead

By Bhogtaram Mawroh

The maiden speech given by Ricky AJ Syngkon marks the entry of the VPP into Parliament. According to Ricky, the party won on the plank of anti-corruption and clean politics. Of course, that is not entirely true. It has to be acknowledged that people are fed up with the dismal condition in which the state finds itself today and want a change. But without an inordinate amount of exhortation in the name of jaidbynriew and religion, this spectacular victory, both in the state assembly and the parliamentary elections, would not have been possible. Therefore, it was also inevitable that both of these would feature prominently in his speech.

Ricky began his speech by acknowledging the grace of God by stating that "nothing is impossible with God" and linking it to the party's victory. Of course, God also helped the parties the VPP fought against to win seats elsewhere. And the ideological enemy of the VPP, i.e., the BJP, still won the highest number of seats in Parliament. So, it is true when people proclaim that "God works in mysterious ways." And what God was Ricky talking about? It is the Judeo-Christian God, as made clear by his reference to King Solomon of the Old Testament. But to Ricky's credit, he was not as divisive as some of the others in the Parliament. While the reference to God is present in the standard oath to be administered by the MPs, some of the religiously motivated chanting was an absolute disgrace.

When Asaduddin Owaisi, the MP-elect from Hyderabad, walked towards the dais to take his oath, there were chants of Jai Shri Ram from the Treasury Bench. Chanting Jai Shri Ram after taking an oath is understandable, but doing so when a Muslim MP is about to take an oath is a reflection of the ideology that believes that all Indians are Hindus since the religion is indigenous to the subcontinent. Of course, this is not true, as Hinduism is as foreign as Christianity and Islam. But coming back to Owaisi, he began his oath by reciting a prayer in Arabic, from which I could only understand the word 'shaitan' which means the devil. So, I think he was asking God something in relation to the 'devils' who are trying to intimidate him. In the end, he chanted Allahu Akbar, which means 'God is great'. I was thinking maybe Ricky would say something like 'in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.' He didn't, but during his maiden speech, he came very close to that. It is certain that this will help shore up the VPP's support among Christians. But where does this leave the non-Christians, especially the practitioners

of the indigenous faith, who also make up a substantial proportion of the state's population? Will he push for granting minority status to the Khasi indigenous faith (highlighting its distinct identity from Christianity, Hinduism, etc.) in Parliament? Only time will tell.

But for the non-Christian Khasi, Ricky also had something in his speech. Ricky's surname is Syngkon, which is from his father's side, and his mother's surname is Tiarang. While Syngkon is a Pnar surname, Tiarang is a War surname from Elaka Amwi (Amlarem Block). Ricky was quite profuse in the mention of the community as Khasi and not Khasi-Pnar/Khasi-Jaintia, which had become the norm and is one of the reasons why some claim that both are not the same community. It is to be remembered that it was the daughter of Loh Ryndi Tiarang and Ka Li Dakha, Ka Nga, who founded Hima Sutnga, which later became Hima Jaintiapur that marked the beginning of the Pnar identity as a separate linguistic group. So, it is good to see that someone who has both Pnar and War lineages representing the Shillong seat from the most influential jaidbynriew political party of the day, stood for unity and mentioned the community by its proper name, Khasi.

Another good thing that he raised concerning the Khasi community was the inclusion of the Khasi language in the 8th Schedule. Khasi, as it belongs to the Khasian group, of which War-Amwi is the oldest, in fact older than Sanskrit, Hindi, and other Indo-Aryan languages spoken in the subcontinent. The Sohra dialect, which is the youngest among the Khasian languages, is itself around 700 years old. But the Indo-Aryan languages and Tibeto-Burman languages like Bodo and Meitei are already part of the 8th Schedule, while Khasi is not. While we must congratulate all these languages, especially the two indigenous languages mentioned above, not including Khasi is a grave injustice. It is high time that this is rectified and Khasi gets its rightful place in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Another thing that all Khasis, Christian or non-Christian, will appreciate is his mention of the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples. While the term 'indigenous peoples' (IPs) is often used, it is not officially recognized by India. There will be occasions when he will be challenged on the use of the term, but Ricky must stand firm and continue using the term to describe the Khasi and the other indigenous peoples in

the country. But apart from words, Ricky will also have to show in action that he can deliver on the issues that he has raised in Parliament, the most important of which is the border issue with Bangladesh and Assam. This is of course going to be the toughest challenge considering Assam is being ruled by the BJP, which will also have their own Assamese 'jaidbynriew' pride to satiate. The fact that VPP decided not to align with anyone in Parliament is also going to make it difficult to get support for the inclusion of Khasi in the 8th Schedule and the most important jaidbynriew demand of implementing ILP in Meghalaya, which was curiously absent from Ricky's speech.

The VPP's stance of going it all alone is a strange one, made stranger by their abstention from voting in the Speaker's election. Granted that the BJP's nominee was always going to win, the voting was a symbolic move to discern who stands where. In this highly partisan environment, not taking sides actually benefits the ruling dispensation. On one side, there is the BJP-led NDA, which has been accused of planning to change the Constitution if they had crossed 400 seats, and on the other side, there is the INDIA bloc, which used the motto 'save the Constitution' to bolster its numbers in Parliament. And we have the VPP, which is not in either of these two camps, effectively suggesting that they believe that both are wrong. In his speech, Ricky criticized the current government as well as the previous Congress governments for not solving the border issue. It is certain he will do this in the future as well. So, by annoying both camps, how does the VPP intend to garner support for the various issues that the party intends to raise in the coming days? I hope they are not planning to use this as an excuse in the future for not achieving whatever they have promised during the elections.

Everything is about give and take. What is the VPP going to promise either to the BJP or the Congress in return for their support of the issues that Ricky will raise in the future? More than the Congress, it is the BJP that will need the VPP's support to increase its political influence in the eastern part of Meghalaya, i.e., the Khasi region. In Parliament, the BJP does not need the VPP's support for any of the laws that it intends to pass in the coming days. It already has enough numbers to do it on its own. But it will need the VPP's support to grow the party in the state, which at the moment is dependent on the personality politics of Sanbor Shullai and AL Hek. If VPP indeed is a party on

the rise, it can, as part of the alliance with the BJP, help transfer some of its votes in the elections, thus helping the party open its account in the KHADC. AL Hek has already stated that the party might contest the MDC election. Assuming that VPP can maintain its upward trajectory, this partnership can continue into the 2028 Assembly elections as well. Being the ruling party, the BJP has the numbers to accept the demands, especially the inclusion of Khasi in the 8th Schedule. Unlike the BJP, which is not a serious political force in Meghalaya, the Congress will be hoping for some good results in the upcoming assembly elections to win back power. It already has a dedicated vote bank, which will be galvanized by the victories elsewhere, and they will not want to divide it with a party that will pose a serious challenge. Also, since the VPP is not supporting the INDIA bloc, with the recent example being the Speaker's election and the criticism of the Congress governments handling of the border issue, it has no obligation to help the VPP increase their own support.

The partnership with the BJP, though, is laced with serious risks, especially considering its anti-indigenous peoples' moves like the passing of the CAA to give citizenship to illegal immigrants. Then there's the anti-minority violence that has been a feature of the last ten years. Will the BJP give up its Hindutva agenda for one single vote from an MP from Meghalaya? Even if it does, what will it want in return? One has to remember that nobody is going to do a favour to anyone if there's no quid pro quo, especially in this polarized environment.

I like most of what Ricky said, but the biggest disappointment was his lack of mention of Manipur. When he talked about peace in the North East, I was hoping he would mention the conflict in Manipur and show solidarity with the indigenous peoples of the state, both Meitei and Kuki-Zomi, who have been left orphaned by the Prime Minister. Not siding with either the NDA or the INDIA bloc on ideological issues (I don't know what they are) is fine, but ignoring the suffering of our indigenous brethren in the same region was very disappointing. Very soon, whether the government and the prime minister desire it or not, there will be discussions on Manipur. When that happens, the party, especially Ricky, must prove that he really believes in the rights of the indigenous peoples, and it's not a phrase to be used and discarded. We will soon find out.

(The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organisation or institution)

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Green Grass On The Other Side...

The wise man who once said, 'grass always looks greener on the other side,' must have chuckled as he spoke those words, as he looked out one night and saw this young couple:

It was Valentine's Day and they had been invited to the home of another friend and his wife who were actually their neighbours. They were quiet as they came back from their friend's house with their little one fast asleep on his father's shoulder; they'd had a great dinner, but the husband had noticed his wife growing quiet as the evening progressed. He'd wondered what the problem was; had their child been too naughty, or had their conversation disturbed her. But as he reflected, he couldn't really figure out what had been the cause of her change in mood.

"What's the problem?" he asked her as they let themselves into their own house.

"Nothing!" said his wife Leila quietly, and he knew there was huge trouble ahead. 'Nothing' in a woman's language meant, 'Storm ahoy!' He remembered enough times earlier on in their marriage when he'd thought,

she envied her. "I don't know what you mean," Shobha said with a puzzled look on her face.

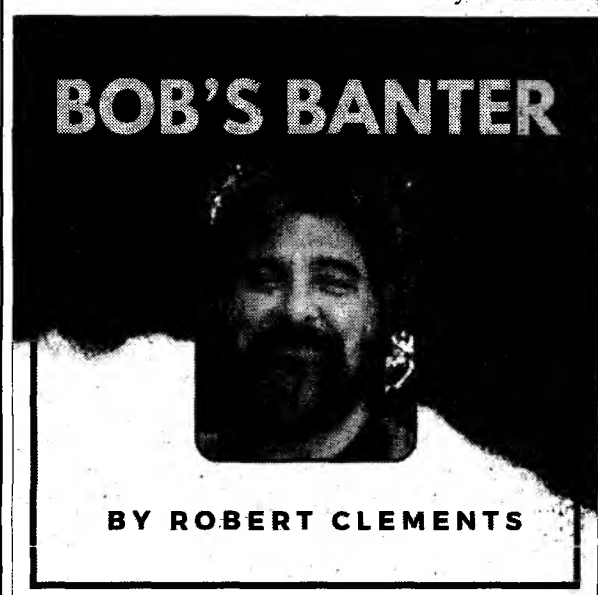
"I wish my husband was half as nice as yours," she said. "I even see him out in the front tending the garden, and I wish my husband would do the same thing," Leila said. "Your garden is beautiful!"

Shobha laughed and then made her confession. "I've been doing the same thing Leila," she said. "I watch your husband from my front garden, and I have envied you!"

Leila shook her head with disbelief. "What on earth do you mean?" she asked.

Shobha continued, "I watched him carrying your toddler home that night. How caring he was. I also watched him being so patient with your child that evening, while we were all talking and I wished I had such a patient, caring, loving man like that. I see him playing ball with him so nicely too. How I wish Rohan, my husband, would do the same thing! He never wants our children in the way when he gardens."

That evening as Leila sat at home waiting for her husband, she asked herself, "Be honest, would you rather have your husband



'nothing,' meant nothing, had gone to bed and had woken up the next morning to notice that his wife had cried the whole night.

Now many years and many Valentine days later he knew better. "Come on, out with it," he said gruffly.

"What's the use, you'll never change," sniffed his wife.

"You want me to change?" asked her husband.

"Like I said, what's the use," muttered his wife, then burst into tears. "Did you see how Rohan looked at his wife Shobha throughout the evening?"

"How did he look at his wife?" asked her husband, wondering whether he should have been looking more at the couple who had entertained them than at his own child who had been a little naughty during the evening. "How did Rohan look at his wife?" he asked simply.

"With love!" wept his wife. "There was adoration dripping from his eyes, all the time, and then when I looked at you..."

"You didn't see any I guess?" he said sadly.

"No I didn't!" she said and started crying silently. He looked at her for a moment, wondering whether it was any point arguing with her, whether to tell her he had been so busy running after his mischievous child that evening that he had had little time to do anything else, but he decided to remain silent. The couple silently got into bed, the man making a mental note he would start looking at his wife with love and adoration, and the woman dreaming how it would be to have a husband like Rohan next door.

Since the two neighbours lived across the street from each other, from their living room windows, each was able to observe the activities of the other's family. A few days later, as she met her neighbour, Leila confessed she'd been watching what went on in Shobha's front garden and that

play with your son, and help look after him, than someone who looks at you with adoration, maybe because you look like his well-manicured garden?"

She had not thought of that before, and she realized her neighbour's husband might have the best garden in the world, make loving eyes at his wife all the time, but her own man had so many wonderful, meaningful and hidden qualities which didn't come out in looks of love or sudden hugs and kisses. She also knew her son was a little bundle of joy because of the time her husband gave him.

She looked away from the grass on the other side! That evening when her husband came home, he was startled to see her with a big smile on her face and shook his head wondering as she gave him a hug. "What's this for?" he asked.

"A belated Valentine's gift!" she said as he again shook his head and wondered as men often do, as to what had made her forget he hadn't looked at her with big loving eyes the day before. "I've been practicing!" he said.

"Practicing what?" she asked with a grin.

"Practicing in front of the mirror, how to make loving eyes at you all the time!"

"You needn't," she chuckled. "Just be the way you are, and I'll be happy!"

And I'm sure the couple went to bed happy, accepting the other the way they were, not wanting to change each other into their neighbour's garden mould.

But it's the same with many of us, isn't it? How often we enviously look across at our neighbour's green lawn, blind to our own blessings that are so obvious to others. Let us cultivate the habit of concentrating on our own blessings rather than brooding over what our neighbour has.!

Read more in the author's motivational book DARE available on Amazon.in bobsbanter@gmail.com

Letters to the Editor

Political ability versus nepotism: What is the NPP prioritising?

Editor,
Apropos to various reports in your esteemed daily regarding NPP supremo Conrad K. Sangma planning to field his own wife Mehtab Chandee for the Gambegre bye-polls, it seems like it is no longer a hidden fact that the NPP is facing a heavy issue of nepotism.

NPP veteran Agatha K. Sangma suffered a substantive defeat in the Lok Sabha elections, an indicator that voters are disenchanted with the current leadership and governance dynamics in the state. Despite this, it appears that the lessons from this electoral debacle have not been heeded.

The current murmurs also raise a critical question about the internal democracy of the party and the value it places on its dedicated workers, where people working for the party for nearly two decades have been sidelined

to perhaps pave way for someone who is politically inexperienced.

Is the NPP becoming a one-man show where leadership positions are reserved for family members, irrespective of their political acumen and public support? Such actions not only undermine the morale of loyal party workers but also erode public trust in the commitment to democratic principles and meritocracy.

Party workers, who tirelessly campaign and support the party's endeavours, deserve recognition and opportunities based on their hard work and dedication. The current trend suggests that their efforts and aspirations are being overlooked in favour of familial ties. This approach is detrimental for even the electorate.

Transparency, merit-based leadership, and genuine inclusivity are crucial for rebuilding trust and ensuring the party's long-term success. And if the current trends continue and the media reports turn out to be true, then it would not be impractical to expect a repeat of the Lok Sabha election results for the NPP in the Gambegre

bye-polls.

Yours etc.,
Patrick Kurbah
Via Email

This is 2024: Not 1975 nor 2047

Editor,

The present is the only area where a person has the option to work. The Bhagavad Gita says, "You are only entitled to the action, never to its fruits." But we are entitled to the action only in the present. Therefore, the present is all that matters. It will become the past and can take care of the future. This is a simple truth. Lord Buddha famously said, "Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment."

However, to study the past is not to dwell in the past. It is for taking appropriate actions in the present and not to repeat a mistake of the past. It is not for living in the past but for making the present actions more prudent. For example, the study on the Holocaust is

done all over the world not to abuse the Germans but to tell the world leaders not to repeat the dangerous act of demonising the members of a religion.

Germans have learned their lessons from the Holocaust and have thrown any trace of Nazism into the dustbin. Recently, Germany has withdrawn jerseys with number 44 immediately after it was pointed out that there was a resemblance between that number and the stylized SS used by Nazi Party's Schutzstaffel group.

The Holocaust should be discussed to prevent the totalitarian inclinations of a government and attempts at demonising a minority community that happened during the Nazi regime. But to invoke the Holocaust to criticise the Germans, who themselves are ashamed of it, is totally unacceptable.

Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi publicly apologised for all the mistakes and excesses committed during the Emergency and declared that she was taking "the entire responsibility for the same." To criticise the Congress now for the Emergency that happened nearly

fifty years ago and for which its leader had sought public apology long ago, could only be compared with flogging a dead horse.

Given the people in power are to take action, they should not dwell in the past but remain in the present. They need to concentrate on how to safeguard our Constitution now in 2024 rather than dwelling in the distant past period of the 1975 Emergency.

A government in a democratic country gets the mandate from the people to govern. Similarly, the opposition MPs get the mandate from the people to make the government answerable to the people and to critically review every government action.

In a parliamentary democracy, opposition parties are there to provide checks and balances on the government; to prevent it from becoming a totalitarian one. It is said, "dissent is the highest form of patriotism." It means dissent is necessary to protect democracy, and democracy is necessary to protect the nation.

People in power need to concentrate on how to safe-

guard our Constitution now in 2024 by not gagging the voice of dissent by misusing technology and the UAPA.

India is ranked 159 out of the 180 countries in the 2024 World Press Freedom Index. A few months ago, several journalists from across the country had written to the Chief Justice of India. They observed, "Journalism cannot be prosecuted as terrorism," and the invocation of the UAPA was "especially chilling".

Also, the people in power must focus on the pressing problems of the present, like rising inequality, unemployment, inflation, train accidents, question paper leaks, airport roof and bridge collapse, highway cave-in, corruption, and pollution. It would be equally damaging for all of us if they start dreaming about the future as distant as 2047.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

"Equality under the law is the slow triumph of hope over history."

—Jim Cooper

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JULY 4, 2024

Shillong MP hits the ground running

IT is rare for a newly elected Member of Parliament (MP) from Meghalaya to take up the burning issues of the state within the week that he was sworn in. Dr Ricky AJ Syngkon of the Voice of Peoples' Party (VPP) has shown that he means business and is not going to be in Delhi sitting through a disruptive parliament session while the ruling party tries to score brownie points and the rejuvenated Opposition now with a formally designated leader hell bent on putting the government on notice from day one. After Chief Minister Conrad Sangma met the Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari he was told in no uncertain terms that the Ministry cannot continue to condone delays and would have no alternative but to scrap the pending road projects. Now the VPP has discovered that powerful middlemen working with a section of politicians and technicians in the government are in connivance with such middlemen. This has happened because from the time Meghalaya was born these middlemen too were born along with it. Two of them, now no longer alive ran their businesses simply by buying land at throwaway prices and selling them to government at exorbitant rates even then. They would get prior information about proposed road projects from their politician friends or high ranking PWD engineers and buy off entire areas at a pittance. In these deals the only ones privy to the information are the Rangbah Shnong whose connivance is contingent for the success of such land deals.

Meghalaya is now a state where landlessness is growing at a phenomenal pace because the affluent have enormous greed for land. It happens to be the only investment whose value rises exponentially. How a society that started off with community land being distributed to married adults so they can have a roof over their heads, now has almost 76% of landless individuals, which also means they don't own a home and have to take one on rent, thereby exacerbating their poverty. Now that the VPP has taken up the issue of middlemen who connive with the Rangbah Shnong in villages to unreasonably hike up land prices, it will be interesting to watch if they can zero in on these middlemen who are known to all and who strut around knowing that they will be protected by those in power. Dr Ricky Syngkon has drawn the attention of MoRTH, Nitin Gadkari to the state of the existing national highways that have been washed away by the rains and the under-construction highways too that have run into rough weather courtesy the middleman syndrome. If the Shillong MP can follow up on a few priority areas such as roads and air communication it will be a boon for Meghalaya.

Simple steps not extravagance make a smart city

By Sanjoy Hazarika

a few sectors. I made them after a review of a Smart City Proposal which is accessible on the Shillong Municipal Board's website.

The proposal was developed by an organization called LEA Associates South Asia Pvt. Ltd. India. In February 2017, its name appeared on the draft proposal in association with (as Sub-Consultant) Crux Consultants Pvt. Ltd., India and VBSOFT India Ltd., India. A check of its website says that its main office is on Mathura Road, New Delhi and has been around since 1993. The Urban Affairs Department (UAD) of the Government of Meghalaya is the government department which made the proposal for the Smart City Mission. The results for the NER, not just

cities in the northeast region has the capacity to execute projects involving cost Rs 1000 crore due to which the Ministry had decided to allocate Rs 500 crores and asked the state governments to contribute Rs 50 crore each matching the funding pattern of 90:10.

The parliamentary committee presented its report to both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha on February 8, 2024.

The Smart City project for Shillong came down from Rs 1,279 crore to Rs 825 crore but since the Centre would not release more than Rs 500 crore to each project across the country, the balance of Rs 325 crore (including Rs 50 crore for non-capital expenses such as salaries) would have to come from the state

and cities. In 2011, the population of Greater Shillong was pegged at 4.16 lakh. It is probably more than five lakh these days. Dozens of spanking new vehicles (large and small) surge across the city, making traffic denser and crossing roads more hazardous.

One would suggest simple initiatives on a few issues to see visible, measurable impact. These may be small for policy makers but major for ordinary people. Thus, the idea of decongesting Shillong looks at traffic control. It does not consider making the city friendly for pedestrians who have an equal right to urban spaces.

There are police personnel including what appear to be volunteers to conduct traffic. But not one of them is looking out for pedestrians who have to struggle, dodge and weave their way through high density traffic. Most vehicles are courteous enough to let them pass. But why can't the Shillong Police institute the position of traffic wardens, which will enable not just school children but all people in need of help in crossing roads? One understands there are already arrangements with local educational institutions to involve students in traffic management. But their role needs to be expanded to enable pedestrians to move to safety. Involve the local Dorbars, the churches and even ask for volunteers from retired persons to give their time between 8 am to 11 am and 2 pm to 5 pm when the traffic is at its peak.

Will a new capital complex (not just a new Assembly) with homesteads, markets and communities reduce the pressure on Shillong? However, the homes and offices left behind won't be left unoccupied! So, shifting the capital doesn't actually resolve the challenge.

Another issue relates to garbage disposal: there need to be enough garbage bins on street corners and outside parks (including at the start and end of hiking trails as the Malki forest). A familiar sight in Shillong and other NE cities is of people simply flicking a piece of plastic (could be a cigarette carton, juice or chips pack) without a second thought onto the pavement or road.

Large funds, fancy PPTs and consultants, high promises and bright ideas don't make for a smart city. Taking care of basic needs such as safety for pedestrians and improving public conduct about garbage could represent small steps in the right direction.

"What is truly stressful, not just for me, but for I think everyone else, is getting across the roads. It means dodging the traffic at several points including the place where four roads meet near the Seventh Day Adventist Church, with one rushing up from Nongrim and the Bethany Hospital side, another one-way past the Fire Bridge field, yet another coming after a merger's side and the main road from Laitumkhrah. of the road from Jowai and one from St Edmunds."

for Shillong, are abysmal: here are the rankings according to NEZINE, in descending order: Guwahati is ranked 96, Imphal-97, Gangtok-95, Aizawl-94, Shillong-93, Itanagar-92, Agartala-89, Pasighat-86.

Shillong had the fewest projects (17) but ranked No. 4 in the size of the budget! Even Guwahati, the biggest city in the region with perhaps the greatest urban challenges, had more projects but asked for less money. The original budget presented in 2017 sought Rs 1,289 Crores and so was obviously slashed.

In a stinging review by a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Housing and Urban Affairs, "Smart Cities Mission: An Evaluation". "Overall, the performance of the scheme in North-Eastern States appears to be dismal despite an altered funding pattern," observed the parliamentary committee.

The Ministry apprised the committee that none of smart

government. End June is when the project is supposed to close and till that, a senior official in the project told me, the state government has released Rs 80 crore. There is no indication if it will meet the rest of the balance which is expected from it.

Details of social media outreach were given in one presentation accessible on the web. These made sorry reading: There were 392 FB likes, 32 from Instagram while there were 27 and blogs (essay competitions). Anyone familiar with social media would say that this underlined how citizen-unfriendly and distant the project seemed to ordinary people.

A detailed review of the Shillong Smart City Project and its effectiveness is needed. It should be conducted by an independent group of subject specialists and community leaders.

It should be pointed out that urbanization grows every day here and in other towns

Two trending public issues: City redevelopment plans & reservation

By Ubahunlang Dkhar Tmar

The recent news report on the government's re-development plan generates a sense of unease that provokes certain reasoning. Before I elucidate my thoughts, I have added few relevant lines as reported in The Shillong Times June 30, 2023) that caught my attention—

"The proposed redevelopment in Barik aims to create an iconic space that promotes heritage, enriches tourists' experiences, and provides a social gathering place for residents."

Based on the above news report, the following are questions welling in my mind:

1. How do we "promote heritage", when first we have to dismantle Heritage?

Since heritage is a priceless inheritance and historically important, Heritage requires continuity with less interference and actually requires maintenance/protection, in the parlance of sensitive Architectural/Archaeological/Anthropological undertakings.

In the context of buildings and spaces there is also the aspect of embedded Aesthetics attached from the past. Whose aesthetics will we dress and address now? What I have observed is that our government (including past governments) have very low IQ on aesthetics faculty and sensibilities.

2. "Iconic Space that promotes heritage" in this context, this is a subjective view point, a planner's general assumptions. What are the ingredients and contents of this iconic space? Who will decide and interpret on what is heritage?

3. Enriches tourist experiences" The word Tourist is also a collective term that embraces differences, not similarities. Every single tourist has different tastes, sense of style, food habits, viewpoints etc. How do we cater to these variables? Tourism as an industry in different parts of the developed world have adopted paradigm shifts in their policies. They have developed their own 'unique selling points' (USP) based on their unique and peculiar geographical endowments.

4. "Social gathering places for residents" Most cities (European especially) have public spaces which have historical importance too. Many highly urbanised nations in their urban planning have also created public spaces (family, children, general public) for their citizens and most of these spaces are also centres of public expressions either art, music and even site for protest/political gathering (like the public square).

We first have to understand what is a public space; its political, philosophical, legal and historical connotations, since most of our public spaces in this city are used for commercial purposes. Again, what happens to the site/place of recent hunger strike near secretariat? Isn't that a public space? Recently the Government has tried to barricade that area by putting barriers to discourage civil protests which is actually a Constitutional provision. Can political gatherings also enhance socialization? Will social gatherings encourage politicization of space? One has to understand the socio-political dynamics and mechanisms and the psychology of space, the science of proximity and evolutionary organising principles.

On the Church Relocation: The plan to relocate the iconic English Service Church is such an abhorrent idea that no sane, educated individual would even think about it. This obsession with 'beautification' is a superficial and shallow understanding of, 'What it is to be a city?' This is the same thing that the Scholar Jane Jacobs an Urban Theorist talks about in her book "The Life and Death of Great American Cities". We must understand that a city is a sociological-commercial organism that only its citizens can beautify and support its growth and maintain flexibility and stability. There is no place for 'Le Corbusier' style

of Architecture and Urban Planning in Shillong. No amount of space creation will eradicate the spatial (space) problems we face.

A Paradox: A Smart city requires smart citizens and smart planners. And nowhere in the world will you find a smart city. I have only heard of efficient cities. If you change and tweak the definition and content of "smart city", you will find smart cities everywhere.

A thought on the Reservation et al

On social media there has been a lot discussion on the present Reservation issue. There are those who stress on the criteria of 'backwardness' 'deprivation' as a condition for reservation among Scheduled Tribes but not on the size of population. I think this will not stand, since it leads to the sub-categorization of Scheduled Tribes on the basis of the yardstick of backwardness, deprivation.

The moment you address backwardness and deprivation, you have to take into account the measurement/criteria of 'relative backwardness' within a tribe. We know that among any group, of Schedule Tribes there are creamy layers with high disposable income and easy access to resources and there are those who are deprived/backward. There are also regions within the territory of a Schedules Tribe, which are backward and under-developed if we use the yardstick of development.

If we bring the criteria of backwardness, deprivation index for Reservation we are opening a Pandora's box. One of the probabilities is of income tax being levied or a system in the line of Public Distribution System being worked out. If backwardness and deprivation will be the criteria for Reservations, this will lead to the sub-categorization of the term Scheduled Tribe. If that is the case, the issue of sub-categorization of the Scheduled Tribes has to go to the Parliament before any policy of sub-categorization of such Scheduled Tribe is initiated in the States.

If we use the criteria of 'Backwardness and Deprivation', we must also understand that population size is also a factor of backwardness. A large population that depends on small amount of resources (allocation) will result in, some section of that population being deprived thereby intensifying backwardness. We know about this when we look into the dynamic relationship between population and resources. We must therefore ask and interrogate what are the causes of backwardness, despite the large amount of central schemes/funds which have been disbursed in the State. Where have all the resources gone? What about the capital assets and resources? Who controls and exploits them?

Reservation is not the cause of backwardness or underdevelopment; it is also not the only solution to backwardness. As a State we need to address the efficient use of resources/endowments and rigorous intensive investment in capacity building. Creating locales of reasonable self-reliant economies must be the trajectory. To address these, we don't need any arm-chair, paper based, PowerPoint aficionado consultants that have no depth on the dynamics of locational, historical, ecological, geographical, psychological, sociological, economic and political peculiarities and extremities (outlying extreme variables).

The wisdom lies with the people and their geographical surroundings. They just need an honest, on the field, helping hand to guide them. Development is an affair of daily interaction with the object and subject we wish to mould and sustain ourselves. We learn about this from small advanced nations with limited resources.

After all, development is also a social process not only a political-economic one.

Letters to the Editor

Securing the fifth domain

Editor,
All warfare is based on deception—Sun Tzu. It might sound old, but strategic planners have foreseen the importance of waging a geo-economic warfare which has the potential to cripple strong economies. Edward Snowden and Julian Assange were familiar with this type which is why whistleblowers are a rare breed. In today's world, information is incredibly important from weather reports, election updates to news flow, we are relentlessly dependent on Google news, Instagram feeds or X. Recent indicators have shown that Meghalaya is facing cybercrime issues, 70 percent of the cases reported are related to financial fraud, but this is likely just a small portion of the overall problem. Not only are we sharing data on the cloud space, but profiles to money transfers are at our fingertips. Lured by links which might give us a chance to redeem our luck, we ignore the minute details of this mammoth space. Do we hold a strong

ground on communications intelligence?

The vulnerable section over here are children and older adults who still have to be sensitised more through informed debate or discussion, hours spent on screens and virtual windows it becomes easy for them to be lured through blackmailing or worse case trafficking. Definitely the Home Department of the state is deploying countermeasures, curating a separate department to fuse national security analysts, law enforcement experts, cyber warriors, media professionals would burn the exchequer's pocket but there has to be an understanding between various stakeholders who have a responsibility to protect not only the 0 and 1 but lives which is on the razor's edge.

Ashok Kumar and O.P Manocha's book 'Cyber Encounters' reveals a fresh look into stories of how criminals have reshaped their modus operandi and why it is imperative for us to be practical in balancing our connected world.

Yours etc.,
Christopher Gathphoh,
Laitkor Rngi,
Shillong-10

Prime Minister's weird utterances!

Editor,
When feverish campaigns for the 18th Lok Sabha elections were in full swings stretching from April to early June this year, we have read innumerable unsavoury plus unimaginable hullabaloo which are more often than not irrelevant as such. None however, could match our Prime Minister Modi in terms of weird utterances which had bewildered all and sundry when he self-confessedly retorted that after the demise of his beloved mother he intrinsically realized that he was not biologically born, inferring that he was born in the Indian subcontinent via supernatural dynamics. Incidentally, when I asked some elderly women about their reactions to this specific statement of our Prime Minister, their unambiguous response was this was nothing short of an insult to the status of motherhood! Further, Prime Minister Modi is quoted to have said that the world came to know the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi only after the release of the

movie Gandhi on November 30, 1982. Notably, however, even twenty years preceding the birth of Modi, one of the premier journals Time magazine in 1930 had eulogized Mahatma Gandhi as the, 'Most talked about man in the world'.

Over and above that, in one of Modi's election campaigns, he had publicly asserted that on Sunday workers enjoy a holiday which is a colonial or a Christian legacy enforced by the British administrators when they ruled our country. But lo and behold, it was the Bombay Mill Hands Association in 1890 that declared Sunday as a holiday for all labourers, pursuant to the unstinted efforts of Narayan Maghaji Lothande, a social reformer and the father of trade union movements in India, who unreservedly worked for ameliorating the work conditions of Indian workers in the 19th century.

Putting two and two together of the foregoing contentions vis-a-vis Prime Minister Modi's self-assertive utterances, one may be inclined to recall the unsettling words of Euripides a great Greek tragedian, who said, "Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad." God forbid that this 'I' not happen to our incumbent

Prime Minister!

Yours etc.,
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Via email

Postal service in Meghalaya gone to the dogs

Editor,
In the greater interest of the public, I declare: Trust Indian Post at your own peril. Booking a document and expecting timely delivery is like fooling yourself. My fervent advice? Never, under any circumstances, send "important" documents via Speed Post, let alone any other mode of posting. Documents might either go missing or be delivered only after two weeks—sometimes even one or two months later. There are countless nightmarish situations in which people suffer daily.

Allow me to amuse you with my latest postal adventure. An urgent document dispatched to Tura from GPO, Shillong-1, on June 12, 2024, via Speed Post waybill no: EE451605421IN, was only delivered on June 25, 2024. This delivery took 13 days. What if some parents book mark sheets or critical documents to the MBOSE, and they never get delivered? The horror! In 2016, a big parcel

sent off to Houston, USA, through express service was delivered only after four and a half months. Imagine the ordeal we all went through because of the missing parcel. Usually, only 1% of customers lodge complaints about their postal grievances.

In all seriousness, I pose this question to the Chief Postmaster General and his merry band of subordinates: Why are you all in these exalted positions if your service only brings public despair? Many have reported that several branches are reluctant to book parcels and update their savings or recurring deposit passbooks, further adding to the public frustration.

So, dear Chief Postmaster General, why did my document take 13 days to cover an eight-hour drive from Shillong to Tura? Why has the postal service in Meghalaya gone to the dogs? Please answer my question in the greater interest of the people who suffer silently. You are not paid to make gullible citizens suffer endlessly.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong

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“What a man can be, he must be.
This need we call self-actualization.”
— Abraham Maslow

The Shillong Times

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Lessons from Hathras

THE human tragedy in Hathras, which took a toll of over 120 lives, mostly women, is a pointer to the blind faith that turns people into senseless devotees. A police constable facing criminal cases turned himself into a godman while on bail and fooled the people with a carefully planned circulation of stories about his healing powers – starting with an unfounded story on his “resurrection” of a dead girl. Bhole Baba’s followers are largely drawn from women in some Hindu communities, many of whom along with their children were the first to perish in the stampede on July 2, Tuesday. Religion, as Karl Marx stated, is opium to its followers. The more they are into it, the more they tend to lose their senses. All this is not to argue that a former police constable has no right to hold religious Satsangs as he did this time too. The rules of the game should be followed. The original plan was to have an assembly of 80,000 persons for which police permission was sought and given. The crowd swelled to over 2.5 lakh, and it turned uncontrollable when the godman was about to leave the place. In the mad rush to get closer to him and get his blessings, the deaths took place on a slippery ground. Obviously, there was no proper crowd management plan, for which both the police department and the government should take the responsibility.

An overdose of an infatuation, including religious or spiritual pursuits, leads to unwelcome situations. Spread of baseless stories, like spiritual powers, draws people in large numbers to such entities. The people, as in Uttar Pradesh, are largely uneducated and less informed about the ways of the world. Even the educated among us hanker after lollipops from those who claim to possess mystic or supernatural powers. Some states have laws that curb spread of superstitious beliefs. The UP government understandably turned its face away from such initiatives. Neither can the BJP governments elsewhere be trusted to rein in fraudulent religious practitioners, who are one too many.

First Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru eminently sought to promote a scientific temper among the people. Today, governments are on a reverse drive. A prime minister takes on his shoulders the responsibility to build temples in Ayodhya or abroad. Narendra Modi chose to enter parliament through Varanasi, the religiously potent seat of Hindu pilgrimage. Religion is getting mixed with politics – a lethal combination, but the number of visitors to the highly trumpeted Ayodhya shrine has thinned down and the BJP endeavour to win Hindu hearts failed to click, to a large extent, in the just concluded general elections. The adherence to religious pursuits is less in the developed West today while Muslim nations aided by uneducated mullahs have also turned unduly zealous. Where indeed is the scientific temper?

Letters to the Editor

Clarification from SRGT

Editor,
Apropos the article captioned, ‘Drainage work delay cause of football turf water logging,’ which appeared in your paper on June 25, 2024, we wish to clarify that the 1st Ground at Polo is not looked after by the Shillong Recreation Ground Trust (SRGT). Though the ground belongs to the SRGT, the place is leased out to the Shillong Sports Association which is responsible for looking after the ground. The SRGT which was formed in 1901 and was thereafter duly registered, had acquired land in the Polo area in 1902, 1903 and 1904 to encourage recreational activities for the residents of Shillong. The 1902 and 1903 plots were leased out to the State Sports Council while part of the 1904 plot i.e. the 1st Ground, was leased out to the Shillong Sports Association.
The delay in laying out the outlet drain was mainly because of the misunderstanding that arose between the State Government and the SRGT with regards to the ownership of the 1904 plot which was not clear to the Government but whose ownership was in no doubt as the SRGT has the proof of sale/purchase. After many meetings and court appearances, which unfortunately took over a year, the matter was finally cleared up and mutually settled.
The SRGT was in no way a stumbling block but had to make sure that Trust interests were not violated before agreeing to any proposals. As the alignment of the

earlier proposed drain has been found to be untenable, the SRGT has suggested another route which will provide a suitable outlet to the Umkhrah river.

On behalf of the SRGT I would like to reaffirm that the SRGT stands true to the commitment made by its six founders in 1901 to the residents of Shillong to encourage recreational activities at the places which had been acquired by them.

Yours etc.,
DM Pariat,
Secretary, SRGT

Govt can restore students’ confidence by conducting fair exam reforms

Editor,
Amidst growing concerns over the effectiveness of this year’s National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) for medical education, the Centre recently cancelled the University Grants Commission-National Eligibility Test (UGC-NET) a day after its administration, citing potential compromises to the process’s integrity. Consequently, over 900,000 aspirants will need to retake the test, adding to the anxiety of around 2.4 million NEET candidates already affected as counselling is about to commence. At the heart of both incidents is the competence of the National Testing Agency (NTA), responsible for conducting these exams, and the resulting impact on candidates’ confidence in the integrity of the examination process. The government

Wading in the jungles of the Indian Parliament

By Patricia Mukhim

Our two first time MPs Dr Ricky AJ Syngkon and Saleng Sangma have found their voices in parliament when they took oath and the former when he was given the opportunity to speak, albeit very late in the evening. They must have surely been overwhelmed by the uproar and the continued booing especially when the Prime Minister stood up to speak. More than that it must have sounded like they were in some temple (not the temple of democracy) when chants of ‘Jai Shri Ram’ rang through the hallowed halls of the sanctum sanctorum of democracy. There have been disruptions in the past too but the walk-outs from parliament were few and far between. A sort of unwritten bonhomie existed between the ruling and the opposition MPs. There were no attempts to belittle anyone as the ruling party MPs and their cohorts outside the House continue to do with Rahul Gandhi who is today the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha. This is an era of ugly dog-whistles which were unheard of before. Crude and indecent language have become the order of the day in India’s political firmament.

Once there was a sense of parliamentary decorum where the Speaker would remain a neutral, countervailing force and would not bend over backwards to please the ruling party. That’s no longer the case today. Om Birla stood up when the Prime Minister rose to greet him. He didn’t rise when the LoP congratulated him on being elected Speaker. When this was pointed out to Birla he gave a bland, unconvincing answer that Modi is senior to him in age and he was taught to respect his elders, whereas Rahul Gandhi was a younger colleague hence he did not feel the need to stand when the LoP congratulated him.

The problem with Parliament today is that the Prime Minister does not realise the value of time. He spoke for over two hours mainly taunting the Opposition INDI Alliance. There is not much difference between the Prime Minister addressing parliament and Narendra Modi addressing an election rally. The barbs and superciliousness were all too evident. More parliamentarians should learn to use wit and sharp communication techniques as Mahua Moitra does. Each word

of hers must have hit the Prime Minister and the BJP MPs bang on target. Without batting an eyelid she listed out what she lost when she was unfairly targeted by the Modi Government in her last avatar. Amongst the things she lost was her “uterus” since she had to undergo hysterectomy. She must also have lost her peace of mind but Mahua’s sweet revenge came when all those MPs who were in the Committee overseeing her case lost the election. Moitra said all this in just a little over 30 minutes but covered so much ground from Manipur to Ayodhya to Kashmir. That’s what makes a good speech – incisive and delivered with precision.

In the Lok Sabha the Speaker allowed members in the ruling benches to retort to Rahul Gandhi’s speech and to Mahua Moitra. On several occasions a much-chastened Amit Shah got up to defend the Government. But in the Rajya Sabha where the Prime Minister went overboard to harangue the Opposition, the Chairman Jagdeep Thakur, would not allow a riposte. The partisan behaviour was so conspicuous that the only way that the Opposition could protest was to walk out of the Upper House.

It’s plain as daylight that the parliament sessions in the next five years are not going to be constructive but confrontational. In this confrontation it is the people’s issues that will get short shrift. While the parliament session was going on Hathras happened. Over 120 people died in the melee and many are still being treated in hospital. What do we have to say about a country where lakhs of blind followers of self-proclaimed god-men continue to flock to their gatherings in the 21st century? Is this blind faith also not a result of illiteracy, of ignorance, of hopelessness in a governance system that has created more inequalities and of not seeing a way forward and therefore finding solace in the opiate-inducing speeches of god-men? We actually have to look beyond the stampede where the state has completely failed in its basic administration and analyse why Indians place such blind faith on god-men and women? Where is the scientific spirit which the BJP claims has been an intrinsic part of ancient In-

dian texts? Or is governance failing especially the poor millions in this country and they resort to anything that will bring temporary solace? But at what cost?

The shameful truth about India is that the tall claims about its growing GDP and human development indices are not reflective of the ground realities. With a Prime Minister who has turned into a bully pulpit, things are not going to get better. Until Indians rise above partisan politics that has divided this country like no other time; until they get out of the rhetoric of chauvinism and forced patriotism and realise that country is above party politics, India shall continue to fall from grace even if this fall is window-dressed so that the world does not see it. There are shameful truths that are being played down such as the continued lynching of Muslims where the perpetrators are never arrested. Instead of arresting such murderers there is instead the tendency to gloat about such killings as if they are achievements and that with an overweening pride.

Shillong MP, Dr Ricky Syngkon has learned the ropes of negotiating his way through the corridors of power to demand what Meghalaya rightly deserves. His first tryst with the NDA Government was with the Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Mr Nitin Gadkari who has promised the necessary amount for repairing of the Assam-Meghalaya-Mizoram-Tripura lifeline – National Highway 6 at a cost of Rs 200.81 crore. There are a total of 54 Union Ministries and 93 departments that make up the Indian Government. Several officials that have served in these departments have confided that most MPs representing the North Eastern states have never come to these ministries to pursue projects for their states. Let’s hope that the 2 MPs from Meghalaya will check into all these ministries, particularly the ministries of Civil Aviation, Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare, DoNER, Tribal Affairs, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Food processing; Women & Child Development but above all Education. The two MPs are well placed to adjudicate about the state

of education in Meghalaya and the need for adequate funding of educational institutions.

But wait a minute, the most important Ministry that the Shillong MP needs to pursue is the Health & Family Welfare Ministry. NEIGRIHMS needs urgent intervention as it is unable to employ adequate human resources. It may have the infrastructure and equipment but if there are not enough competent personnel to handle them, then the institution is unable to give its best to the growing number of patients from the entire North Eastern region. Without health care people will not be able to give their best, so health is a priority as much as road and rail communication are.

Yesterday the Ministry for Road Transport and Highways had stated that Meghalaya would be allocated Rs 24,000 crore for the construction of a four-lane road from Umiam to Silchar via East Jaintia Hills district to improve the road connectivity to Assam, Mizoram and Tripura. Out of the total amount approved, Rs 12,000 crore has been sanctioned for the construction of the 100-km stretch of road between Umiam and Malidor (both in Meghalaya). The amount also includes compensation for landowners. This project would help ease the travel to and from Guwahati to Silchar, Mizoram and Tripura. The remaining Rs 12,000 crore is earmarked for the construction of the remaining 4-lane road in Assam.

Rs 12,000 crore is a lot of money and I am sure the land mafia in Meghalaya are already sharpening their knives and counting how much they will get out of the land compensation. They must already be in touch with land owners to hike up the price of land along the stretch of the highway. This is what kills all road projects in Meghalaya. And this is where the VPP’s commitment to eradicate corruption and provide clean governance, which also means eliminating all the middle-men who benefit from land acquisition by government, comes in.

Corruption in projects related to roads and highways is a mortal sin and a plague that has to be uprooted. This will not be an easy task but if the VPP has the people on their side they should be able to achieve what they had promised the electorate.

Manipur needs peace: Appeal to PM Modi

By Snarbor Laloo

The rest of India empathizes with the suffering, anguish, and dire circumstances affecting Manipur, a state in North East India.

The protracted ethnic violence between the indigenous Kuki and Meitei tribes in Manipur has claimed hundreds of lives, leaving the inhabitants of this strife-torn land feeling vulnerable and estranged in their own homeland. The crisis has led to the establishment of relief camps everywhere, with both military and paramilitary forces patrolling disturbed areas day and night to maintain a semblance of security.

Manipur has a significant historical legacy, having been recognized as the 19th state of India when the country first formed its union.

Those of us not from Manipur, may not fully understand the pain and suffering of our dear friends from this state. The people of Manipur

of duty, has been in vain, unless justice and peace are restored to the land.

Despite the fervent appeals made by the Manipur MP and the chorus of condemnation from the opposition led by Rahul Gandhi, the Prime Minister and the ruling NDA government seem oblivious to the plight of Manipur. The state’s cries for help appear to fall on deaf ears, with no immediate resolution in sight to quench the burning fires of violence and unrest. The government’s indifference is all the more glaring given the overwhelming support from the Opposition, leaving one to wonder if they truly feel the pulse and heartbeat of Manipur.

The resilient people of Manipur will never beg nor bow down for a lasting solution to their struggles. Bimol Akojiam, with unwavering determination, declared that the government’s apathy



have endured immense hardships, with mothers losing their children and daughters being subjected to violence, including rape, much of which goes unreported in the media. We may not feel the full weight of their struggles, but it’s essential to acknowledge their plight and offer

has not only hurt him in the past but has also deeply offended him today. His words resonate with the collective anguish of the Manipuri community, which refuses to be silenced or defeated. With steadfast resolve, they demand a permanent solution to the crisis, and their

“The dire situation in Manipur serves as a stark reminder to the entire Northeast region that our voices and struggles are seemingly insignificant to the mainland. It appears that our leaders are deliberately attempting to erase our presence, making it seem like the Northeast is disconnected from the rest of India.”

support.

According to government reports, at least 221 people have been killed and over 60,000 have fled their homes in Manipur since the violence broke out on May 3, 2023. Other estimates state that there are over 75 deaths and 35,000 displaced people as of June 2024, with the violence resulting in the burning of at least 1,700 buildings.

Despite the escalating violence, the people of Manipur have organized various protests and rallies, decrying the state and central authorities’ indifference and adamant attitude towards the crisis. The authorities’ inaction is shameful, and their silence is deafening, as they remain mere spectators, seemingly unconcerned about the suffering in this part of India.

However, after a long period of silence from the central government, the sudden emergence of Angomcha Bimol Akojiam as the MP of Manipur has given voice to the struggles of the state. His passionate speech in parliament resonated with everyone, finally drawing attention to the issues that mattered the most to the people of Manipur.

Akojiam’s impassioned speeches stem from a deep sense of anguish and heartbreak on behalf of his people. His voice echoes through the hallowed halls of parliament, poignantly highlighting the struggles faced by his constituents. With fervour, he declares that the blood shed by martyrs from Manipur, who laid down their lives in the line

voices will not be silenced until justice is served.

The dire situation in Manipur serves as a stark reminder to the entire Northeast region that our voices and struggles are seemingly insignificant to the mainland. It appears that our leaders are deliberately attempting to erase our presence, making it seem like the Northeast is disconnected from the rest of India. This feeling of neglect and marginalization resonates deeply across the region, fuelling a sense of frustration and disillusionment.

No wonder neighbouring countries like China, and possibly others, are keeping a close eye on the situation, waiting for an opportunity to exploit the chaos and instability in the region. The turmoil in Manipur and the broader Northeast region presents a vulnerable target for external forces to meddle and gain an advantage, much like fishing in troubled waters.

We therefore, urgently appeal to Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, to prioritize the crisis in Manipur and take immediate action to address the deteriorating situation. We implore him to set aside political interests and, in the name of humanity, work towards promoting peace, understanding, and goodwill for the people of Manipur. The time to act is now, before the situation spirals out of control. We request him to use his leadership to bring about a lasting solution, ensuring peace, justice, and prosperity for the people of Manipur.

them (12x2). The latter and prevailing scenario causes unemployment for one in three workers.

A study was conducted on 10,000 Indian cab drivers and gig workers by the People’s Association in Grassroots Action and Movements and the Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers, with technical support from the University of Pennsylvania and a German foundation. It was published in March this year. According to the study, almost a third of app-based cab drivers work for 14 hours a day, while more than 83% work over 10 hours and 60% work over 12 hours. While 78% of app-based delivery persons spend over 10 hours each day at work, 34% earn less than Rs 10,000 per month.

This is nothing but a loot of the lifeblood of our youth. Long work hours made drivers physically exhausted. This, plus the 10-minute delivery at the doorstep policy of certain e-commerce platforms are two of the reasons behind many road traffic accidents in our country. The Karnataka government needs to include in the draft bill a ban on the 10-minute delivery policy.

This draft bill should serve as a model for other states and the government at the Centre. The Government of India should table such a draft bill before the Parliament.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

for enacting a law that will provide a safety net for gig workers.

It will be mandatory for all aggregators to provide to the board all data related to gig workers working for them within 60 days after the commencement of the Act. Subsequently, all workers employed after the enactment of this law would also have to be registered with the board within 60 days.

The bill says that an aggregator cannot sack a gig worker without providing a valid reason and a prior notice of 14 days. The aggregators will have to inform the board about any deduction in payment to gig workers and also have to explain the reason for it.

The draft bill wants to ensure a safe and healthy working condition for the workers. Gig workers will have the option of filing complaints before the grievance redress officer or on a dedicated web portal. They will also be provided with a social security and welfare fund.

However, the Karnataka government needs to ensure that no worker has to work more than 8 hours daily to where she or he has been employed. It would safeguard the physical and mental wellbeing of the workers, generate nearly 50 per cent more employment, and check accidents.

Working at a stretch for long causes exhaustion and health issues. It also triggers unemployment. To get 24 man-hours daily, an employer needs 3 workers if each worker works for 8 hours daily (8x3). But if the employer forces each worker to work for 12 hours per day, he will employ just two of

rectly engage with this year’s aspirants, ensuring minimal disruption to their career trajectories, and transparently addressing the flaws. The urgency to act cannot be overstated; the future of India’s youth is at stake, and ensuring their trust and confidence in these critical examinations is paramount.

Yours etc.,
Channmiki Laloo,
Shillong-02

Karnataka’s model draft bill

Editor,
Kudos to the Karnataka government for publishing a draft bill for providing gig workers social security and welfare. This bill is in sync with Rahul Gandhi’s promise which he made before the last year’s assembly elections. He deserves praise for regularly meeting with marginalised people and for fighting for their cause.

The Karnataka Platform-based Gig Workers’ (Social Security and Welfare) Bill, 2024, wants to make, “obligations on aggregators in relation to social security, occupational health and safety, transparency in automated monitoring and decision-making systems to provide dispute resolution mechanisms.”

Once enacted, the bill will bring an estimated two lakh gig workers under the ‘Karnataka Platform-based Gig Workers Welfare Board’ headed by the labour minister.

The Karnataka government sought suggestions and objections from stakeholders within 10 days of publishing the draft dated June 29, 2024

"Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work."

— Aristotle

The Shillong Times

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Regional parties in disarray

SO the inevitable has finally happened. The Regional Democratic Alliance (RDA) comprising the United Democratic Party and the Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party (HSPDP) is set for a split and both parties will go it alone in the ensuing District Council Elections. This follows the poor performance of the joint candidate that the RDA put up - Robert Kharjahn in the just concluded Lok Sabha election. While the HSPDP President is vacillating in stating the fact, UDP Working President, Paul Lyngdoh unequivocally admitted that the HSPDP is opting out of the RDA and is seeking to fight the District Council election on its own.

For both the UDP and HSPDP the recent defeat of their candidate who came a poor fourth securing only 44,563 votes out of a total of 10,37,911 votes was a disaster. This clearly shows that the RDA candidate could not win the confidence of voters for various reasons. As Paul Lyngdoh correctly assessed, Dr Ricky AJ Syngkon of the Voice of Peoples' Party (VPP) had started campaigning well before the election dates could even be announced. This meant the VPP was sure who they were fielding. So they had a head start over the other parties. Even the NPP candidate Ampareen Lyngdoh had been campaigning at least three months before the elections. Congress candidate, Vincent Pala too knew he was contesting much before the official announcement from the Party. The RDA on the other hand announced the candidature of Robert Kharjahn rather late making it difficult for him to cover much ground. When there is an alliance of more than one party it is always difficult to get a consensus candidate agreeable to all sides. This has been the tragic history of regional parties in Meghalaya. Their repeated attempts to merge have failed.

Now that the Autonomous District Council elections are close at hand, it is obvious that the UDP and HSPDP would want to control their own turf. A common candidate for the Lok Sabha is easier to decide since the HSPDP with only 2 MLAs does not enjoy much clout in the rest 34 constituencies. In a sense the HSPDP was piggy-back riding on the UDP which has 12 MLAs. It is unsure if the HSPDP would be able to field and win any seats in 2028 going by the attrition rate of the Party. It is almost certain that like the PDF the HSPDP too would finally merge with the NPP which is a stronger party with a state presence. However, until the ADC elections the HSPDP will try to go it alone with the hope that it can have some control over the affairs of the state rather than surrender to an alliance. This has been the bane of regional parties in Meghalaya and it does not look as if this complex issue will be resolved any time soon.

Draining the Swamp : Permanent Money & 100% Reserve Banking

By Kittor H. Blah

In the article "Draining the Swamp" dated 2nd July, 2024, I had defined the swamp as the rising public debt, rising fiscal deficit, bloated government budget, rising taxation, rising inflation, recessionary cycles, and a currency that is collapsing. I had pinpointed the root of this problem as the two ways in which money is created - government borrowing from the Central Bank, and minimum reserve lending by commercial banks. I had shown how this system of money creation makes it necessary to perpetually increase the flow of debt, which means that public debt and fiscal deficit must perpetually rise, which also means that taxation must also rise to keep the fiscal deficit in check to an extent. Since the perpetual increase in the flow of debt means more money in the economy, therefore inflation must also continue to rise.

All these factors mean that government budgets are already bloated. Furthermore, because money is created as debt, the increase in the flow of debt causes economic boom, and when the flow of debt is constricted, the decrease in the flow of money causes recession or bust. Thus, this system creates the business cycles of booms and busts, and also allows for this cycle to be manufactured. Lastly, I had shown how the minimum reserve system of banking puts the citizens' deposits at risk of being wiped out under the burden of huge loans or NPA's. If the banking system fails to contain NPA's, it would eventually fail to make good on paying the depositors' money. And if the big corporations fail to make good on paying their big loans, they would burden the whole banking system with huge NPA's. If they were to fail, a huge chunk of the citizens' deposits would be wiped out.

The only way to prevent this is to refinance this debt burden perpetually. So this minimum reserve system creates an ever increasing burden of debt on our deposits. The longer it takes to crash, the bigger the crash will be. So we can imagine the burden on resources, the consumerism culture, the toll on the environment, the waste generated, the need to buy and produce far beyond necessity, just to keep the system from crashing.

Many people, including some economists, scoff at the idea of a financial collapse. But to get into that debate, we must first properly define this term. What does a financial collapse really mean? Does it mean nationwide or worldwide poverty? Does it mean an economic tragedy for each and every citizen of the country or the world? I think the best way to define a financial collapse is as the greatest transfer of wealth from the poor and middle class and upper class to the super wealthy. When the currency collapses, the daily wage earner becomes non-

existent; the middle class person with savings and no assets becomes extremely poor; the upper class person with a few assets will have some buffer against the loss of value of his money, since assets serve as a sponge that absorbs the value that is lost from the currency. But it is the big business corporations whose wealth is mostly measured in assets, infrastructure, commodities, or industries, and less in currency or money that will have absorbed most of the value that is lost from the currency. In other words, the ones with real assets, commodities and industries will profit and the ones with only currency or savings will be impoverished. But this is already a reality today with inflation. People buy gold or property as a hedge against inflation. The very poor and daily wage earners do not have this luxury. So, inflation affects the daily wage earners more than the gold investors. Inflation which is caused by our debt based monetary system, has slowly transferred wealth from the citizens of all classes to the big corporations and industrialists.

is that the work they do will be reflected in a stable currency in which they can save all their hard earned money, and not get robbed by inflation, financial collapse or taxation. Bitcoin is not a stable form of money to this end. Of all forms of money, it is the one that is most drastically influenced by the environment, just like the stock market. Crypto-currency, like stock trading, is not a serious form of money. Like stocks, it is a speculative investment.

Some have proposed digital currency. The idea of a digital currency is to eliminate cash. In fact, the Bank of England and the Reserve Bank of India have started the Central Bank Digital Currency. This eliminates the cash crisis that banks must face in case their loans go bad. It also means that the banking system is constantly recapitalized. Since deposits serve as banks' capital, every time money is withdrawn from the system in the form of hard cash, the system loses capital. By eliminating cash, a digital currency allows for banks to constantly be recapitalized every time

"The longer it takes to crash, the bigger the crash will be. So we can imagine the burden on resources, the consumerism culture, the toll on the environment, the waste generated, the need to buy and produce far beyond necessity, just to keep the system from crashing."

Inflation should be seen as the silent, gradual and hidden version of the eventual collapse of the currency.

Therefore, a financial collapse is nothing but the logical conclusion of inflation. It is the ones who build their wealth on debt, and continue to have access to huge debt, who will benefit from the system, but at the cost of the value and the security of the citizens' savings. A financial collapse is simply that which will cause the greatest and most drastic wealth inequality ever.

So, what is the solution? How do we drain this swamp? First of all, we must recognize that the issue is not that some people built their wealth on debt. The issue is not even that some people have a more privileged access to debt. The problem is that they do so at the cost of the value and security of the citizens' savings. There are some radical solutions that people have proposed. The one at the forefront is crypto currency. Bitcoin is already legal tender in the country of El Salvador. Sure, Bitcoin is not created as debt, nor is it created out of the minimum reserve banking system.

What citizens deserve is a stable currency that will act as a stable storage of value for every hour of work they put in. What citizens deserve

money is created from the minimum reserve banking system. This will help the banking system meet its capital requirements as recommended by Basel from time to time. In fact, this is exactly what Demonetization did. Demonetization ensured that all the cash came back into the banking system, and withdrawal limits were also imposed to ensure the deposits stayed in the system, and no frills or zero balance accounts were also quickly made into Rs. 200 or Rs. 500 minimum balance accounts, all to recapitalize the banking system.

A digital currency will achieve to the maximum what Demonetization was intended to do. In fact, if we look at our country, we would see that the cashless payment systems really got a momentum from both Demonetization and COVID-19. But a digital currency is only a cosmetic solution, to prevent a banking cash crisis, to ensure deposits remain in the system, and to help with the deposit-credit ratio of the banking system. It will not drain the swamp in any way.

Some, like the author Harvey Francis Barnard, who wrote the book, "Draining the Swamp: Monetary and Fiscal Policy Reform," which is the inspiration for

the name of this article, have proposed a bi-metallic system of money, that is, a return to gold and silver as legal tender. But this is not a viable solution. Under a bi-metallic system of money, he who has no gold or silver suddenly has no money. Those who have saved in currency will have to convert their currency into silver or gold, which are already rare commodities. Gold and silver cannot absorb all the bloated amount of money in the economy.

What about a bi-metallic standard of money? Under this system, every unit of currency is based on a unit of gold or silver. For example, every Rs. 5000/- worth of currency may be backed by 10 grams of gold. This would stabilize the value of currency according to the amount of gold, so governments cannot inflate the current at will. This would definitely protect our savings against inflation, but since it is so rigid, the government may be forced to borrow from the market and raise taxation in order to meet its spending. Moreover, such a transition is no longer possible because of the bloated amount of currency and money already created in the economy. If this system is adopted, the price of gold would sky rocket because the inflated amount of money has to be absorbed by this limited commodity. This would create drastic wealth inequality between those who have gold and those who do not. There are other novel proposals by innovative people like a land backed currency, or a credit barter system.

The solution does not need to be too radical. Since the problem is rooted in the simple fact that money is created as debt, we can simply eliminate the two ways in which money is created as debt - that is, government borrowing from the Reserve Bank of India and the minimum reserve banking. In the first part of this article, I mentioned that coins are permanent money created by the government. We can expand this means of money creation and create debt free permanent money in the form of currency notes under this same legal power.

This one small change will eliminate the perpetual increase of public debt and fiscal deficit. It will therefore check inflation as well as reduce taxation. And in order to secure the citizens' savings, the government can simply eliminate the minimum reserve system, and bring in a 100% Reserve Banking system, so that the citizens' deposits are always secured, regardless of the huge loans of big corporations or the big NPA's of the commercial banks. With these two simple steps, we can keep much of the current system and do justice to all citizens. How this transition can be done requires an ingenious and common sense approach, which may be the subject of another article.

Round the states

By Insaaf

Manipur's 'Hurt' Touches Parliament PM breaks silence, but no balm?

The tragic silence on Manipur is broken! Prime Minister Modi finally spoke. But, only after the Opposition pointedly, through slogans, badgered him in both houses of Parliament as well as Rajya Sabha member Angomcha Bimol Akoi-jam's anguish-filled maiden speech, which got impressive coverage, despite being close to midnight! "I will keep quiet the moment the prime minister opens his mouth, and the nationalist party says. Manipur is part of India, and we care for the people of that state," he said during the motion of thanks to the President's address. Noting absence of Manipur in Murmu's address, he said "This is not a simple absence. It's a reminder of a rashtira-chetana (national consciousness) which excludes people". He spoke of the 'hurt' as: Over "60,000 people are languishing in relief camps in wretched conditions for past one year, it's not a joke; 200-plus people died; there's a civil war-like situation, people are armed to the teeth, fighting each other, defending their villages"; Indian State is a mute spectator for one year; it's one of the most militarised areas of this country; BJP govt is continuing with a colonial mindset when it came to dealing with people from northeast states... And threw the big question, "Is this silence communicating to people of N-E

ers or 'sevadars' explicitly blamed for it. While Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has announced a judicial inquiry, saying "If this isn't an accident, then whose conspiracy is this? All of this will be probed," the big question is: wasn't the local administration aware of the preacher's popularity? Why didn't it act when numbers started exceeding the permission sought -- 80,000, whereas the venue eventually had 2.5 lakh people? Two PILs have been filed, one in the Supreme Court seeking setting up of a 5-member expert panel under a retired judge and another in Allahabad high court urging a CBI. Predictably not having faith in Yogi's judicial inquiry? Or agreeing with SP chief Akhilesh Yadav's retort: "Look, there can't be a conspiracy in this. The conspiracy could be that the government wants to run away from its responsibility!"

AP's Shopping List
Andhra Pradesh has changed its strategy. Instead of pursuing a long-pending demand for special category status, Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu met Prime Minister Modi instead, sought financial handholding and gave his shopping list. Justification being: "fiscal situation has significantly deteriorated due to previous government's misadventures and absence of a strategic long-term development plan. Unproductive expenditure, fiscal hara-kiri marked by exploitation of natural resources for personal use and no focus on development of

"I will keep quiet the moment the prime minister opens his mouth, and the nationalist party says. Manipur is part of India, and we care for the people of that state," he said during the motion of thanks to the President's address. Noting absence of Manipur in Murmu's address, he said "This is not a simple absence. It's a reminder of a rashtira-chetana which excludes people"

and Manipur in particular that you don't matter in the Indian State's scheme of things?"

Replying to the debate next day in Rajya Sabha, Modi spoke at length on Manipur. He said efforts are being made by the Centre with the state government to ensure 'a return of complete peace,' and hope for peace is a definite possibility. Violence is continuously declining, educational institutes and businesses have opened in most parts of the state, over 500 people arrested, over 11,000 FIRs registered, Union Home Minister visited several times, are reasons for his hope. At same time, he urged "We must all rise above politics and cooperate towards normalising the situation. It's our responsibility," as clearly 'social conflict is deeply rooted with a long history, leading to President's rule 10 times since Independence... the five-year long conflict from 1993 onwards..."

The bottom line: there's need to handle the situation with "wisdom and patience." He needs to remember the idiom 'If there's a will there's a way'. For only that very day, the Supreme Court pulled up the state government saying it 'did not trust it', pointing out that petitioner, a Kuki undertrial in Manipur was 'denied care because of the community he belongs to'. It directed medical treatment at an Assam hospital and warned it would take the government to task if the medical report turned out to be serious. Indeed, words won't heal wounds still fresh even after a year. Genuine concern and action are the balm and much needed.

UP's Tragic 'Conspiracy'
The Uttar Pradesh government's insinuation of a 'conspiracy' behind the Hathras tragedy is like rubbing salt in the wounds of the victims' families. It simply shouldn't, rather can't abdicate its responsibility when 121 people are killed and over 300 injured in the stampede at the satsang of Bhole Baba on Tuesday last. Worse, the FIR doesn't name the preacher among organis-

human resources growth has plummeted, revenue receipts have tapered, and liabilities have peaked." Worse, committed expenses, including salaries, pensions, and debt servicing, exceed the State's revenue receipts, leaving no fiscal space for productive capital investment, he explained. So now it's not just the 'unscientific, unfair, and unjust bifurcation of 2014' but getting his pound of flesh; whichever way. Higher Central aid sought among others is for rebuilding of government complex and road infrastructure for capital city Amaravati, Polavaram Irrigation Project, developing backward regions with Bundelkhand-like package. People, he said, have placed their trust in the NDA coalition government, thereby 'granting both leaders a significant mandate to fulfil their promises and commitments.' Clearly, a give and take!

Bihar Bridges Collapse
Bihar has earned the dubious distinction of building bridges which collapse like a house of cards! In just 15 days, Thursday marked the 10th bridge, built 15 years back, crumbling in Saran district, the third in the last 24 hours. The bridge, which was over Gandaki river, connected several villages with neighbouring Siwan district. Fortunately, no casualty was reported, the district administration was trying to ascertain the exact cause, and a 'high-level inquiry' has been ordered why three 'small bridges' collapsed. Guess, the rain god may come to its aid as heavy rainfall for the past few days could be a reason cited. With bridges collapsing in other districts -- Siwan, Madhubani, Araria, East Champaran and Kishanganj, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has directed road construction and rural works departments to conduct a survey of all old bridges and identify those that require immediate repair. Too little too late? But perhaps well in time to add to the government's financial list of getting funds from the centre instead of the special status. ---INFA

Letters to the Editor

Pathetic postal services

Editor,
The letter by Salil Gewali - 'Postal services in Meghalaya gone to the dogs' (ST 4th July, 2024) made interesting reading. It is really surprising to know that the document posted from Shillong reached its destination (Tura) only after 13 days whereas the motorable journey from Shillong to Tura takes hardly 8 to 9 hours. This indeed is a matter of great concern. It shows the nonchalance of the Indian Postal Services another government departments that needs an overhaul.

At one time the postal service was the only source of communication in India. We were fully dependant on it. Many failures in the service of the Postal Department have gone without complaint by the public owing to dearth of other alternative services in the country. But at present

in the so-called New India which is a rapidly developing nation it is surprising that the Postal Department has been allowed to degenerate to snail's pace. This is a case of complete failure of the concerned department that has estranged itself from the people and made them turn away from using its services especially on urgent matters. What is the Postmaster General doing to address these fault lines?

Yours etc.,
Deepak Chhetry
Tura, Meghalaya

Jowai's abandoned Govt girls' hostel

Editor,
It is now 3 months since various media outlets have highlighted the issue of the abandoned Government Girls' Hostel in Jowai.

Kudos to these two-news outlets for highlighting issues which don't appear significant for our stakeholders. Three months have passed by and still nothing is being done to renovate the abandoned building. In these three months not even one single leader from Jaintia Hills has spoken about or taken up the matter of this dilapidated Girls' Hostel which is no longer fit for occupation. Perhaps this issue is not so popular among the masses and does not make political sense to those elected to address these issues. What was once a place for accommodation for girls from distant places is now another government building left in ruins. No one knows what the future holds for such buildings. Looking at the dilapidated condition of the building! God forbid if a natural calamity occurs and deeply impacts the neighbouring localities in its vicinity. Just like the critical garbage issue in Jowai, nothing is being solved. Similarly the Supermarket issue at lawmusing too is lying incomplete! In the same manner just like the abandoned Govt Girls Hostel in Jowai, we residents of Jowai too feel abandoned by our MLA and Government! We are left to our own devices for God knows how long!

Yours etc.,
Omarka Laloo
Jowai

SRGT rejoinder lacks substance

Editor,
The clarification from the Shillong Recreation Ground Trust (SRGT) smacks of indefensible justifications and questions galore. The questions that arise are - who were the founders of SRGT and how were the present members of the Trust appointed. The amount of revenue generated from the Polo

grounds must be substantial. Are the accounts of SRGT duly audited and taxable? What are the recreational activities encouraged by the Trust? Lastly how was the property next to Golf Course sold to an influential individual where now stands a monstrous RCC building?

The trustees are affluent powerful individuals who need to answer the above questions and the Government is duty bound to initiate an enquiry on the loss of revenue.

Yours etc.,
PS Nongsteng,
Via email

No religion preaches hatred

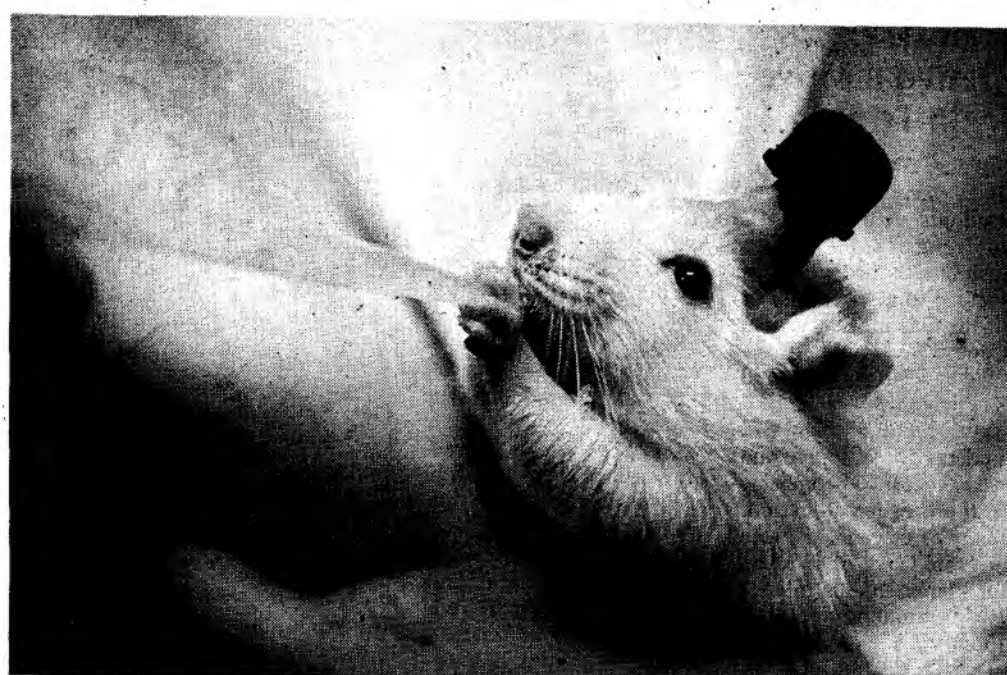
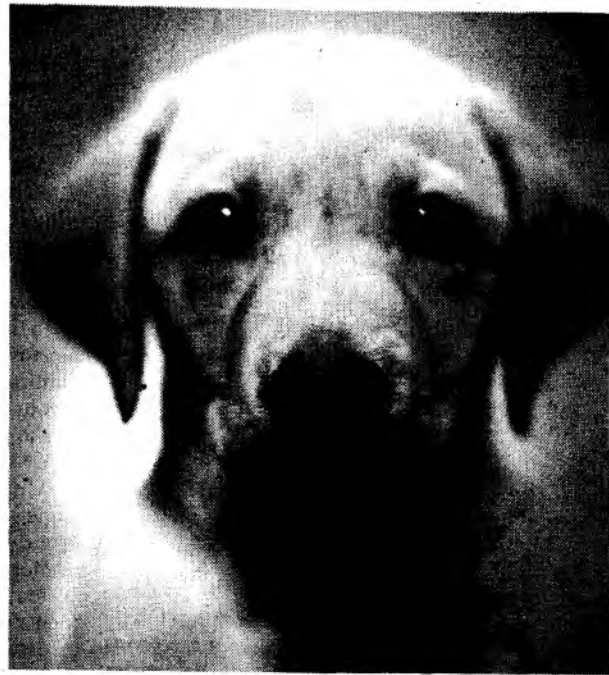
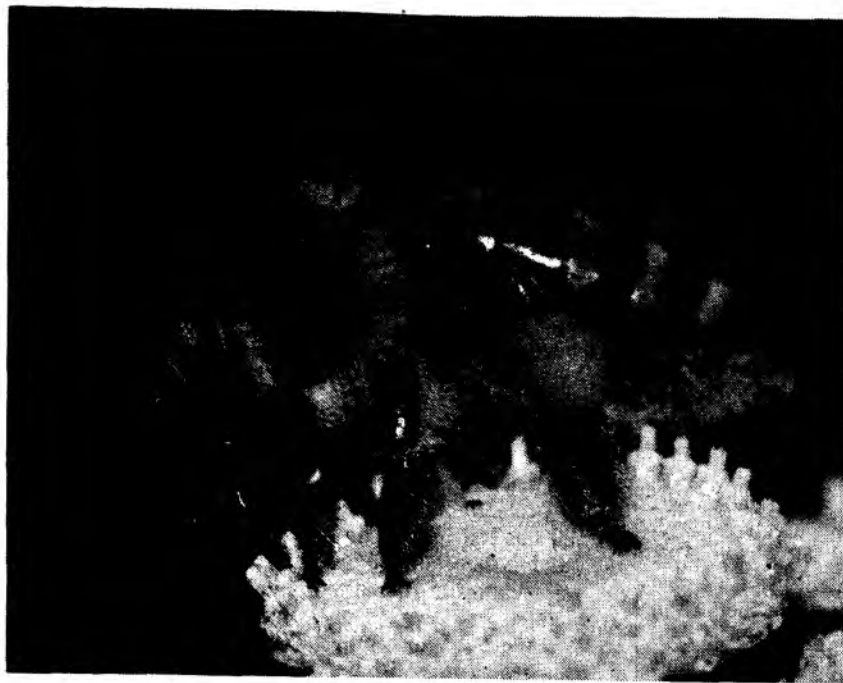
Editor,
A truly religious Hindu like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and Mahatma Gandhi cannot indulge in hatred and violence. But

this is equally true for every person who belongs to a different religion. It is also equally applicable to a true human being who does not believe in any religion but believes in God. Even a person who has faith in ethics and empathy but is an atheist remains far away from hatred and violence. Lord Buddha himself did not accept or deny the existence of God. He said, "Driven only by fear, do men go for refuge to many places -- to hills, woods, groves, trees, and shrines" (The Dhammapadam 188), and "Such, indeed, is no safe refuge; such is not the refuge supreme" (The Dhammapadam 189). But he always was against hatred and violence.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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Three animals that can detect disease in humans



When it comes to accurately diagnosing a disease, you might think you need expensive, high-tech machinery and equipment capable of looking deep beneath the skin at what's going on in the body. But while these high-tech implements certainly are incredible, they aren't the only instruments capable of detecting disease. In fact, you may even share a home with one of these powerful disease-detecting agents.

There are numerous of instances of unsuspecting pet owners learning they had a health problem from their pet. Examples include dogs licking, sniffing and even trying to chew spots on their owner's skin – spots that were later diagnosed as malignant melanoma.

In fact, many species of animals – from the microscopic worm *C. elegans*, to ants, mice and dogs – have all successfully demonstrated the ability to detect diseases in people and from biological samples during experiments.

The diseases detected are diverse – from cancer and urinary tract infections to COVID-19 and the gastrointestinal infec-

tion, *Clostridium difficile*.

Many of these diseases are potentially serious, especially in vulnerable and immunocompromised patients, so accurate and early detection is essential.

Dogs: Dogs are possibly the most well-known example of an animal that can detect a range of diseases – including Parkinson's disease, bladder cancer and malaria. Epileptic seizures and low blood sugar in diabetic patients can also be detected by specially-trained medical alert dogs.

It seems that a dog's impressive olfactory sense is key to their ability to detect specific odours, even at incredibly low concentrations. Indeed, the dog's sense of smell is thought to be more than 10,000 times better than our own. They can even use their nostrils independently of each other when investigating new scents.

Biodetection and medical alert dogs are initially trained to associate specific odours with a positive reward – such as a tasty treat or toy. They then become primed to recognise odour changes or physical and behav-

ioural changes in their handler that predict a seizure (or other health event).

Biodetection dogs will typically freeze when they recognise a scent, awaiting their reward. Medical alert dogs will often interact with their handler – perhaps pawing or nudging them to indicate that they need to take action for their safety.

Rats: Rats are also great at sniffing out specific smells.

The African giant pouched rat has been trained to detect the odour of land mine explosives in Mozambique. These rats are also proving to be valuable medical detection partners, playing an important role in the detection of tuberculosis in sputum samples recovered from suspected cases.

Rats have an incredibly accurate sense of smell. The rats are fast, taking only 20 minutes to review 100 patient samples. They use their sniffing skills to detect the distinctive chemical signature of tuberculosis in samples.

Their payment for a job well done is an avocado and banana treat. This makes these trained rats a valuable option where

time and money might be limited in diagnostic and screening facilities. These rats have an incredible success rate – accurately detecting positive tuberculosis cases 81% of the time.

Bees: Even honeybees can detect the signs of certain diseases in samples – including lung cancer, tuberculosis and COVID-19.

Honeybees are extremely sensitive to low concentration odours, making them able to detect chemical changes in a similar way to dogs and rats.

Researchers have been able to train honeybees to respond to the presence of specific smells by rolling out their tongues for a sugar reward. With training, this response becomes consistent and highly sensitive for smells linked with disease states.

This ability makes honeybees useful for detecting disease in the same way as other animals. Their size could make them an even more efficient and low-cost option for rapid sample screening.

SUPERIOR SENSES

But how are animals able to

identify the presence of specific diseases? It has to do with many animals' ability to detect tiny changes in a person's chemical scent profile.

Many species (including dogs, rats and bees) can detect very subtle changes in substances called volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that the body releases in very low levels, even when healthy. In fact, exhaled human breath contains approximately 3,500 different VOCs. The composition and concentration of VOCs the body releases changes based on a person's health – and will be different if they're fighting an infection or dealing with a health problem.

The disease-detecting abilities of animals aren't just for human benefit, either. The worm *C. elegans* can not only detect cancer in human samples, their superior olfactory senses mean they can also detect cancer in samples from dogs and cats.

The skills that different species have in accurately sniffing out disease might just make trained detection animals an effective, non-invasive, speedy and cost-effective way to screen for particular health conditions.

It may even further enhance positive interactions between people and animals.

Notably, because of regulations, animals used for disease detection are currently only viewed as screening "tools" to be used alongside medical diagnostic techniques. But if regulatory frameworks permit, detection animals could one day become a key diagnostic component.

Indeed, detection dogs were faster (and cheaper) at screening samples for COVID-19 than routine PCR testing. By understanding the detection abilities of animals, we might just help improve laboratory diagnostic tests further by applying some of their amazing skills.

While exploiting the sniffing skills of animals might be useful for us, it's important to remember that the health and welfare of the animals involved must be prioritised too.

The ethics of working animals must always be taken into account alongside considerations of the cost, safety and efficiency of any widespread disease screening programmes that involves them.

(The Conversation)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, July 7, 2024

'Birthday Forecast'

Venus semi-square Jupiter on your solar return chart laying foundation for a very fortunate time period ahead. It is going to be a beautiful year. You will impress people by your impeccable manners and charismatic personality. And will be dynamic in approach. You will be able to communicate well and able to put your views effectively. You will do well in your professional life and even your business will grow. You will come in contact with lot of influential and learned persons. Your financial position will be strong and stable. And can also enter into love relations. It will be fruitful and long-lasting. Marriage is possible. Relations with siblings will remain good. You can also make plans to travel abroad for vacation with family. Your overall health will remain excellent.

This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) A lot of excitement, pleasure and romance are on the cards. You focus on having fun, and expressing yourself creatively. Your romantic affair gives you a big boost of confidence. Moreover your personal magnetism runs high to be admired and adored. You express true feelings, ideas and plans without being afraid of consequences. You enjoy every moment, whatever it brings and follow your intuition to feel more integrated. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with unapproachable people in authority. Strong chances of finalization of a property related matter. Monetary transactions are beneficial in land related matters.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) This phase may put on lot of pressure on you. A positive and creative approach brings gain and resolution in old conflicts and work situations. You need to view professional and business problems from a balanced perspective. Learn from past experience and get on with your life rather than repeat old patterns. Emotive issues can crop up. However later on the dust will settle down and you will look up with a lot of hope. This is a time to do what you can to build trust in your family life and a strong foundation within yourself. You might make short trips, visiting friends and relatives. It's a great time to open up conversations with loved ones, when it comes to matters related to love and romance.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) The planetary configuration promises an excellent period. You can charm many with your strong personality and soft approach. With inner strength and hard work, you can transform a breakdown at work into a breakthrough. It's time to let go of obsolete patterns and routines and have a new vision for the future. Your mystical and enigmatic personality attracts some interesting people around you. You will spend a lot on clothes, furniture, and entertainment. The areas of life where you are most likely to express your social, romantic, and artistic qualities are through an intellectual appreciation of art, cultural pursuits, and literature.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) Money and domestic issues will take centre stage as you grapple with these issues. Your main concentration will be to make domestic relationships and the home environment harmonious and peaceful. You are proud of your ideas, and very good at expressing them with ease. Here is strength in your feelings of love and the power of attraction, which may open the door to new romantic relationships. You are more likely to pay closer attention to your physical appearance and mannerisms, aiming to improve and enhance your attractiveness.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) Your courage and confidence will keep your hopes alive. You will need to attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with unapproachable people at work. On the other hand enhanced energy and a renewed feeling of confidence favors you. Take advantage of this and utilize your energy prudently. Problems may be overcome by self-assertion, and directness. There's nothing wrong with a bit of self-centeredness. You are highly motivated to make money this enhances much energy for new money-making projects. Romantic matters come to the fore and the single will find that they are drawn towards someone in their social circle. Activities related to communication such as journalism, literature and fine arts are prominent.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23) There is increased creative energy within you which provides the necessary dynamism to complete your projects with élan. You might play with various ways to increase personal funds, resulting in more than one source for monetary gain this time however make sure that you read the fine print. However, financial pressure will be there as you spend huge amount of

money on homemaking, house repairs, re-decorating and family activities. Your communication abilities will largely be applied to professional worldly ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued in order to enhance career prospects or social standing. Relationships take on a fun tone now. Friends and lovers take priority for most of the time. Health reads fine.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) Travel, contacts and communications are the keywords at this time. Opportunities and invitations from overseas take you on an unplanned journey. Visitors, friends and family make this a happy time as an event in the family is celebrated. You are full of hope and enthusiasm as you make new beginnings at work and home. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. Activities related to communication such as journalism, literature and fine arts are prominent. You express your feelings to your beloved and will be happy to find that they are reciprocated. Your health or that of someone close will cause some anxious moments.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) An action oriented phase keeps you busy throughout. Public relations work, interpersonal relations and other such endeavors are highlighted now. There will be a multitude of tasks for you to handle both at work and at home. This is a good time to do some financial planning and strategizing. You will also show aggression in your dealings but make sure that this does not get out of hand. As such, this is a great time to open up conversations about topics such as those revolving around the sharing of power, intimacy, and finances. Your friends and well wishers would be supportive.

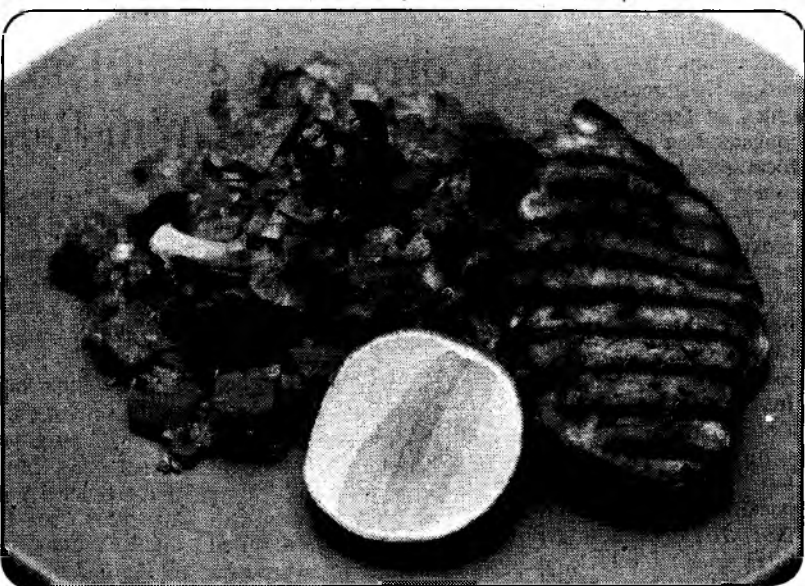
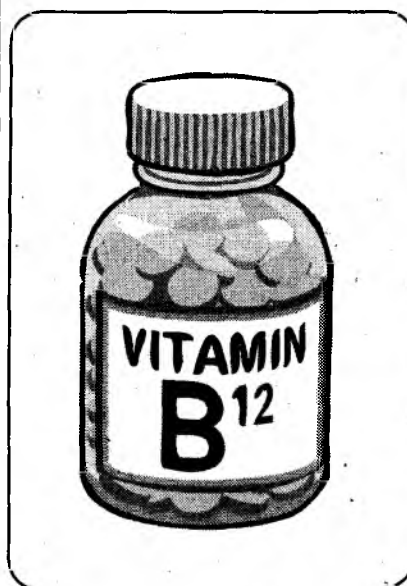
Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) This is a period of mixed results for you where you will have to deal with emotional disturbances. There is likely to be more activity, movement, contact, and communications with co-workers now. It is best to go ahead with your work and avoid confrontations or arguments. Think twice before you speak. You are inclined to learn new work skills, or to improve your skills and output in terms of work. Your family and friends will support you and you will find solace in their company. You will be able to enjoy personal relationships with love and affection. Children will bring joy and happiness. Pay attention to your health and do not neglect or overlook minor ailments.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) This is an excellent phase where communications, affair and fun activities flourish. You would be able to make good use of your talent and communication skills and impress people around you. This brings some new opportunities. Your career prospects also improve as you bring about changes in your work style and interact in more positive way with your colleagues. You make great strides in your career as you win accolades and gain recognition for your work. You may have a desire to redecorate your home. Family life will be very harmonious. Romance is in the air and you enjoy the time spent with your beloved. For the unattached a roaring affair is in the offing.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) New associations will boost your career in a big way. You plan in an unorthodox way and get appreciation from your business associates. At the work place your continuous efforts will bring fruitful results. You have many overseas opportunities to boost your security and comfort. You may find yourself in a position in which there is a blending of the financial with social or public affairs. You are likely to travel and engage in a variety of activities and meet new people. You may be assigned to complete a task and travel overseas. Your family also cheers you up and you have a holiday together or spend time with them. You extend your hospitality to family and friends.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) A change or betterment in career is strongly indicated this also brings better financial prospects. Your style of communication boosts your magnetic powers. Let others know they can depend on you. People notice and admire you for your pleasant and cheerful personality and this brings new job opportunities or assignments. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for this placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits. Obstacles in your life may be overcome by bravery, self-assertion, and directness. You get good financial returns from investments and insurance. Monetary transactions would be beneficial if you research and focus. Romance is very much on the cards.

Facing mood disorders? You may be low on Vitamin B12



Vitamin B12 plays a key role in producing brain chemicals that affect mood and other brain functions, said doctors on Saturday.

Vitamin B12 (also known as cobalamin) plays a crucial role in the formation of red blood cells, cell metabolism, nerve function, and the production of DNA.

Some common symptoms of Vitamin B12 deficiency include strange sensations, numbness, or tingling in the hands, legs, or feet, difficulty walking (staggering, balance problems), anaemia, difficulty thinking and reasoning (cognitive difficulties), memory loss, weakness, or fatigue.

"Vitamin B12 and other B vitamins play a crucial role in producing brain chemicals that affect mood and other brain functions. Low levels of B12, as well as other B vitamins like vitamin B6 and folate, may be linked to depression," Dr Anshu Rohtagi, Senior Consultant, Department of Neurology, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, told IANS.

"The deficiencies can result from poor diet or difficulties in absorbing the vitamins consumed. So, maintaining adequate B12 level is essential for overall well-being, including mood regulation," she added.

Vitamin B12 is majorly found in poultry, meat, fish, and dairy products. It is available as an oral supplement, as injections, or nasal spray.

People who consume a vegetarian or vegan diet may be more prone to deficiency as plant foods do not contain vitamin B12. The elderly and people with digestive tract conditions that affect the absorption of nutrients also are susceptible to vitamin B12 deficiency.

"Vitamin B12 plays a crucial role in producing brain chemicals like serotonin, which helps

regulate mood. When B12 levels dip, these chemicals can become imbalanced, potentially leading to symptoms like mood swings, irritability, and even depression," Dr Guruprasad Hosurkar, Additional Director - Neurology, Fortis Hospital, Bannerghatta Road, Bengaluru, told IANS.

Importantly, the doctor explained that the "connection is not gender-specific. Both men and women can experience mood changes due to B12 deficiency".

While research is ongoing, studies suggest a link between low B12 and depression, with some showing improvement in mood with B12 supplementation.

However, it's important to note that mood swings can have many causes, and a doctor should be consulted to rule out other factors and determine if a B12 deficiency is present, Dr Guruprasad said.

"Vitamin B12 deficiency causes several neurological symptoms such as tingling, numbness & burning of feet, imbalance, memory impairment, mood disorders, psychosis, seizures, and Parkinsonism," explained Dr Sudhir Kumar, from Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals, Hyderabad in a post on social media platform X.

"In a patient presenting with neurological or psychiatric symptoms, suspect vitamin B12 deficiency as a cause (especially if there is no obvious cause identified). Early diagnosis and prompt initiation of treatment rapidly improves patient's symptoms," he added.

The doctors also stressed the need to maintain a healthy lifestyle and advised key behaviours such as managing high blood pressure, and blood sugar, quitting smoking, and alcohol, staying physically active, getting adequate sleep, and managing stress. (IANS)

"Health is not a condition of matter,
but of mind."

—Mary Baker Eddy

The Shillong Times

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Power shift in UK

RISHI Sunak's rise to the post of UK Prime Minister was as surprising as his exit from office this past week. Sunak, son of immigrants from Punjab province who reached the UK after a stint in Africa many years ago, took over as PM not through elections but by virtue of being a leader who was a natural choice for that post when Liz Truss made a premature exit from power in 2022. In less than two years, internal political compulsions forced Sunak to call early elections. The nation voted him out and brought in the Labour Party after its 14-year-long performance as the main Opposition. While Sunak's policies and leadership of the UK as its prime minister were remarkable in several respects, an undercurrent of racial feelings appeared to have swung the balance in favour of the Labour and its new Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

A politician from among the Indian immigrants being sworn in as the Prime Minister to lead the UK was unthinkable in the past. But, the demographic changes in the UK in recent years were also a pointer to the shape of things to come. Greater London now has a Muslim population of 15 per cent; and there are sizable Indian / Asian / Pakistani / African settlements across the country, swelling in numbers, even as they in totality do not form even a quarter of the total population. The population of whites is dwindling across Europe. Two Indian businessmen—Lakshmi Mittal and Gopichand Hinduja—are among the top billionaires in the UK; a far cry from the era when India was a part of the British Raj. In the age of Globalization, the hope of "borders disappearing and the world turning into a global village," is still a mirage. But, changes of a significant nature are perceptible in the geopolitical sphere. US vice president Kamala Harris, born of immigrant parents, is half Indian and half African. She's a step away from the post of President, also as her split ancestry would be her added advantage in a future election.

An Indian-origin leader being the head of the US or UK in itself means little in terms of a strategic advantage to this country. Rather, such links would be a constraint in such leaders' decision-making processes vis-a-vis the dealings with India. In policy formulations, the US president or the UK prime minister does not have an independent decision-making authority. They will be guided by the teams of policy makers linked to their parties. Yet, the feel-good factor of an Indian being at the head of powerful nations like the UK or the US is an advantage to India. Sunak will be the new leader of the opposition in the UK, which also is a powerful position.

Meghalaya's Rivers in Distress

By H H Mohrmen

The dumping of garbage and the disposal of liquid waste into rivers in the state, especially those in or near urban areas, has polluted these rivers to the extent that reclamation is beyond possibility. Additionally, the construction of houses near or on the banks of rivers has made reclamation almost impossible. On the other hand, the rivers in the coal mining areas have died long ago, often unnoticed.

The rivers in Jaintia Hills, in particular, and those in Meghalaya, in general, are in very bad shape. In most cases, the river waters are no longer fit for human consumption. Some rivers, like the upstream of the river Myntdu, are affected by pollution from human waste, which includes both solid and liquid waste. Meanwhile, other rivers in the district have become dead rivers due to acid mine drainage caused by coal mining.

Land of Dead Rivers

In 2007, I wrote an article for Eastern Panorama, a city magazine titled "Jaintia Hills: The Land of the Dead Rivers," which surprised many readers. The article responded to news reports that, for the first time, thousands of dead fish floated on the river when Lukha turned blue. This incident shocked the state because such occurrences had not been reported before. The article also mentioned a similar incident from a decade ago that received little publicity.

In a similar incident, hundreds and thousands of fish died along the downstream of the river Myntdu, putting an end to all aquatic life in this river. In the mid-90s, during one of my pastoral visits to Nongtalang, I met a relative who had moved to a village near the river Myntdu. The relative, who lived in the Kharkhana area, told us about the mass death of fish along the river Prang (Myntdu river is called Prang in this area), which went unreported. This incident went unnoticed because it happened in remote areas along the river Myntdu from the Raji Tuber region down to its exit into Bangladesh.

Since then, the downstream Myntdu has become barren, a river devoid of aquatic life. However, Myntdu and Lukha are not the only rivers affected by mining. The same story applies to Kupli, where acid mine drainage has killed aquatic life and corroded the machinery used in the hydroelectric power plant. A few years back, electricity production from

the Kupli Hydro Electric Project (KHEP) was stopped because the machines had to be repaired due to premature corrosion caused by acid mine drainage (AMD) from the coal mine areas in Meghalaya. This is the condition of the rivers which originated or flow from the coal mining areas.

Rivers in Urban Areas

The rivers in coal mine areas are not the only ones dying; the rivers in the urban areas of the state also face similar problems, albeit from pollution. For example, Wah Umkhrah in Shillong, river Myntdu in Jowai, and possibly other rivers near towns and cities are heavily polluted. Despite much being written about Wah Umkhrah, there is no visible impact on the river. Unfortunately, the government is not even learning a lesson from what is happening to Wah Umkhrah.

Government Intervention

Despite numerous government interventions, including enacting acts and implementing policies, pollution of the state's rivers continues unabated. The government introduced the Meghalaya Protection of Catchment Area Act, 1990, which received the governor's assent on April 27, 1992. However, the question remains whether the Act has been implemented in letter and spirit. The act provides for the creation of the Meghalaya Catchment Area Advisory Board, but it is unclear if the government has constituted this body. Similarly, the government introduced the State Water Policy in 2019, which envisages the creation of the Meghalaya State Water Resource Council under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister. However, the public is unaware if the Council is functioning. Have the Act and Policy had any impact on the rivers and water bodies in the state? Or are these policy documents like toothless tigers—good on paper only and good for nothing?

Role of the ADCs

The role of the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) is interesting. According to the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, the ADCs are mandated to make laws regarding rivers. However, the Councils have not made any laws to protect or preserve the rivers. The public is unaware if any of the three ADCs have made any laws to protect and conserve the rivers in their respective districts. In Jaintia Hills, the ADC is known only for

leasing rivers to bidders for fishing, without taking any measures to protect them. The Council also leases rivers to private individuals for sand collection but does nothing to protect the rivers under its jurisdiction.

Civil Society Intervention

When government agencies fail, civil societies step forward to try to save the rivers and water, which is crucial for human life. In Jaintia Hills, organizations like the Jaintia Fishing and Environment Association, formerly known as the Jaintia Fishing Association, have led efforts to protect the rivers. This award-winning organization of anglers has had a significant impact on the entire district. In Jowai, along the river Myntdu, it has constructed check dams and established the Syntu Ksar section of the river Myntdu as a fish sanctuary. The organization has also helped other villages engage in activities to conserve fish and protect rivers. The question is how much can a civil society group do?

The Operation Clean-Up

In Shillong, a group of concerned citizens organize regular cleaning drives to clean sections of the Wah Umkhrah called Umkaliar. The group, which has consistently organized the cleaning drive, recently met with the Chief Minister to inform him about their efforts to protect and preserve the upstream section of Wah Umkhrah. They also urged the government to implement robust plans to protect the environment and ban single-use plastics in the state. It remains to be seen if the Chief Minister will heed their call, but the group has made an impact.

The Green-Tech Foundation

Similarly, Green Tech Foundation is another organization engaged in cleaning rivers. This group of young people, which is only a few years old, has organized cleaning drives in the West Khasi Hills District and other parts of the state. They have cleaned many rivers in various parts of the Khasi region of the state. On the bright side is the fact that this group under the leadership of H. Nonglang has units in different parts of the Khasi Jaintia regions of the state and has extended its operation in the Garo hills too.

Ka Khuid Ya Ka Wah Myntdu

In Jowai, another group, not seeing themselves as an

organization but rather as a platform called Ka Khuid Ya Ka Wah Myntdu, is continuing the work of the Jaintia Fishing and Environment Society to protect river Myntdu. This group, under the leadership of Khroo Lamsalanki Pariat, has taken on several influential contractors in the state to protest the mistreatment of river Myntdu. After the PWD initiated road construction along the river Myntdu near Jowai, the forum protested the rampant environmental destruction and pollution caused by the construction.

The construction of the road has even damaged many of the paddy fields on the upper valley of the river, and the forum is collaborating with the farmers to protest against this destruction. The advantage for the people of Jowai is that they have witnessed what happened to Wah Umkhrah in Shillong, and they do not want this to happen to the river Myntdu. The forum recently initiated a signature campaign and submitted a complaint against the destruction of the river and paddy fields along the river to the Chief Justice of Meghalaya High Court, Shillong. A copy of the complaint was also sent to the Chairman of the National Green Tribunal.

Where Will the Buck Stop?

The condition of the rivers in the state is dire, and the future does not look promising. Due to the deteriorating condition of the rivers, civil society, including colleges are contributing to efforts to protect and preserve them. Shillong College recently organized a short film festival on the theme "Shattered Reflection: Meghalaya's Rivers in Distress," which was an apt theme for the competition held as part of the Diamond Jubilee Celebration of Teaching Science. The budding filmmakers did a commendable job with their films, but the question is - is it enough? Films help create awareness among the public about the condition of the rivers, but the pertinent question remains: where does the buck stop?

The question remains: who will save our rivers from the impending danger? Are civil societies initiatives enough if the government is not making every effort to protect and preserve our rivers? What will be the future of the state if all its rivers become dead rivers which humans cannot use? Are these the kind of rivers we want to leave behind for our children and grandchildren?

First session of 18th Lok Sabha a let down for Narendra Modi

Modi's stature as Vishwaguru has diminished after duel with Rahul Gandhi

By Sushil Kuttu

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi addresses the Prime Minister of India 'Narendra Modi' sans 'Prime Minister' and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has started referring to Rahul Gandhi as 'Balak Buddhi'. The mutual respect shown is extraordinary. If 'Sansad TV' was popular TV, children would be learning "show respect to each other," in the most extraordinary setting, India's Parliament! Even otherwise India's children are living in extraordinary times.

Prime Minister Modi's contempt for LoP Rahul Gandhi is extraordinary. Modi had sworn to make India "Congress Mukti" in

Minister in his 'Motion of Thanks' speech talked of the 'ecosystem' and what was in store for the 'ecosystem' in his third and final term as Prime Minister. For somebody who couldn't do zilch to the 'ecosystem' in his first and second terms, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was talking big and mighty.

The 'ecosystem' Modi spoke of has a number of elements, which includes the entrenched bureaucracy. The rules and regulations and the legal system as it stands, also. The Supreme Court of India is also part of the 'ecosystem' that PM Modi wants to 'Ukhaad' in Sanjay Raut's language. This when Prime Minister



his first term itself. And with the battle-cry "Abki baar 400 paar", there was every chance for a "Congress Mukti Bharat". However, Modi's slogan perished in electoral dust and Rahul Gandhi made sure 'Congress Mukti Bharat' died its own death. Rahul Gandhi is now the 'Leader of Opposition' and Rahul Gandhi as LoP is a different ball game altogether as the BJP's Lok Sabha back-benchers are coming to realize.

When Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury was LoP he made no impression even when he was on his feet to make a telling intervention. BJP back-benchers made fun of him, mostly. Not that Congress front-benchers

Narendra Modi isn't on sure foot, himself!

What can a lame-luck third time Prime Minister do to the ecosystem? Former US President Donald Trump spoke of 'draining the swamp'. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had two chances to rid India of its version of the Washington Swamp, but Modi never once mentioned 'ecosystem' in his first and second terms. Modi broke several promises but this one he never even spoke about.

It is only when somebody is down and out that he talks big. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is such a person. He knows he is vulnerable from head to toe and his

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi cannot ever again use 'Congress Mukti Bharat' to embarrass the Congress and its 'first family'. The Prime Minister in his 'Motion of Thanks' speech talked of the 'ecosystem' and what was in store for the 'ecosystem' in his third and final term as Prime Minister. For somebody who couldn't do zilch to the 'ecosystem' in his first and second terms, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was talking big and mighty."

went on their knees to show respect. Today, after his loss to erstwhile cricketer Yusuf Pathan, the memory of LoP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury is fast fading and nobody in the Congress is mourning.

That being said, comparing LoP Rahul Gandhi with LoP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury is like comparing apples and oranges. This, when Rahul Gandhi happens to be the apple of the Congress eye. Sonia Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi were in the Visitor's Gallery when LoP Rahul Gandhi stood up to deliver his first LoP speech. People shouldn't forget that Rahul Gandhi was born to step into Rajiv Gandhi's shoes, it doesn't matter how many Modi-terms are in between!

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has many reasons to feel let down. Among them is the realization that he cannot remember 'Congress Mukti Bharat'. All his cronies too have forgotten. That 'Congress Mukti Bharat' has slipped out of the BJP IT Cell's vocabulary is a testament to the resilience of the Grand Old Party, which has withstood more debacles than Modi has in his life so far. Modi's dream of 'Congress Mukti Bharat' is dead in the water.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi cannot ever again use 'Congress Mukti Bharat' to embarrass the Congress and its 'first family'. The Prime

toehold on power could slip off the brink at any moment on any day of the next five years. Fact is, Prime Minister Narendra Modi cannot touch the 'ecosystem'. The current Prime Minister of India is on a very weak footing and the hoi polloi, the ordinary citizen living in extraordinary times, is aware.

Somebody in Parliament should ask Modi how he intends to dismantle the ecosystem, pray tell? Surely, his hold on India's abused institutions has slipped. The brute majority of 303 seats is no longer there. Then, he was basking in the glow of international limelight, wooing world leaders who were kowtowing to him because India was a "huge market" to tap. Some of those world leaders went down on their knees and one of them called Modi "Boss".

The global adulation went to his head and he never spoke of an ecosystem to mend or dismantle. Today, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants of dealing with the 'ecosystem', he sounds intellectually dishonest and he can only be "Trusted Like A fox", which happens to be the title of a James Hadley Chase novel. Hadley Chase, if he was alive today, would have written a book on Narendra Modi with all the 'masala' available on Modi's life. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

NEET has to be reconsidered

Editor,
With NEET results under the scanner for alleged irregularities and paper leaks our students who passed the NEET exams are in a fix. In the last orientation programme conducted by the Health and Family Welfare Government of Meghalaya it was informed that the state needs to have approximately 300 to 400 seats per year but at present the state has only 50 seats, an approximate 20 - 22 seats for Garos and 20 - 22 seats for Khasi & Jaintia aspirants.

I hope the Government tries its best to increase the quota to 200 plus like other states. Some students, especially those from poor family backgrounds, are trying repeatedly to clear the NEET with better scores to get a Government seat. Some take up to 4 attempts (4 years). But my request to students who have passed Class 12 with 85% and above and a NEET score of 350 and above is that they are already smart and fit to become doctors. If they can avail loan or if parents can afford to, please take the private seat also since our State is in dire need of doctors. Our villages face extreme shortage of doctors. I sincerely hope that the marks scored in Class

10 and 12 to be considered and that those conducting the entrance exams do not depend entirely on the NEET scores.

Yours etc.,
Rangki Lyngdoh
Shillong - 3

Heat wave & VIP culture

Editor,
My local State Bank of India branch has a special counter where customers can withdraw or deposit money with ease. There are three counters in total for monetary transactions. But often, only two counters stay open - one general and one special. The queue for the general counter is always much longer than that of the special counter.

Standing at the end of a serpentine queue at the general counter, an old man leaning on his stick asked if the special counter was for physically challenged persons and senior citizens. Immediately, he was enlightened with the information that the special counter was only for the VIPs who would transact a minimum amount of Rs 50 thousand!

There was a heatwave outside, and the old man was visibly not feeling well. But he did not like to beg for a favour. God forbid if something happened to that man while or after returning home, it would be said that another person died of

heatstroke. There would be no mention that VIP culture had contributed to it.

Thanks to rising inequality, which as per the recently published report by the World Inequality Lab, has surpassed even during the time of the British Raj, the tentacles of VIP culture are spreading rapidly with each passing day.

As many as 33 polling personnel, including sanitation workers, home guards, and polling officers, died from heatstroke in Uttar Pradesh during the seventh phase of the Lok Sabha election on June 1. Were they VIPs? No, they were not. When it comes to providing basic amenities, even presiding and polling officers are treated like Less Important Persons (LIPs). Sometimes, they have to compromise on issues like dirty toilets and lack of water in their booths.

The deaths of so many polling personnel on a single day raised questions if adequate protective measures like continuous supply of water and ORS, sufficient fans and clean toilets were in place in all the polling booths in Uttar Pradesh.

Ironically, the poor mainly suffer from the heatwave for which they are the least responsible. Ulka Kelkar, a climate change researcher, rightly said, "Those who contribute the least to global warming or greenhouse emissions are the worst sufferers

of climate change."

Nature is egalitarian. Its ponds and fields are the areas where the people can cool off, irrespective of their class. To enjoy swimming during the day time and a cool breeze sitting on a field in the evening can soothe the nerves in hot summer. But the greed for profit in an unscrupulous way and the mindless creation of a concrete jungle under the guise of development and urbanisation are bulldozing the open areas and lungs of the poor who have no or little access to air-conditioned space.

Banks had written off Rs 10.57 lakh crore during the last 5 financial years, of which Rs 5.52 lakh crore was in respect of loans pertaining to large industries as per the government reply in the Parliament in November last year, whereas the 11-year-old girl, Santoshi Kumari starved to death because her parents failed to link their ration cards with their Aadhaar cards. This shows two diametrically opposite ways to treat irregularities of VIPs and LIPs.

These, plus question paper leaks, highway cave-in, airport roof and bridge collapse indicate something seriously wrong. The wrong is to indulge the greed of some VIPs. The wrong is to indulge the inequality and to create a wall between the VIPs and the LIPs. That had literally been done in Ahmedabad to hide the LIPs in the slum area

behind the wall during the visit of Donald Trump.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Reformed laws and their impact

Editor,
On July 1, 2024, the nation witnessed the enactment of three novel laws aimed at superseding its outdated colonial-era criminal statutes, marking a significant evolution in its system of criminal justice. The introduction of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) to supplant the existing Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) to replace the archaic Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) to take the place of the Indian Evidence Act (IEA), signifies a landmark restructuring effort within the legal framework of the country.

These legislative measures, which were ratified in the preceding month of December, are designed to revolutionise India's legal landscape by tackling contemporary challenges such as organised crime and economic violations, underscoring the significance of identity verification and genuineness in the era of technological advancements, and introducing

community service as a novel punitive measure.

The primary goal of the BNS is to establish clearer and more stringent sanctions for criminal transgressions, with a potential outcome of bolstering public safety and more efficiently combating hate crimes. On the other hand, the BNSS pledges expeditious dispensation of justice, heightened protection for victims, and streamlined accessibility to legal remedies. Through the enactment of the BSA, the legal system endeavours to simplify and fortify the process of evidence collection, ensure transparency in judicial proceedings, and amplify safeguards for susceptible witnesses and victims.

A noteworthy alteration introduced by these laws is the rescission of several provisions previously instituted to safeguard against abuse and violence during custodial interrogations. It remains paramount to safeguard against any potential overreach or misuse of power by investigative entities during such interrogative processes, as the crucial concern should always be the well-being of both the populace and society at large.

Yours etc.,
Chanmiki Laloo
Shillong - 02

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

"Faith is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into the light."
— Helen Keller

The Shillong Times

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Rule of Law must be visible

THE fundamental principle guiding a civilised society is a fair and strict application of the Rule of Law at all times. It means no citizen is above the law and no public misdemeanour that defiles those public servants, such as the police and other enforcement agencies seeking to uphold the rule of law should not be tolerated. The most important demand of the Rule of Law is that people in positions of authority should exercise their power within a constraining framework of well-established public norms rather than in an arbitrary, ad hoc, or purely discretionary manner on the basis of their own preferences or ideology.

The Rule of Law however is not just about government. It also requires that citizens should respect and comply with legal norms, even when they disagree with them. When a citizens' personal interests conflict with that of others they should accept legal determinations of what their rights and duties are. Also, the law should be the same for everyone, so that no one is above the law, and everyone has access to protection under the law. Application of the Rule of Law ensures that citizens live without fear for their lives; that they can enjoy what they earn without being subjected to extortion by forces that believe they have a right to a share of what other people earn without doing any work themselves. The numbers of such extortionist groups in Meghalaya have spiralled in the last few years. That such groups operate with impunity also shows that the extortionists do not fear the law knowing very well they can get away with anything. It is this impunity that endangers a society because it impacts adversely on the economics of the state and also puts paid to any kind of entrepreneurial venture. No credible corporate entity would want to invest in Meghalaya because their returns after all the extortion would be abysmal or go on the negative.

Recently a video of a young man giving a mouthful to an official of the Enforcement Wing of the Transport Department because he was pulled up for some misdemeanour. All this happened within media glare. This video will encourage other hotheads to cock a snook at all law enforcers. This will erode the very spirit of the Rule of Law which is necessary if there is to be peace and development in society. Often in Meghalaya the Rule of Law descends to a point of ethnocracy where a particular community feels entitled to live by its own set of rules. Ethnocracy is defined by development sociologists as the specific expression of nationalism 'where a dominant ethnos gains political control and uses the state apparatus to ethnicise the territory and society in question. This is exactly what is happening in Meghalaya where Khasi slogans like, "Ha Ri Lajong, Leh Katba Mon" (meaning "In my land I shall do what I want") which in fact is a blatant challenge to law keepers. This has got to stop and the Police and other agencies entrusted with enforcing the Rule of Law must themselves be above board.

On Abortion – A Genuine Moral Dilemma (I)

By Deepa Majumdar

This article is dedicated to the aborted fetus.

The Shillong Times (Feb 9, 2024) reported the "spine-chilling" incident of an infant's cadaver being discovered in a garbage truck. Indeed, it is "spine-chilling" when the unborn and newborn are reified to inconvenient commodities – to be destroyed and disposed of, whimsically. The progressiveness, viability, and humanity of a society lies – not in its GNP, outer space adventures, or ostentatious temples – but in the loving care, it provides for the most vulnerable of its members – whether the unborn, the newborn, and young children – or the elderly, the specially-abled, the destitute, those belonging to the lowest castes – and last (but hardly the least), helpless animals. That nation is prosperous, which cares for and prioritizes the most defenseless of its members.

The natural sciences have brought many benefits. But as an amoral form of intelligence, they cannot guide us morally. Yet, they have endowed us with godlike powers over life and death. One example is the mother's power to grant or deny life to her unborn child. Indeed, mothers play God when they decide whether or not to abort a fetus. Mother Teresa's words of wisdom ring in my ears as I write – "If we accept that a mother can kill her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill each other?" Her words also evoke in me the glory of motherhood – a cosmic principle that redeems matter and the body, by infusing the light of unselfishness into amoral biological processes and into the ceaseless antipathy that haunts the slaughter-bench of Nature.

In the realm of embodiment, giving birth and breast feeding are the only acts that are biologically unselfish. Even the most selfish of mothers perform an unintentionally unselfish act, when they give birth. Motherhood may begin with pregnancy. But it does not end there. It continues on to giving birth and nurturing and nourishing the newborn. Moreover, human mothers are often the first teachers of their children, using precept and action to teach wisdom and ethics. We see the glory of motherhood also among animals, who otherwise, are creatures of passions. If despite excruciating labor pain, risks to their lives, and patriarchal prejudices, women still long to have babies, this proves that the miracle of motherhood still prevails – despite patriarchy and feminism. Women should be proud of having unselfish bodies that can give birth and nourish helpless infants. All viable societies therefore worship not only biological mothers, but the cosmic principle of motherhood. In our times, statues should be built to honor the single mother, who has proved her mettle, by raising children single-handedly. As a moral dilemma that allows mothers to play God, by granting or refusing life to the unborn fetus, abortion militates against this cosmic principle of motherhood.

Adding to this, we must remember the sheer helplessness of the fetus, dependent as it is wholly on the body of the mother. To see the fetus only in terms of science can sound grotesque. Far greater than a mere biological blob, the fetus should never be objectified to its body. Science lacks the wherewithal to determine whether or not the fetus is ensouled, or to understand the mother's bond with her fetus. Going

abhorrent nature, abortion, which is never a virtue, yet can, in some contexts, be a necessary evil. A selfish abortion of convenience, or patriarchal abortions that abort female fetuses with impunity, are wholly repugnant morally. Regardless of context, they are inexcusable. But abortion in the case of a rape-survivor can be a necessary evil.

Then there is the question of fetal pain, which may be a medical controversy, but remains a moral quandary. If indeed the fetus feels pain, it cannot control its experience of this pain, the way an adult can – through self-control, forbearance, or wisdom. The life of the unborn fetus and that of its mother, whether a young girl or an adult woman, cannot be compared – because each is unique. Prioritizing one over the other is always a problem. To argue that the mother's life is of greater value than that of her fetus – simply because unlike the fetus, she is already born – is specious, to say the

"The natural sciences have brought many benefits. But as an amoral form of intelligence, they cannot guide us morally. Yet, they have endowed us with godlike powers over life and death. One example is the mother's power to grant or deny life to her unborn child."

by the doctrine of reincarnation, the fetus is ensouled from the first moment of its embodied life in the womb. Even if one does not believe in reincarnation, one ought to respect the embryo as a symbol of life – at that, the life of a helpless child.

Abortion inflicts two levels of violence upon the fetus – denial of life and the possibility of pain. To deny the fetus, a voiceless being, the right to life, is an act of undeniable violence. From the fetus' standpoint – if it could speak – abortion is abhorrent. Moreover, whether or not the fetus feels pain during abortion – especially a later-term abortion – should not be determined based on medical evidence alone. Inasmuch as pain is a subjective experience, with thresholds of pain varying among individuals, and insofar as pain is a mental response, the brain alone cannot determine whether or not we feel pain.

On many moral issues, good and evil depend on the empirical context of the action in question. The same action, which, in one context is a vice, in another, can be a virtue. Applied to abortion, this means that despite its

least. But so is the opposite, as when a harsh pro-life law demands that the fetus be saved at the cost of its mother's life. In some cases, this fatal conflict of interests, which demands one life at the cost of the other, becomes unbearable – as in the case of a later-term abortion. Unless the mother's life is in danger, a pain-centered ethics should prioritize the agony the fetus might feel when undergoing a later-term abortion, over the mental pain of the mother being coerced to give birth to an unwanted child.

But abortion takes on a whole different meaning in the case of a rape-survivor. Here, an early abortion becomes a necessary evil – while, at the same time, remaining a moral dilemma. I draw inspiration from women rape-survivors from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who retained the glory of motherhood, by refusing to abort the fetuses they conceived through rape, saying, "My child has already been wronged once by being conceived through rape. I cannot wrong it again, by aborting it." But this noble stance becomes ignoble when imposed on all rape-

survivor mothers. Not all are capable of this generosity. No rape-survivor should be condemned for feeling repugnance for her fetus conceived through rape.

Yet this revulsion, although understandable, remains unbearably tragic. For, it is inherently unjust to the fetus. No fetus ever asks to be born through rape. No fetus ever causes rape, but appears as a result of rape. Hence, no fetus deserves revulsion or condemnation from its mother. The light of motherhood sometimes overcomes this repugnance – but not always – because mothers are human. Thus, abortion, which, in essence, is a moral dilemma, becomes all more so in the case of rape. A rape-survivor should never be coerced to bear the child she conceived through rape. Yet, at the same time, the fetus should not be forced to forfeit its life for something that was never its fault – that is, for being conceived through violence. Clearly, there are no easy solutions to this grim moral dilemma.

I wish Mother Teresa had understood better the nuances of abortion – especially the tragedy of the mother who conceives through rape. I wish she had understood that motherhood does not always happen under ideal circumstances. I wish she had reflected on the many betrayals of motherhood, of which, rape, perhaps, is the greatest. But there are many others too. The glory of motherhood is denigrated whenever the womb is objectified, through coerced reproduction, whether by an individual, the community, or the state. For example, when a woman is coerced to give birth until she produces a son, her motherhood is degraded to a mere process, and she is reduced to her womb. Motherhood is betrayed when a pregnant woman is sexually and physically assaulted (especially in front of her children), or even neglected by the father; when due to poverty, she is undernourished; when her husband ignores the risks to her life and the labor pain she undergoes, by dubbing child-bearing merely "natural" – hence unworthy of gratitude; when she is chastised for giving birth to daughters; when she loses daughters through female feticide.

Of what use is it to pay lip service to the Indian cult of mother-worship – when real life mothers are neglected, abused, and coerced, by individuals, society, and even the state?

(To be concluded)

Next few poll meetings will shape Prez Biden's future

By Kalyani Shankar

U.S. President Joe Biden's underwhelming performance in the 2024 presidential debate last week raised concerns due to his apparent fatigue, forgetfulness, and confusion. This has caused uncertainty among supporters despite Biden's attempts to reassure them in the post-debate period. Even last week, during a speech in Madison, Wisconsin, he initially said he would "beat Donald Trump again in 2020" before correcting himself to "2024," which added to the uncertainty.

According to the Spanish newspaper El Pais, Biden has defended himself about three things. First, his support stayed pretty much the same after the debate. Secondly, most party voters want him to continue. The last point is that other options are not better.

President Biden has demonstrated resilience in the face of pressure to step down. He confidently declared at a rally in Madison that he would run and win again, which cheered his supporters and reassured some doubters within the party.

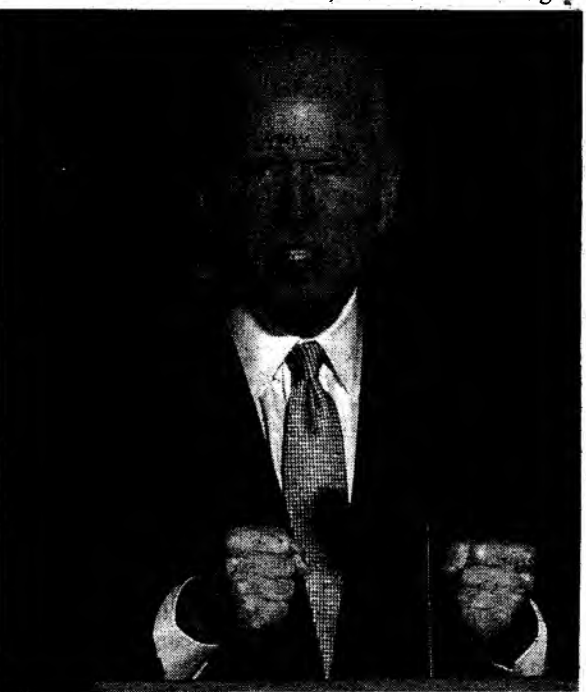
President Biden's improved performance in his public appearances post-debate has the potential to significantly reshape his chances in the upcoming election and the prospects of the Democratic Party. This shift in dynamics could bring a sense of hope and anticipation to the party.

ever, Michelle has repeatedly said she does not aspire to be President, so it's doubtful she will run.

Several names are being floated to replace President Biden. This includes at least six governors: Gavin Newsom from California, Gretchen Whitmer from Michigan, Josh Shapiro from Pennsylvania, J. B. Pritzker from Illinois, and Ro Khanna, a representative from California. Each of these potential candidates has their strengths and weaknesses. For instance, Gavin Newsom is the favourite. Their potential to run for office would have different effects on the Democratic Party and the upcoming election.

After the debate, polls from CNN, The New York Times, and The Wall Street Journal showed that Biden is six points behind Trump in the country: Biden is also trailing in the most crucial states he won in 2020 elections. Furthermore, other states he won—Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Mexico, and Virginia—now seem uncertain. In 2020, four months before the election, Biden was 9 points ahead in the polls. However, he eventually won the election with 51.25% of the popular vote, compared to Trump's 46.8%. This data suggests Biden may face a more challenging race in 2024 than 2020.

When asked whether he could run the country for another term, he told ABC in a recent interview, "I believe so; I wouldn't be running if



Next month, the Democratic Party will nominate President Biden as its 2024 Presidential candidate in a virtual convention. This event will officially confirm Biden's candidacy and establish the party's campaign strategy.

If Biden stays in the race, it will be tough for any other candidate to win the Democratic nomination. This is because the party rules give Biden a big advantage. These rules include specific guidelines for delegate allocation and influence of super delegates.

If Biden were to resign, who would take his place? With only four months before the 2024 election, finding the right person takes a lot of work. This shows how serious the situation is.

Kamala Harris, the current Vice-President and Joe Biden's running mate, is the top contender for the upcoming presidential election. Many believe that she has the advantage. However, her lack of popularity could be a significant challenge, as 49% of Americans disapprove of her according to polling averages. Republicans hope Harris will become the Democratic presidential nominee, believing it will benefit Trump's campaign. The Trump campaign has launched an ad with the slogan: "This November, vote Republican. Stop Kamala."

A recent poll by Reuters/Ipsos showed that Michelle Obama could win against Trump in November. How-

I didn't think I did. Look, I'm running again because I believe I understand best what has to be done to take this nation to a completely new level. We're on our way."

Polls reveal that voters are more concerned about whether the 81-year-old President could manage another four years in the White House than his 78-year-old rival. Biden needs to be more competent to win in November.

Biden was confident when he said, "If the Lord Almighty came down and said, 'Joe, get out of the race,' I'd get out of the race," but added, "The Lord Almighty's not coming down." So, it is up to God Almighty to go down and ask him to keep out of the race. Trump quietly observes Biden's challenging position.

India has had a good rapport with both Trump and Biden. There is also bipartisan support. Therefore, it is unlikely that their South Asia and India policies will change, given the growing economic influence of India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also has a good rapport with both of them.

Biden is facing challenges as he moves toward November. 5. Trump has raised a lot of money and still has support from his party despite some court decisions going against him. Both candidates are trying to harm each other's reputation. Elections are unpredictable, especially with four months to go. Anything can happen. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

The Shillong Times - The 5th pillar of the Mawkhair Church

Editor,
At the very outset, we as members (few) of the Mawkhair Presbyterian Church, would like to express our gratitude to this esteemed newspaper 'The Shillong Times' for publishing letters to the editor in the last few weeks and also news reporting for the last three years on matters relating to the mishandling of funds by a few church committee members, which has caused debates and discussions amongst the church members. Had it not been for The Shillong Times, this matter would have been ignored and left dormant for perhaps many years to come. The letters to the editor and news reportage have undoubtedly helped to bring justice to the Church instantaneously.

This practice has also led to the church committee putting some serious thought on the matter and addressing the matter on June 23, 2024 by the Secretary. By

this announcement, it may perhaps sound that action has been taken seriously by the church committee by seeking audit queries from the defaulters but without setting a tentative date for submission of reply. By asking for an audit reply, it is apparent that there are frauds being committed by the aforementioned members. As we all know, most of the Church Elders and deacons of the Mawkhair Presbyterian Church are bureaucrats of the State Government. We believe they were well aware of the administrative and fundamental procedures, the do's and don'ts when asking for queries from the defaulters. Could this be another delaying tactic by the Church Committee or is the Church Committee afraid to take a stand against the defaulters or are they being led by the defaulters? Are they protecting the defaulters' reputation and image?

Church members that elope are suspended from the church as per Church rules, but when church leaders commit a crime against the church itself, no action is taken. If this takes too long, no choices are left but to take a stern and serious legal action by filing a police

complaint.
Hopefully, this will be the last and final request and a humble appeal to the Church Committee to come clean on the matter before the congregation, at the earliest.

Yours etc.,
D. Kharwanning,
M. Sohtun,
(Members of the Mawkhair Presbyterian Church)
Shillong

UK election results: an analysis

Editor,
The editorial, "Power Shift in UK" (ST 8 July 2024) made interesting reading. Apart from the demographic changes and rise of Indian immigrants in politics in the United Kingdom. The UK election 2024 was a damning result for the Conservatives in 14 years losing more than two thirds of their seats and most went to the Center-Left Labour Party while 63 went to the centrist Liberal Democrats. The Conservative Party has never performed as poorly in an election since the United Kingdom assumed its modern form in 1922. The elec-

tion was historic in other ways too. The country's smaller parties have also never performed as well as they did on Thursday. That continues a decades-long shift away from a two-party system, and means that the Labour's position may be more fragile than it looks on the surface. The Labour Party won one of the largest majorities of seats in Britain's electoral history on the lowest share of votes of any election indeed! As a share of votes, Labour barely got 35% of the votes which is only 2 % better than 2019. The tsunami of seats won was courtesy the British Freedom Party. Conservative voters split their votes. The Liberal Democrats were the beneficiary of millions of votes that would have normally gone to the Conservatives, leading to a whopping 71 seats. The Conservatives lost 248 seats. 180 seats to Labour, 59 seats to Liberal Democrats, 4 seats to Reform. Reform won more than 14 percent of the vote but just won four of the 650 seats in Britain's Parliament. The Green Party also won four seats with about 7 percent of the vote. Labour lost 4 seats to pro-Palestinian

independent candidates in seats with large Muslim populations. To win 2029 or whenever Starmer calls a general election. Labour must show significant improvement on every plank of their manifesto.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Reclaiming mines for greener future

Editor,
The state government had in its earlier avatar came out with a much pro-activeness in bringing reforms in various sectors and most importantly with regards to mining of minor and major minerals. The recent report on the initiative to begin to reclaim abandoned mines in the state is a positive way towards regenerating the environment by way of rejuvenating and converting these "waste lands" into a fertile, green and habitable place fit for human habitation. The blueprint seems promising but will take decades or more for the forests cover to take shape and form. A major part of the mined

areas in the state happen to be in East and West Jaintia Hills, parts of West Khasi as well as in Garo Hills. But the question is how far can this entire process succeed without taking the quarry owners as partners or collaborators to give back to nature and whether an exhaustive research study, GIS mapping, baseline survey etc., been conducted to understand whether these places are still feasible or will be just another worthless exercise with a top down approach rather than a bottom-up action plan is a big question. Another point here is, that if such a process begins then there should be a public discussion with those affected from mining activities with expertise from the state and a list of timelines with the entire cost of reclamation provided in the public domain. Then only will the affected community understand the benefits and impact of this reclamation process.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S. Wankhar
Via email

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“Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction.”

— John F. Kennedy

The Shillong Times

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Balancing in Russia

THE selection of Russia as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first overseas outreach after he won power for a third consecutive term was significant. This was his first visit there after Russia launched its war on Ukraine in 2022, though the PM had visited Russia six times in the last ten years. The visit this time was overshadowed by Putin's reckless act of bombing a children's hospital in Kyiv, much against the established norms of warfare, and killing over 41 innocents. Yet, bilateral issues were obviously uppermost in the talks between Modi and Putin except for a passing mention of the incident and expression of sorrow by the PM.

The visit takes place during a period when, in the context of the Ukraine war, the West has imposed sanctions on Russia and is seeking to corner it through tough engagements. China, never a close ally of Russia, sensed this as an opportunity and is helping Putin with supply of critical wares including defence spares and components manufactured in the West but routed through China. The trade between China and Russia has increased substantially. Modi is mindful that the steady strengthening of the China-Russia ties could eventually work to India's disadvantage. At the same time, Russian crude oil accounts for nearly half of India's oil imports. Through trading in rupees to overcome sanctions, India is getting cheap oil from Russia. Trade between Russia and India rose steeply to 465 billion after the Ukraine invasion, while European nations have cut down trade with Russia. In recent years, India is steadily reducing its dependence on arms from Russia and doing more purchases from the US, Israel etc., that specialised in sophisticated technology. Russian defence technology is inferior in quality though India depended more on it since the Nehruvian era. Putin might attempt to make India buy weapons from Russia yet again. Modi will obviously have to be careful, as the western powers would react negatively to any excessive indulgence by New Delhi vis-a-vis Moscow.

Putin, weakened in his influence over Russians after the ill-conceived and inopportune war, needs new posturing to keep himself afloat. He is making a bid to rally the Moscow-led "global majority" against US "hegemony" and seeks to get Indian backing to the extent possible. Fact is, Putin had never shown a closeness to any country unlike the rulers of the USSR days. He preferred to be a loner and India's steady improvement in relations with the US might also have acted as a dampener to Putin. Yet, an alliance of Russia and China against India, should Xi Jin Ping flex his muscles along the northern border, should be to New Delhi's disadvantage. Viewed against this overall context, Modi could at best do a tight-rope walk in Moscow.

On Abortion – A Genuine Moral Dilemma (II)

By Deepa Majumdar

This article is dedicated to the neglected and abused child.

Both Nature and History are asymmetrical in their apportionment of the burdensome aspects of child-bearing – with women bearing the brunt of it all. It is therefore understandable if women reject biological motherhood and the ideologies associated with it. But how do men feel about child-bearing by their partners? Unfortunately, not all men understand the full depth of labor pain or the risk to the life of the mother. The sexual act, which to them is pleasure, to the woman can lead to something, which, in ideal circumstances, is far higher – namely, motherhood. The womb, therefore, can serve as an altar and instrument of transcendence of the pleasure-principle to the unselfishness of parenting. Once the child is born, good-hearted fathers mature to fatherhood and dispense the responsibilities thereof. But even these fathers do not necessarily understand the labor pain, physical sacrifice, and risk to life that mothers endure in giving birth. If men understood this better, they would overcome the pleasure principle and insist on having fewer children. They would cook for and serve their partners during pregnancy. They would serve as the main breadwinners, with their partners returning to work only when they feel ready to. Immediately after birth, they would take care of their infants, letting the mothers rest. Above all, they would be grateful to their partners for risking their lives and undergoing labor pain to give birth to their children. Today, thanks to righteous forms of feminism, some men, I am sure, understand childbirth better and act as ideal partners. But not all. I shudder to think of the cosmic punishment awaiting those men who abandon their pregnant partners in their hour of need – especially men who abandon their partners for being no longer attractive, on account of pregnancy. I cannot forget a former student whose boyfriend left her for being "fat" – because she was pregnant with their child.

I have often wondered if conservative men who seek to use public authority to control the womb, identify too closely with the fetus, because they fear women's power to abort male children – a strident form of misogyny,

carried to an extreme. This fear, if it exists, cannot be swept off by feminist rage alone. It is understandable (but not justifiable) if men fear women's power over the very existence of the fetus. To be able to decide whether or not a helpless being like the fetus should be born is a terrifying godlike power over life itself. But the solution cannot lie in coercing rape-survivors to bear children they do not want. Nor can the solution lie entirely in the pro-choice slogan, "My body, my choice!" For, every right comes with enormous responsibility. In the case of child-bearing, this responsibility should rest squarely with both parents. Moreover, responsible reproductive conduct presupposes responsible sexual conduct – by men and women alike.

to enforce democratically created laws that prevent body-related crimes.

Abortion becomes a dubious form of eugenics when used to destroy fetuses that belong to unwanted cohorts – female feticide in India being one example. A later-term abortion becomes euthanasia when a fetus with serious health problems is denied life. For some, fatal birth defects, such that the fetus will die immediately after birth, are perhaps the only criteria that justify early abortions. But even this raises serious questions. Should we be playing God and terminating a life just because it is, according to human judgment, terminally sick? Given that its birth defects are fatal, do we not owe the fetus greater love, respect, and care? Is the fetus a product to be

“Once the child is born, good-hearted fathers mature to fatherhood and dispense the responsibilities thereof. But even these fathers do not necessarily understand the labor pain, physical sacrifice, and risk to life that mothers endure in giving birth. If men understood this better, they would overcome the pleasure principle and insist on having fewer children. They would cook for and serve their partners during pregnancy.”

The U.S. Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v Wade (on June 24, 2022) is all the more troubling because it happened amidst a sexual revolution still rife and showing no sign of abating. Had it happened after the sexual revolution waned historically, it would have had different implications. Upholding the pleasure principle far above child-bearing, this dangerous revolution has destroyed all norms of self-control. The fetus should not have to pay the enormous price of not being born – at the altar of a reckless pleasure principle. It should not have to pay this price for rape either. But this agonizing decision – whether or not to abort a fetus conceived through rape, should be left primarily to the mother – not to the state. In fact, the state should have no right to intervene in matters of the body – whether sexual or reproduction – except

disposed of just because it is sick? Do we not owe more care to those who are more seriously sick? The cosmic principle of motherhood inspires mothers to love their children unconditionally – to love them all the more, when they are sick, helpless, and dying. To deny a fetus the chance to be born only because it has serious (even if fatal) birth defects is among the most revolting forms of abortion. But it becomes hypocritical for the state to refuse abortion to such mothers without caring for them or for the fetus once it is born. This beautiful saying – “every child born brings his loaf of bread with him” – is seriously challenged in the case of a child with special needs. Here faith helps a lot – trust in a divine providence that will provide for the child and its mother. But not every mother has such faith. Nor does every mother have the family or community sup-

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

The Trump Haircut!..

There are many in this world, millions I'm told who need to dress like a cult figure. Even in India, after Prime Minister Modi started wearing his multi-colored jackets, many throughout the country followed suit, filling the country with Namo lookalikes, with some not blessed with a 56 inch chest looking a tad ludicrous! The rose nestling on the jacket of the late Jawaharlal Nehru stood the test of time and there are still many including the late Dev Anand who loved being seen with the red flower seductively adorning their jackets.

But rumour has it that such cult fashions are slowly moving away from jackets and roses to actual physical appearances. Though changing one's physical self to look like someone else, especially a new world leader is not as easy as wearing a jacket or sticking a rose on one's suit, which a worried association found as they met:

It was at the International Barbers Association's emergency meeting at some unknown place that barbers all over the world showed their agitation, "Trump seems to be making a comeback,"

decided not to proceed with such suggestions.

There was a commotion somewhere in the seats at the end of the huge hall, and he suddenly looked with interest as an old barber put up his hand, "I think," said the man, his voice trembling with age, "That I have the solution!"

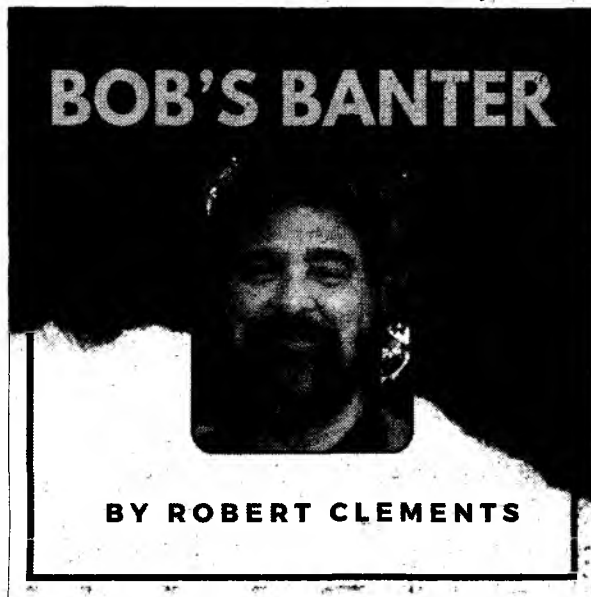
"Hear, hear!" shouted the delegates in unison.

"But," continued the ancient delegate, "It is not, you barbers, hair stylists or whatever you call yourselves who can do it..."

"Then who can?" shouted the delegates, "And who are you?"

"Quiet!" shouted the President of the International Barbers Association, banging his gavel onto the table, as other delegates gave vent to their frustration by drowning out the feeble voice of the old man. He knew members were fed up, but he also knew any suggestion was welcome at this moment, and could be the solution to the elusive Trump Haircut, "Silence!" he shouted, "Let our old friend speak!"

The members reluctantly turned with disinterest towards the old man and even gave him a mike to hear more clearly the feeble



screamed a haircutting delegate with a buzz cut, his voice filled with anguish and concern, "but we are not able to master the Trump haircut!" The other delegates in the large hall shook their heads in acknowledgement and looked at one another in despair. "It is indeed a serious problem!" shouted a delegate from India, "Hundreds and thousands of our youth in every city in our country want to have the Trump look, have even got their hair dyed flaxen like Donald, but finally when we cut their hair we never get it right!"

Again, all the other members in the room shook their heads in agreement. They all seemed to have faced the same problem, and the feeling of despair was turning into a deeper sense of impending gloom. "I have not been paid by many of my clients because they leave my saloon disappointed with the result!" wept a barber from South Korea. "I know the North Koreans are laughing at my attempt to imitate the American president-elect, but what am I to do, all the youth want that same look!"

From his lofty podium, the President of the International Barbers Association realized with deep concern the magnitude of the problem affecting barbers throughout the world. He had heard rumours about the unsuccessfulness of haircutters giving their clients the Trump cut, had even seen some of the best barbers in the world weeping with frustration over their inability to master the technique, and after much contemplation and deliberation had called this extraordinary emergency meeting to find a solution to this prodigious problem of what he thought was a mammoth proportion. But all he saw was more and more frustration with no answers. "Have you tried changing your tools?" he asked half-heartedly, knowing even as he spoke that like a carpenter a barber always blamed his tools for shoddy workmanship.

"What do you want us to use? New Zealand sheep shears?" asked a delegate disdainfully as other barbers sniggered, and the president

voice, "I was Hitler's barber," said the ancient.

The was another uproar in the hall, and the president continued banging his hammer till the members settled down to listen.

"When I was Hitler's barber," continued the old man, his voice getting stronger, "there were many barbers who tried to imitate the Fuhrer's hairstyle during the mad mah's lifetime. We failed. We also had a meeting like this, researched and deliberated on the problem and do you know what we got to know?"

"Speak up old man, we are listening!" said a few members, now all ears to find a solution.

"We found," said the old man, "that such haircuts were successful only when the customer had the mindset of the person who's hairstyle he wanted to imitate! So, to have Trumps hairstyle, your client needs to have Trump's mind. And if you don't, you need a psychologist alongside the barber to work on the customer to make it happen!"

"Hear! Hear!" shouted all the delegates, "The old man could be right!" "I am right!" whispered the old barber.

"We will employ a psychologist in every saloon," said a stylish barber from Brooklyn. "Yes, that will work," quivered the voice of Hitler's barber, "A specialist who will be able to thrust paranoia and hate and anger into your clients! One who will fill suspicion into their hearts and make each Trump Cut client a builder of racist walls, he will surround himself with! Then you will see the haircut succeed!"

The old delegate, Hitler's former barber, sat down, as all the members of the International Barbers Association roared with approval and carried forth a resolution to employ psychologists and therapists in every barber shop, worldwide. Professional men and women who would counsel their clients in negativity and crassness till the Trump Cut sat successfully on their heads..!

Read more in the author's motivational book DARE available on Amazon in bobshanter@gmail.com

Letters to the Editor

Church not a private entity

Editor, I cannot hold my studied silence any longer over improprieties of churches no matter whatever denomination. And to all believers, church hierarchical leaders and layman, kindly reflect and introspect deeply before brushing off misappropriation of funds, assets and church properties as an "in-house" matter! It is God's money remember and God is Never an in-house issue! I winced when reading responses of learned church leaders berating members who made public the swindling of crores!

And rightly so, I believe, (and support), D. Kharwanning and M. Sohtun in thanking 'The Shillong Times - The 5th pillar of the Mawkhair Church' for publishing letters and news reports over the years. (ST 9th July, 2024).

The imprisonment of Moderators, Bishops and priests of the Church of North and South India for fraud and embezzlements must stand out as a deterrent for all churches. Leaders and elected committees of churches cannot afford to be selective when inquiring into church funds being misappropriated nor can they compartmentalise the matter.

Our Diocese of North East India too is a divided, nay fractured lot, including

the members of The All Saints' Cathedral. How can we permit God's money to be misused in the guise of doing His work shocks me. For God's work is not clandestine! It doesn't line the pockets of his servants! Nor does it swell the bank balances of His servants substantially!

I was hoping I'd be summoned last year by the Synod to depose in administrative and financial issues of the Diocese, but sadly the Synod never responded to the Pastorate Committee nor does it respond to new matters of improprieties under the current leadership! So much for sweeping things under the carpet in the name of "In-house" policies!

Yours etc., Kevin Phillips Shillong - 19

Complete absence of Rule of Law

Editor, Few recent incidents in our State Meghalaya confirms that the State is actually being run by 'non-state actors' instead of by the democratically elected Government or the administrative machinery. The elected representatives although have taken solemn oath under the Constitution of India to protect the rights of all citizens irrespective of caste, creed or religion but in reality, none of them has

been found to uphold their constitutional obligation as far as protecting rights of non-tribal citizens are concerned. Here any group or organization routinely tramples upon the democratic and constitutional rights of non-tribals be they from the State or from other parts of the Indian Union in the name of protecting the 'indigenous community.' Meghalaya is perhaps the unique State in the country where a village council (Dorbar Shnong) has the power to expel all non-tribal people as a consequence to a 'drunken brawl' involving only two persons. It is however, not clear which article of our sacred Constitution or which enacted law grants such sweeping powers to a Village Council of Meghalaya to punish an entire population on the basis of their race for an alleged criminal incident.

Similarly, fellow Indian citizens hailing from other states entering Meghalaya or transiting through it are branded as "illegal immigrants" with impunity and are subjected to harassment by 'non-state actors' on the pretext of "illegal influx", a term which is used primarily to target fellow Indian citizens from other states of our country. The inaction on the part of the Government to uphold their constitutional responsibilities proves that they are merely occupying the 'chairs' without any authority to rule which is nothing but complete subversion of established democratic principles.

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

State Reservation Policy

Editor, We are all aware of the team that has been assigned the very important task of examining Meghalaya's Reservation Policy. The Committee has two eminent jurists in Justice (Retired) Mool Chand Garg of the Madhya Pradesh High Court and Justice (Retired) Dr Satish Chandra of the Allahabad High Court. It also has a leading sociologist Prof. D. V. Kumar from the Dept of Sociology, NEHU, Shillong apart from experts in Population Studies and Economics. It goes without saying then, that this is indeed a very high-profile team and without a doubt a truly efficient one to look at the Reservation Policy of Meghalaya.

When the team was formed, Meghalaya's Cabinet Minister Ampareen Lyngdoh said that the task at hand would be for the Committee to study the current Reservation Policy and recommend modifications, if necessary and to undertake wide-ranging consultations with all stakeholders and visit various locations of the state to solicit the views of all stakeholders.

The Expert Committee,

which was formed in September 2023 (if my memory does not fail me), has been asked to submit its report to the Meghalaya government within 12 months. While I understand it is no easy feat to take up a task as sensitive as this one, every stakeholder has provided, as desired by the Committee, suggestions and comments with the hope that the Committee would give recommendations at the earliest. Now it is upto the Committee to examine the various suggestions and comments which have been received and come out with a policy which takes into account various dimensions of the issue. While doing so, the Committee needs to consider historical and sociological factors that prompted the Reservation Policy in Meghalaya. The sooner the Committee gives its recommendations, the better it is for the State of Meghalaya.

Yours etc., Shemlang Lyngdoh, Via email

BJP's missed opportunities in Meghalaya

Editor, The BJP's alliance with the NPP in Meghalaya has been largely unproductive, benefiting only a couple of MLAs while the state continues to grapple with fundamental infrastructure issues like poor roads, inad-

equated education, and a lack of clean water. As a central party, the BJP has failed to advocate effectively for the people's rights, choosing instead to hide behind the NPP.

In stark contrast, smaller parties like the VPP have made a tangible impact in the state. The people have entrusted them with the chance to bring about much-needed change. For the BJP to establish a foothold in Meghalaya, it must empower local youth leaders who are educated and capable of driving real transformation.

The state's urgent needs in transportation, education, and infrastructure require immediate attention. The BJP should prioritize providing the Inner Line Permit (ILP) and including the Khasi and Garo languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Mere token gestures like filing RTIs from air-conditioned rooms are insufficient; the party must engage directly with the people and develop a comprehensive strategy to address their needs.

If the BJP fails to adapt and respond to these challenges, it risks becoming irrelevant in Meghalaya.

Yours etc., R Sarki, Shillong

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

"Fear is the mother of foresight."

— Thomas Hardy

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Single motherhood dilemma in Meghalaya

WHEN the Chairperson, National Commission for Women (NCW), Rekha Sharma who was recently in Shillong was asked by media persons as to her views on the high number of single mothers in Meghalaya, she expressed her ignorance on the matter. Later she was told that the Meghalaya State Commission for Women (MSCW) had in 2022 released the report on single mothers and their challenges. This Report evidently did not reach the NCW. The State Commission released the report captioned, 'Exploratory Study on the Socio-Economic Status and Problems of Single Mothers in Meghalaya,' which highlighted significant challenges faced by 3,078 single mothers across seven districts in Meghalaya. The Report says that 46.2% of these women were illiterate and 28.4% had only primary education. Many of these women, whether deserted, abandoned, or widowed, bear the responsibility of supporting their families. The burden of women in a matrilineal society is that children remain with their mothers when the couple are divorced or the woman is abandoned by her partner/husband.

This study is important considering the large number of single mothers in Meghalaya. The study however highlighted the significant challenges faced by single mothers in 3078 households. The study was conducted in 7 districts (according to Census 2011) and 18 Blocks in a total of 122 villages in the rural area and localities/wards in urban areas. The study covered 2322 households, 87 villages and 35 localities/wards in urban areas of Meghalaya. Fieldwork for this study was conducted in October 2016 to June 2017. Additionally, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)- 5 had stated that 42% of households in Meghalaya are led by single mothers. Research questions for the study included - How many single mothers are there in the state? 2. What is the socio-economic status of single mothers? 3. What is the material well-being of single mothers? 4. What is the physical and mental health of single mothers?

The problem with the State Commission Report is that it is not available online and hence the NCW Chairperson can be forgiven for not having an inkling about matrilineal Meghalaya's most pressing problem which is a contradiction in terms. The study was aimed at understanding how women access resources from the state, their familial ties, social networks and support systems and was aimed at helping the state to make interventions to alleviate the sufferings of single mothers. The Report however was not even discussed in the State Assembly and no resolution was moved on how it could be used to make special interventions to assist single mothers. It is fair therefore that a second more robust study on single mothers is conducted within a definite timeline.

Letters to the Editor

Take action KSU!

Editor,
The recent events as reported by the media are deeply concerning. I urge members of the Khasi Students Union (KSU) to refrain from vigilantism. Let us collaborate with state enforcement agencies to address issues related to illegal activities or migrants. It is commendable that the KSU often highlights health concerns to state authorities. However, I believe our collective efforts could be better focused on enhancing our education system as it is the backbone of growth and development of our people.

Our school education curriculum under MBOSE is not on par with the ICSE or CBSE boards, which hinders our students from competing effectively on broader platforms for higher studies. Similarly, the curriculum at our universities may not adequately prepare our youth for current job requirements. I urge the KSU to prioritize advocacy for curriculum improvements in school education and universities. This requires sustained efforts and follow-ups with the authorities, rather than a single meeting with the Minister or respective authorities.

Let us channel our energy

towards constructive initiatives that will bring about growth and development in our beloved State.

Yours etc.,
Melani Nongrum,
Via email

Male Nurses at NEIGRIHMS

Editor,
A few days ago, I visited a friend who was admitted at NEIGRIHMS hospital and what I had seen really touched me. Though I had tried to let it pass but my conscience doesn't allow me to do so. Finally I decided to put my thoughts in the public domain because I don't wish anyone to go through the same experience; even if they are my enemies. In the same ward as my friend, a few beds away, I saw two guys who look like test cricket players with their dirty white uniform who looked like they have not shaved in ages. They were trying to put an IV cannula in a lady patient's hand. I can see that they were struggling to find the vein to insert the needle through and in the process they had caused a lot of pain and agony to the patient to the point where her hand bled. After they tried with the left hand with no success, they again tried with the right hand while the patient covered her face with a small

Street vendors of Shillong: What is their story?

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

What do we do with the street vendors in Shillong?

This question has plagued urban administrators since the time of Mukul Sangma. It was during his tenure as the Chief Minister that the Meghalaya Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, was passed to regulate people conducting business by the side of the streets. This Act was announced through a notification on December 8, 2014. What was surprising about this act was that a national law on street vendors had already been passed by Parliament in the same year. This is the 2014 Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, which came into effect in May 2014. Made under the concurrent list of the Constitution, the Central Act would have precedence over the State Act if both were found to be in conflict. Despite this, the Government of Meghalaya brought out its own State Act, which removed many of the progressive sections from the Central Act. This brought the government into conflict with the street vendors, who had by then organized themselves into the Meghalaya and Greater Shillong Progressive Hawkers and Street Vendors Association (MGSPHSVA), created in June 2016 to campaign for the rights and welfare of the street vendors in the state.

There were rounds of discussions with the government, but they could not arrive at a consensus. The government wanted to remove the street vendors from the commercial areas (which was a violation of the Central Act since existing markets cannot be declared as no-vending zones), and at one point, the street vendors were banned from conducting their business. The government stationed security personnel with automatic weapons to prevent the vendors from sitting on the roadside. In many cases, wares were confiscated, and vendors were asked to come to court to get them back (more on this later). In the meantime, for three days street vendors protested in front of the place where they worked, holding their details written on a placard, asking the administration to come and do the survey as mandated by the Central Act. According to the Central Act, nobody can be evicted until an in-situ survey has been conducted to verify the credentials of the vendors. The government again tried to violate that by calling for people to apply for vending licenses from the Municipality. Realizing that such an approach had the risk of giving licenses to those who are not street vendors, MGSPHSVA boycotted the exercise and

continued with the protest. The case finally went to the High Court, where the deliberations that happened and the kind of documents produced will itself require another article. Suffice it to say that the case was set for a long haul.

In August 2022, the new state government, led by Conrad Sangma, decided to repeal the 2014 State Act. A decision was made to adopt the Central Act, which had been the demand of the street vendors from the beginning. However, six years were wasted in which the street vendors had to struggle to make a living. I was personally involved in all of this through Thma U Rangli-Juki (TUR), which was instrumental in organizing the street vendors and leading the legal challenge supporting MGSPHSVA in court. Analyzing the difference between the Central Act and the State Act, conducting workshops with street vendors to explain the difference between the two, and coordinating the protests were some of the responsibilities I shared with the other members of TUR. One thing that has always stuck with me from this experience is the human stories that I encountered during the process. I am going to share some of these stories.

One story that was particularly heartbreaking was that of a lady who was asked, to appear before the court to retrieve her wares, after they had been confiscated by the officials. We happened to meet her during one of the hearings. She told us that she used to sell food sitting on a footpath in front of a government office. People from the office would often come and buy food from her. One day she was asked to shut down her business, and her goods were confiscated. To retrieve it, she was told to appear before the court. The irony was that the people who did this to her were the same people who used to buy food from her. Carrying her child on her back, she reached the court. There, she was told that there was no case against her and she did not have to come to court. Imagine the cruel joke played on her just because she was a poor woman whose only crime was trying to earn a living through honest means.

During one of the meetings with street vendors, we met a young man who was selling garments on roadside. This young man must have been in his mid-20s, but he had already been in the business for a long time. He told us that, through his small business, he was able to send his brother to school. A similar story was told to us by another elderly lady, who

informed us that she was able to provide for her children's education by doing business on the roadside. One of them is a boy who later completed his graduation and helped TUR and MGSPHSVA give free tuition to children from underprivileged families.

According to the Central Act, the total number of vendors in an area cannot exceed 2.5 % of the population of the ward, zone, town, or city. Based on this calculation, we found that the total number of street vendors that can be allowed to do business in East Shillong, North Shillong, South Shillong, West Shillong, and Pynhrong was 3473. This means that for more than six years, 3000+ people were able to pay their rents, buy medicine, get married, have children, send them to school, and hope that when they die one day they can do so with dignity and respect. This is the biggest achievement of the movement, and the street vendors are still fighting to maintain those gains.

At the time when the struggle was at its peak, there were some distressing moments as well. Since street vendors come from poor backgrounds, many of them stay in low-income areas that are ethnically mixed. Time and again, such locations are the target of miscreants who want to intimidate the non-indigenous population of the state. During the 2017 anti-railways agitation, one such location was subjected to a petrol bomb attack. One of the houses attacked belonged to a member of MGSPHSVA who was staying there with her children. The attack left one of her child seriously wounded, with burn injuries on both hands and face. This was not a planned attack on the family, but they became collateral damage from the hate politics that has for long infected the state. In fact, one of the ways in which the movement was targeted by those who were against the street vendors was by trying to paint a communal picture. There were allegations that the majority of the street vendors belonged to the non-indigenous community, and the business allowed such people to settle in the state. Like the claim of illegal immigration, this was also a complete lie. MGSPHSVA is the largest organization of street vendors in Meghalaya, and it keeps a complete record of all the details of its members. The documents showed that nearly 80% of the street vendors were Khasi, mostly women. Most of those who were not Khasi had an EPIC from Meghalaya, while only a few had an EPIC from outside the state. I personally came across an incident that showed how

racism was being used to target the movement.

During the three days when street vendors were standing in different locations around the city waiting for the administration to come and take their names for registration (mentioned above), I was standing with a group outside the Reliance Shopping Mall in Khyndailad. People would come and ask us about the problems, look at the placards, and continue on their way. My group comprised people who were of non-indigenous origin. One Kong came to us and expressed her support, but at the same time, she kept asking about the residential status of those standing. When somebody answered that he or she has an EPIC from outside Meghalaya, Kong would get agitated. The paranoia of being overwhelmed by outsiders was so intense that oppression of the poor was not only tolerated but also applauded.

One thing that some may have noticed is that I have not given any hint about the ethnicity of the street vendors whose experiences have been narrated. Some of them are Khasi, while others are non-Khasi. I will not tell who is which. This is because I want to do an experiment. For those who have stayed on reading till this point, I would like them to assign ethnicities to the street vendors. If you are a Jaibynriew-loving Khasi who feels that only Khasi should have any rights in the state, disparage the pain and suffering of someone you believe is a non-Khasi. For those who you think are Khasi, feel sorry for the problems they had to go through and get angry at the government for having put them through all of it. However, just make sure that you hate the right person, because you could actually be cursing a Khasi, which will be quite ironic. As for those who believe that street vendors, whether Khasi or non-Khasi, should not be allowed to do business, feel free to hate all of them. This particular group doesn't have to feel guilty about being racist.

The street vendors, who have fought a long battle, will continue to stand their ground. To be fair, this government has been accommodating their concerns, and things are moving in the right direction. However, through their experience, the street vendors have learned to be vigilant, and they will remain so until they get their rights as provided to them by the Constitution. Hopefully, they get this soon and are allowed to live with dignity and respect.

(The views expressed in the article are those of the authors and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organization or institution)

A Proposal for the MIG-47 Project

By Ajit Ranade

The reader might think that this column is a proposal for a new fighter aircraft development project in partnership with Russia. Especially on the occasion of Prime Minister Modi's visit to that country. After all, the acquisition and operation of MiG aircrafts have been a cornerstone of Indo-Russian defense relations. The MiG-21 became a backbone of the Indian Air Force since the early 1960s and it was the most prominent aircraft supplied by the Soviet Union. If MiG-21 played a stellar role in the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971, then MiG-21 and MiG-27 were very effective in Kargil in 1999. The experience of operating and maintaining the MiGs contributed significantly to India's indigenous aircraft program, and HAL's Tejas is a testament to that development. There is a MiG-29 upgrade programme with enhanced avionics, radar and weapon systems.

There are no MiG-47 aircrafts in sight (and some people confuse the Sukhoi-47 with MiG-47). Besides India seems to be veering away from MiG series toward Tejas and Dassault's Rafale. This column hence is about a new and more ambitious project 'MiG'-47 which is Make India Great by 2047. This may sound like the 'Make America Great Again,' (MAGA) campaign of President Trump! Or it is in the same spirit of 'Vikshit Bharat 2047' announced by our PM, which aims to see India a developed country by 2047 when we celebrate hundred years as an independent nation.

'MiG'-47 is about working for the glory of our nation. Before we proceed, we need to ask a basic question. Is nationalism going out of fashion, or is there a resurgence? Is it waning or waxing? The concept of nations bounded by geography is perhaps only three centuries old, hence the nation state is a relatively new concept. And the factors leading to its waning influence are globalization, technology and existence of supra-national entities like the European Union, customs unions, military alliances, trade blocs and so on. Nationalist sentiments can be diluted by exposure to international and multi-cultural influences. Member states in entities such as the European Union happily surrender their sovereignty at least partially. For instance, the member nations do not control monetary policy, and have to abide by free trade rules applicable across two dozen nations. The recent electoral outcome in the UK might be a vote to roll back BREXIT.

Movement of refugees and presence of large diaspora also somewhat dilute nationalist sentiments. Conversely, there is evidence of resurgence of aggressive nationalism too, especially manifesting in anti-refugee and anti-immigrant movements. We see some of this in Hungary, Poland or in sub-national independence movements in Catalonia and Scotland. There is anxiety about unemployment, blamed on outsiders i.e. people from other nations (e.g. Bangladeshi intruders). Remember Obama campaigned about how jobs were being stolen from Buffalo to Bangalore? Or by China? Nationalist feelings are also stirred by geopolitics, border conflicts, threat to national security and sabre-rattling rhetoric. And to add to all this is muscular and sometimes ugly manifestation on social media. The jury is out whether nationalism is going out of fashion, or will become even more entrenched. Hence let's talk about 'MiG'-47. This has economic dimensions, of raising India's per-capita income in the high middle-

income bracket (say 20,000 dollars per person, in present terms). For that to happen the national income must go up ten-fold in the next twenty-five years. This means a growth rate of 9.6 percent per year in dollar terms. Since the rupee as a currency may remain stable, or if inflation is in control, then can even become stronger, this growth rate is quite feasible, not impossible. It has to be sustained for more than two decades. 'MiG'-47 also has an ease of living dimension. That refers to safe and abundant drinking water availability, housing made from environmentally sustainable resources, extensive public transportation availability in cities, and air quality which is much less toxic. Since income growth will be energy intensive, it is imperative that renewable energy growth is faster by a factor of two or three. India is the global leader of solar alliance. The night storage of solar energy should be planned in a distributed and diffused manner, sitting in millions of small automotive rechargeable batteries. That is, we invert the role of car and scooter batteries. They drain at night, running household electricity, and get recharged by solar in the day. Each one of us, like the proverbial squirrels who along with monkeys helped build the stone bridge to Lanka for Lord Ram, act as solar energy storage devices.

Air quality will improve greatly with a focus on sustainable strategies in the automotive and housing sectors. The latter consumes cement, which is made from calcium carbonate, a major source of carbon dioxide. Hence the construction sector has to be radically reoriented to reduce its carbon footprint. The third dimension of 'MiG'-47 is building of human capital, through education, skill training and enhancing productivity and innovation capabilities. This is the toughest ask. It calls for herculean effort and reforms on multiple fronts. Education (along with agriculture) continues to be unreformed and shackled, although the National Education Policy 2020 is a step in the right direction. Here is a small tweak. How about if we mandate that senior civil servants must educate their child till class 5 in the panchayat or municipal schools where they have their posting? That will align incentives magically. How about that parent teacher associations will assess the performance of teachers in every government school, annually? That is to say that parents will have a say in the school governance.

The fourth dimension of 'MiG'-47 is aggressive, relentless and continuous decentralization of power, to the lowest i.e. the third tier of government. This is the closest to the people but is least empowered in terms of decision autonomy, funding and functioning. The more power gets centralized, the more we get deeper into the rut or quagmire of politics of power. The only long-term way is massive effort of decentralization of governance and power. The fifth dimension of 'MiG'-47 is cultural, social, religious and spiritual. Our country has been blessed with unimaginable diversity in every conceivable facet, and yet we also are the world's showcase for harmony and unity in diversity. The key message of India to the world is "samanvay", not tolerance but acceptance, not just co-existence but co-flourishing and blooming.

(Dr. Ajit Ranade is a noted Pune-based economist) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

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"For every good reason there is to lie, there is a better reason to tell the truth."

—Bo Bennett

The Shillong Times

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Jobs in 'abundance'

GOVERNMENTS in democracies demonstrate a temptation to reel out figures in the form of official statistics that may or may not be true to the core - the idea being to project an image of a performing dispensation. By experience, informed sections of the public are used to taking these with a pinch of salt. They know the truth may lie elsewhere. Statistics cannot be manufactured, but can be manipulated. Governments do this all the time. Take, for instance, the periodic claims of the Narendra Modi government that the jobs scenario in the country is improving vastly. The figures released by the Labour department now, for instance, have it that 20 million new "employment opportunities" were generated each year since the 2017-18 fiscal.

For one, it is not easy to counter such claims unless robust and credible research is done on the basis for such claims. However, independent tracking agencies can be depended on to pick holes. This time, for instance, a Citibank report made light of the government claim by concluding that only less than 9 million jobs were added every year to the workforce in the country since 2012. Significantly, this was the time when the economic growth under the two UPA dispensations began slowing down, and this was from where Narendra Modi picked up the thread. Eventually, a scenario arose when the growth in manufacturing and other sectors began further dwindling. From a high of nine plus, the GDP growth fell to around 4 and then began slowly climbing up. The manufacturing sector failed to gain momentum, also because of the heavy reliance on Chinese goods and the huge corruption in the Indian systems that discouraged entrepreneurs from venturing into new initiatives. We are "happy" rather with what we ship from China.

Fact is also that, while the industrial sector suffered despite some strides under Make-In-India, the agriculture sector showed robust growth in recent years on the back of successive favourable monsoons and other factors. Experts quoted an RBI database to show that agricultural work opportunities contributed to 48 million of the 100 million jobs generated between 2017 and 2023. This is a field where corruption by bureaucrats or politicians cannot undercut human initiative. The toil of the agricultural workers and the efforts of farmers put together, the agriculture sector remained buoyant. Fact, however, is the formal jobs sector, where regular salaries are a norm, is still a weak spot. Salaries of those in the formal sector are rarely increasing, except for those in government services or in top business establishments. Private enterprises are still citing the excuses of the adverse Covid-conditions since the year 2020. Increases in salaries for the workforce would have a salutary effect on the markets and, by extension, economic growth too.

Letters to the Editor

Mawkhair Church: The other point of view

Editor,
As an avid reader of your esteemed daily, I have noted with great concern the matter relating to the sordid affairs in Mawkhair Presbyterian Church, Shillong. Differing and contrasting views have been expressed on it, which is fair enough. However, being a member of the Christian community, though of a different denomination, I am a little perplexed that the unsavoury affairs of the church had to be raised in public by its own members, which is invariably unheard of and therefore very unfortunate. Some of the church members might have felt so right and justified in lampooning the church and its leaders the way they did, but their actions and motives might not have the effect of achieving anything except surely hurting the church and sowing the seeds of dissensions among its members in the process. Perhaps, it may have given a sense of gratification and vindication to the protagonists of the whole episode.

Alleged misappropriation of church funds of any proportion cannot and should not be condoned nor allowed to be brushed aside just like that, much less kept under wraps. The truth must be unearthed. However, I am of the view that the matters that were raised are part of

the institutional problem of the church that can and should only be addressed and fixed internally through the institutional process and mechanism which I hope the concerned church has got in place in accordance with the ways of God and not of men (world). What is needed is divine intervention and retribution which is far above all human discourse and contrivance.

I fervently hope that the church, in the midst of this fiery ordeal, would find ways to set its house in order, the sooner the better, and get everybody especially those discordant and recalcitrant members to the right path of rebuilding the church and preserving its sanctity.

Yours etc.,
S F Diengdoh,
Via email

Polite request to perpetrators of violence

Editor,
The recent incidents of harassment and assault of the non-tribals are both sordid and casual. Sordid as usual for the victims. Casual because bashing of this victimized section is normal in Shillong and its vicinity and murder of a few may be a little serious. Never mind. But its horribly shameful to see all the proverbial ostriches (read Ministers) of the Meghalaya government hiding their heads in the sands of crisis, whenever

There are many things that are not going right in Meghalaya and these are aggravated by the sullenness of polite society. This polite society prefers to keep silent in the face of all kinds of evil because speaking up has consequences and few want to pay the price. This silent and polite society knows that the future of Meghalaya if it continues the way it has is a bleak one. But taking action seems to extract a heavy cost.

Then there is a cacophonous category of loud speech makers who appear especially during the elections but who have now gone into their rabbit holes. They too have decided to take the vow of silence. All of them are silent on the deteriorating rule of law in Meghalaya. This group is the infamous political class that seem to have done a deal with the devil.

While Congress supremo and the present Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi was in Manipur to wipe the tears from the eyes of suffering internal refugees, his Congress Party in Meghalaya has not a word to say and no condemnation against the non-state actors who have been relentlessly pursuing the path of ethnocentricity and spreading hate against defenceless labourers. Those labourers are in Meghalaya because some contractor has brought them here. It is the contractor who should be held up for not following procedures and applying for work permits through proper channels for their labourers. Why assault and intimidate the labourers while being silent on the contractors? Or is this one way of doing a deal with the contractors?

One would have thought that a rejuvenated Congress would be speaking out against all wrongdoings of not just the MDA Government which anyway draws flak irrespective of what it does or does not do but of all other anti-social elements who go around asserting their pseudo-patriotism in the name of the "jaidbyrniew," and that by assaulting helpless non-tribal labourers who are here to earn a livelihood. If there was no vacuum in this labour market, if the locals executed their work professionally and timely and with precision and the contractors have no reason to complain why would they employ

By Patricia Mukhim

labourers from outside the state who they have to provide living accommodation as well?

If the Congress is silent as a mouse in the midst of all the inhuman treatment meted out to other humans, the VPP too is not far behind. But the VPP is an ethnocentric party that has ridden to power during the MP election on the premise of the "jaidbyrniew" politics. So expecting the VPP to call out hate crimes committed by groups that operate along the same premise as them is a futile hope. But since the VPP also never fails to invoke the name of God at every public event does God not shake

rom class) society too will not condemn wrongdoing. Meghalaya society today is so dehumanized that it renders other suffering humans as inconsequential and invisible.

Then there is this group of hot-heads who argue that if they are not there to defend the jaidbyrniew from the "illegal" migrants (for them anyone who is not a Khasi-Pnar is an illegal migrant (poi-ei), then Meghalaya would have become a Tripura, without understanding the historical background of that state. They rage if only to convince themselves of their own rightness. But it's

and the systems of value on which such ends of life are based. These systems of value are 'beliefs about how life should be lived, what men and women should be and do.' It is about learning to live and let live and not to expect conformity. We are at a point when societal debates are urgently needed on whether we should only be loyal to a particular community or work at universal solidarity with all humankind; whether we have respect for authority or individual autonomy. Do we want social progress which comes with its share of challenges and upheavals or do we only look for social stability and resist change?

Instruments like the Inner Line Permit (ILP) have limited utility if the people entrusted with implementing it are prone to taking money and letting in anyone who pays. Then other groups will have to police the police but that group too cannot be expected to be above board where money is concerned. So laws that depend on strict policing which is something we haven't seen in a long time in Meghalaya are just placebos that will not yield anything. The politicians know this very well and so does the educated class but all will shout in unison - We Want ILP.

For decades Meghalaya has seen performative activism that has not resulted in any real change on the ground. Meghalaya is also infamous for its lack of reasoned public discourse. Whatever debates happen on social media are actually tit for tat crudities full of the tantrums of the merchants of rage. Politics too has sunk to a point where people regard those in other parties not as political rivals who can sometimes find common ground but as sworn enemies. Think of the Congress and the BJP sitting across the table to discuss the pressing problems of Meghalaya. Can that ever happen? Political parties should be questioning why the Labour Department is amiss in its duties. This will seal the vacuum that allows other actors with the wrong intent to fill in.

At this point I only know one thing - our collective silence is opening up the floodgates for disruptive elements to capture spaces they should not. It may not affect us now but this culture has diminishing returns which will have devastating impacts in the not so near future.

or pressure groups and as we are witnessing in the last couple of days the members from different self-styled unregistered organisations are now out in the open like wild geese. They erect check gates at their fancies, they can check papers at their whims and police are just mute spectators. Genuine citizens of the country face embarrassment unnecessarily when people who are not law enforcers check documents? Aren't these actions demeaning and worth condemnation from law abiding citizens?

The CM boasts of making Meghalaya a tourist hub but how and when will that materialise? Don't these daily drama scenes of harassing travellers, tourists, and visitors on the pretext of checking documents by non-state actors not affect the industry in the long run? When will our society evolve or when will dorbar shnong become facilitators instead of issuing diktat?

It is worth reminding all readers that when Dr. Mukul Sangma was the CM. Such abuse of the law and state machinery was seldom heard, but for the last 6 years in Meghalaya law and order is collapsing and gunda raj is blooming.

Yours etc.,
Ibalamon K.nair
Shillong -1

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Silence of Complicity from Political Parties & Civil Society

"For decades Meghalaya has seen performative activism that has not resulted in any real change on the ground. Meghalaya is also infamous for its lack of reasoned public discourse. Whatever debates happen on social media are actually tit for tat crudities full of the tantrums of the merchants of rage."

their conscience when groups take the law in their hands without any respect for laid down procedures? The VPP can take on these Government departments that fail to perform their duties but it cannot remain silent when non-state actors pretend to be the government.

Now coming to the BJP in Meghalaya whose leader is on a European tour to ostensibly hold the peace of this precariously balanced world, the party is as silent as every other political group in Meghalaya. One of their state leaders is a former top cop but now seems to have mellowed down after having contested the elections and being a full-time party worker. The two BJP MLAs too are tamed. It's a case of "If you can't beat them, join them." And if political parties have failed us there's also not a single politician with the moral fibre to call out this constant taking over of the law by those with the propensity to break the law.

Now if the political class is silent for reasons of protecting their vote bank, we have an enlightened society that is otherwise very cultured and many are avid church-goers. But this very 'civil' (donbu-

time for such people to be suspicious of their own rage and to ask themselves as to who or what is igniting that rage. Yes rage might make them feel luxurious because it makes them convinced of their own moral rightness but ultimately that rage blinds them and turns them into hate-filled monsters. Such people are so consumed with self-righteous fury that they become cruel and authoritarian zeitgeists of this 21st century. People with this attitude force themselves to believe that the enemy is out to destroy them and that belief tells them that savagery is necessary. But that savagery also gives them a sense of power especially when they can go around committing violence unchecked by the arms of the law.

What we need in Meghalaya is to embrace a certain way of thinking that is fundamental to being citizens of a democracy. We need what philosopher Isaiah Berlin calls "value pluralism," which is an ethical concept of systematically examining the relations of human beings to one another, the conceptions, interests and ideals from which human ways of treating one another spring,

actions of the dorbar shnong. In complete absence of rule of law of these so-called village institutions continue with their diktats and the government seems to pay no heed at all. Despite the administration's crackdown on illegal collection of money the dorbars openly loot the public in the name of dorbar funds and upkeep of the locality.

In municipal areas where citizens pay taxes for civic amenities, the dorbars also collect monthly fees, registration of tenant's fees, residential certificate fees, witness to land sale fees and many others from time to time. The citizens are made to suffer deliberately especially the non-locals as they cannot participate in any dorbar meetings but pay whenever forced too. All these actions by dorbars in urban localities are in total violation of the fundamental right of an individual. And the irony is nobody dares to complain nor raise voices as in dorbar system ostracization is common and no one will step forward to support even if the cause is genuine.

The state government of Meghalaya has failed its common citizens miserably to uphold the rule of law while those who escape from harassments are the handful few high level individuals but undoubtedly the common man faces the brunt on a daily basis. It is a common state of affairs that the government is scared of taking action against anyone be it dorbars

Europe poised to enter a new period of confrontation between NATO and Russia

Washington summit decision pledging \$43 billion military aid to Ukraine dashes all peace hopes

By Nitya Chakraborty

Europe has entered a dangerous period with all the potential of the 28 month old Ukraine war crossing the border into other parts of the continent. The summit of the 32 nation North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) held in Washington on July 9 to 11 has decided to pledge US \$43 billion worth of military aid to Ukraine next year and what is more, has declared their intention to admit Ukraine to NATO as a full member. Ukraine President Zelensky attended the summit hosted by US President Joe Biden.

The immediate upshot is that the current efforts of the United Nations for cease fire to stop massive destruction of lives and property in the country, will have no meaning as the rejuvenated Ukrainian president is going back to his country to be ready for intensifying the war efforts against the Russians bolstered by the granting of massive military aid from the NATO. Significantly, this year is the 75th year of NATO which was founded by the western nations in 1949 at the height of cold war between the United States and the then Soviet Union ruled by Joseph Stalin.

The summit decisions have all the bearings of a belligerent West led by the USA to corner Russia in other areas of Europe including the present countries of east Europe. USA has been making efforts for military deployment in Germany on

capability of the Ukrainian military against the Russian attacks. The July 10 decision of the NATO summit was meant to appease the Ukrainian president that the western nations will not allow Ukraine to be defeated by the Russians.

The summit declaration also says allies will continue to support Ukraine's "irreversible path to full Euro-Atlantic integration, including NATO membership." It affirms that "Ukraine's future is in NATO."

However, the declaration also underscores that Ukraine can only join when all current members agree. The United States and Germany in particular are against rushing the process as per diplomatic sources. But other NATO member states want to demonstrate that Russia cannot put the brakes on Ukraine joining NATO by waging war against the country.

It is recalled that NATO has accepted the idea of Ukrainian membership in principle since 2008, while Ukraine has had its NATO membership ambitions enshrined in its national constitution since 2019. Alongside the \$43 billion pledge, NATO leaders also agreed to launch a project for the training of Ukraine's military. Such move is taken for the first time. There are reports with the Pentagon, that the Ukrainian military personnel could not use many sophisticated weapons supplied by

"All the decisions taken at the summit are meant to anger the Russian President Vladimir Putin who in the course of his discussions in the last two years made the point that Russia would never tolerate the NATO membership of Ukraine and President Zelensky was being egged by the USA and the other NATO nations to continue the war rejecting all the bilateral and multilateral negotiations on ceasefire."

the plea that President Putin has imperial ambitions in expanding Russian influence in the nearby countries and that should be combated in collaboration with Germany. Accordingly, the US and Germany in a joint statement announced that the US will deploy its military and long range cruise missiles in Germany as a deterrent. The phased deployment of these US missiles will start from 2026.

All the decisions taken at the summit are meant to anger the Russian President Vladimir Putin who in the course of his discussions in the last two years made the point that Russia would never tolerate the NATO membership of Ukraine and President Zelensky was being egged by the USA and the other NATO nations to continue the war rejecting all the bilateral and multilateral negotiations on ceasefire. Further, as regards deployment of long range US missiles in Germany, President Putin had conveyed earlier his strong objections to the American officials including President Biden saying the US move would start the cold war again in new form.

The plan to spend US\$ 43 billion in 2025 was proposed by NATO's outgoing Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at a foreign ministers' meeting in Prague in May. However, Stoltenberg had wanted NATO members to make a multi-year commitment to Ukraine in order to show Russia it cannot win the war by waiting for Western support to wither.

Instead, the funding will be reviewed next year. The Ukrainian president recently complained that the western aid has slowed down and this is adversely affecting the

the NATO countries due to lack of training in handling the high tech equipment. So now, the Pentagon experts will take a major responsibility in training the Ukrainian military. Sensing the urgency, the training project starts with immediate effect from July 12.

Interestingly, the summit declaration also calls on China to cease "all material and political support to Russia's war effort." China "cannot enable the largest war in Europe in recent history without this negatively impacting its interests and reputation," says the declaration. This has been stated knowing fully that at the recent summit, both President Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping have underlined their joint stand on global issues and the need for taking a joint approach. President Putin has also got a fresh boost after the World Bank report stated that Russia has joined the high income group of nations like the USA defying all the economic sanctions that have been imposed on Russia in the last few years.

President Putin is expected to expand the war in Ukraine in the wake of the NATO summit decisions. The situation may change in NATO position if Donald Trump wins in the presidential elections in November this year. His policy is to bring down the US share of military aid outside to the minimum. The maverick Republican is sure to dilute the role of NATO as president. But taking the situation as it stands today, the cold war environment has become hotter in Europe with NATO confronting a powerful economically strong Russia (IPA Service)

“Take time for all things: great haste makes great waste.”
— Benjamin Franklin

The Shillong Times

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Waste Management Agency

THE MDA Government cannot be accused of not engaging with the issue of waste management. The Government has given a patient hearing several times to the heads of traditional institutions and other concerned citizens and sought their cooperation in tackling the grotesque sight of the Rivers Umkhrah and Umshyrypi both on their death throes for a number of reasons. Strict discipline is not presently maintained as far as waste collection beyond the Shillong Municipal areas are concerned. Timings are uncertain and so are the number of vehicles available. Add to that the resistance of the areas beyond the Shillong Municipal Corporation to come under its jurisdiction and the stranglehold on those areas by the Autonomous District Councils, which have no resources to deal with waste.

The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council came up with the Solid Waste Management Act in 2020 but what about the liquid wastes draining from people's homes and their propensity to drain their septic tanks directly into the rivers. Merely coming with an Act is not going to change things on the ground. The ADCs were created for a specific purpose related to protection of customary practices and tradition. They don't have the capacity nor resources for development work, which in any case is the brief of the government. In recent times the ADCs have managed to get some garbage carrying trucks through World Bank funding. But the Councils have not been helpful insofar as acquiring land for a solid waste landfill is concerned. Everywhere people are unwilling to give land for a landfill hence for Shillong, Marten is the only available space. But Marten is dealing with waste dating back to 1928. Now a firm is contracted to deal with this legacy waste which will free up a lot of space at Marten.

The MDA Government's plans to circumvent the hurdles of having multiple waste management agencies by bringing in one single Integrated Waste Management Agency to cover the entire Shillong right up to the New Shillong Township is expected to be the game changer. This Agency would function professionally and effectively and would have the competence to adhere to strict pick-up schedules including waste segregation at the household level which is currently blatantly violated despite households having been given the blue and green containers for wet and dry waste. One thing has to be said about housing plans. Why can't the building plans include enough space for wet kitchen waste? Why should everything be brought to the landfill? And why can solid waste composting not be democratised and different Dorbars ceding space for this process? Citizens have become far too dependent on Government for everything while simply sitting back and watching the same Government deal with the problem which is largely created by citizens. Some civic responsibility lies with the people too and it is high time the Government learns to tell people this home truth.

Letters to the Editor

Life of a Rapido driver & Govt regulations

Editor,
I often use Rapido for my daily commutes, finding it reliable and efficient for reaching my destinations on time. My preference is to book rides through the Rapido app, avoiding the unpredictability and high charges of riders operating independently. Engaging with these riders has given me insights into their lives and the challenges they face, which warrant serious consideration by our government.

Recently, a Rapido rider shared his story with me. He is a married man with two children, striving to provide for his family. While government regulations, such as permits, aim to organize and oversee operations, they come at a steep cost. The permit fee of Rs 5000 is burdensome, even for those already affiliated with Rapido. This fee seems more like an attempt by the government to profit from the youth struggling to earn a livelihood than a genuine effort to streamline the industry.

Moreover, the government's interference isn't limited to regulation. The rider mentioned that despite the launch of an OTT platform promoting local talent, there is a glaring lack of government-developed apps akin to Rapido, Ola,

or Uber. Instead of facilitating the growth of these companies and motivating youth through technological innovation, the government seems intent on controlling the market, thereby stifling opportunities for young entrepreneurs.

Our conversation also touched upon the alarming state of pollution in Bynihat, infamous for being one of the most polluted cities. Despite this notoriety, the government appears to turn a blind eye, allowing industries to operate unregulated and wreak havoc on the environment. This leniency starkly contrasts with the stringent measures imposed on young riders simply trying to earn an honest living.

As we were stuck in traffic, our discussion deepened my concern over the government's priorities. It is high time the authorities learn from past mistakes and shift their focus towards the welfare of the youth. The government must balance regulation with support, fostering an environment where young people can thrive both economically and creatively.

Yours etc.,
R Sarki
Shillong

PM Modi's balancing act

Editor,
Apropos of the editorial "Balancing in Russia" (ST 10th July 2024) the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Moscow has

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and North Ireland saw the return of the Left political narrative to the center stage of British's political life as the left-leaning Labour Party led by Keir Starmer secured a landslide victory in the latest general election ending 14 years of Conservative Party rule (2010-2024). The 14 years Conservative reign of Britain was eventful, including the successful implementation of the famous/infamous Brexit, the party producing two youngest Prime Ministers in the country's history (David Cameron and Rishi Sunak, who also is the first ever British-Asian and Hindu to become Prime Minister), two women Prime Ministers (Theresa May and Liz Truss) and shortest-serving Prime Minister lasting just 49 days (Liz Truss, who eventually failed to retain her parliamentary seat). It was however the Conservative Party's inability to provide stable leadership to the country, having as many as five different prime ministers, which became one of the decisive factors that caused the party to suffer one of the worst electoral defeats in its history. This is in contrast with the preceding 13 years of Labour Party's rule (1997-2010) where the country saw only two premiers at the helm of powers of the world's oldest parliamentary democracy.

With the economically and socially left (or center-left) political party assuming power, calling "Change" as its theme for the general election, would the country now abandon the great conservative values that not only define Britain but which have made the United Kingdom a great kingdom/nation for the last one millennia. The 133-page Labour Party Manifesto for the UK General Election 2024 entitled "Change" had no mention of "Religion" while it mentioned the word "LGBT" (and its related issues) only once affirming the party's commitment to "protect LGBT+." While calling the need for Change and embracing the promise of modernity, the Labour party appeared to be mindful of the great British heritage, and the emerging antithetical social forces that are threatening that very heritage. In contrast, the Conservative

Revival of the Left in the UK

Dr. Nsungbemo Ezung

Party is categorical in its manifesto to "give same-sex couples the opportunity to enjoy the institution of marriage", meaning to recognize the same-gender union as a formal marriage. In other words, the Conservative Party of UK supports redefining marriage, which amounts to endorsing the disastrous path towards diluting the most sacred human institution.

When it comes to social issues and their related challenges, it appears like the Conservative Party is more liberal than the Labour's. The British people should not forget that if there is one thing that makes Britain a Great Britain and one of the greatest nations on earth, it is the conservative foundation upon which the nation was built. Marriage, as a union of one man and one woman, family, society and Christianity, as an agent to promote and protect religious freedom are some of the inspiring

growing influence of Indians not just in the UK but around the world. If there is a reason why the world respects India and the world increasingly feels the importance of India in the comity of nations, it is not necessarily because of the kind of leadership India produced at home or what India as a nation is impacting in the world. Rather it is because of the performance and positive impact that the Indian diasporas have wherever they go or live. Indians and Indian-origins representing different professions including statesmen, scientists, economists and technocrats are among the finest that the world admires.

The United Kingdom has just got an Indian-origin completed serving his term as Prime Minister and the United States has another Indian-origin serving as its vice-president are just a few to mention among the many enormous impacts the Indi-

The result of the UK's general election also marked the growing influence of Indian origins in the UK and beyond. A record number of 26 candidates of Indian origins representing both the two major political parties of the UK are elected and set to become members of the British Parliament. This is a reflection of the growing influence of Indians not just in the UK but around the world. If there is a reason why the world respects India and the world increasingly feels the importance of India in the comity of nations, it is not necessarily because of the kind of leadership India produced at home or what India as a nation is impacting in the world.

conservative values that served as a founding pillar of Great Britain and, the world at large has learn those values from them, and the abandonment of those conservative values would mean taking the path of unmaking Britain.

The result of the UK's general election also marked the growing influence of Indian origins (Non-Resident Indians - NRIs) in the UK and beyond. A record number of 26 candidates of Indian origins representing both the two major political parties of the UK are elected and set to become members of the British Parliament. This is a reflection of the

ans are having in the world today. Acknowledging this growing Indian influence, the Labour Party through its manifesto calls for the need to have a "strategic partnership with India" and the need to have with India "free trade agreement" and "co-operation in areas like security, education, technology and climate change". It remains to be seen how the Indian government will read this historic opportunity that is offered by the growing Indian influence (through Indian Origins) in the world, particularly in the West including Europe, the UK and the United States.

The Left revival in the UK

should mean a new direction in the UK-Europe relation. Although rejoining the European Union (EU) seems unlikely in the near future, with the formal divorce between the UK and Europe in place through Brexit, Britain under a new pro-Europe Prime Minister would likely change not only the UK's relation with Europe but the overall UK's Europe policy. In one particular section of the Labour Party's manifesto entitled "Britain Reconnected", the new ruling dispensation reaffirmed that "Britain will remain outside of the EU" and rejected the possibility of returning to the "single market, the customs unions, or freedom of movement" with the rest of Europe. Nevertheless, the Labour Party promised, if voted to power, to "reset the relationship and seek to deepen ties with Europe..." By "Britain Reconnected", the Labour Party could be of the opinion that there was a kind of disconnect in the past between the UK and Europe thereby isolating the UK from the mainstream social, economic and political life of Europe and the need to break that disconnect, and acknowledged healthy relationship with Europe as an indispensable factor for the progress of UK.

A strong and healthy Europe-UK-US relationship/partnership is always a pre-requisite condition for peace and stability not only in the West but in the world in the post-Cold War era. The post-Cold War world order is a unipolar world/pole dominated and controlled by the West i.e. Europe-UK-US political narrative. Yet the West itself is today already crippled with many problems and challenges that are all their own makings. The return of war in Europe in the form of the Russia-Ukraine War, the problem of illegal immigration and the dilution of human and social values where if the West did not find a solution to these problems at the earliest possible time, then these problems could lead to the ultimate downfall of the great western civilization and bringing chaos to the world around. Can the new Labour Government in the UK be a solution to the problems of the West and an agent for ushering in peace and stability in the world?

Parliament after the election, Rahul Gandhi, leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, accused the government of having created two types of jawans - those who would receive pension after retirement and those who would not.

A war hero and gallantry award-winning former navy chief, Admiral Arun Prakash has questioned the combat efficiency of Agniveers. In a post on X, he asked, "A lot of attention is (rightly) being focused on in-service disparities and poor post-demob prospects of young Agniveers. But is anyone worried about the huge operational handicap imposed on combat units, forced to accept barely trained recruits, fit only for sentry duties?"

In response, army veteran Sachin Pawar said, "It's crystal clear that the scheme is detrimental to the armed forces..."

The government needs to ponder over what former Major General Yash Mor said about the life of Agniveers in barracks because the divide in any place can cause problems. Moreover, what several veteran military officers pointed out about the operational handicap that this scheme may generate is another serious issue that cannot be ignored.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

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What ails our doctors?

By Sanjana Brahmawar Mohan

There is a growing voice on the "commercialisation" of healthcare, with stories surfacing time and again - the recent reports around kidney transplantation being a case in point. Partly in response to the situation it seems, the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita came into force this Doctors Day, with a provision of jail terms for doctors if found guilty of negligence. The many errors in the NEET examination and postponement of the PG entrance exams have brought the country's attention to medical education in India. As we start rebuilding the examination processes it will be pertinent to see what more needs to be done so that our doctors are on top of their work.

In our decade long work of providing primary healthcare in rural tribal Rajasthan we have worked with a large number of young doctors and interacted with many more working across government Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and Community Health Centres (CHCs). We have also conducted several workshops for doctors to sensitize them to the realities of rural India. Based on these we share a few priorities that need to be addressed.

Quality of education and "connection"

There is a popular lament that MBBS doctors of yesteryear knew a lot more about medicine than the present-day ones, and could "see" patients independently. Many of us will remember doctors visiting our homes with a briefcase, seeing the sick, and providing treatment there and then. They have all but disappeared. There was a lot of rigour in medical college teaching with teachers fully invested in their students, and knowing each one personally. Classes were held as per schedule.

This rigour is weakening. In the rural sensitisation workshops, many doctors spoke of their presence at the college not mattering, of "studying at home" and staying away for weeks together. They lamented that their teachers have little time for them - "people are all mouths, not ears", is something we hear frequently. "Your business is to treat patients, not to be empathetic" - a senior gynaecologist had once chided one of them.

We also hear the other side of the story, from private medical colleges. The doctors-in-the-making come from very rich families, go around in fancy cars, with little interest in their classes. Many of them have established nursing homes/hospitals to go back to on completion. At times the Management also pressures teachers, to clear (and not detain) them. A third group that is growing fast, are students who complete their medical education in China/ Russia/ other east European countries. Even with the poor quality of teaching in the Indian medical colleges, there is a wide disconnect between the foreign-educated doctors and the local ones. There is no clear flow of information when talking to patients, also a lack of knowledge of many of the basics/ABCs of medicine. This cannot go on. We need to make sure that all those becoming doctors have both the knowledge and skills, and the empathy that a doctor requires.

Post MBBS/MD support

Some months ago, one of our doctors received a call from a friend - a doctor working at a PHC. He had just diagnosed a patient with malaria and was calling to inquire what treatment to give. For doctors working on a standalone basis, this

need for guidance is to be expected: in a day they could be seeing many infections (TB, malaria, others), non-communicable diseases, pregnant women with complications, while also suturing people with road traffic accidents, and conducting deliveries.

This need got a number of us doctors working in different parts of India, to come together as a group. We post our questions in the group, or call up an expert for guidance: how do you manage fluctuating blood sugar in a young woman with diabetes? How do you treat malaria in a pregnant woman? We meet online once a week - to share new knowledge, case studies, and also ask questions. Interacting with doctors working across PHCs in rural areas and also in hospitals in the cities, we see they have few peers/ seniors to turn to, when in doubt. We need systems for doctors to get answers to their questions, and to make sure they stay up to date with new knowledge - not necessarily coming from the drug companies. There is talk of introducing examinations for renewing registration. This will help, but we need to do more.

What do we celebrate?

What are the kinds of news that keep feeding our news channels and social media? At present it is a lot about India winning the World Cup, and a celebrity marriage. Stories of likely misconduct, such as the kidney transplant stories get attention, but what about ones where lives are saved?

A week ago a woman with eclampsia was referred from one of our clinic areas to Udaipur, a distance of 120 kms. When she reached the hospital, she had been having seizures for over 3 hours and was barely conscious. That she was saved owes a lot to the prompt treatment she received from the gynaecologists and nurses.

In the different news media, such stories do need to be featured. These will have a significant impact, both on how doctors view themselves and their profession, as well as how society views them.

Creating a fairer World

Two stories doing the rounds at present are around the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, and the kidney transplant racket. Let us go back - when was the last time we talked about the appalling conditions in which our young doctors/ doctors-in-the-making study - the hostels they live in, food they eat, their abnormally long duty rosters? When did we celebrate stories of the lives they save day after day? We remember well the stellar roles our doctors played during the COVID pandemic.

We need to keep telling such stories. The absence of such stories and constant presence of not so positive ones creates a disquiet which can be dangerous. A few years ago in a hospital in central Rajasthan, in a complicated delivery the woman died. The immediate backlash from the media and the (expected) pressure from the family was not unexpected. But the tragedy that followed was not expected, and heartbreaking: the doctor under the spotlight could not take the strain and ended her life. The situation in our country today is a wakeup call. As we start rebuilding our healthcare, it would be worthwhile to not pick up fragments but to see it as a whole.

(The writer is a doctor and co-founder of Basic Healthcare Services, a Rajasthan-based non-profit that runs primary healthcare centres. Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Watching sports is good for you

Being a sports fan, whether you're watching top flight football, the Olympic games or your favourite local team, can be a rollercoaster ride. Incredible highs if you win, depressing lows if you don't, and lots of stressful feelings in between.

Thankfully, the overall impact should be a positive one because research has shown that people who watch sports experience greater wellbeing than those who don't - and that this is probably linked to the social aspects of watching sport.

By wellbeing we mean a person's psychological state - how well someone feels. People with higher wellbeing tend to have better physical health and live longer than people with lower wellbeing.

Research carried out by a group at Anglia Ruskin University used data from 7,209 adults, aged 16-85, living in England who participated in the Taking Part Survey commissioned by the UK government.

It was found that people in the UK who attended a live sporting event in the last year are more satisfied with their lives, feel their lives are more worthwhile, and are less lonely than people who have not. These findings chime with other studies, which found that people who watch sports in person at least once a year have fewer depressive symptoms than those who do not.

Can't get to live events? Watching sports on TV and online can also be good for your wellbeing. Research has shown that people who watch sports on TV or on the internet were also less depressed than those who did not, and depressive symptoms were even less likely for those who watched sports with increasing frequency.

Those who watch sports are more likely to report higher feelings of life fulfilment than people who don't, regardless of whether they watch sports in-person, on TV, or online.

All these findings are correlational, which means we can't be certain which factor influences the other or whether they might both



be influenced by another factor altogether (like wealth, or number of friends). However, social identity theory and brain imaging research tells us that watching sports could provide the primary wellbeing boost rather than other factors.

The positive effect of watching sports is likely about social identity. We seek connection through the formulation of in-groups: communities of people with whom we share something in common. These communities form part of our identities, and through them we find social and emotional support.

An example of in-group formation is the community we share with people who support the same sports teams as us. Research has shown that people who identified strongly with a sports team were more likely

to feel emotionally supported by fellow fans, which increased life satisfaction.

Through our shared social identity, we also share the social and emotional benefits of successes amongst our group. Researchers at KU Leuven in Belgium have dubbed this "basking in reflected glory".

However, when our team loses, we are more likely to distance ourselves from our team to protect ourselves from negative social and psychological consequences: "cutting off reflected failure".

The role of social processes linking sports spectatorship and wellbeing is demonstrated by a Japanese study that used brain imaging. They found that areas of the brain associated with psychological

rewards (feeling good) were more active when participants watched a popular spectator sport, like baseball, than a less popular spectator sport, such as golf.

So, the social benefits of watching sports aren't necessarily confined to going to live events with friends and family. We can enjoy the sense of community provided by our favourite athletes whether we watch sports in-person or from the comfort of our own homes, and by extension we can also enjoy the psychological benefits.

Whether you support your team from home or at the game, you can enjoy the highs and lows of being a sports fan in the knowledge that it's good for you - as long as you're sharing that experience with others. (The Conversation)

Sleep tourism promises the trip of your dreams

Imagine arriving at your hotel after a long flight and being greeted by your own personal sleep butler. They present you with a pillow and invite you to a sleep meditation session later that day.

You unpack in a room kitted with an AI-powered smart bed, black shades, blue light-blocking glasses and weighted blankets.

Holidays are traditionally for activities or sightseeing - eating Parisian pastries under the Eiffel tower, ice skating at New York City's Rockefeller Centre, lying by the pool in Bali or sipping limoncello in Sicily. But "sleep tourism" offers vacations for the sole purpose of getting good sleep.

The emerging trend extends out of the global wellness tourism industry - reportedly worth more than US\$800 billion globally and expected to boom.

Luxurious sleep retreats and sleep suites at hotels are popping up over the world for tourists to get some much-needed rest, relaxation and recovery. But do you really need to leave home for some shuteye?

Not getting enough

The rise of sleep tourism may be a sign of just how chronically sleep-deprived we all are.

In Australia more than one-third of adults are not achieving the recommended 7-9 hours of sleep per night, and the estimated cost of inadequate sleep is A\$45 billion each year. Inadequate sleep is linked to long-term health problems including poor mental health, heart disease, metabolic disease and deaths from any cause.

Can a fancy hotel give you a better sleep?

Many of the sleep services available in the sleep tourism industry aim to optimise the bedroom for sleep. This is a core component of sleep hygiene - a series of healthy sleep practices that facilitate good sleep including sleeping in a comfortable bedroom with a good mattress and pillow, sleeping in a quiet environment and relaxing before bed.

The more people follow sleep hygiene practices, the better their sleep quality and quantity.

When we are staying in a hotel we are also likely away from any stress we encounter in everyday life (such as work pressure or caring responsibilities). And we're away from potential nighttime disruptions to sleep (night experience at home (the construction work next door, restless unsettled children). So regardless of the sleep features hotels offer, likely we will experience improved sleep when we are away.

A do not disturb tag hangs on hotel door handle

Being away from home also means being away from domestic distractions. Makistock/Shutterstock

What the science says about catching up on sleep

In the short-term, we can catch up on sleep. This can happen, for example, after a short night of sleep when our brain accumulates "sleep pressure". This term describes how strong the biological drive for sleep is. More sleep pressure makes it easier to sleep the next night and to stay asleep longer.

But while a longer sleep the next night can relieve the sleep pressure, it does not reverse the effects of the short sleep on our brain and body. Every night's sleep is important for our body to recover and for our mind to process the events of that day. Spending a holiday "catching up" on sleep could help you feel more rested, but it is not a substitute for prioritising regular healthy sleep at home. (The Conversation)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, July 14, 2024

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon square Sun on your solar return chart which ensures a good year ahead. It is going to be an action-packed year overall. Your relations with your bosses will improve and they will keep supporting you. You will also implement new ideas at your workplace with fair amount of success. Your business will flourish. And you will enter into joint venture or partnership. Government related work will get completed. Your sources of income will increase. You will get loans from banks/financial institutions for some pet projects. Lovebirds will enjoy favorable time period. Marriage can take place. ner will keep supporting you.

This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) Good luck in finances and opportunities is encouraging. You take a stand and are likely to protest against domination by people at work. You may have to face egoistic people. Personal relations are difficult and sensitive at times as both partners seek freedom, independence and space. Rather than control others, take time to transform yourself. You initiate a wave of forceful energy to achieve success in an important venture. This period brings love, romance and excitement in personal relations. Deep personal relations are likely to get closer. Restlessness worries you and a new health regimen such as regular exercise; a more structured and productive use of your time could help.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) It is a gentle, considerate, and sensitive vibration that surrounds you during this phase. You have the desire for love, harmony and a peaceful life. You are diplomatic, warm and sensitive. This period brings for you socializing, romance and stability at work place. Love, friendship and relationship are emphasized. There are strong chances of materialization of a friendship into a long-term relationship. Students will complete their studies and enter the professional world with ease. You would make best use of your knowledge and skills but wisdom would influence you more as compared to knowledge. This is a good time for teachers as well as those in the hospitality and finance industries. People in marketing and sales would work hard to meet professional commitments. Health remains good.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) You are sociable, friendly, and have a positive vibration that reaches others around you. Kindness and optimism endear you to people and you need space and contact with others in order to feel content. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation from people around. Financial benefits may come your way. Self-confidence and action are highlighted. You tend to instinctively know the right course of action to take in most situations. You will be responsible, hardworking, dutiful, and serious when it comes to finances. You are blessed with good mood and health and would want to indulge in sporting activities.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) Your personality will be sparkling which is sure to attract new circumstances and people into your life. You are loving, stable, and harmonious in professional and personal relations. You are more willing to adapt to new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. It's a good time to join organizations and groups and to attend meetings or social events. You are able to find creative solutions to problems now. Flexibility is the key to success under this influence. This period proves good for long-term investments and finances. Students of Management and Law would get better results. Good support from family members will be forthcoming.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) As self-confidence and action are highlighted, your ability to concentrate and focus helps you to achieve what you set out to do. A new project or goal begun now has a good chance of being successful and long lasting. You are practical, trustworthy, hardworking and helpful. This period influences your finances and material aspects, suggests that you are considerably more goal-oriented related to earn. It's an excellent period to make a lifestyle change. You tend to instinctively know the right course of action to take in most situations. You are generous with friends, and loving in family situations. Your partner and you complement each other in different situations.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) You would work very hard to meet professional goals. There is intellectual stimulation and an ability to adapt to most situations. This phase brings financial gains from banking, investment, the hospitality industry and those who are in the teaching profession. You can be successful in the entertainment industry or in any field that requires a lot of imagination and vision,

particularly performing artists. Good financial growth is ensured. Good relations with people of the opposite sex. On the family front you will get full support from your life partner and family members. Cooperation and harmony in relationships satisfies an instinctive need. Spending time with nature and in a related activity is rejuvenating.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) Your personality sparkles, which is sure to attract new circumstances and people into your life. This period brings some changes towards professional goals and new interests develop. You connect with well-known personalities, fun loving people, artists and those in the entertainment industry. Strong existing relationships are likely to grow and transform. Your finances could also improve this phase as long as you employ strategy. Attending an important social occasion or festival may put you in the public eye. Meditation and introspection are therapeutic and revealing as you intuitively get to the bottom of things.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) 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. You would express your adaptability and persistent energy in professional projects. You would be dynamic, forceful and assertive in professional ventures to establish a position of authority. Moreover you are generous and kind in family and personal relationships. Meditate on the constant changes happening around you and centre within to benefit from it all. Good health and energy enable you to participate in sports activities. A pleasant surprise awaits you.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) You proved to be a jack-of-all-trades, active and determined. You are more willing to adapt to new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations during this period. You would have gains from property, and assets. You show your love by helping your partners, and sharing your lovers' problems. Domestic and career needs are fulfilled. Good time for teachers, salespersons and those in the service industry. You can be successful in the entertainment industry or in any field that requires a lot of imagination and vision. You may especially enjoy experiencing different cultures and ethnic styles. You would be more accommodating and compassionate in relationships and not take things personally.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) You are practical, hard working and helpful in personal and professional matters. You would find it easier to express your unique individuality. If this involves changing careers or jobs, also in a new hobby. You are able to find creative solutions to problems now. Stars favor people in the field of law and justice. Excellent professional opportunities for students specially those who have completed their education in hotel management, fashion designing, arts and crafts, music, singing and finance. Health remains good as you pay due attention to your diet as well as your exercise regimen.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) Self-confidence and tremendous efforts are highlighted in order to attend professional goals. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation with people from other countries. Your financial situation looks promising if you manage it well personally rather than trust upon others. Financial benefits may come your way through investments and insurance. You need to be careful in your interpersonal dealings and you must avoid confrontations with people in authority. Sports persons and lawyers can explore excellent work opportunities, as they would present an exceptional impression of their work. Overseas travel is likely as you engage in various activities and meet new people.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) You will attract new people into your life. This will give a boost to your career and your ideas and thoughts will be well-received. You are successful in any field that requires creativity, imagination and vision. As you take on a dreamy and philosophical outlook, which opens up your heart to new experiences. Strong existing relationships are likely to grow and transform. Your dynamism attracts creative and charismatic people and makes your social life enviable. You have to give a little more importance towards your health and a routine check up. Also make sure that you do not get caught up in arguments, a simple and straightforward approach is all that is required to resolve matters.

How was popcorn discovered?



You have to wonder how people originally figured out how to eat some foods that are beloved today. The cassava plant is toxic if not carefully processed through multiple steps. Yogurt is basically old milk that's been around for a while and contaminated with bacteria. And who discovered that popcorn could be a toasty, tasty treat? These kinds of food mysteries are pretty hard to solve. Archaeology depends on solid remains to figure out what happened in the past, especially for people who didn't use any sort of writing. Unfortunately, most stuff people traditionally used made from wood, animal materials or cloth decays pretty quickly, and archaeologists never find it.

We have lots of evidence of hard stuff, such as pottery and stone tools, but softer things - such as leftovers from a meal - are much harder to find. Sometimes we get lucky, if softer stuff is found in very dry places that preserve it. Also, if stuff gets burned, it can last a very long time.

Corn's ancestors

Luckily, corn - also called maize - has some hard parts, such as the kernel shell. They're the bits at the bottom of the popcorn bowl that get caught in your teeth. And since you have to heat maize to make it edible, sometimes it got burned, and archaeologists find evidence that way. Most interesting of all, some plants, including maize, contain tiny, rock-like fragments called phytoliths that can last for thousands of years.

Scientists are pretty sure they know how old maize is. We know maize was probably first farmed by Native Americans in what is now Mexico. Early farmers there domesticated maize from a kind of grass called teosinte.

Before farming, people would gather wild teosinte and eat the seeds, which contained a lot of starch, a carbohydrate like you'd find in bread or pasta. They would pick teosinte with the largest seeds and eventu-

ally started weeding and planting it. Over time, wild plant developed into something like what we have today. You can tell maize from teosinte by its larger kernels.

There's evidence of maize farming from dry cave in Mexico as early as 9,000 years ago. From there, maize farming spread throughout North and South America.

Popped corn, preserved food

Figuring out when people started making popcorn is harder. There are several types of maize, most of which will pop if heated, but one variety, actually called "popcorn," makes the best popcorn. Scientists have discovered phytoliths from Peru, as well as burned kernels, of this type of "poppable" maize from as early as 6,700 years ago.

You can imagine that popping maize kernels was first discovered by accident. Some maize probably fell into a cooking fire, and whoever was nearby figured out that this was a handy new way of preparing food. Popped maize would last a long time and was easy to make.

Ancient popcorn was probably not much like the snack you might munch at the movie theater today. There was probably no salt and definitely no butter, since there were no cows to milk in the Americas yet. It probably wasn't served hot and was likely pretty bland compared with the version you're used to today.

It's impossible to know exactly why or how popcorn was invented, but one would guess it was a clever way to preserve the edible starch in corn by getting rid of the little bit of water inside each kernel that would make it more susceptible to spoiling. It's the heated water in the kernel escaping as steam that makes popcorn pop. The popped corn could then last a long time. What you may consider a tasty snack today probably started as a useful way of preserving and storing food. (The Conversation)

"Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection we can catch excellence."

—Vince Lombardi

The Shillong Times

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Arrogance of power

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP have been put on notice yet again. Having failed to establish a clear majority for the BJP-led NDA alliance in the last parliament polls, a more shocking and shameful series of reverses awaited them when the results of the 13 assembly seats across seven major states — five of them in the deep North — were declared on Saturday. The BJP could win only two seats — one each in Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh — while the INDIA alliance recoiled again from its worse days and won 10 seats; and an Independent one seat. Clearly, the BJP that had boasted of being unassailable has taken a huge hit, and its reverberations will linger on the political horizon for long. If the parliament polls showed Modi's hold on the people was weakening even in the main battleground state of Uttar Pradesh, including in the religious powerhouses of Varanasi and Ayodhya, the assembly by-poll results, in one go, showed a deepening sense of discontentment against the BJP too. Starkly, even Badrinath too turned its face against the religious bluff of the BJP. The party manages to retain its high profile only in Madhya Pradesh thanks to the solid ground built for the party by Shivraj Singh Chouhan while as CM. Apart from the Congress wins, the TMC won seats in West Bengal and the AAP in Punjab's Jalandhar.

Modi, it appears, had begun demonstrating the arrogance of power in increasing levels starting with the arrest and jailing of Rahul Gandhi in a defamation case in Gujarat, where "manipulation of justice" was suspected. In a series of abrasive acts, the central government and its investigating agencies targeted Modi's — or BJP's — opponents one after another, and lately Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and Jharkhand's Hemant Soren. Both the CMs were arrested in corruption cases after investigations of a tured kind. Yet, notably, a 'tainted' Chandrababu Naidu, who was arrested by the AP government in a corruption case, won the recent polls with BJP backing. He is now CM again and the main lieutenant for a weakened Modi's government. Most of the worst kingpins of corruption are left untouched. The LS and the by-poll results put paid to BJP's and Modi's ambition and arrogance of seeing a "Congress-Mukht" Bharat, even as the Congress' history is eminently intertwined with the history of the nation. Modi's lip-service to the poor and backward segments of the society, to tiring levels by now, was never matched with action on the ground: Modi has proven he has no panacea to address the major ills that plague the society, like corruption and social disparities. From being an 'emperor,' a chastened Modi's fall was to the level of a 'consensus-builder'. It could soon be worse, if the present results are any indication.

Letters to the Editor

Contribution of Filmmakers in Meghalaya's New OTT Platform overlooked

Editor,
I am writing to share my thoughts on the recent launch of Meghalaya's first OTT platform, which was celebrated with much enthusiasm and included an awards segment for content creators. This initiative, alongside a collaboration with Hard Rock Cafe for musicians, is indeed commendable. However, I must ask: what about the filmmakers who have significantly contributed to our society through their art?

As a student of mass media aspiring to be a filmmaker, I had high hopes that Hello Meghalaya would provide opportunities for filmmakers like us who are looking for a platform to showcase our work. If Hello Meghalaya focuses primarily on content created by influencers, it is a significant letdown for filmmakers struggling to recover their expenses in the current state of the industry. We want to create meaningful films that influence society positively, and we invest years in film school to hone our craft —

not to produce content with mobile phones or GoPro cameras. If Hello Meghalaya continues to prioritize content shot with minimal equipment, the future looks bleak for aspiring filmmakers.

Historically, filmmakers have managed to produce and release their films in theatres, even before the concepts of content creators and influencers emerged. Films were the primary influencers during those times. Now, with the rise of OTT platforms, it seems films are being overlooked. Despite numerous challenges, filmmakers continue to create films with substantial budgets. Can you imagine an OTT platform without films or web series? Can an OTT platform survive solely on content from influencers and music videos? We should not turn Hello Meghalaya into another YouTube of our state.

Filmmakers from our state have achieved remarkable feats, bringing accolades to Meghalaya and making us proud on international platforms. The recent Garo film "Rapture" is a prime example, being the first Garo film released in 150 theatres across France. Our Chief Minister, being Garo himself, should be well aware of this achievement. Furthermore, Pradip Kurbah's "Iewduh" was the first film from In-

dia to win the Kim Jiseok Award at the prestigious Busan International Film Festival in South Korea. His earlier work, "Onaatah," was also significant enough for a Khasi film to be remade in Marathi.

Despite these accomplishments, it is disheartening to note that both the Chief Minister and the Minister of Tourism seem to overlook the contributions of our filmmakers. During the OTT platform launch, the CM spoke about including the Garo and Khasi languages in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. However, isn't it true that our films, which have won four National Awards in both Khasi and Garo, have already significantly contributed to the recognition and promotion of these languages?

The new OTT platform should not only cater to content creators but also prioritize cinema. Filmmaking involves immense pain, dedication, and hard work. It is a medium that profoundly impacts society and often requires a different set of skills and commitment compared to content creation. Consider the budgets involved: content created by influencers often requires minimal financial investment compared to the substantial budgets needed to produce films. If the OTT platform is primarily for con-

tent creators, then films and web series should not feature on the platform at all.

This is not to undermine the efforts of content creators but rather to highlight the need for balanced recognition. The contributions of filmmakers to our society are immense and deserve equal acknowledgment and support. Let us not ignore the vital role that cinema plays in our cultural and social landscape.

I hope this letter will prompt a broader discussion about the importance of cinema and the need to support our filmmakers.

Yours etc.,
Damang Kharbuli,
Shillong -3

Health Policy, Prevention or Cure

Editor,
I'm sure many of us remember when we were kids, growing up singing and playing to this popular nursery rhyme "Ring a Ring o' Roses, Pocket full of Posies....." holding hands while moving in a circle and falling to the ground. The origin of this song has often been associated (although some may dispute it) with the Great Plague which ravaged London, England from 1665-1666 that killed tens of thousands of the city's population. The 'pocket full of posies', a bunch of

pleasant-smelling flowers and herbs were originally thought to be preventive or an anti-plague defense but later became purely decorative for Judges and Mayors attending civic functions.

Over the years, much medical and administrative thought was given to ways in which the plague could be prevented. Some of the preventive steps taken by the authorities were, not to allow unwholesome food to be exposed and sold in any shops and markets, to encourage better sanitation and cleanliness including covering of open drains and construction of a better sewage system. Then in later years one of the most significant preventive steps to improve the health of the people was the provision of potable water to every household throughout the country allowing people to drink water straight from the tap.

Even while great effort is being taken to improve and advance medical science to find ways and means to prevent another Black Death and to find a cure for all known human sickness even to this day, preventive measures should also be a priority while formulating a health policy in the state and country as a whole.

The articles of many prominent writers appearing in this daily from time

error of the composite state of Assam since 1967 because they are ethnically different and it is the most neglected area in the state. He states that the rearrangement of the constituencies will definitely jeopardize the special minority status that they enjoyed in the district. The demand of the people of Saipung is to maintain the status quo and let the constituency remain as it was.

Gerrymandering is abusing power

Gerrymandering is also considered a corruption of the democratic process where those in power abuse their power for their own benefit, which is exactly what happened in the new delimitation of MDC constituencies in the district. The delimitation done by the JHADC is corruption of the highest order, in which those in power abused their power for their own selfish interest.

Can the members of the delimitation committee arrange the constituencies at their own whims and fancy? The question is, what are the criteria by which the villages are included in the constituency? In the delimitation done by the EC of the JHADC, there does not seem to be any yardstick or rule by which the constituencies are rearranged. The entire process seems to be done in haste and without proper consideration of the territorial integrity, population, or ethnic or racial aspects of the society.

What transpired from the entire exercise was like what Wayne Dawkins, a professor at Morgan State University, described: "Gerrymandering, as a process, is when politicians are picking their voters instead of voters picking their politicians." How ironic and unfortunate that this is happening, and it is a sad time in the history of the District. The ADC, which is always in the news for the wrong reasons, needs to have MDCs who have the vision to chart a new course of action for the Council, but the incumbent members are only interested in ensuring they return to power again.

Thombor-mandering the JHADC's Constituencies

The Thombor Shiwat-led Executive Committee of the JHADC has succeeded in doing what Elbridge Gerry did exactly 212 years ago, so he deserves to have the term coined after him which is "thombor-mandering," after Thombor Shiwat, the Chief Executive Member of the JHADC. The incumbent CEM should be ashamed of what happened to the ADC and withdraw from the election because he has failed the Council and its staff as their salary has been pending for more than ten months.

PM Modi leaves India-US ties at a Moscow crossroad

NSA Doval trying to salvage bilateral strategic partnership from US wrath

By Sushil Kuttu

BJP leader Narendra Modi in his first term as NDA Prime Minister of India shouldn't have forgotten how to kowtow, and who to kowtow to. Why he went to Russia before kowtowing to the United States is a mistake. Why he went and hugged Russian President Vladimir Putin is a bigger mistake. Modi's hugging habit is working against India's interests. Also, Modi might have forgotten his Chanakya, but the Americans have their Sun Tzu correct: An enemy's friend is an enemy.

With relations strained, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval had a telephonic talk with US counterpart Jake Sullivan on July 12. They discussed a range of issues in the growing shadow of Modi and Putin clinched in a bear-hug. Jake and Ajit found the strain unbearable is the verdict of foreign policy wonks. The high-level engagements under the Quad framework would be impacted.

Truth is, Prime Minister Modi has been under the weather ever since his third shot at becoming third-time BJP Prime Minister of India

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi starts speaking in poorly conceived riddles in when India should start worrying. The way things have panned out, Moscow has gotten its angle right, but the United States is agast at how Modi is angling for global attention at the cost of US friendship. The obtuse angle Modi has taken vis a vis the United States is sure-shot hara-kiri.

After Modi's return from the Russia-Vienna tour, the realization has struck New Delhi that Modi in his first term as NDA Prime Minister has forgotten all that he learned in his two terms as BJP Prime Minister. The tremendous strain on India-United States relations is the talk of the US town: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Moscow must be a highly disastrous for India-US ties by any reckoning.

For sure, NDA Prime Minister Narendra Modi will not get an invitation to address the US Congress again unless, perhaps, if Donald Trump makes himself a fixture in the White House with Melania and Barron



was rudely cut short by a surging opposition. NSAs Jake and Ajit are now trying to salvage whatever is left of cordial ties. A sterile MEA readout, smelling of diplomatic anaesthesia, is available: "The NSAs agreed to work closely to further advance India-US relations, which are built on shared values and common strategic and security interests," the readout said, stressing on the need to address global challenges to peace and security, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi had put at risk with his gay abandon with President Putin! There is concern that the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership is more or less dead.

The fact is, the massive strain is impinging India-US ties. The fault lies squarely on India, with Modi trying to make a triangle of the binary! Did Modi underestimate the United States? It is still a bipolar world with the United States the sole superpower. Modi in his first term as NDA Prime Minister appears to have forgotten the cardinal points that govern US ties with lesser nations.

The thought that he's "Vishwaguru" seems to have gotten to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's head. He wants to single-handedly bring peace between Putin and Zelensky. The Nobel Peace Prize is waiting. But with the US sidelined, will Modi ever get to hold his dream? Also, Narendra Modi may or may not last in the high office even till November of this year when the United States will elect its next President.

Right now, the Biden administration has had enough of the 'Hugging-Modi' who will regret he isn't the 'Smiling Buddha'. NSA Jake Sullivan hinted at this when he said China and not Russia was the better bet for India after Modi spoke of "Yudha" and "Buddha" and how the twain shall never meet as long as he was around.

Trump for four more years. Jake Sullivan and Ajit Doval have the hard job to correct the strained bilateral ties again, but with Prime Minister Narendra Modi bent on winning the Nobel Peace Prize, chances are India-US ties will not be any better than they are today.

NSAs Jake Sullivan and Ajit Doval have agreed to "work closely" and advance bilateral ties including addressing matters related to the Quad. There is the upcoming Quad Foreign Ministers meeting and then a summit of the Quad leaders to be held later this year. It is at such meets that Prime Minister Narendra Modi reveals in. If the Quad disintegrates, Prime Minister Modi will lose the will to live!

The United States is not humoured. Under the diplomatic camouflage, the Americans are really pissed off. India's ties with Russia go back to the Soviet-era and the US administration isn't happy Modi is taking them to greater heights. Modi has been warned to hold back the raging testosterone, but who is listening?

Before the Modi-Putin hug, there was the "conversation" between US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell and India's Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra. Also, State Department officials had been talking with India's acting Ambassador to the United States. And US Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti cautioned the NDA government of Modi that the United States should not be "taken for granted". Jake Sullivan mentioned India's "bad bet" on Russia, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi had an ear only for the Russian! The global diplomatic community is missing something. Modi is no 'Vishwaguru'! He hardly understands the importance of global parleys with everyone taken into confidence. (IPA Service)

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"Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent."

— Isaac Asimov

The Shillong Times

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Violence antithetical to Democracy

THE events of Saturday evening when 20-year old Thomas Mathew Crooks attempted to fire at former US President Donald Trump has stunned Americans. Quick action by a Secret Service sniper ensured that Crooks was killed at the scene. He reportedly used his father's gun to fire at Trump. Several questions remain unanswered at this point of time. What made Crooks a registered Republican fire on Trump? The upcoming US elections on November 5, 2024, would have been the first time he voted in a presidential election. Jason Kohler who attended the same high school as Crooks but did not share any classes with him said Crooks was bullied at school and sat alone at lunch time. Other students mocked him for the clothes he wore, which included hunting outfits. Kohler said that Crooks was bullied almost every day and he was an outcast. This brings to the fore the mental health of such people who grow up with a deep-seated inferiority complex which parents are all too often too busy to recognise.

But what is currently being discussed is also whether Trump's security cover was inadequate. This will remain a question to be answered by the Secret Service. What's urgently needed is for Americans to converge on one issue – that political violence or any kind of violence is antithetical to democracy. But that is far from happening. The Saturday assassination attempt on Trump has instead driven the wedge between the Democrats and Republicans deeper. A democracy is about discussing differences in an atmosphere of civility which Trump does not seem to believe in. His language has been asinine at the best of times. Also in a democracy, candidates are supposed to tame their supporters and not use provocative language against opponents as if they are sworn enemies. In a contest, one side wins and the other loses. Supporters should be able to accept the loss of their candidate. To claim like Trump did in the last election that Biden stole it, is not acceptable.

American democracy as envisaged by Thomas Jefferson is the novel agreement to work out differences in peace through representative democracy. Democracy is fought through the ballot box, not bullets. This incident has created an indelible image of Trump with his hands raised, signalling to his supporters that he is alive, albeit brushed by a bullet. Trump can be expected to use this as his campaign logo. And knowing Trump, this incident is likely to make public discourse more abrasive. But a time has come for American civil society to take stock of Saturday's incident and urge political leaders of both parties to accept that the electoral process is more important than the results and the sanctity of that democratic process needs to be safeguarded.

Do people in the state want good governance?

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

In the last couple of weeks, the verification drive conducted by the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) to check the paperwork of migrant workers has resulted in multiple assaults on them. In response, the Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma, came out with the statement that migrant workers do not need a permit to work in the state but only registration, which is done by the Labour department. This process, he claimed, was started during the previous term of the MDA to ensure safety and to keep a full database of all those who enter the state to work on various projects. This claim has been contested by the pressure groups, including the KSU, who argue that a work permit is required by law for migrant workers who are entering the state. Maybe the Government is trying to wash its hands of the fact that migrant workers have entered illegally under their watch; however, the assault and the public shaming that took place during the verification drive are not something that can be called legal by any means.

First, let's talk about the public incident that took place with a picture circulating in the local media channel of two migrant labourers holding a piece of paper where it was written, "We can enter Meghalaya because it's one of the non-ILP states in North East India," and, "I may be a Bangladeshi who knows me." Later on, the faces of the two migrant labourers were blurred, but by then, screenshots had already been shared on many social media platforms. Both of these signs are highly objectionable. This is a typical case of racial profiling of a certain group of people based on their ethnicity. How different is this when people from the North East (including from Meghalaya) are targeted because of their physical affinity with populations from East and South East Asia? Does it mean that if a Khasi is similarly targeted in the mainland and made to hold a paper that says, "I am a Chinese and I speak Ching Chong," we will be okay with it? During the COVID-19 pandemic, people from the North East were refused accommodation because it was thought the virus came from China. For people who themselves have suffered racial discrimination, it's quite ironic that we are doing the same to others.

The argument against this would be that Khasi, or people from the North East, are not illegal immigrants. The reporting on the story of the public shaming also mentions that the migrants were from Nepal, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh. India has a special treaty with Nepal, and Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are part of India. So, these migrants were not illegal. One can argue that without the work permit, they should not have

been allowed to work on the projects. But to brand them illegal migrants (i.e., Bangladeshis) and publicly shaming them is a hate crime. Maybe that's why the Meghalaya Human Rights Commission has asked for a report on the incident. Will that stop such incidents in the future?

Staying with public shaming, there have been complaints that the Government is quick to share pictures when a Khasi is arrested for some crime but does not do so when a non-Khasi is arrested. This is claimed to be an example of step-motherly treatment against the Khasi, who are being victimized because they are from the local community. I think the Government should not publish any pictures of anyone, whether those arrested are Khasi or non-Khasi. While not condoning any crime, there is always a possibility that a criminal may want to leave the past behind and start a new life. But that can become difficult if your face is out there in the public, which in this day and age of social media will be available to everyone. The public humiliation can also be difficult for family members who have nothing to do with the crime and would like anonymity. But if a pressure group like the KSU, which has accused the Government of always arresting their members on dodgy charges, also engages in public shaming their victims, can they have any moral authority for protesting when the police do it to them? Can their supporters also claim moral high ground on this?

The other issue is about the actual assaults. One might argue that the pressure groups had to step in to verify the papers because the government was not doing its job. In short, they were doing a public service. Let's accept that for the moment. But how is assaulting someone an example of public service? The 'illegal migrants' (of which no one is sure) could have been handed over to the police, or they could have been escorted to the border, warning them not to come in again without proper papers. That would still have been fine, but assaulting them is highly condemnable. Apart from being illegal, some people have warned that this could backfire on the Khasis who are staying outside. The Chief Engineer who was assaulted warned that such incidents could cause hatred against the locals who are working outside the state. He stated that "If an organized group attacks an Indian citizen here, what message does it send? Does the KSU president never travel beyond Bymihat? Is he trying to incite others to retaliate against him outside the state?" I think it was an irresponsible statement, but

he was upset, and one can understand his anger. But will such incidents lead to backlash against the Khasis outside the state?

In July 2012, violence broke out in Assam between Bodo and Bengali Muslims, leading to the deaths of at least 108 people, and over 400,000 were displaced. But the violence was not limited to Assam. In Andhra Pradesh, two labourers from the North East were attacked while traveling on the Ernakulam Express, with one later dying of his wounds. People from Nagaland and Assam were also attacked in Bangalore. In Pune, a software professional from Manipur was beaten by miscreants. Labourers from the North East working in Kerala were also asked to leave the state or face dire consequences. There were innumerable SMSs and MMSs circulating, inciting hatred against the people from the region. This led to a mass exodus of people, with Bangalore alone seeing 30,000 people flee in fear of retaliation. If the assault on migrant labourers continues, will this also happen to the Khasis staying outside? What if what the Chief Engineer says is correct?

For the moment, let's assume that such retaliations don't happen. Actually, I think it won't happen, at least not yet. On the other hand, the assault on migrant labourers is not a new thing. The Government has promised action, but except for Mariam Kharkrang from the BJP and Vincent Pala from the Congress, not much has been heard from other political leaders. I can understand why. Many of the leaders in different political parties have a history of being in different pressure groups. So, condemning them would be betraying what they actually believed in at one point in time (they may still believe it even now). Secondly, the government might feel that common people (i.e., the local Khasi population) support the actions of the pressure groups. All members of the pressure group are from the local populace, and in many ways, they reflect what common people believe on the ground. So, while the Government may not always do what the people want, they will not do what the people don't want. After all, they might lose votes if they go against the wishes of the people. But this actually means that the Government is abdicating its responsibility and, especially, asking the law and order machinery to stand down. If there's no retaliation against the Khasis outside the state and the actions of the pressure groups, who represent the common people, are condoned, isn't it a perfect situation then? Not exactly!

The problem is that when a culture of impunity and lack of accountability is encouraged, it does not only remain limited to issues of the jaidbynriew. The culture spreads throughout the whole system. There's always a complaint that the governance in Meghalaya is rife with corruption and the state is not doing its duty to provide for its citizens. It's the reason why the state is one of the poorest in the country, and its once-famed educational infrastructure is in a bad state. Forget about the health and sporting infrastructure, which is also in a very dilapidated condition. Does this lack of accountability from the state towards its citizens disconnect from the lack of accountability discussed above? Or are they both related? I believe they are connected. Let's give an example. If I am a government servant who knows that there are certain issues for which I am not supposed to be accountable, why shouldn't I follow the same rule elsewhere as well? It actually makes my life much easier. Imagine that everyone is following this logic because they know that there's a culture of impunity that has been sanctioned by the people. And the Government, the one enforcing the rules, always listens to the people, especially when votes are at stake.

Of course, people would immediately respond angrily that this is not what they want. They support the pressure groups and want the government to go easy on them, but in other cases, they want the Government to do its duty. So, it's like a Jekyll and Hyde kind of situation. Maybe someone can reply to this article by citing examples where societies that practice a lack of accountability and impunity in certain situations are still able to have an efficient system that is nevertheless accountable and looks after the welfare of the people it considers its own. Then I will accept that the connection I am trying to make is flawed. Till then, I believe that it's difficult to compartmentalize governance in such a way that it is accountable in some areas but not elsewhere. When the rot takes root in one part, it spreads to the entire system.

Whether it's a democracy, autocracy, or monarchy, the system is what the people want it to be. The same applies for Meghalaya. If a lack of accountability and a culture of impunity are what the people want, we will get them, and we will have to learn to live with them. In the end, we all get what we deeply desire, whether we like it or not.

(The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organization or institution)

How Brazil fired up the G20

By Jagdish Rattanani

Brazil has fired up the G20 with a sharp focus on wealth inequality within a few months of taking the presidency of the influential grouping from India in December last year. Led by Brazil and endorsed by several other countries, notably France, Germany, South Africa and Spain as well as by the IMF – the agenda has gained momentum and become a rallying cry that India will find hard to ignore. Just last week (July 10), nineteen former Heads of State and Government wrote a letter to G20 leaders calling upon them to back the Brazilian G20 presidency's proposal for a new global deal to tax the world's ultra-rich individuals.

"We, as former leaders, recognise a rare strategic opportunity when we see one. Taxes are the foundation of a civilised, industrious, and prosperous society. Yet our time is one in which the ultra-rich across the world pay a lower tax rate than teachers and cleaners. Billionaires, globally, are paying a tax rate equivalent to less than 0.5% of their wealth. Trillions of dollars that could have been productively invested in communities, education, health, and infrastructure have instead been unproductively accumulated by the ultra-wealthy," wrote the former heads of Costa Rica, Chile, the Netherlands, Latvia, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Spain, Lithuania, Austria, Korea, Poland, Belgium, Sweden, Greece, Spain, Slovenia and France.

This is a speedy and sharp uptake for a plan that began right here in New Delhi, where delegates heard the Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva say in Sep.2023: "If we want to make a difference, we have to put the reduction of inequalities at the centre of the international agenda." With relentless attention to "issues that we need to stop avoiding and start addressing", President Lula later said: "It is no longer humanly possible for the world to be so wealthy, with so much money flowing across the Atlantic, and for so many people to be hungry."

The "Brazilian twist", as it has been called, is in sharp contrast to the Indian Presidency of the G20, which closed with the New Delhi Leaders Declaration in Sep. 2023, a 37-page document where inequality is mentioned twice, without actionable steps. A 171-page e-book, 'The Grand Success of G20 Bharat Presidency: Visionary Leadership, Inclusive Approach', issued by The Research and Information System for developing countries (RIS) which includes government functionaries as contributors, also offers limited mentions on poverty, one of them speaking only with respect to Africa. In contrast, barely four months into the Brazilian presidency, the finance ministers of Brazil, Germany, South Africa and Spain wrote a joint editorial in the influential Guardian newspaper of UK to argue for higher taxes on the super rich as a key to battling global inequality and the climate crisis. The ministers asked that billionaires across international borders be made to pay a minimum 2% wealth tax as a step to "boost social justice and increase trust in the effectiveness of fiscal redistribution" and to "generate much-needed revenues for governments to invest in public goods such as health, education, the environment, and infrastructure – from which everybody benefits..."

This tax is being pushed as a globally agreed and coordinated minimum to plug loopholes and fix the problem of tax avoidance by the super rich. The noted economist Gabriel Zucman of the Paris School of Eco-

nomics and the University of California, Berkeley, who is advising the G20 on the proposal, wrote in the New York Times ("It's Time to Tax the Billionaires"): "In liberal democracies, a wave of political sentiment is building, focused on rooting out the inequality that corrodes societies. A coordinated minimum tax on the super rich will not fix capitalism. But it is a necessary first step."

This is the first time that the power of the G20, a grouping of 19 nations plus the African Union and the European Union (making a total of 21), is being used to stir up discussions on a coordinated wealth tax proposal, building on the lines of a similar global corporate minimum tax rate agreed by the OECD that takes effect this year across 135 member jurisdictions. As the OECD puts it: "The Global Minimum Tax (GMT) represents a major step forward in international cooperation on the taxation of multinational enterprises (MNEs). It will ensure that MNEs with revenues above EUR 750 million are subject to a 15% effective minimum tax rate wherever they operate."

This is also the first time that proposals on taxing the super rich are being endorsed by the IMF. The IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva has been quoted as saying that closing tax loopholes and ensuring that the richest paid their fair share would mobilise funds urgently needed for sustainable and inclusive growth. In September last year, she had asked Pakistan to increase taxes on the rich to protect the poor.

In India, the growing income and wealth inequality, now shown to be higher than it was at the time of India's independence, was a hot political topic that the Congress hammered home to telling effect during the election campaign, and the BJP studiously avoided. The word "inequality" itself appeared eight times in the 48-page Congress manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections, titled 'Nyay Patra'. Most references talked about efforts to reduce wealth inequality, which was the theme of Rahul Gandhi's campaign. In contrast, the word "inequality" did not feature in the BJP's 76-page manifesto.

The global focus on the topic of wealth inequality comes at a time India is flooded with images of a star studded multi-million dollar wedding of the son of Mukesh Ambani, the Chairman of Reliance Industries Limited, reckoned to be the wealthiest man in India with a net worth estimated to be above 100 billion USD. Long running festivities culminated last week with the attendance at the wedding by the Prime Minister and several leaders from Opposition parties, among them Mamata Banerjee, Lalu Prasad Yadav, Akhilesh Yadav and the Congress leader Abhishek Manu Sanghvi. After the wedding, the RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat dropped by at the Ambanis skyscraper home for dinner. The images sit in contrast to the emerging global resolve to fight inequality and to curb the overreach of the super rich.

The Congress has correctly asked the Prime Minister to take a stand on the new G20 focus. Will India support the global minimum tax on the super rich, and thus be forced to introduce the provision in the Indian tax code? This is one global movement that will have important implications for Indian politics in the years ahead.

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

Letters to the Editor

Democracy at risk: Confronting the menace of political violence

Editor, The startling events of Saturday amid an already heated election season highlight an urgent warning that the U.S. and global democracies can't overlook. The striking image of Donald Trump, the former president and presumed Republican nominee, with a raised fist and bloodied ear, being escorted off stage by security moments after shots were fired at his rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, is indelible. Despite America's history with political violence and its resilience, this moment stands out. The FBI is investigating this attempted assassination amidst a backdrop of increasing political

and cultural division, a shift towards extreme ideologies, and a vanishing middle ground. Inflammatory rhetoric, conspiracy theories, and a deep-rooted gun culture are creating a perilous environment where political violence is becoming more probable and accepted.

America must now confront the challenge of avoiding further descent into conflict. This incident should prompt a deep reflection and aim for healing rather than further division. However, this is a difficult feat as both Republicans and Democrats have pushed their supporters to the edge of ideological extremism. Democrats, on the other hand, have used grave warnings about "the end of America" to turn voters against their political rivals. Trump remarked on "Truth Social" that it was unbelievable for such an act to occur in the Country."

For American democracy to remain stable, voters must reject extremism and place their trust in elections as the legitimate means to address

the nation's critical issues. This incident should serve as a broader warning not only to America but to democracies worldwide, against a zero-sum brand of politics that turns campaigns into blood-sports, where victory is everything. America the oldest, richest, and most influential democracy must return to its foundational values of respect, dialogue, and civility to lead by example. The entire globe doth observe this and ought to seize this moment to reflect upon and scrutinise its own democratic practices.

Yours etc.,
Chanmiki Laloo
Shillong-02

Child rape and murder

Editor, In a remote village called Muchumbarri in Andhra Pradesh, a harrowing tragedy came to light a week ago. The news pierces the very fabric of social moral-

ity. What is outrageous is that three minor boys, aged between 12 and 15, gang-raped an eight-year-old girl from their own school. To cover up their heinous crime, the juvenile perpetrators murdered the girl and threw her body into a nearby canal. Viewed from any angle, this barbaric act is not just a crime against a tender girl but a glaring reflection of the moral decay that has plagued modern society.

If an elderly person lethally harms someone, we can blame that person individually. However, when a 5 year old boy pulls out a knife and goes stabbing people around, the parents need to shoulder the blame. How could a boy as young as 12 rape an 8-year-old girl, and murder her, unless he had fallen prey to harmful influences earlier? Have the parents deliberately exposed the boy to such influences? Are we raising our children in a society and environment that are so badly unhealthy? Given the increasing cases of

crime against women/minor girls, the time has come for dispassionate introspection. One concerned teacher in the town laments, "the cell-phones the parents give to their children these days for school projects could potentially expose them to harmful images and videos. Under innocent searches lie rabbit holes of perversion, which many of our children might also slip into. Children's exposure to explicit content has become a serious concern these days. Hardly any parents set their mobile phones to child lock mode before giving them to their children."

I don't want to mince words. We can all dig deeper and find out for ourselves what all Google and Meta also shower upon internet users as their choicest blessings, (pun intended). Furthermore, let's not overlook the fact that in order to earn millions of likes or quick money from YouTube, Meta and TikTok, countless people/channels are involved in

churning out a whole lot of outrageous content. These filthy contents and pranks are consumed by millions, including our gullible teenagers, in no time --- a feast for the senses, a famine for decency. All of this dreadfully corrupts the minds of our youngsters.

I strongly believe, in this situation, if we do not speak out, we ourselves will be held complicit. Our deafening silence will only encourage the insane lust of even immature boys, leading them to take away the lives of our beloved daughters and sisters. Moreover, as conscious parents/citizens should we not cherish lives and human values over 'likes' on Meta and YouTube? Our silence could indeed be a crime.

Yours etc.,
Salil Grewal,
Shillong

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"Accept the challenges so that you can feel the exhilaration of victory."

— George S. Patton

The Shillong Times

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Governance by Consensus

THE BJP is faced with a fresh disadvantage in running the government at the Centre as it has seen an erosion of its strength in the Rajya Sabha due to retirements – from 90 to 86 – and of the NDA to 101, in a house of 226 members. There is no serious threat to the government as such other than in passing key legislations. This too can be done on condition that some regional parties or independents come to the government's aid. Problem is, they would demand their pound of flesh. In other words, the BJP and also Prime Minister Narendra Modi will have to bend over backwards with more flexibility to run the government.

In fact, Modi has foreseen this scenario once the people refused to give him and the saffron party a working majority in the Lok Sabha in the recent parliament polls. The PM changed his previous tune and stressed that he would, from now on, rule by "consensus." There, indeed, is no other way. This was not so in the past two terms. Modi could dictate and chart out the government's course without consulting non-BJP-RSS entities except for formality's sake. They were in no position to give him a challenge. For, options for survival were one too many for the two previous NDA governments. Problem parties like the Shiv Sena and the Shiromani Akali Dal had made their exits from the NDA, while the other allies were pygmies. Independents by themselves offered a buffer, too. Now, 11 Rajya Sabha posts are vacant – 10 since last month as they had contested the general elections and won other seats, while a BRS member defected to the Congress. Elections could take place to the vacant posts in a matter of a few months – which will be a critical period. Expectations are that the BJP would win about eight of these seats based on its strength in various state assemblies.

Yet, a scenario could arise sooner or later when both TD chief Chandrababu Naidu and JDU leader Nitish Kumar could ruffle the feathers of the NDA if they get the right chance, while JDS is a weakling. Both Naidu and Kumar could eventually seek deputy PM post or a readiness to come to Delhi by leaving governance of their states to their near and dear ones. In AP, Nara Lokesh is already dreaming of such a possibility. It is quite likely that the BJP is mindful of these situations. Rumours are that the saffron party is trying to get more allies to it to neutralize the scenario. For instance, it would try to break up the BRS in Telangana, which has now fallen on bad days.

No relief for common struggling masses can be expected in 2024-25 budget

Modi govt working only for the welfare of crony capitalists

By Anil Rajimwale

dustrial production and sale. 'HDFC Capital Advisors' is betting big on housing plans to invest more than two billion dollars over two years across 15 cities.

A natural corollary at the opposite pole of the economy is the rapid and big fall in investments. CMEI data analysed by Bank of Baroda show manufacturing investments falling to a 20-year low in the quarter ending in June, to Rs 44,300 crore only. The previous lowest level was in June 2005. This despite tall claims of all round economic 'growth'.

Yet, big Indian companies have raised a record Rs 2.5 lakh crore (30 billion dollars) in the equity market in the first half of this year, the highest ever figure for January-June period. It is double the amount for the same period last year.

Adani and Ambani have become the symbols of the financialisation and speculative nature of the Indian economy. Billionaire Gautam Adani is getting ready to start building ships at the Group's Mundra port, the country's largest, with the government at his service. India 'wishes' to become one among top ten shipbuilders, and the government finds no better alternative than Adani, at the cost of the public sector. Presently India is ranked 20th in the world.

It is interesting to note that Adani's ship-building schemes have gone unreported previously, being hidden in the Rs45000 crore expansion plan for Mundra Port. Environment will be destroyed extensively but environmental and coastal regulation zone clearances have already been managed. Adani has taken advantage of the fact that the yards in China, S Korea and Japan are booked till 2028, forcing global players to look at India. But the Indian government has used the situation to side-track the public sector ports and yards.

Another planned ultra-large port is to be located at Vadavan on Maharashtra coast, supposed to be among the ten largest worldwide. Of the estimated Rs76000 crore project under the PPP, Rs 37,244 crore will be contributed by the private sector. It will extensively destroy the rare mangroves, wetlands etc. No land acquisition is needed as it is 'sea land'. Adani presently is the richest man in India with 111 billion dollars, with Ambani at 108 billion dollars, positions fluctuating. In rupee terms, Adani may be worth around 7,00,000 crore

(figure rounded). The richest in the world is Bernard Arnault with 207 billion dollars. Adani's daily income Rs 1600 crores (2022 data). The BJP government wants Indians to take pride in this 'great achievement', while facilitating the giants to grow bigger still!

While Adani has been accused of stock manipulations, inflating valuations, accounting manipulations etc, no action is contemplated. This at a time when the government is merrily arresting opposition leaders on corruption charges.

Government has targeted Rs one lakh crore for FY 2025 from disinvestments and 'asset monetisation', a respectable term to cover up the destruction of the public sector and its handing over to big business. The interim budget in February 2024 had clubbed both of them under the innocent looking 'miscellaneous capital receipts'. So they are just capital 'receipts', and not sell off of hard earned public property?!

'Monetisation' is a cover for the destruction of the public sector. Dalal Street of Mumbai is really sizzling with the equity mutual funds adding a record Rs 40608 crore in June, higher than 34697 in May. Kotak Special Opportunities is a big gainer. The net assets under management (AUM) in MF industry has reached a whopping 60 lakh crore mark. AUM is the total market value of all the assets under management. This money is garnered from the public for capitalization.

The SBI economists have suddenly released a strange report, advising the government to reduce its participation in the public sector banks because their financial health is good! The report also asked the government to clarify its position on the sale of the IDBI Bank.

The government and LIC are selling up to 61 percent in the IDBI but the sale is stuck up due to RBI not granting 'fit and proper' recognition to any bidder. The interesting fact is that the government has not been able to sell the IDBI Bank despite its being reclassified as a private bank in March 2019.

Sales growth of the FMCG or 'fast-moving consumer goods' slowed down both in volume and value during the first two months of the June quarter. The slow-down is more pronounced in the urban areas. The overall FMCG growth fell by nearly half in April and May at 4 per cent. Demand for the daily grocer-

ies, essentials and household products is likely to continue to be muted in the present quarter.

The tendency of jobless growth is accelerating, a result of doling out sops to the giant business houses, in particular the Ambanis and the Adanis. It is the direct result of the decade-long policies followed by the Modi governments, accentuated due to the large-scale destruction of the MSMEs. Demonetisation, GST and rising imports created havoc for this sector.

A report by the American investment bank theCiti-group pointed out that India will need to create 12 million jobs every year for the next ten years to provide jobs to its youth. Even a GDP growth of 7 per cent will not create jobs.

Labour law violations are taking place in Amazon warehouse in Haryana (Manesar), electronics major company Foxconn's Chennai factory, where women workers were discriminated against. Layoffs are becoming increasingly frequent.

The Ministry of corporate affairs (MCA) is contemplating wide-range revisions to the IBC or the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code as also in the Companies Law. A creditor-led approach is further continued, wherein insolvency resolution would be adopted in favour of the larger firms, helping them cover losses.

Government wants to reduce the 'compliance burden' of the Indian corporate by bringing in some 100 amendments in the Companies Act 2013. Doing big business will be eased and the corporate houses will be freed from the 'burdensome' procedures putting hurdles in their path.

Wealth tax has already been abolished by the previous BJP regime. Besides, our big business houses and billionaires do not properly pay the taxes they should pay. They for example can indulge in 'public charity', which is not taxable. They can concentrate wealth and capital from people and then spend a pittance on their 'charity'. Government keeps on appealing the companies to remember their 'social responsibilities'!

It is bleak for the masses and bright for the speculative finance capital headed by the Adanis and Ambanis. Massive transfers of industrial, agricultural and artisanal capital is taking place into speculation and share markets, leading to accelerating emergence of giant billionaires. People have to sit up and take note, and roll back the trend. (IPA Service)

Budget Musings

Challenges for finance minister

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will be presenting the Union Budget 2024 for this fiscal amidst a lot of challenges, thereby outlining economic priorities for the next five years under the coalition government. Industry bodies and economic experts have put forth several crucial demands they hope will be addressed in the budget to spur growth, improve livelihoods, and simplify the tax structure. While there has to be a lot of focus on the agricultural and rural sector, there are other things that need her attention, which obviously means carrying forward essential reforms to attract manufacturing, specially growth of MSME sectors and those that are labour-intensive.

The present economic situation has shown that consumer spending is depressed, inflation is rising while the growth composition appears imbalanced. These were highlighted during the elections, which transformed a majority government into a coalition. The stress points are visible as sectors like small trade, hospitality, transport, storage and communication decelerated to half its growth rate in the previous year. These service categories are the biggest creators of informal and non-farm jobs, engaging a broad range of semi-skilled and unskilled workforce, including rural migrants. The facts are indeed alarming as the size of this combined segment has expanded by just 10 percent over 2019-20, growing an average 2.5 percent each year since.

Much of the supply-side growth comes from construction, another mass employer of casual labour. This has grown at around 13 percent on average in the last three years, more than double its re-pandemic trend. But even this activity has had little effect on consumer spending. The main challenge is that slower growth of disposable income coupled with food inflation has suppressed real rural wages and affected poorer sections. In fact, these contracted for almost two years due to persistent price pressures.

Considering the situation, the first decision of the new Cabinet was the announcement of a big expansion of an existing housing assistance scheme to build 30 million additional homes for rural and urban poor, expressing the government's commitment to inclusive growth. But more such measures are needed, including increased budgetary allocation for the rural jobs scheme and various other such projects aimed at rural revitalisation. Rural infrastructure at the village level, specially in backward areas needs to be given proper thrust while health facilities at the block level need to be upgraded to tackle emerging diseases.

There are expectations that the budget is likely to give a boost to the affordable housing segment. The definition of affordable homes, it is expected, will be expanded along with tax breaks for developers and incentives for buyers. The ripple effect this sector can have on the larger economy is known to the government and specific steps to balance the interest of all stakeholders could be reflected in the budget. However, the share of affordable homes in the overall supply fell to 18 percent this year from nearly 40 percent in 2019.

As regards the farm sector, at a recent meeting farm organisations and agriculture experts advised the finance minister to ramp up investment in agricultural research, rationalise fertiliser subsidies and develop infrastructure to enhance the sector's resilience in climate change. The stakeholders called for a substantial increase in the budget allocation for ICAR from Rs 9500 crore to Rs 20,000 crore. Indian Chamber of Food and Agriculture (ICFA) Chairman, M.J. Khan emphasised the need to make massive investments in agriculture R&D growth and boost incomes.

Likewise, for farm export, agricultural economist Ashok Gulati and various farm bodies have urged the government to lift restrictions on exporting farm products like rice, wheat, sugar, and onions. These restrictions, imposed to control consumer prices, have impacted rural incomes. Over 45 per cent of India's population relies on agriculture, and easing these restrictions could boost farmers' earnings.

Meanwhile, it is heartening to note that the pressure on public finances has been greatly relieved by the fiscal windfall from the central bank, which approved a Rs 2.11 trillion dividend payout to the Central government last month. Thus, fiscal metrics will remain unspilt while planned corrections in the public balance will continue. Moreover, RBI's recent Financial Stability Report (FSR) has shown that non-performing assets (NPAs) of banks fell to a 12-year low of 2.8 percent at the end of March even as stress tests conducted by the central bank showed that the capital levels will remain above the regulatory minimum even under severe stress scenarios, while the net NPAs ratio fell to 0.6 percent.

If inflation can be checked, which obviously the RBI has been trying to do, the economy should have a smooth run. But the problems of the rural sector must be given special attention, which the government is aware of. There are expectations of an increase in state subsidies on rural housing to around 50 percent as compared to the previous fiscal's Rs 33,413 crore, according to various sources and a recent report by news agency Reuters. This is part of the government's plan to boost rural infrastructure spending, but the allocation must be substantial as village communication, i.e. building proper rural roads has been rather neglected compared to the vast needs while the focus has been on building and widening highways.

Similarly, job creation initiatives which appear to be a key component of the budget, allocation for rural jobs programme may witness an increase but anything below Rs 120,000 crore may not be sufficient to cover the full 100 days a year. It would indeed be a great job if a job scheme, say for 50 days a year, is introduced for the urban poor who could be gainfully used for different sorts of work, specially in municipalities, which are suffering for lack of personnel.

Apart from the rural sector, the other expectations of the budget include boosting consumption, lifting farm export restrictions and simplifying tax regimes. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) very aptly suggested tax cuts for India's lower income brackets to increase disposable income and spur consumption. Although the Indian economy grew at an impressive 8.2 percent in 2023-24, consumption only grew at half that rate. In tune with current thinking, CII also recommended higher wages under the rural job guarantee scheme and increased cash handouts to farmers to support rural spending.

Industry bodies have also recommended simplifying India's complex tax regimes. The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) has suggested streamlining the capital gains tax regime into two or three broad categories and reforming the GST system, proposing fewer tax slabs and the inclusion of currently excluded sectors. The BJP-led NDA government would have by now made a thorough analysis of the Lok Sabha results and shortlisted the reasons for being much short of the 400 plus mark as claimed. It is expected to be guided by the electorate's verdict and the Budget could be a beginning. —/INF

Letters to the Editor

Protectionism or progress?

Editor,
Going by the recent incidents of violence, harassment and intimidation of non-tribal labourers it appears that Meghalaya is slowly but certainly heading towards anarchy. The demand of legislation of more laws to regulate entry, visit and stay of fellow Indian citizens in Meghalaya ostensibly emanated from the perpetual fear of insecurity although that fear unfounded. This fear psychosis is perceived by a section of populace of the State right from the days when it was part of Assam. Normally, such sense of fear should have been reduced considerably in the last fifty years after formation of Meghalaya keeping in view the special protection and privileges such as Land Transfer Act, Sixth Schedule, reservation in Government jobs, education, reserved assembly constituencies as well as Income Tax exemption that have been granted to the people of Meghalaya.

Recently, almost entire State has also been kept outside the purview of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) to dispel any fear of settlement of persons seeking citizenship on the basis of the amended Citizenship Act. But sadly, these special laws have utterly failed to make the beneficiaries secure and accommodative. When so many existing special laws

are perceived to be grossly inadequate necessitating demand of more isolation in this age of globalization, what is the guarantee that new laws, if enacted, will be able to make them confident, cooperative and stronger to face the real world?

Yours etc.,
D. Bhattacharjee
Shillong-1

Why education is going downhill in Meghalaya

Editor,
The quality of teaching in Meghalaya is deteriorating due to several factors, including nepotism and favouritism. Through my recent RTI application, I uncovered evidence that many schools prioritize their own interests to favour preferred candidates which is a corrupt practice.

To address this, I recommend the following:
Implement a roster system for vacancies to ensure fairness and transparency in recruitment.

Consolidated advertisements for multiple schools, conducted once or twice a year, like MPSC, but with a more efficient process.

Conducting examinations and interviews for all candidates simultaneously.

Adopting transfer policies like Assam's, rotating teachers across the state to foster

exposure and improvement.

Currently, teachers in Meghalaya are often stagnant and lethargic, neglecting basic duties like correcting school copies. I offer my advice to the Education Minister to rectify these issues and enhance the education system in Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,
R Sarki
Shillong

Violence an inherent part of American politics

Editor,
The editorial "Violence antithetical to Democracy" (ST July 16, 2024) made interesting reading. The assassination attempt on former President Donald Trump is nothing new in the history of American presidents. According to Darlene Superville and Christina A. Cassidy, the former who covers the White House chronicles that Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth on April 14, 1865 who was then shot and killed on April 26, 1865 when he was found hiding in a barn near Rowling Green, Virginia. James Garfield the 20th President was assassinated six months after taking office when he was walking through a train station in Washington on July 2, 1881 by Charles Guiteau who was found guilty and executed in June 1882. William

McKinley 25th President of the USA was shot after giving a speech in Buffalo, New York, on 6th September 1901 by Leon F. Czolgosz, an unemployed, 28-year-old Detroit resident. He was later found guilty at trial and put to death in the electric chair on October 29, 1901. Franklin D Roosevelt, the 32nd President at a time when he was the President-elect, had just given a speech in Miami from the back of an open car when gunshots rang out. He was not injured in the February 1933 shooting that killed Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak. Giuseppe Zangara was convicted in the shooting and sentenced to death. Harry S. Truman, the 33rd President was staying at a Blair House across White House two gunmen broke in in November 1950 but the President was not injured but a White House policeman and one of the assailants were killed in an exchange of gunfire. Oscar Callazo was arrested and sentenced to death. Truman commuted the sentence to life in prison in 1952 and he was released from prison in 1979 by President Jimmy Carter.

John F. Kennedy, the 35th President was fatally shot by Lee Harvey Oswald in Dallas in November 1963. Oswald was arrested after police found a sniper's perch in a nearby building. Two days later he was being taken from police headquarters to the county jail when Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby fatally shot Oswald. Gerald Ford, the 38th President

1975 faced two assassination attempts twice but was not hurt. Fromme a Charles Manson disciple Lynette Squeaky was sentenced to prison and released in 2009 while Sara Jane Moore who fired one shot and missed was sent to prison and released in 2007. Ronald Reagan, the 40th President walking to his motorcade was shot by John Hinckley Jr in March 1981 and recovered. Hinckley was arrested and confined to a mental hospital after the jury found him not guilty by reason of insanity in shooting Reagan. In 2022 he was freed from court oversight after a judge determined he was no longer a danger to himself or others. George W. Bush, the 43rd President while attending a rally in Tbilisi in 2005 with Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili when a hand grenade was thrown toward him but did not explode. In this case Vladimir Arutyunyan was convicted and sentenced to life in prison. Theodore Roosevelt, presidential candidate, was shot in Milwaukee in 1912 while campaigning to return to White House. Folded papers and a metal glasses case in his pocket apparently blunted the bullet's impact and was not seriously hurt. John Schrank was arrested and spent the rest of his life in a mental hospital. Robert F. Kennedy, presidential candidate seeking Democratic nomination brother of President John F. Kennedy was killed at a Los Angeles hotel moments after giving his victory speech for

winning the 1968 primary. Sirhan was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to death that was commuted to life in prison and his petition for release last year was denied. George C. Wallace, presidential candidate was seeking the Democratic presidential nomination when he was shot during a campaign in Maryland in 1972, an incident that left him paralysed from the waist down. Wallace was governor of Alabama known for his segregationist views, which he later renounced. Arthur Bremer was convicted in the shooting and sentenced to prison was released in 2007.

Extremist language fuels violence in Abraham Lincoln's democracy therefore Plato was right in defining "democracy a flawed form of government that can easily descend into chaos and tyranny." Plato's point was that too much freedom can lead to tyranny. He saw democracy as inherently unstable due to susceptibility to manipulation by self-interests and lack of emphasis on political expertise. History points that violence, while indefensible, is also a quintessential scar on American politics. Violence is infecting and infecting American political life.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

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"An investment in knowledge pays the best interest."
—Benjamin Franklin
The Shillong Times
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Governance challenges in Meghalaya

GOVERNMENTS are legitimately elected with the mandate to govern. Those who form the government are expected to use state resources for the larger public good and to be accountable for all money spent. Governance is defined as the exercise of political authority and the use of institutional resources to manage problems and the affairs of society. Governance is the stewardship of the formal and informal political rules of the game. Governance refers to those measures that involve setting the rules for the exercise of power and settling conflict by using those same rules.

In a democracy, governance flows from the Constitution which clearly lays out the norms for ensuring public order and an efficient and equitable service delivery mechanism. Also, in a democracy these development goals are arrived at through a participatory process and public consultations and not through arbitrary legislations. Governance also includes the daily interaction between state and society. Governments can make policies that are aimed at ensuring the larger public good only after due consultation. Hence it would be correct to say that every rule of governance flows from the public mandate. Anyone that violates such rules, actually violates the mandate of the people, more so when political parties are also voted on the basis of their manifesto which are a set of promises for good governance in the many areas of human development.

Democratic governance demands that there be public consultation when there is public disorder as is happening today in Meghalaya. The public has to have a say in what they feel about the violence meted out on non-tribal labourers and its consequences for the state and its development. Public indifference, nay silence in the face of pressure groups enforcing their own laws in society will lead to chaos and stall whatever little progress the state is making through development goals that the government is trying to implement. When disruptions engulf the state, service delivery to the last point is also disrupted. There is a shortage of skilled labourers in Meghalaya and above all the absence of a work culture which optimises output. As long as there is a gap between supply and demand, outsiders will fill the gap. It is important for pressure groups to demand instead a number of skill-based institutions in carpentry, brick-laying, painting and a host of other skills that are required in the construction industry. Construction workers earn decent wages but also must produce outcomes on a daily basis. The pressure groups should be addressing this issue instead of adopting violence as a modus operandi.

Governance in Meghalaya has always been suppliant to disruptive forces. Barring some chief ministers the rest have bent over backwards to appease the pressure groups. This is what has emboldened them over the years. In these challenging times can the government allow such disruptions? Till date the 'national' media has not picked up on these instances of violence on non-tribal labourers. Once this becomes a national issue, the Government of Meghalaya will be held accountable for not flexing its muscles and ensuring that the rule of law prevails.

Letters to the Editor

Whose interests does this culture of violence serve?

Editor,
Through the local media and also through social media we have seen the recent spate of checking of so-called illegal activities by the KSU of people from the mainland of our country. Today's trend is that the various local pressure groups (not like before in the 1970s, 80s, 90s) comprise highly educated people as their presidents, secretaries, advisors etc. The question that arises is how these learned people fail to understand that they cannot take the law into their hands. Why are they misleading the people by downplaying the law and creating chaos and fear psychosis amongst the non tribals who happen to come here to earn their livelihoods which is their right as per our Constitution guidelines, of course subject to their availing relevant papers as per the State Govt. orders. It seems to me that these people are trying to make a name for themselves, to be "U Khlor Ka Ri," and be so famous that one day they will join

politics, become very rich working as suppliers, contractors etc. thereby making themselves and their families self-sufficient.
These leaders know very well that they cannot run a parallel government here or in any part of India because in a democracy we have elected our leaders to represent us for any thing under the law. The least that the pressure groups can do if they find any discrepancy in the working of the State Government is to put pressure on the Government and work in tandem with it so that the governance gaps are addressed through lawful and democratic methods. There is no need to instigate people to assault and commit violence. We as a society cannot live in isolation. We need other people and are inter dependent on one another.
Moreover, we in Meghalaya are dependent on the Centre for almost everything. Even to cover our modesty we depend on them. Added to this, there are thousands of our people who either study or work outside the State in the mainland. What will happen and how would we feel if the same treatment is meted out to our people?
All that is happening now and what has happened since

Manipur Violence, Infrastructural Injustice & Plight of Kuki People

On 21st March 2024, the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Manipur's Chandel district issued an order to stop the construction of a bridge over the Manipur River at K. Molnom village. It is true that the bridge construction was "unauthorised", as the DC claimed. However, it is crucial for the Kuki people of Chandel district to obtain food and other essentials from Churachandpur, as their neighbouring Meitei community has denied them basic needs following the ethnic tensions in the state.

Manipur, a tiny state in India's Northeast, has historically been divided into the hills and the valley. This hill-valley divide is not limited to the topography but permeates through all domains, including the distribution of infrastructures. According to the composite infrastructural index of the Ministry of Development of the North Eastern Region (2006), the Meitei-inhabited valley districts of Manipur are far better equipped with infrastructures of transport, education, healthcare, banking, electricity, etc., than the hill districts predominantly inhabited by the Kuki and Naga tribes. The four valley districts (now six) of Imphal West, Imphal East, Thoubal and Bishnupur are on top of the table, while the five hill districts (now ten) of Senapati, Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Churachandpur and Chandel sit at the bottom. The same infrastructural index also shows that Manipur's valley districts are among the best in the entire Northeast India, with Imphal West leading the table, whereas the hill districts are among those with the poorest infrastructure, with Chandel ranking 78th out of 80 districts in the region.

While disparity exists across all types of infrastructure, it is most apparent in education, road transport and healthcare facilities. In Manipur today, most state and central universities, including technical and professional institutes like the Manipur University, Central Agricultural University, the Ione Sports University of the country, National Institute of Technology Manipur, Manipur University of Culture and Manipur Technical University - are situated in the valley, posing accessibility challenges for hill people. Even the regional campus of the Indira Gandhi National Tribal University (IGNTU-RCM) is kept within close proximity to the valley rather than in one of the hill headquarters where tribal populations are more concentrated.

In the road transport sector, there is an average of 117 km of road length per 100

By Thanglienmang Haokip

square kilometres area of the valley, out of which 90% is surfaced. On the contrary, the total road length per 100 square kilometres in the hill districts is merely 22 km on average, of which 72% is surfaced. Consequently, people residing in the hills do not have access to all-weather roads, which is a denial of their fundamental rights. Further, the hill districts are not interconnected; one must cross the valley to commute from one hill district to another. For instance, there is no direct road connecting the hill districts of Churachandpur and Chandel, despite the two being adjacent to each other. Travellers between the two districts are required to pass through the valley district of Kakching.

It is not different in the distribution of medical facilities. There is a huge dearth of primary health centres in the hill districts, and where it exists, they often lack doctors and nurses. Both the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences and the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences, two premier medical institutes of the state, are kept in Imphal. Public hospitals in the hill districts are poorly equipped, frequently missing essential machinery and adequate medical staff. Even basic necessities like mortuaries are not available in most of them. The Churachandpur District Hospital was elevated to a medical college in 2022, yet it continues to lack the basic infrastructure and medical staff necessary to run a college.

The infrastructural deficit in the hill districts of Manipur is not simply because of the topographical challenges and high cost of construction. It is rather a systematic attempt of the state to make the hill people depend on the valley, and hence, it is an injustice. The state government, often controlled and headed by the valley community who have a higher share of political power than the hill people (40:20 legislators), largely concentrates its development initiatives in the valley and historically neglects the hill areas. Rocky R. Zupao (2020), a professor at IIT Bombay, observes that in projects aimed at benefiting hill communities, the state government often delays the release of funds, utilisation certificates, and other requirements, sometimes resulting in project suspensions, whereas, in projects that would benefit the valley communities, the government even bypasses legal obstacles and expedites constructions.

A huge disparity is also seen in the state budget allo-

cation. According to the state finance department, as cited in Kipgen & Chowdhury (2016), the hill districts of Manipur were allocated only 26% of the education budget, 25% of the health budget, 22% of the public works department budget, 14% of the social welfare budget and 12% of the agriculture budget in 2004-05. Similarly, Alfred K. Arthur, a former legislator from a hill constituency and a newly elected parliamentarian, pointed out on the floor of the assembly that the state's expenditures for the development of hill areas in 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, and 2020-21 were a meagre 108 crore INR, 150 crores INR, 120 crores INR, and 41 crores INR, respectively, whereas for the valley, he claimed, were in terms of thousands of crores every financial year. This is despite the marginal difference in population between the valley and hills (60:40) and the significant difference in geographical area (10:90).

While infrastructural injustice in Manipur is historical, it is the ensuing violence that has intensified its consequences, particularly for the Kuki people. With the valley and all its infrastructures being inaccessible to the Kuki, communication between Kuki-dominated areas has become paralysed. They are separated by rivers and mountains, creating challenges in the supply of food and other essentials. It was to mitigate this that the K. Molnom bridge was constructed by the locals through public donations, but it has now come to a halt. The problem of connectivity was also the reason many Kuki villagers, especially those in the foothills, fled to the jungle when they faced attacks from their neighbouring Meitei community.

The only means of transportation available to the Kuki people in different districts today are the unsurfaced inter-village roads and makeshift boats for crossing the river. For those needing to cross the river with their vehicles, they must have their vehicles transported across by trucks paying exorbitant prices. The arrival of the monsoon exacerbates the situation as the water level rises and landslides often block the road. The distance between Churachandpur and Kangpokpi, which used to take only three hours when travelling through Imphal, now requires a whole day to cover as one travels along an unsurfaced road through hills and mountains. Besides the supply of essentials, the Kuki

people face significant challenges in maintaining their customary practices as they cannot visit each other across different districts easily during times of both hardship and celebration.

For the Kuki youth, particularly those who studied in Imphal, education has come to a standstill, although a fortunate few managed to get transferred to universities in other states. With no university in Kuki-dominated areas, most youth cannot continue their education, nor are there jobs available for them locally. Many have migrated to metropolitan cities like Delhi, Chennai and Bengaluru in search of jobs. Unemployment is at its peak. As far as schools and colleges are concerned, they are overcrowded with students. With little to no support from the governments (both at the central and state), local student bodies like the Kuki Students' Organisation are compelled to set up what they call "community schools" in various locations to prevent internally displaced students from dropping out. These community schools barely have infrastructure and rely on donations from like-minded individuals for their operation.

The impact of infrastructural injustices on medical care is also immense. Patients from the Kuki community are left with no choice but to travel to Aizawl, Kohima or Guwahati when local hospitals are unable to treat them. Earlier, Imphal was the main hub for transferring critically ill patients. But, with Imphal being inaccessible and medical facilities in the hill districts very poor, the only option left for critically ill Kuki patients is to travel to other states, which is time-consuming and expensive. While a few could afford it, many could not, forcing them to live with their illnesses. Tragically, some have passed away en route to other states.

Given the complexities, the Manipur violence is unlikely to end soon. It is, thus, pertinent for the Indian government to address infrastructural challenges facing the hill people, particularly the Kuki. This includes improving communication channels between hill districts by constructing rural roads and bridges, addressing the problems faced by students and youth and mitigating medical challenges by mobilising specialised doctors and nurses from other states of the country. Chopper services between specific locations and short-term deployment of doctors are insufficient. It must undo the historical injustices meted out against the hill people.

(The writer is a research staff at IIT Gandhinagar)

Changing population by economic status disheartening for India
Poor people need special attention and social security coverage

By Dr Gyan Pathak

India, the largest populated country of the world, has been undergoing significant changes in population distribution by economic status, which need urgent attention of the government. Though extreme poverty has declined by 12.5 per cent and the moderate poor population came down by 5 per cent, the number of poor rose by 11.4 per cent between 2011 and 2019. During this period non-poor people in the country rose by 6 per cent.

It has been revealed in the newly released report by the World Bank titled "Rethinking Social Protection in South Asia: Towards Progressive Universalism", which categorized the people earning less than US \$2.15 a day calculated in 2017 at PPP (purchasing power parity) basis as extremely poor, earning between \$2.15 and \$3.65 as moderate poor, between \$3.65 and \$6.85 as poor, and above \$6.85 as non-poor. The report divides the non-poor in two categories - first earning between \$6.85 and \$15 a day, and the second earning \$15 and above.

As per the study, there were only 1.5 per cent people in the country who were earning above \$15 a day in 2011, but their number grew to 3.5 per cent in 2019. During this period the percentage of people earning between \$6.85 and \$15 a day grew from 8.6 per cent to 12.6 per cent.

The poor people suffered the worst during this period whose percentage grew from 27.6 per cent to 39 per cent. It shows that earnings of the poor drastically declined. In the meantime, the percentage of moderate poor declined marginally from 39.8 per cent to 34.8 per cent while extremely poor declined from 22.5 per cent to 10 per cent.

This situation needs urgent attention of the government because many more people are only a shock-away from poverty who are presently in the category of non-poor earning between \$6.85 and \$15 a day.

Though the report says that in the last two decades, most countries in South Asia witnessed economic growth contributing to substantial reduction in poverty, poverty reduction has been significantly slower. Moreover, households with consumption per person in the moderate poor category account for approximately a third of the poor in the region. A large percentage of households is also vulnerable to poverty.

Poverty prevalence in the region exhibits large spatial disparities. For example, in 2019, the extreme poverty rate in India's poorest state was more than three times the median state's poverty rate, and in six of the poorest states in the country, the extreme poverty rate was more than twice the median state's poverty rate.

Rural residents and children are more likely to be poor. In 2019, 87.2 per cent of the extreme poor in South Asia were living in rural areas. Among countries where recent data are available, the urban-rural gaps in extreme poverty are largest in Bangladesh, where 16 per cent of the rural population was extremely poor versus 5.8 per cent of the urban population, and smallest in Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

However, these gaps are substantially larger if one considers the US\$3.65-a-day poverty line, particularly in Bangladesh and Pakistan. For example, the rural-urban poverty differential is a staggering 26.7 per cent and 26.8 per cent in Bangladesh and Pakistan, respectively.

In 2019, children constituted 34 per cent of the population in South Asia and, in most South Asian countries, faced higher poverty levels (at US\$3.65) than, for instance, the working-age population and the elderly.

In Bangladesh, 17 per cent of children were extremely poor, and 58.5 per cent of all children in the country were living below the US\$3.65 poverty line, a significantly higher share than the corresponding shares of the elderly and working-age population. The same pattern applies in Pakistan, but with larger children-elderly and children-working-age population poverty differentials. High, stubborn levels of poverty mostly arise because of the limited creation of quality jobs, the study found. Between 2000 and 2020, around 386 million South Asians entered the working-age population, whereas only 81 million jobs were added to the economies. Only Sri Lanka, managed (until 2016) to create more jobs than labour market entrants.

The limited availability of quality jobs coincides with overall low levels of labour force participation, especially among women and youth. Labour markets in South Asia offer limited opportunities for the working-age population, especially youth and women, to realize its full potential and contribute to the region's growth and development. The average labour force participation rate in South Asia is 51 per cent, much lower than the average in low-income countries, at 64 per cent. The labour force participation rate is 24 per cent among women and 81 per cent among men.

Many young people in South Asia are also neither participating in the labour market, nor building skills to participate later on. The share of youth who were NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) among all youth in South Asia is above 33 per cent, which is higher than the corresponding share among lower-middle-income countries, at 28 per cent. Among young women, 47 per cent were NEET (versus 43 per cent in lower-middle-income countries), compared with only 14 per cent among young men.

South Asia has low employment ratios and high levels in the underuse of human capital, especially among the poor and vulnerable. In many countries in South Asia, less than 50 per cent of the working-age population is employed. Low employment rates tend to be concentrated among the most vulnerable workers, for example, those in the lowest wealth quintiles and education levels. The prevalence of underemployment (the share of employed workers who work at less than minimum wage) is significant in many countries, reaching 33 per cent in Bangladesh, 32 per cent in Maldives, 18 per cent in Nepal, 14 per cent in Bhutan, 13 per cent in Pakistan, and 10 per cent in India. Workers with lower levels of education and those in the poorest wealth quintiles are also more likely to suffer underemployment.

Most workers remain locked in informal and low-productivity jobs that do not allow them to escape vulnerability and improve economic mobility. There is also a higher share of workers engaged either in self-employment, or as unpaid family workers, reaching 73 per cent in Bhutan, 58 per cent in Bangladesh, 57 per cent in Pakistan, 54 per cent in India, 46 per cent in Nepal, and 44 per cent in Sri Lanka. These types of jobs do not offer workers regular income and other protections that could allow them slowly to build their savings base and escape poverty and vulnerability. This also makes these workers more vulnerable to shocks because they lack access to protection. (IPA Service)

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"Time and tide wait for no man."

— Geoffrey Chaucer

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Jobs for locals

RESERVATIONS are always a ticklish issue. There's the right side and the wrong side. So too with the move by the Congress government in Karnataka to reserve jobs in the private sector for natives. The state cabinet has given the nod for reservation of 70 percent non-management private sector jobs and 50 percent management-level positions for Kannadigas, but the decision has been frozen due to dissent and protests. The Congress party cannot afford to be promoting parochial feelings.

Karnataka's main economic strength is its IT sector, from which it earns huge sums by way of taxes, including duty for large-scale export of software. Adjoining Telangana also earns majorly this way. This principally oils the economy of these states, and the revenue from IT is used to develop these states and even feed the welfare schemes. Every individual is thus benefited. Thanks to the burgeoning IT sector growth, large-scale developmental initiatives are made and employment opportunities generated across Karnataka. Bengaluru city itself has several lakhs each of taxis, auto-rickshaws, trucks, etc mostly driven by Kannadigas. Nearly three lakh taxis were registered in the city this year alone. Non-transport vehicles' registrations there for the year crossed a crore.

The thriving hotel and restaurant business employs several lakh people. Almost every house in Karnataka has someone working in Bengaluru and sending money home. Real estate market is thriving in Bengaluru and across the region due to the massive growth of the city in the last 20 years. All these are thanks to the IT sector, where however non-Kannadigas enjoy prominence by virtue of their engineering degrees or business instincts. As the city grew, there's an increasing influx of people from other states, including from the Hindi belt, North-East etc. Big businesses are largely in the hands of the Marwaris, who dig in where wealth is. There is growing resentment that Kannadigas are becoming second-class citizens in the state capital. This feeling is more so among the lower, uneducated segments of the society. Their 'anguish' prompted the Siddaramaiah-led government to take this controversial decision. The main power behind the Congress win in the last assembly polls was the state's ordinary people, the Dalits and Muslims. The chief minister is keen on retaining their support. At the same time, the concept of India being a nation and the states being its parts, needs to be upheld and promoted. Notably, educated youths from the North-East find employment in major cities across the country today. Such situations promote the ideal of national integration. Using the huge earnings from the IT sector to help provide higher education to those from disadvantaged segments of Kannadigas can help create a level playing field there, rather than ethnicity-based reservations. One cannot afford to kill a goose that lays golden eggs.

Letters to the Editor

Hunger knows no boundaries

Editor,

I recently read D Bhat-tarachee's letter titled "Protectionism or Progress," published in your esteemed daily on July 17, 2024. The letter eloquently addresses a pressing issue in our society. Drawing from my own experiences, I would like to contribute additional perspectives to this discussion.

Once upon a time, I too was a labourer, toiling each day to earn a modest wage by making bricks and working on construction sites. Each brick I crafted earned me just 50 paise, a stark reminder of the hard physical labour I endured. From mixing cement and sand to carrying heavy materials like sand, cement, and stones, I did it all alone, under the constant scrutiny and pressure of my boss. Despite the challenges of cold weather and the relentless demands of the job, I persevered silently, driven by the necessity to provide for my family.

Reflecting on my own experiences, I cannot help but empathize deeply with today's labourers, especially those who leave their families behind to work in unfamiliar places. Their sacrifices are immense — enduring harsh conditions, uncertain futures, and now, the added threat to their safety posed by current circumstances.

It's crucial that we recognize and appreciate the pivotal role these labourers play in our lives. The roads we travel, the buildings we inhabit, and the schools where

we learn are all made possible by their tireless efforts. While we rest safely at night, they brave the elements and physical strain, ensuring our communities continue to grow and thrive.

Let us extend empathy and gratitude to these unsung heroes of construction. They deserve not just our applause, but our unwavering support and advocacy for fair working conditions and dignity. By understanding their challenges and respecting their contributions, we can truly honour their hard work and resilience.

When considering the challenge of employing local labourers, my experience has highlighted a prevalent difficulty: the reluctance among many to pursue labour-intensive work seriously. In today's society, there's a strong cultural inclination for children to aspire towards professions such as doctors, engineers, or office workers, rather than skilled labour roles. This preference often makes finding dedicated local labourers feel as elusive as searching for a needle in a haystack.

Furthermore, the plight of small shopkeepers deserves our utmost attention and recognition. These resilient individuals face ongoing challenges in maintaining their businesses, compounded now by additional threats. From managing rent payments and wages for their employees to navigating various conditions imposed by local authorities, their daily struggle is compounded by the imperative to ensure their families' livelihoods. Many

As far back as 1975, Meghalaya's Chief Minister, BB Lyngdoh who was a pragmatist had called for a cadastral survey of the entire State of Meghalaya so that (a) it is firmly established that Meghalaya actually measures 22,249 sq kms which is what it claims (b) it is also decided as to who owns how much land. In recent times, land that was designated as Forest Land has been redesignated as private land and has been rapidly built up. These include the land near the Shillong Garo Union School in Bivar Road and the place where the office of the National Peoples' Party (NPP) has come up. In the book - The Development Dilemma: Displacement in Meghalaya 1947-2010 by Veronica Pala and Walter Fernandes, a lot has been written about the fact that Meghalaya's land records are not in order; that Government is unaware as to how much land it actually owns and how much of revenue land has been converted to private land. In a state where land hunger is threatening to turn some into land ogres swallowing up everything they cast their eyes on, a time will soon come when the tribals of Meghalaya become landless not because the land is bought over by non-tribals which is the canard spread by those who want to throw the wool over our collective eyes but because the growing number of affluent tribals, mainly politicians are setting their eyes on every possible plot available in Shillong city and beyond - into the rural areas of the State where proposals for road construction and other infrastructure are being mooted.

The tribes of Meghalaya today live very precarious lives even as poverty and inequality are visible within this very city; not to talk of the poverty of access to resources in the rural hamlets. To add to the dilemma, this country has not had a census survey that was due in 2021 so we are all groping in the dark as far as the exact population and other statistics of Meghalaya and the country are concerned. In fact, Meghalaya has scarce data and most of us have to rely on the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) which is a fairly independent agency and the NITI Aayog which has been providing us statistics we cannot be proud of. According to the

NITI Aayog data of July 2023 Meghalaya is ranked with Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh as the poorest states in India and the poorest in the North East. Meghalaya recorded 32.54 per cent of the population with multi-dimensional poverty, as per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), against 27.79 per cent in NFHS-4. Ironically these statistics don't seem to worry those in government and to work out policies that will look at this grave socio-economic scenario.

The people owning large tracts of land and property are (a) politician-businessmen/women (b) other businessmen/women (c) contractors (d) engineers/technocrats and others with dubious sources of income. The first category is continuing on their land purchase spree as there is no bar on how much land a person in Meghalaya can own. The question is whether this is a sustainable social structure in a tribal community. Landlessness in rural Meghalaya was reported to be as high as 76 % (socio-economic caste census, 2011). Is anyone worried about these statistics? Who should be worried about them? The tribals of Meghalaya today are sharply divided by a class hierarchy. We may not have the caste system but we are sharply divided into two sharp classes - the affluent whose own hectares of land and the poor roadside vendor who struggles for two square meals and can never think of owning a roof over her head.

Many ask why the need for a cadastral survey and some in government claim to have done some scientific survey but they refuse to share those findings with the public. Why? What is the purpose of the survey if all it does is give information to the upper echelons of government so that they can buy up more land than they will ever need? A cadastral survey is an important and specialized form of land surveying that is used to define and measure land boundaries for the purpose of creating and maintaining land ownership records and maps. It follows several fundamental principles, including accuracy, legal considerations, integrity, and respect for property rights.

There are several different types of cadastral surveying, including boundary surveying, subdivision surveying, topographic surveying, and planning surveying. Cadastral surveying is a vital part of land development, real estate transactions, legal matters, and many other activities related to land ownership.

As stated above, the idea to have a cadastral survey in Meghalaya was mooted by various leaders in the past including former Chief Minister BB Lyngdoh. It was during the budget session of the Assembly on March 21, 1975, that Lyngdoh, who was the minister (in-charge) revenue at that time, had also proposed in the House the need to have a cadastral survey.

He told the House then, "We have to tackle the problem (related to land) and it is a matter of urgency to have a cadastral survey to determine the right owners. It is a subject matter of the Land Reforms Commission that should be taken up as early as possible." Lyngdoh had stated this in his reply to a cut motion where members of the House discussed the land issue. But as usual the survey could not take off. Instead, it was severely criticised as an attempt by the Government to impinge on the rights of the people in matters related to land. The chief protagonist of this resistance was Hopingstone Lyngdoh of the HSPDP and this was probably at the behest of those who already had an eye for land acquisition as the best investment.

Interestingly we haven't heard of this Land Reforms Commission in recent times and neither does the Government have a land use policy. So agricultural land or even forest land under the jurisdiction of the District Councils can overnight be turned into a residential area or an industrial area. It's a free for all as far as land transactions are concerned. Community land is overnight turned into private land and quarrying can be carried out anywhere at any time. Although the State Forest Department lists out the processes to be followed for grant of mining/quarrying licenses it is not known how the State has over 1700 illegal quarries/mines. Government claims these mines are abandoned but the Forest

Department does not state so. In the absence of authentic data we will have to accept that these mines are illegal as certified by the State Forest Department.

Without a cadastral survey how does anyone know which clan owns how much land and where. Can a society be called egalitarian when some clans own hectares of land while other clans are landless? Land has become the sole obsession of anyone with money to invest. Inequality is today the hallmark of Khasi society and we pretend as if this is normal. What happens to the children of those who can barely afford two square meals? Will education ever come within their reach? Without education what future do these thousands of kids have who already are deep into child labour?

It's pathetic that the District Councils that repeatedly assert their commitment to safeguard the customary practices and tradition don't give any thought at all to the looming landlessness of a large number of Khasi families especially in rural areas. Land, forests and rivers are their domain. If the State Government is remiss in addressing the issue of landlessness, the District Councils are expected to take up the matter and question the Dorbar Raid and Dorbar Shnong how and why there is a rapid privatisation of community land. The Councils have adopted the short-cut route of amending the Khasi Lineage Act ostensibly to prevent land alienation to non-tribals through the route of that non-tribal marrying a Khasi woman. Hence the Khasi woman marrying a non-tribal and her children would cease to be Khasis. Is there a tradition among the Khasis where a Khasi woman marrying a non-tribal ceased to be a Khasi? And this in a matrilineal society where the case of such women is already a settled one by the courts?

To make women the scapegoat for everything that's going wrong with society has been the bane of Khasi society. These are smoke-screens that are intended to hide the real societal flaws - the greed for land by the affluent Khasi by depriving others in the community of their legitimate share.

Is Yogi Adityanath the fall guy taking the hit for Modi?

BJP's weakened state brewing unrest in Uttar Pradesh Unit

By Sushil Kuttu

Will the Bharatiya Janata Party recover in time for the by-polls in Uttar Pradesh? July 18's morning news reports said Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya have been convinced to stop the squabbling and get ready for the by-polls in 10 assembly seats of which five are confirmed Samajwadi Party strongholds and the remaining five, the party of Yadavs is hungry to make a meal of.

This, even as Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav asked restless BJP leaders to "come with 100 MLAs and form the government". The BJP defended its UP unit. Understand, the BJP has been mostly defensive ever since June 4 when the results of the Lok Sabha elections were announced and the BJP found it had lost more seats than it had won! The Samajwadi Party was the emphatic victor with the Congress piggy-back riding on it.

More tellingly, the BJP humiliation was complete, repeatedly told to its face

Minister Narendra Modi is riding the TINA factor and BJP voters have nobody else to choose from though this Modi isn't the Modi of 2014 and 2019.

The swagger is gone. Modi acolytes now talk of Putin honouring Modi with Russia's top award as proof of Modi's invincibility. This, even as Modi has lost standing, in the BJP itself as evidenced by the UP infighting. Even NDA allies are criticizing and debunking BJP policies and actions. Is Keshav Prasad Maurya acting on his own or is he acting on "orders". If so, on whose orders?

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's "bulldozer" has been blamed for the BJP's poor showing in Uttar Pradesh by the "Nishad Party". This wouldn't have happened before June 4 and the "BJP defeat". Neither Prime Minister Narendra Modi nor Home Minister Amit Shah have spoken in support of Yogi Adityanath.

There was more proof of the BJP panicking when Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath put an abrupt halt



that it had lost the "right to rule with just 240 MPs." Once glib and assured, BJP spokespersons couldn't counter their INDI-Alliance counterparts. The BJP's confidence had crumbled in the face of relentless

to planned demolitions of illegal colonies on the banks of several UP rivers. On whose directions did he do so? Is the BJP anticipating a slaughter in the by-polls? If Keshav Prasad Maurya can openly attack Chief Minister

"If only the BJP had done better in Uttar Pradesh, where it won 33 Lok Sabha seats and the SP 35. The perception war is that the INDI-Alliance way and Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya, who was overlooked in 2017 for the CM's post, got his opportunity to blame the Yogi and eject him from the CM's post."

assertions that Prime Minister Narendra Modi should own up responsibility for the "defeat", and leave the proverbial "Build-ing" as quickly as possible.

If only the BJP had done better in Uttar Pradesh, where it won 33 Lok Sabha seats and the SP 35. The perception war is that the INDI-Alliance way and Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya, who was overlooked in 2017 for the CM's post, got his opportunity to blame the Yogi and eject him from the CM's post. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is the biggest stumbling block to many in Uttar Pradesh and not just KP Maurya. Both Akhilesh Yadav and Raebareli MP Rahul Gandhi also believe UP will be "theirs" if CM Yogi Adityanath is removed and the BJP is in total disarray. Who doesn't know that the BJP's central command is wobbling after the setbacks sustained in the Lok Sabha election 2024?

The question that arises, is whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi is being protected and Yogi Adityanath is the fall guy? The BJP's plethora of second-rung leaders cannot do without Modi. Though Yogi Adityanath is very popular, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is considered as the only vote-catcher for the BJP just like the Gandhi family is the lucky charm for the Congress. Prime

Yogi Adityanath, regardless of the BJP high-command, does it indicate that the party reins are slipping out of Modi and Shah's oily fingers.

Modi doesn't have to concede "defeat." The BJP losing majority has spoken loud and clear. It is not about a "moral victory." It is about losing the "perception war". The BJP's 'IT Cell' has lost its canines. The infighting in the Uttar Pradesh unit is a product of the BJP's setbacks in Uttar Pradesh, and the BJP's overall failure to get a clear parliamentary majority. The party's highest echelons should have taken the blame, but it is 'Operation Eject Yogi', as predicted by the INDI-Alliance during the campaigning for the Lok Sabha elections. Is Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath the fall guy? Has Prime Minister Narendra Modi been spared the embarrassment of looking like a failure? On July 17, both Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and LoP in the West Bengal Assembly Suwendu Adhikari blamed Modi's 'Sabka Saath and Sabka Vikas' for the election setbacks. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was let off the hook, but for how long? The UP by-polls are the litmus test for not just Yogi, but also for Modi. Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya struck when the iron was hot! (IPA Service)

National football tournament the Durand Cup will be hosted right here in Shillong. We expect great teams, good footballing and a vibrant soccer loving crowd from all over to come. The State Sports Department and the Chief Minister have been doing their best to put Meghalaya on the football map. However, what would be an added motivation is for the State Government to streamline funding to registered clubs in various sporting disciplines so that they are able to meet their necessary requirements and also with a foolproof mechanism to ensure that they adhere to guidelines set by the Sports Department. Many a times whenever sportsmen or women go to participate in international events they lack funding to support their basic needs. Hence if the state government is serious in following its sports policy in letter and spirit then this initiative would be a source of inspiration.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S. Wankhar,
Shillong 3

Bye-election results indicates that India is matured democracy

Editor,
Results of bye-elections in seven states show that democracy has matured in India. First, BJP lost the Ayodhya seat in the Parliamentary elections and now lost the Badrinath assembly seat in Uttarakhand which

indicates the maturing of democracy in India. The same is reflected in results of Himachal Pradesh, also known as Devbhumi where BJP tasted defeat in two assembly seats and the worst position for BJP is in West Bengal. The bye-election to Punjab shows that now voters are intelligent enough to distinguish between assembly seats and the parliament elections as the Congress party had won this seat with huge margin but now the Congress party is at third place in the bye-election.

The bye-election results are an eye-opener for the present government and for the future assembly elections which are to be held in the coming four-five months. Such events indicate the future trends and in this regard I quote two examples.

The first example is of UP when the candidate of Congress being run by Indira Gandhi defeated the sitting chief minister T.N. Singh due to this one seat Congress controlled by Indira Gandhi won the other elections also. The second example is of Sharad Yadav who was the first candidate of Janata Party when he defeated Seth Govind Dass who has not lost any election in last 50 years. It was a record as the second candidate was Churchill who had not lost any election in 50 years.

It is a good sign of a mature democracy and it has demonstrated that freebies are not a guarantee for fetching votes. A common person is tired of inflation and unemployment and Government has no definite programme to solve both

problems. On the basis of religious slogans no party will get votes which is evident from the above results.

India is the largest democracy in the world and the entire world is watching the events in India after the elections when the BJP is running a Government dependent on the support of the other parties. While the present government is speaking against dynastic politics but the common man is least concerned about it.

At the grassroots level the public impression is that Government agencies are being misutilised against the Opposition parties and when the same person joins the BJP all corruption charges are dropped. Such feelings undermine the democratic set-up and the Government should refrain from it.

In this regard many examples are being circulated in the media. The present political scenario is such that every step of the Government will be countered by the Opposition parties as now BJP had declared Jun 26 as Samvidhan Hatya and the Opposition had declared it the day of demonetization and end of jobs.

Every citizen of the country wishes for a strong Opposition so that issues of the public should be raised in Parliament.

Yours etc.,
Yash Pal Raihan,
Via email

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"The responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision."
— George Eliot

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Spoken like a Statesman

TOURISM and Social Welfare Minister, Paul Lyngdoh has at last spoken like a true statesman unlike other politicians who have chosen the path of least resistance on the issue of non-local labourers who have been harassed by the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) activists. Paul Lyngdoh pointed out quite succinctly that the job market is such that any contractor who needs to complete any major construction work within a definite time frame cannot rely on local labourers because of their propensity to remain absent on flimsy grounds; to take smoking and betel-nut breaks and in this era to check their mobile phones for juicy news that trigger their inquisitive nature. Lyngdoh has also stated upfront that activist groups desirous of getting the Government to implement protective mechanisms like the Inner Line Permit (ILP) should be working in tandem with the Government and not against it since both have similar objectives and need to put pressure on the Centre to get the issue resolved.

As Tourism Minister, Paul Lyngdoh has also set to rest the imbroglia vis a vis taxis coming bringing tourists from Assam to Meghalaya and the ruckus raised by the Taxi Association in Meghalaya not to allow them entry into the tourist spots but for the tourists to disembark from Assam tourist taxis at a certain point and board the local taxis from Meghalaya. The manner in which passengers embarking at the Inter-State Bus Terminus at Mawiong are being fleeced by local taxis is something that the Transport Department needs to keep check on. There have to be standard rates and no taxi can over-charge any passenger. The same is the story of passengers bound for Umroi Airport. While the taxi charges from Shillong to Guwahati airport is Rs 3000, the same charges are paid by unsuspecting passengers taking a flight from Umroi airport. This is outright fleecing. Passengers coming in from Guwahati airport and wishing to come to Shillong for a day trip obviously prefer to take the Assam registered taxis which charge standard rates because there is a huge competition in this sector and the passenger is king and has a choice. Besides, Assam has Uber cabs where not much haggling happens. Meghalaya is far from adopting such passenger-friendly Apps. In this state, there is fear of competition in every field yet everyone wants to be an entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurship is built on confidence and the ability to compete on an even playing field. Competitors cannot be eliminated by using tactics that deprive them of fair play and even-handedness. To expect something like reservation even in the transport business is taking protectionism to a different level. People from Meghalaya who use the taxis from here to travel to Guwahati airport or elsewhere in Assam are bound to face a backlash if the Taxi Associations of Meghalaya insist on not allowing Assam taxis carrying tourists and other passengers to enter the State. There is such a thing as reciprocal dependence and the Tourism Minister has rightly stressed that point.

Beyond Stereotypes: Poverty and Well-being of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo in Meghalaya

By James Dkhar

The government's promises radiate like sunrays, weaving a mosaic fabric of hope and optimism. Yet, the harsh reality remains: Meghalaya stands as one of India's poorest states, according to the recently published Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). Despite assurances of prosperity and development, the poverty rate stubbornly persists, leaving a significant portion of the population struggling to make ends meet. The state's economic growth has failed to reach those who need it most. The glaring contrast between politicians' claims and ground realities is startling. While the government highlights its achievements, people continue to grapple with challenges—limited access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and basic living conditions.

The report, National Multidimensional Poverty Index: A Progress Review 2023, showcases India's 2019-21 MPI results, plus the progress in multidimensional poverty reduction between 2015-16 and 2019-21. Traditionally, poverty estimation relied solely on income or monetary measures. However, people can be poor in various ways. Regardless of income level, the national MPI identifies those who lack access to basic necessities. It is the first-of-its-kind index that estimates multiple and simultaneous deprivations at a household level across the three macro dimensions of health, education, and living standards. This report also showcases India's remarkable progress in reducing multidimensional poverty between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5 (survey period from 2015-16 and 2019-21). The share of India's population who are multidimensionally poor has declined from 24.85% to 14.96%. In Meghalaya, 27.79% of the population faces multidimensional poverty.

Historically, the perception is that the Garo community faces more poverty than the Khasi and Jaintia communities. Surprisingly, this report challenges this stereotype. The Garo community fares well in this assessment with lesser multidimensional poverty and relatively much lower when compared with the Khasi and Jaintia. The Garo region also shows commendable progress in the reduction of multidimensional poverty during the survey period. However, Jaintia districts, despite their mineral wealth, perform poorly. The richest in resources paradoxically struggle with poverty.

The East Khasi district shows negligible improvement, and the other Khasi districts also performed poorly, similar to the Jaintia districts. Ri Bhoi district shows notable progress in poverty reduction, but a substantial portion of the people are in multidimensional poverty. The district-wise percentage of multidimensional poverty, according to the report, is as follows: East Jaintia Hills (43.79%), West Jaintia Hills (52.08%), East Khasi Hills (24.10%), Ri Bhoi (31.67%), West Khasi Hills (52.48%), South West Khasi Hills (40.98%), East Garo Hills (14.96%), North Garo Hills (13.26%), South Garo Hills (9.77%), South West Garo Hills (18.27%),

and West Garo Hills (8%). Overall, both the percentage and intensity of poverty are very high among the Khasi and Jaintia, reflecting the extent of multidimensional poverty. West Jaintia district and West Khasi district are among the most impoverished districts in the country.

The Khasi and Jaintia districts, which struggle with high poverty rates, also exhibit a high prevalence of polygamy—the highest number of men with multiple wives. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) 2019-21, East Jaintia Hills has a polygamy rate of 20%, the highest in the country among districts. West Jaintia Hills follows at 14.5%, West Khasi Hills at 10.9%, South West Khasi Hills at 6.4%, Ri Bhoi at 6.2%, and East Khasi Hills at 5.8%.

Meghalaya, among the states, boasts the highest prevalence of polygynous marriages in the country at 6.1%. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in these regions compared to the rest of the country, where the national average is significantly lower at 1.4%. Interestingly, these districts concurrently grapple with notable health and nutrition challenges.

The high rates of poverty and polygamy in the Khasi and Jaintia districts cannot be mere coincidence. While no specific study has investigated this relationship in these districts, research elsewhere has shown a correlation between poverty and polygamy. Economic insecurity can drive the pursuit of multiple marriages as a means of survival or social security.

In turn, polygamy can perpetuate poverty through the division of resources among multiple households, creating a self-reinforcing cycle that exacerbates economic vulnerability. Further research is needed to explore this complex dynamic in the context of the Khasi and Jaintia regions, taking into consideration the matrilineal system. However, the available data suggests a potential link between these factors.

Although polygamy is not legal in India for any community except for Muslims, its practice persists in some sections of the country. In the context of the Khasi and Jaintia matrilineal society, polygamy appears to disproportionately impact women. They are often left to bear the brunt and shoulder the responsibility of caring for their children and managing households without adequate support. According to NFHS-5 (2019-2021), 41% of households in Meghalaya are headed by females, one of the highest percentages in India. Several studies have shown that male-headed households tend to have higher incomes, greater access to education and healthcare, and better overall well-being. In contrast, female-headed households are more likely to experience poverty, food insecurity, and limited access to resources and opportunities. Thus, these female-headed households may face increased vulnerability to poverty and social challenges, exacerbating the

struggles faced by women in this region.

Research consistently shows that children raised by single mothers face additional challenges compared to those raised by both parents. Studies indicate that children from single-mother households often experience lower academic achievement, higher dropout rates, and an increased likelihood of behavioural and emotional problems. Additionally, they may encounter economic disadvantages, including reduced access to resources and opportunities.

This is not to diminish the ability of single mothers to provide a nurturing environment; rather, the absence of a second parent can cause added stress and reduced support, ultimately affecting the child's well-being and development. While a mother provides warmth, comfort, and nurturing, a father's presence brings illumination, guidance, and support. Also, it is important to recognize that many single mothers do an amazing job raising their children, and this paragraph highlights the added challenges they face rather than their capabilities.

Women in Meghalaya occupy a paradoxical position. On one hand, they enjoy a unique cultural status in the matrilineal society, granting them a significant degree of autonomy and power. On the other hand, they face numerous challenges that perpetuate their victimization.

The state's high prevalence of female-headed households, early parenthood, health and nutrition challenges, and more underscore the difficulties they encounter. While the matrilineal system empowers women in some ways, it may inadvertently contribute to their vulnerability in other areas.

The family structure and well-being serve as the building blocks of a prosperous society. The health and well-being of families are paramount for growth and development. A stable and supportive family environment is essential for individuals to thrive, and by extension, for communities and societies to flourish. Without strong families, we risk perpetuating cycles of poverty, inequality, and social injustice.

Moreover, poverty is not solely about lacking financial resources or a mere matter of individual misfortune. It is a complex web of interconnected factors, including historical, cultural, social, economic, and political elements. Government policies, such as resource allocation and welfare programs, can either alleviate or exacerbate poverty. For instance, programs that focus on short-term fixes, such as food assistance or temporary housing, may provide immediate relief but fail to address the underlying causes of poverty. The emphasis on quick fixes and political point-scoring often overshadows long-term solutions, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Consequently, some policies and practices inadvertently reinforce inequality and discrimination, trapping marginalized groups in poverty.

India's Vision 2030,

aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), envisions a future where "no one is left behind." India has made remarkable progress toward achieving this vision, with significant strides in poverty reduction, education, and healthcare.

However, the Khasi and Jaintia districts remain outliers, persistently grappling with poverty levels that defy the national trend. Meghalaya's administration lags behind, failing to effectively translate the national vision into tangible action in these districts. This disparity raises questions about the state government's capacity and commitment to addressing poverty, especially given the successful implementation of central government initiatives in other states.

The sobering reality of poverty in Meghalaya underscores the need for nuanced understanding of the local context. A one-size-fits-all approach has fallen short, highlighting the importance of effective governance and resource allocation. Inefficient delivery mechanisms and inadequate infrastructure may have contributed to poor outcomes.

Additionally, it is pertinent to consider the potential impact of government policies regarding officer transfers and postings on regional development. Frequent transfers and postings can have a disruptive effect on institutional continuity and effectiveness. It would be enlightening to examine the patterns of officer transfers and postings across the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo regions. Understanding bureaucratic dynamics in the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo regions could provide valuable insights in the regional developmental outcomes.

Acknowledging and addressing these shortcomings is essential. Policies should be rooted in evidence, and recent data provides a clearer understanding of the ground realities in Meghalaya. By leveraging recent data, policymakers can develop targeted strategies and interventions to tackle challenges effectively.

In the past, decision-making was often guided by intuition, leading to uncertain outcomes. But with the advent of data, we now have a reliable compass to navigate the complexities of policy-making. Data-driven policies ensure fairness. Far from being just cold numbers, data represents the pulse of progress. By embracing data-driven decision-making, we can build bridges of understanding, rather than walls of assumption, and create a brighter future for all.

In conclusion, poverty represents a denial of basic human rights, an erosion of dignity, and a stifling of potential. It perpetuates inequality, compromises health, restricts education, and fosters social exclusion. The time for rhetoric has passed; now is the time for action. It is imperative that the government recognizes the urgent need to address poverty and its interconnected factors, working toward a comprehensive and inclusive development strategy. Only then can Meghalaya hope to catch up with the rest of the country, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Rumblings in the BJP

By Lekha Rattanani

Some indications of a BJP unraveling are coming in at least from two key States, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, both where the BJP took heavy losses in the Lok Sabha elections that brought Narendra Modi in his third term as Prime Minister heading a minority government, cut to size from the char sau paar campaign that the party ran. In Uttar Pradesh, Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya has come out with what is being seen as at least a move if not a revolt against Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. In a social media post that is now being widely quoted, Maurya noted that the organisation is bigger than the government, that the party workers are the pride of the BJP. In doing so, it is said, he has taken aim at the working style of Yogi Adityanath and the Chief Minister's focus on running the administration with an overdependence on bureaucrats. As a result, the argument goes, party workers appear to have been left with the feeling that they are not heard, or that their work is not being done and that of officialdom rules – a style that is being attributed directly to the way the Chief Minister works and controls the politically-sensitive State.

In a video clip shared on the platform 'X', Maurya said at a public meeting, to rounds of hearty applause: The organisation was, is and will remain bigger than the government. I consider myself first a worker of the BJP and only next the Deputy Chief Minister.

Maurya met State BJP Chief Bhupendra Singh Chaudhary, and the two together then met the BJP national President J P Nadda, followed by a meeting between Chaudhary and the Prime Minister, all in quick succession. The statements and meetings indicate at one level serious dissatisfaction with the way Yogi Adityanath is running the government, and on the other hand are a result of concerns that election reverses are not a one-off but indicative of a deeper decline in the way the party is now being perceived. Yet, it will not be easy to unseat Adityanath, who is also popular at least among some sections, a counter to which is the simple question that comes up now: Is this popularity only on paper, or whipped up over the years to project the Chief Minister as bigger than he actually is? The Lok Sabha elections seem to indicate so: The BJP won 33 seats, down from 62 in the 2019 elections. The upcoming by-polls to 10 Assembly seats in UP will therefore be a tough fight and may well determine much in UP and its fallout across the nation. Key seats here include Akhilesh Yadav's Karhal constituency and Milkpur (in Ayodhya), whose SP legislator Awadesh Prasad stumped the BJP with an astounding victory from Faizabad, the constituency that covers the city of Ayodhya.

In Maharashtra, the forced split of the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena and Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) has brought bitter dividends in the polls. Unlike in UP, where poll forecasters were happily presenting a BJP sweep, in Maharashtra it was very clear to observers even before the elections that the BJP would take a big hit. This is indeed what

happened. The alliance of the BJP-Shiv Sena (Shinde faction)-NCP (Ajit Pawar faction) together won a total of 17 seats, down from 41 out of 48 in the 2019 elections. The BJP itself won only nine of the 28 seats it contested this time; the Congress won 13 of the 17 seats it contested.

The RSS-linked magazine 'Vivek' has now offered an analysis that says Eknath Shinde, who broke away from the main Shiv Sena party but was declared to be the "real" Shiv Sena, was acceptable to the people. The problem, it said, stemmed from the unacceptability of Ajit Pawar, the nephew of Sharad Pawar, who was first attacked by the BJP on charges of corruption and then taken into the BJP fold as a key ally. The Ajit Pawar faction of the NCP now has its own doubts about the wisdom of joining the BJP ranks. Maharashtra is rife with speculation on the Ajit Pawar group of MLAs coming back to Sharad Pawar. Amidst this meltdown, how good is the analysis that it was Ajit Pawar and not the entire, well-coordinated operation that toppled the duly elected government of Uddhav Thackeray (who was in power with the support of the Congress and the NCP) that is seen by the people as unacceptable?

In many ways, these are some attempts to raise questions that do not get to the root of the problem, which is moral bankruptcy. What has become clear is the perception of the BJP as a party in a race to win at any cost, be it with money power, Hindutva politics or the investigative agencies it uses to bulldoze opposition leaders into submission. This is in plain sight of the ordinary citizen, and for the BJP to believe that it can fix the narrative, grab a headline or turn the story into something in its favour, it seems, stems from the belief and presumption that it can fool all the people all the time. The 2024 election results told the party that it cannot get away. Yet, the BJP refuses to listen even today; its clever arguments and questionable tactics continue.

The reality is that communal politics of the kind played by the BJP, led by the Prime Minister, has stopped paying dividends of the kind that it once did. The loss of the Faizabad seat where the Ram temple was hastily inaugurated is not just a metaphor of the bigger losses for the BJP; it is a slap in the face of everything the BJP has stood for and pushed during its tenure – from its ideas of mixing religion and politics to its idea of development that pushed out the poor to make away for a new-found sleekness and a would-be greatness that it thought would descend on Ayodhya with outsiders, and the moneyed class moving in. This decidedly anti-poor approach has become pervasive and is seen as such by everyone but the BJP itself. The party has sought to redeem this slant with free food grain distribution to 60% of India – does that highlight a top-down growth model it is accused of promoting and one that cannot make a sustainable growth story for India.

(The writer is the Managing Editor of The Billion Press) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Sad waning of the reading culture

Editor,
The write up published in The Shillong Times, Tura, July 16, 2024 on the dwindling of the reading habit is really worth noting it. Yes, the reading culture these days in Meghalaya has lost its past glory. The drifting interest from reading be it newspapers, magazines and the comic magazines for teenagers is really astounding. Of course, reading academic books and career oriented magazines remains unchanged but leisure time reading these days has really gone down.

There was an era where one's mornings were incomplete without reading newspapers and sports maga-

zines. That was a beautiful era which will perhaps not return. The joy of going through the daily newspapers with a hot cup of morning tea is indefinable. Those moments provided a different kind of ecstasy. At present the book stalls are bereft of colourful magazines and novels. One can only reminisce the past with some regret because reading a variety of books and magazines has its own uses.

Yours etc.,
Deepal Chhetry,
Tura.

ILP imperative for Meghalaya

Editor,
Apropos of the news item "Paul blames migration on locals' reluctance to work" and "No question of restricting Assam tourist vehicles

from entering the state, says Paul." (ST July 19, 2024), the Inner Line Permit system, implemented in several North-Eastern States of India, including Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland is designed to regulate the entry of outsiders into these regions. Prior to Independence Inner Line Regulation was to protect the interests of the Crown but now the primary purpose of the ILP is to protect the indigenous cultures and prevent influx of people that might disrupt not only the local way of life but alter the demography of a microscopical tribal population of the country. Hence, Paul Lyngdoh, Minister Tourism rightly stated "We have to fight for ILP in tandem with NGOs. It cannot be NGOs versus Meghalaya. It should be NGOs and the Govern-

ment of Meghalaya working together to take the Assembly resolution to its logical end." Together We Can. The statement of the Minister is rational and pragmatic that our regulatory mechanisms should be in place instead of restricting Assam tourist vehicles from entering Meghalaya.

The North Eastern Region or for that matter Meghalaya is a labour deficient economy in many aspects and more so when it comes to skilled and highly skilled labour, we still depend on labour from other parts of the country for various public and private works. We cannot shy away from this reality till our own labour is skilled up in order to get the economic wheels rolling for employment and income generation so as to sustain the economy which is still dependent for both food

and non-food items from outside the region. There are those who argue that ILP is a deterrent for economic growth but practically speaking the ILP system can add extra steps for tourists, it does not necessarily impede tourism. In fact, it helps manage and control tourism in a way that preserves the natural beauty and cultural heritage of these beautiful hills of Northern Eastern India. Many travellers still visit these States, and the process of obtaining an ILP is generally straightforward. However, some argue that the ILP system might deter spontaneous travel plans and could be seen as a barrier for those unfamiliar with the process. Despite this, the Inner Line Permit is crucial for maintaining the ecological and cultural balance in these sensitive regions of the

country.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Dismal performance in civil services

Editor,
Meghalaya's quest for bureaucratic brilliance appears elusive each year. While the Civil Services Examination (CSE) topper's list often features candidates from across the country, Meghalaya has seen a concerning lack of representation in recent years. There are complex reasons behind this under-performance, and addressing them requires a collective effort.

Despite having a number of premier institutions in the State with very high standard of education especially in

Shillong with ICSE & CBSE background, the State has not produced successful aspirants for the past few years. It is a fact that there is a lack of strong support system. Unlike in some other states with a well-established civil service bureaucracy, Meghalaya may not have a wide network of mentors and seniors to guide and inspire young aspirants.

To bridge this gap, the state government may collaborate with the premier Institutions of the State to play a proactive role, perhaps, even local NGOs or other civil society groups can take up the initiatives such as sponsoring coaching programs, providing scholarships for civil service aspirants, and creating a mentorship network, which can indeed make a significant difference.

Equally important is creating awareness about the civil services exams at the school level. Exposing students to the possibility of a career in the civil service, early on, can spark interest and encourage them to dream big. Teachers and parents alike can play a major role in inculcating a more supportive eco-system and by fostering a culture of excellence; Meghalaya can witness a rise in its civil service aspirants and contribute more effectively to the nation's administrative machinery.

Yours etc.,
R. Kamar,
Via email

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One small update brought down MNS of IT systems around the world

This weekend's global IT outage caused by a software update gone wrong highlights the interconnected and often fragile nature of modern IT infrastructure. It demonstrates how a single point of failure can have far-reaching consequences.

The outage was linked to a single update automatically rolled out to CrowdStrike Falcon, a ubiquitous cyber security tool used primarily by large organisations. This caused Microsoft Windows computers around the world to crash.

CrowdStrike has since fixed the problem on their end. While many organisations have been able to resume work now, it will take some time for IT teams to fully repair all the affected systems - some of that work has to be done manually.

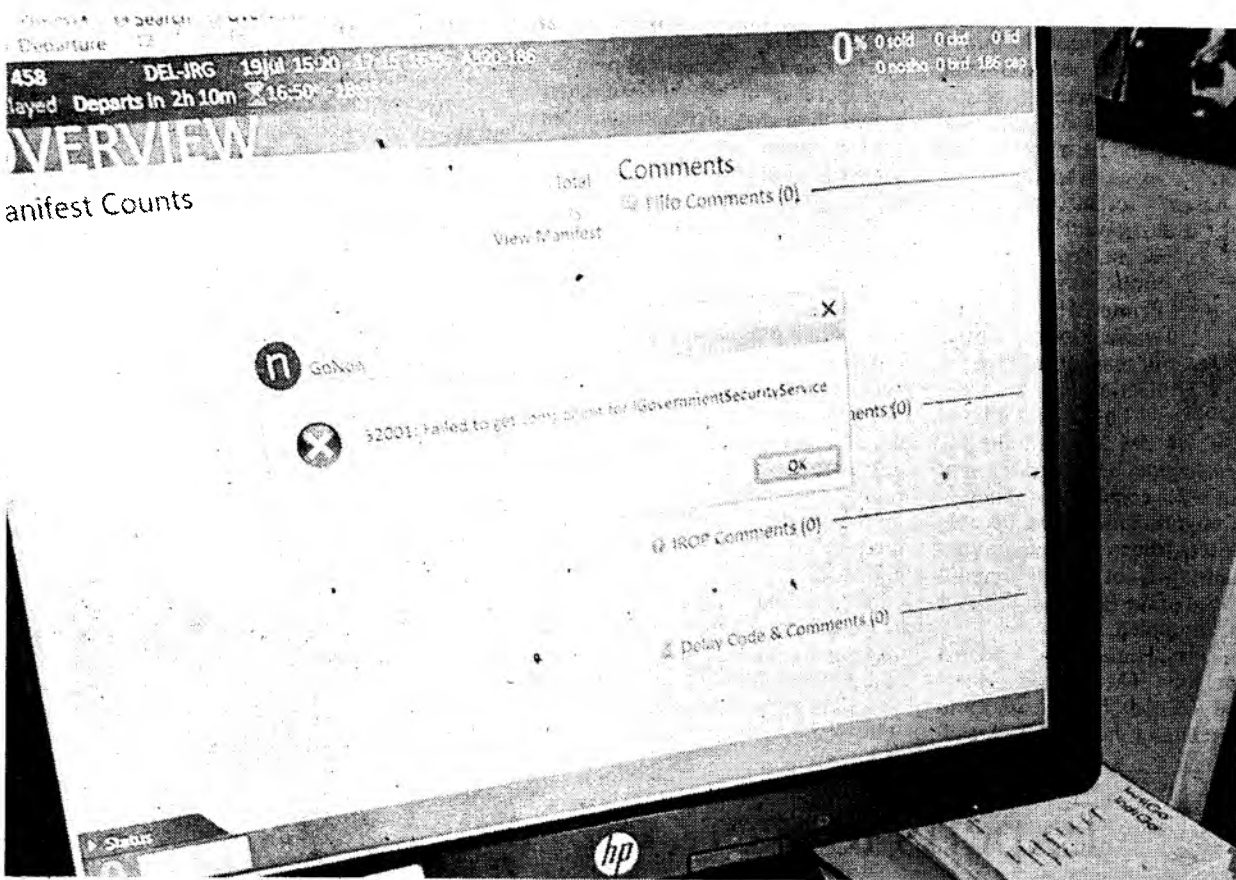
How could this happen? Many organisations rely on the same cloud providers and cyber security solutions. The result is a form of digital monoculture.

While this standardisation means computer systems can run efficiently and are widely compatible, it also means a problem can cascade across many industries and geographies. As we've now seen in the case of CrowdStrike, it can even cascade around the entire globe.

Modern IT infrastructure is highly interconnected and interdependent. If one component fails, it can lead to a situation where the failed component triggers a chain reaction that impacts other parts of the system.

As software and the networks they operate in becomes more complex, the potential for unforeseen interactions and bugs increases. A minor update can have unintended consequences and spread rapidly throughout the network.

As we have now seen, entire systems can be brought to a grinding halt before the overseers can react to prevent it. How was Microsoft involved? When Windows comput-



ers everywhere started to crash with a "blue screen of death" message, early reports stated the IT outage was caused by Microsoft.

In fact, Microsoft confirmed it experienced a cloud services outage in the Central United States region, which began around 6pm Eastern Time on Thursday, July 18 2024.

This outage affected a subset of customers using various Azure services. Azure is Microsoft's proprietary cloud services platform.

The Azure outage had far-reaching consequences, disrupting services across multiple sectors, including airlines, retail, banking and media. Not only in the United States but also internationally in countries like Australia and New Zealand. It also impacted various Microsoft 365 services, including PowerBI, Microsoft Fabric and Teams.

As it has now turned out, the entire Azure outage could also be traced back to the CrowdStrike update. In this case it was affecting Microsoft's virtual machines running Windows with Falcon installed.

What can we learn from this episode? Don't put all your IT eggs in one basket. Companies should use a multi-cloud strategy: distributing their IT infrastructure across multiple cloud service providers. This way, if one provider goes down, the others can continue to support critical operations. Companies can also ensure their business continues to operate by building in redundancies into IT systems. If one component goes down, others can step up.

This includes having backup servers, alternative data centres, and "failover" mechanisms that can quickly switch to backup systems in

the event of an outage.

Training staff on how to respond when outages occur can manage a difficult situation back to normal. This includes knowing who to contact, what steps to take, and how to use alternative workflows.

How bad could an IT outage get?

It's highly unlikely the world's entire internet could ever go down due to the distributed and decentralised nature of the internet's infrastructure. It has multiple redundant paths and systems. If one part fails, traffic can be rerouted through other networks.

However, the potential for even larger and more widespread disruptions than the CrowdStrike outage does exist. The catalogue of possible causes reads like the script of a disaster movie. (*The Conversation*)

Humans cause climate change

For decades, scientists warned that continued burning of oil, gas, and coal would have devastating climate impacts.

Those impacts are now being felt around the world.

Climate change is driving extreme weather. By all accounts, the last few years have been brutal for the climate - and for the humans and other living things within it. Around the globe, heat records have been shattered. Floods have soaked Pakistan, Libya and numerous other countries, in torrents that destroyed property and claimed lives.

Powerful hurricanes have blasted the usual land targets, like the eastern coasts of India and the United States. And there have been strange, once-in-a-generation events, like a tropical storm that hit California.

The science of what is happening is clear. For more than 100 years, scientists have known that large quantities of greenhouse gases, released from the burning of fossil fuels, go up into the atmosphere and heat the planet. That heating leads to frequent and more extreme alterations in weather patterns. In that sense, climate change can be thought of as the Great Accelerator.

The heat wave that was always going to be hot is even hotter and hangs around much longer, forming a suffocating dome over large chunks of land. The periodic drought that was already going to happen ends up being drier and lasting longer, stripping moisture from the land and leaving cracks in its wake. The tropical storm that was always going to form in the ocean, but might have subsided before, more frequently turns into a powerful hurricane that pummels all it touches and leaves major flooding.

The pace of extreme weather events is dizzying, so much so that governments, scientists, and humanitarian groups find themselves responding to multiple crises at

once. The extremes have heightened awareness of climate change, even among people who have denied it, or had the means to insulate themselves, or just wanted to look away.

And the impact is coming into sharp focus.

Climate impacts are felt everywhere, but not felt equally. No place on Earth is immune to the extremes of climate change, but those extremes are not experienced equally.

Faced with rising seas, a coastal dweller with enough money can pay to raise their house, or simply decide to buy another house further inland. Meanwhile, a poor person may have no way to fortify their home and thus no choice but to watch it get washed away - or worse, get washed away themselves in the flooding.

Climate change didn't create the inequality but did make it worse.

One of the most visceral manifestations of climate inequality is migration. Every year, the UN estimates that more than 21 million people around the world move because extreme weather has made life inhospitable where they live.

Floods have taken their homes. Drought has shriveled their crops. Incessant heat, and no way to escape it, such as with life-saving air conditioning, has put them at risk of death.

The extremes hit the most vulnerable hardest, but impacts are widespread - no one is completely spared. One of the best examples: wildfires that burn for months push smoke across countries and even sometimes across the globe, making the air dangerous to breathe even while doing simple things like taking a walk.

The extremes also have financial costs. Each year, countries around the world are spending hundreds of billions of dollars to prepare for and rebuild after bouts of extreme weather. (*The Conversation*)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, July 21, 2024

'Birthday Forecast'

Full Moon on your solar return chart ensures a very favorable year for you. You will be a lot imaginative and creative. And will have new ideas. You will like to take people along with you and will be goal oriented. Your subordinates and colleagues will also listen to you and give support. Your bosses too will encourage you. Your imagination and plans will work out perfectly. Enemies won't be able to harm you. You will be entering into partnership or joint venture. And will get favorable atmosphere for growth. New romantic ties also look possible. A very charming person will come in your life. You will face no worries on health front. New contacts will be made.

This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) Though mixed results are indicated it will be an overall happy one. Try to keep harmony and patience in all communications and dealings in family. Although you will remain extremely busy still you will keep pace with personal and professional life. Be careful of letting yourself get too overwhelmed by what is going on around you. Take things one step at a time. Promotion or betterment will also take place. If looking for a change then that too shall materialize. Your health will require attention and you should try to have a proper diet. Keep a distance from those with negative thoughts otherwise you will not be at ease. You enjoy romantic outings with your beloved.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) Works relating to the arts and fashion work will take priority and you may decide to expand your profession in these areas. You will have good personal and professional relations as your interpersonal skills shine. By engaging in the activities that you enjoy the most, you will most certainly create new bonds with the people that you meet in these arenas of your life. The atmosphere around you will boost your emotional feelings. The health of a family member may demand your attention but it may be a passing phase. There are chances that some events may cause stress but this too is a temporary phase.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) You will have good chances of professional and monetary gains as you get more involved in the work at hand. Your career will improve your position and you will be expected to use your skills to the best of your ability so bring forth your experience and knowledge to make the best of this opportunity. News of possible profits through investments could come your way. Fuse together your desire for new friends with your passion for familiar activities. Things take a turn in respect to your romance and love related matters. Issues related to property and assets may crop up so take care that your money does not get held up. You will enjoy good health during this period.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) The burden of work continues so do not let your mind wander in other directions and new projects and areas as this will dissipate your resources. With the requisite concentration you will achieve your goals and also earn accolades from seniors and peers alike. Your spontaneity and ability to take decisions on the spur of the moment will take you up the ladder. Do not try to speculate in any way as it may not prove to be good. You will resolve some pending domestic issues with support from family members. Simply let things go at normal speed and do not push matters or exhibit your haste at this time.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) The position of stars is indicating mixed results. Some unusual circumstances may draw your attention. Unattended dues may demand your time and energy. Some of you may also consider taking loans. If there is something you need to achieve go ahead and take the initiative and stop waiting for others to catch up. You will find people to support you wherever you go. You will take up a cause which is close to your heart but at this time you may not get a good response. Your thoughts and ideas will waver as you jump from one idea to another and you will feel an element of uncertainty. You should take care that someone does not interfere in your domestic life. Yoga and meditation will be of help. Travel during this period will prove beneficial.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) Look at all pros and cons before you reach a decision in any situation as there may be misunderstandings which will affect your working. Once you avoid confrontations things will pick up speed. You are then ready to put your novel ideas into practice and they then gain acceptance too. No doubt a lot of efforts will be required to be put in but they will not go unrewarded. You take considered and wise steps to maintain

harmony and affection in your family relations. Your children will prove to be helpful in taking away your stress and strain of mind. You will be keen to go on a pilgrimage or to a place of worship. Matters of romance are likely to be postponed.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) The planetary configuration indicates that your thoughts and courage will lead you to adventure. Your confidence will be high and you may believe that you can achieve anything and everything. You may also make some changes in the existing business. Your ideas and creations will help you in making professional relations better. You will discover some new ways to boost your income. Your luck may give you some sudden profits and monetary gains. You may finalize some new contracts and may renovate your existing home or office. Your health may give some trouble so keep a close watch on it.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) Financial and other monetary matters will get solved and you may expect a rise in your career. You will also enjoy a phase that gives you plenty of good money making ideas. There are strong chances of financial gains. If you go for a new big project then you will have a better chance in the near future. You will be feeling more expansive than usual and your imagination and intuition are operating at a high level. Romance is delightful as a long awaited affair is very much on the cards. At the end of the day you will realize that it was worth waiting for.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) You may have some mixed results so it is best to avoid deals and investments during this period. You could be beset with negative emotions and a pessimistic outlook. You need to be extra careful while getting into new associations or taking up new assignments. People can exert undue pressure on you. However your courage and strength will help you in your professional life. New contacts made during this period will provide a springboard to further your career and social life. Your health will require attention keep your thoughts positive and focus on your inner self to get rid of stress. This is a good period to rejuvenate and regroup your thoughts and energy.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) You will put your efforts on in the matters of your career and profession and these efforts will pay off. Just as you are full of dynamism there is a positive energy around you and this will further help your efforts and take you to new heights in your career and related matters. Your stamina and courage will go a long way for you to do the needful in achieving your goal. Romance draws you and you add a special intensity to existing relationships and an ongoing affair can convert into wedlock. With good health on your side you take a step ahead in all types of successful events.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) During this period you will be in the need of some peaceful environment at home and at work so take measures to have the same. You do not want to appear to be too ruthless in the way you handle a particular issue, but you do want to achieve your goal. Your profits may be higher than expected giving you the much awaited financial stability. Career related matters may get sorted out soon as you prove your capability. You are wise enough to settle matters in your favour and there are chances for improvement in your business or professional life. The family environment will be harmonious and will give you happiness and joy. There will be strengthening of bonds with your spouse/ beloved and romantic gestures go a long way in cementing the relationship. Long distance journey will be there and it will also prove quite helpful. There may be some unexpected expenditure so think wisely. Your health-related problems will keep you alert.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) Your stars indicate that you will enjoy good results in fields related to finance, profession and health. This configuration also indicates a powerful and magnetic personality with which you shine in public gatherings. You will get good financial returns. You may get involved in some real estate related activities. Besides handling professional assignments, you will also attend to your personal relations. Romance is also indicated for the unattached as you strike an immediate chord with someone you meet. Those in a relationship will find a closer bonding with their beloved. Family and domestic relations will improve if you listen and take a softer stand. You will also gain the affection of children. Your wit will be sharp as also your humour and this will help you gain popularity in your social circles.

Five ways to keep pets cool when the weather's hot

When summer arrives in the UK, it seems to appear suddenly. One day we can be wrapped up cosy winter woolies - the next we are panic buying fans and ice lollies.

Any sudden and extreme change in temperature can be dangerous. Every year, people perish as a result of heat-related illness.

Extreme temperatures aren't just a threat to human health, though; they are also a problem for our pets. Human health alerts should also help us to prepare our pets and their environment for extreme weather events, including heatwaves.

Here are five ways to help keep your pets cool and safe during a heatwave.

Travel with care

Dogs in hot cars are at serious risk. Cars can heat up rapidly, even with opened windows. This can be a problem when parked, but our pets can also be at risk of heat exposure while travelling. Avoid leaving your pet unattended in a closed vehicle without suitable ventilation. Air conditioning is useful - and some modern vehicles have it as an option even while stationary - but don't leave your pet alone: air conditioning can fail. Opening windows or using air conditioning while travelling is important but do ensure the cool air can flow to where your pet is, especially if they are in the rear of the vehicle. If stuck in traffic, the air recirculation option in the vehicle can help to maintain a cool temperature inside, while limiting traffic fumes. Remember: if in doubt, don't go out.

Exercise with caution

Exercising your pet during a heatwave can be fatal. Unlike humans (and horses) who manage body temperature by sweating, dogs have limited ability to cool themselves. They rely on panting, which can mean that dogs are unable to cool down efficiently while exercising in hot, humid conditions.

Pets at particular risk of suffering from heat exposure include



flat-faced animals such as Persian cats, pugs and bulldogs. Unfit, overweight, very young or very old pets and breeds with thick coats also need protection and careful attention in high temperatures.

During a heatwave, walk your dog at cooler times of the day. Make sure routes are shaded and that your pet has access to water. In extreme conditions, you could forego walks entirely and exercise your pet by playing or training inside, if temperatures allow.

Finally, don't forget that ground surfaces can become dangerously hot in high temperatures and can cause serious burns to paws.

Water and shade

Pets need access to cooler, shaded areas and fresh, clean drinking water at all times.

Animals drink more fluid on hot days so, to keep them hydrated, you can add extra water to their meals. Ice cubes added to drinking water can help keep it cool. For working dogs, dehydration is a major heatstroke risk factor so suitable electrolyte solutions can help keep them hydrated.

Small pets such as rabbits, guinea pigs and birds housed in hutches or small cages, which can heat up quickly, are especially vulnerable in high temperatures. Avoid direct exposure to the sun and move the cage to a shaded areas.

Ideally, offer pets choice about how to manage themselves in the heat by giving them access to different areas of the house or garden with shade and ventilation. Dogs might enjoy supervised access to paddling pools. Put cooling mats down in pet resting areas and create air flow by opening windows and setting up fans.

Remember: whether you have an indoor or outdoor pet, they are at risk of heat exposure if they are unable to find adequate shade, water and ventilation.

Know the signs

Spotting signs that your pet is suffering from excessive heat exposure is critical so that you can take immediate action.

A subtle change in behaviour, such as restlessness, slowed movement or unwillingness to continue exercising might be the first sign. They may begin to pant and, in dogs especially, look out for the end of their tongue expanding to a wide spatula shape.

Pets may be lethargic, have glassy eyes, laboured breathing and unsteady gait - and drool. Affected pets might vomit or have diarrhoea. As the condition progresses, they may have seizures or even collapse. Remember: heat exposure can be fatal so early recognition and intervention is critical. (*The Conversation*)

"Real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present."

—Albert Camus

The Shillong Times

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Inside Bangladesh

WITH over 130 protesters dead, the anti-reservation agitation in Bangladesh shook the nation and raised questions about the stability of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government. The entire nation has been brought under curfew regulations and shoot-at-sight orders are in place against those who attempt to disturb peace or indulge in violence in the streets. It is in the fitness of things that the Supreme Court, on Sunday, "watered down" the reservation for children of the 1971 Liberation movement veterans by limiting it to just five percent and keeping 93 percent of government job recruitments in merit-based open category – while two per cent for some specific groups. It was a high court verdict last month, reinstating 30 per cent quota for the kin of war veterans that led to eruption of the unrest in Bangladesh with students in the vanguard of the protests. To be fair, the Sheikh Hasina government had taken a realistic view of the situation and did not back the high court verdict, though her party's followers would have stood to majorly benefit from the reservations.

India is specially concerned over the sudden eruption of unrest in Bangladesh, where Hasina has been able to hector the nation in impressive ways for the past several years and winning parliament polls repeatedly. Her close association with India was based on historic foundations of mutual trust between the two nations after the liberation of what was East Pakistan in 1971 and formation of Bangladesh – a nation of 17 crore people; the eighth largest population -- under the leadership of her father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. While India's military support helped in the Liberation and subsequent formation of Bangladesh as an independent nation, Pakistan has not been able to stomach this. The Pakistan military, through its ISI military intelligence, has been making efforts to let down Hasina even as her rival, Begum Khaleda Zia remains unpopular. The present upsurge in the name of reservations too will obviously have the anti-Hasina, anti-India forces fuelling it from behind. India has evacuated its students from Bangladesh in recent days and put its nationals there on alert. The intervention of the Bangladesh Supreme Court should help end the protests. But, the sudden eruption of unrest in Bangladesh points to serious problems within. So far, Hasina has been able to handle her adversaries in effective ways. She has also been able to control attempts to spread Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism there, through hidden Pakistani hands. The people's support to Hasina thwarted such devilish attempts in the past.

People Who Grow a Bridge from a Tree

By H H Mohrmen

"War" is a generic term used to describe a sub-tribe of the Khasis who live on the southern slopes of the Khasi and Jaintia hills of Meghalaya, bordering Bangladesh. The Wars are further subdivided into the War-Khasi and the War-Jaintia based on the region they inhabit. The War Jaintia live in the Amlarem area of the Jaintia Hills District, while the War Khasi reside in the Pynursla and Sohra areas of East Khasi Hills. There are also Wars who live in the villages on the slopes of the Mawkyntrew block. A majority of the people living in the villages on the border with Bangladesh and Assam in the East Jaintia Hills District are also War Jaintia. They have distinctive features compared to the Khasi and Pnar of Meghalaya: they are short, stout, and muscular. They live on the slopes of the hills and speak three different Khasi dialects: War Khasi of Pynursla, the Amwi dialect spoken by the War Jaintia, and the Sohra Khasi, which has become the link language for all.

Variation in the Dialect

The Khasi language, an Austro-Asiatic Mon-Khmer group of languages, is believed to have originated from the War Amwi branch, another War dialect. The War dialects are distinct from one another, and speakers of one dialect can barely understand those of another. The War dialect spoken by people in Pynursla differs from that spoken in the Amlarem area and from the Sohra Khasi. For example, in the Amwi dialect, cooked meat is 'doh,' whereas in War Shnongpdeng it is 'ah.' A boy is 'hymbo' in War Jaintia and 'boit' in War Darang. However, one word that both the War Jaintia and the War Pynursla share is 'chynnam,' which means real or true. Despite the variations in dialects, they are part of the same language group. In most of the Khasi villages in Bangladesh, the lingua franca of the Khasi people who live there is War Jaintia.

Topography of the Area

They are called 'ki War ki riak' because of their preferred place to live, which is on the hill slopes down to Bangladesh or on the slopes towards Assam. The majority of Khasis who live in Bangladesh are War, and even their brethren who live in Bangladesh reside only in the hilly regions of that country. Similarly, those who live in Assam and Tripura prefer to live in the hills.

In India, the mountain slopes where the War people live, act like a giant wall, the first barricade to obstruct the rain-laden monsoon winds blowing from the Bay of Bengal to the hills of Meghalaya. For this reason, the War areas in both the East and the West Jaintia Hills receive the maximum amount of rainfall and experience a subtropical climatic condition.

The subtropical forests in the region have rich biodiversity, which provides many wild edibles. However, these forests are gradually being replaced by areca nut and broomstick plantations. The War Jaintia people, in particular, consume a wide variety of wild edibles foraged from nearby forests. Jakeng, Jia lachiang, Jia haerew, soh tukra/soh kwid are a few of the wild edibles people in the area consume. The region used to be rich in wildlife, such as tigers and slow lorises, but these have become less abundant now. There were even stories of tigers, and people celebrated tiger festivals because it was once a tiger-infested area.

Inventors of Bamboo Drip Irrigation

The region slopes towards the plains, and the sub-tropical climatic conditions are conducive to rich and thick forest cover, which is a good source of water. Thus, water has never been a problem in the War area, at least in the Jaintia Hills, where water supply is always gravity-fed. This abundance of water helped farmers invent bamboo drip irrigation to cater to their need for pan leaf of betel leaf plantations. Pan leaves need just the right amount of water to grow; too much or too little water can harm the plants. This necessity led to the invention of bamboo drip irrigation, often neglected now, but it is an invention of the War people of the Jaintia Hills.

The Land of Fruits

The prevailing climatic conditions once made the region famous for its oranges, earning it the name "ka Ri u soh u pai." Unfortunately, orange orchards are now vanishing from the area. In the past, oranges were even exported to Bangladesh or East Pakistan, but they are now being replaced by areca nut, pan leaves, and, worst of all, broomstick plantations.

The major cash crop of the people in the War Jaintia area is areca-nut, and the ingenu-

ity of the people led to the idea of fermenting betel nut (pdem kwai) so that this food item is available throughout the year. Another activity showcasing the War people's ingenuity is the smoking and drying of fish, a tradition that continues to this day.

The sub-tropical climatic conditions, which are hot and humid, are also conducive to the growth of *Ficus elastica* or *Ficus indica* trees (dieng jri in local parlance), rubber trees used to weave living-root bridges. These bridges can only be found in the territories inhabited by the War people because only the War people of Meghalaya have the tradition of weaving bridges from the rubber tree.

The Root-Bridges

The one thing that the War Jaintia, the War Pynursla, and the War Sohra share in common is, the tradition of growing bridges from ficus trees. The entire state may be proud of the living root bridges, but it is only the War people of these regions who have this tradition. In the early 2000s, I wrote an article for The Shillong Times on the living-root bridges found in the Amlarem subdivision, where I noted that these bridges were made for different purposes and not to attract tourists.

Reason why Root Bridges Were Made

The making of the bridges was a community, multi-generational effort because it took years to complete a bridge. The work to help grow the bridges was done voluntarily. Among the War Jaintia, it is a tradition that farmers themselves jointly make the path to their respective orchards or betel nut and pan leaf plantations. The bridges are part of the trail towards the terrain where they farm, and maintaining the bridges is traditionally the responsibility of the farmers. An individual farmer's contributions to making the bridges could be as simple as helping tie the roots while walking down to his plantation if he found a tendril wandering away from the planned handrail. It could also involve using a sliced bamboo to tie the roots together and direct them in the right direction. Hence, the farmers who use the bridge over many years contribute in whatever way they can to its construction. Since it is also a living bridge, it still

needs care and protection, so the farmers are not only the makers but also the keepers of the living bridges.

The living-root bridges were made by the community on a voluntary basis and were completed without supervision. Notably, there was neither a blueprint prepared nor community planning done before starting work on the bridge. It was made out of human instinct with the clear objective of creating a bridge from the tree roots across the river span. The goal was to make it convenient for farmers to cross the rivers, even during the monsoon when rain causes the river to overflow. The process or tradition of making (or growing) a bridge is bio-engineering at its best and a living testimony to the genius of our ancestors, particularly the Wars of the Jaintia and Khasi hills.

All the living-root bridges are located on the southern slopes of the state on the Indo-Bangla border, where the War community of the Khasi and Jaintia hills districts live. In many cases, two *Ficus elastica* or *Ficus indica* trees (dieng jri in local parlance) were planted on each side of the river. Once the trees start growing, humans manipulate the roots to connect across the river span. Once the main roots are connected, more roots were directed to make the bridge's rails, the footpath, and other parts of the bridge.

Gallery and Ladder

Not only root bridges but ladders and even galleries were made from the roots of the ficus tree in the War Jaintia area. The gallery at the cremation ground in Nongtalang and the ladder in the Nongbareh-Padu area are a few examples. Unfortunately, the gallery at the cremation ground in Nongtalang has been destroyed, preventing people from appreciating the marvel of humans and nature creating wonders from virtually nothing.

Keepers of the Special Ecosystem

The War people are not only those who grow bridges from trees but also the keepers of an ecosystem rich in biodiversity. In War Jaintia, the clans maintain sacred groves called "ki-ken," small though they may be. They consume many wild edibles and have a rich tradition of living with nature. The War areas are rich in biodiversity, and people live harmoniously with nature. They live in nature, with nature, by nature.

Bangladesh protests part of geopolitical turmoil in South Asia

India has cause for concern as its escalation impacts regional stability

By Arun Kumar Shrivastav

The student protest in Bangladesh over job quotas has taken a deadly turn, with more than 100 students reportedly killed by police and security forces. Despite the government's suspension of the controversial job quota decision, there is no sign of the protests abating. Students from across the country continue to take to the streets, indicating that their demands extend beyond the job quota issue.

Experts believe that the ongoing turmoil in Bangladesh may be part of a larger geopolitical game plan. This troubled region, crucial for India's strategic corridor to Southeast Asia, is facing significant unrest. This geographical area is vital for India's ambitious multimodal transportation projects, including a direct rail and road route from India's Northeast to Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. Recently, India's Manipur witnessed prolonged riots between two tribal groups.

If this region remains in conflict, it poses severe challenges to India's plans. The proposed road link is crucial for the economic prosperity of India's Northeast, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and beyond. Experts suggest that there may be a deliberate effort to create instability in

As we observe the developments in Bangladesh, it's crucial to consider the broader geo-political context. Governments in this region often rise and fall swiftly, influenced by the interests of major global powers. Regional instability can obstruct India's progress and its strategic ambitions in Central and Southeast Asia. India must not only watch but be prepared to respond proactively.

The crises in Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan extend beyond their borders, affecting regional stability and, by extension, India. Afghanistan's health-care system is collapsing, Myanmar is experiencing severe violence, and refugee crises are escalating. These issues spill over into India, as seen with the unrest in Manipur and other states.

Dismissing these regional problems as purely internal is shortsighted. They hinder India's strategic vision and economic outreach. India needs a proactive strategy, which includes urging neighbouring countries like Afghanistan and Myanmar to stabilize their internal situations and create a peaceful environment. Ignoring the turmoil just 10-700 km from its borders, whether in Myanmar or Afghanistan,



Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Manipur, isolating India and hindering its access to Southeast Asia.

The creation of Pakistan serves as a historical precedent, effectively isolating India from direct access to Central Asia. The situation in Afghanistan, where the Taliban government remains largely unrecognized internationally due to its extreme and unpredictable governance, is crucial in understanding regional dynamics.

Afghanistan effectively hinders India's strategic vision beyond its borders. Afghanistan's instability, coupled with the contentious relationship between India and Pakistan, prevents India from accessing Central Asia and engaging in commerce and trade with these regions as seamlessly as it might have otherwise. These issues are not isolated internal matters but significant impediments to India's progress and its aspirations to be recognized as a global power alongside the US, China, and Russia.

The unrest in Bangladesh should be viewed within the broader context of regional instability affecting India's geopolitical landscape. The unrest, civil war, and medieval mindsets ruling smaller neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Pakistan are not merely their internal problems but also substantial obstacles to India's legitimate ambitions.

Recent political shifts in Nepal, combined with ongoing turmoil in Bangladesh, suggest the influence of international geopolitical forces in the region. The situation in Bangladesh today echoes the political changes in Sri Lanka in 2022. The fall of the Gotabaya Rajapaksa government came after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent efforts by Western countries to isolate Russia on the international stage. Around the same time, Pakistan saw the fall of Imran Khan's government.

is not a viable option for India.

India must communicate clearly to these countries the necessity of addressing their internal issues effectively. This approach not only aids regional stability but also supports India's strategic interests, ensuring a secure and prosperous future for the region.

India's emergence as a global economic powerhouse is not obstructed by major world powers but by the instability in its neighbouring countries. To achieve its strategic ambitions, India must address the challenges posed by its immediate neighbours, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh.

India does not need to persuade global powers like the United States or Russia; it needs to ensure that its neighbours understand the importance of regional stability. These countries' internal problems significantly impact India's progress and its aspirations to connect with Southeast Asia and Central Asia.

Pakistan and Afghanistan are critical gateways for India to access Central Asia, while Myanmar and Bangladesh are essential for reaching Southeast Asia. The issues in these countries create substantial barriers to India's strategic goals. Therefore, India must prioritize resolving regional conflicts and promoting stability as non-negotiable aspects of its foreign policy.

Amid the escalating crisis in Bangladesh, India must urgently clarify its position. The Indian government should communicate to both the Bangladeshi authorities and the protesting students that the ongoing unrest is detrimental to peace and stability in the region. India's proactive engagement could help stabilize the region, ensuring mutual benefits for both countries and contributing to broader regional stability. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Bangladesh Quota Protests

Editor,
Apropos of the news item, '67 Meghalaya students return home from restive B'Desh,' (ST July 19, 2024), the current state of affairs is deeply worrying and unsettling in Bangladesh. What is unfolding in Bangladesh is deeply unsettling for a generation that only asked for a fair opportunity in public service recruitment. The tension escalated when PM Sheikh Hasina made a controversial remark, "If the grandchildren of the freedom fighters don't get quota benefits, should the grandchildren of Razakars get the benefit?" Razakars refers to a militia force that helped the Pakistan Armed forces to crush pro-independence supporters in then East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, during 1971 Bangladesh Liberation war. This led to the eruption of the simmering discontent of a youth population built over years. The protests are the first challenge to Hasina's government since she won a fourth consecutive term.

Yours etc,
M.Haque (Advocate)
Shillong-6

VPP's abstention!

Editor,
In the recent Lok Sabha

session where newly elected Members of Parliament to the 18th august House of Lok Sabha were sworn in, there was a contest for the post of Speaker and the final result was par for the course as the BJP and its allies won the crucial coveted chair by electing O M Birla. However, many of us, if not all, who voted for the VPP candidate Dr.R A J Syngkon thought that he would vote against the saffron candidate, but, conversely, he resorted to abstain from his sacrosanct right of voting; thus giving the BJP contestant an outright win. We may think that this non-exercise of voting by the VPP MP may be a pivotal strategy or a masterstroke with a far sighted aim for the holistic welfare of the Hynniewtrep people!

In less than no time post the election of the said Speaker, the BJP led government through the Union Minister for Road Transport & Highways (MORTH) Nitin Gadkari has called the newly elected Shillong MP on July 3, for a meeting where it transpired that the Central government has sanctioned Rs 200 crore for exigent repairs and maintenance of the National Highway 6 since the same has been in a deplorable state for a pretty long period. Incidentally, when I queried some politically discerning citizens behind such an unprecedented be-

nevolent gesture of the NDA government when our former Congress MP couldn't do anything much notwithstanding his having been elected for three terms on the trot, the unanimous response I received was, 'quid pro quo!' Others have even concluded, 'you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours!'

However, it may not be impertinent perhaps to conjure up the past when Ardent Basawiamoit, the present leader of VPP, while he was the president of HSPDP, contested the State's election in 2018 from Nongkrem constituency. As ill luck would have it, he was defeated by his political rival. Subsequent to the 2018 Assembly elections, Basawiamoit resigned from the HSPDP. This resignation was not owing to his loss at the hustings, but some political pundits had opined that Basawiamoit's opting out of the HSPDP stock and barrel was because the two victorious HSPDP candidates joined hands with the two saffron MLAs in the formation of the then government; given the fact that Basawiamoit wasn't preferring to have any truck, as he may have thought, with the alleged communal party!

Be that as it may, in the ultimate analysis, the Hynniewtrep voters, big, big and large, elected our MP or shone for the VPP as a domi-

nant regional party, knows how to roll the dice!

Yours etc
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Shillong-2

Next parliament session set to be a stormy one

Editor,

The lengthy speeches from Rahul Gandhi and Modi at the opening the 18th Parliament session indicates that the next budget session which will start from Jul 22 will be a stormy one and it also shows the deepening of democracy in India which was not visible during the last ten years as the Congress could not win enough seats to get the status of Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and during the last five years there was no deputy Speaker in the Lok Sabha while bills were passed within minutes without referring to Parliamentary Committees. Now, due to the presence of a strong Opposition in the Lok Sabha the undemocratic practices will be stopped and true democracy will prevail and every Indian will feel proud of it.

It is evident that during this parliament session the shouts of "Modi Modi" on Modi's arrival in the Lok Sabha were comparatively weaker as compared to the earlier sessions and the same is likely to happen in the coming sessions. Similarly,

Rahul Gandhi was allowed to have his say with minimum interruption from the treasury benches and due to this reason he could deliver his speech for about 100 minutes which is a vast change from the past. During the speech of Rahul Gandhi Modi as well as Amit Shah and Raj Nath Singh intervened twice but still Rahul remained adamant on his versions which was rarely seen in his speech. Moreover, BJP's allies except for Chirag Paswan were not heard making overly supportive statements.

Well aware that its election campaign on the BJP's proposal to amend the Constitution resonated with the electorate especially the Dalits the Congress led INDIA alliance is continuing to focus on this issue as seen in the opening session of the Lok Sabha. We are also aware how a single statement of RSS Chief on reservations in Bihar elections proved costly for the BJP and Malayalam Singh himself narrated in the Lok Sabha that BJP lost the assembly elections due to one statement of RSS Chief on review of reservation policy.

The Opposition has extended the "Samvidhan khatre mein hai" narrative to Dalit assertions with plans to woo the Scheduled Castes to its fold and due to this reason the SC candidate of Samajwadi Party was sitting with Rahul Gandhi in the Lok Sabha. The issue of NEET is not

being handled by the ruling party and during the budget session it will be a hot topic being discussed in the coming parliament session and moreover Agniveer scheme is under attack from opposition parties and divergent views are being expressed. It is expected that the government will try to clear the doubts of the parties. GST also needs further improvement. On the employment front the government has to present the guidelines and also on inflation the government needs to present the future map.

During the Parliament session Opposition parties had also put pressure on the Speaker which was demonstrated by one example. When Modi entered the Lok Sabha, the Speaker stood to greet him. Rahul Gandhi immediately objected to his action stating that the Speaker is the Presiding officer of Parliament and should know his place. These small examples indicate how the next parliament sessions will be and we have to wait and watch even while the INDIA alliance strives to strengthen the democratic values of this country which had been under attack under the BJP regime.

Yours etc.,
Yash Pal Ralhan,
Via email

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“The only way to survive is to have a sense of humour.”
— Bob Newhart

The Shillong Times

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Data versus Assumption

IT is easy to spread wrong messages based on assumptions and create a fear psychosis. The role of Government is to nip such assumptions in the bud by providing correct data. These days, pressure groups with wide ranging acronyms and all professing to work for the 'jaibynriew,' meaning in this case the Khasi people, since the word jaibynriew is a Khasi word, have been asserting their power derived from the assumption that all jobs in the different construction and other companies have been taken over by non-tribals by depriving an equally competent tribal labour force. Is this the correct position? Only data can give us the accurate picture.

Ri Bhoi district is currently the hub for these constant tugs of war between the so-called non-tribal business establishments in the industrial areas and the people they employ to run those factories. If the motive of the pressure groups is to ensure that the jobs meant for the tribal labour force are not taken away, they should demand that the Government conduct a survey to find out exactly what is the skilled labour force requirement for the different companies? Is that labour force available locally? Where is that labour force registered? Does Meghalaya have the required skilled workforce? What are the areas of work (labour) where there is a shortage of local skilled labour? Is the Government skilling people for such specific work areas? Are the pressure groups demanding that the Government set up skilling institutions in these critical areas so as to fill the vacuum that is currently there? If a migrant worker is an Indian citizen, he would have at least one identification document. Isn't that enough to prove his credentials? When a person from Meghalaya is employed outside the state does he/she have to go through the processes that are demanded by the pressure groups here? Do those workers have to register themselves with the Labour Department of those states? Is it the brief of the Labour Department to check who is a migrant worker and who isn't?

The Labour Department's brief is to secure the basic rights of workers wherever they are working and to ensure they are not exploited by their management. The Labour Department ensures that social security schemes and welfare fund boards for different sections of workers are working well. The Department is instrumental in conciliation and conflict resolution between the labour and the management. In short, the Labour Department seeks to promote the welfare of the working class by ensuring safety, security and improved conditions of work, enforcing various labour laws in respect of minimum wages, payment of wages, gratuity etc., facilitating collective bargaining within the framework of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, providing social security for the workers and their family members and legal remedies in exigencies like loss of job, strike, lockout, closure etc. It's a different matter that the State Labour Department here is remiss in most of the tasks outlined for it. In fact, the Labour Department should have stepped out to take to task the pressure groups that have overstepped their brief in recent times. It is incumbent on the Labour Department to come up with the correct statistics to clear all assumptions which give a handle to opportunists to take the law into their hands!

Letters to the Editor

Khasi matrilineal fiasco

Editor,
Referring to the recent news concerning the non-recognition of the ST status of Khasis born to both Khasi parents who carry their father's clan name, what are we trying to prove? In a day and age where we claim to be modern, how can a person be a non-Khasi simply because he/she bears the father's surname? However, when we look at the DNA of that person it will prove otherwise. Why are people so alarmed when we hear that so and so is taking his/her father's surname and claim that it would disrupt the matrilineal society. I dare challenge the upholders of the matrilineal laws and ask them where the right of the 'kni' (maternal uncle) is in a family? As we can see, in the urban setting, his role has been somewhat superficial and a mere showpiece. The father in a matrilineal society has restricted powers over his children that he fathered with his wife especially if it's the the Khun 'khatduh' (last born daughter). It is the 'kni' who has more power over them when it comes to decision-making. But I rarely see this in modern Khasi society, hence this cherry-picking is the height of hypocrisy. If one wants to follow the matrilineal

lineage follow everything or none at all. Nowadays, even parents are alright with their only daughters or youngest daughters leaving them to create a nuclear family, when that concept does not exist in the matrilineal Khasi society and tradition. Hypocrites!

Yours etc.,
Gameliel Kharshiing,
Via email

Call for Transparent Recruitment

Editor,
The Meghalaya Medical Services Recruitment Board (MMSRB) has been conducting recruitment drives for Doctors and Dental Surgeons in the recent past. However, there has been a noticeable lack of effort to recruit for other important paramedical positions like Pharmacist, Lab Technicians, Radiographers, Physiotherapist, and various other technicians under the Directorate of Health Services.

Despite vacancies arising from retirements for so many years, these positions have not been advertised and the Directorate has relied continuously on temporary appointments without following proper advertisement and recruitment procedures which is highly irregular. After years of service, incumbents in these temporary roles

are likely to seek regularization of their positions without having been recruited through a transparent and fair process, potentially leading to avoidable litigation in the future. Such recruitment practices also undermine the principles of equal opportunity and fairness while also violating the guarantee enshrined under Article 16 of the Constitution of our country.

As per the terms of reference, the MMSRB was set up with the aim to speed up recruitment processes in a timely, simplified and streamlined manner for vacancies in the Health Department and to conduct recruitment drives on a regular basis as per the vacancies. It is hoped that this matter will be taken up urgently by implementing a fair and transparent recruitment process for all paramedical positions. This will not only ensure that our healthcare system is staffed by qualified and competent professionals but also uphold the values of fairness and integrity.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Create trickle-down channels

Editor,
According to the Britannica dictionary, trickle-down (adjective) - is 'an economic theory which says that financial benefits and advantages given to wealthy people, cor-

porations, etc., will improve the economy and eventually help the poorer people in a society.' A research study published by the IMF in June 2015 debunked the theory of trickle-down economics. As per the report, annual growth decreases by 0.1% within 5 years when there is a 1% rise in the income of the wealthiest 20%. But annual growth increases by 0.4% within 5 years when there is a 1% rise in the income of the poorest 20%. It reiterated the dangers of capitalism without effective state intervention.

The experiments with capitalism turned out to be a disaster. It has long been an established fact that trickle-down cannot happen automatically in an economy. Poor children died young after working as chimney sweepers in capitalist countries. Let us recall a line in William Blake's poem, 'The Chimney Sweeper, "When my mother died I was very young. So your chimneys I sweep and in soot I sleep."

A modern welfare state with a mixed economy is now trying to amalgamate capitalist laissez-faire liberty into a socialist endeavour to ensure equality. Such amalgamation is necessary to create a level playing field with the help of positive discrimination in favour of the needy. This helps welfare states climb up the ladder of the human development index.

Will ILP solve a problem which doesn't exist?

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

On the issue of migrant labourers entering the state without a 'work permit', the recent discussion held between the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) and Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma failed to arrive at a consensus. After the meeting KSU vowed that they will continue with their drive against "illegal immigrants" raising concerns as to the safety of the migrant labourers in the state. In the meeting, the Chief Minister reiterated that there is no provision in the law, i.e., the Interstate Migrant Workers Act of 2020, for a 'work permit'. It only talks about registration. Paul Lyngdoh, the tourism minister and former KSU president, had informed the same thing a few days ago. The KSU, on the other hand, pointed out the loopholes in the Act, but gave no clarification in the press as to whether they had misread the Act regarding their claim of a 'work permit'. Maybe they clarified on some other platform, but if they did not, the press should have asked the KSU if the entire issue is based on a misunderstanding of the law. Does it mean that the verification drive could have been avoided? Of course not! A similar drive would have still happened under another guise, as the underlying issue of 'illegal immigration' is still not resolved. However, this is a claim that, although it enjoys widespread support among the local populace, is not based on facts.

Based on media reports, it was revealed the people assaulted during KSU's 'work permit' verification drive were from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Nepal. These people are not illegal immigrants. They are similar to the Khasis, who have also migrated to different parts of the country looking for a better opportunity. Unlike the Khasis, though, they are prohibited from owning any land in the state, and they have to register themselves under the Interstate Migrant Workers Act of 2020 or obtain a trading license if they want to do business. These are constitutional measures that are perfectly legal. But hindering their movement and assaulting them are illegal. This fear of 'illegal immigrants' is rooted in the prospect of migrants overwhelming the local population, like it has happened in Tripura. There is no doubt that, as a small indigenous community, there is a need to be vigilant. But it is not the same thing as being paranoid, something that is a feature of the jaibynriew politics in the state.

Since the 1970s, the non-indigenous (i.e., migrant) population of the state has been experiencing a continuous decline. It was around 20% of the total population in 1971, and now it has come down to 13%. This is because they are constrained by various restrictive laws, like the Sixth Schedule, which doesn't

allow them to buy land and the need to get a trading license, which, in recent times, has become a tool for harassment. While talking to the press, the KSU complained that despite these protective measures, certain areas in the city, like Laban and Pynthorunkhrah, have been overrun by the non-indigenous population. Nongmynsong is also made part of such claims from time to time. However, these claims, like the claim of uncontrolled 'illegal immigration', are not backed by any evidence. Census reports have instead revealed that the ST population has been increasing in these areas. The ST population in Pynthorunkhrah has gone up from 34% in 1981 to 54% in 2011, while in Nongmynsong, it also went up from 38% in 2001 to 51% in 2011. Laban is part of the municipality, which has also seen a rise in the ST population, increasing from 36% in 1971 to 51% in 2011. So, instead of people illegally entering the state, there has been a steady outmigration from the state.

The demand for ILP to counter the threat of 'illegal immigration' has been going on for many decades. But, like discussed above, there is no evidence to back the claim. The non-indigenous population is growing, but it is the natural process of people getting married and having children. In fact, Meghalaya has one of the highest fertility rates (combining both indigenous and non-indigenous) in the country. It has to be acknowledged, though, that the CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) does create some complications and is a potential threat, despite the state having been left out of its implementation. The claim of illegal immigrants entering the state, however, predates the CAA, which means that it is a deeply held belief. That's what paranoia is all about - a delusional belief that one is being persecuted, harassed, or betrayed by others without any evidence.

At the same time, what is not being acknowledged is the fact that migration has been beneficial for the state's economy. It is migrant labour that has built a lot of the infrastructure in the state. While I partly agree with Paul Lyngdoh that migrant labourers are coming to Meghalaya because locals are not willing to join the labour workforce, it is not just the 'work culture' among the locals that is the problem here. Meghalaya is a labour-deficit state. Without migrant labourers, it is impossible to build the quality infrastructure needed to either support local economic activities and/or attract investment into the state. Without investments, it will be difficult to create decent jobs for the growing

number of educated youths, unless they want to work in construction sites in place of the migrant laborers. Is that what they and their parents want? All labour is dignified, but no one wants to sleep in waterlogged conditions with no proper accommodation while being exploited by the contractors and made to work under stressful conditions without any concern for health and safety. I actually have a personal story to share about this.

A few years ago, when I was studying at the university, one of my juniors approached me one afternoon. There was a lot of construction happening on campus, with the labourers coming predominantly from the eastern parts of the country. He told me that one of the labourers, who happened to come from the same state as him, had approached him, begging him to help him get out of Shillong. There was blood coming out of his anus, and he had told the contractor about it. But instead of taking him to the doctor, the contractor assaulted him and forced him to continue working. I asked my junior to tell the labourer to gather his things and hide behind one of the buildings. I hired a car, got him inside, and hid him while we drove to the sumo stand. We bought a ticket for him and bid him goodbye. He was very emotional and relieved to have escaped the ordeal. But it's not just the migrant labourers who are exploited. After I left the university, I worked with Thma U Rangli-Juki (TUR) on organizing the security guards, all of whom were Khasis. These security guards were getting paid very little and had to sleep on the cold floor in the winters. One particular incident that I always remember is a meeting with the security guards. In that meeting, an agent of the contractor tried to dissuade the security guards from forming a union. She claimed that the contractor was a kind person and had supported her on many occasions. Later, this woman became an important member of a pressure group, which became well known for a couple of years. As for the security guards, they formed the union and were able to demand higher salaries and better working conditions.

Migrant labourers are vulnerable to harassment and exploitation. But being poor, they have to endure all hardships in order to make a living. This actually ends up benefiting the local economy in which they are based. Migrant workers will save a large portion of their money to send back home. But they will still spend some money on rent, food, and other essential items. This creates demand for goods and services in the local market, boosting sales, which brings

increased income for local businesses. This helps in the expansion of the markets, creating more opportunities for new businesses and expanding existing ones by hiring more people. More business means more revenue collection for the government. This in turn means more financial resources to spend on public goods, like improving health, education, and other services. In fact, this growth in business is also good for those who are engaged in extortion from business establishments, especially those owned by non-indigenous persons. More profit means that such groups can demand more contributions. This ill-gotten wealth can then be used by members and leaders of such groups to amass more assets, especially to buy more property, which benefits land agents as well. It's another matter that this might lead to the landlessness of the local population. Still, whether it is through legal or illegal means, more business means a greater number of people stand to gain. Almost everyone wins.

The pressure groups have been demanding that the government implement ILP and MRSSA (Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act) in the state. This, like the 'work permit' issue, is also confusing. Like the Chief Minister clarified, how can you implement something that is not yet a law? Even if the Union Government approves the implementation of the ILP and MRSSA in the state, I am supremely confident that the issue of illegal immigration will not go away. The demand was never based on facts but on a deep-seated fear that will not be removed so easily. A way out of this quagmire of fear and confusion is for the economy to grow, allowing people to get decent jobs for themselves and their loved ones so that they can live with respect and dignity. Maybe the feeling of 'victimhood' will finally disappear. However, that will not happen if the paranoia that is leading to these outbursts of violence every now and then is not brought to an end. It's like the infinite loop a friend shared: the road is bad, people go on hunger strike demanding road repair, labourers are sent to repair the road, people beat up labourers, and it starts all over again.

We have been living with paranoia for the last 50 years. Maybe we will live with it for another 50 years? Although, I am not sure how this is helping our loved ones create better lives for themselves. The question to be asked is whether we really want things to change. If we don't want it, let's make peace with it. If nothing else, at least we will have peace.

(The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organisation or institution)

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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Modi 3.0 Budget: Navigating in Choppy Waters

By Ajit Ranade

The world is in turmoil. The Russia-Ukraine conflict is well into its third year with no end in sight. Israel's pounding of Gaza is eight months old, with nearly 40,000 dead due to the bombing. The U.S. Presidential favourite just survived an assassination attempt. The United Kingdom just had a massive electoral reversal, with the Conservative Party swept out of power after fifteen years, and the Labour Party gaining nearly two third majority with just one third of the votes cast. And while these geopolitical upheavals are going on, we also had the world's biggest IT failure, of the ever-reliable Microsoft system. This was presumably a bug in the cyber security module and not a cyber attack. The global outage caused hundreds of flights to be cancelled and disrupted government functioning. The country not affected by the Microsoft outage was China, and to a large extent India. There is perhaps some subtle geopolitical message in this quirky fact!

The global macro-economic context is that big economies are still fighting inflation which refuses to come down to the target level of 2 percent. That is why monetary tightening continues even though industry keeps asking for an increase in money supply, and lower interest rates. Because of the still high interest rates industrial and housing investment is not rising as fast as it should to support employment. Unemployment worries are bringing out strong anti-immigrant sentiment, which has been tapped by the campaign of Donald Trump, and the far-right parties in France and elsewhere in Europe. It has also led to a protectionist sentiment. Trump has already promised further penal import duties on Chinese goods. China too has its own economic woes. There is a glut of production of electric vehicles which are being dumped on the world.

The stock markets index however continues to zoom higher. We have to be careful about bubbles, because the index rise is fueled by only a few tech stocks like Nvidia, Apple, Tesla, Microsoft and of course everything connected with Artificial Intelligence. Out of the five hundred stock prices in the benchmark S & P 500 index, if you take out the seven biggest gainers, the rest of the index performance is very modest. This stark intra-index variation in stock price rally is true of stock markets elsewhere too, including in India.

In this global scenario of turmoil India's macro-economy is showing remarkable strength, resilience and stability. For the past four post-Covid years the average growth rate has been about 7.5 percent, inflation has hovered around 4 to 5 percent, exports are doing well, especially of services including software, foreign exchange stock of dollars is at healthy levels, and the fiscal deficit ratio has been steadily coming down. The latter is a pointer to fiscal responsibility. Thus, these are indications of macro stability. Furthermore, the banking sector is doing exceptionally well with very low non-performing loan ratios and record profitability.

The upcoming Union Budget is important because it is the first one of Prime Minister Modi's third outing as PM. Hence this is being called the Modi 3.0 government. It will be Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's seventh budget presentation to parliament. Note that not even

a single rupee of taxpayer money can be spent without the consent of Parliament. Extensive consultations have preceded the Tuesday presentation of the Budget proposal by the FM. The budget proposals need to be only passed in the lower house, i.e. the Lok Sabha, where the NDA has a majority, but not the single party BJP by itself. This implies that the budget may see some shades of influence of push and pull of coalition politics, although it is not the same, as complete tug of war between parties of opposite ideologies within a coalition. Besides the budget now consists of a large portion of non-discretionary items such as interest payment (the largest component), subsidies, salaries and pensions and other revenue expenditure items. The element of surprise has been largely taken out of budget announcements over the years. Nevertheless, given the political atmosphere, there is bound to be some nod to freebies and extra welfare spending.

Even though this budget will be for the next seven months, it will be an occasion to articulate economic strategy for the coming years and an economic vision too. It will be the first time that total spending of the Union government will cross 50 trillion rupees. As a percentage of GDP, it will be about fifteen percent. The fiscal deficit this year has benefited from a windfall bonanza of a large dividend of 2 trillion rupees from Reserve Bank of India to the Union government. This large "profit" resulted from deft forex management and handling the debt management of the government. This cannot be counted upon next year. The RBI dividend more than offset other areas of shortfall which are non-tax revenues from privatisation and disinvestment. Income tax collection has risen faster than the GDP growth rate showing good buoyancy. Will the FM give some relief and at least bring personal income tax rates in line with the (lower) corporate tax rates? India's income tax has a peculiar anomaly. On one hand it grants complete exemption till 7 lakh rupees income, but on the other it taxes income above 15 lakhs at the full rate, which with additional cess comes to a rate of 39 percent. A radical reform is needed wherein a small tax rate should become applicable at say 4 lakhs, and the top rate applies only about 50 or 75 lakhs. The FM is aware that below the rosy macro scenario is a worrying micro picture. Consumer spending is sluggish, and so is private investment spending into new factories and expansions. The rural economy is struggling. The latest National Sample Survey shows household consumption data, which if we apply a slightly higher poverty line of 3 dollars per day, makes India's rural poverty shoot up to 25 percent. This means a lot of households are hovering just above the official poverty line. Their prosperity requires not just welfare spending, but creation of job opportunities. The single most important determinant of long-term prosperity is investment in human capital, i.e. health and education. India's education spending needs to more than double, to reach 6 percent of GDP. Hence look for these cues to support long term and inclusive growth in the FM's budget speech.

(Dr. Ajit Ranade is a noted Pune-based economist) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Your heart is full of fertile seeds,
waiting to sprout."

— Morihei Ueshiba

The Shillong Times

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Lack-lustre budget

NIRMALA Sitharaman's seventh Budget, an amplification of the interim budget passed in February, would cover just eight months of the present fiscal. As is usual with her budgets, there were no major surprises and no major lures other than the normal allocations for various departments. But for an allotment for Space, there is no special programme-thrust to take the nation to the aspired super-power status. The finance minister has allocated 2.66 lakh crore for rural development and held out a promise to build 3 crore more houses for the homeless. Over 20 crore youths have been promised "first salary" from the government when they join the organised sector workforce, by way of a provident fund input. The Congress was quick to state that the minister lifted this offer from the tricolour party's poll manifesto. How this would benefit the large army of the unemployed remains to be seen.

The salaried class gets a rise in the limit for standard income tax deductions from Rs 50,000 to Rs 75,000. From rural development funds, the agriculture sector has been offered schemes worth 1.52 lakh crore out of the projected governmental earnings of Rs 32 lakh crore — set against an expenditure of Rs 48 lakh crore. A promise is that the fiscal deficit would be brought down to 4.9 per cent from the 5.1 per cent projected in the interim budget. Inflationary trends, she has stated, are under control and could stabilize at a tolerable 4 per cent. This meant the national economy, powered majorly by GST revenue, is doing well overall.

Coalition compulsions were evident in the preparation of the budget, with Bihar being allotted Rs 26,000 crore for roads sector development and Andhra Pradesh being given Rs 15,000 crore for its Amaravati capital development. Bihar has also been selected for two temple-related corridor projects. Surprisingly, the budget speech made no special mention of the railways sector even as the Modi dispensation had, from the outset in 2014, done away with the long-held practice of a separate rail budget. Clearly, the government has no major plans to announce for this key sector, though the economic survey had claimed that capital expenditure on the Railways increased by 77 per cent over the past five years. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated after the BJP's lack-lustre poll win this time, emphasis has been laid on job generation in the organised sector, based on a feeling that unemployment was a cause for the BJP's loss of votes and seats. Yet, most governmental interventions in various spheres did not really benefit the targeted groups. The governance system and the bureaucracy will undercut such noble aims and vested interests would take full advantage. Mere allotment of funds in itself means little. Targets must be achieved and outcomes need to be measured.

Communication: A pillar of good governance in modern-day politics

By Andrew W. Lyngdoh

"Leaders who don't listen will eventually be surrounded by people who have nothing to say."

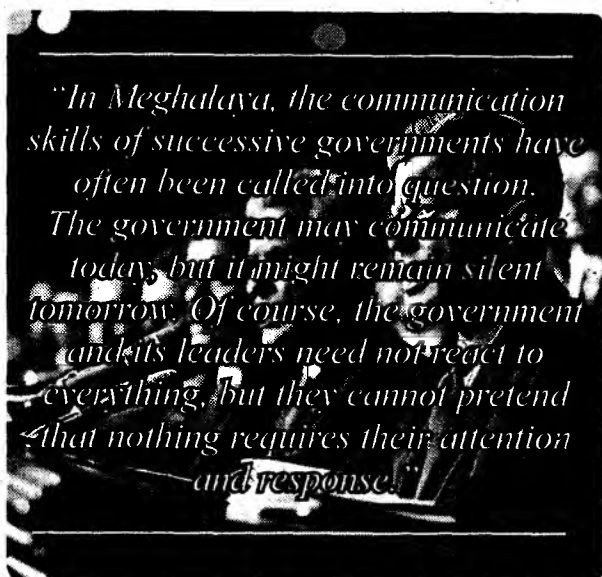
Today's political landscape has become highly competitive and intricate, leaving no room for poor communication skills. Poor communicators in the realm of politics and governance can bring an entire government to its knees, even if it appears to be standing firmly on its feet. On the other hand, a good communicator can do just the opposite — snatching victory from the jaws of defeat. Many people have always been amazed by the speechwriters of successive American Presidents. The White House has been fortunate to have many great speechwriters, although some Presidents have relied on their own communication skills. One of the greatest and most often quoted speeches is John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address on January 20, 1961, in which he said: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." There are many other notable examples, such as Franklin D. Roosevelt's "The Only Thing We Have to Fear Is Fear Itself" (March 4, 1933); Ronald Reagan's "Tear Down This Wall" (June 12, 1987); and Barack Obama's "Yes We Can" (January 8, 2008).

In India, its first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was an orator par excellence. His "Tryst With Destiny" speech is memorable. On August 15, 1947, Nehru began by saying: "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time has come for us to fulfil our pledge and realise the dreams of our freedom struggle." Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was also a great orator, especially in Hindi. His poetic expressions could move mountains. The current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, is known for his powerful and crowd-pulling speeches. Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, has drastically perked up his communication skills with the people, the media, and inside Parliament.

As the phrase goes—the gift of the gab—communication is a talent that should be painstakingly nurtured. For political leaders who unfortunately do not have this gift, it is essential to cultivate it. It is pointless to be a leader if you cannot communicate effectively. A political leader may be doing hundreds of deeds, but when their communication is poor, no one really cares. Why would anyone care if they do not know what their

leader is doing? In his 1992 campaign speech, Bill Clinton, who went on to serve as America's President for two terms, said, "In politics, you have to tout your own horn. I know it's not always easy to do. It's not always the most pleasant thing to do, but it is a necessary part of the process." While tooting their own horn, some politicians go overboard, while others remain unseen and unheard. There are those who understand the "process" so well, like Modi, and then there are those who fail to comprehend either the alpha or the omega of the "process."

In Meghalaya, the communication skills of successive governments have often been called into question. The government may communicate today, but it might remain silent tomorrow. Of course, the government and its leaders need not react to everything, but they cannot pretend that nothing requires their attention and response.



ma took the "CM-Connect" programme to another level by visiting block headquarters to interact with citizens. Indeed, to be heard, Sangma must also listen. A note from the government's Information and Public Relations Department highlighted concerns raised by citizens, which the Chief Minister addressed. For instance, the note mentioned that a resident of Bhoirymbong Block, Rangshabong Kharbikhiw, informed the Chief Minister about a water supply issue that had lasted for two days. In response, Sangma called an official from the PHE Department and instructed that the matter be resolved within the next 24 hours after hearing the official's explanation.

On the other hand, we also remember Ronan Keat-

ing's lyrics, "...You say it best when you say nothing at all." Apart from the romantic context, there are political leaders who would do well to learn the value of silence, as their words often lead to disaster. For such leaders, many would be hoping they talk less. Aside from embarrassing themselves, which is their own concern, they also undermine the dignity of the positions they hold, which should be avoided.

The current dispensation under Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma has made efforts to improve communication, but there is still room for improvement. Recently, Sang-

ma took the "CM-Connect" programme to another level by visiting block headquarters to interact with citizens. Indeed, to be heard, Sangma must also listen. A note from the government's Information and Public Relations Department highlighted concerns raised by citizens, which the Chief Minister addressed. For instance, the note mentioned that a resident of Bhoirymbong Block, Rangshabong Kharbikhiw, informed the Chief Minister about a water supply issue that had lasted for two days. In response, Sangma called an official from the PHE Department and instructed that the matter be resolved within the next 24 hours after hearing the official's explanation.

Another resident, Baiahun Lyngdoh, inquired about the delay in releasing free textbooks for Lower Primary schools. The Chief Minister responded by directing education officials to purchase books in advance to ensure that students receive them on time. There were also queries regarding Anganwadis and food items under the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). Sangma asked officials from the Food

Department to come up with correct statistics to clear all assumptions which give a handle to opportunists to take the law into their hands!"

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Ethical crisis in medical care

Editor,
In recent times, many families have experienced a sense of betrayal from certain private nursing homes and hospitals. What is disgusting is that some reputable hospitals keep coma patients on ventilators far longer than necessary with the sole intention of raising medical bills. This practice has left families not only emotionally shattered but also financially ruined. According to numerous media reports, some hospitals in metros even keep deceased patients on ventilators long after they have passed away.

One family member, who wished to remain anonymous, shared their traumatic experience: "My grandmother, suffering from acute respiratory issues along with high blood pressure, diabetes, and other old age-related frailties, was kept on a ventilator for 12 days. Later, we realized that she was unnecessarily kept on the ventilator for so many days

and Civil Supplies Department to address these concerns, stating that the matter would be promptly resolved through the Early Childhood Development Mission.

This two-way communication is a positive step for democracy. Democracy does not end on voting day; it requires ongoing engagement and accountability. Through this medium of "resolution through communication," the Chief Minister can learn about gaps in governance, identify requirements to bridge those gaps, ensure effective public service delivery, and address bureaucratic lethargy. Not all problems in governance are caused by the political executive or elected representatives. Many issues are also attributable to the bureaucracy. However, in moments of hysteria, we often focus solely on the politician and forget about the bureaucrat who may evade accountability for their actions.

The Chief Minister must ensure regular follow-ups and hold officials accountable for their performance. The next time Sangma meets Rangshabong, Baiahun, and others, officials should be expected to address previous complaints. If any official is found to be lax in their duties, the Chief Minister should not hesitate to take disciplinary action. People expect not only words but also visible results. Improving public service delivery requires the Chief Minister to act against errant officials. If just ten such actions are taken, it would send a strong message to all: perform or face consequences.

Communication is indeed a pillar of good governance, as demonstrated by the Chief Minister's initiative to engage with the public. Other ministers and legislators should follow suit. There are problems that only the government and its agencies can solve, even though some of these issues may have been created by the government itself. However, there is no room for complacency. Sangma must ensure that the government improves its communication skills, especially in countering fake news, false narratives, concocted accounts, and misleading stories. In this day and age, a government may even collapse under the weight of fake narratives circulated on social media. Social media has become overwhelmingly powerful, and a government that ignores this does so at its own peril.

(The writer is a Shillong-based journalist)

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Watching A Beheading..!

Since I've been driving round England, Scotland and Ireland the last few weeks I've been visiting a number of castles, and hearing much about powerful kings who loved giving their subjects plenty of entertainment in the form of beheadings! Also watching the TV serial, 'The Tudors', what fascinated me were the crowds that gathered to see the bloody scene. They came in hordes, the common man and his family to attend a beheading!

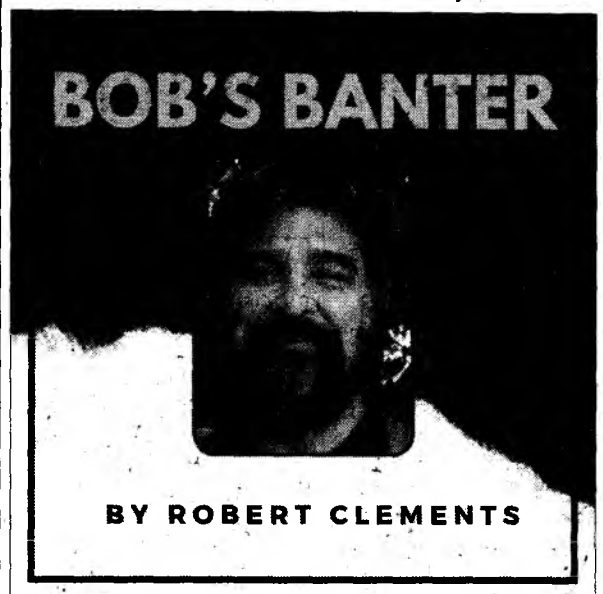
They came for two reasons, one, that with no other entertainment, this was great fun, and I am sure better than looking aimlessly at the walls of their miserable huts, and secondly and more importantly, because they loved seeing the rich and famous brought to dust. They had seen these same people in their carriages looking down

late Veerappan, the sandalwood dacoit also knew this strategy was a good one, and made off with hundreds of crores of sandal wood, guarded and shielded by the poor villagers around.

Coming closer in chronological time, Vijay Malya watches in astonishment from England as the common man in India bays for his blood. "But," thinks, the king of good times, "I gave them good times, I gave them pretty air hostesses, I gave them their fantasy, why are they after me?"

"Well sir, that's what happened at the beheading, five hundred years back in the very Merry England you have run to, the poor love a beheading! And a beheading is what they want to see!"

I have reasons to believe that our bearded head of state also watched the 'The Tudors' serials, because the scene a few years back in



at them, and beheading was when they could level off, with these same snobs!

It was a time they could laugh and mock those on stage as they walked to the block of wood where they rested their heads in dread before the designated chopper did his job. When the victim tried to say a few words before their execution, the crowd booed them. They did not want to show any pity, they did not want to hear whether he or she was innocent or guilty, all they wanted to hear was the sound of the head falling on the ground and then they cheered lustily.

All this took place hundreds of years ago, and you'd think, that with civilization becoming better, and entertainment more available, what with a thousand TV channels churning out soap and other serials every day, that people had a better sense of fun, but feelings haven't changed: The best entertainment for the poor is for the rich to get humiliated!

Watch when an accident takes place in our country! Even if the victim of the accident, is squirming in pain, even when he desperately needs to be taken to hospital, the crowd is so busy beating up the owner of the car, pulling him out by his tie, hitting him till he is black and blue, kicking him, and roughing him up that many a time the accident victim shouts out, "I'm dying, please do something!"

But nobody heeds his cry, because it's not justice the crowd wants, it's about getting even, hitting the person for acting superior all this time, and here's the chance to level the score.

Opportunities for such leveling up aren't many, because the rich generally have their security around, but instances like an accident, sometimes even strikes and morchas throw up situations where the poor, the otherwise weak and destitute are given proximity to the wealthy and a golden chance to do what they like with the rich and famous.

Robin Hood understood this well, and used this concept well. He robbed the rich, but never the poor, and the poor shielded him against the Sheriff of Nottingham, and the poor officer never could catch the wily thief. Back home the

our country is strikingly the same, and if I may say so, was well-orchestrated.

Thousands of men and women stood in queues outside banks to get a few rupees out, and Rahul and his men, seeing their plight, thought that with this they would win the 2019 elections. They made demonetisation the poll issue, but our prime minister was made of sterner stuff. "Brothers and sisters," he shouted, "I have caught the rich and you will witness a beheading!"

The poor stood in the burning sun, some fell because they were old or tired or hungry, some died, but all of them even as they suffered felt the rich were suffering even more.

They actually believed they watched a beheading. They felt grateful to the man who ordered the entertaining scene they were called to witness. What fun, look at the rich being dragged to the block of wood, with their ill-gotten black money and swoosh, their money has disappeared and they are finished!

They laughed and grinned, sweating outside in the sun, watching in their imagination the beheading of the rich. Then they ran with the only item of value they possessed, their vote and gave it to the man who had ordered their entertainment!

"You gave us a show! Here is our payment!" they said as they came out with ink on their finger!

But as I followed the history of the 'beheaders' and the game they played with the public, I realized that finally the people saw through the game, and most of these kings and even queens became unpopular.

Ah well, I wonder if the same is happening here in our country, where the man who gave this entertainment to the people is being found out.

"Hey," says the poor man as he watches the vulgarly lavish wedding of the Ambanis, "it looks like we were the ones who were beheaded..!"

The Author conducts an Online Writers and Speakers Course. For more details send a thumbs-up to him on WhatsApp 9892572883 or bobsbanter@gmail.com

Letters to the Editor

In support of migrant labourers

Editor,
The good ole thumping times are back! Thumping migrant labourers, that is! Sarcasm aside, let's get down to brass tacks as regards local and non-local labourers as experienced by a local commoner like me. The work ethics of the 'local' labourers I encountered left me wanting to tear my hair out. They would come late but leave early; take umpteen breaks, so much so that in essence, they worked only about three hours a day, four or five if I was lucky (I timed them). It was also vitally imperative for them to take a few days off for some pressing social obligation or another every other week or so. They would leave early on Saturdays but would never appear on Mondays either. You have to tread on eggshells around them for, heaven forbid! should you happen to scold them for whatever reason, they will refuse to come to work the next day. They charge almost double that of their non-local counterparts for work quality that is average at best. In contrast, non-local workers do better quality work at a faster pace; at more reasonable rates and take criticism in their stride. Case in point,

it took a 'local' carpenter two days to make me a rough 2 x 4 wooden box at Rs. 500 per sq. ft. whilst a non-local one took five days to frame out three 8 x 10 wardrobes at Rs. 300 per sq. ft. As a salaried individual with shallow pockets compounded by a rising cost of living, my priority is getting good work done as quickly as possible and at a price I can afford. I would love to support our local workers and all that jazz but not when I have to pay through my nose or lose my sanity, not to mention my temper, during the process.

Yours etc.,
J.R. Rani
Shillong 3

Migrant workers versus local workers

Editor,
The ongoing so-called "checking" of migrant workers across various parts of Shillong and outskirts by pressure groups has more or less brought to a standstill critical construction projects be it private or government funded. The action of such groups many times have led to their crossing swords with the law and points to the failure of the departments concerned for not doing their duty well. One more aspect is the insistence of labour licence given by

the State Government authorities whereas there have been instances of the rôle of the District Councils as well in the issuance of such certificates. Everything lacks synergy and coordination and it seems that everyone is operating within their silos. We lack the required skilled labour force which is the reason for skilled migrant workers to come. The lack of interest to learn is also another aspect and the absence of professionalism, discipline and work culture is also the reason why contractors and contracting firms hesitate to hire local labour. We need to first address the problem at the local community level before we claim to fight for the rights of local labour which is wanting and in short supply.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S. Wankhar
Shillong:3

Robust data critical for decision-making

Editor,
The editorial "Data versus Assumption" (ST July 23, 2024) made interesting reading. It is said that data is based on analysis and evidence; it is an educated guess about what will happen in future while assump-

tion is a belief that is not based on data, often made without much thought, and can lead to bad decision making. We need to have data on in-migration and out-migration in the state which is updated every quarterly to determine what is the real picture on migration instead of guesstimating given the fact that we have no updated census data as of today. The editorial has raised eleven pertinent questions that need to be addressed failing which it could prove counter-productive for a state that is trying to catch up in every sphere of socio-economic development, especially in the implementation of National Projects and Central Schemes where a huge amount of investment is made by the Government of India which are time bound. Missing it means Meghalaya is regressing and the Central Government does not wait for anyone and at times it may be compelled to abandon such projects when the progression is at a snail's speed and such investment outlives its economic utility. As it is, money does not come for free because money is what money does.

The problem with the Labour Department in Meghalaya is that they are not labourious; perhaps they have their own predicament for that. However, the editorial is not incorrect to point out that, "It is incumbent on the

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"There is no moral authority
like that of sacrifice."

— Nadine Gordimer

The Shillong Times

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Bangladesh in turmoil

STREET protests are not new to Bangladesh or to any South Asian nation. Democracy or its assumed avatar allows for protests on any issue affecting the public. But why has this country of 170 million people suddenly turned so violent? So much so it is being described as the worst violence in living memory. At least 105 people have been killed so far and over 2,500 injured. Hundreds of security personnel were also injured. The government has imposed an unprecedented communications blackout, shutting down the internet and restricting phone services. It is shocking how peaceful protests on university campuses has transformed into a nation-wide protest and violence being unleashed on the streets.

The root of the problem is the quota system for government jobs. One third of public sector jobs are reserved for the relatives of veterans from the country's war for independence from Pakistan in 1971. The youth feel that this reservation has carried on for too long and is discriminatory, and they are asking for recruitment based on merit. Protest coordinators say the police and the student wing of the governing Awami League – known as the Bangladesh Chhatra League – have been using brutal force against peaceful demonstrators, triggering widespread anger. The government denies these allegations and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been making provocative comments to defend the reservation. Clearly Hasina is losing popular support as people from all walks of life have joined the movement. The protests have been waiting to happen with unemployment hitting an all time high despite Bangladesh being one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Economic growth has not translated into white collar jobs for university graduates in particular. Around 18 million young Bangladeshis are looking for jobs even while university graduates face higher rates of unemployment than their less-educated peers. Ironically Bangladesh has become a powerhouse of ready-to-wear clothing exports totalling around \$40 billion worth of clothing to the global market. This sector employs over four million people, many of them women. But factory jobs alone are not sufficient for the aspiring younger, highly-educated generation.

Under Sheikh Hasina's 15-year rule, infrastructure development has gone up by leaps and bounds but so has corruption, especially in the inner circle of the Prime Minister's office. Clearly infrastructure alone is not enough. Employment generation is equally important. Bangladesh's per-capita income has tripled in the last decade and the World Bank estimates that more than 25 million people have been lifted out of poverty in the last 20 years. But the growth has been skewed and people allege large scale corruption and nepotism. These aspects have come up on social media since the democratic space for public protests in shrinking. Elections in Bangladesh have not been free and fair, particularly in this last term and people seem to have had enough of Hasina and are desirous for a change, but how?

Statecraft and national security; two sides of a coin?

By Admiral Arun Prakash (Retd)

The findings of the 1999 Kargil Review Committee Report start with these words; "...the Pakistani armed intrusion in Kargil sector came as a complete and total surprise to the government, army, and intelligence agencies..." In fact, "surprise" is a leitmotif that runs, unbroken, through independent India's national security discourse. The onus of responsibility, for national security, was placed squarely on the politician's shoulders, by Prussian strategist, Carl von Clausewitz's dictum, that war was a, "branch of political activity". Consequently, understanding the compulsions of national security and evolving strategies for achieving security objectives has become the 'sine qua non' of the civil-military security establishments of major powers.

In India, Clausewitz's dictum has been implemented somewhat selectively. While adherence to the principle of "civilian control" has ensured that the soldier remains subordinate to the elected representatives, the latter has, for various reasons, delegated exercise of his authority to the defence bureaucracy, and both have remained ambivalent about their responsibility/accountability vis-à-vis national security.

The creation of two new entities, in 2020, after decades of procrastination by successive governments - a Department of Military Affairs (DMA) and a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) - was deemed the most significant national security reform since Independence, for two reasons. Not only did the CDS become the first, ever, military officer to be recognized as a government functionary in the "Allocation of Business Rules", but the onus for management of the armed forces, also shifted, from the Defence Secretary, to CDS. Paradoxically, however, the responsibility for "defence of India, and every part, thereof," still remains with the civilian Defence Secretary.

The decision to go to war should come, only after politicians and diplomats have exhausted all other avenues of dispute-resolution, and if war is, indeed, a political compulsion, it must be waged with the aim of eliminating the underlying 'casus belli' to achieve enduring peace.

This places three responsibilities, on the country's political leadership: (a) to lay down, clear aims, for every military operation, it orders; (b) to specify the desired "end-state", before conflict termination; and (c) to ensure that adequate resources, are provided, well in time, for warfighting.

Unfortunately, in India, these stipulations have been disregarded time and again, because the Indian politician has remained detached from issues related to national security. In 77 years of independence, no government has ever undertaken a defence review, or issued a defence white paper, or a national security doctrine/strategy. Total preoccupation with election-related pursuits, leaves our political-order little time or mental space to devote to national security, except when it is seen as a "vote-catcher".

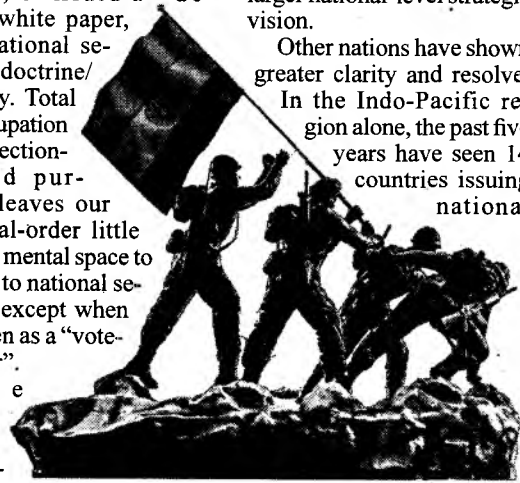
The long-term security policies of a state must be rooted in perceptions of its vital interests, and guided by a long-term vision of its place in the regional or world-order. Therefore, all major powers undertake periodic reviews of their evolving national security objectives, the options available, and the economic and military means available for achieving them. Such reviews automatically generate assessments of existing/potential adversary threats, as well as own military's material state and capabilities/readiness.

From here, it is a short step to estimation of capability shortcomings, and the funding support that the national exchequer must generate. Apart from providing fiscal guidance, this process also facilitates the evolution of a national security strategy. By not undertaking these exercises, the government deprives itself, of a holistic national security picture, with regard to: where we stand; where do we want to go; and, how do we intend

to get there?

Moreover, given the rapid pace of technological advancement, the absence of a long-term roadmap creates seemingly intractable issues for the military. Our stalled transition to theatre commands is a proximate example, but recent conflicts have thrown up other posers for the military, that include, role of cyber and drone warfare, employment of armoured forces, vulnerability of warships at sea, and continued relevance of manned aircraft in combat. Such force-architecture conundrums can only be resolved in the context of a larger national-level strategic vision.

Other nations have shown greater clarity and resolve. In the Indo-Pacific region alone, the past five years have seen 14 countries issuing national



security strategies, policies or defence white papers. Apart from major powers like the US, China and Japan, this list includes, Australia, Indonesia, Vietnam, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines. Of interest is China's example. Its political leadership has, since 1995, been issuing a defence white paper (DWP) every two years. The 11 DWPs issued so far – all public documents – discuss geo-political objectives, force structures and defence economics, against the backdrop of clearly stated national security aims, objectives and challenges.

India's National Security Secretariat has produced many draft strategy documents, but none has seen the light of day. Regardless, of this vacuum, the three armed forces have gone ahead, and issued doctrines or strategies, or both, with the stated objectives of providing, for example; "broad tenets for the prosecution of operations, across the entire spectrum

of conflict"; or "strategic guidance for growth, development and deployment of the service". However, in the absence of formally enunciated national aims and security objectives, and given the silence of MoD and Parliament on such issues, one wonders about the degree of conformity between the military's doctrinal thought-process, and the politician's 'Weltanschauung' (world-view).

The world's most populous nation, and fifth largest economy, India is a nuclear weapon state with a military that counts amongst the largest in the world, and a defence budget of US \$ 75 billion. And yet, there is a view that India "punches below its weight," because Indian statecraft has been unable to leverage its significant national power to deter or dissuade neighbours from undertaking actions inimical to its interests.

As he commences his second innings, in the MoD, our Raksha Mantri may note that his Chinese counterpart, Admiral Dong Jun, was till January 2024, the serving PLA Navy chief. This, first-ever appointment of a career naval officer as head of China's armed forces, is a testament to the importance Xi Jinping has placed on bringing professional expertise to bear on the ongoing transformation of China's national security and military, in general, and its navy in particular.

The scale, complexity and diversity of security challenges that India faces today, will continue to test the acumen of its statesmen, diplomats and soldiers. In this milieu, coherent security policies will serve to dispel perceptions of laxity or indifference towards national security and grand strategy. Using all its tools of statecraft, India needs to evolve a holistic national security strategy that will guarantee, firstly, a safe breathing spell for the country to build its economic, industrial and military sinews; and thereafter, the effective employment of its comprehensive power to stand up to external adversaries.

(The writer has been a member of the National Security Advisory Board and is based in Goa. Article by arrangement with the Deccan Herald).

Fallen but not Forgotten

By Maiphang Syiem

5229-5590-5310-4590-4875-5203-5287-4812-4927-4100-5300-5239-5620-5720-5770, as you begin, you will be muddled with the figures. They seem like ciphers but the fact is that each figure has a gripping tale of grit, courage, sacrifice, affliction and triumph. These figures must be remembered for the supreme sacrifices made by the 527 Brave-hearts of our country. The "tragedy of war is that it uses man's best to do man's worst" - (Emerson Fosdick), and it is in these peaks that such acts have resonated. War is definitely an unwanted tragedy that humanity has seen and which we are unfortunately witnessing from time to time. However, as a matter of reality, war and peace have coexisted since time immemorial with a choice to choose. Which one do we choose? This fact also reminds us of a statement made by former US President John F Kennedy which says, "It is an unfortunate fact that we can secure peace only by preparing for war."

We need to understand that the men and women in the forces are also humans and the importance of peace and security is obvious. However, there are Brave-hearts who sacrifice their peace for ours. May-July, 1999 reminds us of ferocious battles fought during the Kargil conflict and this entire month of July should be a special month for every concerned individual of this great nation to remember and rekindle, though we've secured peace and integrity but at an irreplaceable cost. Many lives were lost, young officers and jawans who had an entire life before them chose to give their lives so that we have a life. There are many interesting talks, documentaries, books and interviews, which are worth following. Perhaps listening to their stories is in itself an act of honouring their supreme sacrifices and it's definitely inspiring to hear it from living legends. We now have that luxury at our fingertips unlike earlier times. As the common public, all know India won the Kargil War, but one should also understand how the Brave-hearts won it for us.

Let us go back into the timeline, to understand what series of events led to the Kargil war theatre. The bone of contention was always the Kashmir issue. The Pakistan Army code-name for the Kargil War was Operation Badr, and plans were in place way back in 1998. The plan was scaled up with the appointment of Gen. Pervez Musharraf, superseding his two seniors. The appointment came after the controversial resignation of a former Gen. Jehangir Karamat due to differences back then. In the narration by General VP Malik the then Chief of Army Staff, he said that the motive of incursion by the Pakistani army across the LoC was to "alter the alignment of the LoC east of the Zoji La (pass) and deny the use of the Srinagar-Kargil-Leh highway in this area to India. Reviving jihadi terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. Highlighting the Indo-Pak dispute over Jammu and Kashmir to the international community. Capturing Turtuk, a strategically important village located on the southern bank of the Shyok River in Ladakh through which an ancient trade route cuts through the Ladakh Range into the Northern Areas of Pakistan." Astonishingly, Pakistan Army was involved in a proxy war which it denies but the ground evidences were enough to support the proxy speculations. They had already planned to make the attack during April-May, 1999. Later, in May 1999 the Kargil war was waged after 52 years of Independence and after three months of signing the Lahore Declaration on 21st Feb, 1999 thereby violating the bilateral resolution and the Shimla Agreement. Facts about Pakistan incursions to the Indian side is nothing new since conflicts had existed right after the Partition. To recollect, the

year 1947-48 had witnessed the first Indo-Pakistan War, (Kashmir War) and subsequently in 1965 and 1971. However, the Kargil episode was unique as it came with a surprise and disguised move. The Pakistan Army took advantage of the winter months to mobilise their actions due to low movement of troops. But why Kargil? A geographical perspective would substantiate the question of the conflict, and the ultimate approach is a map, which gives a good understanding. The LoC is a stretch of 740 Km starting from the southernmost Akhnoor sector till the northernmost point called Point NJ 9842 proceeding ahead towards NJ 9842 is the AGPL which is 110 Km long, AGPL is a line dividing the Military Post between India and Pakistan. The AGPL starts at point NJ 9842 which also opens up to the strategic Siachen Glacier the highest and costliest battlefield with inhospitable weather conditions. Siachen is strategic because it's like a passage for India, China and Pakistan.

Another bone of contention was the Shaksgam Valley which was illegally ceded to China in 1963 by Pakistan. Some narratives say that Kargil War was Musharraf's revenge for Siachen. If one would see it aerially, Kargil lies very close to the LoC; it's just 11 km to the Pakistan occupied side. Now joining the dots we can conclude why Kargil was star-marked. Our Brave-hearts knew exactly how strategic each post was. Therefore till the last breath and the last bullet was fired they fought with true grit at the cost of their lives and completely thwarted the Pakistani incursions.

As the common public we can only understand this as a conventional war, but the missing link is that the Kargil Conflict was a series of fierce battles fought from peak to peak which makes it look like a full-scale war. Beginning with Kaskar Sector, Bajrang Post, point 5299, it was at this location that the capture of an Army Officer and his men who were tortured to death by the Pakistan Army escalated the conflict further. Thereafter the Indian Armed Forces went all out; took the bull by the horns and came out victorious. We can proudly say that the Indian Armed Forces were a unique force consisting of Brave-hearts from the Himalayan Mountains, the North East India, the Gangetic Plains, Deccan Plateau, the Coastal Plains, Deserts, and Islands and it is a force which is always ready to negotiate for peace and security but at the same time it is also a force to reckon with. In one interview a senior Army Officer metaphorically mentioned that a Rhinoceros is always open for peaceful negotiation when he keeps his head high, but when he lowers down his head and the horn is up it means negotiations have reached their limit. It's time to attack and the same resonates with the Indian Armed Forces and the Kargil conflict. There were many incidents during the conflict which cannot be fully elaborated here but there are interesting taunts and conversations even in the midst of fierce battles back then at point-4875. "The Pakistani soldier says 'Yaar, itni goliyan kyun chala rahe ho. Hume Madhuri Dixit de do, hum wapis chale jaayenge'" (don't fire so many bullets; just give us Madhuri Dixit and we will withdraw. An amusing reply from an Indian Soldier 'Tum Madhuri Dixit ke sapne dekh rahe the, yahan tumhe Dharmendra mil gaye' (You were dreaming of Madhuri Dixit unfortunately you found Dharmendra here!)

To conclude all the 527 fallen must be remembered for their sacrifices. It should be just like the last word uttered by a fallen Brave-heart "Na Chodnuhos (Gorkhali). Their stories must be retold." When you go home/Tell them of us and say/For your tomorrow, we gave our today" – Kohima Epitaph

(The writer is a Geospatial expert)

The Smart City Debate

Editor,

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Smart Cities Mission on the 25th of June 2015, he did so with the noble intention of promoting cities that provide core infrastructure, clean and sustainable environment and give a decent quality of life to citizens of the country through the application of "smart solutions". However, nine years after the official launch, several gaping holes in this "smart" project were disclosed/exposed after a Shillong-based computer hacker successfully hacked into the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on the June 25, 2024, extracting over 5 gigabytes of data.

Among these documents, is a confidential report titled "Reimagining Streets of Indian Smart Cities" prepared by the Smart Cities Mission -- Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) and the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) on December of 2023. The compendium which aimed to provide an "extensive database" of street transformations of decision-makers, city engineers, urban practitioners, and academicians involved in street transformation projects could use as advocacy material, unfortunately failed to capture several essential user perspectives about the smart project. The lengthy 174-page report, though elaborate, has failed to analyze core properties of smart city projects, such

as (a) interventions on the physical, social, and digital space of cities, (b) the relation to city sectors and ecosystems, (c) engagement of users and stakeholders in decision-making, and (d) impact through optimization and innovation of city processes and routines.

This aside, many here are still hung over the news that Shillong, one of 100 cities identified by the Centre to be developed as a smart city, was among the ten worst performers in terms of implementing smart city projects. This news came as a shock to some people working under the Shillong Smart City Project and the ICCS -- a project that prides itself to be "the brain" for city planning and operations handed the lovely task to integrate and streamline various city functions, including surveillance, data processing, emergency response coordination, and the implementation of smart city applications. Yes, the initiative that promises to bring "significant technological advancements" by installing various field devices such as 368 CCTV cameras for surveillance and traffic management, 42 Emergency Call Boxes (ECB), 58 Public Address Systems (PAS), 20 Variable Message Displays (VMDs), 300 streetlights equipped with LED/Smart Lights and Light Point Controllers (LPC), 60 Public Wi-Fi Hotspots, GPS-based vehicle tracking for 50 Solid Waste Management (SWM) vehicles, and 200 Smart Bins was ranked at the lowest 93.

So, what's the reason behind Shillong's embarrassing

performance? How do we make implementing smart city projects easier? The one factor that would make the biggest difference to the success of smart city programs, in the eyes of the public, is not technology or funding but visionary leadership. At least, that is what executives are crying out for. In the public sector, it is often safer to do today what you did yesterday. Many governments, including Meghalaya have effectively admitted as much by incubating innovation hubs to challenge the status quo. Yet to lead change is to take risks and the desi media's ruthless scrutiny of the public sector -- which, in many states, starts with the assumption that taxpayers' money is being wasted -- hardly encourages bureaucrats or politicians to think outside the box. A leader's long-term vision needs to be inclusive, encouraging collaboration between agencies and across departments. Top down command and control management will not genuinely unite stakeholders in pursuit of a common goal -- nor will it encourage the sharing of knowledge that executives believe will smoothen implementation.

Though the term "smart cities" is somewhat new here, the idea isn't. Some experts claim ancient India (particularly the Indus Valley) actually used elements of the concept, such as using "technology" to make citizens' lives easier. The water drainage system is just one way they did that. But what makes a city "smart" in today's day and age? Is city smartness achieved

through automation of city infrastructure? Is a smart city one that uses technology to provide services and solve city problems like improving transportation and accessibility, improving social services, promoting sustainability and giving its citizens a voice? What's your definition of a smart city?

Yours etc,

Joseph M. Kharkongor
Teacher and Skill Trainer
Shillong – 8

Misuse of government vehicles

Editor,

Driving around the roads of Shillong it appears that the number of Government of Meghalaya vehicles has rapidly increased, whether they be ML 01 vehicles or even private vehicles with the red tag on the number plates. I tried finding out the entitlement rules with regards to vehicle allotment for Government of Meghalaya employees, however there are none available on the internet. And it is not just the number of vehicles, even the type of vehicles is surprising. I have seen Grand Vitaras, Thars and various other expensive vehicles as well. My question is what is the use of such expensive vehicles for office work? I also wonder whether the Government pays for the fuel for the private vehicles with Government tags? Who is entitled to such vehicles? And if they are Government vehicles, why is the

number plate not ML 01? As a citizen and knowing the financial status of the State and looking at the number of Government vehicles on the road, if the expenses for all these vehicles are borne by the state then it is sheer waste of public money. Also, one major problem with Government vehicles is that officials use them for private purposes. I'm sure I am not the only one who has seen official vehicles being used for dropping kids to school and official vehicles plying on Saturdays and Sundays which we all know are non-working days. The Government should be clear on the use of official vehicles and the entitlement of officers. If the vehicles are being procured from public funds then we the public have every right to question how public assets are being used or misused, whichever the case may be.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Penalty for throwing garbage randomly

Editor,

Apropos the news item, "Now, garbage bags must for tourist vehicles entering Sikkim" (ST July 22, 2024), I believe it is high time for our State as well to come up with such needed rules and regulations. As a frequent traveller on the GS road, I have often observed with great concern how passen-

gers in tourist vehicles as well as from private vehicles throw their junk and garbage out of their cars, which is indeed an eyesore. This is degrading and polluting to the environment. Drivers and car owners should be penalized if they cannot control kids or grown-ups from throwing junk on the road. I would urge the concerned authorities, as well as shop vendors dotted all along the roadsides, to put dustbins as far as possible, especially dustbins for non-degradable wastes such as plastic bottles, plastic bags, chips packet, etc. The urgent need of the hour is to put stringent measures in place whereby, the beauty of our roadside and the environment at large, will be safeguarded. It will be great if CCTVs can be installed all along the GS road and roads leading to popular tourist destinations. There should also be stringent penalties or severe fines for anyone caught throwing non-degradable items into drains or rivers, which is a menace to our already polluted rivers and the ecosystem. As concerned citizens, let us work together to preserve the beauty of our State, for which we have always been known.

Yours etc.,
A Wanswet,
Nongpoh

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"Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere."

— Albert Einstein

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PROMISE versus PERFORMANCE

THE mismatch between expectations and delivery is all too pronounced when it comes to governmental performance. Prime Minister Narendra Modi got the unique opportunity to lead the nation for three consecutive terms – meaning 15 years. This is a long period in the history of a nation. China, which ran neck and neck with India in matters of economy and defence till the turn of the century and emerged as the second top super power with five times the strength of India, achieved this distinction in a matter of less than 20 years. The Covid19 disaster stopped it in its tracks for a while, yet its strengths have not diminished. India, under Modi, marched forward with the pace of an elephant, the government avoided ruffling feathers for most part and ensured political and economic stability. India aspires to be a 'developed nation' by 2047, the time India celebrates the 100-th year of its Independence. Drumbeats apart, the nation of 1.40 billion might or might not achieve this distinction.

India's problem is its bulging population combined with an inability of its leadership to make use of the productive energy of its people, the largest army of its youths. The subsidised ration scheme made sure that a lazy generation would work less and idle away their time. China did the reverse. It created opportunities for its people to work. Factories mushroomed there. Its production lines fed the world. In India, the manufacturing sector as a whole took a nosedive. The 'Make In India' by itself did not help much. Aspirations for 2047 are one thing; the realities on the ground are altogether different. This mismatch is all too pronounced when one digs deeper into the subject.

The over 10 years of the Modi dispensation has little to boast of in terms of nation-building other than the erection of a parliament house, the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, the development of the road infrastructure or the installation of ports and airports. It invested huge sums in development of the railways, which had been neglected by successive governments, but fact is also that the railways sector has not improved in any significant way. The government lacks the cutting edge. A metaphor is the truncated bullet train project in the western sector. The plan was conceived in 2014, works for the 500km stretch – no big shakes -- began in 2020 and its first phase is "expected" to be completed by 2027. Just nine out of the 24 bridges are complete. The budgetary allocations for railways this fiscal is 2.52 lakh crore, double of the funds earmarked in the 2021-02 fiscal. Yet, the budget speech this week had only a passing mention of "what is new" for the railways sector.

Letters to the Editor

Why a compromised MCS Preliminary Examination Must Be Reconducted

Editor,
I am writing to address a significant issue regarding the Meghalaya Public Service Commission, MCS Preliminary Examination held on November 4, 2023. The initial results were announced on December 15, 2023 (580 were declared successful), but it has only recently come to light publicly that there were errors in the examination questions, as confirmed by the MPSC on July 23, 2024.

The MPSC has now included 62 additional successful candidates to the original list, attempting to apply the doctrine of equality. However, this approach does not fully resolve the fairness and justice issues at hand. MPSC has further announced the tentative Mains examination from 23rd September, 2024. The fact that some candidates have had over seven months of preparation while the newly declared successful candidates have none, is a significant disparity.

Moreover, in an examination with confusing and lengthy questions, any error in the questions would have significantly impacted the

performance of the candidates. Such errors can lead to confusion, misinterpretation, and wasted time, all of which can severely hinder a candidate's ability to answer accurately and completely. This not only affects their overall performance negatively but also their confidence during the examination. The stress and uncertainty caused by these errors further exacerbate the challenge, making it unfair and undermining their performance.

The 62 newly declared candidates are expected to prepare for a comprehensive Mains examination, including four General studies papers, an Essay, an English paper, and also two papers of an Optional Subject, all within just two months. This period is insufficient for thorough preparation, particularly given the nature of the descriptive papers and the necessity to stay updated on current events, which the new candidates have missed out on for more than seven months.

The Controller of Examinations (MPSC) mentioned in a past interview pertaining to MCS, Prelims examination, that candidates who have prepared will find the exam easy, while those who haven't will find it difficult. Given the current situation, where some candidates have had a head start of 7 months plus and others none, this statement raises concerns about fairness. How can fairness be maintained when preparation time is so unequal?

Given this context, errors in questions, delayed action and notification, half-baked attempts to rectify this botched-up exams are just the issues that have surfaced. It raises serious concerns about potential underlying issues, back door entry, nepotism if the examination is not reconducted.

The MPSC might argue that reconducting the examination is impractical. However, considering the example of the Meghalaya Police Recruitment in July 2018, where a technical fault in evaluating OMR sheets led to the cancellation and re-conducting of one paper of the exam it seems feasible. If the Meghalaya Police could manage a fresh examination despite a large number of candidates, the MPSC should not use impracticality as an excuse. Failure to correct the situation might suggest potential compromises, making the examination less credible.

The integrity of an examination also relies on the accuracy and fairness of the questions. Errors in the questions compromise this fundamental integrity, as they affect the validity of the assessment. The reliability of the examination results is compromised when errors are present, detected and publicly notified only after more than 8 months from the date of the Preliminary Examination.

The MPSC's attempt to apply the doctrine of equality has not succeeded. By acknowledging errors in the

questions and addressing them only after a significant delay, they have inadvertently created an unfair advantage for some candidates while disadvantaging others. This failure undermines the principle of equality they aim to uphold.

While the inclusion of additional candidates is a step towards rectifying the situation, it does not resolve the underlying fairness concerns. Reconducting the examination is the most equitable solution to restore integrity and ensure a fair competitive process for all candidates.

Yours etc.,
Mih Dkhar
Jowai

North Eastern States must set their house in order

Editor,

The news item "Budget has nothing for NE: Pala" (ST July 24, 2024) made interesting reading. According to the Union Budget 2024-25 Consolidated Fund of India, Revenue Account – Disbursements for Special Areas Programme for North Eastern States (Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources) under head 2552 the actuals for 2022-2023 indicates Rs 671.56 crores; the Budget Estimate for 2023-24 shows as Rs 69,839.73 crores while the RE 2023-24 shows Rs 66,408.83 crores and the

Budget Estimate 2024-25 indicates Rs 75,216.09 crores. Those interested can analyze what these figures mean but it cannot be said that the Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources of the Government of India which commenced from 1998 is zero for the North Eastern Region for the current financial year. The fact is that the Budgeted amount for the current financial year is Rs 75,216.09 crores. This is a substantial amount for the North Eastern Region but the right question to ask is whether the North Eastern States are in the position to absorb such huge funds provided liberally by the Government of India for Special Area Programmes for the region.

I was instrumental in monitoring this fund when I was with the Government of India and I know that the North Eastern States are very poor in absorbing the funds provided by the Centre. In fact, what is important is that the Government of India should provide State-wise how this fund is channelized and what is the absorption rate of the 8 North Eastern States separately. It is absolutely incorrect to say that the Government of India is not providing the funds adequately to the region when it is liberal in providing the same. The eight North Eastern States should set their own houses in order before blaming the Government of India.

Yours etc.,
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Inclusion and terminology

Editor

Apropos of the news item, 'Women's body felicitates notable personalities' (ST July 22, 2024) it is now the turn of Sarada Sangha to be feted for their remarkable work and achievements. In launching their quasi-quinquennial (125th) on July 21st at Ram Krishna Mission Shillong, they not only honoured notable achievers in diverse fields but they also extended their ambit by facilitating the underprivileged and disadvantaged too.

Though the city event was well covered by the ST reporter, it must be pointed out that Ms Sona Choudhary (felicitated for overcoming multiple disabilities) was reported to have taught for twenty years at the Deaf and Dumb School. Does such a school exist in Shillong? It is rather doubtful as the words deaf and dumb are considered insensitive and unacceptable in modern day principles of inclusive education. In fact, she actually taught at the School and Centre for Hearing Handicapped Children, Shillong.

Yours etc.,
Mondakini Basu
Secretary, Society for the Welfare of the Disabled,
Via email

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Meghalaya's misadventure with Tourism

By Patricia Mukhim

gentleman who was collecting the ticket fees from each trekker, coming and offering to be our guide. He also officiated as our photographer and took pictures of us in the most exotic places such as when we were precariously perched on the bamboo bridges that were just about two feet wide. He egged us on and said we could do it and we did reach the final destination which he called the "viewpoint" from where we looked down to the sheer precipice below which could well have been several hundred feet of sheer drop. It tested the human spirit to the core but it was worth the trek.

Managing garbage: A monumental challenge

All along the way, it is now customary to see the Khasi khoh (basket) being hung to accommodate all the plastic junk that tourists bring with them. Every tourist destination today has to deal with huge numbers of plastic water bottles, chips packets and all kinds of trash. With no scientific waste management system in place the only way to tackle the waste is to burn it. We know that burning plastics is toxic but the villagers are hardly aware of this. Do we wonder then why so many people suffer from serious respiratory ailments today. It's time to get some statistics, especially from hospitals and health centres. It is evident that villages can no longer tackle the humongous amount of waste. At a certain point in the trek one could see a whole mound of bottles lying there. They will obviously be picked up at some point and burnt but at what cost?

Putting the cart before the horse: Half ready tourism sites

A number of these tourist destinations have been promoted before they are ready to sell their services professionally. There will be shops selling all manner of chips and Maggi noodles. None of the shops will even experiment with the local cuisine and the variety of rice-based snacks that we have. All the shops are trying to make a quick buck without the quality that marks out tourist destinations elsewhere. On my visit to Kerala and to the backwaters of Kochi I

couldn't see a single plastic wrecking the beauty of the place because at every destination there are gates where visitors have to hand over all plastic materials they carry – snacks packed in plastics, water bottles et al. After they have completed their walks or boating or sightseeing and are on their way out they would take back what they had left at the gate and be told that they cannot leave anything behind anywhere near the tourist venue. In Meghalaya we are too indulgent of tourists almost as if we are afraid that they might not return if we are strict with their behaviour. The Indian tourist is bad news. They are loud, boisterous and don't know how to respect silence. People coming from foreign countries are more respectful of the local cultures and will ask questions about our songs, dances, cultures and try to learn at least a few local words. Such is not the attribute of the uncouth Indian tourist.

Do's and Don'ts for tourists

On a particular Sunday when some of us had gone to a tourist destination to plant some trees since the place was turning bald, we came across a number of tourist vehicles already on their way out at 11 am. They had evidently camped at the place the previous night. A tourist vehicle came to a halt and a young man who was sozzled out of his wits got out to relieve himself in full public view even as he swayed to the right and to the left. It was a sorry sight for those of us just entering the place. But those guys couldn't be bothered. It means the local village tourism society had not made clear the do's and don'ts for tourists. Getting so drunk on a trek is potentially dangerous because the person could slip and topple down several feet below and break his bones. But it would seem that the village tourism societies are only interested in collecting the entry and parking fees. Other than that the tourist could actually do whatever he/she wants. They are left to their own devices as there are not too many guides that can speak English and Hindi at every tourist place.

Tourist Guides an imperative

There is a dire need for tourist guides that know the art of story-telling including spinning yarns about the rocks and caves, rivers and forests, flowers and birds and beasts. I am not sure whether the colleges and universities are churning out tourist guides or turning all the students into tourism entrepreneurs who will set up their tourism enterprises. I have yet to come across a single learned and educated tourist guide who can entertain tourists and give them some stimulating stories to take back home with them.

Online portals for pre-booking

What makes tourism in Meghalaya different from what we see outside? Well, every tourist destination has an online portal where tourists who wish to visit have to book online. They just cannot decide to come to Meghalaya on a particular day and go to Destination A or B. Without an online booking a tourist cannot just arrive at a place. Period. As stated earlier the tourist destinations have been promoted far too quickly with the intention of making hay while the sun shines, never mind the overall impact on the environment.

Carrying Capacity

Much has been written and spoken about the carrying capacity of a tourist destination but we are losing this battle. Every place is literally over-crowded. Try going to Laitlum or any other place on Saturdays and Sundays and you would wish the place was never discovered. The local communities seem to be consumed by greed and don't realise they are killing the tourism goose that is laying the golden eggs.

I really don't know who to blame for this gold rush but I know for sure that this tourism boom is not going to last if the village tourism societies do not sit and think and plan for a better tourism experience for tourists – an immersive experience that they will carry back home and remain embedded in their hearts. Today everywhere you go there's only noise – including inside the Mawphlang sacred grove because people have not been told the meaning of "sacred" and what makes it so.

So there you are – these are first hand views from a local tourist who means well – take it or leave it!

Banking models that the Budget does not discuss

By Devidas Tuljapurkar

With an eye on creating jobs and MSMEs as a key provider of these jobs, the budget speech of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman noted that PSU banks "will build their capacity to assess MSMEs for credit, instead of relying on external assessment." It is clear that banks will be under pressure to increase lending to MSMEs; they have been asked to build new credit assessment models, as the FM noted in her budget speech. Further, the government wants banks to lend Mudra loans with enhanced limits, though the scheme itself has raised many questions and its outcomes are seen as questionable.

That takes us to the long story of how the government needs and uses the banking system, in particular PSU banks, and what it has done with these banks.

Right now, public sector banking in India is passing through the stage of "feel good". In 2024, PSU banks booked a net profit of INR 1.47 lakh cr. as against INR 0.82 lakh cr. losses in 2019. Gross NPA in percentage terms has gone down from 12.03% in 2019 to 3.49% as of 2024, while net NPA is down from 4.95% to 0.75%. Growth in business was 5.46% in 2020 over the previous year, while in 2024 it is 12.06% as against 2023. The only worry is market share, which was 71.1% in 2019 and has gone down to 64.40% in 2024. This means that the market share of private sector banks has gone up from 28.90% to 35.60% and within that, the market share of new generation private sector banks has gone up from 23.78% in 2019 to 31.02% in 2024. During the period, the market share of public sector banks has gone down by 6.70%, which is more than the market share of Bank of Baroda, which stood at 6.49%. Thus, it is clear that without privatising any of the public sector banks, the banking business equivalent to the size of Bank of Baroda stands privatised. The direction is clear: in the days to come, public sector banking in India will likely be marginalised further. This is a cause for worry.

Why is it so?

What we see is the manifestation of the policy prescriptions by the regulator i.e. Reserve Bank of India, and the owner, i.e. the Government of India, together. During the period, a major disruption took place on account of mergers in public sector banks. In 2019, Dena and Vijaya Bank were merged into Bank of Baroda while in 2020 a mega-merger took place whereby six banks were extinguished. As a consequential effect of this merger, the number of branches of public sector banks fell from 89,870, as of 2019 to 87,009 in 2024, down 2,861 branches as against which, in the case of private sector banks this number has gone up from 27,380 in 2019 to 38,216, i.e. an addition of 10,838 branches. Thus, the share of branches of public sector banks has gone down from 76.65% in 2019 to 69.48% in 2024, as against private sector banks, which has gone up from 23.35% to 30.52% and within that, the share of new generation private sector banks has gone up from 16.95% to 23.87%. This is one reason why public sector banks have lost market share as against private sector banks.

The 'Yes Bank' dilemma

In 2020, the State Bank of India was asked to bail out the new generation private sector bank, Yes Bank, by infusing INR 11,760 crores i.e. 49% stake into the troubled bank. In 2017-18, it had booked losses of INR 6,547 crores and a marginal profit of INR 862.23 crores in 2018-19. In 2020, despite having infused Rs. 11,760 crores into Yes Bank, SBI was able to book an impressive profit of INR 14,487

crores. The government, which was championing the cause of privatisation and speaking the language of market economics, itself compelled SBI to bail out the ailing Yes Bank, but did not allow SBI to infuse a little more to acquire 51% stake, since it would have changed the character of Yes Bank from a private sector to a public sector bank. This, in the government's view, would have proved to be counterproductive and self-defeating on the grounds that the government is committed to pursue so-called reforms further.

It is further interesting to note that during the period, the only bank from amongst public sector banks, the Bank of Maharashtra, saw its market share up from 1.15% in 2019, to 1.32% in 2024. This bank was the first amongst all public sector banks to turn around from loss-making to profit-making and is ranked number one in almost all parameters of performance. Thus, this bank has proved that it is not size which matters. This is proof of the self-defeating policy prescription of mergers in public sector banks to create large banks as if size can solve problems.

'Accounting profit' versus 'social profit'

The government compares PSU banks with private sector banks but it expects PSU banks to be in the forefront in the implementation of all of its many schemes and policies and makes them reach the remotest areas. This forces PSU banks to operate as loss-making in economic terms but the benefit is that PSU banks are profit-making in social terms. Accounting profits versus social profits is an age-old dichotomy.

The business model of PSU banks has undergone a major change consequent upon Asset Quality Inspection at the instance of the then RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan. In order to turn around from a loss-making to a profit-making entity, there was very little scope to tinker with the rate of interest on deposits or advances. The only option left with those banks was to reduce administrative costs. With this, PSU banks resorted to rampant outsourcing and contractual employment. All this has helped to reduce the staff costs but has exposed the system, resulting in huge risks in operational fraud.

Indirect Lending

In addition to this now, banks are tempted to resort to co-lending or indirect lending instead of lending directly. In the name of innovation in products and services, RBI has come out with various instruments such as Assignment of Debt, sell-purchase of portfolios etc. to enable banks to evade direct lending to save the overhead costs. All this helps reduce costs, but ultimately it is the customer who pays. There has also been a rampant increase in service charges; plus charges on services that traditionally were free. Thus, now low net worth customers who were brought in the ambit of banking with the implementation of Jan Dhan are required to pay the costs for the services and resolutely now, they are quitting. It is time the government clarifies its stand on the role and responsibility of banking in India, which is still a developing economy struggling hard with poverty, unemployment and economic disparity. Banks should book profits but profits cannot be the sole motive of banking. We also need to learn to measure social profits.

(The writer is Joint Secretary of the All India Bank Employees Association and a former Director of the Bank of Maharashtra) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

"Success is a journey, not a destination."

— Ben Sweetland

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JULY 27, 2024

Home Department Disoriented

IT looks like the pressure groups (not NGOs) in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya have decided to synchronise their agenda of embarrassing the MDA Government by following up on their acts from one day to the next. One day it's the Hynniewtrep Youth Council (HYC) threatening to lock up the Khasi Hills District Council (KHADC) alleging it of failing to check the trade licenses of companies operating in the State, more precisely in Ri Bhoi district. The next day it is the Hynniewtrep National Youth Front (HNYF) which stopped all tourist vehicles with Assam registration from crossing Umtyang near Mawdok one of the favourite spots for tourists to stop by as they get their first glimpse of the floating clouds across the ravine. The third day it's the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) checking labour licenses of migrant labourers and then also the Federation of Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Students (FKJGP) also an avowed cheerleader for the suffering class in the State. All these groups seem to have decided to jointly make the lives of those running the Home Department miserable – beginning with the Home Minister, Prestone Tynsong. Unless spoken to by media-persons, Tynsong will not speak up and condemn what is happening currently which is the complete absence of the rule of law and where every group has taken upon itself the task of governing this state by proxy.

How could the police not be aware that the HNYF would be banning Assam registered tourist cabs and private vehicles from entering Sohra, Dawki, Pynursla etc., on Friday? What was the Intelligence Wing of the Police doing? Any use of force by any group without following due process of law is a crime. The HNYF have no authority vested on them to prevent tourist vehicles from other states from entering Meghalaya and the tourist destinations, if there are no formal rules and regulations from the Government here that tourist taxis from outside can only be allowed up to a certain point from where the local tourist taxis would take over and ferry the tourists to their destination of choice at Government regulated rates. In Meghalaya it's a free for all as far as taxi charges are concerned. Passengers feel they are being fleeced and prefer to use the Assam vehicles which are relatively reasonable.

The Meghalaya Tourism Policy, 2023 claims that, "to address the issue of the safety of tourists coming to Meghalaya, a dedicated police team may be set up as Tourist Police Force. The Policy says "taxi services play a vital role in tourist transportation. Hence, the government could focus on ensuring safe and comfortable road transit for tourists. All the tourist taxis may be enrolled with the Tourism Department. All such cabs should clearly display the driver's details including name, photograph, and contact no. Additionally, emergency numbers are to be properly displayed in these cabs. The taxis may also be retrofitted to have a SOS button. A dedicated helpline could be set up as a single point of contact to resolve the queries of the tourists." Obviously, these are statements of intent which have not been implemented. The question is why?

Letters to the Editor

From Agitation to Cooperation

Editor,

We are concerned about the ongoing agitation regarding tourist transportation in Meghalaya. As concerned citizens, we believe it is essential to address this issue and find a balanced solution that benefits both the state and its people.

Tourism, when managed properly, significantly benefits society and utilizes a destination's resources meaningfully. However, recent agitations by the Hynniewtrep National Youth Front (HNYF) concerning tourist transportation have raised critical questions about Meghalaya's approach to this sector. These agitations have negatively impacted Meghalaya's image as a tourist-friendly destination, instilling fear among tourists and potentially deterring future travel. This is particularly concerning as tourism generates substantial income for the state, especially for rural communities.

While prioritizing our own people's safety, we must also consider their safety when they travel beyond our borders. Therefore, we should extend the same courtesy to visitors from neighboring states.

We suggest that tourist cabs with All India Tourists Permits (AITP) should operate freely in our state, benefiting both tourists and locals by ensuring convenience and supporting local drivers and businesses. Learning from Sikkim's agreement with West Bengal, which eased travel restrictions and boosted tourism income, Meghalaya can adopt similar cooperative measures. A regional approach can enhance and facilitate smoother transit.

It is necessary to take a unified approach that considers the interests of all stakeholders as well – tourists, locals, and businesses. We simply cannot ignore this. Effective transportation solutions require collaboration, not fragmentation. Our recent feedback from stakeholders indicates that this issue will severely impact their tourism and related businesses.

Also, evidence-based decision-making is crucial. Without accurate data on the number of tourist cabs in Meghalaya, how can we confidently claim that our local tourist taxis alone suffice? This calls for collecting and analyzing such data to inform better policies in our state. Tourism generates employment opportunities, especially for our youth, but not all youth 'are' and 'will be' absorbed in the tourism sector in our state. Hence, restricting tourist transportation excessively could lead to unemployment and economic setbacks. Agitations carried out without consulting tourism stakeholders can lead to unintended consequences. To bridge this gap, inclusive dialogue involving all relevant parties—local communities, taxi operators, and government officials—is essential at the moment. Collective decision-making ensures that the interests of all are considered.

Negative publicity can significantly impact tourism inflow and damage the state's reputation. The recent classification of Meghalaya as an unsafe tourist destination by US authorities is alarming already. In an interconnected world, insularity can hinder progress. We must embrace a broader perspective.

In resolving this issue, let us work towards a harmonious balance between tourism growth and local interests while considering the long-term implications of our decisions.

The enlarged NDA govt's new budget has little for the common man

Healthcare, social security, aid for elderly get little attention

By Nantoo Banerjee

non-farm sector till 2030. The massive unemployment and retail consumer price inflation, which is often

India's annual budgeting traditions, with tinkering tax rates as a major attraction, continue. It may be interest-

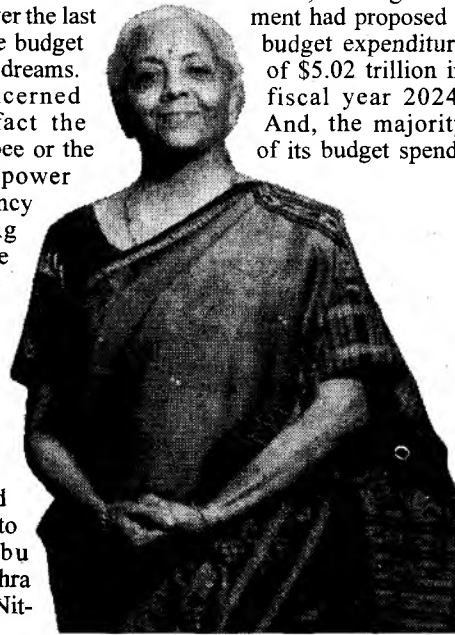
"Ever since the NDA government came to power in 2014, its annual budget is focused more on future goals than on its immediate agenda for the budget year. For the last 10 years, which near-consecutively witnessed a fall in the country's annual net employment growth rate despite reasonably good economic expansion, except during the Covid pandemic year, the government paid little attention to this aspect."

understated, are driving the country's poor and lower middle class, comprising around 70 percent of the population, almost crazy.

There is nothing in the current year's budget which could not have been implemented over the last 10 years. The budget is selling dry dreams. It is unconcerned about the fact the value of Rupee or the purchasing power of our currency is dwindling by day. The key expenditure focus of the budget seems to be to keep the NDA together by making massive allocations and concessions to Chandrababu Naidu's Andhra Pradesh and Nit-

ing to note that the annual national budgets of leading democratic countries such as the USA, Germany, France, Japan, the UK and Asian neighbour Indonesia focus more on public good. For instance, the US government had proposed a budget expenditure of \$5.02 trillion in fiscal year 2024.

And, the majority of its budget spend-



"The tax system in the UK, traditionally known for strong social security measures, is highly pragmatic. It is fair and simple, providing reward for hard work. Consumption growth supported by domestic manufacturing and export together served a key focus of communist China's national budget system."

ish Kumar-led Bihar. Telugu Desam's Naidu and Janata Dal (United) supreme Nitish Kumar together hold a vice-like grip on the NDA.

ing was on Social Security. The primary expenditure of the US government is on healthcare, retirement and defence programmes. In

Germany, the federal government's three top priorities are: security, cohesion and growth. The 2025 draft budget and growth initiative are designed to ensure that Germany will be a secure and economically strong country. In France, social spending, including unemployment insurance payments, which amounted to over 31 percent of the French GDP in 2022, continues to be a big focus of its expenditure budget. The other expenditures in the framework of allowances allocated in France include aid for the elderly, and to those with disabilities, and child-care. The tax system in the UK, traditionally known for strong social security measures, is highly pragmatic. It is fair and simple, providing reward for hard work. Consumption growth supported by domestic manufacturing and export together served a key focus of communist China's national budget system. The budget focus has been highly rewarding for China, making it the world's second largest economy over a period of only the last 25 years.

It is time that India's national budget system stops tinkering with taxes and politically-motivated expenditures and concentrates on areas having direct impact on the common man's life and living. It should focus on education, healthcare, social security, domestic manufacturing, job creation, inflation control, stability of Rupee, surplus trade, and creation of a business environment that attracts massive foreign direct investments from chosen countries. As in China, high domestic manufacturing and consumption should drive the country's economic growth and help boost the government's coffers to concentrate on public good. In a true democratic system, no political party remains in power forever. However, the comparison of economic performance and political sincerity often help a party to return to power after a break. (IPA Service)

Budget 2024-25 proposals inadequate to boost medium and small industries

Under Modi regime big corporates getting bigger advantage than MSME's

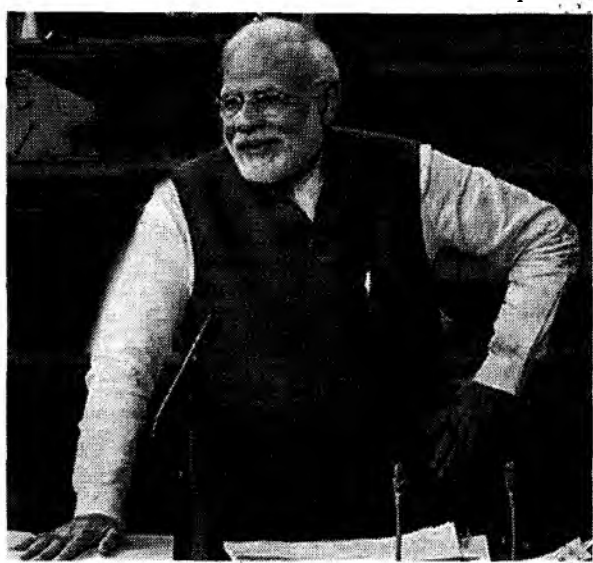
By Subrata Majumder

For the first time, the Indian annual budget for 2024-25 focused on the aim of manufacturing from the perspective of job creation, rather than boosting GDP. Manufacturing has been a failure in the earlier years to drive the GDP growth. The BJP led NDA government, vowed to give a new shape to manufacturing with a larger share in GDP composition – from 17 percent in 2014 to 22 percent by 2022. A new focus was made with Make in India to resort to growth in manufacturing, with simultaneous emphasis on employment generation. But, Make in India lost

and turnover have become detrimental to the growth of MSMEs and SMEs. Eventually, the growth of MSMEs and SMEs slowed from the perspectives of employment generation.

Second, unlike overseas, MSMEs and SMEs are not parallel to larger houses in dependence on each other in India. Under the policy on SMEs in India, a long list of items were reserved for SME. This created a hostile relation between SMEs and larger houses. In most cases, they are competitors to each other.

Eventually, larger houses take the benefits of produc-



sheen, losing catalysis for job creation.

Unemployment became the crucial issue in the 2024 general election. It emerged as one of the major issues for the Modi government losing sheen. Make in India lost steam due to faulty mapping of the policy and incurred a collateral damage to employment generation.

Realizing the hidden factor for the debacle in the election, the budget made an overture in reshaping the dynamism of manufacturing in Make in India, shifting from growth factor to job creation. It relied more on invoking fiscal incentives to increase employment opportunities in manufacturing rather than focusing on Ease of Doing business and increasing shares in GDP.

There are three main fiscal incentives in the Budget to the employers for job creations. First, the government will pay the first salary of the newly employed person, subject to Rs 15,000/month. This will be paid in 3 instalments. Second, incentives will be provided both to the Employers and Employees directly at specific scale with respect to their contributions to EPFO for 4 years. Third, special subsidy will be given to employers with regard to their contribution upto Rs 3,000/month for 2 years to EPFO for each additional employee.

Nevertheless, success of fiscal incentives to boost employment through manufacturing depends upon the industrial structure in the country, specifically, their scales in manufacturing.

MSMEs and SMEs are the hub for job creation in India. About 96 percent of industrial units belong to small companies, according to government data. They account for 40 percent of the country's industrial production and 42 percent of exports.

But the restrictive policy of MSMEs/ SMEs hinder the job creation. According to industrial policy, restrictions in investment and turn over hamstrung MSMEs and SMEs for job creation. A MSME is subject to investment curb upto Rs 50 crore (Rs 500 million) in plant and machinery, with a turnover restriction upto Rs 250 crore (Rs 2500 million). Similarly, a SME is subject to investment curb upto Rs 10 crore (Rs 100 million) in plant and machinery, with a turnover restriction upto Rs 50 crore (Rs 500 million). The policy did not change for more than one and half decades, while the inflation quadrupled during the period.

Given the rapid growth in technology and global integration in the manufacturing, curbs on investment

sion sizes, linked to cost-benefit ratio and the advantage of brand image over the MSMEs and SMEs. In contrast, overseas, larger houses hold big financial stakes in MSMEs and SMEs, embracing a collective responsibility for the companies' success, such as technology, marketing and others.

To this end, a leaf from Japanese experiences for restructuring its industry in the post World War II can be a lesson. Japan also faced a similar crucial period in industrial volatility at the time of rebuilding its economy, devastated by the atomic bomb in 1945.

SMEs in Japan contribute over 99 percent of all businesses and more than 70 percent of all employees till 1999.

Restructuring of industry in Japan in the post World War II relied more on systematization of SMEs through initiatives of larger houses. A pyramid structure of business relations was built up in Japan, especially in automobile, electronics and textiles.

SMEs acted as sub-contracts at the bottom of the pyramid and larger houses performing as assemblers at the top. In 1980 and 1990's more than 60 percent of Japanese SMEs in manufacturing were sub-contractors and secured a good relation with larger houses in assembly operations. In other words, Japanese SMEs acted as catalyst to the growth of Japanese manufacturing. In most cases, the larger houses were big stake holders in Japanese SMEs financial kits.

The close relation between Japanese SMEs and larger houses endowed a shared responsibility, with respect to multiple supports from larger houses like in technology up-gradation, marketing and financial assistance. Thus, comprehensive relation between SMEs and larger houses under the umbrella of pyramid structure played a key role in development of SMEs in Japan. There was a time when at least 3 jobs were running after a Japanese worker.

The system was dismantled after the Yen shock (Yen appreciation), which shackled the nation with recession. Japanese larger houses shifted their production lines to South East Asia and China after the Yen shock turned uncompetitive to produce in Japan.

To this end, why not give a second thought to Make in India and overhaul the structural balance between MSMEs and SMEs and larger houses on the Japanese line to increase propensity to job creation. (IPA Service)

world, insularity can hinder progress. We must embrace a broader perspective.

In resolving this issue, let us work towards a harmonious balance between tourism growth and local interests while considering the long-term implications of our decisions.

Yours etc.,
Phidari. Kharlukhi,
Sawarisa Suaim,
Zaman E. Tongper
Via email

Meghalaya tourism in shambles

Editor,

The impromptu stopping of vehicles from Assam carrying tourists, by members of HNYF is a wrong move. The tourists were bound for Sohra, Pynursla, Mawlynong, Dawki and many other places. The HNYF and others like it forget that there are many of us from the state who travel for various purposes to Guwahati and elsewhere across Assam and to disallow visitors from traveling in an AS registration commercial car is just not done. It violates the Constitutional rights of a citizen under Article 19(1)(d) of the Constitution. Now the trouble here is the indecisiveness of the state government to address the growing unemployment, although not all unemployed youth can be absorbed in the tourism sector or become successful entrepreneurs. There has to be a mutually agreed mechanism between Assam and Meghalaya over the matter. Adopting the Sikkim model is also not feasible but tourists vehicles from Assam can always stop

at ISBT or at pre-designated points within the periphery of Shillong eg: Lad Smit for those going towards Jaintia Hills, then at 7th mile ground which is unused and the local taxis could then ferry tourists to any destination towards West or South West or East Khasi Hills. If these points could be taken it will help our local tourists vehicles who would take over the rest of the journey safely, happily and comfortably with our guests. Atithi Devo Bhava translates into "Guest is our god." Let this spirit prevail in our society.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S Wankhar,
Via email

Why harass the labourers?

Editor,

In the past few weeks there have been a spate of checking of work permits/ labour license/ trading license of the so-called immigrants coming to work in Meghalaya. I remember pretty well, the labourers working at the construction sites be it houses of individuals/ different schools and colleges, construction of government structures as well as labourers working in various central as well as state sponsored roads are always the soft targets. Let's assume that we drive away all the labourers, will these pressure groups take the responsibility to provide local labourers at all those sites? Not to speak of the work culture of our people which has been known and experienced by all, is there sufficient local human resource to do the work and complete it on time? Will there not be

an issue of demand and supply? Who will fill in the gap? Moreover, are there enough skilled labourers among the locals who are trained to do certain kind of works? Are the contractors and engineers in charge of central and state projects not answerable if such projects are not completed as scheduled? Do these people want to drive our State and its people to that ancient time where there were no motorable roads and people had to travel on foot or on horse carts because I can vouch that without non-tribal labourers there would be no roads in our State. Our locals are neither trustworthy, dedicated, or skilled especially when it comes to road construction.

Another point is that our people working all over India need only a voter's ID or an Aadhar Card to work in any private firm or even in government jobs. The question here is why is that not enough here? Why conclude that every person is an illegal immigrant? Why does the fear of being overwhelmed by the dkharhs persist when according to data and census the non-tribal populace has dwindled to a great extent. Who would want to come here and work as labourers with the fear that one may get beaten or killed at the drop of a hat? The dkharhs who come here as labourers are the poorer lot whose main intention is to feed their families back home. This fear psychosis is only a tool for the leaders of the pressure groups to incite the youth and people for their own individual benefit. I'm not talking here about the masses who follow wherever the wind blows. My reference is to the leaders of the various groups. Period.

By driving people away from our State and by not providing them homes to stay (in collaboration) with the dorbar shonghs (even for those working in different central govt offices), what if the same applies to our people residing in different parts of the country? And do we have a plan to isolate ourselves from the rest of India? Is that possible? In this modern world with modern technology people mingle and live together to acquire more knowledge and share the same with all. No one can live in isolation. Of course as a minority community, we have to be careful and safeguard ourselves by certain acts and regulations framed by our Government. In case we see that the Government is not implementing those safeguards then we should take our Government to task but not by taking the law in our own hands through assaults and killing sprees. There are different ways and means to go about this.

Here in Meghalaya, it appears that the Government is working in tandem with the pressure groups. Other than the CM and Paul Lyngdoh (who was once a strong member of the KSU) not a single minister and none in the cabinet dared or cared to say anything on this issue. As a matter of policy the Government should never allow the pressure groups to take it to ransom. Instead they should be dealt with according to the law.

Yours etc.,
Helen Dkhar,
Via email

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

Paris Olympics and the risk of climate change



Europe is in the midst of a heat wave, and while Olympic athletes in Paris for the 2024 Summer Games might be spared the worst of it, the weather will still be hot.

As global temperatures have risen, major sporting events like the Olympics and FIFA World Cup have had to adapt to high heat and extreme storms to keep athletes and fans safe and allow the games to go on.

Olympic organizers have moved events such as marathons to early mornings and even to cooler cities. FIFA, the governing body for world soccer, pushed the 2022 Men's World Cup back from its usual time in June to late November so it could be held in Qatar.

The heat risks and the environmental impact of major sporting events have led some people to question whether these events should be held at all. But as someone who studies sport management and sustainability in an area I coined "sport ecology," I believe that radical approach misses the benefits, including the Olympics' ability to promote sustainable actions to the public worldwide.

HOW RISING GLOBAL HEAT AFFECTS THE OLYMPICS

Sports have good reason for caring about sustainability: Climate change can put athletes' and fans' health at risk and even put the future of some sports in doubt.

Winter sports face the greatest threats from climate change as temperatures rise and precipitation changes, dramatically shortening winter sports seasons in many areas. In 2022, the Beijing Winter Games had to artificially create snow so it could have ski runs at all. The International Olympic Committee has delayed its decision to select Winter Games host cities for 2030 and beyond because of the uncertainty of winter sports.

In the summer, global warming fuels extreme heat and storms that can affect the quality of the competition and the health of the athletes and spectators.

HOW GLOBAL TEMPERATURES HAVE RISEN OVER THE PAST 50 YEARS.

Major sport federations and leagues, as well as the Olympics, have responded to the risks by delaying competitions to cooler times of day or year, implementing water breaks and offering more player substitutions.

Organizers of the Tokyo Summer Games, held amid a fierce heat wave in 2021, had preemptively moved the marathon to Sapporo, more than 500 miles north of Tokyo, so athletes could run in cooler weather. They also delayed competitions during the Games to avoid extreme heat and excessive rain.

OLYMPIC PROGRESS TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

Any large event like the Olympics can produce vast carbon emissions through its construction, transportation needs and energy use.

That impact, and the risks it creates for sports and their athletes, are why sustainability has been a pillar of the Olympic charter since 1996 and is a focus of its planning for the future. In

2012, the London Olympics pioneered a new international certification standard, ISO2012, which provides guidelines for any large event to make more sustainable choices, from construction to catering.

The 2024 Paris Games, from July 26 to August 11, and Paralympic Games from August 28 to September 8, are certified to the latest standard, and organizers are taking many steps to reduce their climate impact.

The organizers plan to power the events' operations with 100% renewable energy from wind and solar. They are using existing venues when possible, had new ones built with low-carbon concrete and recycled materials, and brought in thousands of seats made of recycled plastic.

All furniture and temporary buildings approved for the Games also must have a contractually guaranteed second life, rather than going into a landfill. All of the competition venues are on public transportation, allowing for fewer vehicles in the streets. Even the food is targeted for a 50% emissions cut compared with the average meal by increasing the use of plant-based foods. The Paralympics will use the same venues and housing in the weeks that follow.

That doesn't mean the 2024 Olympics won't have a large carbon footprint, however, particularly as many spectators and athletes arrive by plane. But the organizers are aiming for the construction and operations emissions to be half those of the London and Rio Games in 2012 and 2016.

WORLD'S FAIR OF SUSTAINABILITY

The Paris Olympic Games is an example of what large sporting events can do to reduce their impact on the environment and promote sustainability solutions to a global audience. Spectators will experience sustainability firsthand, and organizers will promote the Games' sustainability efforts.

Such campaigns can influence people's everyday behaviours and even increase their advocacy for sustainability in their home communities.

Suggestions to reduce the scale and size of sports events or even eliminate commercialized sports, ending spectator sports as we know them, overlook the ability of sports to influence and change human behaviour.

SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS AT THE PARIS GAMES

Sustainability is a constantly evolving process of learning from the past to improve for the future.

The 2024 Olympics' strategies, building on those used in previous events, and what Paris learns in carrying them out, will also help in planning for future events, including the 2028 Summer Games in Los Angeles.

In essence, the Olympic Games, the largest sporting event in the world, is a sport sustainability world's fair. It highlights what is possible for a sporting event through collaborations with international corporations to reduce its environmental impact. And it influences others to follow suit, whether that is other sporting events, leagues and federations or spectators from around the world. (*The Conversation*)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, July 28, 2024

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon semi-square Saturn on your solar return chart which is going to bring mixed results for you. You will have obstacles but can overcome them with hard work. It will seem struggles will never come to an end and you will be tested. At times you will lose patience. People whom you trust might betray you. But overall the situation will be good. Your relations with peers and colleagues will remain cordial. They will keep supporting. You will enjoy your work and make good progress. Even your plans will materialize. Your business will flourish. You will grow professionally. Your financial condition will be good. Your spouse will be supportive. Children will listen. Peace and harmony will prevail at home. Auspicious functions will keep taking place. You will go to an exotic location with your family. Your overall health will remain perfect.

This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) This phase brings excellent results towards personal growth. A personal relationship has the qualities of love, balance and freedom something that you have been searching for. You do not need to overanalyze personal relationships but rather respond with your heart; as a new understanding blended with maturity develops around you at home and at work. Those in sports, law and justice would benefit from this planetary alignment as they are infused with positive energy and gain recognition for their talents and hard work. You would pay attention to your image and avoid conflicts and arguments. Strong chances for a visit to religious places.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) This phase promises communication and intimacy with loved ones and family. You focus on enjoying romance, and having fun, as you express yourself creatively. Your attention turns to domestic matters and towards building, renovation, decorating and purchase of household goods for your home which figures strongly now. Personal relationships are warm and comfortable as you spend wonderful time with your family. Social, romantic or financial opportunities arise this week. Avoid arguments and confrontations with senior colleagues and those in authority. This can also produce an event that requires you to take charge and show your responsible side. You feel fresh and re-energized after a long walk or light exercises.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) Favorable results in communications, finances, and family and investments related matters are on the cards. You successfully perform tasks that involve cooperation and team harmony with people around you. Creative self-expression of any kind is favored. You instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others. Take advantage of the smooth, magnetic energy by surrounding yourself with like-minded people. Your career matters come to the fore. You come across as especially agreeable and your good nature is bound to attract some attention. Take care of your health and adopt a regular routine of healthy eating to avoid stomach disorders.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) You would attend to children, family and loved ones with devotion and care. You feel emotionally attached with loved ones and family members. It is time to expand your social circle and to make more contact with groups and those with similar interests and hobbies. It's time to get in touch with exactly what pleasures and comforts you. Short romantic trips elevate you and you enjoy the company of your loved ones this week. Your efforts have paid off as you strike a balance with love and harmony at home. Attending an important social occasion or festival may put you in the public eye as well. This is a very significant period, when you are inspired creatively and emotionally.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) This is going to be an adventurous phase for you. It is the time to turn your attention to your creations, love affair, children, and hobbies. Pleasure and amusement play an important role in your search for freedom of self-expression now. An overseas trip brings new opportunities and chances are you may find yourself in a new atmosphere or a new environment than usual. You take overseas projects in hand and enhance your funds from them. You exhibit individualism and brilliance in handling business ventures and collaborations. You may feel restless at times.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) This period brings joy, understanding and harmony in personal and professional relationships. It's a good time to travel, learn and do things that you normally don't do. It is a favorable time to air your ideas and apply them in your profession

as they will be well received. Financial gains are stronger. It's a time of creativity, drama, and passion. You are more communicative and busy than usual and this boosts your confidence level too. Remember, domestic relations cannot be resolved through discussion and analysis alone but through love, acceptance and freedom. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) The planetary configuration brings a pleasant atmosphere at work and you enjoy the company of your loved ones. You express yourself with charm and grace, whether it's through what you say or what you write. You instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others. In fact, it's a great time to open up conversations, as you are more rational when it comes to personal matters now. Your mind often wanders to domestic concerns, and issues surrounding your home, family, and personal life.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) This period would bring favorable results in domestic and professional life. You might make short frequent trips and visiting religious places. Communications too is highlighted. Your beloved one would be supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You would change your priorities and support your family with love and affection and make them more secure. There are strong chances of relocation and a few more responsibilities at the work place. There may be a development of romance at your work place.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) This period augments your professional prospects as you communicate cleverly and interact in more positive way with people around. You express true feelings, ideas and plans without being afraid of consequences and try to please your loved one. You enjoy every moment, whatever it brings and follow your truth and intuition to feel more integrated with your loved one. You tend to get mentally stressed and anxious causing health problems; detach yourself from problems and view them from a different perspective. Meditation and daily prayers would help to overcome from the recently generated problems.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) People notice and admire you for your pleasant and cheerful personality and this brings financial growth. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for the planetary placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits. Problems in your life may be overcome by bravery, self-assertion, and directness. People in law, justice and related fields will meet with success as they use their talents and skills to meet desired goals. You have to be very careful and try to be friendly, cooperative and helpful to resolve the issues related to your married life. You need to conserve health and energy to meet domestic responsibility.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) This period may put on lot of pressure on you. A positive and creative approach brings gain and resolution in old conflicts and work situations. You need to view professional and business problems from a balanced perspective. Draw from past experience and get on with your life rather than getting in the quagmire of repeating old patterns. Emotive issues can crop up. However later on the dust will settle down and you will look ahead with a lot of hope. This is a time to do what you can to build trust in your family life and a strong foundation within yourself. It's a great time to open up conversations with loved ones, when it comes to matters related to love, family and romance.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) In this phase money and domestic issues will take centre stage. Your main concentration would be to make domestic relationships and the home environment harmonious and peaceful. You are proud of your ideas, and very good at expressing them smoothly to family members. You tend to entertain them with your conversation and your sense of humor. There is strength in your feelings of love and the power of attraction, which may open the door to a new romantic relationship. You are feeling inspired creatively and romantically and you express your love quite openly now. You are more stimulated by all that is unconventional and your ideas are original and progressive when it comes to professional growth. You are more likely to pay closer attention to your physical appearance and mannerisms, aiming to improve and enhance your image.

When temperatures soar to record highs

In the unrelenting heat of Morocco's Middle Atlas, people were sleeping on rooftops. Hanna Ouhbour needed refuge too, but she was outside a hospital waiting for her diabetic cousin who was in a room without air conditioning.

On Wednesday, there were 21 heat-related deaths at Beni Mellal's main hospital as temperatures spiked to 48.3 degrees (118.9 degrees Fahrenheit) in the region of 5,75,000 people, most lacking air conditioning.

"We don't have money and we don't have a choice," said Ouhbour, a 31-year-old unemployed woman from Kasba Tadla, an even warmer city that some experts say is among the hottest on Earth.

"The majority of the deaths were among people suffering from chronic diseases and the elderly, as the high temperatures contributed to the deterioration of their health condition and led to their death," Kamal Elyansli, the regional director of health, said in a statement.

As the warming Earth sizzled through a week with four of the hottest days ever measured, the world focused on cold, hard numbers that showed the average daily temperature for the entire planet.

But the 17.16 degrees Celsius (62.8 degrees Fahrenheit) reading recorded on Monday doesn't convey how oppressively sticky any one particular place became at the peak of sunshine and humidity. The thermometer doesn't tell the story of warmth that just wouldn't go away at night so people could sleep.

But people don't feel data. They feel the heat.

"We do not need any scientists to tell us what the temperature is outside as this is what our body tells us instantly," said Humayun Saeed, a 35-year-old roadside fruit seller in Pakistan's cultural capital of Lahore.

Saeed had to go to the hospital twice in June because of heat stroke.

"The situation is much better now, as it was not easy to work in May and June because of the heat wave, but I have been avoiding the morning walk," Saeed said. "I may resume it in August when the temperature will go further down."

The heat was making Delia, a 38-year-old pregnant woman standing outside a Bucharest, Romania, train station, feel even more uncomfortable. Daytime was so hot she was drowsy. With no air conditioning at night, she considered sleeping in her car like a friend had.

"I've really noticed a very big increase in temperatures. I think it was the same for everyone. I felt it even more because I am pregnant," said Delia, who only provided her first name. "But I guess it wasn't just me. Really everyone felt this." Self-described weather nerd Karin Bumbaco was in her element, but then it became just a little too much when Seattle had day after day of much warmer than normal heat.

"I love science. I love the weather. I have since I was a little kid," said Bumbaco, the deputy state climatologist for Washington. "It's sort of fun to see daily records get broken. ... But in recent years just living through it and actually feeling the heat has become just more miserable on a day-to-day basis." "Like this recent stretch we've had. I wasn't sleeping very well. I don't have AC at my home," Bumbaco said. "I was watching the thermostat every morning be a little warmer than the previous warm morning. It was just building up the heat in the house and I just couldn't wait for it to be over."

"I've been analyzing these numbers from the cool of my office, but the heat has started to affect me as well, causing sleepless nights due to warmer urban temperatures," said Roxy Mathew

Koll, a climate scientist at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in Pune, Maharashtra, which normally has a relatively mild climate.

Philip Mote, a climate scientist and dean of the graduate school at Oregon State University, had moved in junior high to California's Central Valley and its triple digit summer heat.

"I pretty quickly figured I didn't like a hot dry climate," Mote said. "And that's why I moved to the Northwest." For decades, Mote worked on climate issues from the comfort of Oregon, where people feared that with global warming the Northwest "would be the last nice place to live in the US and everybody would move here and we'd have overpopulation." But the region was hit by nasty fires in 2020 and a deadly heat wave in 2021, causing some people to flee what was supposed to be a climate haven.

In the second week of July, the temperature hit 104 degrees (40 Celsius). As a member of a masters' rowing club, Mote practices on the water Tuesdays and Thursdays evenings, but this week they decided to just float down the river in tubes.

In Boise, Idaho, tubing in the heat that has hovered between 99 and 108 degrees Fahrenheit (37 to 42 degrees Celsius) for 17 days has become so popular there's a 30-minute to an hour wait to get into the water, said John Tullius, general manager for Boise River Raft and Tube.

In Denver's City Park, the swan-shaped pedal boat rental shop isn't that busy because it's beastly hot outside and those brave souls who do go out have to sit on hot fiberglass seats.

There's not much shade for the workers, "but we do hide in our little shack," said employee Dominic Prado, 23. "We also have a very strong fan in there that I like to raise my shirt over it just to cool down." (AP)

"Yesterday is not ours to recover, but tomorrow is ours to win or lose."

—Lyndon B. Johnson

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No NITI, No unity

WHEN NITI Aayog met this time, 10 chief ministers kept off the crucial meeting that deliberated on future planning of the nation. Unity of purpose was the first casualty. While they sent their representatives, this was less of a consolation. The Prime Minister laid out his government's vision for the nation that touches 'hundred years' of Independence in 2047, with a resolve to make it the world's third largest power. With major opposition stalwarts keeping off the meeting, an added irritant was the 'walkout' by chief minister Mamata Banerjee, as she had not been given "sufficient time" to hold forth. Yet, she pressed home some significant points, namely that this entity does not have teeth since it has not been accorded any authority regarding finances – much unlike the Planning Commission that Jawaharlal Nehru started shortly to roll out the five-year plans. One of the first acts of Narendra Modi as PM in 2014 was to dissolve and replace it with Niti Aayog. The five-year-plan process has altogether been done away with. Mamata Banerjee rightly sought its restoration or a widening of the financial powers for the new entity.

In the past 10 years, nothing goes to show that the planning process in this country is better focused. With Modi emphasizing on long-term planning up until 2047, chances are also of a culture of drag, unless short term targets are fixed and these goals achieved. Like the Bullet Train project and Make In India or the Smart City project, the net result could be discouraging to the nation. Modi is additionally saddled by the constraints of the coalition politics at the Centre where, as per his own admission, it now is "rule by consensus" – a euphemism for pandering to the interests of pressure groups within the NDA. States like Bihar and Andhra Pradesh are bound to seek their pound of flesh as regional stalwarts like Nitish Kumar and Chandrababu Naidu are providing the much-needed oxygen to Modi. This was precisely what most chief ministers who kept off the Niti Aayog meeting were miffed at. They were unhappy with the way the Union Budget ignored their states while lavishing funds for Modi's allies. Naidu, for one, is capable of putting a knife on the Modi establishment's neck and extracting what he wants from it. Even in the present scenario, Modi has sufficient room for manoeuvring to neutralize those who browbeat the weak NDA dispensation. But, just as the PM allowed the GST bill to drag on for want of sufficient parliamentary numbers, nothing exhilarating need be expected from him now. He could be depended on, rather, to remain tied to "coalition dharma" and "consensus politics." The electorate is to blame; they have brought him to such a pass.

Letters to the Editor

Parochial potholes on tourism's trail

The recent actions of the Hynniewtre National Youth Federation (HNYF) in East Khasi Hills are nothing short of outrageous and deeply misguided. The incident that occurred on July 26, 2024 afternoon, where HNYF members attempted to block Assam-registered vehicles from accessing tourist spots at Umtynggar, is not only alarming but also reflects a disturbing trend of misguided activism that threatens the very fabric of our state's economy and reputation.

The HNYF's imposition of a ban on all Assam-registered vehicles in the Umtynggar area is an ill-conceived and short-sighted move that demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of the complexities of tourism and interstate relations. Their demand for a government policy to restrict non-local vehicles carrying tourists is not only impractical but also goes against the principles of free movement within our country.

As a citizen, I am embarrassed and angered by this primitive display of parochialism. The HNYF's actions reveal a "life under a rock" mentality that has no place in our modern, interconnected world. Instead of engaging in constructive dialogue with government officials, they have chosen to take matters into their own hands in the most counter-productive way possible. This is truly an absurd move by the pressure group, showcasing an illiterate way of working and a clear indication that

they care only for their own misguided agenda, not for the people of Meghalaya.

However, amidst this distressing situation, I would like to commend the swift and efficient action taken by the Meghalaya Police, particularly the Sohra sub-division police. Their prompt response in detaining the HNYF members involved in this illegal activity is praiseworthy. Special appreciation goes to the officer who handled the situation adeptly without the presence of a magistrate, demonstrating professionalism and quick thinking in a potentially volatile scenario.

It is crucial to consider the broader implications of such actions. Meghalaya, being a small state, heavily relies on tourism for its economic growth. If pressure groups like the HNYF continue to obstruct the inflow of tourists, where will our state generate its revenue? The tourism department's efforts to promote Meghalaya as a desirable destination will be in vain if visitors are met with hostility at our borders.

Moreover, the HNYF seems to have overlooked the fact that vehicles with Assam registration may be carrying tourists from various parts of the country. Their blanket ban is not only discriminatory but also illogical. Imagine the frustration and financial loss these tourists must have experienced due to this unnecessary obstruction. How would we feel if Khasi people traveling to Assam were asked to return at the border? This lack of empathy and foresight is deeply troubling.

The authorities must take stringent action against such absurd and illegal activities.

Clan is Not Just About Lineage

By H H Mohrmen

We are at a very important juncture in our journey as a society because right now we are struggling with how we are going to define our identity. For the majority of the population, identity as a tribe is profoundly connected to lineage; yet for others, it is not. It is also true that change happens and we continue to evolve with time, but this issue needs to be debated with a clear view of the future and a sound mind. Let me begin by telling you a story.

I was trying to explain the importance, complexities, and intricacies of the clan system in the Hynniewtre Trep Society to Dr. Richard Ford of Clark University in the USA but was not very successful. I then asked him, "Dr. Ford, are you by any chance related to Henry Ford, the inventor of the motor car?" to which he answered, "No, not at all. Why?" I then said, "Well, that is the difference." I also added, "If there is a Mohrmen in Hong Kong or a person whose clan name is Laloo, Lamin, or for that matter, a Diengdoh, Mangar or even a Pariong anywhere in the world and is originally from here, I am certain that he is my clan." The clan system is part of our unique culture and identity where lineage is taken from the mother, but is that all? Is it really just about taking the lineage from the mother's clan line?

It ss about our Origin

Every Hynniewtre Trep sub-tribe shares the same genesis or creation story, albeit with some variations. Different clans also have their progenitor's stories. The creation story tells us about how the 7 huts came down to Earth while the 9 remained in heaven, but the Jawbei or Seifjeit stories tell us the origins of different Jawbei or how particular clans started. Jawbei stories also tell us about the migration of the Seifjeit of the particular clan. Jawbei stories not only tell us about the genesis of that particular clan, but also about the Niamtre or Niam Tynrai in that particular Raid and about the Raid itself. One will not understand the Raid or the Niam Tynrai in the particular area without knowing the story of the primary clans of the region.

Clan system's link with Raid formation

Raid is an important traditional institution, sometimes spelled Raj. Raj is a borrowed

term like for example the British Raj, but Raid is the primary institution in the Hynniewtre Trep people's local administrative system. In the Khasi hills, the local administrative system comprises of two tiers: the Raid and then the Hima, whereas in Jaintia Hills there is the Raid, the Elaka, and the Hima. One study suggested that people migrated to Jaintia in groups that formed the Raid. A group of people moved to one area and settled there while others moved to different areas, which is how people settled in the region.

There is evidence showing that the lawbei stories have a profound connection to Raid formation. Raids were formed by primary clans who settled first in the area and later assigned roles and responsibilities among themselves to different traditional offices. This explains why a certain Kur is assigned a specific traditional office and the others different offices were assigned to the other clans. Clan stories tell us about migration, settlement, and how Raids were formed and why certain clans were designated specific traditional offices. The reason why only members of a certain clan can contest in the election to the Daloihip is also prescribed in the clan's story.

Clan not limited to one's family tree

The lawbei story tells us not just about one clan but also about the other sub-clans related to it, because one clan has many Kurs that belong to the same clan. The Soo kpoh in Jowai, which started from the four divine females, further subdivided into the "Khatar wrynai" (12 sub-clans). The San Syngkong is the grand clan of the five clans, which include the Shylla, Pariat, Pde, Blah, and Thangkhiw. The Jawchibidi is the grand clan of the Lamin, Laloo, Diengdoh, Pariong, Mangar, and many other sub-clans because all these clans share the same lawbei story. Hence clan stories tell us about the clan and also about the different clans related to it.

It is about the Father too

We often hear people saying that in Khasi society, everybody is related to somebody in some way because a person already has a clan with

many sub-clans, and then there are "ki kha ki man," our relations on our father's side. The father's entire clan is one's Kha or relative on the father's side. Relationships also include the families to which one's brother or sister is married; they are your 'hep' and 'kynum,' and you are related to the entire in-law's clan. It is not just about lineage but also about all kinds of relationships based on the clan that the person belongs to. The essence of the culture is the clan, and everything revolves around it. A person without a clan is like a tree without its roots.

Triumph of culture

In 1989-90, I was a student at the Unitarian College in Manchester, part of the Northern Federation for training ministers, where ministerial students from the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, and the United Reformed Church were also trained. The place we stayed in was called Luther King House, and a Baptist Ph.D. scholar, knowing that I came from a matrilineal society, decided to interview me. One of the questions she asked was, "How did your community, which is a matrilineal society, react to Christianity, which was founded on male-dominant culture and basically promotes a patriarchal system?" I did not have an answer to this particular question then. Perhaps, I did not see the issue as a crisis because there was no conflict between the two.

There was no conflict in accepting Christianity while continuing to live with our matrilineal culture because our culture is so accommodating. Khasi converts retained much of their culture, such as their dress, food habits, striving for the common good, reverence for nature and the dead, support for bereaved families, respect for both maternal and paternal families, and other tribal values. Their new religion and their culture complement each other.

The version of Christianity that came here was not aggressive and did not force people to abandon their culture, unlike in some other parts of the world. Instead, it allowed people to continue living their culture.

Imagine if it were another

Abrahamic religion in place of Christianity; the story would be different. People would have to adopt the culture of their new religion because it comes with its own culture and ethos. If it were a version of Christianity that eliminated the culture of indigenous people in the USA, Canada, and Latin America, the outcome would be no different from what happened in those countries. Christianity and the matrilineal family system have somehow coexisted in our society. The two not only complement each other but Christianity thrives in the matrilineal culture.

Identity-based benefits

There are also allegations that people continue with the clan system because of the benefits they derive from being in a Scheduled Tribe. However, this argument does not hold water because people's lives are intricately linked with their culture. Every aspect of people's lives is linked to their culture, and the clan is the bedrock on which the culture is based. It is therefore wrong to say that people keep the tradition just to enjoy the benefits that come with it because their culture is their way of life. It is not about the benefits they enjoy from belonging to a Scheduled tribe, but the culture is an intrinsic part of their lives and they live by it.

The way forward

Our society is at the crossroads, and it is also true that everything evolves and changes with time. It is for us to decide which path to take. We can draw inspiration from our ancestors, incorporate new thoughts and approaches, and focus on the bigger picture. Our identity is linked to our stories, but ultimately, it is how we decide to approach the issue and move forward as a community that is important. Our duty is to avoid dividing our already small tribe. Rather than dividing ourselves between "them and us" or demeaning and calling others half-breed, let us find ways to accommodate ourselves. After all, we are one. Let us remember that there is no such thing as a pure breed or blue-blood. Depending on what you believe, we all originated from the same origin. It could be the seven huts, the Garden of Eden, or the women from Africa; we are one from the beginning. The question is whether our identity is about lineage only?

Nirmala Sitharaman gives Congress its best campaign point for assembly elections

Perceived adoption of parts of Congress manifesto a compelling argument

By K Raveendran

Rahul Gandhi and a host of Congress leaders have criticised Nirmala Sitharaman and the Modi government for copy-pasting from the Congress manifesto while formulating the new budget. Looking at the issue from another perspective, they must be happy that the finance minister has given Congress their best campaign point for the coming round of assembly elections. Haryana and Maharashtra are set to go to polls later this year, followed by Jharkhand and Delhi early next year.

Rahul Gandhi, expressing his dissatisfaction, stated, "The Modi government's attempt to present our ideas as their own is an attempt to undermine our contributions. Instead of innovating, they are merely recycling our proposals." The sentiment was echoed by other Congress leaders, who have criticized the government's approach as indicative of a lack of original policy-making. They argue that the government's reliance on Congress ideas highlights its inability to come up with its own solutions to pressing issues.

Former finance minister

policy from the opposition, the party's potential to drive transformative change while in power would be exponentially greater. This argument not only highlights Congress's current role in shaping policy but also paints a picture of a future where Congress's vision could be implemented without compromise.

The party can craft a compelling campaign narrative by emphasizing that its ideas, once championed as visionary and forward-thinking, have now been validated and embraced by the BJP government as well. This narrative can be built around the premise that Congress's proactive approach to critical issues has not only influenced current policy but has also been instrumental in redirecting the government's focus to areas of urgent national concern.

By leveraging this narrative, Congress can position itself as a key driver of progress and reform, suggesting that its policies have already proven their worth and should now be fully implemented under Congress's leadership. Fur-



P Chidambaram was more specific. In his posts on X (formerly Twitter), Chidambaram highlighted how the Modi government directly borrowed from the Congress manifesto, specifically mentioning two key schemes. The first scheme is the Universal Health Coverage initiative, which aims to provide comprehensive healthcare services to all citizens. The second scheme is the National Employment Guarantee Program, designed to offer guaranteed employment opportunities and enhance job security for the Indian workforce. Nirmala Sitharaman announced a scheme under which the private sector would engage paid apprenticeship to youth.

While participating in the debate on the budget in the Lok Sabha, Chidambaram gave a call to the ruling party members to 'delve deeper' into the Congress manifesto, so that the government can take even more ideas. "Copying is not prohibited in this House; in fact, copying is encouraged and rewarded in this House. So, please copy a little more," he added.

Rather than viewing the Modi government's adoption of Congress ideas as a negative development, Chidambaram has framed it as a positive acknowledgment of the efficacy and relevance of Congress policies. This is something Congress build on for a key campaign in the assembly elections by using it as a validation of their policy framework rather than a cause for grievance. This pragmatic approach implies that Congress ideas are being recognized for their value and potential impact, which could be leveraged to enhance the party's position.

Congress should embrace the adoption of their ideas as a victory, showcasing their ability to influence significant policy decisions even from the opposition benches. This could serve as a powerful campaign tool, demonstrating that Congress continues to shape national policy despite not being in power. To effectively capitalize on this opportunity, Congress should frame its campaign around the argument that if it could steer government

thermore, Congress should emphasize the contrast between its comprehensive and visionary plans and the Modi government's piecemeal approach. While the government's budget might have included elements of Congress's proposals, it could be argued that these measures are insufficiently robust or lack the coherence that a full-fledged Congress administration could provide. By criticizing the Modi government's implementation as inadequate, Congress can make a case for why only a Congress-led government can deliver on the promises that are now on the table.

For instance, Congress's vision for employment generation might include not only job creation but also comprehensive skill development and support for entrepreneurship. By illustrating how these additional components would amplify the impact of the employment initiatives, Congress can argue that only their full policy framework can address the employment crisis effectively.

Similarly, Congress's approach to healthcare could be presented as more holistic, integrating not just access to services but also measures to improve the quality and affordability of care. By contrasting this with the Modi government's approach, Congress can highlight how their policies are designed to offer a more complete and equitable healthcare solution. This comparison will serve to reinforce the message that Congress has a more thorough and compassionate plan for addressing these critical issues.

In fact, the upcoming assembly elections present Congress with a pivotal moment. By effectively using the Modi government's adoption of its policies as a campaign point, Congress can demonstrate its influence and viability as an alternative to the current administration. This strategy not only capitalizes on the party's achievements but also sets the stage for a compelling vision of future governance. (IPA Service)

guidelines.

To my dismay, while my car was being scrutinized and the tint was forcibly removed, I observed numerous other vehicles, including Thars, Scorpios, Fortuners, and Boleros, many of which belonged to government officials, passing by unchallenged. These vehicles had heavily tinted windows, with some appearing to have tints as dark as 5%, far exceeding the permissible limits. When I questioned the officer removing the film from my car about this apparent double standard, my inquiry was met with indifference and went unanswered.

This incident has left me with several troubling questions that I believe deserve public attention:

1. Why are common citizens subjected to stringent enforcement of regulations, while individuals in positions of power or those driving certain types of vehicles are seemingly exempt?

2. What criteria are being used by the traffic police to decide which vehicles are stopped and inspected?

3. Is there a bias in enforcement that favors government officials and higher-end vehicles, allowing them to flout the rules without consequence?

4. What measures are in place to ensure that the enforcement of traffic regulations is fair, transparent, and free from corruption or favoritism?

5. How can citizens trust the law enforcement system when there is such a visible disparity in how the laws are applied?

The notion that common people must bear the brunt of enforcement while others are treated as above the law is deeply disheartening. It

erodes public trust in law enforcement and fosters a sense of injustice and frustration among ordinary citizens.

I urge the authorities to address these concerns and ensure that traffic regulations are enforced uniformly, without prejudice or favoritism. The integrity of our legal system depends on the fair and equal application of the law to all individuals, regardless of their status or the type of vehicle they drive.

Thank you for providing a platform to voice these critical issues.

Yours etc.,

Name withheld on request
Via email

Urgent call for enforcement of regulations & public safety in Tura

Editor

I am writing to highlight the escalating issues of unauthorized construction and public safety hazards in Tura that demand immediate attention from the concerned authorities. The reckless proliferation of structures, particularly those encroaching upon water bodies and roadside shanties, not only violates legal provisions but also jeopardizes the well-being of residents and the environment.

The brazen disregard for regulations, such as the Meghalaya High Court ruling prohibiting construction within 50 meters of the high watermark of water bodies, is exemplified by the granting of building permissions by the Town Planning Office. This flagrant violation raises serious questions about the integrity and adherence to the

law within the department, necessitating a thorough investigation and accountability measures.

Moreover, the unchecked expansion of small shanties along roadsides poses a dual threat to public safety. Not only do these structures contribute to traffic congestion and pedestrian hazards, but they also serve as points of sale for food items without due regard for food safety standards. The absence of oversight from the Commissionerate of Food Safety, tasked with ensuring the safety and wholesomeness of food for public consumption, is a grave concern that must be urgently addressed.

It is imperative that the Municipal Office and the Commissionerate of Food Safety collaborate to enforce regulations on the operation of food vendors in these shanties to safeguard public health. The Deputy Commissioner, West Garo Hills must intervene decisively to rectify these lapses and ensure the well-being of residents is not compromised by unregulated food practices.

I therefore urge the authorities to prioritize public safety, environmental conservation, and food hygiene standards in Tura. It is essential that stringent enforcement measures be implemented to curb unauthorized construction and ensure the adherence to food safety protocols in the interest of all residents.

Yours etc.,

Mirak Challang
Arengh, Tura,
Via email

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"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."

—William Shakespeare

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 30, 2024

Shillong needs SMART governance

MUCH has been said about Shillong's Smart City Project. But there are several reasons that make Shillong an unsmart, non-viable city at present. For one the city is getting hotter by the day and that's inevitable considering the dwindling lung spaces in the heart of the city. All other cities like Kolkata, Delhi etc., make it a point to grow trees by the side of the road. Here there is an obsession to fell as many trees as possible on any pretext. With added floors being allowed to be constructed and the population explosion in Shillong City leading to a mad rush for building spaces, whatever trees there were have vanished. Only a few homes still have a semblance of a garden and a few trees dotting their compounds. Others have become stark, cemented structures with not a leaf in sight.

Second, the number of cars on the road make Shillong the most car-populous city with roads remaining where they were 50 years ago and with no scope for expansion. Statistics inform that about 27,000 students commute in private vehicles between Barik and Laitumkhrah daily. This is what adds to the traffic chaos. To address this the Government requisitioned the STEMS school buses which are run professionally and can be monitored on real time basis and with one caretaker each on board to deal with any exigency. But most parents insist on dropping their kids to school in private vehicles. It is no longer possible for the Shillong Traffic Police to streamline traffic. They are only trying to do their jobs without much success. Some things are just not doable but the STP cannot say that in so many words. In every other city of consequence there are traffic lights which make crossing at intersections a smooth process that does not allow for any arbitrariness. In Shillong this basic necessity is wanting even while the city boasts of being SMART. Traffic lights will ensure that traffic from one side moves within a given timing and that traffic on the main road is not given precedence over others coming out of by-lanes.

The pollution from vehicular traffic is phenomenal and traffic policemen bear the brunt of this throughout the day. But so do pedestrians who walk on the roads including those school/college students who cannot afford to be dropped and picked at from the school gate. Should the Government not think of this health concern? Is there some statistics of the number of patients with respiratory ailments in this city? If there isn't this data is much needed. The STEMS buses operate below capacity because the parents of students in the more elite schools refuse to allow their kids to use them. School authorities plead helplessness. Its time for the MDA Government to act SMART and enforce regulations on use of school buses as is the norm in every other city. Government must act in larger public interest and not pander to private whims. That's called SMART governance.

Are Khasis a confused people?

By Bhogtaram Mawroh

The cascades of events that have taken place in recent times have given the impression that we, the Khasis, are a confused lot. We are not really sure what we want. But nevertheless, we are very passionate about it. The latest evidence of this confusion is the attempt by HNYF (Hynniewtre National Youth Front) to stop tourist vehicles coming from Assam. What was ironic is that Bless Dkhar, the President of HNYF had been arrested a year ago by the police for extorting money from overloaded goods carrier trucks operating between Damsite and Umiam Bridge. Dkhar was accused of demanding Rs 1500 per truck. I don't know what has happened to the case. Is the president still in jail, or is he out on bail? Has the charge been proven? It was not a good look for HNYF. But after this incident, they will be hailed as the protectors of the 'Jaidbnyriew'. Does this mean that the fate of the Khasis is in the hands of people who break the law? That is not a very reassuring prospect.

We need to remember that Meghalaya is one of the poorest state in the country. The majority of the workforce is based in agriculture, but its contribution to the state's GDP is less than 20%. The majority of the contribution comes from the services sector, which generates 50% of the GDP. Tourism is part of the services sector. In recent years, it's the only sector that appears to be doing well. Tourism Minister, Paul Lyngdoh, stated in a program held last year that the number of tourists coming to Meghalaya number almost 15 lakh. To put this figure in perspective, the total population of the Khasis is just over 14 lakh. This inflow resulted in substantial financial expenditures by the tourists, which are being collected by the state in different ways. In 2023, Paul Lyngdoh informed the Meghalaya Assembly that during the Shillong Cherry Blossom Festival, Rs 1.44 crore was generated as tax revenue from all hotels in November 2023. This amount was more than the total tax collection during October. Another form in which tourists' expenditure is captured is in the form of GST. This is an indirect tax levied on all goods, including those sold at tourist sites. The rest is revenue, which includes profit for the local businesses.

In India, the travel and tourism sector contributes around 9.1% to the total GDP of the country. I do not have comparative figures for Meghalaya, but if we assume that the figure is similar or slightly higher, it means that 20% of the value in the services sector comes from tourism. For a financially strapped state like Meghalaya, this is a big figure, and any fall in it will not only affect the people who are dependent on

tourists coming into the state but also the tax collection for the government. This will force the government to borrow more. Despite the Chief Minister's assurance that 90% of the loan will be paid by the Center, this is highly worrying. The way out of this impending debt trap is by supporting local businesses so that we can generate our own revenue. Tourism is one such sector. The action of stopping vehicles from Assam will discourage tourists coming into the state, which will lead to decline in revenue. There's already a news report that there has been a 30% drop in accommodation bookings, with more losses predicted in the coming days. The drop in revenue will force the government to borrow even more.

The pressure groups are part of the society. They belong to the local community, and they take up issues that agitate the local populace. HNYF stopped the vehicles from Assam because the All Khasi Meghalaya Tourist Taxi Association had demanded a ban on vehicles carrying tourists from other states. In its demand to the government, the association gave a breakdown of the total number of vehicles carrying tourists from outside the state. According to them, only 31% (1106) of such vehicles are local, i.e., bearing Meghalaya registration. They also gave the total number of vehicles registered in the state, which is 5120, and came to the conclusion that 4014 vehicles do not have any passengers (subtract 1106 from 5120). Firstly, does this number (5120) include all the vehicles from both the Garo and Khasi regions, or only of the Khasi region? Secondly, even if these vehicles are only of those from the Khasi region, not all 5120 vehicles will be carrying tourists because the tourist circuit is not yet well developed in all parts of the state. For example, do drivers from Mawkyrat come down to Guwahati to pick up tourists to take them to Jakrem or other sites in the district? How many tourists visit the caves of East Jaintia Hills? There is lack of clarity elsewhere as well. The 4014 taxis mentioned by the Association for not carrying tourists do not mean that they don't have any passengers. Otherwise, what happens to other people (like us) who also need transportation? The numbers are highly confusing.

Paul Lyngdoh, has made the statement that the state is actually facing a huge gap between demand and supply of vehicles to cater to the growing demand. This makes the numbers even more confusing. Therefore, Paul Lyngdoh has asked the Transport Department to provide data on the actual

number of vehicles with Meghalaya registration before meeting with the Association in the coming days. If there is actually a shortage of vehicles, stopping the vehicles from Assam will lead to a decrease in the total tourist footfalls. In the end, this will destroy the tourism industry in the state, at a time when it has just started to flourish. This will, as discussed above, kill one of the growing sectors of the economy, destroy the livelihood of thousands of people, and put the state into more debt.

Let's agree for the moment that the claim of the All Khasi Meghalaya Tourist Taxi Association is true and that the local drivers are suffering from a loss in business. If they can get a greater share of the tourists coming into the state, it will definitely help increase their earnings. That, however, is not going to happen by stopping tourists carrying vehicles from Assam entering the state. Firstly, such a move will provoke a reciprocal reaction from Assam. No vehicles bearing registration from Meghalaya will be able to cross beyond Jorabat. What happens to the drivers carrying passengers from Meghalaya to Guwahati and back? Will this not increase the losses for the local drivers? Such a move is therefore counter-productive. Secondly, stopping the vehicles from Assam does not guarantee that the tourist will choose Meghalaya-registered vehicles. This is because their tour may be part of a package, with Meghalaya being just one of the destinations. Drivers from Assam will face losses, forcing the tour operators from the state not to have arrangements with drivers from Meghalaya for fear of retaliation by the pressure groups in Assam. No matter how the situation is analyzed, a move to ban tourist vehicles from Assam is not going to end well for the local drivers or the economy. So, what's the solution?

While rejecting any ban on the tourist vehicles, Paul Lyngdoh explained that Assam is the entry point to Meghalaya because they have the airport and the railway station. Tourists entering the North East have to first arrive at Assam through the airport, the railways, or the roads. Then they move into the different states, again either through the airport, the railway, or, in the case of Meghalaya, the road. It is, therefore, inevitable that the majority of the vehicles carrying tourists will be from Assam. There is only one way to challenge this advantage enjoyed by Assam. Tourists must arrive directly in Meghalaya. This will guarantee that the tourists will take local vehicles. This can be done by expanding

the airport at Umroi so that it can handle the nearly 15 lakh tourists (now supposed to have reached 18 lakh) that will be coming every year. That seems highly unlikely at the moment. According to the data provided by the Airports Authority of India, the total traffic at Umroi Airport between April 2023 and March 2024 was 1,54,658, or just over 12,000 people per month. For comparison, during the same period, traffic at the Guwahati Airport was almost 5 lakh people per month. It will be a long time before the Shillong airport is able to handle the tourist inflow. The other solution is the railway, which will bring tourists directly to Shillong from different parts of the country with local taxis waiting for them outside the station. However, there has been a fierce opposition to the introduction of railways in the state for fear of illegal immigration. There is no evidence that large-scale illegal immigration is taking place in the state. But the fear is widespread and deep-seated, taking the shape of paranoia. As things stand right now, stopping the vehicles from Assam is going to be disastrous for the state on many accounts.

The US government has put Meghalaya on the no-travel advisory list. US citizens are advised against traveling to the state. Though many people were upset with this advisory, the recent incident reinforces the message that the state is not safe. Meghalaya will no longer be an attractive destination for tourists. The lack of safety will also act as a disincentive for those looking to invest in the state. At the moment, the state badly needs investments for creating jobs and helping the economy grow. Instead, low revenue and a lack of investment will further put the economy under pressure. This will again force the government to take on more debt which will make it harder in the future to provide for public goods like education, health, sports, infrastructure, etc. The state is, in fact, already facing a crisis in these sectors. But on the ground, many Khasis, no less the taxi drivers, will support the actions of HNYF. At the same time, they will not support the long-term solutions (e.g., introduction of railways) that can make their future more secure by helping reduce the dependence on Assam. Does all of this prove that we, the Khasis, are a confused people? We say we want something, but at the same time we do things that make it extremely difficult to attain those things. What exactly do Khasis want? This is a mystery that is not getting solved anytime soon.

(The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organisation or institution)

Time to lower the political temperature

By Jagdish Rattanani

The elections are behind us and a minority government styled as Modi 3.0 has taken office. A reinvigorated Opposition has already seen the presentation of the Union Budget, which has picked ideas from the Congress manifesto, like the apprenticeship programme to address the burning crisis of jobs for the millions. This should be a good sign in democratic politics. Good ideas can come from everywhere. The government could give credit to the Congress and earn some goodwill from the party in return. This is a time for the government of Narendra Modi to recognise and respect the new reality of the new Lok Sabha and to understand that long term success in politics and complex issues of governance demand the approach of give and take. The first prerequisite for this is to lower the political temperature to get some real work done. But instead, the government has contributed to raising the political temperature even more. All indications are that the bitterness of the election season isn't going away.

The new attack quite obviously targeting the Congress on the Emergency by proclaiming June 25 as the annual "Samvidhaan Hatya Diwas", the Union Home Minister's latest political attacks on Uddhav Thackeray of the Shiv Sena and Sharad Pawar of the Nationalist Congress Party, and indeed the

the Prime Minister but all these are oblique signs of an internal unease. Direct questions and downright analysis are missing in the party. For all the accusations of the Congress being a family-run party, the BJP has only followed the path it seeks to condemn, becoming in little time the preserve of the vagaries of the Modi-Shah thinking. This capture tells us a lot about the party and its fibre, more than any history-telling can.

It is not difficult to see that the duo has survived by constantly distracting attention. This has inevitably brought us an unending game of bogey-hunting. Consider the latest example of just how much the break and bitterness is with the Opposition on the simple issue of a NITI-Aayog meeting – which was the ninth governing council meeting, and was chaired by Modi just last week. The Aayog's governing council is "the premier body tasked with evolving a shared vision of national priorities and strategies, with the active involvement of States". This is one place where the government could and should have worked hard so that all the Chief Ministers of all the States were respectfully accommodated.

Instead, as many as 10 Chief Ministers did not attend. The only Opposition voice present, Mamata Banerjee, walked out and

"A reinvigorated Opposition has already seen the presentation of the Union Budget, which has picked ideas from the Congress manifesto, like the apprenticeship programme to address the burning crisis of jobs for the millions. This should be a good sign in democratic politics. Good ideas can come from everywhere. The government could give credit to the Congress and earn some goodwill from the party in return."

personal appearance of the Prime Minister at the wedding of Mukesh Ambani's son when rising wealth and income inequality has been brought into sharp focus, all appear to indicate that it's compulsion and/or "business as usual" for the Modi sarkar, and to that extent it mocks the nation and its people who clearly decided not to give the incumbent a clear mandate for the third term. The government's answer is to keep the pot boiling as it lives a Rip Van Winkle story – almost as if it slept through the election results, and now wants to live an old reality in a new world.

Indeed, accommodation and conciliation should have been the approach even with a brute majority that the government did have in its previous term. But that brought hubris, and it is the hubris in large part that brought the political defeat. No lessons have been learned. Indeed, they cannot be, because learnability does not go with a self-righteousness that digs in and a greed that wants to grab it all, be it votes, attention or narratives. This is a command and control mind at work; national issues are pictured as war and everything is fair because the only outcome must be for the leader to win at all costs.

In many ways, the story is a reflection of the internal emptiness of the BJP, which has not been able to fix accountability for its showing in the Lok Sabha, and has been rendered incapable of reflection or raising hard questions for itself. The vice-like grip that the Prime Minister has on the party is at one level a political success for him personally, because which leader doesn't like a party that asks no questions of the leader? There are some internal noises emerging: an important group has raised questions on the working of the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and for the electoral losses in that State, the RSS Chief has yet again offered remarks not seen as favourable to

complained that her mic was muted and she felt insulted. The arrogance in the later remarks of the NITI Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam speaks for itself: "For those who did not participate, I always say that it is their loss." Where do these ideas come from? The slanging match on why she walked out and if the mic was muted is an example of how lower order conversations are fueled and relished. It is for the government of the day at the Centre to stop this slide, to build confidence and to earn some credibility with the Opposition parties, who are as much representatives of the people. The open fissures that the Union Budget has caused is troubling. On the one hand, it saw an ally like Nitish Kumar of Bihar skip the NITI Aayog meeting, reportedly on Bihar not being given the special status recognition it asked. At the other end, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin has issued a strong statement on the injustice meted to his State in the Union Budget, stating that the BJP wants revenge against all those States that voted out the BJP, and TN in particular. It is clear that the government, now overly dependent on two allies, is incapable of carrying everybody along, probably even the allies themselves. Where do we go from here?

Soon after the elections, one view was that the BJP, appropriately cut to size by the electorate, would be now forced to listen and be mindful of boundaries. That has clearly not happened. The other view then may hold, which is that a diminished BJP at the Centre, unable to handle criticism and unskilled in charting the middle path, may end up doing more harm to the nation and its democratic traditions.

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

Letters to the Editor

UDP suggestion impractical!

Editor,
In the news item captioned 'UDP wants traditional bodies to check influx' (ST July 29, 2024) its leader Jemino Mawthoh suggested that there should be a local solution to local problems. He further cited the example of Nongrim Hills Dorbar that he is advising as an example wherein it maintains a register of citizens etc. We all know that Nongrim Hills is a locality which is out of Shillong Municipality and the dorbar shnong there manages collection of garbage that prompts it to collect monthly fees from its residents for the upkeep and maintenance of the locality. In doing so, house owners are required to produce documents of the tenant as well as for themselves and a monthly card is issued in which particulars of payments made is recorded. No doubt this system holds good for localities that fall under the scheduled districts since that is the only mechanism available for solid waste management and for keeping records of residents.

However, in localities that are under Shillong Municipal Board, household taxes are collected by the Board since garbage collection is managed by it. House owners collect rent from tenants and some even pay extra when owners demand payment for municipal taxes. In localities

like Laitumkhrah the dorbars collect monthly fees separately for garbage collection and when tenants are to register themselves separate fees are charged which ranges from Rs 50 onwards. Apart from registration fees house owners and tenants pay monthly fees separately for reasons unknown. This not only burdens the tenants but also causes harassment to landowners as taxes are being levied from every side. This is an issue that authorities need to take cognizance of and address as far as implementation of applicable rules to tenant and owners' registrations are concerned.

Another point that needs to be highlighted is what procedure the State Government contemplates to put in place for registration of permanent residents of Meghalaya who seek rental apartments in different parts of the state for education, job, medical or various other purposes. For example if a person from Nongstoin takes a rented accommodation in Laitumkhrah will the same conditions apply to the person as with those who come from other states? As stated earlier there are localities that collect yearly fees even if the place is rented for 8 months. Why is it that a person from Meghalaya has to pay such fees for residing in Meghalaya itself?

UDP's suggestion holds good only in identifying the cause of the problem of influx but not to correct the anomalies that the state is reeling under when multiple

levels of authorities are still in place. It is about time that the state govt take the subject of tenant's registration seriously and implements the MRSSA in letter and spirit as currently the app and website megssa.nic.in is yet to be fully functional. Many landlords and tenants who try to register online are experiencing technical issues as they are not receiving OTP to complete the registration process. We urge the Government to seriously address the anomalies rather than blowing its trumpet for scoring media brownies only.

Yours etc.,
Firstly Lyngkhohi,
Shillong-3

Meghalaya's incomplete projects

Editor,
Apropos of the news items "UDP wants traditional bodies to check influx", "Exodus: Paul highlights problems of unemployment and unemployment" and NHIDCL alerts govt on land hurdles for key road projects" (ST July 29, 2024) the contents in the first two news items is rational, appropriate and logical which requires immediate attention for implementation. Jemino Mawthoh, General Secretary, UDP has correctly aired his views on the need to involve the Dorbar Shnong by having a mechanism in place so that the Dorbar Shnong monitor the entry of people into the State.

This will enable one to know who is in and out of the locality and for what purpose. This information should be shared with the Labour department of the Government and with the District Councils. In this way we can check infiltration. But the Dorbar Shnong too must have a set of rules on their functioning keeping in view the rule of law. Paul Lyngdoh, Minister Tourism and spokesperson of the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance rightly emphasised on the need for proper documentation of migrant workers when engaged by the contractors. The President of the Khasi Student Union, Lambokstar Mangar has also rightly emphasised that contractors if they get any job order have to take responsibility while bringing in migrant workers and ensure that they have valid and authentic papers or documents for the job that they have been brought for.

If we compare the infrastructure projects funded liberally by the Government of India in the North Eastern Region under National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), Meghalaya seems to have been left behind if we look at the number of projects completed by the Himalayan States under NHIDCL. It is unfortunate that only for a stretch of a 700 metres-long road at Mawshun Bypass the matter remains unresolved for four years. What a pathetic situation. In a competitive

federalism only those states who complete the projects within the stipulated timeline can get maximum benefit from the projects/schemes funded by the Government of India. Those like Meghalaya that are slow in implementation and completion will be left behind.

Yours etc.,
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Tell "outsiders" to stop coming to Meghalaya

Editor,
Any problem, whether personal, social or political, always has a potential solution, and anyone facing this problem should always try to work towards this solution instead of complaining forever. For instance, the alleged issue of "influx" or "illegal immigration" of fellow Indians to Meghalaya is a problem that has plagued our state for decades with no immediate end in sight. Even though the data and the ground reality say otherwise, general perception of the issue and the activities of certain groups show that most of our populace support legislations like the Inner Line Permit (ILP) and other laws designed to restrict the entry and stay of "outsiders" in Meghalaya. The law makers too hold the same views, evidenced by the fact that they unanimously passed a resolution for implementation

of ILP. However, the desired laws have been held up by the Central Government, for reasons best known to them.

In this backdrop, various groups have recently started implementing the 'yet to be legislated' laws on their own, harassing and assaulting poor labourers working in the state and unsuspecting tourists visiting from elsewhere. The State Government, being in favour of these laws, are in a quandary as to how they can deal with the groups who are pushing the Government's own agenda.

Since there is no immediate hope of solving the imbroglio and it is clearly undesirable for any 'outsider' to face undue harassment in Meghalaya, the groups orchestrating the checking and the State Government can openly issue a joint appeal urging the residents of other States not to visit Meghalaya as tourists, labourers or for any other reason till the people's sentiments are respected and the suitable legislations are enacted. I am confident that if this is done, our fellow countrymen, in solidarity with the people of Meghalaya, will refrain from visiting the State. This will be a win-win situation for all: "outsiders" will be spared indignity and harassment, our local groups will not have to patrol for "intruders," and it may likely bring national attention to the legislation demands.

Yours etc.,
NK Kehar,
Shillong-3

"Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm."

— Abraham Lincoln

The Shillong Times

Vol No. LXV No. 350 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JULY 31, 2024

Defective elections

A big question about the 2024 General Elections now is, how worse can the worse be. A credible independent election watchdog, the Association for Democratic Reforms, has come up with a startling revelation: there was a significant mismatch between the number of votes polled and the number of votes counted in every constituency, barring a few. The number of votes counted was either less or more than the votes polled. This is more disconcerting as the electronic voting machine does not lie on its own. The figures ought to be accurate, unlike in the counting of paper ballots. The mismatch is, prima facie, a pointer to foul play, unless proven otherwise by the Election Commission. The EC of today is not the EC of the Seshan era. The "interventions" EC made at the time of the campaign and polling were suspect in several instances even as this is projected to be an independent constitutional entity. "Significant discrepancies in 538 parliamentary constituencies," of this nature is no small matter.

The job of the ADR is not to confront the government or the Election Commission. It has done its job of citing facts and figures and exposed what it found was a scandalous malpractice. If both the government and the EC remain quiet about what has come out in the public realm, they are abdicating their responsibility to allay public anguish over the discrepancies. Accountability is the first casualty with the governing establishments, as also the people's representatives and the bureaucracy. The first prime minister had some prick of conscience when it came to such matters. He did not show the arrogance of power or take the people for granted. Progressively, elected leaders took the systems in this country for a ride. With a pliant media that survive mostly on favours from the establishment, and the opposition being ineffective due to a lack of strong leadership, the Modi government perhaps couldn't care less in situations like this.

All the big talk about India being the "largest" democracy by virtue of its 1.4 billion bulge would make little sense if the integrity of the electoral system is not upheld with zealousness. A situation should not arise when nations like Pakistan or Bangladesh try to take lessons from the Indian experiments in election mismanagement or manipulations. Notably, the poll watchdog also disagreed with "the inordinate delay in the release of final voter turnout data and the absence of disaggregated constituency and polling station figures in absolute numbers." In the electronic voting and counting process, a chance for error is zero. The EC and the central government should explain the reasons for such discrepancies and where things went wrong. A stony silence is neither acceptable nor understandable.

Letters to the Editor

NEHU violates recruitment process

Editor,
An alarming situation has emerged in NEHU where a recent recruitment process for faculty in the Department of Architecture, School of Technology appears to have deviated from the norms prescribed by the Council of Architecture, which is the regulatory authority on matters related to the profession including the prescription of qualifications and standards in architectural education.

In a response to an RTI that took four months to be replied to, it was accepted by the University that the advertisements for the posts in the Department mentioned the eligibility criteria to be followed only as per the UGC and AICTE regulations with no mention of the Council of Architecture Minimum Standards of Architectural Education Regulations, 2020. This is most peculiar as the Department of Architecture is listed as an approved institution of the Council and is expected to implement the criteria prescribed by the Council regulations for faculty recruitment. It is also unusual that the University agrees to conforming to these regulations while contradicting, that the University recruitment portal required candidates to have a compulsory PhD for certain faculty positions in the Department

of Architecture when the Council regulations clearly state otherwise.

What is more baffling is that the RTI reply states that the University Selection Committee ensures that recruitment is done as per the advertisement only which would imply that the Council regulations were not considered. This would have excluded architects who may have been eligible to apply for the posts of Associate Professor and Professor as they were subjected to requirements not prescribed by the Council. A total of seven faculty positions across different levels were advertised with only one position being filled up. The University admitted that the results were not published on the University website. As it stands, the Department is short of fulfilling the required student-teacher ratio and when inaccurate requirements for faculty positions are advertised, it leads to doubts regarding the veracity of recruitment and management practices within the University. It leads to a gap in teaching capacity and for reasons best known to the University, the motive to keep six faculty positions vacant seems unclear. This comes at a time when the entire North East region has ample qualified professionals with experience in this discipline who could enhance the profile of the Department and the University as a whole.

The UGC itself recognises that the Council of Architec-

ture prescribes qualifications and standards of education regarding the discipline and in a recent notice dated the July 16, 2024, has requested all Universities to take serious steps to ensure that vacant positions are filled at the earliest. In this regard, it is presumed that NEHU will ensure that the range of educational disciplines within the University will be governed legitimately by their respective regulations during faculty recruitment.

Yours etc.,

Name withheld on request,

Via email

After the short-lived euphoria over the I-League football home matches brought to us by the Shillong Lajong FC and Ar-Hima FC, now football lovers in town are feeling happy that the Durand Cup 2024 is coming home for the first time. However this edition of Durand Cup 2024 is not exclusive to Shillong as it's being hosted by three other important footballing centres, Kokrajhar, Kolkata and Jamshedpur. But one has no doubt that the Shillong edition will delight football fans of the State/Nation and Shillong in particular and hope that it ushers in a new era of football in Shillong.

Durand Cup Gala 2024:

Shillong is geared up for the grand opening of the Shillong edition of the 133rd Durand Cup on August 2, 2024 and the air is abuzz with enthusiasm that after a very long gap, football lovers are going to witness one of the oldest and major football tournaments in the continent. The stage is all set, despite the critical hiccups that the city is facing due to the intensive drive against "undocumented migrant labourers," which has hampered the works at the construction site of the football venue at J. N Sports Complex. But the fact still remains that the Durand Cup's Shillong edition may also suffer from incompleteness of the entire Sports Infra at J. N Stadium, Polo, as major works are happening simultaneously in and around the sports complex. Unless the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) is able to completely clear the mountain of debris generated daily from the ongoing major constructions within the premises of J. N Sports Complex, it may hinder the free flow of people who would through the football stadium. Thus, the LOC will have to take great care to prevent any mishaps during the ensuing Durand Cup matches and avoid embarrassment to the State.

Slices of Indian Football History:

The first Durand Cup was held in 1888 in Shimla, the summer capital and famous retreat for the British then. The tournament was organized by the British Indian Army under the able leadership of Sir Henry Durand, a famous Indian Civil Servant and Foreign Secretary of India. While recovering from an illness in the hill retreat, Sir Henry Durand realized the importance of physical health for the soldiers and subsequently the Inter

Regiment Units football tournament was organized in Shimla. Since then, the Durand cup is being played annually, with a few exceptions and has become the oldest football tournament in Asia and one of the prestigious tournaments in Indian Football.

Meanwhile 1875 marked an important beginning of organized soccer in India. The Hare School of Calcutta under the inspiring leadership of Nagendra Prasad Adhikary, the headmaster of the school played a pioneering role in the introduction of "Desi" football in India by organising football matches among its students that year. With the growing popularity of football, arose the need of football clubs and thus the first Desi team, the Shova Bazar Club was formed in Calcutta...during these early years and in 1893 the Indian Football Association (IFA) the maiden football Association of the country was formed in Calcutta with about twenty clubs and introduced two major football tournaments, the IFA Shield and Trades Cup in that very year...In 1935 at the Conference at Darbhanga the IFA however strongly felt that a national body is required for the betterment of football in India in the future and this dream of having a national football association was materialized in 1937 in which the All India Football Federation (AIFF) came into existence and elected its first officials. The Federation also adopted the rules for the administration and conduct of football in India. One of the first acts of the AIFF was to organise the Inter-State or Inter-Provincial Football Championship in 1941 and this championship is also popularly known as the Santosh Trophy. (The Assam Tribune March 5, 1989).

Shillong Footballing Stories:

According to Jatish Datta, "The British officers who came to Shillong after the formation of the new Province brought with them football, cricket, golf, hockey etc., among other things. They established the Shillong Club. Following their footsteps the Bengalis established the Shillong Town Club in 1891...Gradually the thrills and excitement about football attracted the young boys who adopted the game. The first Khasi Club - the Christian Athletic Club or C.A.C was

for the "changes of seasons", and the same distance from the Sun? The planetary distance and the length of days and nights haven't changed one bit. Nature hasn't deviated an inch, but we surely have!

Truly, this steep rise in temperature is a direct result of our mindless actions and insatiable greed, apart from global warming. What if we could remove the entrenched "greediness" from the minds of citizens of the state? I am sure Shillong would be the Scotland of the East within just 10 years. It would soon start healing! But alas, that seems next to impossible. When we have not been able to clear even smelly garbage from our drains and riversides, how could we ever think of clearing the dirt of avarice from the minds of the people?

Whether one agrees or not, greed is the main driving force behind the extensive deforestation in Meghalaya! This greed, as sharp as a razor, has chopped down hundreds of billions of trees over the decades. We've exported them by fleets of trucks every day and night outside the state and even the country, all in a rush to get rich quickly. It never occurred to any of us that we were inviting disaster with the resultant destruction of our forest cover. It never dawned on us that this rapid damage to greenery and water bodies would lead to losing a vital part of our ecosystem that regulates temperature and maintains

ecological balance.

Haven't we dug out millions of metric tons of sand, stone, boulders, coal, and limestone as if there's no tomorrow? I think the education that we brag about has not made us any wiser. Do any of the authorities speak out against this madness? No, not at all; except for a few writers and journalists. It seems our environmental administrators have all gone fishing.

I wouldn't be surprised if some businessmen climbed up to the top of a hill and shouted, saying that wads of money earned is the key to fresh air and clean water, proudly brandishing a bottle of mineral water and an oxygen cylinder.

Ironically, the stifling traffic jams caused by the excessive number of vehicles, which also contribute to the rising temperatures in town, haven't stopped us from splurging on expensive Thar and SUV cars. Our new mantra is: if not on the road, let them be in our garages. At any cost, our wealth, ill-gotten or otherwise must be on display!

Yours etc.,
Sali Gewali,
Shillong

Regrets and Correction

Editor,
Apropos of the letter 'Inclusion and terminology,' by Mondakini Basu, (ST July 26, 2024), I on behalf of

Nongthymmai Sports Club was prominent. Their team was known for its short passing game and the art of playing Roosevelt and Jimmy was displayed. Sunil Das was a formidable full-back who played for Shillong in an exhibition match against Mohammedan Sporting, Calcutta. Other notable players included Niranjana Bhat-tacharjee (Central Excise & Land Customs Football Team) who excelled as a centre-half and Major Dal Bahadur Rana who played for Hills United Club.

In 1956, Shlur Nongbri became a national sensation in football. His performance during the Santosh Trophy in Ernakulam was praised by National Sports Magazine: "There were a few goals, but the one scored by Assam's inside-right Shlur Nongbri against Delhi was a gem... Eighteen-year-old Nongbri...the youngest member of his team...is a product of Mawkhair Christian High School in Shillong. He showed rich promise, appearing facile in both inside and outside positions. He also displayed an equable temperament."

Shillong Durand Cup 2024 and Inter-State & Intra-State Migrant Workers:

In a few days the J. N Sports Stadium at Polo has to appear good for the Durand Cup 2024 Gala and Grand Shillong Opening. Excepting the lush grassy green football ground, the rest will be just a facade by the time the first Shillong match is played. The migrant workers, both the Inter-State and Intra-State workers, have been working round the clock to ensure that everything is in place before the first match. The Inter-State migrant workers are here to fill up the State's labour deficit and also to provide services in areas which require skills where locals are not sufficiently available.

There is no second guessing that they (Inter-State migrant workers) must be regulated as per laws and registration and work permits must be provided to them. At the same time all workers must have access to rights like safety and security, better working conditions, living wages, health care, leisure, overtime etc. Most importantly every worker must be treated with respect and we must acknowledge that this sports infrastructure etc are built on their backs.

So Let's Football! Cheers!

The Hills United Club was another prominent club in Shillong. The team's players would gather at Hiwet Pariat's shop at Mawkhair. Bah Wiseman Swer was one of the notable players, along with Bridin, Medro, Edro, Dolishon, Welbar, Presswell, Maxwell, Ableman, Wendrick Mawlong and others. After the matches, players would take lemonade from special bottles collected from Bah Sumar Singh Sawain's mother's house, as they manufactured it.

During World War II, the

Sri Sarada Sangha Shillong would like to thank the author for her words of appreciation towards the philanthropic activities of the Sangha while also pointing out the 'unacceptable' use of the words 'Deaf and Dumb' regarding the school, meant for welfare of the disabled, as was published in the report of ST July 22, 2024.

The Sangha regrets the use of inappropriate words to define the performance of the differently-abled children which is purely due to lack of awareness on our part and is totally unintentional.

Further, with reference to the first paragraph of Ms Basu's letter, I would like to point out that the Sarada Sangha Shillong has launched its 70th anniversary only, and not its 'Quasqu-anniversary (125yrs)', as mentioned in the letter.

Yours etc.,
Uma Purkayastha,
Via email

Clarification

Editor,
My sincere apologies to Sarada Sangha Shillong for mistakenly referring to their platinum jubilee anniversary as quasi-qui anniversary in my letter to the Editor dated, 26.07.24.

Mondakini Basu

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

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

A Bloody Ireland or Peaceful India..!

Every part of Ireland was beautiful to me last week as we drove through the country, with its lush green farms, long winding, narrow country roads, and folklore that still lived in the minds of locals we met in pubs, taverns, restaurants and churches. But even as we saw what God gave the Irish, we also heard about fights they had in the name of God.

It was only in the late nineties, after thousands had died through bullets and bombs that a brokered peace was established 'twixt the two warring religious sects, both believing in the same God, but each believing their method of worship was the best. Against this bitter background I attended an inter-faith gathering promoted by the Inter-Religious Solidarity Council and what I saw was a way we as a country, even though being cleverly seduced into communal destructiveness, could escape this evil and come together as one nation, with different religious ideologies.

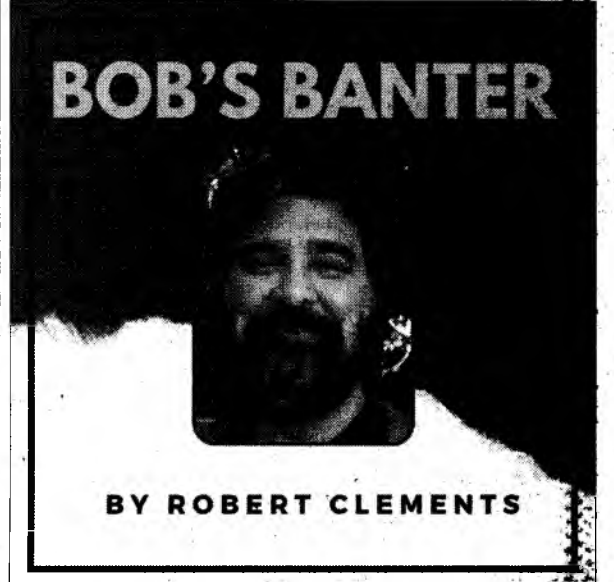
I heard different religious heads from Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Bahai faith, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and others with rationalist

I believe that real spirituality doesn't stay hidden within oneself but can be seen and felt by all those around you. Here's the thing; when God dwells in you your behaviour changes, and you start developing the characteristics of the divine.

Now the Divine has many characteristics so I'm going to mention just two of them that others should start seeing in you.

The first is empathy. Empathy is the ability and willingness to fully understand another person's experience and connect it to your own—for example, rather than seeing an irritable co-worker as a nuisance, you may recognize that they are reacting to stress in the workplace. Compassion is the practice of responding to this realization with kindness—because you understand why the coworker is in a bad mood, you respond with extra patience, and listen deeply when they complain, rather than snapping back.

Andrew Weil, author of Spontaneous Happiness, describes empathy and compassion as "learnable skills that can bring greater happiness into your life and improve all of your relationships."



perspectives, share their approaches to the Divine.

What struck me was that all religions spoke of peace, oneness, acceptance and inclusion and no discrimination to be shown to someone of another faith. Swami Dayadhipanandaji of the Ramakrishna Mission for one, spoke about this aspect found in Swami Vivekananda throughout his life. Salim Khan spoke on forgiveness, and one speaker Dr Nouman amazed me as she said that 'according to the Holy Quran, the diversity of the human race in the forms of tribes, religions and nations was a deliberate act of Allah, so that human beings got to know each other'.

Another aspect I saw as co-organiser Irfan Engineer so succinctly put everything together at the end, was that the idea of service, brotherhood and love stood out in each religion; a common thread.

As I walked out and nearly got into the Swamiji's car, which was the same model and colour as mine, making me smile and realise we shared similar tastes about comfort despite any religious differences, I remembered Ireland, peaceful, serene, and exceedingly beautiful, except for the bold brutal strokes of bloody red that tarnished its past. Why, I wondered, did we fight for our different ways to the divine, when these paths were made for those who walked in peace?

And as I drove back, my driver wondering, I'm sure, why I was so silent, I realised that what political leaders picked up and exploited from religions was religious customs and culture, and not any spiritual awakening. Those who promoted violence in the name of religion, had never felt or known spirituality ever, whereas what I had seen and heard from each speaker was deep spiritual emphasis, each faith offered.

Your acceptance, dear reader, of spirituality will take us to a united India, or be led by political leaders to the bloody evils that plagued lovely Ireland! But even as I say these words, I can hear many of you asking, "What is true spirituality?" and "How will people know whether I am spiritual or not?"

ships." They are important to spiritual development, he explains, because they help you get out of self-centered ways of thinking and help you make connections with others. There are many ways to develop your sense of empathy and compassion, including:

Listening deeply and prioritising what the other person has to say above what you yourself would like to say.

Taking others' perspectives into account. In addition to simply listening to others, open yourself up to imagining what it would be like to be in their shoes. How would you feel if you were in their situation?

Look for the good. Positivity researcher Barbara Fredrickson recommends boosting compassion by actively considering others' positive qualities. Encouraging yourself to acknowledge the whole picture of another person will help you see them as a complex, dynamic human who is worthy of kindness and compassion.

Which means you stop thinking of people around you as 'others.' If you do, then there's no spiritualism in you. The next characteristic is forgiveness. You will stop harping on mistakes that were committed and instead start understanding why they were committed. An example I very often talk about is that of a Man on the cross, beaten, speared, humiliated, and dying, and instead of calling to His father in heaven to take revenge, He cries out, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!"

That means we do not have 'memorial days' to remember past hurts, but learn to forgive and move on.

Yes, if spirituality was imbibed in our country, we would all be able to live in peace and reject this false culture of what comprises religion that is being banded.

We have a choice to fight on the basis of religious culture and become an Ireland, or become deeply spiritual, and make India great..!

The Author conducts an Online Writers and Speakers Course. For more details send a thumbs-up to him on WhatsApp 9892572883 or bobsbanter@gmail.com