

"An investment in knowledge pays the best interest."

— Bertrand Russell

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Brain drain from Meghalaya

THE number of students from Meghalaya pursuing Medicine in Ukraine and China among other countries is growing by the day. Apart from Medicine there are other professional courses, mainly the different engineering streams for which students have to move out of the state. Arunachal Pradesh which became a full-fledged state only in February 1987 has a fully functional State Medical College. It has a Regional Engineering College and a Central University.

Meghalaya which has turned 50 this year does not yet have a medical college although the conceptualisation for creation of two medical colleges dates back to 2017. Basically everything that is conceived in the State tends to run into controversy. In October last year the present Health Minister, James Sangma informed the Assembly that a lot of paperwork had to be completed in respect of the Shillong Medical College while construction of Tura Medical College has started in spite of challenges. The Health Minister said he is constantly monitoring the projects so that they are completed as soon as possible. The proposed site for the Shillong Medical College and Hospital at Umsawli in New Shillong Township was being used in 2020-21 as a corona care centre when the pandemic was at its height. Now that the pandemic has reached a plateau the Shillong Medical College will hopefully take wings and become operational soon. That said, the question that arises is why projects in Meghalaya are never completed within a timeline, thereby resulting in time and cost overruns. Every single project is delayed. Till date not a single project has been completed on schedule. This happens because the central government which funds these projects hardly takes stock or monitors them.

The absence of a state medical college has pushed many young aspirants to study outside the state and country at great cost to their families. At the moment the problems in Ukraine have heightened the fear and paranoia of family members eagerly awaiting the return of their wards. Images of the war in Ukraine being televised daily and the students crowded in bunkers with no transportation to take them to the borders from where they can take the trains to the nearest airport, are frustrating for the students and agonising for their families back home. Apart from studies, many young Meghalayans are forced to work outside the state since there is a squeeze on job opportunities at home compatible with their education. These issues require solutions at multiple levels on an urgent basis. Meghalaya @50 needs major course correction.

Purchased leadership and the danger it poses

By Toki Blah

Elections to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly are due for next year, 2023. Keeping in vogue with the Covid virus the political parties of Meghalaya too are mutating into various variants of their own. Mutation within political parties however is mostly caused by a shortage of a basic nutrient called money. It is rumoured that as per the assessment of political pundits in Meghalaya, it is the NPP that has the dough (how they got it, from whom and who collected it for them, is perhaps a mystery that only coal that was never mined but transported itself nightly by ghostly trucks that don't exist, can answer) but it is likely that more and more 2023 aspirants will be gravitating towards this party. The Congress is believed to have become dry as far as funds are concerned and many believe that this is the main cause for its sudden disintegration. The TMC is sending up trial balloons and of the so called Regional Parties the less said the better. They neither have the money, the appeal nor the zeal. So they shall continue the survival practice of picking up crumbs that fall from the table. What is obvious is that some party perhaps on its own or through a combination with other parties will form the next Govt. That much is clear. What is not clear and is a cause of major concern are the intentions and plan of action of this next Government. Will it continue with the tradition of the present MDA and continue to remain mute, indifferent and inert to the development needs of Meghalaya? Will the spree of looting and exploitation of Meghalaya's natural resources carry on unabated?

As a common citizen of Meghalaya I fret and lose sleep over the fact that the politicians of our state have lost their sense of direction. Politicians and political parties are busy and more concerned about winning the next elections and forming the next Govt.

Their loyalties more to the party they belong than to the state they claim to represent. News headlines of both local English and vernacular papers are full of such bombastic claims and promises. I suppose this is being done both to attract the attention of the public as well as to boost morale and self confi-

dence of the party. Nothing wrong in all this. Of concern however is the silence of parties as well as politically inclined individuals as to what they intend to do once they win and form the next Govt. There is the silence of the graveyard over this subject. 50 years of statehood and all our leaders can do is celebrate the event without even batting an eyelid on the growing profile of Meghalaya as a Failed State. So what are we celebrating about? The collapse of democracy? The disappearance of democratic norms and values? The erosion of traditional values and ethics? Please enlighten me for I really don't know what the celebration is all about. As a citizen I would have accepted an acknowledgement of failure. We are mortals and to fail is just part of a learning process. I lose sleep when our elected leaders pretend and fail to accept reality; I fret when we celebrate 50 years of flawed governance without even expressing the need for introspection; I become anxious when elected representative and their parties are more concerned with winning than with providing the state with a vision for the future. Admitted that winning an election is desirable but winning is just a means to achieve an end, which is providing good governance to the electorate who have given you this electoral victory. This crucial aspect of parliamentary democracy seems to have been overlooked. Service to the state and the people no longer counts. Most shocking is the fact that the Govt is more than satisfied perhaps even eager for the Judiciary to intervene on issues of governance be it traffic regulation, saving our water bodies or investigating a crime of illegal mining apparently masterminded by some powerful being from within the bowels of the Secretariat. Now if the Judiciary is to do the work of the Executive, pray tell me why should I come out on election day to vote? It's a fundamental question, not on the validity of the Representation of the Peoples Act; not on Judicial intervention, but simply because it no longer makes sense.

The usual ploy used to ensure that the facade of democratic setup is main-

tained is the call for the voter not to waste his vote and to come out on election day and exercise his right to elect the leader of his choice. It is acknowledged that casting of votes to elect a leader of ones choice is the corner stone of parliamentary democracy. Political parties are therefore set up, equipped with a visionary document called a party manifesto, to be placed before the electorate to help the voter make his choice. That is how the system is supposed to work. In Meghalaya a distorted and immoral version of the above has been in practice.

Manifestos are never made and even if they are its usually a cut and paste job which the candidate of the party is totally unfamiliar with or one that he contemptuously uses instead of toilet paper. Even coalition Govts refuse to come up with a common minimum programme. So much for a vision from the parties.

The electorate of the constituency is rarely consulted on the candidate of their choice. Instead someone from somewhere is brought in for the people to vote and the only credentials required of this someone is a bankroll to purchase votes. The process is adoringly termed the "winnability" factor which has for the last 30 years been solely responsible for the introduction of scoundrels, unscrupulous businessmen, certified idiots and worst, members of the coal mafia, persons directly responsible for the destruction of our fragile environment, into the hallowed hall of the Legislature. It has resulted in the election of public representatives who are megalomaniacs; who occupy an Assembly seat or a Cabinet Ministerial chair with the sole intention of pilfering the state exchequer to enhance his or her family business. So voters are supposed to come out on election day to vote for such people? Thank you but no thanks. I would rather stay home and read a book. That gives me greater pleasure than abetting a process of robbing my grandchildren of their future.

For the last fifty years perverted politics, lack of vision and a distorted governance has pulled the state

from the pinnacles of glory it use to enjoy to the depths of despair it now finds itself. Meghalaya has too many institutions of governance, each waiting to trip the other. We have the government, the district councils and our traditional institutions. We have analysed the composition of the government and reasons why it fails to respond to the needs of the people. We have the Autonomous District Councils hanging like cancerous appendages that have contributed next to nothing to the well-being and development of the state but we lack the moral courage to advise the Centre to abolish these anomalies we inherited from Assam. Then come the traditional institutions, the Dorbars, still endowed with the respect and prestige from society, but unsure of their own legal status and confused with whom they should associate themselves with, the State government or the ADCs.

50 years after statehood and our systems of governance still in a state of flux and confusion. Into this murky arena of existence the Pressure Groups have jumped in with their own version and perception of the future of the jaitbyrniew. They have nothing to offer but fear for the future and the demand for more protection to safeguard our minority status. I feel I too would like to put in my two pence worth of opinion. Many may not like what I have to say but it needs to be said. Unless Meghalaya immediately discards the perverted leadership we have adopted; unless we have a vision and roadmap for the next fifty years; unless we recognise that economic strength backed by quality education and Hope is our only lifeline to survive, unless we improve our systems of governance and unless we rediscover the value systems and principles of our forefathers, we are sunk. Another 50 years from now and we will disappear. IJP or no IJP we would be gone. The danger dear reader is not from without as we are led to believe but from within. Set our house in order and we shall be fine, we shall thrive, we shall prosper. Continue on the present course and we are bound to sink. Sorry the truth is always bitter but it has to be said and someone has to say it.

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UP results will define national politics

By Rasheed Kidwai

March 10, 2022 would be an important day for all concerned when the results of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur are declared. The centre-piece is Uttar Pradesh, the country's most populous and politically significant State. In July 2022, the country will elect a new President, where the votes of every elected MLA would matter. And Uttar Pradesh scores over all the other States on that count.

As things stand, the Narendra Modi-led NDA in Parliament has an edge in the Presidential poll, having 49.9 per cent of the votes against the UPA's 25.3 per cent and that of non-NDA others' amounting to 24.8 per cent of votes. A Congress victory in Uttarakhand and Punjab would have some significance while the Samajwadi Party-RLD combine's victory in Uttar Pradesh has the potential to alter existing equations.

Sensing the high stakes, the BJP campaign has been aggressive and highly polarising. For the first time in many decades, the Indian electorate is facing a political outfit which believes more in winning polls than governance. Every electoral victory is celebrated as an endorsement of its political agenda. Some of the voices heard in Uttar Pradesh have been most disturbing. At one instance, an elected MLA was heard questioning a particular community for availing rationed food and grain when it was supposedly not voting for the ruling party! The fine distinction between the Indian State and the ruling party is being blurred. Political parties in India (with an exception of the 1984 Lok Sabha when the Congress netted over 50 per cent of votes) have been winning polls with less than 50% of the total votes, but as governments, it was understood that they stood for and served all citizens, not the sections that voted for them.

The UP outcome will have some bearing on the internal dynamics of the BJP too. As it is often said, the road to Delhi goes via Lucknow.

Incredible as it may sound, Yogi Adityanath, if he wins UP on March 10, would become the first Chief Minister of a national party to complete a full five-year term in Uttar Pradesh. If he loses, he'll have to resign and will fall just short of the five-year mark, since he assumed office on 19 March 2017. So far, only Mayawati and Akhilesh Yadav - leaders of regional parties - hold the distinction of completing an uninterrupted five-year term since 1951! Perhaps the Congress, which was calling the shots in Uttar Pradesh till the 1980s, was wary of powerful regional satraps from Govind Ballabh Pant to N D Tiwari in the decades that saw Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira and Rajiv Gandhi as prime ministers, so UP Chief Ministers kept changing.

An outright victory will make the 49-year Yogi Adityanath a contender for the post of Prime Minister in the post-Narendra Modi era. Uttar Pradesh is a State that sends an outsized 80 Lok Sabha MPs to Parliament. During the 2019 parliamentary polls, the BJP tally was 62 while in the 2017 State assembly polls, it won a staggering 309 out of 403 seats.

Union home minister Amit Shah is seen as a 'natural' successor to Modi on account of his clout within the BJP and the Sangh parivar, his so-called acumen and his informal number two status in the Modi government. Shah is more in the Sardar Patel mode or the way L K Advani was for the Atal Bihari Vajpayee regime. Madhya Pradesh chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, 62, is a four-time Chief Minister of the State. However, the low key, unassuming Chouhan does not fancy himself as a contender.

Number twos, or the contenders for the top job in Indian politics, have had a chequered history. The country has had seven Deputy Prime Ministers in Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Morarji Desai, Choudhary Charan Singh, Jagjivan Ram, Yashwantrao Balwantrao Chavan, Choudhary Devi Lal and Lal Krishna Advani. Except for Morarji and Charan Singh, the others failed to make it to the top. In fact, both Morarji and Charan Singh had to fight, break parties to fulfil their ambition, which remained short-lived too. The fate of the other informal yet powerful number twos such as Pranab Mukherjee, Sharad Pawar, Arjun Singh, N D Tiwari have been dismal.

Away from Uttar Pradesh, the rise of the Aam Admi Party in Punjab and in Goa will have some repercussions for the opposition, particularly the Congress. AAP's victory outside Delhi will pose a threat to the grand old party. Privately, many Congress leaders think an AAP victory would pose a serious challenge to the party in the next round of assembly polls in Gujarat, Himachal, Karnataka etc where AAP would try to cut into Congress vote banks.

On the other hand, post March 10, 2022, if the Congress wins Uttarakhand and retains Punjab under a dalit Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi, Rahul Gandhi will emerge as a powerful leader to return as the 87th president of the AICC. An electoral setback in Dehradun and Chandigarh would diminish Rahul Gandhi's prospects of leading a united Congress from the front. The Gandhis, i.e. Sonia, Rahul and Priyanka, may have to allow "free and fair" polls (minus members of the Gandhi family in the fray).

Watching all these developments carefully are Sharad Pawar, Mamata Banerjee and Arvind Kejriwal. Pawar had twice left the Congress and twice staged a comeback. Pawar, having failed to become a non-existent UPA chairman or convenor, seems to now be trying to float a trial balloon of a 'Third Front.' Speaking about elections in five States, Pawar had recently remarked that "The country needs a third front and talks are on with different political parties over its formation. Even CPI-M leader Sitaram Yechury stated that there is a need for a third front, which is yet to take shape."

Pawar would not answer whether the UPA of 2004-2014 exists now or not. For all practical purposes, the UPA that was once headed by Sonia Gandhi and saw Dr Manmohan Singh as Prime Minister for ten long years, is not around. For nearly eight years now, there has been no formal meeting of the UPA, while allies have come and left at will. The Congress under Rahul and Sonia, however have kept trying - be it tie-ups with Akhilesh Yadav for the Uttar Pradesh 2017 State assembly polls or a mahagathbandhan with the RJD in Bihar 2020 that didn't work, or successful government participation in Jharkhand and Maharashtra. But the Congress' alliance story has been largely 'piece-meal' and guided by real-politik.

Ostensibly, there is no direct or visible link between Pawar, Mamata and Kejriwal and Congress dissidents, also known as G23. But it is known that the G-23 has some kind of "Plan B". While it's not a structured formulation, Congress failure on March 10 will bring back the spotlight on Sharad Pawar, Mamata Banerjee and Kejriwal.

(Rasheed Kidwai is a senior journalist and author of the books "Ballot: Ten episodes that have shaped India's Democracy", "The House of Scindias" and "Sonia, a biography") (Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Contamination of water through rusty pipelines

Editor,
It has often been observed that we as people do not give much thought to the little things around us. For many, such things do not exist. But in the final analysis, it is always the little things that contribute to the making or breaking of empires. As the adage goes, for want of a nail a kingdom was lost. I would like to bring to the notice of the authorities concerned and people, in general, a similar matter which if left unaddressed would lead to health complications in the future for residents of certain areas in Malki.

In some sections of certain localities, the pipelines that supply water to the households there are laid in such a way that part of the pipes rest directly on the bed of drains that carry liquid waste and other materials. In other parts of the city and Malki, this is not the case where the personnel of the authority concerned has done a commendable job of ensuring that the pipelines are fixed several inches above the bed of the drains. This keeps the pipelines away from the liquid wastes flowing through the localities.

Now, what is the problem with pipelines lying directly on the bed of drains? Well,

firstly, the pipes begin to rust rather quickly, and in sections where there are joints, the damages take place much faster. Imagine now what would happen if rust was to make several holes in the pipelines over the years. Residents of the localities would be drinking contaminated water - a blend of urine, excreta, spit, car engine oils, liquid waste from households, and what have you. This contaminated water could seep into the pipelines and flow directly to people's kitchens. Now, I am no scientist but I would surely not want to drink such quality of water just thinking of the things that have been mixed with it. It is no longer water but a concoction of things that are both repulsive and risky to our health. This is how water-borne diseases are caused and spread.

I urge the concerned authorities to kindly address this issue and have the pipelines examined and then installed in such a way that they stay above the bed of the drains always in the interests of our health and safety.

Yours etc,
P. Majaw,
Shillong-1

Russia-Ukraine war will hit India

Editor,
The Russia-Ukraine war has far-reaching con-

sequences. It has both national and international and long-term and immediate implications. Given that the war directly or indirectly involves many countries, the implications develop from the international situation. The implications of the war for India need to be understood against this backdrop.

India will have to deal with the volatile situation in the wake of the war. Inflation levels in India are already very high with rise in fuel and food prices. The war will worsen the situation. Given that sanctions will adversely affect supply, prices of other commodities will also rise. The uncertain situation will badly affect investment. Both imports and exports will be hit. Weakening of the rupee compared to the dollar will aggravate inflation. All these factors will reduce growth of the already flagging economy. Expenditure will increase whereas revenues will be badly affected. In the defence sector India may face difficulties. Since Russia is on the war front, it needs defence equipment. This will delay the delivery of defence equipment for India. As a consequence, India's preparations to face China and Pakistan will weaken. India's relations with both Russia and the US will be badly affected due to India's neutral stand on the war. India will have to change its international relations in the post Cold War scenario.

In short, India will be burdened with the responsibility of boosting its economy already hit by the pandemic. Both the public sector and private sector need to be strengthened. The productivity of workers must increase and their living conditions must improve.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

Blatant violation of road engineering rules

Editor,
When respect for and adherence to road engineering is thrown to the winds then the only way to save motorists and pedestrians is to move the High Court. In road engineering, we are told to be extra careful with (1) super elevation and (2) transition curve. Without super elevation in curves, the vehicle at a safe driving speed is bound to overturn in the direction away from the centre of curvature as the centrifugal force is not counter-reacted by the centre of gravity of the vehicle from the opposite direction. A drive from Umshyri till 5th mile Upper Shillong would help us understand the absence of being forced out of the car. Transition curves also help maneuver the steering wheel, which

automatically rotates the wheel with no stress or strain on the hands.

Unfortunately, this super elevation, a must in road engineering, has turned enemy number one to the overloaded coal trucks. For the benefit of the lay person, let me remind the readers of an accident that happened in 3rd mile, Upper Shillong eight years ago. A bus had overturned, killing a pedestrian as the bus fell on him. On enquiry, I learnt that the bus coming from a far off place carried heavy iron rods on its roof. The law stipulates that passenger buses cannot be trucks and hence they are strictly disallowed from carrying heavy stuff on the roof. Alas! In Meghalaya it is free for all. Heavy stuff on the top raises the centre of gravity up. So at turnings and low speed, the centre of gravity and the plumb line vertically down get outside the outermost tyre and the load overturns.

This is the very same spot where so many coal laden trucks in recent times have overturned. As told by many, after 30 minutes of the truck overturning, some police Gypsy vehicles would show up to be followed by an empty truck and a recovery truck with many labourers. In less than 5 hours that spot appears as if nothing had happened. It is cleaned of coal dust. The labourers are of a special cover up team and paid very handsomely.

These are common occurrences at 3rd mile as the super elevation was well executed by the British who built the Dawki bridge in 1931 and which is still alive and kicking.

Now the MDA Government is tampering with that spot to prevent further overturning of coal trucks carrying illegally mined coal. This is highly illegal. I request the State PWD to survey this spot immediately and rectify it.

The MDA Government has trampled on all the laws of road engineering that put our daily commuters and pedestrians in jeopardy. These crimes occur mostly during the night. The lives of ordinary people in Meghalaya weigh less than a feather and some smile sarcastically at such news. What is worse is that the rear number plates of most trucks are folded so as not to be detected by judicious traffic police, when they are informed by passers by over phone in case of hit and run accidents.

In a State like Meghalaya citizens have no other safety net except to move the High Court of Meghalaya to save our wretched souls.

Yours etc.,
CF Lyngdoh, Mawmai
Via e mail

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We are all now connected by the Internet, like neurons in a giant brain.

—Stephen Hawking

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India in Ukraine

WITH the war in Ukraine taking the first "Indian toll" in the form of an MBBS student from Karnataka, the thousands of families that have sent their children there are having nightmares as to what will happen next and how safe are their besieged children. While India is organising evacuation flights in the past one week, it has been a slow process and over a thousand students have been brought back via Air India flights. Air India is no more a government entity and the government has its limitations, also as the airlift is done free. On Tuesday, Prime Minister Modi asked the Air Force to step in with help.

In sharp focus is the question as to why students from India go all the way to Ukraine, or China to take an MBBS degree —after which they have to come and pass a test here to start the practice. The PM has advised students to avoid going to "smaller nations" to take degrees like MBBS. What the PM might not know is that Ukraine is more developed than India in many respects including in the medical education sector or in the matter of roads and other infrastructure. Ukraine was the second most important province after Russia in the USSR. Its medical institutions are a sight to watch; and the degrees from there are well-respected and accepted in the UK and other European nations too. Our sense of superiority is often misguided. This is true of the higher education sector as a whole where, even with huge salaries paid under UGC regime, the standards of our universities are going from bad to worse, not vice versa. Year after year, in global rankings, one or two Indian universities figure in the world's 100 best. The rudderless style in which India functions, despite the periodic five-year elections and installation of governments, is weakening each and every institutional mechanism here.

It is well-known that the MBBS graduates who pass out from Indian medical colleges now are mostly below par; unlike in the past when such institutions produced excellent practitioners. Private medical colleges charge a fee of a crore or more in India, whereas the best medical establishment in Ukraine's, Odessa charges around Rs 30 lakh. The greed on the part of those who run the colleges here has also to do with the money they shell out as gratifications through backdoor to those at the top. As a result of all these, the number of foreign students coming to India is fewer. Even Africa now sends lesser students to India. But do successive governments in this country have time to dwell on these critical issues?

What more does Nengchigen unmask?

By Albert Thyrniang

Illegal mining has once again come to the fore in Meghalaya. Unfortunately it takes the deaths of two labourers from Assam in a coal mine in Shallang to reveal the unholy business in the state. This paper's recent reports of illegal mining have unmasked not only rat-hole mining but a lot of other illicit things in the state. Nengchigen has revealed much more than the illegal extract of coal and its transportation.

Scant respect for traditional institutions
In general traditional institutions like the Dorbar Shnong and the Nokma are held in high esteem in the state. Nothing objectionable takes place in a village without the permission of the village authorities. And if something does occur it will come to an immediate halt when the authorities direct so. That aura of reverence went for a toss in Nengchigen village, the current focus of illegal mining. A nokma is the custodian of the land. Her word is final as far as the use of the land in her guardianship is concerned. But in Nengchigen her authority was distastefully undermined. The nokma did not permit coal mining in her land. But her word was not only disobeyed and her objection ignored, she and her clan members were threatened by illegal miners who she named in her FIR in Shallang police outpost.

Illegality turned the village into a terror spot. For their benefit miners did not mind terrorising villagers and compelling them to live in fear. They even involved gunmen and militants to threaten and assault the nokma, her family, the village clan members and the inhabitants. Anti Dacoity (AD) camp had to be set up. The Police, instead of reporting the underground business to the district administration, thus nipping the illegality, were accused of taking money from transporting trucks, refusing even to accept FIRs and being hand in gloves with the smugglers. Posted to check illegal activities, the police now turn facilitators of crime. This reveals the deep nexus in this lucrative business. Illegality extends to the check gates, the weigh bridges and far beyond.

Might is right
It is war time. So comparison of a chalk and cheese could be excused. Last week Russia invaded Ukraine after a long military build-up. An online war too has erupted. Russia has defended itself saying it has grounds for its actions particularly fearing that its neighbour will

ultimately join the US-led NATO. Ukraine, which has surprisingly been able to withstand the might of its former 'parent country,' has cried foul at Vladimir Putin's unprovoked attack equating it to annexing the second largest country in Europe. You may stand on any side but observers say the principle of might is right is at work. That is still unfortunately the world order today. The mighty Russia contemptuously flew its war planes, fired missiles and sent its tanks across the border because Ukraine is much weaker compared to the former leader of the defunct powerful USSR. If Ukraine were a match to Russia, its president, whom many call a dictator, would certainly have not declared the war. Without shame the US, a country 30 times bigger, invaded Vietnam, one of the smallest countries in the world in 1955. With no justification whatsoever, America and its allies waged war on Iraq, a third world country, in 2003. Two year earlier the same combination set their eye on Afghanistan, a country torn already by centuries of conflicts. In the Vietnam war more than 58,000 were the casualties, the Iraq invasion resulted in not less than 1,51,000 deaths and the Afghanistan hostilities killed 1,76,000 people. The war declarers are not held responsible because their countries are the most powerful. Except the president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte and a couple of others, no one even talks of the misdeeds of America and their cohorts against weaker countries.

The culprits could operate in Nengchigen because they took advantage of the defenceless and probably uneducated nokma and the villagers. They thought that money and connections with politicians and the police could enable them to carry on with their infamous activities unabated. Might is right was certainly in their mind. This is the effect of the illegal coal mining in the state. "Might makes right" was the credo of kings, emperors and totalitarian rulers but to think that in Meghalaya this creed prevails due to the nefarious 'black diamond' activities, is alarming.

Speaking of respect for institutions and persons in office the protests against the elected Chief Executive Member (CEM) of GHADC, Rakesh A Sangma by the pressure groups is baffling. It is not just the protest but

the manner of demonstrations that is disturbing. The protesters 'overthrew' the democratically elected MDC from his post. Once an MDC is elected by the electorate can he be prevented from holding any office? Sangma was elected by the MDCs. Are the pressure groups bigger than MDCs and the institution of GHADC? Is this not undermining the Autonomous Council itself?

During the protest days there were also a lot of personal attacks and vilification against the Babelapara MDC on social media and elsewhere. Anyone can have an opinion on his tribal status and that of his family but the humiliation and threat is uncivilised. Respect for the dignity of a person, whoever he or she is, should remain intact at all times. Whatever one think of Rakesh A Sangma he remains the leader of the people of his constituency, at least for the remaining term of the GHADC. Any personal attack on him is an attack on the voters who sent him to GHADC. Could we also read that the celebrations and 'victory' rally after resignation has an element of 'might is right'?

Crimes follow from the rat-hole mining

The unlawful business does not end with 'might is right' doctrine. Crimes have followed. In March, 2018 the young RTI activist Poipynhun Majaw was murdered in Khliehriat, allegedly for exposing large scale misappropriation of public funds in JHADC and illegal mining by cement firms. In November in the same year social activists Agnes Kharshing, and her associate, Anita Sangma were almost fatally beaten by a mob that included a local NPP leader, while taking pictures of extracted coal. Recently five coal traders from Meghalaya were arrested for tax evasion that runs into crores of rupees. This is where the greed for illicit wealth can take us to. This is what money from the illegal rat-hole mining has done. The state government is in lullaby mode. Different political parties, ruling and opposition, play the blame game but no one seems serious enough even as looting the state has been going on for nearly five years.

A slap in face of the government

For its indifferent attitude the MDA government deserves to get a slap in the face by the Meghalaya High Court. Reading the 'on the spot' report of the Shillong

Times the Meghalaya High Court, on February 24 took suo-moto cognizance of illegal rat-hole mining of coal in the state. The Government which has been demanding that complainants arm themselves with an FIR for a hearing is left red-faced. Hope the Chief Secretary and Director-General of Police's visit to the site produces a positive result within the stipulated time. Hope the mask will be off completely. It is noted that the state BJP has urged the state government and all political parties to not exert interference on the officials. The statement by the party in power makes the public apprehensive. There is a possibility of political meddling in the case.

Investigative journalism is rare

It was refreshing to read the report which impacted the court's conscience. However, it also reminds us that exclusive and investigative stories are rare nowadays. In December last year the Chief Justice of India, N.V. Ramana said, "The concept of investigative journalism is unfortunately vanishing from the media canvas... When we were growing up, we eagerly looked forward to newspapers exposing big scandals. The newspapers never disappointed us... Investigation is an integral part of journalism. But the journalists are facing authoritarian control and climate of intimidation today in India." This 'death' of investigative journalism is a matter of concern because the media is the watchdog over the powers that be. It is the conscience of the society. It is exalted as the fourth pillar of democracy.

Today there is a sense that the Indian newsrooms have become morgues for investigative journalism. It has become spineless. It does not stand up to the present regime. It has become a propaganda machine for the present dispensation. In 2018 Caravan magazine published an article entitled, "The Byline is Dead". 'The byline' is a phrase that came to mean the power of journalism - the courage it provided an ordinary reporter to challenge the high and mighty. Today this extraordinary power of journalism is getting rarer day by day. It is for the profession to look into itself and bring back the vanishing trade.

Thanks to Nengchigen, a far-flung village in West Khasi Hills, which has induced us to ponder on this and other points of critical interests.

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Sein Jaintia Morning School: A boon for the underprivileged

By Amanda A. Pakyntein

The Bible inscribes "Wisdom is better than strength - Wisdom is better than weapons of war" (Ecclesiastes 9:16 - Ecclesiastes 9:18). From these verses we are fully aware that we should always keep our minds loaded with wisdom and be at peace as we open our hearts to all those around us.

Every community desires that their people have access to education because it is a versatile remedy to dispel all evils. It is the antidote to counteract various problems of life that often throw us into a quandary. Each and every child deserves the right to education. No matter who and what their station of life is we should not clip their wings. Rather we should encourage them to follow their dreams. Education is largely the most important virtue and the principle right of each and every person. Since the time of inception in a mother's womb, every child has equitable right to education.

A country without a robust education system cannot prosper. As responsible human beings and equal citizens we are obliged to provide free of cost quality education to all the children. Educating the society will build an army of skilled workers and also in lowering the rate of illiteracy; of school and college drop-outs and unemployment. It is with the quest to provide education to the poor and destitute and to school drop-outs that Sein Jaintia Morning School was started. Located at Qualapatty, abutting the busy Lewduh (Bara Bazaar) market in the heart of Shillong City, this school has served many who had earlier given up all hopes of every passing out of an educational institution because of stark poverty and other reasons.

Sein Jaintia Morning School offers free education to the aspiring drop-outs and those that have never seen the inside of a school. It admits drop-outs to offer them a second chance at living their dreams. The school opens its doors also to those who have been neglected and socially ostracised because of their addiction to substances. The students show a rare enthusiasm and if asked what they wanted to be some say they want to be doctors and engineers or computer wizards.

Surprisingly, adults who are in their late 20's and elderly adults who are in their late 30's, 40's and 50's too, show a keen desire to resume schooling to make up for the lost opportunities during their childhood and adolescence.

Dr Billiancy Lamare, the founder of Sein Jaintia Morning School, Shillong, introduced this free of cost school in the year 2008. She along with her teachers had a great compassion for the underprivileged children, drop-outs and to all those who are trapped into an assortment of addictions who were out of school. Sein Jaintia Morning School, does not belittle any opportunity big or small that comes its way. The teachers welcome the students with a big heart and radiant smiles. They are compassionate and loving because they know that these kids need those above all. The teachers spend considerable time counselling the students and supporting them through their traumatic journeys. The Principal and teachers of Sein Jaintia Morning School, are akin to the farmers who start work at the break of day to plough the field, sow the seeds, water the plants, remove the weeds and add manure because one cannot sow seeds or reap a harvest if he keeps waiting for a conducive atmosphere.

Trying to bring back a struggling soul who has missed the opportunity to be in school is the best pedagogy we can think of. If we can afford to feed our bodies we should also spend some time nourishing the starving mind. Sein Jaintia Morning School, emerged out of a deep concern for the growing number of poor children who yearn to be at school but

whose parents find the fees prohibitive and are unable to buy books or uniforms. Children too often resist attending school because of several reasons such as teachers lacking compassion and understanding for their learning defects. We are a judgmental society and are quick to label children. Instead, we should be giving hope and sow the seeds of curiosity in the minds of these children and allow them to learn at their own pace. It is the endeavour of Sein Jaintia Morning School to eliminate all learning barriers so children enjoy their schooling.

The teachers work as a team to give shape to the vision of the students. Critics may belittle the efforts of the school principal and teachers but despite the low expectations, Sein Jaintia Morning School, is a beacon of hope for the struggling learner. As teachers, our most important role is not just to impart learning and for the children to secure good grades in their exams, but to enthuse them to be good humans by instilling values and ethics in them. Teachers demonstrate how important environmental consciousness is by telling students that this living environment is the only precious heritage that we humans have inherited from Mother Earth. At Sein Jaintia we teach students to be compassionate towards birds, animals and all living creatures because GOD made this earth not only for human beings but for every living being.

There is something very different and noteworthy about the principal and teachers of Sein Jaintia Morning School. Over the years they have learned from experience that each child is unique and deserves their undivided attention which is a unique perspective. This unique phenomenon shows the teachers and principal's dedication to the cause of education. They possess extraordinary flair for communication and teaching skills to illuminate their students and they utilize this 'gift' as a collective impact of the opportunity to make life better for themselves and those around them.

Every small action of the teachers is designed to improve themselves so as to bring a meaningful change in this world. The greatest contribution of the school may not be in something they do; but in someone they raise and educate. If any part of us cared about the weaker section and drop-out youths, we'd want them to be happy, not force them to love school the way we think it should be because common sense is not always how we grasp at the springs of life. Rather we should communicate with children in a way that empowers them and steers their minds towards positive thoughts. Teachers constantly counsel the children to seize every opportunity to improve their lives. As an honorary teacher of Sein Jaintia Morning School, one understands the journeys of these children and hence one tries to educate a struggling soul to discover that the world is still a compassionate place. This is what is visible in Sein Jaintia Morning School.

The combined personality of the principal and her gracious teachers have motivated them to accomplish desirable goals worthy of appreciation. The Government of Meghalaya and its Education Department ought to turn its attention to this school which has given many poor and destitute children an opportunity to be gainfully employed after passing out of the school. It is sad that the Government is still ignorant about Sein Jaintia Morning School.

(The writer is a Research Scholar at Mahatma Gandhi University, Meghalaya and a Teacher at Sein Jaintia Morning School, Shillong)

Letters to the Editor

Old wine in new wine skins? You decide..

Editor,
These past few weeks have seen a tumultuous turn of events politically in our state. In headline after headline, we see political representatives and leaders of different political parties suddenly changing route and jumping into the NPP bandwagon.

Surely the wave of the NPP is dominant in Meghalaya and it's neighbouring state like Manipur, but it's sad to see our Chief Minister and his party giving a red carpet, welcome-home party to any Tom, Dick and Harry and I say this with the infamous blunder of "five Ri Bhoi districts" in mind. Are these really the people you want in your party Mr CM?

Admittedly a politician can join whichever party he or she wishes to, but imagine being a politician sitting in the Opposition for four long years unashamedly bashing, battering and questioning the competence of the party they now shake hands and rub shoulders with? It's ludicrous to believe that these so-called leaders are doing

it for the betterment of their respective constituencies as they publicly claimed, when in reality they are simply just a pack of hyenas waiting to masticate and feast off whatever is left of the MDA carcass.

Considering the upcoming 2023 election, the timing of these unscrupulous acts are obvious aren't they? It reminds me of the old adage, "If you can't beat the enemy, you join them." After all, no one expects politicians or political parties to be pure and holy. Anyone looking for these virtues should stay away from politics, but of course it's not too high a standard either to expect politicians to not be pathological liars and their parties to not be a tent of lies is it? What's even more interesting is the five Congress legislators who successfully managed to beguile our Mr Conrad Sangma and his minions without officially leaving the Congress party that they still represent till date. The question is why? Is the negotiation for tender meat still ongoing? After all, just recently the spouse of the now suspended CLP leader has publicly and officially traded the hand for the book. So what's the hold up with his fair maiden? In the midst

of her indecisiveness, I hope she ponders on this quote by Abraham Lincoln, "A house divided against itself cannot stand".

We all know that sitting in the Opposition is not rainbows and unicorns for anyone; their pockets are running dry and they need to make a quick buck to rescue them, come 2023. So, let's leave the holier than thou attitude at the doorstep, and let's just call a spade a spade shall we? That said, I sometimes wonder if politics is a profession or an art, regrettably not the awe inspiring kind of art but more like a con artist claiming himself/herself to be a professional while trying to convince any naive person that he/she is capable of creating a masterpiece.

2023 is coming sooner that we think, Granted the NPP will bring out their grand artillery and go out all guns blazing with the hope of governing the state solely, which I admit is an impressive aspiration but I hope the NPP doesn't lose its stance while it gets too busy drooling over the newbies without noticing that their staunch supporters in some constituencies are quickly taking the exit route.

Let's hope that a leader of

Mr Conrad Sangma's calibre will be wary of the wolves in sheep's clothing lest his party gets dragged to the slaughter house and I hope the masses will see the con artists for who they really are, with their empty promises and rhetorical hyperboles. The ballot box will give the public a chance to rid these opportunistic malignant warts off once and for all. If not, the NPP as we now know it will sadly and inevitably turn into the good ol' Congress party but with a different symbol.

Yours etc.,
Nikkita Sawian,
Via email

Outdated Laws vs Modern Rights

Editor,
The letter to the Editor, "Women's Rights trampled again" (ST Feb 28, 2022) frankly speaking came as quite a shock as it happened in Lumdingri, a locality in the centre of Shillong where one would have expected, literacy, education and better sense to prevail over misplaced misogyny. In this day and age to prevent women participating in local Dorbar

proceedings and to debar them from voting in the election of Dorbar office bearers smacks of a Jurassic Age mindset. That this outdated mentality and behaviour is inspired and motivated by an obsolete and archaic law of Hima Myllem is a shame for the entire Khasi community.

The letter mentioned above had stressed the pride we as a Jaitbnyriew have when we see the prestigious seat of the Chief Secretary to the Government, the chair of DGP Meghalaya Police and the Office of the Deputy Commissioner East Khasi Hills occupied and managed by Khasi women. I now have a very simple question for the Syiem of Hima Myllem, the Hima that passed the Act prohibiting women from participating in Dorbar affairs. The question is if any of the Khasi women mentioned above, in their official capacity, were to summon the Syiem and his myntris, will the Syiem wave the Act of Hima Myllem in their faces and refuse to attend on the excuse that as an upholder of outdated tradition he refuses to obey any order passed by a woman? I doubt if any of our Syiems will have such a spine. So let's not get carried

away by tradition and try to live as per the demands of the day and age we live in.

Further, if the officials of Hima Myllem who attended and conducted the Dorbar elections at Lumdingri actually barred the participation of women in the name of tradition and in so doing, knowingly or unknowingly challenged a Meghalaya High Court order on the same subject, will the High Court suo.moto move Contempt of Court proceedings against these officials and the Syiem of Myllem? Well, I hope so just so that the so-called defenders of tradition and custom are made aware of the supremacy of the Constitution over misplaced emotions and sentiment. In a 21st century Meghalaya, it is the height of nonsense for heads of Traditional Institutions to go by the cheap slogan of "Ha ri lajong, leh kat bamon". It just does not work that way.

Yours etc.,
Bilona Rynjah,
Via mail

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.

"Perhaps everything terrible is
in its deepest being something
helpless that wants help from us."

— Rainer Maria Rilke

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Ukraine falls, India watches

AS one Ukrainian city after the other is fall to Russian shelling, the world looks on helplessly. Evidently the sanctions by western nations like the US has not deterred Russian President Vladimir Putin from undertaking his ambitious project of decapitating Ukraine as a warning to nations under the NATO that they cannot intimidate Russia without consequences. In the past India, known as the world's largest democracy had stood on firm ground whenever and wherever nations have been bullied by dictators. This time though, India has had to walk the diplomatic tightrope over Ukraine in order to balance its ties with Moscow and the West. In fact, Delhi's first statement in the UN Security Council was irresolute. India stopped short of criticizing Russia. This despite Ukraine's appeal to India to take a clear stance. India also chose to abstain from voting for the UN Resolution. All that India did was to appeal to Russia to respect international law.

There are several reasons for India's quest to find a diplomatic balance over Ukraine, the most important being its time-tested defence and diplomatic ties with Russia which continues to be India's largest arms supplier. However, the share has dropped to 49% from 70% after India launched its mission - Atmanirbhar Bharat or a self-sufficient India to boost up domestic defence manufacturing. Russia is supplying the S-400 missile defence system which gives India crucial strategic deterrence against China and Pakistan. That is the reason why it went ahead with the orders despite threats of looming US sanctions. At the end diplomacy also means quid pro quo.

Meanwhile Russia has gone all out bombing strategic institutions that include hospitals, schools and residential areas mindlessly and even threatening to use nuclear weapons. Prime Minister, Modi will be talking to the Russian President yet again to request him to pull back. But will diplomacy work now? India faces a monumental challenge of evacuating nearly 20,000 citizens, mostly students, from Ukraine. To add to the trauma, Indians are facing a raw deal from the Ukrainians who feel that India has not been on their side. At this point India's concern is in safely evacuating its citizens after one student lost his life on Tuesday to Russian shelling. India is forced to do the balancing act right now. If the US and other European nations continue to impose strict sanctions on Russia, then India too may be constrained to abort its business deals with Russia. At the moment the US appears to understand India's position but for how long? And if India changes its stances now, Russia could well align with Pakistan and China to checkmate it. It's indeed a tough call for India.

Cooperation, or the lack of it!

By K.N.Kumar

The cooperative sector, having always been an appendage to the Ministry of Agriculture remained peripheral to the national priorities. Barring a few exceptional states like Maharashtra and Gujarat, the sector mostly remained listless throughout the country, more so in the north-eastern region. This realization may have pushed the Government of India (GoI) to announce a new Ministry of Cooperation at the national level in July 2021. In slicing the sector off the Department of Agriculture and placing it under the charge of a high-profile Minister, one hopes that the GoI gives the sector its much-needed fillip. The vision of the Ministry - 'Sahkar se samridhhi' - means 'prosperity through cooperation.' And in keeping with the promise, an amount of Rs 900 crore has been allocated to the Ministry of Cooperation in the most recent budget. So far, so good.

Undeniably, cooperatives play a key role in the development of any economy, more so in a developing country like ours. Globally, Brazil ranks as the 'most cooperative-centric nation.' One of the finest health cooperatives of the world, Unimed, is Brazilian. In a list of three hundred cooperatives of the world, the French cooperative 'Groupe Credit Ecole' is at the top with 1.39 lakh employees and a turnover of \$ 96.25 billion (Rs. 7.14 lakh crores). Cooperative sugar mills account for 35% of the sugar produced in our country. We have about two lakh cooperative dairy societies and 330 cooperative sugar mills. A third of the market share in fertilizers is commanded by IFFCO (Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited). The state cooperative banks hold deposits of Rs 1.35 lakh crore, while they disburse Rs 1.48 lakh crore annually, as loans. Cooperatives have delved into complex operations like running IT parks and medical colleges in Kerala. The impact of the sector appears formidable at the global and national level, but where are we, as a state? Nowhere. Meghalaya is not even a tiny dot in this massive cooperative landscape. Dairy, Piggery, Handlooms, Handicrafts, Sericulture, Housing, Fisheries, and Tourism are the potential sectors where cooperatives can make a sizeable impact in our state. But they have not. Why so?

Of the more than 2200 registered Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies (PACS) of Meghalaya, 1740 are said to be functional. That is about 80%. Prima facie it seems like a respectable num-

ber. But note that being functional is not the same thing as being profitable. Most PACS are graded 'C' while the 'B' grade PACS are fewer, and the 'A' grade co-operatives are just about fifty. 'A' graded PACS are the ones who make some cash surpluses, and the rest are all dependent upon the government doles. Rhetorically, let me say that the 'C' graders are on the death bed, the 'B' graders are the ones slipping into coma - the government's managerial subsidies keep oxygenating them. Why is this situation so bad in our state?

I can list a few reasons:

(1) To my mind, the primary concern of the sector is the poor human capacity. The co-operators cannot professionally manage their own society's affairs. There is no worthwhile system of continual learning and capacity building of the co-

operators. The institution meant to build the capacities of the co-operators i.e., the Meghalaya Cooperative Training Institute (MCTI) is severely handicapped in terms of availability and capacity of the faculty, poor physical infrastructure, and even the energy to be effective. The MCTI itself is on Ventilator.

(2) Secondly, the functioning of the State Level Cooperative Federations across the various sectors is disappointing. Their members hardly meet, and when they do, hardly do anything worthwhile. Most Federations are near defunct and cannot offer any direction or leadership to the affiliated Primary Societies. They have not grown organically, often parachuted into a domain over which they have little understanding. They desperately crave for government support.

(3) The institution of the Registrar has over the years evolved into a policing set-up more than a developmental one. The nomenclature itself is faulty. Why should the head of a developmental directorate be notified as the Registrar? True to the nomen-



clature the Registrar assumes the role of a police officer and attends to the regulatory aspect of the sector more than the developmental aspect. The subordinate officers at the sub-districts are still called the Inspectors. And we thought the Inspector Raj is long gone in our country. To me, the whole structuring of the department and the legal framework on which it rests, appears very archaic and detrimental to the growth of the cooperative sector not just in our state but in the whole country.

(4) The performance or the lack of it, of the Meghalaya State Cooperative Union Ltd. and the MECOFED is a matter that requires close attention of the state policy makers. The institutional back-up being provided if any, by these institutions to the development of the sector needs to be investigated closely. Given its performance over the last several years I wonder what rationale the MSCU has, to continue to exist. Why shouldn't it be, or why has it not been dissolved yet?

But not all is bad. A small silver-lining is a recent entrant into the cooperative space, viz., the Integrated Villages Cooperative Societies (IVCS) incubated by the MBDA ecosystem are a notch better than the formal cooperatives. The institutional cohesion of the IVCS appears to be better partly because of the better investment of time and resources in building them from scratch. Recently when I met the farmers of the North Garo Hills district, I noticed that they formed three IVCS to aggregate and trade in banana. They appeared sufficiently motivated. Also, the State Level Federation of the Meghalaya Village Development & Promotion Tourism Cooperative Societies seems to be making sincere efforts. Last heard, this Federation has affiliated 26 Village Level Rural Tourism Cooperative Societies (VLRCS) and the performance of the VLRCS appears to be

issue different directions at their whims, leading to bewilderment between what is communicated by the officialdom and UIADI on the one hand and what we hear on the news every day.

Yours etc.,
Jerome K Diengdoh
Via email

The puzzling Aadhaar scheme

Editor,
Since the saffron party assumed power in 2014 there has been confusion in respect of the process of Aadhaar registration of citizens. In this context, several Government bodies, banking institutions and much else, have been pestering the people on Aadhaar cards and lately the authorities concerned have issued a warning that not linking Aadhaar to PAN will tantamount to the latter becoming redundant by 31st March, 2021! Markedly, however, the apex court on October 1, 2021 had directed the Central Government and the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIADI) not to make Aadhaar card mandatory for Covid-19 vaccination. And furthermore, to add spice to this contention the website of UIADI under

web-page called "Aadhaar myth busters" has in no uncertain terms assured that Aadhaar was not compulsory for getting a mobile SIM. Further it reiterated that the same was essential only when a person wanted the benefits of subsidies under the notified Government schemes.

Recently the Union Law Minister, Kiren Rijiju has, to the bewilderment of all in the Parliament stated that Aadhaar is to be linked with EPIC. This implies that Aadhaar has been made inescapable given that EPIC is indispensable in our life long career! However, taking a u-turn, he has inexplicably later on been reported to have said that Aadhaar linking to EPIC cannot be made mandatory as this depends on one's options. In a word, the issue of Aadhaar has for that matter, thrown the public into a welter of confusion and reduced us into a Hamletian dilemma! Aadhaar vis-a-vis this present dispensation reminds me of the book of Genesis highlighted at 11:1-9 on building a tower of Babel where one builder can't follow the language of his counterparts and vice versa leading to the ultimate collapse of the ambitious project of reaching heaven. Similarly, those at the helm in our country

India's ambivalent stance

Editor,
When the UN Security Council met to debate and vote on an important resolution deploring the Russian invasion of Ukraine, majority of nations sided with Ukraine. However, the Indian government chose to abstain. India took a neutral stand on the Russian invasion of Ukraine so that it could maintain good relations with both Russia and Ukraine. On the other hand, India's abstention on Ukraine resolution risks its democratic image before the world.

Some political observers point out that by siding with China and by keeping silent on the Russian aggression, India has surrendered its moral principles. India is one of the global democracies. Whenever democratic

principles are violated anywhere in the world, India's intervention is sought by other countries. The USA believes that India has a great role to play in establishing peace and democratic values in the world.

In the Russian invasion of Ukraine, what needs to be done is defend democracy from authoritarianism. By invading Ukraine, what Russia did is that it deprived Ukraine of its right to exist as a democratic country. Furthermore, Russia disturbed the stable peace in Europe.

The resolution deploring Russian invasion of Ukraine will now move to the UN General Assembly for debate and voting. India will get one more opportunity to prove that it is a champion of democratic values. It must show the world that it is the world's largest democracy. If India can stand with other democracies in condemning the Russian invasion, it will send a powerful message to the world.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

Puppeteer Putin

By Deepa Majumdar

Mr. Putin's barbaric invasion of the sovereign nation of Ukraine proves that the temptation of power continues to plague politics, as it has, since time immemorial. For all our technological advancements and the hubris of the twenty-first century, we remain susceptible to this primitive temptation, which is, perhaps, inherent in politics. If free-will comes with the risk of evil, then politics comes with that of power. Whether statecraft, or protest, politics comes with the thirst to rule. Unlike good forms of power, which are vested with responsibility and hence, legitimate authority, the raw desire to rule is an evil form of power that comes with illegitimate authority. Although always violent, bad power reaches its zenith when sadistic - as in torture and war against an unarmed "enemy." While all wars are cruel, the twenty-first century hi-tech war is malevolent in the kind of weapons it uses. If nuclear weapons are catastrophic, then drone attacks - a result of blind utilitarian reasoning - represent the quintessence of cowardice. This malevolence reaches its zenith when the perceived enemy is innocent and the war unprovoked. The complete

predictable character of its products and their performance. Not so the modern hi-tech war, which draws its contingency, not from mechanical failures, but from unforeseen historical happenings. The courageous resistance of the Ukrainian people has taken Mr. Putin by surprise. Perhaps so have protests from Russian citizens (including two top billionaires) and from a world united against him. Western sanctions, even if weak, will hopefully cripple Mr. Putin's ability to afford this war. Moreover, thanks to technological advancements, like the smart phone, etc., his atrocities in Ukraine (unlike PRC's atrocities in Tibet) are being documented. Based on this documentation, Mr. Putin should face the fullest prosecution for crimes against humanity.

Many questions linger. First, while it is wonderful to see the world unite against Mr. Putin, why has the west not react the same way to the bombing of Yemen by US backed Saudi forces, or to the other invasions and atrocities from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries - like America's pre-emptive attack on Iraq or PRC's invasion of Tibet? Second, I



contrary of a just war, Mr. Putin's sadistic invasion of Ukraine qualifies as among the most unjust of wars - all the more, given his irrational justification - a mix of hypocrisy and revanchist ideologies. As BBC News reports:

Many of President Putin's arguments were false or irrational. He claimed his goal was to protect people subjected to bullying and genocide and aim for the "demilitarisation and de-Nazification" of Ukraine. There has been no genocide in Ukraine: it is a vibrant democracy, led by a president who is Jewish.[1]

Many western experts have analyzed Mr. Putin's invasion - their reasoning ranging from blaming him without context, to blaming the west using historical context, but no free-will. While there is, of course, the broader precipitating context of the history of Russia and Ukraine, plus the need for Russian gas, the economics of it all, the oligarchs and their role, etc., the fact remains that it was Mr. Putin who triggered this war - nobody else. As the immediate cause of this collective violence against innocent unarmed people, he alone is culpable in a way nobody else is. Ukraine would have been spared if Mr. Putin had heeded this warning from the gentle Buddha (Dhammapada, Ch. 10, "Violence"):

He who harms the harmless or hurts the innocent, ten times shall he fall - into torment or infirmity, injury or disease or madness, persecution or fearful accusation, loss of family, loss of fortune. Fire from heaven shall strike his house and when his body has been struck down, he shall rise in hell.

Like all bullies, Mr. Putin expected little to no resistance from Ukraine. He expected a swift conquest - a shock and awe subjugation of Ukraine (reminiscent of America's shock and awe subjugation of Iraq) - an overthrow of Ukraine's democratically elected government, then regime change. But the modern hi-tech war is contingent in a way no other product is. Yes, war too is a product - one that reifies violence. One humdrum aspect of modern technological production is the mechanical certitude, and hence, utterly

understand the need for discipline in the armed forces. I also understand the need to subordinate them below the head of state - so as to prevent military take-overs and coups. But why is their relationship with their commander-in-chief so cultish that they obey blindly the insane orders of an "aging autocrat" (as The Guardian called Mr. Putin)? Third, how do we prevent a revanchist delusional megalomaniac and pure sadist like Mr. Putin - to whom, Ukraine is not even a nation - from positions of power? How do we sublimate the thirst for power to a spirit of service? For Plato, the solution lay in cultivating the ideal leader, who, having glimpsed the numinous glory of the Good, would no longer be interested in power. This, perhaps, is the highest solution to the problem of power. But only a rare few reach this consummate ideal. The rest of us need the structured democracy, with checks and balances, strict term limits for heads of state, plus mature disciplined citizens capable of following democratically created rules.

Ukraine proves that for at least two reasons, non-violence, although the highest ideal, is not an absolute moral virtue. First, not everyone is morally capable of facing violence with non-violence. To force a person to do so would be violent. Second, non-violence is not feasible in all empirical situations. Ukraine cannot afford non-violence before Russian armed forces, described as one of the world's largest military forces. Like the Tibetans towards PRC's invading soldiers, the Ukrainians have been brave, cheeky, and resilient before Russian forces. This is praiseworthy. But they also need weapons, which have suddenly become as essential to life as food and water!

That the world has united in support of Ukraine proves that we are moving away from the subjective ethics of moral relativism towards the objective ethics of Conscience. The tragedy of Ukraine adds to the turmoil that defines our extraordinary historical moment - a moment that presages the next macro-cycle of History.

Letters to the Editor

One and only lesson from Ukraine

Editor,
This particular write up is not on the current situation in Ukraine, the propaganda machine of Russia nor is it to compliment Ukraine on its resilience, bravery and love of mother land. On the contrary it is the heartfelt condolences from all of us to Naveen, from Karnataka the 4th year medical student in Ukraine who was killed in the shelling of civilian buildings by the Russians on March 1, 2022. Condolences poured in for Naveen from India Ukraine and all parts of the world, and even from the meeting of world leaders.

And the only words from Naveen's bereaved father to Prime Minister Modi is, "Please do something for medical education in India. My son scored 97 percent in Higher Secondary yet I had to send my son for medical studies in Ukraine because I cannot pay crores of rupees of capitation fees in India. Ukraine universities are no less than ours but rather even better than Indian universities."

From Meghalaya currently here are about 30 students stranded in Ukraine.

A student from Laitkor and another from Malki could narrate their stories on YouTube. We pray for the safe return of the many thousands still stranded.

30 years ago, those who could not score at par with the toppers numbering 20 or more left India for Ukraine and China. And returning home, have to pass the MCI exam. And they performed well. Since NEET won back the case in the Supreme Court in 2016, and NEET was born, our Meghalaya toppers be they CBSE, ICSE or MBOSE could never qualify in spite of tribal concessions. The poor who missed by a margin managed to take up Veterinary Science. The others take up Arts to be lost to eternity, as pure science has no scope and to switch to Arts is Greek to them. And this goes on and on in our country with no vision. People have different talents and a state with a vision would hone those accordingly. But this has not happened restating in a mismatch between talent and aspiration.

In Tamil Nadu there is a strong protest against NEET. If the Tamil Nadu succeeds in doing away with NEET on the plea that education is on the concurrent list, then our Education Minister too could initiate similar revocation of

NEET in Meghalaya. Only then will our aspiring doctors see better days ahead.

One lesson from Ukraine is that India does not have affordable medical colleges to cater to aspiring doctors.

Yours etc.,
F. Lyngdoh
Via email

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"The essence of strategy is choosing what not to do."

— Michael Porter

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Strategizing war

WITH another round of peace talks involving Russia and Ukraine under way, there is yet little hope of an early end to the war that has already displaced millions in Ukraine and shattered life across its regions, principally the eastern sectors close to Russia. Yet, President Vladimir Putin faces a big question mark – as to what has gone wrong with his calculations of a swift pulling down of the government in Ukraine and installing a puppet regime in capital Kyiv. This, though, is a good omen – that, even mightier militaries need not expect to have a cakewalk and there will be costs to pay for any misadventure. It is this realization that should stop despots like Xi Jinping in China too to pause before targeting Taiwan or India.

The Ukrainian army is less than two lakh in strength, one-fifth of the size of the Russian military. Its military planes are just a few hundred compared to the thousands in Putin's stockpile. Ukraine's limited set of sophisticated arsenal including the portable, 12-metre long, FGM-148 Javelin Missiles that it has positioned against Russia's bomb-carrying aircraft and lethal missiles to protect its cities are, prima facie, believed to have spoilt Putin's hopes of a swift advancement, seizure of Kyiv and overthrow of Volodymyr Zelensky, the West-leaning Ukrainian president. The Ukraine military system's West-aided capacity to seek out and shoot down incoming planes and missiles meant the advancing Russian tanks were left to fend for themselves without air support. Zelenski had ensured as much from the US during the term of President Donald Trump, though at high costs. No cost, though, was high if these systems could defend Ukraine for now.

What Saddam Hussein failed to have in Iraq was sophisticated weapons to thwart American missile attacks from the sea hence his government fell like a pack of cards in 2003. Taiwan, China's breakaway republic, has strong military systems provided by the US to thwart Chinese designs even as there is no comparison between China and Taiwan. Moreover, Taiwan has a direct military alliance with the US and the West, unlike Ukraine that had not formalized a military pact for mutual support via the Nato. Had Putin had his way with ease in Ukraine, that could have emboldened Xi to first target Taiwan and later India. Nations across the world are bound to take a cue from what has happened in Ukraine in the past one week and re-adjust their military strategies, both individually and in alliance with others. The last word is not heard from Ukraine, though. If, finally, Kyiv too falls to the Russian designs, it would only leave more unfortunate lessons for the rest of the world.

Money power and politics: Case study of an MLA

By Patricia Mukhim

A couple of days ago the young and eligible bachelor MLA of Mawhati, the 29 year old Dasakhiatbha Lamare drove a spanking brand new red Lamborghini through the city leaving every person who saw it flit by with a silent gasp. It was a gasp of pleasure and pain (but not envy though). Pleasure to see a thing of beauty and a sigh knowing fully well that we can never, in our wildest dreams afford such an extravaganza in our lifetime. But what the hell? We can still hope to get a lift or should I say 'a royal ride' in that Lambo someday. For many of our youth though, Lamborghini has given them ideas and tickled their imagination. And guess what is the shortcut to acquiring that sort of worldly luxury? A combo of Business and Politics of course! Which other profession would yield so much in so short a time? Unless one sits and trades in cryptocurrency!

Dasakhiatbha Lamare comes from a business family. His father, the former

The work started way back in 2014 with the deadline for completion being set for September 2017. It is now March 2022 and the project is still not operational. But then this is how Meghalaya has performed with every single project. Not a single project is completed within the deadline. Anyway, let's leave the unfinished projects for another day. Today we are doing a case study of an MLA who represents a sickening level of affluence and his journey in politics.

The Association for Democratic Reforms which keeps a sharp eye on the assets of MLAs and MPs and their wealth ranking after being in politics for five years, had in 2018 stated that the top three richest MLAs are Metbah Lyngdoh of the UDP with assets worth over Rs 87 crore, Dasakhiatbha Lamare from NPP with assets worth over Rs 40 crore and Renik-ton Lyngdoh Tongkhar from HSPDP with assets worth

over Rs 29 crore. (Northeast Now, March 4, 2018). Metbah Lyngdoh is an established businessman and owns several Maruti vehicle retail outlets among other businesses. For most businessmen/women in Meghalaya, politics is also a way of gaining VIP status which business can never bestow no matter how rich a person is. And VIP status is a much-desired status in Meghalaya. But politics is also where wealth is consolidated.

What is a bit of a shocker is how a 25 year old Dasakhiat was already worth 40.37 crores with no liabilities. That is why he is a good case study of a businessman-politician who by now might have crossed the Rs 100 crore mark in terms of his wealth ranking. In 2018 he owned 15 vehicles of which 7 are tipper trucks besides a BMW worth 72.38 lakh at the time. He owns several Boleros, Scorpios and what have you. Now at 29 years, it is but natural that the next level after a BMW can be nothing less than the best – a Lambo-

polling day only to suck their lifeblood for the next five years. There are many young people who are pessimistic about the present state of affairs. They will have to form a cohort that will not join the bandwagon of picnickers who are sucked into the vortex of merry-making during the election season.

There is so much to deconstruct about our political legacy. How did it turn so vile and indecent that politicians dare to flaunt their wealth before a people shriveled by stark poverty? Until about 15 years ago there were some standards of behaviour to make one accepted as a member of society. At that time politicians did not lie so outrageously; they would not have denied the fact of illegal coal mining and the use of the Department of Mining and Geology and Transport to cover up tracks and make us believe that coal is imported to Meghalaya from outside the state. Do these ministers and officers of the MDA Government think we are so congenitally stupid and ut-



MLA, Naitlang Dhar is a co-owner of the Dhar Brothers Construction Co Pvt Ltd which is engaged in construction of the bulk of roads and highways in our State. Right now the road leading to NEIGRIHMS and to thence on to the Shillong by-pass is under their watch. And there are many other road and building projects across Meghalaya. Funnily Dasakhiatbha Lamare who is currently the Transport Minister is yet to complete the much touted Inter-State-Bus Terminal (ISBT). Until September 18, 2021, his uncle Sniawbhang Dhar was the Transport Minister. In July last year, Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated an incomplete ISBT.

Dasakhiat took over the Transport Department from his uncle on September 19, 2021 (it's all in the family, mind you) and the ISBT is still non-functional. The Rs 48 crore project partly funded by the North Eastern Council was sanctioned in 2013 and is built on a plot measuring 53,041.74 square metres.

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terly depleted of our thinking capacities? Of course, they would be delighted if we were to become unquestioning robots and bozos. It is difficult for us to adjust to this low life reality.

Thankfully some new political parties with some promising young leaders are offering us an alternative political discourse. It is important to tell people that they are being robbed of their and their children's future when they accept money for voting a candidate, any candidate. A candidate that wants to serve his/her constituents does not need to pay money to anyone. Period.

Meanwhile, it is interesting to note that Dasakhiatbha Lamare is shifting from Mawhati to Nongkrem to give the likes of Lambor Malngiang, Ardent Basaiawmoit, Bindo Lanong et al a run for their money. Nongkrem will be an interesting constituency to watch. Will the man with the Lambo turn the tide in his favour or will the underdog win the day?

Refugee Crises Increasing: Remember Rohingyas, Afghans, & now Ukrainians

By Jubeda Chowdhury

The Rohingya and Afghan refugee issues are currently important international issues. Over 1.1 million Rohingyas have taken refuge in Bangladesh since August 2017 due to genocide and ethnic cleansing in Myanmar. About 50,000 newborn Rohingya children are added to it every year. Earlier, the Rohingyas had been subjected to systematic discrimination, deprivation of the right to vote, and regular targets of violence in Myanmar for decades.

In the last four and a half years, despite various initiatives, no real progress has been made in resolving the Rohingya crisis. Under pressure from the international community, the Myanmar government signed an agreement on Rohingya repatriation, but to no avail. According to the agreement, the Rohingyas were to be repatriated in stages. The repatriation process has not started yet. The Myanmar government has failed to repatriate the displaced Rohingyas and resolve the crisis. Bangladesh has repeatedly urged various international forums to take effective steps to resolve the Rohingya crisis but to no avail.

The proposal is based on the human rights situation of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in vis-à-vis the state of emergency in Myanmar. Top politicians were arrested after a military coup overthrew a democratic government in the country on February 1 and declared a state of emergency. Political unrest, protests and clashes are going on in the country. Thousands of people have lost their lives in the military repression. Whatever the context, the unanimous resolution adopted by the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly is very important for Bangladesh. 108 countries have supported it. The proposal calls for finding out the root cause of the Rohingya problem. The resolution, with a number of guidelines for the introduction of democratic governance, called on all human rights organizations, including the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Myanmar, to cooperate.

A resolution presented by the OIC and the EU on the protection of the Rohingyas was unanimously adopted by the United Nations in 2021. Observers say the UN recognition is a reflection of the international community's strong commitment to resolving the crisis. In addition to the EU and OIC, the resolution is supported and co-sponsored by a large number of countries in various geographical regions, including the United States, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, Japan, and South Korea. The world community has been expressing solidarity with Bangladesh for sheltering the Rohingyas on humanitarian grounds and urging for repatriation of Rohingyas. Myanmar authorities have agreed to repatriate Rohingyas in the face of international pressure. But they did not take back the Rohingyas even after two rounds of discussions. In this situation, as part of regular diplomacy, Bangladesh has raised the issue of the Rohingya crisis in various world forums but everyone is listening quietly. There's no response or action from any quarter. Citizens of neighbouring Myanmar have been given asylum in Bangladesh on humanitarian grounds. The extra responsibility of looking after this huge refugee population is definitely a big burden for Bangladesh. The frustration of the Rohingyas is intensifying due to the lack of progress on repatriation, which is creating various security concerns and instability in the region.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) continued hearing the case of genocide against the Rohingya people in Myanmar from February 21 to February 28. According to Human Rights Watch and the Global Justice Center, the hearing is a crucial step in bringing justice to Myanmar's military's

crackdown on the Rohingya people. Gambia filed a lawsuit against Myanmar in the ICJ in November 2019 for failing to stop the genocide against the Rohingyas or punish the perpetrators.

The case, filed by Gambia, alleges that the Junta in Myanmar violated various anti-genocide memoranda and agreements by torturing the Rohingyas. This case is not a criminal case against any individual, but an entire nation has been blamed for the genocide.

Earlier, at the request of Gambia, the ICJ issued an interim order on January 23, 2020 to The Hague in the Netherlands to take emergency measures to protect the Rohingyas in Myanmar. Originally, the order was issued for the safety of the remaining 6 lakh Rohingyas in the country.

Specifically, the ICJ asked the Myanmar government to take four temporary measures. These include preventing genocide, ensuring that military and police forces do not commit genocide, preserving evidence of genocide, and reporting on compliance with these orders within 4 months. This report should be reviewed every 6 months. The ICJ issued the order after hearing the case.

However, Human Rights Watch has accused Myanmar's military junta of committing genocide, torture, violence, harassing arrests and other human rights abuses since the military coup in 2021. They allege that security forces killed about 1,500 people, including 100 children, and detained more than 11,000 people for harassment. Detainees include human rights activists, politicians, journalists and others. Those who tried to flee the Rakhine state were severely punished.

In 2019, the Myanmar government appointed former leader Aung San Suu Kyi to represent the country in the ICJ delegation. But during the 2021 coup, she was detained by the military. She was later sentenced to 150 years in prison in various cases. A panel consisting of six senior members of the military junta was then formed to represent the court.

Representatives from Myanmar and Gambia argued whether the ICJ has the authority to investigate and prosecute genocide allegations against Myanmar at the hearing. The hearing was held in a hybrid format in the wake of the ongoing coronavirus epidemic.

Earlier, Myanmar security forces cracked down on Rohingyas on several occasions. Bangladesh is still a shelter. Teknaf in Cox's Bazar became the largest shelter in the world. Bangladesh has held several talks with the Myanmar government on Rohingya repatriation. Although an agreement was reached between the two countries in December 2016, the result was zero. In this situation, after the army coup in February last year, it also fell into disrepair.

Despite repeated repression of the Rohingyas, Western countries, including the United States, have limited themselves to condemnation. The United Nations has not taken any action, citing reports of genocide after an investigation by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission in Rakhine. That is why millions of Rohingyas are now waiting for the verdict of the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

We hope that this crisis will be resolved soon. A political solution to the Rohingya issue is essential for lasting peace, stability, and security in the region. The regional crisis is also growing. The locals are suffering from various problems due to Rohingyas. The only way to resolve the crisis is to send the Rohingyas back to Myanmar as soon as possible. Last Thursday (February 24), Russian President Vladimir Putin announced the attack on Ukraine. In response, the United States and its Western allies have imposed a series of sanctions on Russia.

Letters to the Editor

'Danger close' in Ukraine

Editor

A grim situation is witnessed in Ukraine. The Russian bombardment across major cities has put civilians in jeopardy, many migrating to neighbouring countries which would change the face in demographics and a trigger for future conflicts. The term 'danger close' is when an air support is called upon to support ground troops and in this case innocent people are near the vicinity of those selected targets. It is appalling that the response to bring students to their home countries has been too close for comfort when the call for war was warned weeks ahead and Senator Bob Graham's book 'Intelligence Matters' describes how stonewalling can cost precious lives. Civilian aircrafts lack counter-measures and would

land in a catch 22 situation with the threat of shoulder fired missiles. Not all possess the creativity of the Israelis on the Iron Dome air defense system. A learning curve when the adversary is global in approach and the most important factor is the human element forgotten in the race for territory and domination. Will the NATO repeat 1995 Operation Deliberate Force to prevent the collapse of humanity?

Yours etc.,
Christopher Gathpho,
Shillong-10

UN fails to prevent wars

Editor,

The Russia-Ukraine war brings into sharp focus the failure of the United Nations (UN) as a negotiator and peacemaker. The inability of the UN to discharge its duties at a crucial time makes one

wonder what the significance of the Organisation is. It is ironic that an Organisation formed to prevent wars has failed miserably to do so on several occasions. As a consequence, nations have suffered a great deal of hardships. The UN's inaction casts suspicion on its neutrality. Many nations have levelled criticisms against the UN for following the dictates of a few powerful nations. Notwithstanding the fact that the ongoing war provided the UN an opportunity to improve the Organisation's public image, nothing much was done.

The futility of the Organisation at crucial times like the ongoing war necessitates its reformation. It is a fact that a war like situation had prevailed in Europe for a long time. However, the UN feigned ignorance about it. The UN failed miserably to bring the warring sides to the negotiation table and de-escalate tensions. The UN

has failed to establish itself as a peacekeeper. It does not have the power to force the member nations to follow its directives either. The right time has come for the 200 member nations of the UN to devise plans to empower it to deal with similar situations.

The first focus must be on restructuring the UN Security Council (UNSC). As the idea of permanent members is not in line with the changing world, it needs to be dispensed with. Members should be selected on rotational basis so that every nation gets a chance to contribute towards establishing world peace. Similarly, veto power must also be abolished. Otherwise, the UNSC cannot function in a significant way. If the UN is not reformed, the body can never discharge its duties as a custodian of world peace.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

Please just wait and watch

Editor,

Apropos the letter, 'The Puzzling Aadhaar Scheme', by Jerome K Diengdoh (ST March 3, 2022), to solve the puzzle, we need to know the origin of Aadhaar and its real meaning as on November 2022 which is 8 months away. The UPA first rolled out Aadhaar in 2010, four years before Modi became Prime Minister of India. The direct beneficiaries were our people all over the country. The scheme is a blessing especially for those beneficiaries of MGNREGA. Those days, before history was badly distorted, Mahatma Gandhi is the name loved by the rural poor. The rural poor, living from hand to mouth have been greatly relieved by MNREGA.

In the past few years Aadhaar has been through many puzzling journeys. But thanks to Supreme Court,

Justice D. Y Chandrachud who will hopefully will be Chief Justice by around November 2022, we will not be puzzled any longer. While hearing the case of Aadhaar and its use beyond a point Justice Chandrachud noted his dissent as appeared on July 10, -2021. The following were his words, "The majority view held by the Constitutional Bench declared Aadhaar an "unparalleled Identity proof that could not be duplicated unlike PAN, ration card or Passport." And what a charge by the Judge that "Aadhaar is Unconstitutional".

And it would be a great relief for our youth if Aadhaar is done away with while applying for a driving license etc.

Yours etc.,
C. F Lyngdoh Mawnai
Shillong 14.

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"The trust of the innocent is the liar's most useful tool."

— Stephen King

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MDA's alibi unconvincing

THE Conrad Sangma-led MDA Government has reached a point where it has to take a call not to allow the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to unearth scams in Meghalaya without the permission of the Government. This is akin to paranoia lest the investigating agency finds skeletons somewhere. But this is expected when a government that is overtly supporting illegal mining and transportation of coal, amongst other wrongdoings like the rice scam. The latest alibi of the MDA Government in response to the illegal mining is that there are not enough boots (read uniformed personnel) on the ground to check these criminal activities. How convenient is that! The question is – how many of those donning the uniform are actually working to check crime and how many are facilitating illegal mining and transportation of coal? That would give a clear picture of policing in Meghalaya. More often than not an FIR ends in 'not enough evidence,' and returns to the person filing it to say that she/he should state in court that the investigation by the official concerned has reached a dead end. This is the rule more than the exception. The exception is that Nidamon Chullet the NPP supporter from Jaintia Hills is finally convicted for murder. Whoever the investigating officer of that case is deserves commendation because it takes a lot to convict a ruling party acolyte.

Congress leader Deborah Marak has correctly stated that the MDA Government lacks the will to check illegal mining and transportation of coal and that its not about manpower constraints. She is also correct in stating that the Congress regime had virtually stopped this illegal trade and the Party paid the price for that when it was rejected in 2018 and when the big sharks (coal mine owners) joined the NPP which promised to lift the ban on coal mining imposed by the National Green Tribunal in 2014.

The emergence of a new claimant to the Nokmaship of Nengchigen, the hotspot for coal mining is a strange coincidence. Her claim that there is no coal mining in Shillong reeks of rank opportunism. And that after the police had seized the coal. There's a limit to lying and the Meghalaya High Court ought to ensure that such opportunists do not mislead its attempts to detect the illegal coal trail. In that aspect the local MLA of the area should know the facts of the matter more than anyone else. There comes a time in the life of a state when its people should unite to reclaim their rights rather than take the route of victimhood and be forced into silence and self-pity. People have to call out corruption, illegality, nepotism et al if they value their rights under the Constitution.

Millet: A neglected crop making a comeback

By Bhogtoram Mawroh & Janak Preet Singh

Recently one of the authors was made aware of the Free Rice campaign launched by the World Food Programme (WFP). The campaign is implemented through the Freerice website and mobile application which allows participants to donate rice to needy families by playing a multiple-choice quiz game. Every correct answer results in ten grains of rice donated via the United Nations World Food Programme. The total score is displayed as mounds of rice and the number of grains earned. The game is relatively simple and those interested can go to this link <https://www.freerice.com/age-screen>. While the initiative is highly commendable and we encourage everyone to go and participate, it also raises some important questions.

The choice of rice as the food of focus is understandable. Presently, rice, maize and wheat supply more than 50% of the world's food energy intake. In other words, the aforementioned crops are the most dominant staples consumed by the majority of the world's population. While many cultures have evidence of rice cultivation, the earliest archaeological evidence comes from central and eastern China and dates to 7000–5000 BCE. The cultivation of wheat, on the other hand, started around 10,000 years ago with its origin being traced back to Southeast Turkey. Maize was also first domesticated by the indigenous people in southern Mexico about 10,000 years ago. From their place of origin, these crops have now spread throughout the world. According to the data provided by the Directorate of Agriculture, Government of Meghalaya, rice and maize are grown by farmers in all the districts of the State. Cultivation of wheat, however, is limited to West Khasi Hills, East Garo Hills, North Garo Hills, West Garo Hills, and South West Garo Hills. At the moment, rice is the most important staple food of the people in the State with maize primarily meant for animal feed. Has this always been the case? If not, what were the other staples that people consumed in the past? What has happened to them now?

Food staples are food (plants or animals or both) that are eaten regularly and supply the major proportion of a person's energy and nutritional needs. They make up the dominant part of a population's diet and vary depending on the plants

and/or animals domesticated in a particular region. For example, in the islands of the South Pacific, roots and tubers such as taro are the traditional food staples while in the Andes Mountains of South America it is quinoa, a grain-like plant. Such plants are known as starchy staples as categorized by FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN) according to the guidelines derived from the 'Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women: A Guide to Measurement' report. According to the Directorate of Agriculture, Government of Meghalaya in 2017-2018 the starchy staples cultivated in Meghalaya are rice, wheat, maize, millet, potato, sweet potato, and tapioca. Among them, millet is an important crop that has been traditionally grown by the indigenous communities of Meghalaya since a very long time.

There is evidence to suggest that the local indigenous community i.e., the Khasis were growing millets (commonly known as krai) since the late 19th Century. Since the Khasis are an ancient group of the Indian sub-continent and millets were probably first cultivated in Asia more than 4,000 years ago, it is highly probable that cultivation of the crop is a very old practice. Indications of this are the traditional festivals which are linked to millets.

In 2015 NESFAS (North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society) and Department of Arts & Culture, Government of Meghalaya brought out the documentary 'Kings Have Resorts/ People Have Songs' during the 2nd International Terra Madre (ITM) that was held in the State. The film was directed by Tarun Bhartiya and based on the research done by H.H. Mohrmen. It is about a weeding song called Long Hai which had not been sung in the village of Syndai (located in War Jaintia) for the last 60 years. Linked with millet, once its cultivation was abandoned, the song was also not performed anymore. The documentary looks at the effort to revive the festival by the local community with women playing an important role. It is certain Long Hai is not the only festival which has been lost as millets receded in importance (another example is provided later).

Just as it must have been the case in the past, millets

are still usually grown in the jhum or shifting cultivation fields where seeds are broadcasted during the sowing season. The seeds are traditional seeds which have been preserved by custodian farmers. The 2018 participatory mapping exercise conducted by NESFAS in Khapmaw and Rasong (villages in Mawkynew Block, East Khasi Hills) reports four millet species, viz., *Digitaria sanguinalis* (commonly known as crabgrass, finger grass and fonio), *Echinochloa crusgalli* (commonly known as finger millet), *Setaria italica* (commonly known as foxtail millet) and *Coix lacryma-jobi* (commonly known as job's tears) being grown by the local community. These included the three varieties of finger millet. Garo Hills reported the additional millet species of *Pennisetum glaucum* (commonly known as pearl millet).

Traditionally, millet is cooked in the same way as rice. In many cases, it is often mixed with rice, the preferred proportion being one part of millet and two parts of rice. Previously a kind of bread was also made out of it. In certain parts of Pynursla, millet was also being used to brew local liquor. Based on an informal conversation it was revealed to one of the authors who has a family in the area, that millet was still being grown until a few decades ago. Now broom and areca nut has become the main crop grown in his village and millet is replaced by food bought from the market. Cultivation of millet is very much linked to the jhum system. With the decline of this most ancient form of farming, the crop might also completely disappear in the future. To make matters worse even in areas where jhum is still strong, cultivation of the crop has started fading.

In Nongtraw, (a village in Khat-ar-shnong Laitkroh Block, East Khasi Hills) although people still practiced jhum, only 2 out of 37 households were cultivating millets. Of the 4 varieties grown previously only one variety remained. In 2012, NESFAS with the support of local custodian farmers like Kong Bibiana Rane among others, revived and promoted the cultivation of millets in the village. Seeds

of the lost varieties were sourced from Nagaland and nearby villages. The village is now growing four varieties of finger millet and job's tears. Similar to Long Hai, the festival of Bom Krai (Millet threshing) was revived in Nongtraw. The initiative also encouraged 13 out of the 46 villages in the Khatarshnong area to rejuvenate the cultivation of millets. Similar impacts were recorded in Mawkynew and some parts of Garo Hills as well.

Millets are often called "Nutri-Cereals" due to their high nutritional values. According to Dr. Aburto, Deputy Director in the Nutrition and Food Systems division of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, compared to other cereals such as wheat, rice or maize, millets can grow under drought conditions, under non-irrigated conditions even in very low rainfall regimes, having a low water footprint. These features along with the fact that they require low maintenance and have disease and pest resistance, millets are also considered as a climate smart crop. Realizing the potential of millets in boosting sustainability, the UN General Assembly recently proclaimed 2023 as the International Year of Millets in March 2021, to promote cultivation as a solution to climate and global food security challenges.

Millet is not the only staple to have been consumed in Meghalaya. As reported by the Syiem of Sohra during a program organized by NESFAS, taro/shriew (*Colocasia esculenta*) was also very important in the past. It is still consumed but has been greatly side-lined by potato introduced in the 1830's by David Scott. Like millets, taro is also nutritionally rich, especially in calcium. Focus on traditional staples is not only about reviving and protecting tradition. But like the Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems to which it belongs, it holds tremendous solutions for solving many global problems including food insecurity and adaptation to climate change. It is time we revive the past to save the future.

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Do's for Meghalaya Government: Run up to the State Budget 2022-23

By Dr Sridhar Kundu

The Meghalaya state government is going to present its budget for 2022-23FY, in the second week of March. There are many expectations from the government looking at various macro-economic challenges, the state is facing at present.

Challenges
The state economy has witnessed a most secular growth rate of about 3 percent per annum during 2011-12 and 2019-20. The covid-19 pandemic caused some additional injury to the economic health of the state during 2020-21 by reducing the growth rate to -7.2 percent.

Lower rate of economic growth of the state led to a stagnancy in the growth of its per-capita income. In 2020-21, the per-capita income of the state was Rs. 56470 (at 2011-12 constant prices) which is about 35 percent less than the per-capita income at all India level. Since 2011-12, the per-capita income of the state has witnessed a declining trend.

The basics of economics say that a stagnant economy does not possess adequate capacity to generate employment opportunities. According to Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), total unemployment rate was 9 percent, 31 percent in urban and 5 percent in rural, in 2019-20. Urban female unemployment rate was 52 percent compared to 20 percent in male.

The Centre for Monitoring of Indian Economy (CMIE) provides a different picture on the state's unemployment. According to this source, unemployment rate stands below 2 percent as on the last week of February, 2022. Further, the sources say that the monthly average unemployment rate in the state has remained below 3 percent during 2018 and 2021.

The above employment statistics by the CMIE sources may not be a representative for the whole state looking at the trend of income and its growth since 2011-12. A stagnant economy at a lower level of equilibrium may not attain full employment. If yes, there is possibility of over employment in the disguised form, particularly in agriculture sector. The disguised unemployment generates negative externalities and impairs growth and productivity.

Further, standard of living of the people in the state is not construed to be improved. According to NSSO 68th round, 2011-12, the poverty ratio of the state was 11 percent. A fall in per-capita income during 2011-12 and 2021-22 confirms the possibility of rising poverty level in the state.

Present status of government finance

On the revenue front, the state government has remained surplus since 2012-13. By revenue surplus, we mean, total revenue receipts over the total revenue expenditure. In 2021-22(BE), total revenue surplus of the state was Rs. 1275 Crore, about Rs. 500 Crore over and above the same in 2012-13. Annual average growth of revenue receipts was about 13.9 percent, stood taller compared to 12.4 percent in revenue expenditure during 2012 and 2021. This financial position of the state government, discipline or dullness, makes clear that it has obediently followed its revenue model while planning its expenditure strategy in every annual budget.

On the capital front, annual average growth of expenditure was about 21 percent during 2012-13 and 2021-22. The state government has resorted to open market borrowings to feed its capital expenditure on various socio-economic sec-

tors. These borrowings over the years have accumulated to cause debt burden for the state. According to CAG report, 2021, total debt of the state government was Rs. 11533 crore, about 32 percent of the state GSDP.

Do's for the Government

The government needs to increase its present capital spending limit and prepare a long run growth strategy for the state. Average growth of capital spending during 2012-13 and 2021-22 was about 20 percent. In the year 2020-21, the capital expenditure was two times higher than its previous year. The government needs to priorities certain sectors in its capital spending strategy.

a. Agriculture remained a key sector in the state economy. In 2019-20, the agriculture and allied sector contributed about 15 percent of its GSDP and 52 percent of state's total employment. The sector faces lower rate of growth and productivity. Crop intensity is one of the lowest in the state showing that many agricultural land sown once in a year and remained barren after the first harvest. Capital spending in this sector is needed on the areas of extension programs in use of technology, creating infrastructure for better market access. This would help increasing productivity and help farmers get a better price of the product.

b. Besides agriculture, the rural economy needs additional support from the government in terms of generating physical infrastructure in health, education, and road transport. This activity would create wage employment generation in the rural areas. In this way, the additional labour force in agriculture sector would be pushed out and participate in productive activities.

c. According to PLFS 2019-20, about 48 percent of workers in the state are self-employed in various sectors. These workers need additional support in terms of better credit access to grow in their occupation. The state government needs to lay out a plan for creation and growth of startups.

d. Dependency ratio is one of the highest in Meghalaya. According to PLFS, 2019-20, about 68 percent of population fall under this category who live on others' earning. Women play a key role in the development of family and nation. The state government needs to emphasize on the gender specific schemes in its expenditure model. Strengthening of the women self-help groups would help in improving the living standard and bettering quality life.

e. Last but not the least, a bigger push for the tourism sector is the need of the hour. It would help in creating local employment and local products to be marketed with a better price.

In conclusion, the government needs to improve its spending behaviour and move towards a higher intervention in terms of public spending to generate growth and employment. Having surplus in the revenue account may improve the stature of the government but it has certain economic cost. Further, every deficit is not bad. Public participation also creates new energy and helps crowding in private investment.

At present, the state economy is facing a lower rate of economic growth, lower level of income, higher level of unemployment and poverty. The economy needs a big push, and a higher public spending can leapfrog the economy from its present state.

(The writer is Sr. Economist, Bharti Institute of Public Policy (BIPP) Indian School of Business, Mohali)

Letters to the Editor

Is Kharlukhi speaking in tongues?

Editor,
It would have been better had Mr WR Kharlukhi, (MP Rajya Sabha) been blessed with grey matter; then he would have been able to comprehend and elicit correctly what the NPP spokesperson and MLA Mr Marcuse N Marak had stated earlier on the protests against the then democratically elected CEM, Mr Rakesh A Sangma. Mr Kharlukhi should refrain from speaking 'in tongues.' We, Meghalayans are yearning for leaders and not misleaders

Regarding Mr Kharlukhi's observation on the unfortunate, tragic incident that occurred on the September 30, 2005 at Tura and Williamnagar, those deaths still bring back haunting memories and the loss of human lives will never be forgotten. But to club the two incidents is downright inappropriate and devious in nature.

The restructured Headquarters of the MBOSE is still very much in Tura and it has been further strengthened since then.

The statement on the

2005 incident does not enhance his reputation as our representative.

Yours etc.,
Tyron D'Brass
Tura

'Fails' is an appropriate word for the UN

Editor,
Apropos of Venu GS's letter 'UN fails to prevent wars' (ST March 3, 2022), I love the word 'fails' read in conjunction with the word UN. It tells us the story of the UN right from 1945 till 2022. 'Fails' is a word in the present tense and appropriately selected as the UN had, has and will fail to protect wars. The UN now has 193 members. The most sophisticated new organisation born out of the UN is the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) comprising the Big 5 nations namely China, UK, France, Soviet Union (Russia) and USA. Currently Russia is under threat of being removed from the UNSC.

The UNSC has one strange peculiarity which is the 'Veto' power. The word Veto in Latin means

'I forbid.' In short democratic principles are thrown to the wind. When Hafeez Sayeed in the aftermath of the Pulwama attack was to be classed as a global terrorist by the UNSC, China vetoed that move. This move is detrimental to India. And for this Nehru was blamed as it was he who helped China gain ascendancy to the UNSC. How could Nehru foresee this in 1955 when he could not predict the 1962 Chinese invasion?

The UN had failed in the resolution of 1947 on the status of the Palestinians where Jerusalem was to be a shared domain with Israel. The UN also failed to stop bombings by Putin and Assad on schools in Idlib. African colonies that suffered during the time of the French colonisers are bloodstained with wars involving government and terrorists which are yet unresolved till date.

War correspondents cried aloud and begged the UN to take action in Myanmar where people are hard hit by the junta with the Rohingyas endlessly shuttling between Bay of Bengal sea and Indonesian sea. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Chief Mitchell Bachillet promised to restore the ruins of Israeli bombing within months but the Pal-

estinians are still living in ruins on the streets. Countless acts of omissions and commissions are there for all to see. The UNHRC is engaged only in unfulfilled promises.

But in spite of UN failure, it would seem that the nuclear threat by Putin is hyperbolic, shocked as he was by the Ukrainian resilience. We have witnessed how doctors, scientists and engineers fought Covid 19. Let us pray that those fingers on top of nuke buttons belong to the same heart like Covid 19 life savours and they would not press the red buttons even if the warmongers and destroyers of the planet order them to do so.

Yours etc.,
F. Lyngdoh
Via email

The other side of war

Editor,
The most nerve-racking news of March 4, 2022 is the missile strike at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear reactor in the southeastern city of Enerhodar. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) confirmed that the missiles belong to the Russians and quite understandably so for

the plant belongs to Ukrainians. The good news is the announcement by IAEA that the fire is under control.

But the news on our stranded students was very bad. One student, Harjot Singh, while trying to escape along with friends in a taxi to the station was shot several times and could come back to his senses only after waking up in Kyib hospital to find bullet wounds on both legs and the left chest. We can only wish him speedy recovery. Thankfully he is mentally strong.

There are students from Kyib and Sumy at two hiding places. Both have declared there's no more food, water nor electricity which means they are in dire straits. Worse, both these groups are caught in between two forces, the aggressor and the oppressed. Of course it is heard that Russians buses are available but only at the border. And nobody from the Embassy could assure safe passage. Sad indeed that the Indian Embassy did not respond to calls from several students.

Herein comes the important query as to why so many thousands of Indian students have had to make a beeline for Ukrainian medical colleges. The reasons are

simple. Most people cannot afford the capitation fees charged by medical colleges in India or the coaching fees for NEET. This is what India should be thinking about henceforth. This brain drain has to be plugged. We pray and hope that normalcy returns the sooner the better. And we also pray for those still stranded to return home soon.

While all the above ordeals and the fervent prayer to Prime Minister Modi from bunkers were heard, what was seen on TV news channels is our Union MOS Defence urging the students "Thank You Modi Ji," before they boarded the IAF aircrafts. Elated, the minister then asked them to chant, "Bharat Mata Ki Jai." There was an eerie silence until the minister started and the room echoed louder from the rescued students. The few IAF officers did not seem happy with this blatant display of pseudo nationalism by the minister.

Yours etc.,
J. Kharmih,
Via email

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

Homefront troubles for the 'insane tsar'



Vladimir Putin's military aggression against Ukraine is meeting more opposition from Ukrainians than he expected. The Russian president also saw widespread condemnation of his military's aggression in Ukraine at the UN General Assembly. But the opposition Putin faces domestically in Russia is also likely giving him cause for alarm.

There are clear reasons, however, to be sceptical of claims that Putin will soon be deposed in a palace coup – or that the existing elite could be removed by mass protests.

There are three broad categories of Russians who have voiced their opposition to the war, albeit in different ways. It helps to visualise these as three concentric circles, starting from the largest and closing in.

Anti-war street protests attended by regular citizens have swept the country. Within the first week of Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, at least 7,669 people were detained by police at anti-war protests across Russia according to OVD-Info, a Russian human rights organisation.

Those detained include people all the way from primary school children to an elderly pensioner in St Petersburg.

Jailed opposition figure Alexei Navalny has called for daily anti-war protests in and outside Russia, referring to Putin as an "insane

tsar".

Cultural elite and the intelligentsia

Portions of the intellectual and cultural elite have also voiced their opposition to war – from TV celebrities to sportspeople and scientists. Beyond individual statements, a flurry of open letters have been signed, including by 44 of the country's top chess players and by academics.

There are already cases, though, of signatories facing negative consequences, including losing their jobs.

As well as the detentions at protests, this serves as a clear reminder of the bravery of those publicly opposing the war.

Economic and political elite

What about important economic actors? With the enormous fortunes that stand to be lost because of the west's unprecedented sanctions on Russia, it is plausible that they might speak out.

Some already have. A few of Russia's wealthiest people – for example, the oligarchs Mikhail Fridman and Oleg Deripaska – have called for peace. One of the country's largest oil companies, Lukoil, has also called for an end to the war in Ukraine.

But there is clear caution. Calling for peace is not the same as directly criticising Putin, as Fridman has acknowledged.



Some public dissent has also been shown already by minor political officials: for instance, a Russian adviser to the World Bank and a Russian delegate at a UN climate conference.

What about people higher up the political food chain?

Today's Kremlinology has begun to resemble that of the Soviet era, where the opacity of politics forced western analysts to scrutinise material like photographs of official events to glean insights into intra-elite dynamics.

In similar fashion, people are now trying to read the body language of senior officials during meetings with Putin for signs of disquiet.

One notable example relates to an image of Elvira Nabiullina, the head of Russia's Central Bank, captured looking glum with her arms crossed and eyes down at the opposite end to Putin of a comically long table.

So far, however, there are no signs of significant cracks at the top.

And that's no surprise – Pu-



tin has surrounded himself with hyper-loyalists, the inner circle of which share his impression of a west intent on undermining Russia and his rule.

Even if members of the broader political elite are deeply shocked by – or disagree with – Russia's assault on Ukraine, the costs of voicing dissent or trying to exit the system are overwhelmingly high. For the moment, at least.

The true depth and breadth of opposition

It's very difficult to measure the true extent of opposition to the war – and to Putin personally – across these three groups, as well as to work out how this might change over time.

The Russian president's press secretary, Dmitry Peskov, has said that the "level of support for the president, for his decisions, and

his actions is very, very high". According to the Kremlin-friendly VTsIOM polling agency, 68% of Russians support Russia's activities in Ukraine, with another Kremlin-aligned agency, FOM, reporting that 71% of Russians trust in Putin following the start of Russia's military operation, up from 60% just before the invasion.

How can this be? Russian state media continues to portray a very different reality to the coverage in western media. Rather than a full-scale assault, the narrative is of a "special operation" to protect ethnic Russians in the so-called "republics" of Donetsk and Luhansk from "genocide" being carried out by Ukraine's "neo-Nazi" government.

Words like "invasion" and "war" are banned in Russian media. Independent outlets have been blocked or shut down. And Russians face the prospect of harsh punishment for challenging the state's line on the conflict.

A bleak outlook

The degree of opposition going forward depends on a number of factors, including the Russian military's ability to subdue Ukrainian forces. The scale of economic hardship in Russia will also influence public opinion. But a lot will also depend on the Russian state's capacity and willingness to repress dissent at home and continue to control the narrative. We'll see economic problems and the deaths of Russian soldiers continue to be blamed by the Kremlin on the west.

Putin has staked his survival on this. And we've seen what he is capable of doing to critical voices: the incarceration of Navalny and the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko in 2006 being just two examples. Given the steps that have already been taken to respond to domestic opposition, it is likely that – in the short term, at least – we will see a doubling down of repression, including to prevent any cascade of dissent that might shake the very foundations of the regime. (*The Conversation*)

From Hero to anti-hero: Putin's fictional transformation



By Vikas Datta

In his initial stint in power, he was lauded for stabilising his country and restoring its great power status after the chaos and drift of the 1990s. Later, Russian President Vladimir Putin ended up facing criticism for the same reason. People may adulate him or despise him following his recent actions in Ukraine, but they cannot ignore him.

Initially perceived (in the Western world at least) as a reliable partner shoring up Russia – an acknowledged power across two continents and still influential across the world – he began to be seen, from one side of the political spectrum, as a defiant maverick, an autocrat, then a tyrant; and now, following the Ukraine invasion, as a war-monger.

Others may see him as a prominent figure resisting the hegemony of the sole superpower, and its allies, who are seeking to impose their own values in a disparate world.

Putin's depiction in fiction, mostly of the English-speaking world, has seen him move from a valuable support/mentor figure to a spy-turned-political mastermind, who, if not evil, is cold-blooded and definitely not nice as the Cold War seems certain to make a comeback with Russia striding back on to the world stage. In some Russian literature, subsequently translated into English, the references are wide-ranging, ranging from prophetic to the fantastic.

Dissident, exiled writer Vladimir Voinovich's *Moscow 2042* (1986; English translation, 1987), which came out in the days when the Soviet Union showed no signs of its collapse a few years ahead,

was uncannily prophetic in depicting a future "shrunken, post-Soviet Russia run by a former KGB spy who had been stationed in Germany". Putin, however, first appeared in accomplished US spy novelist Robert Littell's *The Company: A Novel of the CIA* (2002).

The novel, which chronicles the Cold War from its beginning down to its winding down (a brief hiatus only, as we would learn subsequently) in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, through some of the key episodes – the spy games in Berlin, the Bay of Pigs episode, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the 1991 coup against Mikhail Gorbachev, among others – all from the American viewpoint, and featuring a legion of real-life characters, brings him on stage in the end.

As some of the American operatives gather in Moscow to forestall the coup, and make sure it cannot recur, he is referred to as an up-and-coming politician. He appears in one scene – silent and unsmiling – and is tipped for support in his rise.

Putin reappears in Henry Porter's *Brandenburg* (2005), a gritty espionage tale set in East Germany in the months before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

East German art historian (and former spy) Rudi Rosenharte is hauled back into service by the Stasi to contact his former lover (now working for NATO) for some information. Our hero, who is a double agent, knows it is a ploy by his other masters – MI6 and CIA – to contact him for their needs, and as he juggles between his alliances, the Soviets get into the game too.

A seemingly non-descript KGB lieutenant colonel, heading his service's Dresden base, makes an appearance, helping Rosenharte in various ways – protecting him, giving him key information, and even intervening to free him from jail. If the description and designation were not enough, he is even identified as the future Russian leader.

This Putin is also present at a seminal event – the evening press conference where an East German minister jumped the gun on easing travel restrictions, triggering the

massive crowds on both sides of the Berlin Wall that, in a few hours, brought down the nearly three-decade-old barrier.

Subsequent appearances are not very complimentary.

Set in Russia of 2005, Martin Cruz Smith's *Stalin's Ghost* (2007) repeatedly refers to Putin, who was then beginning his second term, though he does not make an appearance himself.

The book, part of the investigator Arkady Renko series, focuses on the country's faultlines – war crimes in Chechnya, criminal elements in security agencies, and the rise of undesirable sentiments – "under the former spy in the Kremlin".

Charles Cumming's *The Trinity Six* (2011) swings the other way.

Based on the premise that there was a sixth man in the infamous Cambridge spy ring – five highly-placed MI6 officials spying for the Soviet Union – it sees the hero, a Cold War historian, trying to expose the last traitor. Ranged against him are the Russian regime, headed by President "Sergey Platonov", and British intelligence.

Why does Platonov want to keep this sixth man hidden? Because something – which would not look too good on his record – happened between the two in East Germany, where he once served as a mid-ranking KGB officer!

David R Stokes' *Camelot's Cousin* (2013, 2nd edition) is based on a quite similar premise, except that here the hidden spy is from an Oxford version of the Cambridge ring – and was a close adviser to President John F Kennedy at various key moments, including the Cuban missile crisis.

Naturally, but a little implausibly, the Russians, under Putin – who, as an ex-spy, wants a secret to remain one – will go to any end to stop the name from coming out. Mayhem ensues.

Red Sparrow (2013), by ex-CIA operative Jason Matthews, is a riveting account of the no-holds-barred clandestine struggle between the CIA and SVR (the KGB's successor) – reminiscent of the Cold War at its height – as the Russians strive to unearth an American mole and the CIA tries to save him.

Appearing a handful of times – including bare-chested in the middle of a strenuous exercise (in line with his projected macho image) – the omniscient Putin is not only fully aware of the activities of his spies, who, as ruthless as they may be, are on tenterhooks in his presence – quite like in

Stalin's time.

Putin is shown actively directing the covert operations and, in the end, arranging the brutal but effective contingency plan to ensure the traitor does not escape.

He reappears in the sequels – *Palace of Treason* (2015), where the heroine comes under his gaze, and *The Kremlin's Candidate*, where he orchestrates a plan to eliminate a high-ranking US official so that a Russian mole can fill the ensuing vacancy.

Two books – in 2006 and 2013 – seemed to foretell the coming Ukraine crisis.

In fact, *Third Empire: Russia Which Should Be* (2006), by Russian politician Mikhail Yuriev (who subsequently emigrated to the US), is set in 2054, when following World War III, early in the 21st century, there are five political entities left, including the Third Russian Empire, covering all of what was the Soviet Union, as well as all of Europe and Turkey, Israel, Lebanon, and Jordan too.

This is due to the reign of "Vladimir II the Restorer", under whom Russia has emerged victorious over the US and NATO after a tumult in Ukraine, which, as a result of a "rebellion against the pro-Western government", has to separate its south and eastern part, which asks to become a part of Russia.

The remaining part is also taken over, leading to a new Cold War, which sees Russia leave all international organisations and agreements, including the ones for nuclear non-proliferation.

US thriller writer Tom Clancy, known for his Jack Ryan series, seemed to have anticipated the coming crisis too. In the posthumously-published *Command Authority* (2013), Russia, which had even joined NATO (!) to forestall Chinese aggression in *The Bear and the Dragon* (2000), returns to its Cold War villain status under ex-KGB president Valeri Volodin, who to regain control over ex-Soviet states provokes a crisis in first Estonia, and then a bigger one in Ukraine.

There are more like Michael Honig's *The Senility of Vladimir P* (2016), set two decades in the future, where the eponymous leader is pensioned off to a dacha on the outskirts of Moscow and sporadically recalls his stint in power.

Given the present happenings, the Russian leader is likely to appear in more works of fiction – and not in a positive light.

Ukraine-Russia conflict, climate change to be part of this year's Jaipur Literature Festival

The 15th edition of Jaipur Literature Festival, to be held at Hotel Clarks Amber here from March 5 to 14, will focus on Ukraine-Russia conflict, climate change, new world order, along with art, travel and history, among others.

The 15th edition will also feature 15 Indian languages and have specific sessions on Rajasthani heritage and culture, he added.

State Tourism Minister Vishvendra Singh said, "I am delighted that the Jaipur Literature Festival is returning on-ground in the Pink City. I believe that the Festival will provide an exceptional platform for both Indian and global authors and thought leaders to engage and strengthen our literary heritage and culture."

The Festival will showcase a variety of sessions exhibiting the dialects of Rajasthan-centric literature. At one session, poet and litterateur Chandra Prakash Deval will discuss languages, literature, poetry and music of the desert state with writer and poet Anukrti Upadhyay.

The rich oral, linguistic and literary traditions of Rajasthan find their voice in a variety of dialects, although Rajasthan still awaits official recognition in the schedule of Indian languages.

Rajasthan has long been a dynamic cultural centre and home to prestigious art forms.

At a session on the treasures at the Jaipur Court, author Vandana Bhandari and historian Giles Tillotson will be in conversation with historian Rima Hooja to discuss the magnificent treasures commissioned and collected over centuries by the Jaipur Court.

A panel discussion will be held with historians Yashaswini Chandra and Rima Hooja, discussing the powerful warrior king Maharana Pratap and his legendary horse Chetak. Together they will explore the legend of the resilient pair. (*IANS*)



ICON. LEGEND. THE KING.

Warnie – a cricketing genius who lived a life of ‘no regrets’

When the news broke it was tempting to conclude swiftly that Shane Warne died as he had lived. On holiday in Thailand, nudge nudge. The tabloids, especially in Britain where he lived much of his life, had luridly chronicled his life. Many may have speculated that he died living life to the fullest.

As it turned out, Warnie, who was just 52, had declared he was on a serious health kick, trying to lose weight and get in condition. Previously, he had even managed to turn weight loss into a scandal, when he failed a drugs test at the 2003 Cricket World Cup in South Africa and was sent home. He was ridiculed for blaming his mother for recommending the banned diuretic.

To say Warnie was no stranger to controversy is as banal as observing that he was a superlative cricketer. One of five Wisden Cricketers of the [20th] Century, cricket fans pore over his bowling record with the same forensic eye as the paparazzi tracked his carousing. It was Warnie who delivered the “ball of the century” in 1993, perhaps the most famous dismissal in modern cricket, to a perplexed English captain, Mike Gatting. It was a piece of sporting sorcery that will never be forgotten.

These contrasting images lead us to ask who is Shane Warne, and why does he matter so much to so many?

Warnie: the soap opera

There are few sportspeople interesting enough to have an entire musical devoted to them, but Eddie Perfect found plenty of material

for his 2008 production *Shane Warne: The Musical*. Its subject may be much admired by cricket followers around the world, but he is also well known to a much wider audience precisely because he has generated so much tabloid fare.

Warnie is often presented as the lovable larrikin, a masculine archetype long celebrated in Australia. This is a colonial-era image of young men who mocked the stuffy propriety of the British with cheeky, anti-authoritarian attitudes and behaviour.

Perfectly suited to play a key role in the “postcolonial pantomime” that is the Ashes cricket series, he was loud, untidy, disrespectful and, crucially, very good at beating the Poms at their own game.

Warnie was radically different from other Australian cricket heroes like Sir Don Bradman and Richie Benaud. When the latter died in 2015, I reflected on his transition from on-field rebel to sober commentator.

Shane Warne also made the move to television commentary, but whereas Benaud offered dignified consideration, Warnie was animated and opinionated. Restraint was never part of Warnie’s armoury, although his successful career as a professional poker player and the subtlety of his bowling were evidence of a shrewd, calculating mind behind the brash exterior.

But Warnie was a different type of larrikin from older cricketers like Dennis Lillee and Rod Marsh, who died on the same day in a different time zone.

Lillee and Marsh were creatures



of the cricket world, aggressive practitioners of the art of demolishing opposition teams.

Warnie moved well beyond this sphere, as the emergent global sport star system fully embraced gossip-based entertainment.

He was both product and producer of the sporting celebrity that now moves effortlessly across the cultural landscape. He unblushingly endorsed hair loss treatment. Warnie’s doomed engagement to British film star Liz Hurley was a classic case of a relationship conducted largely in the media spotlight.

The arrival of social media, and the pocket cameras always on hand to upload “evidence” of a transgression, was crucial in shaping the world’s knowledge of Warnie the man when he was not performing astonishing feats on the cricket field.

He is, therefore, much closer to the postmodern cohort embodied by “bad as I wannabe” US basketballer Dennis Rodman than traditional Australian sporting larrikins.

More than just a cricketer

There is no need to persuade cricket fans to remember Shane Warne. His phenomenal record

places him firmly in the cricket pantheon. But he is also important to sport in general and beyond the world of bat and ball.

Warnie reminds us that sport is always much more than performance on the field. It is not just a question of what is done, but how. There is as much fascination with the back story as the big game.

An indifferent student from suburban Melbourne, Warnie was socially mobile purely because of his sporting prowess. This everyman did extraordinary things with bravado, but was also a flawed personality.

From his ill-advised early fraternisation with bookmakers to his feuding with past and current players, Warnie became Warnie, almost a caricature of the sporty Aussie bloke loved by some and disdained by others.

Warnie compulsively sought and attracted attention. Despite his expression of sadness about his family relationships in the documentary *Shane*, he insisted “I smoked, I drank, I bowled a bit. No regrets”.

Onlookers alternatively admire and criticise this life led on its own terms. It is in the conversational space between that Warnie lives on. *(The Conversation)*

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MAR 6, 2022

Venus conjunct Mars on your solar return chart and it will give exceptional results. You will make good progress in your job/work. In regard to your high work efficiency few more assignments may be entrusted to you. You will take strong decisions in your business. It will help you enhance your share of the profit comprehensively. You will also adopt new methods to do your work. You will make a good impression on your bosses. You need to be careful in your monetary deals. Owing to your intelligence and adaptability you will do even the routine work with enthusiasm. Working in a collective way will give you fantastic results. Your liberal outlook will make life a happy sojourn. You will have good bonding with your mate/spouse. You may succeed in solving others problems as well. Your popularity will rise.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It will be a favorable week. Some work that has been struck and giving you stress will now finish without any obstacles. You will be able to transform yourself and sort out problems. You will be busy in meetings and conferences. Your peers and superiors will support you. Even your perspective towards life will become more positive. You will move with the changing times. You will prove yourself as a true friend of all. You will help your colleagues and family members. The love between brothers and sisters will increase. You will be gentle towards your juniors. Your mood will be good because of which your work will also be good. Your efforts will bring lot of profits. You will receive good news from a relative of yours. You may go on a travel trip with family members. It is a time to relax and chill out.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

It will be a money receiving week. You will get success in your efforts in business. You will plan about your child’s marriage, career studies. You will join a family function too. Your meeting with an important person will be fruitful. You will also have a salary hike in your job. You will also thank your good times. You will carry out your responsibilities very nicely. You will get success in court matters. You will also spend money on purchase and maintenance of your vehicles, machines and other things. A fight at your workplace need to be avoided. You will share wonderful bonding with your mate. You will acquire knowledge. Children studying in school, college will become more serious towards studies. You will make an investment and your abroad trip will be a success. You will be enthusiastic about your future.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Time is favorable. You will remain strong physically and feel positive about your future. You will make best use of your appropriate resources in your work. You will be more creative. This will make you more productive and get you lot of money. Time will be spent along with your skills. You will make a good progress in life and do other tasks along with your skills. You will spend money on upgrading your lifestyle. You will have monetary gains. The time will be spent splendidly in the company of your family members. You will finish all your household tasks easily and seriously. You will be busy in romance, party or entertainment to make yourself feel relaxed. Both your friends and foes will play an important role in your life. You will watch developments with lot of interests.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

These are brilliant days, money and wealth will keep coming. After a lot of hard work and efforts that you have been able to put, you will be able to accomplish all the works. You will be diligent to increase your earnings. The coordination between husband and wife will be great. You will be able to think about yourself. People of marriageable age will get good offers. Your respect and dignity in society will increase. You will meet extra pressure you face in your work with lot of confidence. You will be able to keep your problems at bay by using your intelligence. You will also take part in some family function. There will be an increase your wealth. Your health will remain perfect. You will get the blessings of your elders.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

It is time to re-assess your priorities in life. You will be overburdened with responsibilities. And it will be difficult for you to coup up with the pressures of work. It is equally important to not lose your focus. You also have to remain in the good books of your seniors. It is also good for you to remain away from discord and dispute. Keep a check on your speech. You will have a sign of relief. You will spend most of your time at home. Students will be able to complete their work on time. You will get full support of your spouse and children. You will make best use of your talent. You will be kept busy in your work. You will set your goals and then start working upon them. This is the time for self analysis and self reflection. Time is on your side.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

The placement of planets is favorable for you. You will have to face tough competition at your workplace. You will also prove your intelligence to everyone. You will also receive unexpected benefits. You will be successful in your endeavors to earn more money. You will be busy in social and family matters. Some positive development will lift your status. You will feel calm to the core. People who work as government

officials will receive special bonus or opportunities. You will also have the true support of your friends. Time will be in your favor. Make best use to it. These are good days for money matters. Your name and fame will spread. You will be successful in all your tasks. Every task will go according to your plan.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

It is time to prosper and make progress in your life. You will receive good news from somewhere. You will be expectant of the benefit you may receive in the future. Guests will arrive at your home. You will welcome him/her pompously. You will share good bonding with your spouse. A job done at your workplace will bring lot of applause for you. You will plan to buy a new vehicle. You will finish all your important tasks with ease. You will also finish project that was incomplete for a long time. You will also play an important role in resolving an outstanding issue. You will get support from your home. You will finish your tasks with excitement and you will also receive its benefits. There will be an increase in your earnings.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You will be in a relax mood. You will also try to strengthen your ties with your dear ones and elders. You will want to do a lot for the people you care about. There will be gains in your business. You will plan new things for your house. Those applying for government jobs will get success. New opportunities will also come in your business. There will be an increase in your income. You will do noble deeds. Your marketing skills will also stand out. As it is, you will pay more attention to quality than quantity. The time is auspicious. A marriage function can take place in your family. You will also look after the career of your children and also plan to invest. You will work hard to bring yourself and your family on the road to success and prosperity. You will establish a dialogue with one and all.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

You will be busy in family functions and will attend weddings and parties. Your mood will be upbeat and you will have wonderful moments in the company of your near and dear ones. You will receive some reward or award for your contributions in your field of work. You will also have monetary gains as there will be an increase in income. You will also do overtime work. This will be an improvement in your work. Your image will also improve. People will be jealous of your success but it will not affect you at all. You will also get a auspicious or good news. You will get help in an official matter but it is better to move ahead with mutual understanding and compromise. Husband and wife will share a good understanding. You will have the solution to everything.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

These are days to move ahead in your job/business. You will desire to learn something new. It is knowledge-enhancing days. You will also get good business offers. You will also get promoted in your job. There will be mutual understanding between husband and wife. Everyone in the family will give you lot of respect. Your elders will bless you. And your siblings will listen to you. You will have to make efforts to recover money given as loan. Take care of your luggage while travelling. You will get a first hand account of your work and business. You will interact directly with people. You will be victorious over your enemies or opponents. Work that was lying incomplete will get completed. With a positive attitude your efficiency at work will increase.

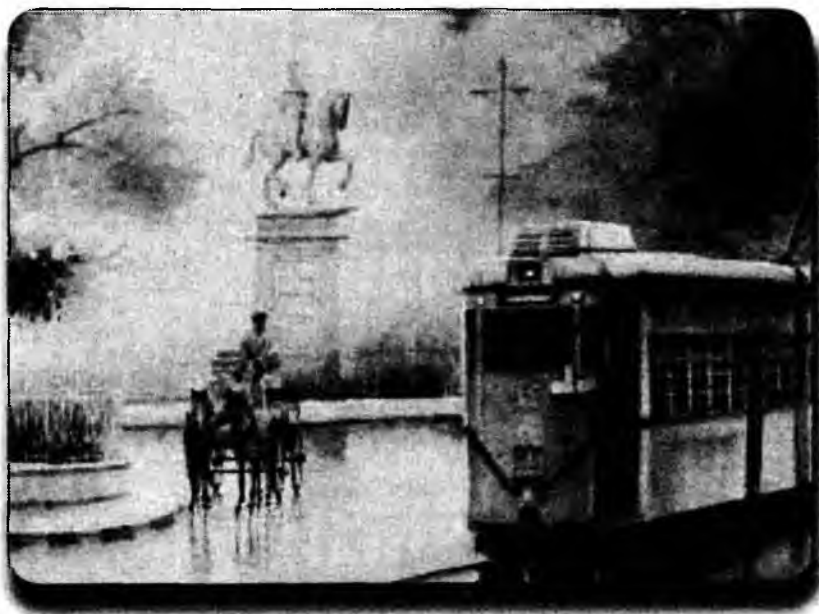
Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You will get lot of fame and fame for your noble deeds. Your worth in the society will increase. Your self-confidence will be high. You will also purchase new items for your house. You will also sell/purchase a flat, house or commercial property. You plans for getting success in your business will increase. Your health will also improve. Availability of things will bring happiness in your life and help to make you feel secure. You will spend most of your time on entertainment and fun activities. There will be a situation of changes in your life which will come as a positive development. The atmosphere at your workplace will be amiable. You will get support of your peers and bosses. Obstacles and troubles will keep coming your way but you will deal with them intelligently.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

The placement of planets this week is such that you will feel more energetic than usual. Your efforts will bring in more money that you have expected. You will get lot of gains from your contacts. Your colleagues will support you fully. You will maintain a balance between work and home. You will also maintain a timetable for your activities. You will also feel mental peace. Troubles that had been worrying you for some time will vanish. Despite efforts made by your opponents, they will not be successful. The time will be fruitful for you. Your financial status will be better than before. Feuds for asset or property division will be solved with the help of a third person. You will put your best efforts for the achievement of your targets.

Bombay Art Society’s 130th exhibition



The Bombay Art Society (BAS), founded in 1888, one of the oldest non-profit art institutions in the Asian subcontinent promoting visual arts for 132 years, is presenting its 130th annual art exhibition.

The BAS annual art exhibition, the only art exhibition in India that is held continuously for 134 years except for a few years during the first and second world war, is considered as the talent hunt in the country.

The selected 240 artworks hand-picked from a total of 2500 entries received from all over India through a highly refined selection process involving art experts at every stage of selection are presented in this exhibition.

The inauguration of the annual art exhibition is scheduled at 5.00 pm on March 1, at Jehangir Art Gallery at the hand of Governor of Maharashtra Bhagat Singh Koshiyari and Chairperson of JSW Foundation Sangita Jindal.

Lakshman Surybhan Chavan Painting, Swayveden. 48 x 48 Inches Acrylic on Canvas.

The Bombay art society has started Roopdhar Lifetime Samman in the field of visual art for the last seventeen years.

This year we are felicitating one of the great artists and Shri Ravi Paranjape with the Roopdhar

lifetime achievement award which carries a citation and one Lakh rupees cash as a token of love.

The Roopdhar lifetime achievement award will be conferred on Shri Ravi Paranjape on March 1, at the time of the inauguration of the annual art exhibition.

Mangesh Patil, who works in a realistic style and excels at portraiture bagged this year’s Bendre-Husain scholarship whereas Laxman Chavan’s Acrylic canvas in semi-abstract idiom got him Lalibhai Dharamdas Bhambhani scholarship.

The Sandhya Misra Scholarship is presented to Swapnesh Vaigankar for his unique artworks. A perfect fusion of visual arts elements.

Sagar Kamble Painting, Black Rain. 48 x 48 Inches, Mixed media on Canvas.

Sagar Kamble’s Black Rain in mixed media on canvas attracted the judge’s attention, making him the winner of this year’s highest prize, the Governor’s Award which carries rupees one lakh in cash and certificate.

The Bombay Art Society gold medal which carried rupees fifty-one thousand cash, certificate and gold medal is given to Vikas Malhara, for his stunning abstract work. The artworks of Ketan Khutle, Sheelvanth Yadgiri, Vinod

Chavan, Rohit Bawadekar, Nema Ram, Basavaraj Achar KR and Harshwaradhan Devtale submitted for the exhibition outside and own them various awards which will be presented on March 1, at Jehangir Art Gallery.

This year the award-winning entries include artists from various cities in Karnataka, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and West Bengal whereas art students who won awards are from many cities in Maharashtra, Goa, Gujarat and West Bengal.

The all India annual art exhibition has been an important art event on the calendar of visual arts events in the country since its beginning in 1888; today it has assumed the form of mega art event for the artists’ community in the western parts of India... not only western parts of India but it is an important event for artists in eastern and southern parts of India as The Bombay Art Society receives exhibition entries as far away as Delhi, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala from many years.

This year, 48 awards to the artists in the categories like paintings, sculptures, graphics, photography along with the Bendre-Husain scholarship, Lalibhai Dharamdas Bhambhani and Sandhya Misra scholarship are presented to the young artists.

Amol Pawar Painting, Old Lane Panel. 12 X 18 Inches Watercolor On Paper.

Bombay Art Society’s scholarships & awards have been a great inspiration in the formative years of today’s many master painters like JP Ganguly, Ravi Shankar Rawal, H Majumdar, Amrita Shergil, SL Haldankar, KK Hebbar, NS Bendre, Badri Narayan, AA Almelkar, SH Raza, KH Ara, Mohan Samant, Jatin Das, Prabhakar Kolte and many other younger established names.

The art journey of many Indian artists of renown has at some time or the other benefited from the munificence and magnificence of the Bombay Art Society’s past. *(IANSlife)*

*"A thousand years may scarce form a state.
An hour may lay it in ruins."*

—Lord Byron

The Shillong Times

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Churning before 2024

GRANTED that not too much need be read into the outcome of local body polls vis-à-vis the political climate, the results of the civic polls in West Bengal, swept by the ruling Trinamool Congress, are educative. These must be seen in the context of a nationwide churning at the political level in the run-up to the general elections two years hence. To this will be added the impact of the assembly election results in the five states that will be known on March 10. Put together, a formal opinion poll on national politics might have emerged by then.

Polling less than 13 per cent of the votes and winning no civic body but only 53 wards across West Bengal, the BJP has demonstrated its hopelessness in the state and cut a sorry figure nationwide. This was against the 38 per cent votes the BJP polled there in the 2021 assembly polls and the 40 per cent of votes and 18 Lok Sabha seats it got in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. The results in West Bengal have repeatedly reinforced not just the superiority of the ruling Trinamool Congress but also the impenetrable, unassailable strength of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. No politician in West Bengal had, after Jyoti Basu, acquired an aura as imposing as Banerjee in state politics. The iterations of election results in the state obviously give her the courage to pursue her dream of grabbing power in Delhi and be India's Prime Minister in place of Narendra Modi. Bengalis, despite their high interest in politics, could never politically lead India though several PMs have come and gone. Today, for such aspirants, the only silver lining is the perceived erosion in the strength of the BJP at the national level, which might create conditions for its exit from power in 2024.

But the problem is, Banerjee is not the only hopeful among the Opposition ranks for the PM's post. Telangana chief minister Chandrashekar Rao, the other hopeful has camped in Delhi for a week to engage in talks with other Opposition figures. This, after he declared at a public meeting that he plans to soon take up an important job in Delhi and sought Telangana people's blessings for that. What he aims at could be the PM's post. Nitish Kumar from Bihar is testing the waters in Delhi. Maratha leader Sharad Pawar thinks he can manipulate things in national politics. Congress and Rahul Gandhi can't be written off; they still have their own relevance over and above the claims of these worthies to be in the forefront. Politics has just got more interesting yet challenging too for its not just about winning but about providing governance to over a billion Indians in a rapidly changing environment.

The Khasi Language and the journey to national recognition

By HH Mohrmen

The struggle to include the Khasi language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution is no doubt a difficult task and obviously we would not be able to achieve this goal within the next few months. In spite of the efforts by the public and the government which includes the adoption of the resolution in the Assembly towards achieving the goal, the same is not going to happen soon. Till today there is no indication that this aspiration of the people is going to be fulfilled. The government has done its bit but the question is where have we gone wrong? Or is there anything else that the different agencies which are mandated to work for the progress and development of the language need to do to achieve the goal?

The British Legacy
Till date the respect that we have in the society for our former colonial masters is still very high. And the fact that the same colonisers who brought the word of God to the hills also gave us the alphabets. Hence questioning the work of the missionaries which includes putting the language into writing is unthinkable. The general impression that we have of our former masters 'that they can do no wrong' still envelops the psyche and perception of the people in the hills. No doubt the missionaries who put our language into writing using the Roman script deserve respect and honour for the work they have done, but they can make mistakes too, can't they?

The whites are always right

Have we ever been critical about the alphabets that were used by the missionaries to write the language? Did we ever ask any questions about the Khasi alphabets as we call them now? Or does it mean that because it was introduced to the society by the white people so the alphabets will have no flaws. Since the art of writing the alphabets was introduced by the British there is no reason whatsoever to doubt that they are perfect. In fact the very reason that the alphabets were introduced to the community more than a hundred years ago makes it sensible that we relook at the alphabets again.

The lesser used 'G' alphabet

There are complaints that "G/g" (pronounced as ek or egg) is redundant as the alphabet has not found any use while writing the language, which is also true. But has there been any constructive debate or have we even started the debate on this important issue? The reason we have not debated the issue could very well be because

we are people who are always complacent with whatsoever things are happening in the society. We are not taught or we do not have it in us to think critically. In fact if we apply our minds carefully we will find that we need to relook at the list of alphabets that we use in writing the language.

Alphabet "Ng/ng" is redundant

Again because we are not critical and do not apply our minds while using the alphabets, we do not realize that there are some alphabets used in writing Khasi which are no longer of any use. The alphabet in the list that we have which is redundant is 'Ng/ng.' One may ask how that can happen and that it is not at all true. Of course 'ng' is the most important alpha-

or a Liverpool accent and not the Royal English accent. The Scots are often said to have a Celtic sound in the way they speak English. So the correct way to speak the language is like the Royal family does and that is the accent that is generally accepted in official communications.

Now there is a similar understanding with regards to the Khasi language too. One can only write Khasi the way Sohra people speak or the correct way of writing the language is as it is being used in the Sohra area. It is understood that because the dialect that was first used for writing the language is Sohra that is also how the language is to be written. It is also true that we need a standard dialect to write the language. But it is equally true that the

Again because we are not critical and do not apply our minds while using the alphabets, we do not realize that there are some alphabets used in writing Khasi which are no longer of any use. The alphabet in the list that we have which is redundant is 'Ng/ng.' One may ask how that can happen and that it is not at all true. Of course 'ng' is the most important alphabet in the Khasi language, but the question is whether we have looked at the word critically? The truth is we already have 'N/n' in the list of Khasi alphabets which is also a very important alphabet and we also have 'G/g' as mentioned earlier.

bet in the Khasi language, but the question is whether we have looked at the word critically? The truth is we already have 'N/n' in the list of Khasi alphabets which is also a very important alphabet and we also have 'G/g' as mentioned earlier. The question is what sound do we get if we combine 'N/n and G/g' alphabets together? If we combine the two alphabets we get the 'Ng/ng' sound. 'N' is another very important alphabet in the Khasi language and if we keep 'G' in spite of the fact that it has not been very useful, we can have the same 'Ng' sound. Hence if we keep both 'N' and 'G' in the list of Khasi alphabets then we can do away with 'Ng' altogether and we have one less alphabet in the list.

Sohra dialect the Royal English of Khasi

In England it is said that one cannot be a news reader or an anchor on any BBC show be it on radio or television channels if one has a Scottish or even a Southerner

Khasi Jahtia which is Austro-Asiatic Mon-Khmer group of languages has many dialects. The people who speak these dialects also have the aspiration to write the dialect they are speaking, which is in fact good for the progress and development of the written language.

Khasi as a mother tongue should be more inclusive

Despite efforts to improve the way we write the language, much is still left to be desired. The immediate need is to have an inclusive list of alphabets. Since we are speaking the same language with dialects which are at times incomprehensible to the other, we need to have alphabets which can be used to write all the other dialects of the language. And instead of complaining when the people and their Autonomous District Councils who want to write their dialect come up with their own alphabets, the question that we need to ask is, how inclusive are the alphabets that we have?

There was brouhaha when the Jaitia Hills Autonomous District Council introduced the alphabet for writing the Pnar language but can we write the dialect with the existing alphabets? Perhaps this issue was not recognized by those who first put the language in writing. Hence the question for the writers and the scholars of the language is whether they can remain complacent and ignore this issue?

In fact there is no need to come up with a fresh list of alphabets to write the other dialects in the language. We only need to think out of the box and come up with solutions. If we only apply our minds, we would find that by including a few alphabets to the existing list we can write the other dialects of the Khasi-Pnar language.

New alphabets to write all the dialects

If we take the Pnar and War as a case in point, the new alphabet we need is 'AE or ae', 'Chi or C' and 'Tj/tj' sound. My friend CA Suchiang, a teacher of Marian Hills High School, suggests that we do not need to introduce new alphabets for 'Ae or ae' sound since we already have 'A/a' and 'E/e' in the list of Khasi alphabets. If we add these two existing alphabets we will get the 'Ae/ae' sound we need to write the Pnar and War dialects in. Similarly do we need new alphabets for 'tj' sound as in 'tjiang' uncle or 'tji' rice in War dialect.

The only alphabet that we need to introduce is for the 'chi' sound if we are to write the Pnar and the War dialects of the language. Alphabets representing these sounds are not there in the existing list of Khasi alphabets.

The advantage of putting the other dialects in writing

It must be reiterated that despite the differences we have in the dialect that people speak, studies confirm that we speak the same Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer branch of language. One of the advantages of including Pnar is because there are already many books published in the Pnar dialect. The other element that may not cross our minds is that religious books of Niamtre can only be written in Pnar or War. The reason is the chanting in the sacrifice or the rituals can only be in Pnar or War as the case may be.

During the Bam Phalar festival, no less than fourteen dramas were presented by the different communities. This tradition has been going on for many years now. If we can only publish a quarter of these dramas in book form we would have many books in the list we send for inclusion in the Eighth Schedule.

Email: hhmohrmen@gmail.com

Cleanliness of Shillong a social responsibility; not that of the Government

By Aiborlang Nongsiej

We nearly always blame the State Government for not maintaining the beauty and cleanliness of Shillong city. As concerned citizens of the state, it is our social responsibility to keep the city clean and not to continue blaming the government without our social cooperation. Our state had just completed 50 years of statehood, but sorry to say that our city is becoming dirtier by the day. It is shocking to see that not even a single electric post in the city is free of white lime stains (tah shun). Our tradition of eating betel nut combined with betel leaf and lime is a unique social trait but to rub the extra lime on walls or on electric posts does not speak well of our social customs.

At present, it is good to see many beautiful wall paintings around the city to celebrate the 50th statehood day and in anticipation of the Amrit Mahotsav or 75 years of India. However, as a concerned citizen of the state I am afraid that one day those beautifully painted walls will be full of lime rubs, if we the residents of respective localities do not

our tourist spots are well maintained and clean? Often we hear from each other that tourist spots are becoming dirtier by the day. Rubbing of lime and spitting of red betel nut saliva is everywhere in the city including tourist spots. All tourist spots are full of plastic packaging, broken bottles and other waste materials. Is this the problem of the people who look after them or the problem of those who visit these tourist spots? It is sad to hear many people complaining about the people who maintain the tourist spots. Actually, who is the real culprit? Why are our tourist spots dirty? I strongly believe that we have no sense of social responsibility towards cleanliness. Of course, the people who maintain those tourist spots must also have civic sense. However, there is no point blaming each other without social cooperation to achieve cleanliness.

At present it is good to see that the State Government is spending crores of rupees to clean the once beautiful Wah Umkhrah. We



keep a vigilant eye. Hence, it is the duty of each citizen of the state to respect and value the cleanliness of the city as well as to preserve those beautiful wall paintings around the city of Shillong. The State Government alone cannot keep the city clean unless there is a collaborative social responsibility.

Golf Links is one of the many beautiful places in the city that attracts many people to go for leisure walks or for family outings. Sadly, those drains around Golf Links are full of dirt and plastics. For this reason, there are times that the authorities of Golf Links stop people from entering inside while they are cleaning. Why do they stop people from coming inside while they are cleaning? Who dirties the place? Is it the golfers of the state government? I believe not. The answer is because there is no social responsibility towards cleanliness. It is good that many shops are there to serve people with different items of food. However, to throw plastics, paper, bottles and other waste materials around the place is demeaning to ourselves and the environment. Personally, I had come across individuals at Golf Links who when told not to leave behind their garbage after they had picnicked there, instead looked back with angry faces. Without social responsibility, cleanliness and beauty cannot be achieved. It seems that our people today have scant respect for the environment.

Our state of Meghalaya is blessed with many beautiful tourist spots. How many of

see several JCBs at different locations cleaning the river. No doubt, the river looks better now but for how long? The Government is taking the initiative to clean it but I don't see any community participation in this cleaning drive. What is the point of spending crores of rupees to clean this particular river when not a single drain from different localities of the city is prevented from emptying into the river? If each family in the city has a proper drainage system that avoids reaching the river, I believe it will be a great help in cleaning up the river.

The majority of families in villages who make use of the central schemes are getting proper toilets and drainage systems. In fact, no water is seen in the drain of each family because of a proper pit that is dug and covered. Similarly, if families in the city adopt a similar method of treating grey water it would prevent drains from reaching the river. Then the story of Wah Umkhrah will change. Fighting for cleanliness is a social responsibility and not only the duty of the government or the duty of some individuals. Of course, there are times when the state government does not do its part of the job such as that of the Shillong Municipality. We saw this situation in Jowai town several days ago when garbage piled up. Therefore, the government should take the first initiative to come forward and provide proper dumping spaces for the citizens. Above all, it is the duty

Letters to the Editor

Political tricks of the trade

Editor,
Nowadays one sits glued to the TV as those horrific pictures of the invasion of Ukraine unfold and one watches with disbelief the flow of displaced persons that this war has produced; the search for a destination; the inability to decide where to go. It's simply inhuman. Interspersed with watching the TV screen one however does find time to also read the local news and flip through social media on what is going on around us. Well believe it or not we too here in Meghalaya do have our displaced persons! Well, there is this news and image of a particular sweet, not so young thing, who could not find her allotted seat in the Legislative Assembly! It brings in a sense of déjà vu on how rootless, but living beings, get swept away by the tide of events they find themselves in, or was it, in desperate times a ruse for some chivalrous party to offer her a seat. We only hope that the person described above makes a quick decision where to sit as 2023 is fast approaching.

Talking about 2023 and one is hit by the picture of pointless luxuriousness and opulence of a red Lamborghini

languishing and teetering on the neglected and rut infested roads of Nongkrem. So what the hell is it doing there? A local wit with a sharp and caustic tongue remarked that it was to shock and awe the voters of Nongkrem. Reminds me of an angler who sat down on the banks of Umiam lake with his fibre rod and expensive Shinamo spinning reel. He sat for hours, but not a bite despite the expensive artificial lure he had specially brought from the US. Alas, no result. After some time along comes a local with his bamboo rod and Kolkata made fly reel. He sat down to fish and in no time started reeling them in. Our first angler with the expensive equipment was intrigued, went over and asked our local boy what bait he was using. "Dough" replied the local, "Dough." The fish just can't resist it since I have been feeding them the stuff every day." Perhaps a lesson to be learnt for the hopefuls of Nongkrem constituency. It's the dough that counts not show of opulence.

Speaking of hopefuls it appears that there are some who will go to any lengths just to get public attention and in the process perhaps catch the eye of any political party willing to give them a ticket. We find them all over the place and they walk with

us everywhere, especially before elections. However, the best so far is the claim of one such starry-eyed individual that he had been asked by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to help them determine how many unfilled Govt posts exist in the state of Meghalaya. Now why should the CBI, an investigating agency specifically set up to uncover crimes that the local police cannot solve, be interested in vacancies in Government Department or why they should ask some run-of-the-mill smart-pants to assist them is not clear. However, if it is an election ploy to get a ticket to contest in 2023, then all one can say is "All the best".

Yours etc.,
Teilang Kharkongor,
Via email

Has our legislature become irrelevant?

Editor,
Our Legislative Assembly used to average about 55 to 60 sittings per annum about three decades ago. However, in the last 15 years this has come down to about 20 annual sittings. This devaluation of legislative democracy is shocking. Such few sittings mean legislators are not spending enough time either

debating laws or debating governance issues. The Assembly has become a venue for political theatrics and a platform to showcase the oratorical skills of a few MLAs which practically means a lot of noise which signify nothing. No wonder then that our laws are now poorly drafted frequently leading to controversies and litigation (example: the striking down of the MRSSA Act by the Court). That is a direct result of legislators not doing their homework and due diligence on legislations. The other aspect is that the government is no longer constrained by the legislature. Hardly 10% of bills of the current Assembly have been referred to Select Committees for rigorous scrutiny. This is down from about 40% three - four decades ago. Hence, it is no surprise that our Hon'ble High Court is the only effective check on executive overreach.

Perhaps it is about time that our Assembly needs a rule - a minimum of 60 - 70 sittings a year and a majority of MLAs from all parties should be present if they are committed to the welfare of the people as they always declare at the drop of a hat, otherwise governance will remain solely an exercise of executive power and we will see further decline in the

quality of democracy and the Legislative Assembly will finally become irrelevant.

Yours etc.,
Samuel Swett
Shillong- 2

Let's give others a fighting chance

Editor,
We are already in the first week of March, the month of many religious gatherings in many districts. What is noticed is that in this month the PWD is over-burdened with extra activities like renovating the access roads to different venues. There's some JCB service here and road repairing there. Even the PHE Department would not be spared as it is expected to provide water where water does not flow from pipes. The MeECL too has to work overtime to satisfy the five-year Gods (ki lei san snem). During this season MLAs and aspiring candidates are in the race to repair roads leading to all religious functions and church leaders are beholden to them for those favours. This quid pro quo between church leaders and politicians has been going on since Meghalaya was born and without anyone batting an eyelid. Benevolent work is always welcome and appreciated, especially if it concerns larger public interests. But we need to think dispassionately for those candidates who actually want to serve the constituency and the people but who would not stoop and entice people by such patronage. Such candidates desire to have a fair fight with the pledged manifesto. Hence let the sitting MLAs exercise restraint in digging into the government exchequer for personal gains only to win votes. And this especially at the fag end of the five-year tenure! The faithful of different churches need not be overly grateful to any politician. The saying, "Don't ever trust politicians for they shake hands with you today and shake your confidence the next day," must always be remembered.

If the faithful could stay out of politics and shun especially the politicians from the ruling coalition then we would do justice to the EVM and to ourselves as conscientious voters who care for the future of the State and the younger generation and will not sell our votes for a few thousand rupees.

Yours etc.,
J.Kharmih
Via email

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

"A negative judgment gives you more satisfaction than praise, provided it smacks of jealousy."

-- Jean Baudrillard

The Shillong Times

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Whither women's empowerment
INTERNATIONAL Womens' Day (IWD) observed every year on March 8, is supposed to remind women that they are special; that they have their worth which is equal to that of any human person and that they are not the "weaker" sex because it takes a lot to be a woman. For one, women are expected to take on all the responsibility of caring for the elderly and the sick. If they are married and also working they have to precariously balance their professional responsibilities with their domestic duties which includes giving birth, caring for the children, mentoring them, cooking and washing and if there are elderly in-laws or parents at home then also caring for them. For some reason all these expectations from a working woman seem to have been normalized. Sadly, women themselves are conditioned to believe that they have to be superwomen juggling between their homes and their jobs and also aspiring to further their careers.

And what about the large majority of uneducated women who peddle their wares by day so they can bring food to the kitchen at the end of the day? Where is their security? Can such women afford to fall sick? Who looks after their children while they are out on the streets selling vegetables and fruits and what have you? Do we even know what their children might be facing at home often without any supervision? How do we know they are safe? All these questions should engage the minds of those tasked with governance. But IWD has become a ritual. The next day all pious pronouncements by governments and other world bodies is forgotten.

On Monday, March 7, the AITC MLA HM Shangpliang countered the treasury bench which during the motion of thanks on the Governor's address, had praised the MDA government's all-round achievements from law and order to health, education and the plight of ASHA workers and unpaid SSA teachers. Shangpliang highlighted before the House that while Meghalaya practices the matrilineal culture it would be wrong to surmise that women are inherently empowered. The MLA spoke of the need for awareness creation for women on all fronts so that they are better able to access important services. Unfortunately, the MLA stopped short of stating before the House (where only one lady member was present) that Meghalaya suffers from a grave social malady – that of single women headed households. These are women who have been abandoned or divorced by their partners/husbands and who have been left to care for their children. Many of such women don't have the wherewithal to deal with life's cruel blows and some end up in sex work which is criminalized in this state. But this is a reality that society can no longer live in denial about.

The "Lamborghini" Narrative Must Be Challenged

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

"The new political gospel: public office is private graft" (Mark Twain)

It was not a coincidence that fifty years ago a few public servants were alleged to have toasted to the Royal Salute whiskey on Meghalaya's Foundation Day. This was an expensive whiskey then and today another public servant bought the most expensive car, the Lamborghini, which cost crores of rupees. It does not matter whether the Royal Salute or Lamborghini was bought from one's own pocket; what matters is that in both instances public servants are involved. While way back in the 1970s the per capita income of an average citizen in the State was Rs 327, which was the lowest; now in 2022 the Government cannot even pay the ASHA volunteers, Mid-day Meal workers, SSA teachers et al their dues. But public servants have no qualms about showing off their wealth.

Tucked away under the mighty Himalayas, Meghalaya and its people are known for their simplicity and hospitality. However, simplicity does not connote meekness and the tribals and other inhabitants cannot be taken for granted. The two basic tenets of tribal society of Meghalaya are, "kamai ia hok" and "tipbriew tipblei". The former represents the idea of earning one's livelihood through just and righteous means or by the sweat of one's brows and the latter can be translated to mean a society which respects fellow human beings and its Creator. The society is said to be founded on the profound ethical principles of Justice and Equality.

Between 1972 and 2022, just a span of five decades, there emerged the two narratives of Royal Salute and Lamborghini. Perhaps, these narratives are also the manifestations of the insensitivities of the political class and the sharp rise in inequality in the State which we keep on denying. Apparently, since the last few decades the political space in Meghalaya has been occupied by people whose sole objective is to engage in profit making business and they are also being facilitated by individuals or families with political lineage. While the stakes in politics and governance are brazenly high, the future and lives of the citizens get compromised and are rendered valueless.

It was on the afternoon of Sunday, February 27, that the people in the City of God (S)

witnessed the shiny red car zipping through the localities. Instantly, people thought that it was one of those modified cars with exhaust silencers that sounded like a Ferrari, which Shillong is also known for. Only when the picture of a Lamborghini went viral on social media platforms did we realize that what we saw in the afternoon on the streets is a genuine Lamborghini and it belongs to the Transport Minister Government of Meghalaya. What ensued was a barrage of critical comments on social media and in some Facebook groups. The responses tended to take an intra-tribal and communal turn that the hardworking and rich "pnar" is being criticized unfairly. Moreover, the other usual "don burom" or polite response was that the citizens are jealous of him and that he earned the Lamborghini as he is a hardworking businessman.

In the period of fifty years there were sundry reported scams which had plagued the State, from irregularities

"In the period of fifty years there were sundry reported scams which had plagued the State, from irregularities in Health Department (The Massar Committee Report) to Housing (CGI sheets) to unscrupulous mining and illegal transportation of coal which has cost the State dearly even while citizens are struggling to make ends meet."

in Health Department (The Massar Committee Report) to Housing (CGI sheets) to unscrupulous mining and illegal transportation of coal which has cost the State dearly even while citizens are struggling to make ends meet. Although the State is rich in mineral resources, the concerned Department is plagued by revenue loss year after year. The Mining and Geology Department which is one of the biggest revenue generators in the State is suffering from serious deficiencies which has resulted in huge revenue loss. The Auditor General had repeatedly and categorically stated that the Department needs an Internal Audit and monitoring system, but the Government pays no heed and no attempts were made to rectify the system. The revenue loss is due to various reasons - (i) under-reporting of export of coal (ii) under-assessing and non-realization of tax/royalty and (iii) systemic deficiencies. According to

the CAG report 2018, "the systemic failure in preventing illegal transportation of coal out of the State resulted in loss of revenue amounting to nearly Rs 300 crores from 2013 to 2014 and 2017 to 2018". On the other hand, the Citizens Report (2018-19) on the curse of coal mining has estimated that nearly Rs 1000 crores were lost in illegal mining and illegal transportation of coal. The hundreds or thousands of crores of rupees which had been lost in revenue collection could have enabled the State to build state of the art public hospitals, public schools, colleges and universities, to give free health care and education et al to all citizens.

Recently we witnessed two massive protests by the SSA teachers and the ASHA volunteers respectively, who took to the streets to rightfully express their plight and sufferings. Both the Unions are essentially demanding that the Government must immediately release their unpaid dues which had been

pending for months. It is appalling that the Government in its wisdom decided to release the salary of SSA teachers for October and November 2021 only which will amount to Rs 58 crores. The teachers will have to wait for the rest or perhaps will have to hit the streets again as their unpaid dues get accumulated from month to month. Also, the ASHA volunteers were asked to wait till the month of June and no one is certain that their demands will be met. This ad-hoc arrangement or patch work tactic is unwelcoming. In Meghalaya nothing happens for the poor citizens, whereas the rich and the well-connected are being pampered by the State. Moreover, the wealth which is being generated from the shared resources are concentrated in the hands of a few and the gulf that separates the rich from the poor is getting bigger. In the near future, this may cause socio-political unrest and destroy

the distinct communitarian social fabric of tribal society beyond recovery.

From the Royal Salute to Lamborghini and Bah Bindo's golden reminder that Professor G.G Swell was highly critical of the then State Ministers of Meghalaya who spent lavishly on the most expensive whiskey, today, the common citizens of the State are also making sharp and legitimate criticisms against the Lamborghini narrative.

However, the challenge must not end here, we have to take it further and provide a strong and sound alternative narrative. The new narrative should be a peoples' narrative which originates from the ground up, from various social movements and interfaces. The new narrative must speak the language- (i) of sharing, and that wealth must be shared equally and equitably amongst the people. (ii) of inter-generational equity meaning that natural resources and mineral deposits must not be unscrupulously extracted and plundered for selfish gains, but preserved so as to sustain the generations to come. (iii) of respect in spite of sharp differences and that inter-community and intra-community interfaces will override suspicion and prevent communal violence. (iv) of integrity and probity in governance and politics (v) of solidarity, and empathy with the "anawim," (the poor ones) "who remained faithful to God in times of difficulty), the fallen and the weak. (vi) of hope, and that the new world is possible.

The people's narrative must challenge the profit and business driven politics as expounded by a few families. It is a great indignity that a certain class/section owns and possesses not just the natural but the political landscapes as well. We must take them on. The walls of corruption and crassness must be broken down and the monopoly of a few must stop and it can happen only if we act together. The Biblical metaphor of the city of Jericho (Joshua 6:1-27) can be aptly used in our challenge. According to Joshua, "...And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with great shouts, that the wall fell down flat..." The walls of Jericho fell after the people marched around the city walls once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day then they blew their trumpets.

(The writer can be contacted at kyrsoi73@gmail.com)

India and the Ukraine crisis

By Munmun Majumdar

While Russia's actions in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, Crimea in 2014 and now Ukraine are seen as violations of a member state's sovereignty and territorial integrity, Russia has all along denied any wrongdoing and illegal military involvement in Ukraine. Presently calls it "special military operation" in Ukraine on "sovereignty" grounds (as it was in 2014). It is essential to examine the claims used by Moscow to justify intervention and the different explanations of the Russian invasion that undoubtedly has great consequences also marked the beginnings of a direct challenge to the post-cold war order. In 2021 Moscow deployed more than 100,000 Russian troops, raising the speculation of a potential invasion of Ukraine at that time. The ongoing events in Ukraine confirms this speculation and about restructuring and redefining the rules of European security order, the simmering great power rivalry that in a way compels thinking about spheres of influence.

Vladimir Putin for the last two decades, has requested that Russia must be an equal partner in rearranging the post-Cold War European security architecture. Specifically, it means Russia seeks to keep the now more or less independent former Soviet Republics as Russia's sphere of influence. Ukraine is of particular importance due to its strategic location. In 2001, Putin articulated this request in the German Bundestag, and he repeated himself even more emphatically and in harsher terms at the Munich Security Conference in 2007. All such requests received widespread support in Europe in-principle, but without any follow up. The West is well aware of the price for an accommodation with Moscow that essentially is to accept de facto Russian influence in EU's Eastern neighborhood. So, in reality given European history and the great role Russia has in it, this should be a matter of concern. Hence the real debate is once again about spheres of influence. The logical consequence of a recognition of a Russian sphere of influence is not simply giving in to Russian demands at the barrel of the gun. What must be clearly recognized is that it is crucial to grasp the diverse range of European perspectives on continental security. More importantly peace in Europe cannot be maintained without Russia or by going against Russia.

Amid widespread global condemnation of Russia's attack on Ukraine, India's cautious position when it abstained from the UN Security Council vote deploring Russian aggression and instead calling for "immediate cessation of violence" and "diplomatic negotiations and dialogue" made it clear that its stand is based on its national interest. India was among the three countries to abstain, along with China and the United Arab Emirates On 26 February 2022, when the United Nations Security Council held a vote on a resolution demanding that Moscow immediately stop its attack on Ukraine and withdraw all troops. While Russia expressed its appreciation of India's "independent and balanced" position, it brought back memories of 2014, following Russia's intervention in Crimea, when India had abstained from a UN General Assembly vote condemning the annexation of Crimea. National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon at that time said "there are legitimate Russian and other interests involved and we hope they are discussed and resolved." This caused many raised eyebrows. President Pranab Mukherjee in a media briefing attempted to make a correction when he said "we do not like the interference of a third country in the internal matters of any country." India remained acquiescent to Russia's act then and the current guarded response and its call for "respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states"

reflects a similar display. Will this have a bearing on India's aspiration to be a leading power? Apart from the possibilities of rendering it inconsequential in Europe, India's relationship-notably with France, Germany and UK may be impaired especially when these countries have begun to increasingly support India's geopolitical interests in the Indo-Pacific. Similarly, India's approach about India's credibility as a strategic partner. US has called on India to distance itself from Russia. Surely fundamental questions relating to the extent to which India can afford to take this position and whether such a stand is compatible given that Russia is threatening to go to an extent of generating a nuclear crisis will certainly be raised.

It is correct to say that Russia is a major supplier of weapons for India. In 2021, they had signed a 10-year defence cooperation pact, that included the sale of S-400 surface-to-air missile systems worth US\$5.43 billion and a deal to manufacture more than 600,000 Russian AK-203 assault rifles in India. Russia is also helping India with its ambitious nuclear energy expansion. The two countries signed an agreement on nuclear cooperation in 2017. Russia is currently building a 6,000-MW plant at Kudankulam, which will have six nuclear reactors. India and Russia have also agreed to expand nuclear cooperation in third countries. In these engagements what must not be overlooked however, is that the dependence is mutual. Between 2016-2020 Russia accounted for 23% of Russian arms sales to India. Considering the steady decline in Russian weapons exports since 2017, Moscow cannot afford to refrain on weapons transfers to India. Russia is essential to India's nuclear energy market. Equally India offers a potentially huge market to Moscow. Clearly therefore, the weapon connection was not the only reason for India's stand in the UN. Instead, India's response to the challenging foreign policy issue where it has taken a cautious stand displayed strategic autonomy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, to express his deep anguish about the loss of lives and properties without criticizing Russia validates New Delhi's desire not to alienate Ukraine. The Indian Space Research Organisation's semi cryogenic engine for example is being developed on Ukrainian supplied RD-810 designs and many Indian navy warships depend on Ukrainian gas turbines.

New Delhi has sought to push back the impression that abstaining amounts to being soft on Russia emphasizing that it has always opposed to violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity and upheld its fundamental interest committed to a stable rule based global order. Such a position is in sync with New Delhi's stand on China's violation of Indian sovereignty on the India-China border, China's actions in the South China sea etc. Former Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal, who was also India's ambassador in Russia, in his opinion piece said: "We [India] have very friendly ties with the US, Europe and Russia and would prefer not to take sides. This would require very deft diplomacy on our part." "This is not fence-sitting but a dispassionate evaluation of the complex roots of the crisis based on its own experience in the subcontinent." Unlike the Chinese Foreign Minister wang Yi's remark during his telephonic conversation with Foreign Minister Serei Lavrov when he referred to "Russia's legitimate concerns on security issues" India has not made any such reference. (The writer is Prof. Dept of Political Science, North-eastern Hill University, Shillong)

Letters to the Editor

A social need from 70 years of political neglect

Editor,
The ST of March 7, 2022 carried some interesting stories. Of interest are three issues namely the public complaint on shoddy implementation of JJM schemes in Garo Hills; closure of polluting coke units in Jaintia Hills and the article by Aiborlang Nongsiej on how we deface our own city. What all three issues boil down to is the lack of empathy between Govt and the public on issues that are of public interest. The Meghalaya Legislative Assembly is in Session and it is hoped that some public spirited member of the House will have the guts to raise the issue on the floor of the house and members the fortitude to discuss on how Meghalaya plans to improve delivery of Departmental services to the satisfaction of the public. A major flaw is the absence of public sense of ownership over all development activities. In other words the absence of stakeholders in governance and is the ideal breeding ground for corruption since there is no social appetite to check the guilty. To illustrate my point bear with me as I attempt to highlight this aspect through a real story.

North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCRMP) or the IFAD project as it is fondly known was introduced. To manage community resources, empowerment of all community members (read village community) was identified as the first and foremost priority. This was achieved through the adoption of two stratagems ie The formation of the Natural Resource Management Group (NaRM-G) and Women's affinity based SHGs. NaRMG was composed of two members from each household (one man and one woman) a platform for the community to identify, debate and discuss its developmental needs. Women SHGs on the other hand were encouraged the practice of micro savings and financing, lending amongst members and addressing gender related issues as a collective women's problem instead of an individual, private household matter. (Three things immediately started happening in the village. Wife beating dropped to an all time low; Public attention on the school performance sharply increased and poor women started having money they could really call their own). Self confidence of women SHG members rose; women leaders started emerging and gender related issues started featuring as agenda items in NaRMG meetings.

In one particular village the NaRMG identified drink-

ing water as its priority development need. A water source was identified and a gravity based drinking water scheme was chalked out for Project funding. Various members of the NaRMG were given various tasks (such as cleaning the brush; digging the channel for the pipes, providing labour etc). The Headman and the Dorbar Secretary were tasked with purchasing the best Tata brand pipes from Shillong. Somehow along the way temptation got the better of the duo and they returned with vastly inferior pipes. Everyone in the community immediately realised what had happened but the Rangbah Shong happened to be a Tymen Basan and the Secretary the licensed PDS distributor. Tradition prevailed and no man dared say a word. The empowered members of the women's SHG however were made of sterner stuff and not so easily intimidated. They blew the whistle on the fraud; a general meeting of the village was called; the Headman and Secretary made to confess and as punishment were stripped of the post they held with an added punishment that they and their families were debarred from all future IFAD aided benefits. Colleagues, when I narrate the story usually ask "So was an FIR lodged?" That exactly is not the point! A social audit of sorts had taken place because people were no longer prepared to

be cheated; stakeholders were prepared to challenge the guilty; People took ownership over management of their resources; they lost the fear of raising the alarm when they felt they were being cheated! Empowered village women became whistle blowers when they accepted development as their own and not as another Sarkari ka mal imposed from above.

Three important community aspects emerged that we need to strategise. First Meghalaya needs to break this stupid belief that tradition bars women from decision making processes within the community. Women above 18 should be part and parcel of the Dorbar and a Law by the Legislature is needed to uphold this. Our District Councils have sat on the issue for the last 70 years and failed to do anything. Second, because of 70 years of being treated as inferiors in Dorbar meetings our women need a strategy that can fast track women's self confidence and empowerment. The NERCRMP strategy was through micro finance of affinity based village women. This proven technique can be followed. Thirdly and most important, a law passed by the Legislature on the composition, powers and process of financing these grassroots institutions on similar lines for Panchayats needs to come in as fast as possible. Petty political jurisdiction between ADCs and State Govt has to end in

the interest of the people and the state.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

Plight of Indian medical students

Editor,
The plight of Indian students who pursue medical education in Ukraine puts the spotlight on the inadequacies of medical education in India. The crisis they face has sparked off an intense debate on why medical education in foreign countries is so popular and what India can do to make students in India join medical courses in Indian universities. Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently urged corporate India to put in efforts so that Indian students don't have to go to foreign countries for medical education. Unless affordable medical education is provided in India, the exodus of students to foreign countries is likely to continue in the future. Likewise, the number of medical seats in Indian universities needs to be increased to stop the flow of students to foreign countries.

Although there are only around 90,000 medical seats in private and government medical colleges in India, 1.6 million applied for the NEET

to qualify for the under-graduate courses in 2021. Apart from the big gap in demand and supply, the differences in fees structure in government and private colleges is a serious impediment to medical education in India. It is unjustified that it costs between Rs.80 lakh and Rs.1 crore to study medicine in private colleges. In contrast, medical colleges in Russia, Ukraine, China and Belarus offer these courses at Rs.20-45 lakh. As a result, around 25,000 Indian students go to foreign countries every year to study medicine.

Considering the present crisis that Indian students face in Ukraine, the government needs to take measures to make medical education in India hassle free and student friendly. The number of seats for MBBS must be increased. Also, medical education must be provided at reasonable cost. If the requirements for starting medical colleges are made simple, it will attract private management. Similarly, those who pass out of medical colleges must have globally recognised medical degrees.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

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"War is failure of diplomacy."

— John Dingell

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War and diplomacy

A season of war presents an extraordinary situation. The multitudes getting caught in it are bound to face odds, miseries, loss of property and even lives. It's natural that the thousands of Indian students doing MBBS in Ukraine were caught between the proverbial devil and the deep sea. For days, they could neither remain there nor get out. Under the circumstances, the Indian government has overall done an excellent job in evacuating over 20,000 of its nationals from there in a fortnight of the war; a few hundreds are still left behind in what was a battlefield. The Operation Ganga involved scores of flights evacuating and airlifting the stranded citizens back to India. All these and their further transport to their homes were done free, at government expense.

Many students are thankful the government helped them at this critical hour; and many are livid at the "delay" caused for their evacuation and the "unhelpful" responses from the Indian embassy in capital Kyiv. Groups of students have refused to accept roses extended to them at the airports by Union ministers. Despite the central government going out of its way to airlift its nationals back home and even sending as many as four ministers to neighbouring Poland, Romania etc to facilitate Operation Ganga, there are complaints galore. These are mostly about the way the embassy in Kyiv went into non-responsive mode, the diplomatic mission staff remaining incommunicado and doing little to even pass on information to the affected Indians there by its official website.

Information these days is easy to disseminate, thanks also to the internet, official web sites, social media pages and WhatsApp. Those who kept track of the official and social media pages of the Indian embassy in Kyiv, including parents here, were hugely disappointed that the embassy was rarely speaking up — a few 'advisories', but no word even about the flights getting ready under Operation Ganga. It had no information about the spread of Indians in Ukraine. Those of us who lived abroad are not surprised at such attitudes of Indian diplomatic missions. Indian diplomats are not accessible and they conduct themselves in imperial styles; their attitudes shaped by a hangover of the past — a mix of the British Raj and Royal era styles; a Raja-Praja style. This is unlike the way diplomatic corps of other nations conduct themselves. Even the Chinese diplomats are warm and down to earth; and so are the Pakistanis. Other diplomats do a lot of PR for their nations, which is what 'diplomacy' all about; but our stiff-necked men are not cut out for that.

In affinity towards Russia and Ukraine

By Albert Thyriani

The warfare in Ukraine is a developing story. 227 are said to have been killed and 525 injured, including children. 1.5 million people have fled Europe's fastest growing refugee crisis since World War II. Stories of human suffering are told in real time. Sports too have become a notable casualty. The full-scale military operation has resulted in shifting of the Champions League final from St Petersburg, the expulsion of Russia from the FIFA World Cup, withdrawal of F1 in Russia and the possible ban of Russian athletes from all international competitions. 'My' football club, Chelsea has been put on sale by its billionaire owner, Roman Abramovich. In the Russian oligarch's 19 years era the premier side won every single trophy on offer, including the Premier League and the Champion League. The West London club may never be the same under a new buyer.

The parting of ways with the \$3.2 billion club came two days after Labour MP Chris Bryant claimed the 55-year-old oil baron is close to Putin and does his business the dubious way. Now, Bryant is against the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, the Rhonda MP voted for the infamous Iraq war. The former Anglican priest has generally voted for the use of UK military forces in combat operations overseas. The MP from 2001 brands Abramovich of engaging in "corrupt activities and practices" but he forgot about his own role in the 2009 expenses scandal.

NATO's hypocrisy too is on the fore. USA's Joe Biden questioned Putin's brutal assault on the people of Ukraine without provocation, justification and necessity. Putin's justification of the presence of neo Nazism in Ukraine is no excuse. But his predecessor, George W Bush went to war against Iraq in 2003 under the pretext of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction (WMD). It was a lie. He misled the world. Other NATO countries have also decried Russia's destruction, killing of civilians and destabilising Ukraine, but they themselves were responsible for massive devastation in Iraq and Afghanistan killing thousands of people and leaving the countries in the hands of rogues. The very same people who flouted international norms at will have accused Russia of the guilt. No one is a saint in war. Putin is the aggressor. He could be a villain post conflict. But Russia has its own concerns. NATO

is preoccupied with its own safety at the possible expense of Russia. Surely NATO is a threat to Russia. If Russia is silent, Ukraine will certainly join NATO. That the West promised Moscow in 1990 that NATO would not expand an inch might be a myth but with NATO already at its borders (Poland and Georgia) Russia faces dangers.

If Putin is condemned his counterpart, the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy is hailed a hero. But Ukraine has been brutal against Moscow-backed Donetsk and Luhansk, called Donbas regions where more than 14,000 people have perished since 2014. The West ignores this cruelty. The West overlooks the suffering of Palestinians. The west discounts millions of victims of war in Africa and the Middle East. The West focuses its lenses where is convenient. The West has imposed stringent economic sanctions against Russia. Did anyone enforce these embargos when the US and its allies pounced on hapless nations?

Russian has sided with the Donbas separatists and recognised their declaration of independence. However, the leader of the Soviet Union has cracked hard on rebellion in Chechnya. China supports Russia because the communist country is also inhumanly suppressing Xinjiang province. India claims to be the largest democracy in the world but has not taken a firm stand against the dictatorial Russian leadership. India too does not take dissent kindly. The brutal crackdown on CAA and other protesters bear testimonies. Geopolitics is playing of one's card based on a position suited to him or her and not for the right thing.

One of the headlines in the western media's racist reportage. On air the CBS reporter, Charlie D'Agata declares that the Ukrainians are relatively "civilized" and "European" and not people from war torn countries like Iraq & Afghanistan. Al Jazeera English's news presenter Peter Dobbie points, "...looking at them, the way they're dressed. These are prosperous, middle class people, these are not obviously refugees trying to get away from areas in the Middle East... (and) ... areas in North Africa. They look like any European family that you would live next door to."

Equally horrific is the Telegraph journalist Daniel Hannan who writes, "They (Ukrainians) seem so like us..."

War is no longer something visited upon impoverished and remote populations. It can happen to anyone". A reporter on French 24-hour news channel BFM TV made known the prejudices, "We're not talking here about Syrians fleeing the bombing of the Syrian regime backed by Putin, we're talking about Europeans leaving in cars that look like ours..." Racism apart, these journalists forgot that the West has been the master of wars and conflicts. World War I and II were primarily their making.

Though racism, discrimination and prejudices is common in the Whites' world one does not expect this level of racist coverage. Videos are still surfacing of Africans, Asians, Arabs, Indians who face racism in the Ukraine borders. Non-whites have alleged they were not allowed to escape the war. They were pushed back by the military. They were not permitted to cross to Poland for their respective countries. Ukrainians and Whites were given preference. The skin colour decides even in time of war.

This is a reaffirmation of white privilege. Whites consciously and unconsciously believe they are superior. They see nothing wrong in it. This privileged attitude is apparent in America and Europe. It is obvious in politics, education, health care, in general living condition and even in religious settings. In 2005 when Pope John Paul II passed away Asian and African names were doing the rounds as the possible successor. A television reporter asked, "But will an Asian or an African be acceptable?"

Are we to fault the Whites? There is racism in our midst too. We often hear of discrimination against North Easterners in 'mainland' India. They are called 'Chinky' (Chinese) for their looks. Students from the region are also ridiculed for their dress, hairstyle, earrings and tattoos. We vehemently protest these incidents. But are we racist ourselves? In many tribal languages we have a word for 'outsiders'. These words have condescending connotations. Xenophobia and chauvinism too often find expression.

In Meghalaya too we are hurt when racism comes to light outside the state. But are we innocent? Are we credible to call out others? Last year a lady from Lumsuhriew under Mawphlang C.D. Block of East Khasi Hills insulted the people from West and

South West Khasi Hills by her 'Maram poi ei' (refugees) utterance. The video went viral. Last February a young lady, in a live video, called the same people, "Maram jaituh bad thiah sni" (People from Maharam are lazy and late risers). In her clarification she said it was a joke with her friends not knowing that she was already live. She further explained that she and her friends have fun by calling each other 'Bhoi thiah sni, Pnar and Maram jaituh'. Her explanation could be genuine but there is something in these jokes. Maram, Bhoi, Lyngngam folks are looked down upon by a section in the Khasi community.

Russian oligarchs are linked to Putin. This is not unique to Russia. We too are home to it. The likes of Ambani and Adani yield enormous political patronage. The once Chief Minister of Gujarat was promoted by business barons to the office of the Prime Minister. India has a billionaire problem. Does Meghalaya have the same curse too? Money has greatly influenced politics here. Only rich candidates are given tickets by all political parties. Crorepatis buy votes. Once elected they get hold of government contracts. The other day's article elucidates the nexus between money power and politics. A former MLA and owner of a Construction Company has groomed his son to his throne. The 29 year old is the MLA of Mawhati and North East's first proud owner of Lamborghini, a car starting at Rs 3.10 Crore. His father's company is engaged in constructing bulk of roads and highways in Meghalaya. Dasakhatbha Lamare is only a case study. Besides wealth, politics is inherited. We have the two political Sangma families in Garo Hills. Political and financial powers are in the hands of a few.

The illegal coal business is being carried out due to the nexus with politicians. Weigh bridges are owned by politicians. We pray that Meghalaya exposes the whole dark reality. The 2023 elections too should be alive to the same. The 'Voice of the People Party (VPP) claims to offer a better alternative. But will it find takers? The NPP may have already planned to ensure that money power triumphs over clean politics. Dasakhatbha may hit where it hurts most - 'destroy' the launching pad of VPP!

Unpleasant but we too can relate to the double standards, contractions and hidden motives, on display in Ukraine. (Email: albert.thyrianiang74@gmail.com)

Russia's Ukraine war underlines urgency of united nations reform

Veto power of top five nations makes bid for solution infructuous

By Kalyani Shankar

Russia's 'invasion of its neighbour Ukraine' on February 24 has brought to the fore once again the urgent need for United Nations Organisation (UNO) reform and the need for an international body to play its proper role. The world is facing a possible nuclear conflict today.

Whatever may be the reason, Russian president Putin, despite the coordinated sanctions of the west, is sitting pretty presiding over a \$600bn war chest.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar summed up that the conflict "derives from the post-Soviet politics, the expansion of NATO, the dynamics between Russia

North Korea, Syria, Belarus, and Russia - voted against it.

Unable to control Putin, a frustrated UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres threw up his arms and said in a statement, "End hostilities in Ukraine - now. Silence the guns - now".

The problem is that there is no unanimity among the P5 to remove Russia. While some members of the US Congress are in favour, the White House is not considering such a step. "We don't see that happening," spokeswoman Jen Psaki said at a news conference when asked about Ukraine's request to remove Russia. She clarified that "we are not considering



and Europe, and Russia and the West broadly."

Ironically the Russian envoy Vassily Nebenzia was presiding over an emergency meeting of the Security Council in New York on February 24 when Putin announced Russia's assault on Ukraine. He called it 'a special military operation'. 'As expected, Russia blocked the resolution to condemn its aggression.

UN has rarely imposed sanctions on the Security Council members. As a permanent member, Russia did not face any UN sanctions in Chechnya in 1999, Georgia in 2008, and Crimea in 2014. Two other permanent members, the US and the United Kingdom did not face sanctions when they invaded Iraq in 2003. There have been other instances also.

Ukraine has questioned the legality of Russia's membership in the UN Security Council. In 1991, most Soviet republics signed the Alma Ata Protocol agreeing that Russia would take over the USSR's seat as a Permanent member. Now Ukraine says it was the USSR and not Russia, which was a member, and is asking for records to show how Russia is a member today.

China also would not like to raise this question. The Nationalist government of the Republic of China initially held the SC seat. The Chinese Communist Party-controlled mainland China and established the People's Republic of China while the ROC retreated to Taiwan in 1949. In 1971 UN recognized the PRC and gave it the Security Council seat.

After Russia's blocking the resolution, the UN adopted the "Uniting for Peace" resolution model from 1950, which had been invoked only ten times before. On Wednesday last week, most members (141) voted in favour, demanding that Russia "immediately, completely and unconditionally" withdraw its military forces from Ukraine.

China, India, and South Africa were among the 35 countries that abstained, while just five - Eritrea,

taking steps that would put us in direct conflict with Russia."

So in such a situation, member countries, particularly those plugging for SC expansion, have intensified their demand for speeding up the reforms. The pro-reform countries include India, Japan, Brazil, South Africa, and even the United States.

Conflicts like the present Ukraine crisis revives whether the UN has been relevant or not. The pro-reform lobby argues that today's UN is hugely different from the United Nations of 77 years ago. From just 51 countries in 1945, the UN membership has grown to 193 today. They argue that the UNSC is increasingly becoming irrelevant to match the realities of the 21st-century world. Members seek the expansion of SC to be more representative and inclusive.

The UN has not been effective in overseeing the Multilateral system for many reasons. For instance, the P5 countries escape any sanctions even when they violate international law. The UN came into being to prevent conflicts and war, yet over 80 conflicts have emerged since its inception.

Under its watch, several authoritarian rulers have used conventional weapons against innocent citizens. The UN is also facing a resource crunch because members, including the US, do not pay their contribution in time.

However, UN supporters believe that the world body has served its purpose by and large. The very fact that it has survived despite the ups and downs shows it has performed within the restraints. Most of all, there has been no nuclear war in the past 77 years. However, the Ukraine conflict makes it dangerous with Putin threatening to use Russia's nuclear power.

Perhaps it is time that the UN speeds up its reform process to make it more effective. It needs more teeth and sufficient funds to play its role as an influential international body. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

'50th Year of Dilemma and Conundrum'

Editor

Like the great saying goes 'Teaching is the one profession that creates all other professions' but in the state of Meghalaya the mother of all other professions is being looked down upon and victimized by the government for the interest of the people in power.

Teachers in our society are amongst the many others that have been deprived of their basic rights and discriminated against by the Government even though they lay the most conceptual foundation in a society. From SSA teachers to College teachers, the government turns a blind eye and deaf ears to almost every aspect of the issues and grievances faced by them. Non-payment of salaries, non-regularization of post and non-revision of all other basic incentives are amongst the urgent and topmost issues that need immediate attention by the government besides others.

A ready reference of such scenes created and mitigated by the government that can be observed is towards the part time lecturers of the Kiang Nangbah Government College, Jowai that were tasked to attend to their duties in the morning shift of the college. For the last two to three years, the teachers of the morning section are being deprived of their salary

rights which was supposed to be reimbursed to them by the government once in a year and that for a meager amount. These teachers too have families and children to feed and take care of besides other things that are required to be attended to. However, they are not getting paid for all the hard work, the dedication and the devotion in teaching the large numbers of students attending their classes daily. Mr Chief Minister and Mr. Education Minister, is there anything much worse than a teacher attending to his/her students on an empty stomach? How do you expect good academic results when our very own teachers are starving?

While it is a very bold move by the Government to accommodate maximum number of students in the college of which a first semester class itself would reflect a whopping number of 1200 students alone, imagine the number of students of the morning section in a college with 6 (six) semester courses !!

This very college was recently accredited by the University Grant Commission (UGC) as a Grade B college. Don't the morning section lecturers also play an important role for such accreditation? How can they be treated so shabbily?

The teachers of the morning section in the college impart education to the poor section of students who cannot afford to study during the day time as they are compelled to work in order to supplement the family

income. For such students the morning section where they can pursue their degree course is a blessing in disguise. Teachers however, besides struggling hard to impart quality and standard education and teaching the students besides attending to other assignments and exams preparation, are being punished by the government for being responsible and dedicated to their duties and responsibilities.

It is undesirable for any government to promote growth and development by compromising the very basic right of teachers? Is that even supposed to happen? This Government has achieved stuff beyond possibilities in creating issues and victimizing the powerless section of the society. Jaintia hills in particular has faced drastic chaos and tantrums from this government, be it garbage drama to coal trafficking, you name it, we have it!!

Ironically, the Education Minister himself hails from Jaintia hills. But his apathy towards this region and his distancing himself from attending to these urgent problems and issues knocking at his door is appalling. Mr. Chief Minister and Mr. Education Minister, is starving the teachers part of your 300 projects for the 50th statehood celebration? If not, then please address this issue immediately. Just because a section of the society does not have the power to raise their voices, it does not mean that you have the right to discriminate and deprive them of their salaries and

paychecks. These teachers need to feed themselves too before they feed all the knowledge of the world to our students.

Yours etc.,
OR Shallam,
Via email

The Lamborghini & the Assembly

Editor,

Apropos of the letters 'Political tricks of the trade', by Teilang Kharkongor, and 'Has legislature become irrelevant?' by Samuel Swet (ST March 3, 2022) I beg to add few more points of public interests, especially as this year is a run up to the 2023 Assembly elections. At no other period of Meghalaya's history are the above two letters more vital to save our state. It's a now or never situation.

Before Jaintias struck coal in the 80s, children toyed around with four wheelers having wooden wheels and some contraption of wooden chassis. On our journey to Lumshong we passed from 8th mile through vilages with thatched huts. The compound was full of cows and bullocks for ploughing. When Ladrymbai turned the biggest coal hub in North East, the scenario totally changed. Huts were replaced with RCC buildings. The compound was replaced with Shaktimans to load from rat hole mines to the main road. By the year 2000,

top line limousines filled all compounds.

Those red flashing lights atop the limousines, with sirens at high decibels and with escorting security policemen ready for action, became the dream of these coal barons. And since then elections in Meghalaya, whether to the District Councils or Legislative Assembly became unaffordable for those who sincerely wish to serve their people and who believe that to buy humans is an unpardonable sin. That's why we are right now deep in the quagmire. The more we try to extricate ourselves the deeper we sink.

Lamborghini though private has all those facilities like BMWs, Volkswagens and Rolls Royce. Two months before polling you can see them waving at you. When they win elections and after the swearing in ceremony, they sink deep into the comforts of the spongy leather. One clarification is that Dasakhat Lamare had begun fishing in Nongkrem waters since January 2021, at the time when fishes were very hungry on account of Covid19. Truly many were benefitted and till date he is seen in Nongkrem and has left Mawhati orphaned. The Election Commission of India should repair this flaw where an MLA abandons his constituency halfway. Alas! CECs like TN Seshan and JM Lyngdoh are no longer seen today. We only expect that the Nongkrem people would remember the now orphaned Mawhati and send him back to where he

belongs.

In the border row with Assam this MLA was hostile to his own people and sided with the Assamese. The MDC sent an SOS to Shillong but nothing happened. All politicians play around with boundary issues.

Coming to question hour, it is sad that questions by Opposition MLAs pertaining to unemployment, farmers, SSA, PHE water (WQI and rusted pipes) and vocational course for high school were never replied. Education Minister, Rymbui ran away from question hour when the matter of plight of teachers was raised. Worse the Speaker did nothing!

But worst is the conduct of the Deputy CM. He stands between the questioner and the minister with permission from the Speaker to holler wildly as if to say, "Don't you dare question my boss. Do your homework." Thanks to social media we see everything that goes on in the Assembly it is an embarrassment to see most ministers and ruling members deep in slumber. One can only hope and pray that the Lamborghini lovers do not return post 2023 so that Meghalaya is saved from complete collapse.

Yours etc.,
F. Lyngdoh
Via email

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"Success is getting what you want.
Happiness is wanting what you get."

— Dale Carnegie

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 207 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MARCH 10, 2022

Hike in fuel prices equals inflation

THE Russian invasion of Ukraine has fuelled speculations of a hike in fuel prices as global oil markets take a hit. In India the price hike of fuel had been kept in abeyance only because of the elections in UP, Punjab and Manipur. Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri, earlier on Wednesday stated that any decision in hiking oil prices will be taken in the interest of the people. He however did not rule out that the Russia-Ukraine conflict will play an important factor in oil companies deciding oil prices. India relies on imports for nearly 85% of its crude oil requirement. At the moment the increase in fuel prices is nearly about 60 percent. The rupee has plummeted so low that one dollar today is equivalent to Rs 80. This is sure to hurt India and its oil companies. Corporate heads are already complaining that they are the most affected due to the hike in oil and gas prices.

Up until Tuesday the prices of petrol and diesel remain unchanged but India will not be in a position to hold back the hike. The world today is deeply interconnected and interdependent and so too the markets. One event like the Russian invasion of Ukraine will affect oil prices across the world. Although the Union Petroleum Minister has said that any decision with regards to oil and gas pricing will be taken 'in the best interests of citizens,' he has not unveiled India's plans yet. Today crude oil prices have gone up to \$140 per barrel in the global market, the highest since July 2008. India cannot remain unaffected. A hike especially in diesel will affect the common man as it will lead to run-away inflation. Political observers say that domestic oil companies, which control the market, have not raised prices since November last year with the aim of helping the BJP in the state assembly elections particularly that of Uttar Pradesh. Now that elections are over, oil companies can no longer take the heat. Apparently, Government will be raising oil prices in a phased manner. The Opposition parties are already gearing to push for fuel tax cuts when Parliament meets from March 14 next.

State oil companies have said they need a price increase of 10-12 rupees per litre for petrol and diesel to cut their losses. But the government is unlikely to cut fuel taxes at least before March 31, considering the impact of that on state revenues. For states like Meghalaya that rely heavily on road transport for goods, the impact of the hike on diesel prices will hit the consumers where it hurts most. The State Government is unlikely to cut down taxes on fuel because that is one source for revenue generation. The common citizen bears the brunt always!

States will have to play major role in setting up new colleges Need a thorough review of medical education following Ukraine crisis

By Dr Arun Mitra

That the students from Sumy have been evacuated and are on their way to western Ukraine is a matter of great satisfaction not just for the family but for the country as a whole. Better late than never; finally the Indian government woke up and took effective steps to plan this evacuation. War between Russia and Ukraine is threatening the lives of innocent citizens and destruction of resources. The danger of use of nuclear weapons in case of escalation of war cannot be ruled out.

amount to hire vehicles to reach the borders from where they could take the journey back home safely.

It is unfortunate that instead of praising the students for showing bravery in crossing the borders, the question being raised is about their studies, their capabilities, their level of knowledge etc. So much is the lack of empathy at this hour of crisis that Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Pralhad Joshi

colleges abroad, the total cost including travel and stay is around Rs 30 lakh.

To get registered with the NMC these students have to clear the Foreign Medical Graduates Exam (FMGE). Those who pass this exam become at par with others. So to raise such frivolous issues of their standard of education is to hide the failure to provide medical education at affordable rates inside the country. The Prime Minister

should be taken to task. Such words at a time when the students and their families are in so much trauma after the nightmarish experience and prevailing uncertainty can have adverse effects. They are now much worried about their future. Government should reassure that they will take up the matter with empathy. All efforts should be made for the continuation of their studies in Ukraine once the situation improves. It would be apt to wait for a period of six months. The decision of the NMC to allow internees



Evacuation of the citizens from war zones is an extremely difficult task. Foreign nationals who want to go back to their families are hard put. Indian citizens, particularly the students, most of them undergoing education in the medical courses, have been facing a difficult time. Whereas most of the countries took away their citizens back home from Ukraine, the government of India failed to act on time. This is despite several requests from the students to the embassy in Kyiv. When the war started, instead of organising evacuation of the students the Indian embassy in Ukraine only kept on issuing advisories to the students to reach the borders of Poland or Romania.

It was a horrendous task for the students since from some places these borders are over 1500 kilometers away. Several young boys and girls braved through the harsh weather and shelling to reach the borders. Patting his own back the Prime Minister and his cabinet colleagues however left no stone unturned in taking credit for what they had not done. Evacuation means to bring a person out from the crisis area. But here the students walked several kilometres or paid exorbitant

amount of helping, castigated the students that 90 per cent of Indians who study abroad fail to pass qualifiers in India. He does not know that even to go abroad for MBBS studies the students have to pass the NEET.

The pertinent issue which has come to the fore now is why should Indian students opt for admission in medical colleges abroad in such large numbers? They are studying not only in Ukraine but in much larger numbers in the USA, Canada and China. Many are in the Philippines, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Bangladesh.

According to the website of the National Medical Commission (NMC) presently India has 605 medical colleges with 90,825 seats for the undergraduate course. Out of these, 306 colleges with 45,035 seats are in the state sector. The number of colleges in the private sector is 289 with 43,965 seats and other 10 colleges with 1825 seats. The tuition fee in the private colleges ranges from Rs 60 lakh to over one crore. This is far beyond the capacity of even the middle classes. Therefore the students look for relatively cost effective institutions. For study in the

has said that more medical colleges need to be opened in the country to prevent our students from going abroad and has called upon the private sector to come forward. This will not be helpful as the private sector's motive is profit making. He has also said that half of the seats in these colleges will be free. This is not something that can be monitored easily.

We have the experience of how the private sector corporate hospitals who have reaped several benefits from the government and for which they are supposed to give affordable treatment to 25% beds, are evading their responsibility with impunity. The government had earlier come up with a proposal to hand over district hospitals to the medical colleges which will be operated by the private sector. It has been proposed that 50% of patients will be given free treatment in these hospitals. Those interested in getting free treatment will have to get authorisation from the designated authority. This will leave the poor people running here and there for authorization.

It is important to see that the career of these young students does not suffer. IT Cell trolls who are out to defame these students

to do internships in India is a welcome step. Others who are still in the graduation process should be assured that if things do not improve in Ukraine, they would be adjusted here in government colleges while charging the same fee as they had to pay in Ukraine. More medical colleges need to be opened in the state sector. To ameliorate the health crisis in remote areas an undertaking can be taken from the students to serve in the remote areas in the state sector for a period from 5 to 10 years.

In the nearly 75 years after independence, medical education was imparted mainly by the state sector. It was only after the neo-liberal economic policies that the private sector got a push. In 1980 there were 112 colleges out of which 99 were in the state sector while only 13 were in the private sector. But from 1980 to 2022 the number of colleges that were added to the state sector are 207 while the private sector colleges number 276. Many of these private colleges lack basic facilities for training despite charging hefty amounts. This trend has to be reversed to give a boost to medical education based on the criteria of medicine as service and not for profit-making as the primary motive. (IPA Service)

World Kidney Day 2022 – Kidney Health for All

By Dr Indakiewlin Kharbuli

Being an organ donor is a decision worth taking since not only can it give a new lease of life to someone, but is also the noblest way to live on after death. Did you know that one organ donor can save eight lives? Or that on average, 25 different organs and tissues can be donated by a donor through transplantation? Unfortunately, despite its immense potential to save lives, organ donation has not found acceptability in our country. There are countless heart-wrenching stories of people who die awaiting an organ transplant in a futile wait of a call that a suitable match has been found. Nearly five lakh people die in India every year waiting for that one chance.

Organ donation is the process of medically removing a healthy organ or tissue from one person for transplantation into another. Common organ transplantations include the kidney, heart, liver, corneas, pancreas, intestines, and lungs. Organ donation is of two types- living donor organ donation and deceased organ donation. In the case of the former, a person can donate their organs like the kidney, liver, skin, or bone marrow without it impacting either the function of these organs or their health. Kidney donation is the most common type of living-donor transplant. Individuals can donate one of their kidneys, while the other kidney can perform the requisite functions. Deceased organ donation is donating an organ after death for transplantation.

Permission is usually given by the donor or by their family after death. The process of pledging an organ is simple- a donor card is issued to a person willing to donate after their death.

In India, organ donation is regulated by the 1994 Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act that allows deceased and living people to donate organs. This law also intends to regulate the removal, storage, and transplantation of organs, and prevent any illegal dealings for commercial purposes. In 2019, the government launched the National Organ Transplant Programme for Organ Donation with a whopping Rs 149.5 crore budget for boosting organ donation.

Despite the government identifying the gaps in organ donation, the statistics related to organ donation are grim in India. There is a huge gap between the demand for organ donation and its supply. Notwithstanding its massive population, India's organ donation rate is a mere 0.01%, which is among the lowest in the world. Seventeen people die every day for want of donors. Only 4% of the 1.5 lakh kidney transplant surgeries needed are performed every year across India. The scenario is equally dismal for people awaiting a donated liver- of the two lakh patients who die of liver cancer or liver failure annually in India, 15% can be saved with a timely transplant. A staggering two lakh people die of liver diseases because of the shortage of donors. There are 50,000 patients in need of a heart transplant every year, yet only 350 have been conducted in the last 24 years.

The reasons for the extremely low levels of organ donation in India include ignorance, religious superstitions, a belief in life after death, emotional reasons, and an extreme grief reaction after a loved one's death which leads to an unwillingness to do a surgical procedure on the dead body. Relatives of organ donors do not want their loved ones to be "disfigured" or "suffer" after death or in next birth. However, the fact is that donated organs are removed surgically, which doesn't impair the body.

Contrary to the prevailing belief that religion prohibits organ donation, most faiths allow it. The act of giving is encouraged in all religions across the world. After all, what greater act of giving a gift of life to someone.

India has come a long way since the organ donation scandals of the 1990s and 20s. There is also a prevalent myth that the rich, famous, or powerful get preference during organ donation. The list of persons

awaiting donation is now automated and thoroughly documented- there is little scope of individual discretion. Preference criteria are based on age, the seriousness of the illness, duration of waiting for an organ transplant, etc.

Most doctors focus on saving the lives of their patients. It is also pertinent to remember that organ donation is considered only after brain death. Moreover, the transplant team is separate from the doctors treating the patient and has to certify that a person is brain dead only after conducting several tests over several hours. Except for the eyes, doctors can't take organs from patients whose hearts have stopped beating.

Another myth about organ donation is that only people above 18 years can donate organs. However, the truth is that even children or those in their Seventies and Eighties can successfully donate organs. Children who need a transplant need organs smaller than those of an adult. While legally, children can't decide on their own, parents can sanction the decision knowing it's what their child wants.

Once the decision to donate an organ is taken, the process is simple. The legal (and voluntary) procedure involves issuing a donor card to a person willing to donate their organs. Once an individual decides to donate in his lifetime, they can fill up a form either online or in a hospital to register to show their intent to donate. Upon registration, the donor gets a donor card. However, the card has no legal value; the final consent to donate is taken by the family members.

The other way of donation is when a patient is declared brain dead, which means there has been permanent damage of all brain functions, with the condition being irreversible. Once a person has been declared brain dead, a death certificate is issued and the treating doctors inform the family that the deceased's organs can be donated. Once the family's consent has been obtained, the lookout begins for a prospective recipient. Recipients must be registered in the waiting list handled by National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO). They then have to wait until a matching donor is found. In case the recipient is registered in the same hospital as the deceased donor, then the organ is directly given to him/her. If the donor is not found within the hospital, the hospital's transplant coordinators inform NOTTO, which is the main body for coordinating and arranging the organs and their distribution. Once the recipient is found, the process of organ retrieval commences and the organ is packed in an organ transplantation icebox.

Since it's World Kidney Day today, let's know more about the most common transplant in today's times- the kidney transplant. It is usually performed on people whose kidneys are either damaged or have entirely stopped working. Kidney damage occurs due to diseases like diabetes, hypertension, cystic kidney, glomerulonephritis (inflammation of glomeruli), and a majority of the patients- 70% or 85%- who undergo a kidney transplant in India report satisfaction with their transplanted kidney. Kidney transplant patients have a better quality of life, less risk of death, fewer restrictions on diet as compared to those on dialysis. It is also more cost-effective than dialysis. Family members are often the most compatible living kidney donors. However, successful donor transplants are also common with kidneys donated from unrelated people. Living kidney donation is safe provided one is in good health overall. The hospital stay for most donors is usually up to one day. Most people can go back to work between two-eight weeks after surgery.

So, what are you waiting for? Pledge to be an organ donor and save lives.

(The writer is MD (Medicine), DM (Nephrology), Woodland Hospital, Shillong)

Letters to the Editor

Has the lifeboat arrived too late?

Editor,

For those of us who worry over the state of hopelessness that shrouds the conservation of our environment, its direct link on Global Warming and Climate Change, it is indeed a delight to read in the ST dated March 9, 2022 the formation of a Core Advisory Group to study and I hope make recommendations to The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), read Govt of India, concern over issues that determine the very existence or disappearance of life from earth itself. Of added pleasure is the appointment of Patricia Mukhim, a prominent citizen of our state; a strong advocate on all issues of Human Rights and an ardent campaigner on the urgent need to safeguard our environment. Meghalaya as is the case with the rest of the North East has serious problems involving the relationship between man and nature; of human greed that continues to gnaw at our natural resources; of political connivance with those indulging in the destruction of our surroundings and most important, the social indifference to the rapid loss of biodiversity of the region. It is hoped Kong Pat will be able to refocus national concern over what is going on in our part of the World.

The UN through its Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples has recognized that preservation of

the tradition and culture of Indigenous peoples is also a Human Right. In view of the above it is hoped that Kong Pat can draw the attention of the core advisory group to a few issues that demand immediate rectifying if we are to be saved from whatever destruction we have brought upon ourselves. On a priority basis I would request the Advisory Group to please look at an issue that exemplifies as no other can, how the environment, the rich biodiversity and the Indigenous Rights of the people has been sacrificed to the greed and avarice of thoughtless individuals occupying seats of power.

9 cement plants were granted simultaneous licenses within a 10 sq km of land. No one knows why the need for them and if any DPR or study was done on the environmental impact these plants would have. Curiously hectic illegal rat hole mining of coal was also being carried out in the same area. The result is jaw-dropping for its unexpected horrific impact on the environment! The Lukha River in Jaintia Hills suddenly turned blue in colour and all life forms within it disappeared. Surrounding water bodies that supported human life and activities turned brackish. Studies were carried out but powerful lobbies both within the coal mafia and the cement mafia managed to confuse the findings by blaming each other. The area falls with the Narpuh sanctuary a renowned safe haven for wildlife. Today we find a reputed cement company,

obtaining permission from the Centre to mine, up to the fringes of this sensitive biosphere reserve. This was done surreptitiously without environmental clearance from the State Govt or the communities living nearby. This is how our rights have been bartered away for money and an environmental disaster has already happened in Jaintia Hills. Who is responsible? Will the Advisory Body, like others before it ignore the guilty just because they are politically powerful and rich?

The death of not only the Lukha river mentioned above but of other water bodies; the whole-scale destruction of forests carried out with the tacit approval of our District Councils; the wanton and malicious quarrying of boulders and lime stone; the denial of the Government over nightly covert transportation of illegally mined coal are but a few of the criminally environmental activities of those whom we have elected to provide us with governance. Today the common man is confused as to where to turn to for justice. As a last ditch effort we turn to this Core Advisory Group on Environment, Climate Change and Human Rights to save our Environment and our identity as indigenous peoples of these Hills. There is total lack of concern, worry or interest in preserving the biosphere and environment in our state. We request the Advisory Group if it is within their TOR to provide and issue directions, regulations and procedures, not to the departments concerned but to

the politicians of Meghalaya, both at the State and especially at the District Council level, on the need to preserve the environment. They need the awareness to appreciate that they are where they are to govern. They are there to take the state forward not hasten its demise. Otherwise, another 50 years of exploitation and we would have disappeared from the face of this earth.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

Omission of Social Work from MCS Mains paper

Editor,
Apropos of the advertisement published in the Kjatngi newspaper (March 8, 2022) on the Meghalaya Civil Services (MCS) Examination, in which the last date for submitting of applications is March 11, 2022, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the professional course called Social Work has not been included as one of the optional papers. Other professional courses such as MBBS, MBA and LLB have been included that are as old as the profession of Social Work. As the subject "Masters of Social Work" is a popular and most demanding qualification in today's age of rapid development, this multi-disciplinary profession that deals with a number of psycho-social and socio-economic problems at the macro, mezzo and micro level, has been omitted from the optional papers, thereby elimi-

nating many MSW graduates who aspire to sit for the State Civil Services exam. It's a dream shattered for many. Also, a major section of the population is not aware that 'Social Work' is a profession in its own right and is often taken as a synonym of Sociology which is not a profession but a discipline in the Arts and Social Sciences field. Hence, I request the concerned authorities in the Meghalaya State Public Services Commission (MPSC) to kindly include the MSW paper for this upcoming MCS examination so that there is equal opportunity for all.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Toying with EVMs

Editor,
On March 8, 2022, Akhilesh Yadav's Samajwadi Party complained to the Election Commission of India (ECI) that EVMs were being transported on trucks, 36 hours before the counting day which is March 10, 2022. Following this, the UP Varanasi Commissioner Deepak Agarwal in his explanation to Akhilesh appeared to have accepted that there was a lapse in protocols in the movement of voting machines. However, he insists the voting machines in question were for training purposes.

It is strange that 36 hours before the counting, some training is required. Why does the public fail to judge from the point of view of all advanced countries in the

world that have stuck to ballot papers. If that is not enough, we should recall that before EVMs were sought to be used Mr LK Advani and Subramaniam Swamy objected to their being fool-proof.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, a retired DGP of Assam complained to the Presiding Officer that the verifiable voter paper audit trail (VVPAT) showed a completely different result from the one he had voted for. Interestingly, the Presiding Officer challenged the voter and asked him to pay Rs 10,000 for the challenged vote. But why would anyone risk shelling out Rs 10,000 when the EVM can be tampered? Similar cases were reported in Delhi too. The then Chief Justice of India, Ranjan Gogoi twice ordered the ECI to study the case. But, rather than study the matter the ECI suspected the complainants.

And think about the lakhs of voters in the country who lost their voting rights as no technician could rectify the faulty EVM throughout the polling day? In Jaintia Hills around 30 persons left the queue and returned home. But who cares? Toying with new inventions is dangerous. If progressive countries of the world had tried the EVMs and found them faulty it's time for India to resort to ballot papers.

Yours etc.,
W. Passah
Nongkrem

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"The world is a diverse place. Nobody has a monopoly on virtue or wisdom."

— Lee Hsien Loong

The Shillong Times

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Big boost to BJP, AAP

THE verdict is crystal-clear. The BJP is here to stay, the Congress is no competitor; the AAP has taken a big step forward and regional dynasts have taken a beating. The AAP, which retained Delhi in successive polls, managed to get one more state – Punjab – under its banner. The BJP that triumphed in four of the five states where assembly polls took on the form of a mini-general election has reasons to cheer in a different way too. These results will symbolically give it the moral courage to try and retain power at the Centre even after the 2024 general elections. The broader implication is also that, with these victories, the upcoming Presidential elections will be a cakewalk for the BJP. The aspiring stalwarts in the opposition as also Bihar's Nitish Kumar who all hoped to have a go at the Rashtrapati Bhavan can beat a retreat.

It will be tempting to analyze whose victory it was in Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere too. The role played by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in expanding the BJP base even during Covid times through a series of welfare steps cannot be brushed under the carpet. But, the UP assertion is principally the victory of chief minister Yogi Adityanath. This is bound to raise his national stature within the BJP to the discomfiture of Modi himself. To Yogi's credit, there was no anti-incumbency wave in evidence. If there was one, it was perhaps limited to Muslims. The Backward Class fortress has been split between the Yadavs and others; and the Dalits on their own could only split the votes further – which was Advantage BJP. Mayawati, like Akhilesh, can keep licking the wounds of her repeated defeats. The consolidation of the Yadavs and the Muslims, to a large extent, did not help the SP put up a strong fight with the BJP. Its alliance with pro-farmer-Jat RLD proved futile. As much for farmer power! The BSP was relegated to one seat and the Congress two. They both failed to impress and it will take a while for these two parties to resurrect themselves from the ashes.

The Congress had hoped for Punjab, Goa and Manipur – and Uttarakhand too, where the BJP had changed its CMs with rare frequency. The next rounds involving Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat might help the Congress try and reassert itself. The regional satraps, other than Arvind Kejriwal, are obviously shocked though the NPP too did well in Manipur. Significantly, the attempts to have a regional dynastic front have received a huge set-back.

The Politics of Talks: A Chimera

By Patricia Mukhim

Governments are made up of political parties that work on a 5-year self-serving agenda. Whatever they do is aimed at winning the next elections and not necessarily to serve the people that have voted them to power. As voters we would be naïve to expect that politicians will deliver on the promises made. On Thursday as the results from the five states that went to the elections rolled out the poll pundits wondered why when they spoke to people in Uttar Pradesh they heard a lot of ranting and raving against the Yogi Adityanath led BJP government yet when asked who they would vote they all said they would vote BJP. Perhaps there is a sense that somewhere the BJP and Yogi are delivering on poll promises. And guess what? Women voted overwhelmingly for the BJP notwithstanding the bodies floating on the Ganga; the no hospital beds and no oxygen during Covid. Those are all forgotten in the heat and dust of electioneering. The women were pleased with the different schemes targeted to reach them through their Jan Dhan accounts. The Hindutva agenda works only partly and largely for the upper and middle class. The common man and woman look for what helps dispel hunger and bring food and oil to the kitchen. This time the exit polls worked well too in all the 5 states. Of course, there is the ugly saga of the EVMs being transported for training purposes in UP. But all said and done, predicting polling behaviour requires knowledge of both Sociology and Psychology for it's fraught with grave uncertainties.

Meghalaya is heading for the polls in 2023 and politicians, especially those that will be battling anti-incumbency will find a hundred ways to show the voters that they have not been remiss in delivering on their promises. But they also know that mere election campaigns and speeches don't work. Money has to change hands too. In this context a ruling party politician had bragged that he will spend over Rs 200 crores in 2023 and get not less than 15 MLAs who will be mostly kith and kin. But over and above the 15, he is also looking at the other 21 constituencies in the Khasi-Jaintia region. His intention seems to aim at giving the Sangma brothers a run for their money. Perhaps this man feels that if he is in the driving seat it is easier for him to exercise control over the state's resources for him to expand his business empire. Not bad to have ambitions provided they don't run wild. Let's see

how a home-grown business magnate gives the challenge to a Wharton graduate in business administration in entrepreneurial management and MBA in Finance from the Imperial College London.

But let's take a look at the much-hyped peace talks with the HNLC that is now being touted. There are many problems with this offer for talks. Why now? Has the ban on HNLC been lifted? If so on what grounds? Has its fire power been audited? The first rule of engagement with militant outfits is that the state does not talk to an outfit with

of the Government of India because it has to resolve the biggest challenge which is to give legal closure to the hundreds of murder cases pending against the members of the NSCN(IM) and to rehabilitate them. And murder cases are not time-barred. The Modi Government does not want to entertain any disaffected group that goes against the idea of nationalism. Home Minister, Amit Shah is no dilettante when it comes to such ticklish issues. He is a nationalist to the core and does not understand why some groups in a



no fire power and which has now started recruiting wide-eyed adolescents. The outfit says it is ready for unconditional talks. So that's clear. Perhaps the members of the HNLC, some who might be having a number of criminal cases against them, want a general amnesty. That is for the Government to consider. Perhaps the HNLC also wants a monthly pay-out as is being paid out to militant outfits in Manipur which are under

corner of this country would want out.

To understand this "talks" conundrum better I spoke with a few senior, retired police personnel, some of whom have been at the forefront in fighting militancy in the State. They said that some years ago when the HNLC was at its height, the Intelligence Bureau (IB) in Meghalaya had proposed peace talks with them without taking the local police

"Meghalaya is heading for the polls in 2023 and politicians, especially those that will be battling anti-incumbency will find a hundred ways to show the voters that they have not been remiss in delivering on their promises."

Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with the Government. But does the Government need an interlocutor for that?

Firstly, the talks with the HNLC have to be transparent because the outfit claims to represent all of us. We have every right to know what's going to be on the table from both sides. As far as I have been able to gather from sources in the Union Home Ministry, the very term "interlocutor" has been discontinued by the Government of India. It has done that with Nagaland which is the biggest thorn in the flesh

into confidence. When the local police heard of this, the higher-ups in the force spoke to the Union Home Secretary then, asking the premise for such talks. They convinced the Ministry then to abort the talks since police were fighting the outfit and had lost a few of their men in that fight. They preferred to fight the outfit than to give them a walkover. The talks were aborted then. I spoke to a retired IB official on this issue and was told this is an old habit of the Bureau and old habits die hard. We hope this time too that it's not the IB that has given the HNLC the idea of peace talks.

many things from the past. At one time it was mandatory that only those who have grown a moustache could attend the Dorbar and men had to wear a dhoti which was the ceremonial dress. Those aspects of tradition have been discarded so why hold on to only the convenient ones that keep women away from discussing issues that affect them?

Yours etc.,
W. Passah,
Nongkrem

India set to face inflation

Editor,
Analysts say that India will be among the emerging economies worst affected by the Russia-Ukraine war. Rise in global prices of commodities will badly affect the already fragile economy. Also, the Covid-19 pandemic recovery will be badly hit by the war.

Considering that India imports about 85% of its oil requirements, rise in crude oil prices will adversely affect the economy. In such a scenario, inflation is likely to rise and account deficit could widen. In the context of rise in crude oil prices, the government will be forced to

The youth of Meghalaya have by and large realised the futility of toting guns and living life on the run. They want a fair chance at employment that is not marred by nepotism, favouritism, backdoor entry and corruption. This is something that successive governments in Meghalaya have failed to do. They have failed to clean up the Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC) and every interview conducted for any job vacancy takes years for the result to appear. This is what is frustrating our youth and what makes them feel that there is no justice and fair play in this State.

It takes a lot for a young person to leave home, take up arms and live a life of uncertainty in the jungles. It would have been worthwhile for institutions to talk to some of the surrendered militants and try and understand what gave them the final push to pick up guns against the state – guns that are mostly trained towards individuals who are victims of extortion; guns that are finally used not for the larger good of Ka Ri Hyniewtrep but which cripples it economically. Worse is that these groups are often used by politicians to intimidate rivals. This had happened in the past in Meghalaya until RG Lyngdoh became Home Minister and cut the umbilical cord that tied the HNLC to some of our politicians.

There are of course those dewy-eyed young men that genuinely believed they would change the course of politics in Meghalaya until they realised what a futile chimera that was.

So the question the Government needs to answer is: Why talk with HNLC now? Who from among the 60 MLAs proposed this peace talk? And what is the justification for the peace talks now?

And just as a tailpiece: The NPP accused the BJP in Manipur with whom they were in an alliance for the last five years that Chief Minister Biren Singh did not have a Common Minimum Programme (CMP) chalked out to include the electoral promises of the coalition partners. Is there a CMP in Meghalaya where the NPP is heading the government? If not, why not? The last time we heard that Mr Bindo Lanong of the UDP was supposed to prepare the CMP. But it seems the regional parties are fine with not having a CMP. After all, the public is not likely to go back to the manifesto of 2018.

We voters are indeed taken for a joyride every five years and we seem to enjoy his ride. It's like enjoying sex with a rapist!

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

There are apprehensions that petrol and diesel prices may be hiked across the country. Fuel prices may be increased by more than Rs 12 per litre. As international oil prices are rising, fuel retailers will be forced to hike the prices of petrol and diesel. Given that India imports more than two-thirds of its oil requirements, rise in international oil prices increases the country's trade and account deficit and it also leads to inflation. India's trade deficit increases in proportion to rise in crude oil prices.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

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Policy Vs Priority: A study of Meghalaya state budget 2022-23

By Dr Sridhar Kundu

The state government of Meghalaya presented its budget for 2022-23FY on 9th of March, 2022. Through this budget, the government has tried to architect a long run growth model for the state, which is stable, sustainable, and inclusive. These policies are made looking at various priorities of the state as highlighted in the Governor's address to the House on March 4, 2022. Some of these policies were highlighted in my previous article on this edit page on March 5, 2022.

Policies

a. Rise in public spending- Total spending by the government otherwise known as public spending, has increased from Rs. 17,323 crore in 2021-22(BE) to Rs.18,881 crore in 2022-23(BE). The spending growth is estimated to be about 9 percent. However, total spending of the government has increased about 18 percent per annum since 2018-19. The year 2020-21 witnessed a major rise in public spending over 58 percent. Total public spending includes both capital spending and revenue spending.

b. Capital spending- By capital spending we mean, the spending by the government on creation of fixed assets. Expenditure on building roads, railways, airways, hospitals, schools, and colleges can be defined as capital expenditure. Rise in capital expenditure helps in expansion of these economic activities. The government fixed its capital spending for the year 2022-23(BE) at Rs.3500 Crore, which is about 9 percent of GSDP. In the last five years, the capital spending to GSDP ratio is on a rising trend. In the year 2017-18, the capital spending to GSDP ratio was about 4.8 percent.

c. Revenue Spending- Revenue spending is defined as expenditure borne by the government on functioning of the existing assets. This is otherwise known as running cost or variable cost. Expenditure on salaries, pensions, subsidies, interest payment etc, fall under this category. Total revenue spending of the government is fixed at Rs.15376 crore, an increase of Rs. 1420 crore over the previous financial year.

d. Fiscal deficit- It occurs when the state government spending exceeds its revenue. In the government budget making process, unlike the private sector, expenditure comes first, and income follows. Therefore, the government controls its expenditure by setting a limit to its fiscal deficit. The Fiscal Responsibility Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003 set this limit at 3 percent of GDP(GSDP) to regulate the spending activities of the government and its borrowings. As the deficit gap is mostly met through market borrowings.

Economic slowdown during 2020-21 because of covid-19 pandemic made many of the state governments including Meghalaya to amend their respective FRBM Acts by increasing this limit to 5 percent and further reduce it by 0.5% annually to reach 3% by 2025. Rise in fiscal deficit provides some additional fiscal space to the state government to raise its interventions.

Accordingly, the Meghalaya state government fixed the fiscal deficit limit at 4.5 percent for 2022-23 FY. However, this deficit does not include the loan repayment which falls under capital expenditure in the budget accounts. Inclusion of loan payment would increase the estimated fiscal deficit ratio to 6.8 percent of GSDP.

Priorities

a. Improvement in standard of living- It is one of the important priorities of the state government as mentioned in the Governor's address. Meghalaya stands

as one among the lowest per-capita income states in India. In 2020-21, the per capita income of the state was Rs. 58,000 which is less than 5 times of Delhi and Goa. The all-India average per-capita income was Rs.94,000, which is about 80 percent higher.

The state is also not free from poverty. According to the NSS Household Consumption Expenditure Survey, 2011-12, the state has absolute poverty of 11 percent, 12 percent in rural and 0.16 in urban. Rural concentration of poverty is high. No change in per-capita income since 2011-12 shows that there is hardly any possibility of improvement in poverty level. At present, above 3 lakh households are expected to be living below the poverty line.

b. Infrastructure- Development of infrastructure remains another priority before the government. Even after 50 years of the state formation, many villages in the state are outside of the road network connectivity. According to Mission Antyodaya, 2019, over 50 percent of villages do not have all-weather roads. The report further said that above 80 percent of villages do not have health sub-centres and about 15 percent villages do not have primary schools. There is not a single village in the East Garo Hills district that has access to an ATM, according to the report.

c. Urban agglomeration and traffic congestion has remained another priority of the state government. Concentration of waste in the residential area of Jowai city and its surroundings, a concern raised by many members in the house. Provision of water and sanitation and good healthcare facilities to the urban centres is also a priority for the government.

Policy vs Priority

a. A higher level of growth could be one of the important measures to attain the sustainable development goal of no poverty. The annual average growth of GSDP (@2011-12 constant prices) remained around 3 percent during 2011-12 and 2019-20 and came down to -7.2 percent during 2020-21.

The government has estimated a 9 percent growth rate during 2022-23. To achieve this and moreover, to sustain this growth in the long run, the government tried to emphasise more on capital spending. During 2019-20 and 2022-23, the capital expenditure has increased about 3 times. As said above, capital expenditure is made to create fixed assets formation which generates additional employment and contributes to economic growth.

b. A larger share of capital spending goes towards creating physical infrastructure such as roads, railways, airways, the government is trying to influence growth and standard of living. Building of infrastructure has a multiplier impact on growth and its sustainability.

c. The budget 2022-23 has given some priority to the agriculture sector and its productivity. A higher productivity would only address the cause of agricultural poverty.

The state government has laid out certain policies which are progressive. However, there is a need for sustained effort to attend the take off stage. As highlighted by the finance minister in his speech, to make the state among the top 10, the budget needs more expansion. There is a need for transparent policies of private sector participation in skill development, capital accumulation and technology upgradation.

(The writer is Senior Economist, Bharti Institute of Public Policy, ISB, Mohali)

Letters to the Editor

Marketing dreams

Editor,
The current dispensation led by Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma and a couple of his teammates seem to be like an 'active' sales team selling 'productive' ventures and mega plans like having a helicopter service to Dawki, Williamnagar and Sohra to promote tourism as well as trade and commerce. It doesn't end there. They have even come up with plans and proposals to start operating electric buses to conserve the environment. There are several other plans too that deserve applause. However, let me remind the readers that if one were to travel to Pynter village further down from Pynursla, there is a foundation that was laid to start a so-called tourism ropeway project which never took off. That poor foundation stone has moth-balled into something else. Another venture is also in education where it was stated that the government spent nearly 2000 crores in infrastructure creation. However a trip to any interior village will show us the reality. Schools are in a pathetic state bereft of any computer lab or even a

library. One last point about the electric buses should also bring in the question of transparency, accountability and responsibility of the existing JNNURM buses. Most of them are worth nothing and need to be sold as scrap. A government that sells dreams without going to the core priorities of the state can only be compared to "Alice in Wonderland."

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar
Via email

Shocking indeed!

Editor,
Apropos of the letter, 'A social need from 70 years of social neglect' by Toki Blah (ST March 8, 2022), the revelation is shocking on two fronts namely the age and certification of materials that determines our safety factors and consequently our life and death. Last week, it was shown on TV that one block in Gurugram, National Capital Region, Delhi would need to be renovated though not before it had claimed two lives of the residents. Following this the residents of one huge block had been evacuated but sadly the contractor is absconding. People

took heavy loans expecting to live in their own apartments but life for them is shattered.

In Meghalaya we play with the lives of innocent people in all Departments where construction activities are involved. From sand to cement to steel rods, the most inferior quality is used and now even with water supply instead of Tata steel pipes some plastic pipes and other metal pipes from third rate companies are being used and the explanation given by the PHE minister is that he cannot explain the technicalities in the House. How convenient indeed! Earlier the river sand from Kynshi which was considered to be of high quality was used for all construction purposes but now that the Kynshi is almost stagnating, the sand too is dwindling since the river has been impacted by human activities.

It was enlightening to read about how women became whistle blowers in West Khasi Hills when inferior quality pipes were used to draw water to the villages and finally the persons concerned had to confess to their misdeeds. Why is this model of empowerment of communities not tried out even today? This is the best way to

check corruption and as Toki Blah says it is done through a public/social audit system. If only the Dorbar Shnong used the social audit tools to check the quality of roads in their localities all our roads would have been of good quality and not needed to be repaired every year. Sadly, most of our Dorbars are so indebted to the MLA who in turn patronises over them.

The MLA of Umroi pointed to the shortage of beef cattle in Meghalaya leading to beef being sold at Rs 600/kg. Beef was at one time the poor person's protein. Now they cannot afford it anymore because our Veterinary Department apparently gave challans for some hundreds of cattle to be transported but those never arrived here. The Veterinary Department needs to show more initiative. As of today Meghalaya is importing pigs, poultry, eggs and even fish. Although the Veterinary Minister spoke on piggery and how it is being promoted, it will be good if we could get the small local variety which is not just tasty but has lesser fat content.

On tradition and barring women participating in the Dorbar Shnong it is time to relax the tradition just as we have done away with so

"Even truth needs to be clad in new garments if it is to appeal to a new age."

— Georg Lichtenberg

The Shillong Times

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Meghalaya Congress – hopes of revival
 AT this juncture, it is fashionable to kick the Congress Party out of its consciousness after its dismal performance in all the five states that had gone to the polls recently. Even in Manipur where the Congress was initially hopeful of aligning with other like-minded parties like the NPP, to have a non-BJP government, it has suffered a huge blow. Electoral fortunes tend to swing like the pendulum. The Congress in Manipur ended up with just 5 seats and the NPP 5. In 2017 the Congress had won 27 seats and was the single largest party then but a quick cobble-up game by the BJP which tied up with the NPP and NPF enabled it to form the government there. For now the Congress looks like it is sucked in by quicksand. Perhaps its time that the party chiefs in all the states get their act together and tell the Nehru-Gandhi dynasts to allow inner-party democracy so that the Party can be rebuilt. For, if the Congress continues to drift like this it will be forgotten by 2024 and perhaps be replaced by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). The AAP has already become the Party that does not mimic any of the stereotypical mainstream political parties.

Considering that the Congress Party still has within its membership some of the best brains of the country and that they are still hanging on despite the drubbing they have got from state after state, they would be committing hara-kiri not to halt the rapid attrition. Coming to Meghalaya where all the 17 MLAs have virtually deserted the Congress Party it is the new look Meghalaya Pradesh Youth Congress (MPYC) which provides a ray of hope. Never before has any political party, much less a youth wing, analysed the budget so incisively as has been done by the Secretary of the newly constituted body. This shows that the youth are now worried about the huge open market borrowings by the MDA government and the increased interest payments which have accumulated over the years. The question is where is this money being invested. Capital expenditure in infrastructure as stated by the MPYC Secretary helps create jobs but only if there is transparency in award of tenders etc.

The CM's claim to put Meghalaya among the top ten states in achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs) looks futile. Recently the SKOCH State of Governance Report 2021 which ranked the states in good governance, completely blanked out Meghalaya. All other North Eastern states were marked. Assam's ranking had gone up to the status of "performer" state. How did this happen? The Meghalaya Congress has its task cut out and there's hope when the youth take on the onus of critiquing the government and governance.

Rise of a 'new' BJP in a 'new' India

By Rajdeep Sardesai

If a week can be a long time in Indian politics, a decade is truly an eternity. Just jog back to Uttar Pradesh 2012 when the BJP won a mere 47 seats and barely 15 percent of the vote while the Samajwadi party won a clear majority. Prime minister Narendra Modi, then chief minister of Gujarat, didn't even campaign in the polls in protest against the choice of Sanjay Joshi, his great rival from early RSS days, as the BJP's organizing secretary for the polls. Ten years later, the BJP has just hit a 'chauka',

and coarse anti-Muslim sentiment – the party has managed to widen its social base by nurturing a 'Hindutva-plus' constituency that goes beyond just religious identity. Central to this broadening of the BJP's appeal is the targeted pro-poor 'welfarism', aimed at creating a vast pool of beneficiaries or 'labhartis' of government programmes. It isn't as if previous governments didn't have a pro-poor outreach – the rural employment guarantee scheme

in the last five years but the state's per capita income is still amongst the lowest in the country. That the BJP had three chief ministers in one year in Uttar Pradesh is proof of the leadership deficit in the state. In Goa too, the Pramod Sawant government was widely perceived as having failed on a variety of fronts, from Covid management to endemic corruption.

And yet, if the BJP was able to create a 'pro-incumbency' momentum, it is be-

cause the Modi factor often overrides all else. The connect that the prime minister has built, especially in his 'karmabhoomi' of Uttar Pradesh, transcends a 'normal' voter-neta equation. Deep in the Hindi heartland, a woman voter laments how her husband died unattended during Covid and her son is without a job but then affirms that she will still vote for the BJP because of 'Modiji'. It is almost as if the prime



its fourth consecutive win in Uttar Pradesh with over 45 per cent of the vote share that firmly establishes the party as the dominant force in Indian politics and prime minister Modi as the Supreme Leader. The Samajwadi party, by contrast, has emerged as the principal opposition force in India's most populous state but too far behind to really matter. So what has shifted the contours of Indian politics so dramatically?

The short answer would be to suggest that this is a 'new' BJP operating in a 'new' India: the party of Modi-Amit Shah has discarded the modicum of gentle reasonableness of the Advani-Vajpayee era and become a relentless election machine that decimates all rivals by the sheer force of its no holds barred methods. This is a political juggernaut that knows how to combine state power and astute media management to virtually overwhelm and even 'invisibilise' its hapless opponents into pale submission.

In the process, the BJP has rewritten the rules of Indian electoral politics, even pushing traditional notions of caste-based identity politics to the margins. It isn't as if the BJP has discarded social engineering and caste alignments on the ground: it has just recast them in a manner that the party is not identified narrowly with any single dominant caste. Instead while flaunting the badge of Hindutva – a religio-political construct that stands for both cultural Hindu nationalism

for example is a successful pre-2014 arrangement – but the manner in which the BJP has linked delivery of public conveniences, be it a toilet, a gas cylinder, free ration or a house to its political agenda, makes it a genuine game-changer. Just look at the disproportionately high woman vote the BJP has received across all segments in almost every recent election, a pointer to the fact that 'Mahila' and 'Yojana' are seen as

Deep in the Hindi heartland, a woman voter laments how her husband died unattended during Covid and her son is without a job but then affirms that she will still vote for the BJP because of 'Modiji'.

the new MY factor that has uprooted the original (Muslim-Yadav) community-caste arithmetic. But the rise of the BJP would not be as striking without the domineering presence of prime minister Modi as messenger in chief. After all, it isn't as if the four BJP governments who have been re-elected have provided wholesome governance. Yogi Adityanath, for example, might justifiably claim to have tightened UP's law and order machinery with stricter policing but can anyone truly assert that the glitzy 'UP Shining' propaganda blitz mirrors the reality of a state where millions are jobless? Manipur might have achieved relative peace

minister has struck a deep emotional attachment with his supporters to the point where there seems an almost irrational belief that 'Modi hai to humkin hai' (anything is possible with Modi) isn't just a catchy slogan but a symbol of billion plus aspirations. The well-marketed 'pradhan-seva', 'karmayogi' image can be lampooned by critics but for those far removed from ideological battles, the prime minister is a cult-like figure who is seen to be challenging a withered and corrupted ancien regime. In a sense, the opposition too has provided a Modi-led BJP with the 'perfect enemy'. Then, be it an Akhilesh Yadav in UP or a Rahul-Gandhi

the BJP can strike a chord by effectively drawing a contrast in leadership style and organizational functioning.

Which is why it is perhaps not entirely coincidental that the other big winner this time is Arvind Kejriwal and his Aam Aadmi party (AAP). For while straddling the anti-corruption platform, Kejriwal too challenged the established order in Punjab: a moth-eaten and factionalised Congress on the one hand and a feudal and corrupted 'family raj' of the Akali Dal on the other. Like Modi, Kejriwal too symbolizes the politics of hope and change, albeit without the massive resources available to the BJP leader. Which is perhaps why the BJP might fear a rising Kejriwal as a political opponent far more than they would any other potential rival. If just the last seven years have brought such tectonic changes in Indian politics, who knows what the next phase might usher in: maybe Modi versus Kejriwal in 2029?

Post-script: Two weeks ago, in this column, I had explained why the BJP was in pole position to win UP. Then, I was criticized for jumping the gun by those who insisted the state was witnessing a fiercer competitive fight. I hate to tell you so, but the truth is, election 'hawa' can be gauged only when you step out of an echo chamber of like-minded voices. (The writer is senior journalist and author. Mail: rajdeepsardesai52@gmail.com)

AAP victory in Punjab means people are tired with national parties

Arvind Kejriwal can certainly nurse national ambitions

By Sushil Kutty

A trait common to all politicians, even the bright young ones, is a penchant for sycophancy. So, when AAP swept its one-state wonder tag out the Delhi window and took Punjab by the "vacuum cleaner", Delhi AAP leader Raghav Chadha, who ran AAP's Punjab poll campaign, couldn't stop himself from blurring out, "Kejriwal will be Prime Minister."

Chadha, to his credit, added that "this shows AAP is the natural and national replacement of the Congress." Maybe the choice of words was not right. The AAP has accomplished a regime change, by not being a natural replacement of the Congress. AAP and Kejriwal wouldn't want to be another version of the Congress. To be the "national replacement" of the Congress is okay, but to be the "natural replacement" of the Congress? Never.

Chadha's euphoria of the moment, perhaps, made him overreact. But a good thing, too, because the "Kejriwal for Prime Minister" will

the AAP sweep of Punjab shouldn't surprise anybody. Such sweeps are AAP's calling card. AAP swept the Delhi assembly polls not once but twice, leaving opposition parties in single digits, and powerful national parties at that, the Congress and the BJP, left in the troughs with no strength to wade into the well of the House!

That said, AAP did not do wonders in Uttarakhand or Goa. If it hadn't swept Punjab, Raghav Chadha would not have spoken of the AAP as the "natural and national alternative" to the Congress. But "Kejriwal for Prime Minister" is a signal to regional satraps who have made common cause to remove Narendra Modi from 7, Lok Kalyan Marg that the time has come to unite under a single party.

There are other assemblies which will go to polls in 2022 and 2023. The AAP victory in Punjab is not only a shot in the arm for AAP, but also the sole reason to celebrate for the entire Opposition. The BJP was winning more than just in



keep Kejriwal from butting into Punjab affairs every now and then. That is a danger. There were reports that Kejriwal would have liked to be "CM of Punjab" more than he would have wanted to remain "CM of Delhi."

Let us not forget, however, that Arvind Kejriwal in 2014 contested against Narendra Modi from Varanasi. He lost then, but it was an early sign that Arvind Kejriwal had prime ministerial ambitions. Not then in 2014, but later. Then, at the time, AAP hadn't even made an impact in Delhi, forget about

UP, the opposition won only in Punjab. Challenging and defeating the BJP in Gujarat should be AAP's focus next. And, maybe those states which go to polls in 2023. A couple of victories more and it will cement AAP's national standing, fuelling Kejriwal's national ambitions. There will also be more stamps of approval to the AAP's 'Delhi model of governance' from the aam aadmi everywhere, all of India. The Delhi model—which made Punjab voters vote for AAP—if replicated success-

Letters to the Editor

Pathetic road condition

Editor,
 The road in Mawlai which is very busy and important and which starts from the Petrol Pump-Stanley Roy Show Room to the junction at Mawroh, FCI Godown is in a very bad shape. The road is uneven, dented, damaged and water is logging at certain stretches. This road is always in a poor condition as against the daily heavy traffic 24/7, burdened on its fragility. Poor and sub-standard repairs done by the PWD after laying of cables and pipes by the concerned departments have added to the damage of this road.

Through this esteemed daily, I just want to bring this matter to the attention of the Mawlai Town Dorbar and our representatives, MLA and MDC who are always pro-active and the Department concerned to consider this very important road on a priority basis for the overall benefit and convenience of everyone.

Yours etc.,
 Reward Rymbai,
 Via email

CM building castles in the air

Editor
 Chief Minister Conrad Sangma in his budget speech announced that the state would introduce 100 mini buses to cater to the school going children of the city. This plan was put forward to the public when Mr B. Dhar was the Deputy Commissioner of East Khasi Hills District, and also the Chairman of RTA. And the plan was stalled when the parents of the children rejected it outright. This time too, we hope it would be no different.

About the electric bus, the idea is next to impossible with the current power scenario, unless the Government can generate extra power source of 67.5 Kw for one bus. But how are electric buses possible, when Meghalaya is currently power

starved? I am sure the CM is well informed about the power crisis in our state and with the above statistical power calculation, he would think twice or thrice before building castles in the air. I wonder why the CM did not take the trouble to consult our MeECL engineers.

When Nitin Gadkari, the Union Transport Minister planned to make all vehicles electrically run by 2024, two persons of a renowned company came to Shillong from Delhi and Bombay to study the feasibility of such a plan. They stayed for three days and sensing that there's constant load shedding and power rationing, with old power lines entangled one above the other, they simply gave up and left Shillong. The lesson here is "Look before you leap."

Yours etc.,
 C. Lyngdoh Mawnai
 Shillong 14.

Too late for lifeboats

Editor,
 Apropos of the letter,

"Has the lifeboat arrived too late?" by Toki Blah (ST Mar 10, 2022) the answer is yes. We no longer need the lifeboat. The MCCL built in 1966 is now almost dead after it was left orphaned by politicians and bureaucrats with no farsightedness. In place of the MCCL the Congress-led Government of Meghalaya set up 11 cement plants by going against all norms of and managing to get through the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Forest Acts. This has laid waste the west end of the Khaddoom range. In contrast, Lafarge, the International mining company that follows all environmental norms and gives a substantial part of its earnings for the well-being of the people is allowed mining under strict monitoring by the Supreme Court.

A final nail in the coffin was hammered by the then Union Minister for Environment & Climate Change, Prakash Javedkar in connivance with the MDA Government when they gave clearance to Star Cement to expand their mining into another 8.2 Km into the

eco-sensitive zone of Narpuh reserve forest. What else can the people of Lumshnong expect? Like the Adivasis and Dalits, the tribes here too live in constant fear of eviction by merchants of greed. Lumshnong is a skeleton village whose air and water are polluted. Add to that the noise pollution coming from loudspeakers howling at drivers till 3 AM. Next on the list of environmental devastation would be Brishymot when Star Cement explores limestone in an eco-sensitive zone.

The Lukha river is dead. Its blue colour was investigated by Mukul Chattopadhyay, senior scientist of Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) in 2017. The report proved beyond a shadow of doubt that the river turns blue after it receives the Lunar river that carries all the human and industrial waste of the cement plants.

At the COP 26 in Glasgow, the philanthropist Bill Gates had donated 5 billion \$ to COP. This money is intended to reduce industrial pollution and electricity guzzling cement plants through the green premium outlay

which would enhance the price of a product to 70% more. One bag of cement currently costs Rs 400. With the green premium added it would cost around Rs 680. Paying Rs 280 extra is compensation for lives saved.

On climate change, if we see what has become of Narpuh then the change is irreversible. This is why the UN Chief, Antonio Guterres in his opening speech at the COP in Glasgow said "We are digging our own graves." And buying time till 2070 which means 40 years more to clamp mercury rise by 1.5 degrees against the wish of all countries sounds too much of an asking.

As far as Meghalaya is concerned boats needs not arrive anymore. We are already doomed.

Yours etc.,
 FC Suchiang
 Lumshnong
 Jaintia Hills

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The good thing for AAP and for the Opposition is that the AAP is an answer to the new generation's aspirations. That was the promise with which it hit Delhi's streets. There were some setbacks, but AAP's Punjab sweep gives millions, who never accepted the BJP, hope for 2024.

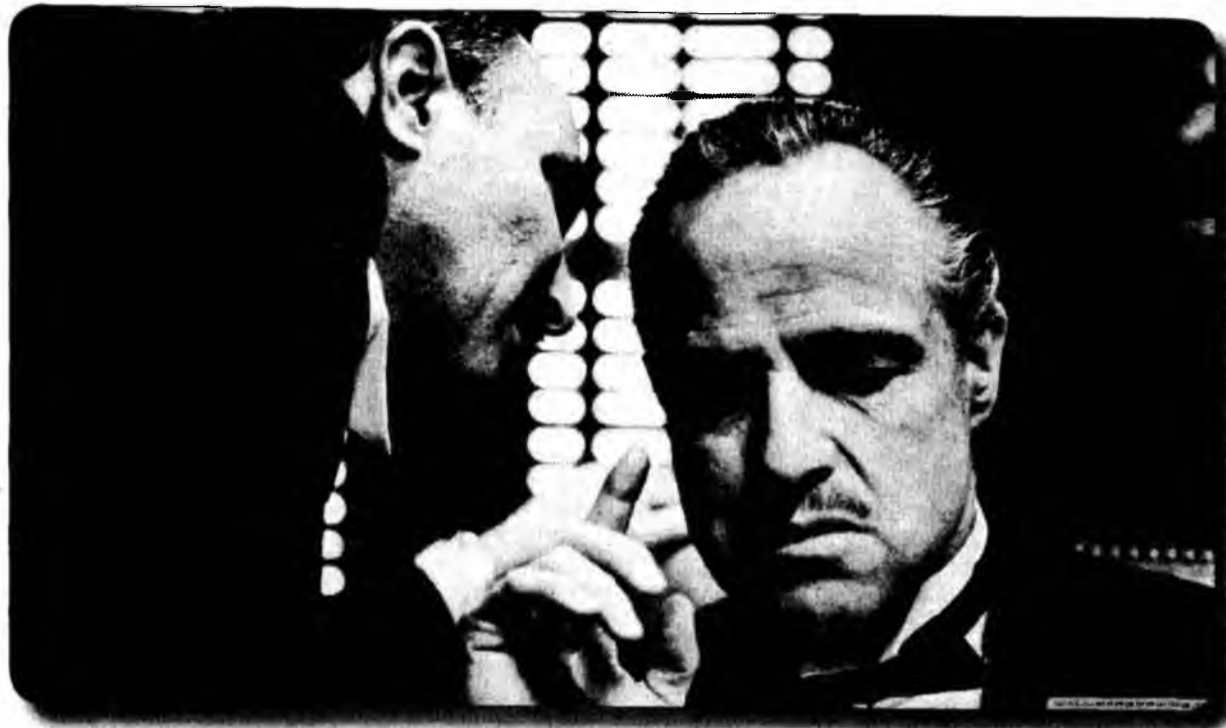
the whole of India.

So, has AAP, today, become the "principal challenger of BJP" at the national stage? The answer to that is that AAP, after its sweeping Punjab win, perhaps, the only political party which can "go to any state in India" and make an impact. This is something that only the Congress and the BJP could lay claim to.

The AAP, in fact, has "all-India" written into its very title—there are "aam aadmi" everywhere in India, cutting across state boundaries. There are Tamil-speaking "aam aadmi", Kannada-speaking aam aadmi and Oriya-speaking aam aadmi; also the Bengali-speaking and Assamese-speaking. In fact, the "aam aadmi" in AAP is the binding force that can make AAP a nationwide phenomenon. Come to think of it,

fully in Punjab could very well be AAP's winning card in other states. From now on, it's the Yogi-model versus the Kejriwal-model. Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan also had a similar and unique "ra-tion model" which delivered him a second consecutive term. The good thing for AAP and for the Opposition is that the AAP is an answer to the new generation's aspirations. That was the promise with which it hit Delhi's streets. There were some setbacks, but AAP's Punjab sweep gives millions, who never accepted the BJP, hope for 2024. The AAP, if Arvind Kejriwal plays AAP's cards right, can, like Raghav Chadha said, emerge as the "national replacement" of not just the Congress, but, more important, "replacement" of the Bharatiya Janata Party. (IPA Service)

THE GODFATHER TURNS 50



It's one of the most famous climactic scenes in film: a tense and shocking denouement that sees a series of brutal assassinations intercut with the central character calmly renouncing Satan as he becomes godfather to his nephew.

Considered one of the great classics of American cinema, the triple Oscar-winning *Godfather* turns 50 on March 14. A bold piece of storytelling, the film reinvented the gangster epic, setting a high bar for all the mafia movies that followed in its wake. It also secured legions of fans obsessed by the murky underworld of the mob.

Admirers of the saga are expressing their devotion in myriad Facebook groups and YouTube channels. Explanatory videos chart major plot developments, provide "10 lessons from *The Godfather* everyone needs to know" or offer sage advice about never revealing your hand when you're in a negotiation.

Paramount Pictures is commemorating the 1972 premiere of *The Godfather* with a series of new releases, building a sense of occasion for a film described as a "towering masterwork". Beginning with a rare theatrical run and ending in April with a 10-part

biographical drama about the making of the first film, Paramount is treating the films as landmark studio heritage.

Remastered DVDs, an accompanying coffee table book and a new interview with director Francis Ford Coppola further cement the film's status as lucrative cultural capital. Given that the studio purchased the rights to Mario Puzo's bestselling novel for \$12,500, it is fair to say that Paramount has enjoyed one of the most spectacular returns on investment in motion picture history.

Crime and family

The film revolutionised the portrayal of organised crime by conflating it with something all audiences can relate to: family. This one is a strong ethnic unit that, as film reviewer Todd Gitlins noted, ran counter to the "bleached American television family" of the early 1970s. Like many other reviewers, Gitlin felt that the appeal of the film was largely due to the fact that it provided "prime national nostalgia" for an idealised version of the past.

The starkness of composer Nino Rota's unforgettable trumpet solo signals a movement into a world where villains have values. Film

critic Pauline Kael described Marlon Brando's Don Vito as a "primitive sacred monster" who approved of gambling but felt prostitution and drug running were "infamia" – vile deeds and morally wrong.

The Godfather trilogy continues to resonate with fans long after its original release. Coppola's epic crime saga would do for Italian gangsters what the great Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein – director of *Battleship Potemkin* – did for Russian revolutionaries: lend the story a gravitas and epic grandeur that belied the brutality of the power struggles involved.

In her book *The Annotated Godfather*, film writer Jenny M Jones describes the climactic baptism murders scene as a homage to Eisenstein's iconic Odessa steps sequence from *Battleship Potemkin* – widely regarded as a masterpiece of 20th-century cinema. Coppola crafted an operatic denouement, crosscutting between the calm of the church and the violence of the executions with deliberate nods to Eisenstein's celebrated montage sequence, staging the action on steps and stairs throughout.

Involving simultaneous action across multiple locations – church, spa, suburbia, barbershop, hotel,

courthouse – and boldly introducing minor and major players in the unfolding action, it is remarkable for its scope and scale. Each of the assassins is revealed in the build up to each execution: one is making heavy work of a flight of stairs while two prepare their guns and another has a professional shave.

The crosscutting lends a complexity to the action that pivots on Michael Corleone, played memorably by Al Pacino, performing the rites of baptism: far from rejecting Satan, Michael is embracing the evils of gangster life.

Creating a classic

The aftermath scenes further showcase Coppola's great skill as a filmmaker. Although not as thrilling as the denouement, these scenes are emotionally satisfying and foreshadow the reverse moral trajectory of the sequel, *The Godfather Part II*.

Having stood godfather to his sister's child, Michael enters his brother-in-law Carlo's house to confront him over his part in the murder of Michael's older brother Sonny: "You have to answer for Santino". Carlo is too stupid to realise that his fate is sealed and he is garroted in the front seat of a car to complete Michael's revenge. His thrashing death throes shatter the car windscreen on the driveway, providing a subtle visual reminder of Sonny's bullet-ridden car at the tollbooth where he was ambushed by rivals.

Novelist and cultural commentator Umberto Eco stipulated that a cult film must offer a "fully furnished world" that fans can return to again and again.

The forthcoming theatrical release of *The Godfather* trilogy provides an opportunity for fans to experience this cinema classic again on the big screen as part of a collective audience.

There is something oddly comforting about slipping into this shady, familiar world of loyalty and revenge. A world of men and guns and pasta sauce. A world where the best veal in the city is served with a bullet in the throat. (*The Conversation*)

PARAMOUNT PICTURES PRESENTS

The Godfather

Who needs one Batman when you can have three? Possibly no one, but that's what Hollywood is giving us in 2022. On March 4, Robert Pattinson – the *Twilight* guy – takes his first trip to Gotham City in Matt Reeves' *The Batman*. Then on November 4, it's the return of veteran caped crusaders Ben Affleck and Michael Keaton, as they appear set to share the Batman role in the big screen adaptation of fellow justice League member The Flash.

That's a lot of Batmans – and that's just the big screen. There are some more hanging around in the comic, animation and video game belfries too. Factor in some of the live-action Batmans of old, like the late Adam West, Val Kilmer and Christian Bale (to name but a few), and maybe even the fun-poking Lego movies while we're at it, and we've got quite the colony on our hands.

What this shows us is that Batman is a versatile fellow, constantly being reimagined. For almost 80 years, the film and television portrayals of DC Comics' Dark Knight have shifted with the times, but that's not always been a good thing.

A history of Batman

In 1943 Lewis Wilson gave us an often forgotten second world war era Batman. Crusading against the "villainous" Japanese on behalf of Uncle Sam, this version of Batman is an openly racist work of propaganda fuelled by the forced internment of Japanese Americans after the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbour.

By the 1960s it was Adam West's turn to don the cowl in Leslie H. Martinson's *Batman: The Movie* and the related ABC television series *Batman*. Once more battling traditional enemies like The Joker, The Riddler, The Penguin and Catwoman, the overt racism was mostly toned down in the television version. Instead, the show was packed full of bright colours, slapstick violence, sexualisation of its female characters and a not-so-subtle homoerotic subtext, openly poking fun at it-



self in a camp parody of the Dark Knight.

Around 20 years later, when Michael Keaton arrived in Tim Burton's *Batman* and *Batman Returns*, it was time to exorcise the camp from the Batman. Now loaded with a heavy gothic look and feel, Keaton and Burton's *Batman* returned the franchise to a dark and gloomy tone that paved the way for the much bleaker Bat-

man narratives to come. Still with this was the overt sexualisation of female characters, especially in the guise of Michelle Pfeiffer's Catwoman.

Particularly noticeable was physical disfigurement as a marker of villainy in Jack Nicholson's The Joker and Danny DeVito's The Penguin. But gone was Batman's spandex suit and cape, replaced with militaristic body armour



and violence to match – although this was nearly derailed by Joel Schumacher's more flamboyant tongue-in-cheek family-friendly interpretations *Batman Forever*, starring Val Kilmer, and its commercial and critical disaster follow-up, *Batman Returns*, with George Clooney.

At the turn of the 21st century, it was over to Christopher Nolan and his Dark Knight Trilogy (*Bat-*

man Begins, *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises*) to reset the franchise once more. Christian Bale's Batman was perhaps the first to go "fully" hypermasculine, where Bruce Wayne was almost as tough and chiselled as the batsuit he wore.

The violence too was more realistic and gritty, as were the motives of the villains.

While still facially disfigured,

No evolution for the Caped Crusader!

they now preferred to engage in domestic acts of terrorism, with Heath Ledger's iconic performance transforming the Joker into a mass-murdering psychopath.

This brooding hypermasculinity spilled over into Ben Affleck's contemporary portrayal of Batman in Zach Snyder's 2016 box office hit *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* and box office bomb from 2017, *Justice League*.

So it was no surprise that the announcement of equally brooding *Twilight* star Robert Pattinson as the next Batman set the DC fandom a flutter.

More of the same?

Further fuel was added to the fire when Pattinson revealed in 2020 that he did not want to contribute to problematic masculine body images by working out for his new role.

Yet, as the promotional campaign for *The Batman* began to ramp up in 2022, Pattinson declared that he'd been joking about not working out, now telling us that it was crucial if an actor wanted to play Batman.

At a time when many Hollywood franchises are abandoning the controversial tropes of their past, it seems that *The Batman* is not. From what we can glean from the trailers, Pattinson's Batman appears set to remain a spectacle of hypermasculinity, with his body buffed and augmented by heavy armour.

The adrenaline rush of fast cars and physical violence is front and centre too. As is the sexualised presentation of Catwoman, portrayed by Zoe Kravitz, whose body is not armoured like Batman, but augmented by her sexuality.

The use of facial disfigurements seems to have been expanded, with scars as markers of trauma etched across the face of Andy Serkis's Alfred (Batman's butler) and the body of Pattinson's Batman, and more substantial deformity marking the villainy of Colin Farrell's Penguin. In the end, it seems it's easy to change Batman, but a lot harder to leave behind his baggage. (*The Conversation*)

From Passion to Profession

A tale of seven women entrepreneurs



Confucius said, "Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life." Finding your voice is not an easy task, especially in the case of women; sometimes, this process becomes even more challenging as society often refrains them from speaking their minds.

But today, the scenario has changed. Today's woman stands on her own feet with flying colours. Knocking off the society's ask to shut their voice, women are more assertive and are willing to go for what their inner voice says, no matter how difficult it is.

Celebrating the voice and strength of such women on International Women's Day, we have a list of seven women who made a career out of their passion.

Pooja Choudhary, Founder, Lavanya The Label

Hailing from a small town, Pooja dreamed of opening her venture. She was very clear about what she wanted - a fashion label. Pursuing

her BBA from Modi Laxmangarh and MBA in Finance from Tokyo, Pooja began her entrepreneurial journey in 2018. Being good in academics, her father wanted her to go for civil services, but Pooja had something else in her mind.

She expressed her desire to open a venture to her father, who understood her passion and completely supported her. She then started her women-centric fashion brand and has not looked back since then. Based in Bhillwara, Rajasthan - a town where most clothing brands are for men - Pooja's company has a 70 per cent women workforce. Pooja aspires to expand this brand furthermore on her own and become a renowned name in the world of women's fashion.

Kratika Jain, COO of Pataa navigations Pvt. Ltd

Kratika Jain holds a master's degree in Management Technology from the prestigious New York University. Currently, Kratika is working as the COO of Pataa

navigations Pvt. Ltd.

She is a fierce and dynamic entrepreneur who is breaking stereotypes with her strategic and organisational skills. Her ambition is to bring something new to the app's development. Supportive of her employees, Kratika is always reachable to all the people working with her. She wears multiple hats at Pataa, building, Marketing, Sales, Product Development, etc. With her primary focus on operationalising strategy, she also offers valuable inputs in conceptualising the ads made for Pataa Marketing. She deftly focuses on all the business divisions. She has a keen eye for product placement and pays more attention to details. The Pataa app has garnered 7 million+ downloads with her profound efforts and team leadership.

Aarti Samant, CMO and Co-founder, Masala Tokri

To help her mom follow her passion, the digital marketer Aarti Samant became an entrepreneur in



2019. They had a small beginning, but now Masala Tokri has become a big artisanal spices led by women. With her profound marketing skills and digital aptitude, Aarti has spread the wings of her brand in the cities like Mumbai, Pune, and Surat. She has worked with brands like Hotstar and Purple to build social media presence. She has been honoured as India's Top Digital Planners, in 2015 conferred by Digital Marketing Asia - Singapore and Business World.

Also, Global Youth Marketing Forum recognised her as the Most Talented Social Media Professional In India - 2014 at their Social Media Summit & Awards. Besides running Tokri, she is into consulting major D2C brands to build their niche on digital platforms. As the co-founder of the women-run company, Aarti feels that Masala Tokri is bringing its kind of change in debarring societal norms and empowering women.

Dishi Somani, Director, DishiS Designer Jewellery

Dishi started her entrepreneur journey in 2013 with DishiS Designer Jewellery after pursuing jewellery designing from the Indian Institute of Gems & Jewellery and Finance from IMT Dubai. Coming from a strong business family background, she was always clear that she wanted to start something of her own, and interest in ornaments drew her towards this field. Envisioning to design accessible and affordable jewellery for all women, Dishi became of the

youngest self-made entrepreneurs of India.

DishiS Designer Jewellery is an online shop for all jewellery lovers who want to wear traditional or modern jewellery at an affordable price.

Dr Nishi Singh, Director, Prime IVF

After retiring as a Major from the Indian Army, Dr Nishi Singh began her journey as an entrepreneur. An acclaimed infertility specialist and recipient of the prestigious Presidential Award, Dr Nishi Singh heads the Department of Infertility & IVF at Prime IVF.

Having experience working in leading fertility centres in Delhi and Punjab for more than 15 years, Dr Nishi has an outstanding record of 5000 successful IVF credited to her name. Being a doctor and entrepreneur, Dr Nishi aims at serving the medical industry with her experience and expertise.

Neha Sahu, Founder and Designer, Haelli

After pursuing her engineering and master's, Neha Sahu instantly got her job as an Assistant Professor in a Gurgaon-based University. Coming from a small city, she did not have much choice other than to pursue a less demanding career and could help her maintain the work-home balance in the longer run.

In this scenario, working as an entrepreneur was not something she could have even thought about. Having an interest in art

and design, Neha tried her hands-on painting some juttis (footwear) that everyone liked, which turned out to be a life-changing moment. That was when Haelli was born.

To pursue her knack for handprints and art, Neha started Haelli - an Indian brand that promotes culture with handicrafts. The brand also features unique sarees, brooches, blouses, and different clothing ranges on the website. With

confidence in her skills and to prove her passion, Neha worked as an entrepreneur and a professor simultaneously.

Managing every little task by herself - designing, painting, logistics, customer care, technical support, and PR, Neha Sahu proved that being a woman does not stop you from taking any challenge in life.

Priya Kaul, Spiritual healer, and Mental Health Expert

After pursuing MBA and excelling in her corporate career for a long, Priya Kaul stepped into the world of spirituality in 2015. A hope creator, numerologist, philosophy graduate, and PhD in Tarot Science, Priya is an award-winning spiritual healer and coach. She aspires to make people aware of their powers and strong enough to win over any challenge in life.

She has won many awards in her journey like Spiritual Healer & Coach of The Year (Delhi-NCR) in National Excellence Awards 2019, Best Healer of the Year Award by Magicka 2018, Iconic Woman Diva Award by 89th All India Achievers Conference Excellence Awards 2018, Arch of Excellence Award by 88th All India Achievers Conference Excellence Awards 2018, to name a few.

Priya is a self-motivated women entrepreneur who is doing well not only in her field but is also inspiring and empowering other women who deal with self-doubts. (IANSLife)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MAR 13, 2022

Moon trine Sun on your solar return chart and it will give fantastic results for the whole year. You will develop good relations with your colleagues. They will support you and prove to be of immense help. Bosses will show faith in your abilities and will encourage you to take greater challenges. You will also be given additional responsibility. You could also be rewarded for your loyalty, dedication and service to your organization. Those who are on the verge of retirement can take VRS. Your financial condition will be excellent. You will be lucky in matters of love and romance. Singles will find suitable marriage proposals. You will be blessed with a very fruitful and satisfying marriage life. Your life partner will keep you in high spirits. Family members will look forward towards you to seek guidance and inspiration. Achievement of children will bring immense joy.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Your disputes will come to an end. You will also devote time to your family. Some mistake made by you in your work may cost you job. You will also have to listen from your boss or senior. Hence you must rectify your mistake in time. Seasoned diseases may pose a problem or two. You need to take adequate care and caution. Keep a check on your anger and speech. You will have monetary gains but don't lend your money to any person. Time motion will be normal. You will be desirous to learn something new. You will also be concerned about your children and about their future. You will be successful in finding solutions to several problems with your intelligence and wisdom. You will also harbor a desire to do something new and good. Peace and happiness will prevail in married life.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

This week is success granting week. You will be very delighted. A work which you were expecting will take a long time to finish will get finished quickly. Your work planning will take you towards success. Your efforts will fetch you great rewards. You will also have monetary gains. You will also do well in your business and make good profits. There will be increase in your work potential. You can also get promoted in your job. You can also go for some investment and saving etc. Your time will be spent mainly in the company of your loved ones. You will also have a loving behavior towards your family members. They will also love and support you a lot. You can feel satisfied from your child's side. You will plan a journey with your family to an exciting location. You will also spend money on renovation of your house.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Whatever work you visualize will get completed. Your wishes will get fulfilled. You will get success in interviews and career related examinations. A job offer will come. You will also plan an expansion in your business. You will do your work peacefully. This time also you will win everybody's heart with your smart work. Once you decide to do something you will not rest until you complete it. You will get opportunity of employment. Your planetary position will inspire you to do new research. You will reach new heights of success on the strength of your creative talent. You will be happy on meeting an old friend. You will have monetary gains. Remain careful in money dealings. Be cautious of enemies and opponents. You will possess a rich personality.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

There will be an increase in your fame and prestige. You will also get attracted to spiritual activities and noble deeds. You also need to keep a check on your diet. Do your exercises and physical activities regularly. Don't take any oily and spicy foods. You will also find a solution to some complex problems. You will have marriage proposals for unmarried boys and girls. There will be an improvement in relation with neighbors and friends. You will not take any decision in your business. You will have a tendency to learn and do something new. You will be worried about a family member. You will have monetary gains. There will be mutual understanding between family members. Relations with boss and superiors will be good. You will win praise with good behavior.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You will have unexpected gains in your business/profession. Additional sources of income can be tapped. You will also get a good job offer. You will get back the money that had been struck up somewhere for a long time. You will find yourself financially strong and in a better position. Your creative potentials will come up before everyone. You will also make new friends. Take business related decision only after giving a lot of thought to it. There will be growth in your status, dominance in society. Fate will once again smile on you. Financial accomplishments will be made. There is strong possibility and joy of increase in salary and financial gains. You will remain busy in your work. You will also spend a lot of time with your family. You will achieve a lot in your work that you have always desired after.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

The stars are in your favor. Tasks that had been thought about by you will get completed without any problems. Your mind will be devoted in spiritual activities. You will have minor ups and downs in your health. You can also be busy in financial activities. It can relate to banks, investment, mutual funds, insurance, shares etc. Your professional competitors will be after you but they will not be able to harm you in any way. The road to

opportunities will keep unfurling for you. Make decisions in financial matters very carefully and judiciously. Drive your vehicle safely. Be careful about seasonal diseases. Marriage of a family member can get fixed. You should pay attention to even the small requirements of your family and house. Be aware of your love relations as well as career and work.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

It is time to gain. Your finances will improve. You will also establish contact with new people. You will explore new business options. You will also feel certain changes within yourself. Matters related to finance will be completed. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your spouse. You will be committed to your family and take care of all their needs. A big task will be completed under your guidance. The time is favorable. You will also learn different colors of life. You will become a lot more practical. You will step out of your dream world into the world of reality. Keep your ears and eyes open. You will open new sources of income. You will get what you have always wanted to in your life. You will try your best to remove the problems being faced by your family buying and selling, beautification and renovation will gather speed. Your list of contacts will increase.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

It will be quite a busy day. The important work will get done and time will be utilized to the maximum. Your own people will help you a lot. You will behave nicely with children and your close ones. You will also be tense free in the process. You will enjoy life to the fullest. You will also be energetic. You will obtain success in works done for obtaining money. You will also get to know some special people during a wedding function and will enjoy yourself. You will recognize the importance of time and work accordingly. You will come closer to your friends. You will gain some knowledge. You will be happy and contented with whatever you have. Your social circle will increase and expenses also. You will be in search of your basic roots. You will make plans for long term investments. You will earn lot of money.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

It is time to re-assess a few things in life. You want peace and calm, you want to spend some time being left alone with your family. And you will get it too. The time will be very well spent. There can be some big responsibility on you in your work place. You will meet your dear ones. Your dedication and honesty will bring you closer to seniors. Government related work will get done. There will be flow of money. An auspicious function will take place in the family people have a lot of expectations from you. The results of your examination will be in your favor. You will get lot of support from friends and colleagues. Your enthusiasm will be high. These are days to reap benefits.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

Your focus will shift to your work. A peaceful and joyous week awaits you. You will enjoy maximum benefits. Your bosses will be very much impressed by your attitude. Your attention will be focused on family and household chores. You will feel that family is important for stability and success. You will complete your tasks. A meeting might get postponed. Behave with humility with everyone. You will work with a cool mind and all things will turn in your favor. The graph of your prestige will go up. There will be focus on travels. The more you travel the more you will earn. You will find a solution to all your problems with intelligence and wisdom. Your mood will be upbeat. Your life will run on right track. You will feel satisfied with your efforts.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

It will be a week resulting in good gains for you. Increasing interaction with people will prove to be beneficial. You will take the right decisions with regard to marriage, romance, investments etc. Money wise you will be getting the best results. Your status will improve. Your children will follow you and make good progress in life. Your popularity and fame will increase. The circumstances will be in your favor. You will love the company of your good friends. A controversy at workplace will get avoided. You will share good vibes with your partner. You will try your best to get important portfolio. You will be very careful and attentive in your work. There will be positive development in a court case. You will also be busy in social welfare works. You will get the best of materialistic pleasures.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

Your efforts will win lot of appreciation. You will earn lot of money. Yours will be successful. You will get the best results of your work. You will be very busy but despite it you will not compromise meeting with your friends and neighbors. Your enemies will be active and you need to exercise a lot of caution. Someone can put an allegation against you. Your partner will keep giving full support to you. It will be knowledge enhancing days. Most of the time will be spent in entertainment. There will be an increase in your efficiency. You will get results according to your expectations. There will be peace at home. Guests will bring in happiness. You will feel tenderness for the weak and feeble. You will be able to achieve good results by your gentle behavior. You will take a big decision in life.

Women have taken greater control of finances since COVID



Shares and Gold. 34 per cent of women prefer to put their money in a mix of traditional investment options like fixed deposits, recurring deposits, PPF and savings account.

"The survey highlights a progressive reduction in gender role gaps and increased independence in women with wealth management. With an increase in awareness and interest in financial planning and wealth creation, we are witnessing a positive shift in investment preferences, goals, behaviours and mindsets. Women are motivated to save and invest and take control of their financial journey now more than ever. As a digital wealth manager, our aim is to help investors make these informed decisions that allow them to achieve their life goals," said Atul Shinghal, Founder and CEO at Scripbox.

Long term life goals continue to be a priority. Saving for retirement (20%) and for children's education (20%) emerged as the most important financial goals for women across India. While women under 35 years wish to make more money as their next financial goal, women over 35 years have said that they would prefer to create an emergency fund.

"The simple truth is that being in control of your own money, means you're in control of your own life. Investing, just like any other skill, needs to be developed. It's encouraging to see women bring their natural predisposition to action to this important area of their life. Only positive things can come from this change!" said Neela Kaushik, Founder and CEO, GurgaonMoms & a Community Specialist & Columnist.

Taking money matters into their own hands helps create a virtuous cycle of benefits. Seventy per cent of women have said that it gave them a greater sense of confidence and independence, and helped improve their overall well-being. (IANSLife)

Scripbox, leading digital wealth manager, conducted the third edition of their annual survey, to understand the qualitative aspects of women's investing habits and financial goals. The survey highlights a growing trend of women taking greater control of their money, accelerated by the economic impact of the pandemic.

Women are proactively seeking to educate themselves on money matters, reveals the survey. Nearly 30 per cent of women share that they had sought to educate themselves on personal finance during the pandemic. Thirty per cent of them rely on digital investment platforms for information on financial planning and investing, 20 percent depend on friends and family and 15 percent refer to articles on personal finance.

Seventy per cent of women (60 per cent in 2021) have said that they are either independently managing their own money (32 percent) or are actively involved

in financial decision-making with their spouse (38 per cent). Compared to last year's survey, there is an 11 percent uptick in the number of women who are independently managing their expenses today.

Independence in financial decision-making has led to a sense of personal empowerment in women. This is promoting positive action. Forty-four per cent women say they prioritised creating a financial plan; 40 per cent say they committed to saving more, while 23 per cent increased their investments.

One in five women (22 per cent) have started to invest for the first time amidst the pandemic. Prudence has been the order of the day, with only less than 10 per cent of women resorting to revenge shopping.

Despite these strides taken with investing their money, women continue to be cautious with their savings. Mutual Funds is the most preferred investment instrument and is the choice of 22 per cent of women surveyed, followed by

*"Every moment of light and dark
is a miracle."*

—Walt Whitman

The Shillong Times

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After Victory, What?

A strong political establishment is a rare opportunity for democracies. India had seen political instability at the Centre ever since the 1980s, but the political process has been smooth since the turn of the century. The unassailable positioning of the BJP, as is reinforced in its sweeping victories in the state assembly polls, bestows on the saffron party and Prime Minister Narendra Modi a heavier responsibility. This is time for them to renew their commitment to change the destiny of the nation in better ways.

Both the prime minister and the BJP have repeatedly shown their great strengths in winning elections. But this cannot be an end in itself. The fact is, a feel-good factor is missing on the governance front. All of China's growth took place in a space of 20 years. Not just for the national economy but on multiple other fronts too, resolute steps are missing here. While welfare measures have been initiated by the Centre, growth has been slow-paced, affecting one and all. The defence acquisitions are low key. Life in cities is becoming more chaotic. Reforms on various sectors including bureaucracy, judiciary and higher education have not been attempted at. Old, decadent systems are taking their toll. They are breeding corruption. Crores of cases in courts remain unattended for years. Justice delayed is justice denied. Notably, strong leaders like Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping had started their innings with cleaning up the system. The corrupt were herded into jails. India under Modi is taking time to change. National life is becoming increasingly disorderly. Regional satraps keep hurling challenges at the Centre. So much so, in Telangana, the state government has threatened to block water and electricity access to the large cantonment area, the southern base of the military in Hyderabad. The elected leader of the nation cannot be a silent witness. A scenario like "the Centre is failing to hold, things are falling apart," as the bard has visualized, is to no one's advantage. A leader like Indira Gandhi wielded authority. The world has changed a lot ever since. New situations require new responses.

Modi had won massive mandates in the 2014 and 2019 parliament polls. He won the mandate to effect changes. A notable obsession is to isolate Muslims, evident in present polls too, which only demonstrates a lack of vision for the nation's future. A government must demonstrate a positive frame of mind and involve one and all in pushing the engines of growth. Massive election victories must be turned into winning propositions for the people and the nation.

Ensuring Umngot Remains Crystal Clear

By HH Mohrmen

Without any doubt the Umngot is one of the cleanest rivers and it has attracted visitors from far and wide. The condition of the river has even compelled people who have seen the river with their own eyes to call it the cleanest river in the country. The crystal clear waters of river Umngot is the pride of not only the villages situated on the banks of the river but the state as a whole. In the state where coal mining and cement plants has polluted many rivers and still many other rivers have become a waste dumping ravine, having a river like Umngot is a soul fulfilling experience. The question that begs the answer is why is Umngot able to retain its crystal-clear form?

The river with a difference
In its (perhaps) not less than ten mile journey from the place of origin till it exits India at Dawki on the Indo-Bangladesh border, the waters of the Umngot remain crystal clear. Throughout its journey in the hills between the canyons and gorges that divides Jaintia with the Khasi hills; the cascading river retains its elixir quality. But have we ever questioned how the Umngot's waters remain crystal clear despite flowing many miles in its journey to the plains? When other rivers are polluted due to acid mine drainage which flows from the coal mines or those near human settlements were filled with garbage because of human recklessness, the Umngot stands out as a river with a difference.

Umngot is akin to Wordsworth idealistic Lucy
It is rather fortunate that the course of the river is so different that it runs through hills and valleys mostly canyons which divide Khasi and Jaintia hills. The terrain through which the river flows is steep hence it also makes it unfit for human habitation. The difficult terrain that it runs through is also the reason that it is the only river which does not have human settlements on its banks. From the place of origin of the river until a few kilometers before it crosses the border, there are only three villages close to the river. Shnongpdeng, Darrang and Dawki are the three villages on the banks of the river in the West Jaintia hills. Like the idealistic Lucy who lives in solitude all by herself in William Wordsworth's poem, the river Umngot too flows in isolation. Umngot flows through the untrodden paths

where only few dare to tread and that is one reason why the river remains crystal clear all through its course.

Umngot and its Tributaries
By hill regions standards Umngot is one big river and for a river to become so big, it must definitely have streams which brings more water to the river. In fact, it is not just Umngot that is free from pollution; the river remains clean because its tributaries are also clean. The tributaries which flow from both the East Khasi and West Jaintia hills do not bring any human waste to the river and that makes the river clean throughout. Umngot is indeed one unique river and there are many elements which contribute towards making the river's water



ST File Photo

crystal clear.

Umngot a source of livelihood
The river not only serves as the natural border of the two districts of the state, but it has been a source of livelihood for the people who live near it. Since time immemorial, the river provides water to the rice valleys throughout its course on both sides of the divide. The forest which is now being replaced by bamboo plantations in certain areas has served as a catchment for the river. Broomgrass which is now a new cash crop for the people has no doubt depleted the forest on the banks of the river and it is something that one needs to worry about. If the water level of the river is to continue to remain the same, the Government needs to address this very important ecological issue in the region.

Protest against the proposed hydro-electric project
The government's plans to construct a run-of-the-river hydro-electric project on the Umngot river was opposed by the people of the area. What the pro-dam group failed to comprehend is the unique

relationship that the river has with the people who depend on it for their sustenance. The project will not only cover large tracks of land which include paddy fields, but the irreparable damage and impact it is going to have on the pristine and crystal clear quality of the water in the river will be phenomenal. This will certainly happen if and when the construction of the project begins.

The tourism project will be affected
For people living in the three villages of Dawki, Darrang and Shnongpdeng, tourism has been their mainstay now. Even Amkoi village upstream of Shnongpdeng which has glacier-like rocks has attracted a lot of tourists until before the lock-

down due to COVID -19. The whitish gigantic rock with unusual shapes and formation has attracted trekkers in spite of the long and treacherous path they have to walk to reach the place. The one common unique selling point all these spots share is that the Umngot flows through these areas. These spots are popular because of one reason only and that is the crystal-clear waters. Had the government proceeded with its plans to construct the project upstream of these spots, then without a doubt the water of the river will change and become turbid and that will also be the end of the tourist spots.

Tourist spots even on its tributaries
Because of the kind of water the tributaries of Umngot have, some of the villages located on the banks of this stream also benefit from tourism. Kudeng rim with its waterfalls and root bridges and now a double-decker bridge under construction has also attracted a lot of visitors to the area. Other villages which have streams which flow to Umngot like Padu and Nongbareh and even

Samangong, Sohmynting and Moosakhia on the upstream are yet to exploit the tourist potential of the rivers in their areas which are tributaries of Umngot.

Safeguarding the crystal-clear waters of Umngot
The question is how will we ensure that the water of the river Umngot remains crystal clear? Surely the quality of the water in the river will not remain so, if there are no efforts to ensure that it is not affected by human activities. Surely the government would not want Umngot to meet the same fate like the river Kupli, Lukha and Myntdu which are polluted to such an extent that no aquatic life is found in these rivers. Myntdu in Jowai is under threat from adverse human activities and Wah Umkhrah which has always been in the news for the wrong reasons are the representations of how humans treat or ill-treat their rivers. Fortunately there are ways to prevent Umngot from succumbing to the same fate that the other rivers in Jaintia hills had experienced.

PES may help
Umngot is the pride of the state. The clear waters which people can see through many meters down to the river bed is the distinctive aspect of the river. Taking a photograph of one riding a boat on crystal-clear waters of the river is the ultimate dream of many. Umngot is one of the few major rivers in the state which still enjoys the status of a clean river. The reason is because the catchment areas of the rivers are still intact. The catchment areas on both sides of the river also still have forest cover. The forest comprises sacred forests, community or clan forests like in the case of Sohmynting, Moosakhia and Samangong and the community can be paid for ecological services that they provide by maintaining these forests. Implementing pay for ecological services can be the way for the government to protect river Umngot. Umngot is the natural heritage of the State and it is the responsibility of the state and the government to protect and preserve it.

In one fell swoop Umngot can go the Myntdu, Lukha and Kupli way if coal mining is allowed in the area. To prevent Umngot from meeting the same fate the Government also needs to immediately stop the dumping of coal along the Jowai Amlarem-Dawki road from Mustem to Jarain.
(Email: hhmohrmen67@gmail.com)

Drug De-addiction Centres : Giving Hope To The Forlorn

By Aditi Kumar

It was my first visit to a drug de-addiction and rehabilitation centre and what an eye opener it was. A quick realization dawned on me that these forgotten members of the society who are pushed to the fringe due to drug addiction require constant love, empathy, support and care. It was an emotional moment when I encountered an 18-year old young man at Kripa Foundation (a de-addiction and rehabilitation centre), who first got into substance abuse out of curiosity and peer pressure but was now ready and determined to break out of the habit and get back to the outside world to pursue his dream of completing his Masters in Computer Applications. He said that he could only achieve that aspiration with support from the Centre and his family.

Other residents at Kripa have similar dreams and all of them need the unstinted support of their families and society. In a world where addiction to alcohol and drugs are on the rise, the importance of organisations like the Kripa Foundation - one of the largest non-governmental organisations in India, affiliated with the Union Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment and others like it, cannot be over-emphasized. They have and are rendering yeoman's

al tumult and mood swings. Children are counseled to love themselves and to develop a healthy self-esteem and to let go of negative feelings.

Some who have contracted HIV or Hepatitis feel it is the end of the world and become depressed. The counselors give them hope that they can overcome the obstacles if they have enough faith and go through a proper treatment regimen. In the course of their rehabilitation they learn from one another and from the counselors that life is worth living and that they need to battle their addiction so they can get back to being productive members of their families and society.

What substance abusers detest most is the stigmatization from society. In this case, members of society too need counseling to better understand the plight of those who have become prisoners of substance abuse because often it is the family circumstances that push young people into drugs or alcohol. Since substance abuse affects the mental health of young addicts some families don't want to take them back and want to leave them in rehabilitation centres.

Often it is found that those addicted to substances hesitate to seek help because

Fueled by a desire to reach out to those who have been ignored by society and subjected to ridicule and stigma, I visited a rehabilitation centre for juveniles in Shillong. The place had 15 inmates who were provided regular counselling sessions.

service in this field. Kripa has also been working with people afflicted with chemical dependency and HIV Infection. It aims to reach out to children and adolescents in the community for early childhood intervention and risk mitigation.

Fueled by a desire to reach out to those who have been ignored by society and subjected to ridicule and stigma, I visited a rehabilitation centre for juveniles in Shillong. The place had 15 inmates who were provided regular counselling sessions. There are classrooms, a recreational centre, library and a community dining hall, similar to a hostel but a free space where they are valued and not stigmatized. Children stay at the centre for about three months and during this period; they go through a process of treatment (de-addiction) and counselling. They have to try and cope with withdrawal syndromes which is one of the most trying experiences. However, it was heartening to learn that the Centre has a very high success rate; almost touching hundred percent in rehabilitating the residents in society and helping them to dream big and work hard to achieve those dreams.

There are several reasons why children get addicted to substances but one thing was clear. None of them chose to get into the habit. They were pushed into it through circumstances but mostly due to peer pressure and conflicts within the family. The journey of these children and adolescents is arduous but their resolve to get out of the habit is admirable. After the children have undergone a process of detoxification in hospitals, they are sent to the Rehabilitation Centre. In the first month, the Centre focuses on physical health, thereafter on mental and spiritual health. The Centre has child psychologists and psychiatrists who provide individual and group therapy sessions. Every child needs undivided attention and the space and time to open up and unburden his/her feelings. Expert psychologists and therapists play pivotal roles for a child in his/her fight against drugs because the mind is afflicted by emotion-

they fear the stigma and family members too don't know how to seek help for them. Hence more awareness is needed to better empathise with those afflicted by drug addiction.

At the time of discharge from the Centre, children are afraid of the outside world and dread the prospect of having to face their peers in schools and colleges. Hence it is incumbent that awareness about having empathy with recovering addicts so that they feel loved and accepted and that can help them get back to a normal life.

The children at the Juvenile Care Centre were bright and ready learners and were provided skills training. In my interaction with a boy who had a keen interest in computers and knew how to toggle issues, I found that he was interested in learning new languages in computer science. This left me wondering as to what would happen to the dreams of this young boy if he did not get the support of Kripa Foundation and the Government of Meghalaya. The dream would have been shattered.

This is where societal awareness about the reasons for drug addiction is imperative. Most often society is judgmental and tends to condemn drug addicts. This is what pushes them to the edge. Just because a child has erred does not mean he/she should be neglected or ignored. Instead we should all join hands in supporting these children who have fallen through the cracks and make them feel accepted. With proper counselling and education they can overcome their predicament and also excel in their studies. These drug de-addiction centres have been of great help and those managing them are patient, consistent and motivated by a desire to do good for the society. They too deserve our respect and support. Greater awareness and NGOs with the expertise in dealing with substance abuse are needed in Meghalaya to help battle and to completely eliminate this societal malaise. A victim of drug addiction must be accepted and rehabilitated by the society to which he/she belongs.

Letters to the Editor

Hellish road beyond Itshyrwat

Editor,
The Government of Meghalaya had decided to decongest Shillong by creating a new Shillong township around Mawdiangdiang and Umsawli. Normally, the first thing that is done before developing a new area is to give the place proper connectivity, wide roads and good drainage. Once that is done, institutions and offices are built. But in the case of our state basic common sense has always been uncommon. Proper roads and drains were not made but institutions such as NEIGHRIMS, AYUSH, MATTI, NIFT, The State Assembly, COVID Step down hospital, Software Technology Park, IIM Shillong etc became functional. It was only after this that the decision to widen roads and make proper drains was taken.

A few months ago, it was seen that the work of widening the roads and making drains started. As a result, the entire stretch between Ishwarwat and Umsawli and beyond was dug up. In spite of the many months that has elapsed, till date there is no sign of the road construction nearing completion. As a result, the entire stretch of around 11 kilometres has become a nightmare

for travellers. The road has become extremely dusty, so much so that vehicles need to use headlights even during the day. The pebbles and sand makes it extremely dangerous. The Government does not seem to be bothered by the plight of the people using the roads and especially the patients and attendants who need to use either the NEIGHRIMS or the AYUSH hospitals.

I travel on a daily basis to my place of work at IIM and I can vouch for the hellish experience the road has become. Officials tell me that the road contract has been bagged by the Dhar brothers as they were the lowest bidder. Was there no time limit set in the contract for the completion of the work? As per the basic requirement in other states, for a firm to bag a contract of this size, they need to demonstrate that they have both adequate manpower and machinery to complete allotted work in time. Thus, most firms have the minimum ability to pave 5 kms on a single day. In other words, this road should have taken a week for completion. It has been a few months now, without any sign of activity or machinery. Will it even be completed or will it meet the fate of the Crowborough project? The joke is that the minister with the Lamborghini ought to be invited to take a drive on the road, maybe to visit the Assembly building, with

the PWD minister as his co-passenger. The experience of the ride would certainly jolt the firm owned by them to speed up the work!

Yours etc.,
Sanjeeb Kakoty
Via email

Congress Mukth Bharat in the offing?

Editor,
'Apropos of the editorial, "Big boost to BJP, AAP" (ST March 11, 2022) was interesting to read. The editor has driven home her view perfectly in saying that "the BJP is here to stay, the Congress is no competitor; the AAP has taken a big step forward and the regional dynasts have taken a beating". Yes, it agreed that the BJP is here to stay. I subscribe to the view of the editor that "the UP assertion is principally the victory of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. This is bound to raise his national stature within the BJP to the discomfiture of Modi himself." After all Uttar Pradesh sends 80 Members of Parliament to the Lok Sabha which is 15 percent of the representation to Lok Sabha unlike Gujarat which sends only 26 MPs which constitutes only 5% representation to the Lok Sabha. For the BJP both Ram and Ration worked. R. Jaganathan, Editorial Director, Swarajya magazine rightly pointed out

that "Economic benefits and freebies, if they become a substitute for real economic reform and progress, will ultimately bankrupt all States." Margaret Thatcher the iron lady of the United Kingdom at one time stated "The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people's money". It is a shame for the Indian National Congress to have won only 2 seats out of 403 Assembly seats in Uttar Pradesh with a vote share of just 2 percentage points and not winning in their one time bastion Rae Bareilly and Amethi is a big embarrassment. This reflects badly on Priyanka G Vadra. The Congress now remains in power in four states, two on its own in Rajasthan and Chhatisgarh and two as a junior coalition partner in Maharashtra and Jharkhand, while AAP swept Punjab. Surely it is time for "Congress-Mukt Bharat"

Yours etc.,
V K Lyngdoh,
Via email

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Yours etc.,
V K Lyngdoh,
Via email

Fishes out of water

Editor,
Whenever there is an inopportune change in the political ecosystem in our country, the first to accept with glee such a god-send opportunity are decidedly some of our unscrupulous representatives. For instance, without mincing words, we saw how the recent defec-

tions of twelve Congress MLAs of Meghalaya to All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) has wrought about a seismic consequences in the political architecture of our state's polity, leaving the other five Congress members high and dry. Incidentally, amongst the five remnants, a few of them had once savoured the pre-eminent powers of cabinet ministers in the past regime, hence with less than a year preceding fresh Assembly elections, the latter have found themselves like fish out of water for being mere MLAs.

Hence, the desertion of the said twelve MLAs was perchance pennies from heaven for the rest of their five counterparts and such an opportunity couldn't have come a day sooner, given the fact the latter have reportedly asserted that they shall henceforth back up the MDA government under the Chief Ministership of Conrad Sangma. And it's anybody's guess that before long they may be accommodated in cabinet ministers' rank in the unforeseeable future. Perhaps they are the unwitting admirers of late Ram Villas Paswan, ex-MP of Lok Sabha from Hajipur in Bihar, who was a consummate weathervane in the art of political defections given that he invariably managed to occupy plump ministerial posts at the centre at every change of dispensation in Delhi, notwithstanding the

fact that he belonged to Lok Jan Shakti party. Thus, is this not called the art of defections?

Yours etc.,
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Via email

What we excel most, no one wants it

Editor,
In the just concluded Manipur Assembly elections the BJP came out as the single largest party with 32 seats. I rang up an old BJP friend over there to offer my congratulations. In the conversation, I simply just couldn't conceal my curiosity anymore and asked him why their old coalition partner the NPP, with seven solid seats (an assurance that the Govt will remain stable for the next five years) was not included this time in the Government. His answer left me stunned and as a Meghalayan I simply could not help share his answer. His answer was very simple and direct to the point. He said "We don't want corruption in this Government." Jai Shree Ram.

Yours etc.,
Ramesh Tripathi
Via email

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

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

— Vince Lombardi

The Shillong Times

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Congress back to square one

THE Congress Working Committee meeting on Sunday virtually ended up in smoke. The meeting was called to deliberate on the Party's near decimation in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Manipur and Goa. Pragmatism demands that the Congress Party go for a complete overhaul and that the present leadership should take the blame for the near fiasco the Party faced in the just concluded elections in five states and move aside to set the ball rolling for elections to the highest post. That was what the members of the G23 dissident group had earlier suggested. It was a prudent suggestion but Sonia Gandhi and her children don't seem to care about the fate of the Party. They are more interested in holding on to power even after losing their pocket borough in Uttar Pradesh, when the need of the hour is for them to allow fresh faces and younger leaders guided by the veterans in the Party to lead at this critical juncture. But some of these Congress elders too are stuck in a time warp. Ashok Gehlot the Rajasthan CM shouted the loudest that Rahul Gandhi should formally lead the Party now. The reason for Gehlot's effusive support for Rahul Gandhi is to block the path for the likes of Sachin Pilot who have the capability of leading the Party from doing so. The problem with the old guard is that they don't want to release their grip on the Congress and perhaps prefer a weak leadership which allows state leaders to continue without accountability.

The problem with the Congress is its inability to face the fact that the BJP is simply steamrolling it in state after state. After the elections in Kerala and West Bengal last year when the Congress did poorly, a Committee headed by Ashok Chavan was formed to analyse the Party's poor performance in the two states. Intriguingly, the Party did not take cognisance of the Report and nor did it effect any change in the Party set-up. Hence many CWC members walked into the Sunday meeting with scepticism that any change would happen.

The CWC is the highest executive authority of the Congress and is responsible for carrying out all the activities, policies and programmes of the Party. It reports to the All India Congress Committee (AICC) which is the parent body. The CWC therefore is the head and heart of the Congress Party and it needs to take decisive action but that is far from happening. This leaves the rank and file who actually want a rejuvenated Congress Party disheartened. The Nehru-Gandhi family has its set of loyalists and they continue to be patronised as a quid pro quo.

Letters to the Editor

Will HNLC surrender all weapons?

Editor,
So the proscribed HNLC, have now decided that they want to talk peace without preconditions. I have dealt with these characters ever since the 80's and frankly speaking talking with a terrorist outfit requires different skills. Militants have no sense of honour, no aim or ideology except to make money at the point of a gun (the entire narrative of them being guardians of the Jait-bynriew - a fairy tale that has blown up in our faces), they are cowards who have no code of conduct except the code of extorting money, murder and hitting defenceless soft targets. In their greed (surrendered bosses of the outfit) are not above using gullible school children to blow up IEDs that kill innocent people simply to enhance their extortion plans. Now they want to surrender with no preconditions. But what about the surrender of arms which the HNLC is silent about?

The State Government has for so long made it a policy that there will be no talks with these people except if they surrender their

arms. So what has changed the mind of the Government that it is in such a tearing hurry to welcome back these outlaws into polite society? Is it the approaching 2023 elections?

I am suspicious by nature and the haste with which the MDA Government is facilitating these proposed talks with the HNLC makes me uneasy. The group has run out of money, the extortion rackets they used to run in Shillong and Jaintia Hills have dried up. No more money for weapons and if some of their surrendered members are to be believed, they earn a living in Bangladesh as miserable labourers in the areca-nut plantations. Their numbers have dwindled and the few insignificant IED bombings they carried out together with the bombastic statements of Sain Kupar Nongtraw (if there is really such a person) are all bluff and bluster to scare a weak-kneed Home Minister. The Govt should, in view of Rymbui's boastful claims - "Rymbui talks tough on HNLC blast" (ST Dec 15th 2020), have just told them that those who wish to come overground can come and surrender with their weapons and face the crimes they have committed.

Surprisingly, we are told this is unlikely to happen.

Evolution of the Khasi Students' Union

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

This 20 March 2022, the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) will complete 44 years of its existence and over the past four decades of student politics and socio-political movements, the Khasi Students Union (KSU) has evolved into an institution. There was a time when the KSU was almost vanishing but a new bunch of students emerged to take on the mantle.

In the general meeting of the students of Khasi Hills held on 11 March 1978 at Khasi National Dorbar, Mawkhair, Shillong, it was decided to create a new students' union. Thus, the two-day long meetings of the Executive and Working committees were held on 18 and 20 March 1978 at the same venue. This subsequently led to the formalization of the Khasi Students' Union. Initially the Khasi Students' Union composed mainly the students of the North Eastern Hill University and of twelve colleges in Shillong.

The Khasi Students Union was primarily aimed at protecting and promoting the minuscule Khasi tribal community. However, during the conversation with Geoffrey Basan, the founder General Secretary, he expressed that the opposition by the students against the new scholarship policy of the Government was the immediate cause which brought the students together and ultimately led to the formation of the KSU. It may be mentioned that in 1978 the Government had issued the new policy in education which restricted the distribution of scholarship to only two students per family whereby the students strongly felt that to be a discriminatory and anti-tribal decision.

Since its inception, the KSU had taken up various issues which are affecting the student community in particular and Khasi society in general. Pascal Malngiang has aptly divided the agenda of the KSU into two broad types, namely, (i) In-campus issues and (ii) off-campus issues. The former included issues relating to the welfare of the students and the latter are the larger socio-political issues. Among the major issues included in both the in-campus and off-campus blocks are- (a) enhancement of scholarship and its distribution should not be restricted to two students per family (b) bus fare concession for students (c) opposing the imposition of Hindi as compulsory paper for civil service examination (d) establishment of public schools, medical and agricultural colleges, upgradation of

Polytechnic into an engineering college. Whereas the off-campus issues are: (a) fencing of international border (b) repatriation of foreign nationals (c) retrieval of cantonment lands (d) Inter-State border problems (e) revival of the Dorbar (f) invocation of Inner Line Permit (g) opposition to Uranium mining (h) opposing railways (i) scrapping of the present reservation policy (j) declaration of Khasi as official language of the State and its inclusion in the 8th schedule of the Constitution of India etc.

In 1991 the collective of students desired to rediscover the essence of students' politics in the State and under the leadership of Banshan Sing Nongbet they vowed to make the KSU as genuinely a students' body as is possible. In the words of Paul Lyngdoh, the then General Secretary, "the KSU under the new leadership is built on a new found principle. It is now the new body of students in the truest sense of the term and it shall no longer be a group of unruly youths. However, this does not mean that we will be sitting quiet and no longer resort to public agitations when the situation demands. We will do what ought to be done, but at the same time we shall bring forward issues for larger debates and discussions within the society beforehand. We will use our intellect and adhere to the primordial principle of respect towards others and God or 'tipbriew tipblei' in our various struggles and not just physical might."

The Constitution of the Khasi Students Union prescribes that any Khasi (male or female) who is in pursuit of formal education within the State of Meghalaya and outside is eligible to be a member of the Union. The structural organisation of the KSU is clearly defined in the Constitution and it was only in 1981 that the Constitution was formally adopted and the same was reviewed, redrafted and readopted in 1993. The membership enrolment takes place via two fronts- (i) educational institutions and (ii) residential localities/villages and (iii) the central leaders of the KSU are elected through elections.

Since its inception, the agitations and protests are the dominating activities of the KSU. It essentially uses two methods to press for

the implementation of its demands, viz, peaceful tactics like poster campaigns, sit-in protest, writing letters and memoranda etc. It also resorts to aggressive or extreme methods like organizing black outs, bandhs, hunger strikes, road blockades, picketing and demonstrations. At the very beginning of the indefinite strike, demands day were organized. From the year 1986 onwards, the Union became fully occupied with agitations and we witnessed the climax of agitational activities where public demonstrations were held in front of the State Secretariat for a considerable length of time in 1987.

As a result, for several months educational institutions were closed, peace and tranquility was disrupted. However, agitations and protests are not the only activities and student leaders are also interested in sports, cultural, arts and literary programmes.

The Bogardus scale and bivariate methods were employed in the research to measure the attitude towards the methods that the KSU undertook throughout their movements and also on the question of the quality of leadership. It is interesting to note here that 86% of the Khasis are for negotiation as a mean to solve the various demands. Only 8% considered strike as an option and another 8% are for violent means as the way to bring forth justice. On the other hand, the KSU is not immune to criticisms as on many occasions the KSU-led movements had perhaps gone to extremes. The KSU was criticised for being parochial, exclusive and violent. Also, the participation of girls' students has been negligible especially at the higher rung of leadership. Unlike in the beginning when the students elected Kong Bluebell Jyrwa as its first Vice President. Now it has compartmentalized female students into a girls' wing. On the quality of leadership, the opinion among the educated youths was sharply divided as the respondents maintained an eerie silence on the question of integrity. Whereas, 42% are of the strong view that the student leaders are sensitive and another 42% saw selfishness as the major problem. Among the under graduates the numbers of respondents

settled and well established. But institutionalization of any kind is inherently defective and might tumble under its own weight, unless it adapts, becomes transparent, accountable and open minded.

(This article is based on the author's own research work entitled- *The Socio-Political Struggle of the Khasi Students Union, which was submitted to the Serampore University, West Bengal in 2000*)

who believed that the KSU leadership is sensitive are as high as 66% and 24% of them said that the leaders are honest.

The KSU emerged to fill in a void. What had been neglected by the political leaders are now being voiced by the students. Back then it was strongly felt that it was imperative to have a strong students' body to persistently and consistently take on the issues that matter to the society and put pressure on the Government of the day. There are certain issues raised by the KSU which are commendable and it has contributed to the political discourse in the State. Regarding the involvement of the KSU with wider political issues a majority of 69% saw the failure of political leadership as the main factor that drove the KSU to engage with critical political questions.

At 44, it is essential for the Khasi Students' Union to embrace criticism, to exhibit magnanimity and maturity in accepting questions, to face debates and dissent at all levels and more importantly to re-imagine and draw out its own future. Some of the issues and struggles that the KSU had taken up have remained since its inception. Should they remain forever? Things in the world and society have changed and are changing. Governance and politics are an on-going process and issues that matter to the society will not remain the same, barring a few. Some issues may perhaps have become obsolete and today we are being confronted with life-threatening issues like landlessness, concentration of wealth and usurpation of powers by a few tribal elites, ecological devastation, mass rural migration, complete failure in education and health care, sharp rise in unemployment and job insecurity, criminality and corruption in governance and politics, gender injustice, inequality among tribals etc. If the Khasi Students' Union falls short in grasping these pertinent issues and fails to chart out its future well, it will have no one to blame but itself.

Seemingly, the KSU looks settled and well established. But institutionalization of any kind is inherently defective and might tumble under its own weight, unless it adapts, becomes transparent, accountable and open minded.

(This article is based on the author's own research work entitled- *The Socio-Political Struggle of the Khasi Students Union, which was submitted to the Serampore University, West Bengal in 2000*)

Tragedy of the Congress in Punjab

By Dr. Dr. Nsungbemo Ezung

As the Indian National Congress (INC) faces another round of total decimation in the latest elections losing all the five states that went to the polls in February-March 2022, one of its senior leaders, Shashi Tharoor came up with the most blunt and critical assessment of the dismal fate of his party. While his unambiguous tweet "Change is unavoidable if we need to succeed" has the potential of inviting wrath from the party high command and its loyalists as his tweet amounts to directly challenging the credibility of the party's leadership at the top, it would once again open the debate within the party on the need for a change of leadership and generational shift in order to revive the fortune of the party.

The INC today is akin to an aging squad where it is the old guards that continue to dominate the affairs of the party. These old Congressmen, including the Gandhis, despite their past achievements and reputations, had

which could successfully halt Modi's wave during the last decade. It was in 2017 when the ruling BJP was at its peak controlling more than half of the Indian states, Punjab was the state where Captain Amarinder Singh led the Congress to successfully wrest power from the then Akali Dal-BJP dispensation. Then came the 2019 Parliamentary Elections where the saffron party retained power at the center by virtually sweeping the whole of the country. In the same election, however, Punjab again was among the only few states in India which could not be breached by the BJP-Modi wave; Captain Amarinder Singh had again delivered 8 Lok Sabha seats, out of 13 in the state, for the Congress Party.

Congress High Command in New Delhi had, however, unfortunately failed to acknowledge this critical fact - the party's status in the state and their popular leader. Instead, they simply allowed one BJP turncoat,



long lost their grassroots' support base and relevance in Indian politics by relegating themselves to the power lobby in New Delhi at the mercy of the party high command. The Party no longer has the ability to infuse enthusiasm and motivation for the party loyalists and workers across the country. Congress leadership, however, appeared to be not ready to reconcile itself to this truth. Instead, the Congress Working Committee (CWC) in its first meeting after being routed in the five states election unanimously resolved to reposit its faith in the leadership of the Gandhi family as the party relaxed to the same old excuses of not holding the central leaders and high command accountable for the party's loss in states election.

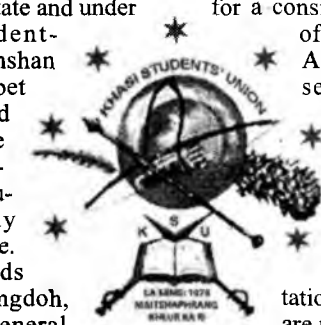
While it is true that the result of one state election is not necessarily a "referendum to the national leadership," - the Congress' standard explanation - when the party keeps losing one state after another and one national election after another for the last two decades under the same leader/s then is it not high time that the party seriously introspects on the credibility of those leaders in leading and reviving the party? If there is one thing that the leaders of the grand old party of India need to do if they want to reverse their electoral fortunes in the country then it is that they need to relieve these old guards from their respective responsibilities and assignments they are holding in the party, and make way for the many young talents that are available within the party to assume command and lead the party. But there was one Sardarji who was an exception to this narration - Captain Amarinder Singh!

Captain Amarinder Singh has for the last two decades been among the few remaining popular grassroots leaders among the Congress veterans. Although his post-Congress political adventure failed to yield the desired result both for him and the new party that he had founded, the Congress under him in Punjab was once a formidable political force. Remember, Punjab under Captain Amarinder Singh was among the very few states in the country

Navjot Singh Sidhu, to take on their popular leader. The party's central leadership watched in virtual silence as Sidhu waged a relentless campaign for four years, since he joined the party in 2017, against Captain Amarinder Singh to remove him from the position of Chief Minister. Instead of restraining Sidhu from campaigning against their very respected veteran, the party fuelled Sidhu by making him head of the party in the state in 2021 which had only emboldened the undisciplined Sidhu to intensify his campaign to remove Captain Amarinder as Chief Minister at any cost. And as Sidhu succeeded in removing Amarinder Singh, his party had to pay the high price to eventually lose in 2022 one of the last Congress bastions - Punjab. BJP must be relieved today given that Navjot Singh Sidhu had left the party: the one who did not get a chance to create trouble in the saffron party is today creating lots of trouble in Congress.

If the crisis in the past four years within the Congress in Punjab is any indication, then it is that the central leaders of the grand old party of India are either already in a state of being brain-dead, losing all aptitudes to read any unfolding crisis or they have lost control over the party. The inability of the central Congress leadership to control the infighting and factionalism among the Sardarjis reflects the overall dismal condition of the party.

The 2022 Punjab state election marks an end of an era in Indian politics in a sense that the curtains had come down on the illustrious and inspiring political careers of one of the most respected and leading Indian statesmen. And as Captain Amarinder Singh went down fighting, facing humiliation from his own party men, he had also ensured that those who had humiliated him and stole power from him also went down along with him. Charanjit Singh Channi, the man who replaced him as Chief Minister, lost from two assembly seats that he had contested, Navjot Singh Sidhu too lost and his former party was routed and left totally humiliated. As he loses, Congress too lost along with him.



LA SANGH 1978
KHASI STUDENTS' UNION
SHILLONG

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Noise pollution

Editor,
Religion is supposed to foster harmony, brotherhood and result in peace. In the vicinity of Reid Provincial Chest Hospital located at Upper Mawprem, Shillong, one can witness religious rituals and prayers being conducted through PA/loudspeaker systems and these activities become more intense as the night approaches. It appears one group is trying to outdo the other. However, one aspect that needs due consideration is the patients and staff of the above-mentioned hospital who are subjected to such high levels of noise pollution whereas, the hospital needs a conducive environment to provide best services to the public. The need for noise reduction in the area can therefore not be ignored by the competent authorities. Hence, effective steps/action may be taken in this regard.

Yours etc.,
Earningstone R Sangma,
Via email

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Technological breakthrough

Editor,
About a month ago, I came across a mind-blowing report published in *The Hindu*, concerning what modern scientists have long been struggling for, and thank God, India has finally achieved that. The two environmental scientists from Hyderabad, interestingly husband and wife, put forth an incredible "solution" to energy generation without obnoxious fuel. It is a breakthrough technology that can throttle back greenhouse gas emissions. It may help drastically cut down the damaging fuel consumption. The fruit of exhaustive research spanning over three decades by Dr Srinivas Bhaskar Chaganti and Dr Bala Chaganti who worked together and pioneered a revolutionary "cyclic wheel" to address the most nagging concern of modern times. It is learnt that even the BBC has done extensive coverage on the technology on January 9 last.

This could in fact be the fundamental premise to

quickly build a drain-less battery. The couple, since their early days, had been experimenting with various technological ideas and methods to generate energy without fuel. Their efforts finally paid off in 2021, as they were successful in producing a powerful battery system as a "hybrid perpetual mechanical battery", with the potential to provide an immediate solution to the world's energy crisis. The invention has formally been patented on 22nd Nov. 2021 under the Government of India.

There is every likelihood of opening up the possibility of converting chemical batteries into mechanical setups. Who knows the idea can further be evolved and replicated in the making of a lithium battery and so on! The world will one day wake up to electronic gadgets that never run out of juice, vehicles that can travel the world without fuel! Well, if everything falls into place then very soon, the earth's healing and human greed will also go hand in hand. More than anything, we badly need the fuel-less power to power this civilization. The heat of climate change should not take away the breath of humanity.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwalli,
Shillong

The Government instead has hastily identified an interlocutor to facilitate the talks even when reports floating around are that the Home Ministry is reluctant to bow to the wishes of this ragtag band of criminals. It's important to bear in mind that surrendering without their weapons is like an official license for these chaps to come overground and continue with their extortions and criminal activities; except that now they are under Government protection.

Extortion, intimidation and murders will start again. The most probable and apparent reason for accepting such talks on such unviable grounds is to use the surrendered militants to intimidate, arm twist and ensure electorate victory to some unscrupulous politician and his party. This is no conjecture. We are talking about unprincipled politics here. It has happened before for both Assembly as well as MDC elections. Hence the haste of the Government in the matter is deeply suspicious. The saddest part of the story is if things go wrong, as they are bound to be, the blame will fall on the interlocutor. No wonder there is the proverb that says "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread".

"Globalization creates economic policies where the transnationals lord over us, and the result is misery and unemployment."

— Evo Morales

The Shillong Times

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End to Hijab row

A keenly awaited order from Karnataka High Court has put at rest what was sought to be turned into a big issue, namely the "right" or otherwise of Muslim girls to wear hijab in educational institutions. It is understandable that the matter went to court rather than the religious faithful and their leaders filling the streets and engaging in violence. Court is here to adjudicate in such matters and its word should be final even as this presupposes that judges conduct themselves in a sane and impartial manner. If they do so, that will raise the prestige of India's judicial system and of the nation in the eyes of the world too.

In its extensive judgement, a three-member bench involving the chief justice and a Muslim judge among them has rejected a petition on behalf of nine Muslim schoolgirls from Udupi and ruled that students must abide by the prescription of uniform set by their institutions, be it school or college as discipline demands as much. It has also made it clear that hijab is not an essential religious practice and the ban on it by an institution cannot be revoked. The court quoted extensively from Islamic religious texts, the views expressed by judicial courts here and in the West as also provisions of the Indian Constitution to back up its final order. Expectations are that the matter will rest there and life will carry on smoothly. Muslim leadership has always respected court orders or had challenged them in higher courts. It has accepted the final arbitration by the Supreme Court in the vexed and long-standing Ayodhya case. India famously accords freedom to all religions to practise their faith and the Constitution guarantees as much. Hinduism, not Hindutva, is a tolerant creed and brotherly relations with other communities are a given. No other religion is as open-minded as Hinduism is, to which the aberrations were the utterances and activities of some hard-line entities. They are also under control now, thanks also to the cautious steps by the Modi-led NDA government.

Situations like riots of the past are rare now. Yet, the 2020 Delhi riots during the anti-CAA agitation by some Muslim organisations had resulted in violence. There were positives to the CAA or to the NRC inasmuch that no nation can allow unbridled infiltration of outsiders, be they Bangladeshis or others. Good sense must prevail on the leadership of minority communities as co-existence is a matter of first priority for them as well, just as this is essential for the growth and well-being of the society.

Cobra effect of raising upper age limit entry into Govt service

By Sumarbin Umdor

There were two important developments coinciding with the celebration of Meghalaya's 50th statehood Day in January of this year. One is the recommendations for partial settlement of six disputed areas along the boundary of the State with Assam submitted by the Chief Ministers of both the states to the Union government. If accepted, it will mark a major achievement for both the states and may pave the way for settlement for the other disputed areas as well. The amicable resolution of boundary disputes between the two states through dialogue and negotiation will also serve as a pathway for peaceful resolution of similar lingering interstate border disputes in the northeast and other parts of the country. For Meghalaya, the progressive steps in solving the long-standing interstate border disputes are a major achievement for which the stellar role played by the present political leadership of the State deserves to be recognized and complimented.

The other development is the decision of the MDA government to raise the age limit for entry into state government services from 32 to 37 years for locals (ST candidates). On the face of it, this measure will benefit the ballooning army of educated unemployed local youth of Meghalaya as it increases the number of attempts that one can make in his/her quest for employment in state government services, which, by the way, is the only available avenue for formal employment in Meghalaya in the absence of opportunities in the formal private sector. The policy will prolong the hope and dream of thousands of local youths of getting absorbed in the government services. However, this step taken by the state government in response to popular demand may also have unintended and undesirable negative consequences which will further exacerbate the frustration of the unemployed young people of the state.

According to the American Sociologist Robert K Merton, unintended or unforeseen consequences are outcomes of purposeful action that were not anticipated by the actor. There are many examples of unexpected drawbacks and perverse results of social actions. One often cited example is the decision of the government of Mexico City which in 1989 attempted to mitigate worsening air pollution by banning most drivers

from driving their vehicle one weekday per week on the basis of the last digit of their vehicle's number plate. The policy however backfired as many drivers bought used, high emissions car which led to an increase in the total number of vehicles in circulation as well as a change in composition toward high-emissions vehicles worsening the air pollution.

Another phrase that is used to describe any affirmative action that leads to unintended consequences and perverse outcomes worsening the prevailing situation is the Cobra



Effect. The term was coined by the German economist Horst Seibert (1938-2009) to describe an experience during the British rule in India when the then ruler of Delhi, in their quest to eradicate the poisonous snakes from the city, announced a cash reward for every dead cobra. This however incentivised the enterprising citizenry

They asked him to consider coming back to the State and try for a government job as he has few chances left before reaching the new upper age limit. This conversation stayed with me as I began to ponder the likely effect of this relaxation, and I foresee at least four unexpected drawbacks and perverse outcomes that may occur.

First and the most obvious is that the number of job applicants will increase significantly as those above 32 and up to 37 years of age will now be competing along with the others for the few vacant

state government positions that are advertised from time to time. Given the present financial position of the state government and the saturation of existing employment avenues in its departments, it is unlikely that there will be any drastic rise in vacant positions in the near future. Thus, with the relaxation in upper age limit, the increased

"The step taken by the state government in response to popular demand may also have unintended and undesirable negative consequences which will further exacerbate the frustration of the unemployed young people of the state."

who took up breeding of the snake in order to get hold of the promised bounty. When this was later realised and the bounty withdrawn, the people rearing the poisonous snakes simply released them from captivity which made the problem worse than it was when it started.

During a visit to a family friend just a few days after the government announcement of raising the upper age limit for entry into state government services, I overheard one of the parents calling their son who was working in a private job in one of the metros.

number of applicants for the few vacancies will result in a greater number of disappointed applicants every time the recruitment results are announced thereby heightening the frustration level among the youths in our society.

Another likely unintended outcome is that many will wrongly assume that an increase in the number of chances to appear in state government competitive examinations due to the higher age limit will translate into higher probability of getting a secured job. This will create a perverse outcome

as it will give a false sense of assurance among many young people leading them to be complacent with their preparation for different competitive exams. As it is, many of the local candidates do not come well prepared for the various competitive exams and the extra five years age relaxation will further fuel this complacent attitude.

A more serious unexpected outcome is that many will find out in their late 30s that they are without a government job because of reasons mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. Before the age relaxation, those crossing 32 years of age come to terms with the reality that the option of joining government services is out for them. This forces them to start finding alternative employment in the private sector or starting their own enterprise. In both cases, starting early is more advantageous for acquiring skills, experience, contacts and building of assets. For those starting their own business failing fast, failing often and failing early is important for achieving success later. It is much harder for someone in his/her late 30s (and many with added family responsibility) to have the appetite and interest to take initiatives and risks in that phase of life.

Last, but not the least, is the impact of this policy on the quality of people recruited for technical posts. At the entry level for technical positions it is always better to recruit someone who is fresh from college with higher retention of knowledge and expertise than someone who has passed the technical qualification some time back. In this new situation, someone who has acquired a technical degree in his mid-20s will still be eligible to be considered for an entry level position almost 12-15 years after his/her graduation exams. How much such a person joining so late in his life long after his graduation can contribute to a department that he/she is engaged in is a big question.

In conclusion, it is apparent that in the present condition the raising of the upper age limit for entry into state government service may benefit a few applicants but will not address the unemployment situation at the societal level. The only way forward is to create and nurture an economic and social environment for the private sectors and entrepreneurship to grow and thrive in the state which will create jobs and opportunities for all.

Punjab shows governance gets votes

By Jagdish Rattanani

One message of the BJP's 4-1 victory in the Assembly polls is that it can turn around a poor performance and anti-incumbency with aggressive campaigning laced with doses of communalism, like it did in Uttar Pradesh. But the bigger message comes from Punjab, where the spectacular victory of the Aam Aadmi Party, AAP, tells us that corruption, plain and simple, is a raging issue with the people of India. It may have gone out of focus, appeared to be side-lined by communal politics but draws votes the moment a credible, viable and organised alternative is presented with a clear campaign: to fight corruption and to offer good governance. Lest we forget, this was the agenda on which Modi first won the national mandate: sab ka saath, sab ka vikas. It is another matter that he and the BJP took everyone on a different ride. It is

everywhere. In the 2017 polls in Punjab, for example, the Congress attempted to change faces with a "one family, one ticket" policy" but it saw more than half the new entrants as relatives of old timers! This time, there is range of fresh faces and an entirely different section at work, an example being mobile repairs shop owner Labh Singh Ugoke who defeated Chief Minister Channi, or Jeevan Jyot Kaur, the sanitary pad activist who defeated Majithia.

The BJP has been quick to note that Kejriwal is no threat to its growth. But like it or not, the vote in Punjab is as much a vote against the incumbency of the Singh-led Congress government, which ruled for the most part of the term, as it is against the farm laws in a place where the protests were the most visible, significant and felt directly. The farm laws have now been directly linked to



another matter that the ride still sells a good number of tickets, given the lack of or the lacklustre nature of the alternatives and the fatigue of falling back on the same old-timers who have often failed in the past.

It is therefore a no-brainer that Arvind Kejriwal's victory speech was sharply focused on issues of governance. Why, for example, do Indian students go to Ukraine to study medicine, a fact that the nation learned in the aftermath of the crisis in that country? Why do schools not work as they should, why do hospitals turn away patients, why are public utilities so poorly maintained? These everyday questions of everyday people can still become turning points even though the election air has been driven by a hateful, communal edge.

The victory undoubtedly has huge implications for national politics headed into the next national elections in 2024, in the light of the expected completion of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, and will unleash its own dynamic that may pave the BJP's pathway into the future.

But as the political power behind the throne of Delhi and Punjab States, Kejriwal will now have the credibility to play out his idea of governance, putting him on a better footing to spread to other States and build his party and candidature for bigger roles. The defeat in Punjab of biggies like former Chief Minister Capt. Amrinder Singh, who aligned with the BJP, the recently appointed Congress Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi (who stood from two seats and lost both), Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) patron Parkash Singh Badal, who is 94 and lost an election for the first time in 50 years, SAD party chief and Badal's son Sukhbir Singh Badal, senior SAD leader Bikram Majithia and others, gives the nature of the mandate for AAP.

There is merit in the view aired again post-election by the BJP that voters have rejected dynasty politics

allegations of corruption which will not go away in a hurry, given the intensity of the protests, their length, the forced come back of the BJP and the voices within the BJP, notably the Governor of Meghalaya, Satya Pal Malik raising many questions on legislation.

It should be clear at this stage that the BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not earned itself the image of a clean party. There was a time of tussle between the so-called old-timers and the "pragmatists", the latter represented by the likes of the late Pramod Mahajan who wanted to grab power, whatever the means or costs. What has eventually emerged is an entirely different and potent force that seeks to override, overwhelm and even obliterate the past, in an unprecedented kind of "Rumsfeldian" shock-and-awe spread across the nation. The US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld used it against Iraq. The BJP uses it against India.

In the end, the BJP can hardly keep away from allegations of corruption. It needs more of the business connections to feed its pipeline, to do the "shock-and-awe", and to carpet bomb the nation with its propaganda. Its policies, like the new labour laws that will take effect now, will pit it against the ordinary people and particularly the poor. Its establishment status and the desire to perpetuate its power and to promote its communal agenda, will lead to more strife. In the end, its corruption is as vulnerable to Kejriwal's rhetoric and work as it has proved against the Congress. So, in the reality of a 4-1 victory and divisive politics sits the tale of a seismic change that carries some hope that governments in future will run on issues of governance and not on issues of gaushala.

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

Letters to the Editor

Traffic woes and unending nightmare

Editor,
Earlier whenever the weekend was afoot or the week begun, commuters dreaded the insufferable traffic jams but nowadays this suffering has become an everyday affair. To add insult to injury, our Chief Minister in his budget speech said that electric buses would be introduced to ease the traffic congestion. Any sane person would understand that the number of vehicles on the roads has increased manifold over the years while the roads have remained the same. Where would the aforesaid vehicles ply then begs the question?

Ambulances ferrying patients to hospitals are not spared either as they don't get the leeway to pass through in spite of sounding their sirens as there's no freeway for them to pass through because of the chaos.

Why can't our political representatives come out with some practical solutions instead of giving us these lofty dreams and ideals which do not suit the ground realities. Our state has reached the 50th milestone. Let's take the state forward and not regress to a point where we might all have to learn to ride horses and start rearing them so

as to get from point A to point B.

Hope our political leaders are listening and doing the work they're elected for and not merely jumping parties as and when it suits them.

Yours etc.,
Angela Lyngdoh,
Shillong-14

Gratitude and Adieu Bah Rowell Lyngdoh

Editor,
The Constituency of Mawkyrwat is deeply saddened by the passing away of Bah Rowell Lyngdoh, the Ex MLA of the constituency. He was once the Deputy Chief Minister of the State of Meghalaya. His contributions to the constituency are remarkable, particularly in getting the full-fledged district of South West Khasi Hills in 2012. He was a renowned and vibrant political leader of the western Maram. During his tenure in active politics, he effected several changes in the entire district of South West Khasi Hills. In fact, his was a successful political career. I often heard his name being mentioned when I was a small boy in the village. If Mawkyrwat is better today in various developmental indicators much of the credit goes to Bah Rowell Lyngdoh. The Con-

stituency in particular and the whole district of South West Khasi Hills mourns the sudden death of this great leader of the region. May God grant him eternal bliss in heaven and reward him for the service done to the society.

Yours etc.,
Aiborlang Nongsej,
Mawkyrwat

It's the era of coal barons & company

Editor,
Apropos of the letter, "Hellish roads beyond Ishyrvat," by Sanjeeb Kakoty (ST March 14, 2022), one empathises with the harrowing experiences of people having to travel on that dusty road (now hanging fire for months) to NEIGRIHMS, IIM, IT Park and the soon to be completed State Assembly. The New Shillong Township is part of a master plan but instead of according top priority to this area by way of four-laned roads and proper drainage systems, the entire area outside NEIGRIHMS has become like a congested bazaar. Anyone is allowed to set up shop anywhere. The letter by Kakoty exposes this misplaced priority of the Government, especially since the Ishyrvat road connects to NH6 that serves as a bypass to Silchar or Guwahati thereby

allowing drivers to avoid the deadly Shillong traffic snarls. Unfortunately, this very important highway is today a horrifying picture of dust and grime. People living around the area are the worst affected by the dust. And no one is held accountable! This is the MDA Government in Meghalaya! In the Assembly people just give assurances or smile sarcastically.

In Meghalaya road contractors are benami fronts of politicians and ministers! Gone are those days before statehood, when tenders were floated in newspapers. Our once honest judicious, not so rich contractors but well experienced and with only a dozen frying steel saucers and no JCBs or road rollers (just hired) would apply and the PWD would grant few kms to each one to give an opportunity to as many contractors as possible. Our unemployed youth were engaged as labourers and at least had some livelihood.

At that time judicious engineers would inspect the quality of work and anything that didn't meet up with the standards would be demolished and redone. Time frame was important but many completed the work right on time for without that they would not be paid their bills. Today the bills remain unpaid for a long time but contractors are so rich they can continue to work without their bills being paid.

However, as soon as the monsoon showers start the quality of work is exposed and fresh tenders are floated. Contractors are never black-listed. This has become the norm now.

Today, it's a one-man show. The PWD minister is also the co-owner of a construction company. Is this not a conflict of interest? But with the MDA Government anything goes. The worst part is that tenders are quickly distributed but there is no insistence on a time line. It can take 2-3 years or more to complete even a small piece of work. Look at the Umpling bridge which connects the residents of Umpling to Rynjah. The bridge was hurriedly dismantled three years ago but remains incomplete even today although it is just about 20 metres long. Earlier the excuse given was that Covid prevented the contractor and his workers from proceeding with the construction work. But since last year normal work has started. So, what's the excuse now? Patients having to go to NEIGRIHMS and NEIAH have to take the roundabout route through the traffic packed Rynjah-Lapalung-Umpling road after being charged very high taxi fares. Fortunately, it is learnt that the new MLA of Mawryngkneng is monitoring this matter closely. Let's hope the residents of Umpling, especially the school children can soon travel through the more

convenient route.

The dangers posed by contractor-turned-minister syndrome is that the Myntdu river becomes a convenient dumping ground for pre and post construction debris. Right now the turbidity of the Myntdu river is alarming. The question is who will bell the cat and defeat these unconscionable politicians. During the campaign period the voters seem to suffer from memory loss. Or, perhaps the Minister is not from the affected constituency. Look at the hot topics of Marten and Lummakjai which are raked up every now and again but soon forgotten. The public of Shillong and Meghalaya seem to have reconciled to the prevailing stench emanating from the garbage dumps.

No one is ready to save Meghalaya from the sorry mess we are in today. The pressure groups never raise their voices against corruption and illegal coal mining, so why should we trust them to do the right thing. No one honours the principles of the Indian Constitution any longer.

Yours etc.,
W. Passah
Nongkrem

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"When a person doesn't have gratitude, something is missing in his or her humanity."

— Elie Wiesel

The Shillong Times

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Hek's pragmatic intervention

ISSUES related to women and children are often relegated to the back-burner. Even women legislators have failed to draw the attention of the House to such pernicious issues which affect the economy of the state in the long run because half of the population are non-productive due to health and other reasons. On Tuesday last, the BJP MLA from Pynthorumkhrah Constituency pointed at the need to expand the ambit of reservation to the depressed sections of society which includes the marginalised among tribals. How this intervention can translate to action is a tall order but the point made by the MLA has to be explored further because this is a much neglected issue since the poor are also voiceless.

As former Health Minister, AL Hek would be informed that Meghalaya is a state with the highest number of single-mother households on account of abandonment and divorce and that children are cared for by their mothers. These women are largely domestic workers or hawkers. They hardly earn enough for two square meals much less to send their kids to school. But they are invisible in the larger schemes of things including in the state budget. Hek should call for a study to determine exactly how many single-mother headed households there are in the entire state so that adequate resources are allocated for them and their families. What also batters women in Meghalaya is early pregnancy and non-adoption of family planning methods. The latest NFHS -5 found that in Meghalaya only 27% women adopt family planning methods while states like West Bengal and Himachal Pradesh are as high as 74%. Even a Christian state like Nagaland has done better with 57% women using some family planning method.

The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) which is the number of live births per 1000 births shows that of every 1000 babies born 32 die at infancy. Maternal mortality or women dying at childbirth is equally high and this is due to the mother's poor health, mainly anaemia. 56% of women in the age group of 19-45 years are anaemic in Meghalaya. The staggering figure of July 2020 where 61 pregnant women and 877 new-borns died in Meghalaya between April to July that year is a stigma. The figures of children who are stunted in Meghalaya is 48.2 rural and 35.1 urban. Stunting has huge costs for the child and the economy. Stunted children have weakened immune systems, are more susceptible to diseases like diabetes and cancer, and are likely to die earlier than non-stunted individuals. Brain development is affected too, resulting in lower IQs and ultimately reduced incomes in adult life. When will these poor socio-economic indicators begin to be taken seriously?

Collective Introspection a Must

By Lawrence Pherliam Sumer

In a representative democracy like ours, we elect a representative who will initiate and vote on legislation or policy undertakings on our behalf. Political parties are the basic framework of representative democracy. They are one of the most fundamental institutions for any democratic setup. They offer electorates unique policy choices and bring together individuals who share the same political ideas that strive to attain the party mission incorporated through party manifestos. They give us a

to live up to our expectations and are not exactly representing our interests, then we do have the power of choice, power to alter and change them as and when the time to do so permits. As electorates, we more or less provide direction to our own economy and state of affairs for the next five years or so. In fact, the quality of our representation in our legislative assembly very much reflects the general mind-set of us as electorates. But, the biggest

easily wheeled away just like that?

We talk about representatives' absenteeism from their constituency post-election only to become visible again after five years, but we undermine our own role as electorates, where we have come to believe that our duty is limited only to exercising our voting right. We do not question, engage nor debate during those five years of "political reign" and when our representatives are not

office bearers. As for their political beliefs, they are non-existent, nothing much to differentiate one party from another, except for the fact that every one of them wants to uphold the indigenous identity of every community. As such, candidates are rewarded with party tickets not on the basis of their political ideas but more on the winnability factor. No wonder, they jump ship and change political colour every now and then. What else can one expect when their individual goals go parallel with their



window about what a particular candidate stands for based on which party he or she belongs to. Yes, we often vote for individuals during the elections but in reality we actually vote for the party which they belong to. We are busy people; we have work to attend to, kids to care for and probably the task of looking after our elderly at home. We do not understand the ins and outs of governance and neither do we understand any single piece of legislation. In a way, we neither have the time nor the inclination to study each law or policy matter. Hence, we delegate such responsibility to others who volunteer themselves through their candidature and whose primary job is to understand the intricate elements of governance and debate or vote keeping in mind our interests.

If our representatives fail

tragedy remains that we usually exercise our franchise with our hearts rather than our heads, which more often than not throw at us representatives that neither understand their obligation nor do they try to study and become experts of governance and legislation when opportunity presents itself.

We do not need a rocket scientist to tell us that a bureaucratic bully is able to raise its ugly head when electorates fail to choose well. As electorates, we do not value our vote to the extent that candidates have to earn them but we would rather offer them as gifts instead. We often fail to exercise our acumen and we are too lazy or laidback to think and ponder what the past five years has bestowed upon us. Why do we always let others think on our behalf and lower our guard emotionally to a point where we are

made accountable to us during that period, they are more or less free to do what they please. Then there are those eligible electorates who do not participate, they choose to leave their own future and the future of their children to someone else's intelligence. We have all become disenchanted by our political class, alright, but to run away from one of our most basic duties, which very much shapes the future of our society, is simply not an answer to the general problems we have at hand.

The relevance of political parties are also subjected to election years alone. Forget grassroots membership, presently most parties are only too happy to survive without being pertinent. We do not see much activity in their posh offices except during election year or when the party chooses to renew their

parties' ideologies. To sum up, our political parties have failed to play their part considerably.

We may conclude that representative democracy has its many drawbacks but as Winston Churchill once said, "Democracy is the worst form of government - except for all the others that have been tried." It is time we introspect and perpetuate the value of our political participation and do give ourselves a moment to get schooled by the last 4 years or so, leave it behind, alright, but learned and unlearned for the next year of opportunity, 2023.

We have always settled for less, it's time we play our part and play it well. Maybe, it wouldn't be a bad idea to start looking for a basic character trait again, INTEGRITY, remember it's always good that a person is only as good as their word.

Two roadshows tell evolving political fortune of BJP and AAP Kejriwal has the mojo now to challenge Modi in Gujarat

By Sushil Kutty

My roadshow versus your roadshow. The last time AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal took on Narendra Modi the 'azaan' sounded and Kejriwal paused. Then, Varanasi voted Modi to make him Prime Minister. Kejriwal didn't have a prayer to stop him. In 2019, nobody had a prayer. Today, another nearly five years later, AAP is riding high and AAP thinks Kejriwal has got more than a prayer to beat Modi at his game.

That is not to say that Modi is not on a high. The BJP's 4/5 report card—Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Uttarakhand and Manipur—depicts a no less sterling performance from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. His stock has soared to an all-time high since after the "bodies are floating in the Ganga" sing-song. Now talk is swirling that after UP 2022, India 2024 will give Modi and the BJP a third straight term.

That is, if the AAP (and the rest of the Opposition)

AAP was handed Punjab lock-stock-and-barrel, the party handle tweeted—, 'After Delhi and Punjab, now Gujarat wants AAP.' 'Dream on' must have been the BJP's first thought, but not the last.

The AAP was planning to take out a 'Tiranga Yatra' in Gujarat. Also, knowing that BJP rides high on nationalism, AAP has adopted Shaheed Bhagat Singh as its own. AAP's 'Tiranga Yatra' will travel through all the tehsils and panchayats of Gandhi's home-state. This, even as AAP mounts a membership drive in states and UTs down South including in Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep. Kejriwal wants the aam aadmi across the length and breadth to vote him in and Modi out.

On the Gujarat blitz, Kejriwal will be accompanied by Punjab CM-designate Bhagwant Mann. AAP's Punjab roadshows were 'mega' affairs. So were plans for the inauguration of the



allows it. AAP is waving the 'jhaadu' and Raghu Chadha talked of the "vacuum-cleaner" and "AAP's national transformation." Two days later, Modi headed for Gujarat, his home-state and the place from where he made his entry into national politics. And the Modi roadshows, one in Ahmedabad and the other in Gandhinagar, have set the tone and tenor for Gujarat 2022.

Arvind Kejriwal, on his part, followed up AAP's stunning 92-seat Punjab sweep with a roadshow in Amritsar. Party workers waved the tricolour, and the AAP flag. Kejriwal said "I love you Punjab" and thanked the "people of Punjab." Come 2024, they will vote for Kejriwal and the AAP while the BJP will find it uphill in Bhagat Singh-country as it always has.

It's very unlikely there will be a Modi roadshow in Punjab. Not today, tomorrow or a month later. Not even after a year, two years, or three years. But expect a Kejriwal roadshow in Gujarat. Definitely more than one as we get closer and closer to Gujarat 2022. Modi, the accomplished politician that he is, must have already factored this into his Gujarat calculations.

The Bharatiya Janata Party will be making a mistake if it takes AAP's Gujarat challenge lightly. AAP did not wait for the Punjab victory to sink in before it announced its plans for Gujarat. By now, the party's backroom geniuses must be at the drawing board sharpening pens and shaping AAP's Gujarat 2022 campaign.

Meanwhile, the campaign on Social Media has started. March 11, the day after

AAP Government of Punjab. Arvind Kejriwal knows how Modi capitalized using event management, how Modi transformed every occasion into an event—a self-aggrandizement larger than life. It's a Modi talent, but Arvind Kejriwal is no less a publicist. How many of us have forgotten how Kejriwal bedded down for the night on the main road in front of Rail Bhavan in New Delhi?

Meanwhile, flowers were selling like hotcakes in Gujarat and Punjab over the weekend. Flowers and slogans rent the air. In Gujarat, it was surfeit of 'mogras' and cries of 'Jai Shri Ram'. In Punjab, Kejriwal began his roadshow from the Golden Temple. Modi does not have to swear he's a Ram bhakt. Kejriwal is a Hanuman bhakt! And anybody who is Hanuman-bhakt does not need to prove his loyalty to Ram.

And the "bhakts" are stringing Kejriwal high for "what he is." The day after the Punjab results, Kejriwal became 'Kejruidin' for many on Social Media. In the days to come expect 'Kejruidin' to trend. Also, expect Gujarat 2022 to be the finest to date. The Hindu-Muslim divide will sharpen; don't forget, the 'Hijab row' is hanging there in the divide!

AAP doesn't want to lose momentum from the Punjab victory, and the BJP does not want its momentum upended by an eight-year-old upstart. For Modi, a defeat in Gujarat 2022 will spell a setback going into the 2024 roadshow. For Kejriwal, if AAP scores three straight 'AAA', it'll be 60:40 in his favour, different from the 80:20 that Yogi banked on. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Shillong needs a futuristic plan

Editor,
It seems that the present political dispensation in the state does not practice what it preaches. While on the one hand statements are made that steps are being taken to decongest Shillong by shifting government offices away from Shillong to New Shillong Township, on the other hand foundation stone for new government buildings are being laid in the most congested parts of the city.

Take for instance the vacant plot next to Nokrek building opposite PHED. While this plot should ideally have been developed as a parking space to accommodate the huge demand generated by the Third Secretariat, PHED, DTO, PWD, Health and other institutions including the office of a political party located nearby instead, a foundation stone for a new office building seems to have been laid. The result would be more roadside parking and complete traffic gridlock in this area. As it is, the traffic in this area during office hours is chaotic, to say the least. It is high time that government takes the opinion of professionals keeping in view the growing congestion in the city instead of being

dictated by contractors.

Similarly, it appears that plans are afoot to redevelop the MTC complex in Police Bazaar. We pray that it is not a commercial complex because that would be putting the final nail in the coffin. In case the city of Shillong has to have a future some very hard decisions will have to be taken by the government. Populist measures like electric buses are impractical in a situation where roads are already choked and electricity is a scarce commodity. It is perhaps necessary that in case the State does not have the capacity, some professional institutions like IIT Kharagpur or SPA Delhi or any other reputed organisations are engaged to prepare a master plan or a development plan of the city covering the next 20 years with public consultation. At the moment apart from the building by-laws which is again a highly contested business, there is no development control or vision for the city and it is a situation of free for all and might is right.

Unless some concrete measures are taken on an urgent basis, citizens will continue to suffer, congestion will continue to grow and in every gathering traffic will be the topic of discussion and the city will continue to die a silent death.

Yours etc.,
B. Dutta
Shillong-1

Unfair comparison

Editor,

The Editorial dated March 14, 2022 captioned "After Victory, what?" fallaciously compared Indian polity with that of China and Russia. There is definite need for reforms in the administration and judiciary in our country for efficient service delivery and quick justice to the common man but to achieve such goal in a multi-party democracy like India is bound to take time as there will always be dissenting voices from the opposition no matter how well-intentioned such measures may be. However, in the case of China which is nothing but an autocratic country, bulldozing any and every reform is a cake walk for the rulers. As such, the allusion of Chinese progress and reforms with that of India appears unfair.

As regards the thumping victory of BJP in four out of five states in the recently held assembly polls, it appears that the electorate has overcome the caste equations and voted for 'sashan' (administration) and ration particularly in UP. If one analyzes dispassionately the reason as to why one particular community which has received the benefits of various welfare schemes

without any discrimination under the previous BJP Government preferred to remain aloof from the winning party, it will be clear that their ultimate goal is not development or good administration but 'something else' which they know for sure, will not hasten if they align with BJP.

Yours etc.,
D. Bhattacharjee
Shillong-1

Congress debacle

Editor,

The debacle of the Congress in the recent Assembly elections confirms the decline of the grand old party and the significance of the BJP in the country's politics. The BJP's resounding victories in four out of the five Assembly elections have put paid to the criticisms against the party and the governments led by the party.

The collapse of the Congress has created a vacuum in the already weak Opposition. An insignificant or weak Opposition is not a good sign for a democracy. An Opposition is as important as a ruling front. A weak or non-existent Opposition will adversely affect proper functioning of government. In the absence of a strong Opposition, rash decisions will be taken by the government. Legislation will be passed without proper

debates.

As for the Congress, lack of good organisational structure, ideological uncertainties and failure to take a decision about leadership change have created a serious crisis in the party. The substantial vote share that it used to get in the past has now shifted to regional parties and the BJP. The party is unable to express its views on important issues. It is likely that its position as the main Opposition party will be taken over by some other opposition parties like the AAP or the TMC.

The AAP has decided to strengthen the party in different states especially those in the south. The party expects to perform well in the upcoming polls in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. In order to become an alternative to the BJP, AAP needs to put in a lot of efforts. It needs to prove that it has organisational power and capabilities of good governance. It must earn the trust of people. As the party is leading governments in Delhi and Punjab, the governance in these states will be assessed by people.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

Kashmir files

Editor,
This refers to the recent movie 'The Kashmir Files'

and the political stir it is causing among BJP and the Opposition. While the ruling party is endorsing it to showcase the plight of Kashmiri Pandits the opposition is saying that the whole exercise involving the movie is politically motivated! Notwithstanding its political or religio-social connotations the irony is that this is the first time it is seen that a movie is being wholesomely promoted by the ruling political party in India. In the backdrop of the passing of the controversial CAA and the timing of the release of the movie just before elections in five states, such a motive of the ruling party cannot be underestimated.

Bollywood movies have been erstwhile always promoting unity and secular ethos of the country. While Kashmiri Pandits deserve utmost sympathy and consideration for what they underwent, incidents like Kashmir Genocide, Godhra or Partition are deep wounds in the history of the nation that need a gentle healing touch and not reopened and reminded again and again.

Yours etc.,
Sadiq H. Laskar,
Guwahati

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"Every adversity, every failure, every heartache carries with it the seed of an equal or greater benefit."

— Napoleon Hill

The Shillong Times

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Rule by entertainer

BY all reckoning, the new government that is being installed in Punjab is different and it sends out some clear signals to the rest of India. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) that rode to victory by eclipsing established entities like the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), the Congress and the BJP is promising to take power closer to the people. The AAP has already done this in Delhi through repeated terms of governance led by anti-corruption activist and Magsaysay award winner Arvind Kejriwal. His down-to-earth styles and positive frame of mind in tackling the basic problems of the people have won him both power and laurels. So far, AAP has been an impressive experiment.

The novelty about selection of a Chief Minister, the one who leads the governance of a state, before the start of the assembly poll campaign in Punjab gave the AAP a head-start. The people were given a chance by the party to choose their chief minister through a text-messaging process via their mobile phones. The result of this online poll was a foregone conclusion – that the state party chief Bhagwant Singh Mann would emerge as the people's choice in view of his large fan-following as an entertainer on television and as a social activist. He needed no introduction. And, for what went wrong in the past as in his fancy for liquor, Mann has apologised. Punjab is a state dotted with taverns, beer parlours, which co-exist with grocery shops. Life there is fast-paced, fun-filled and easy-going. Drug addiction is wide-spread too, about which Mann has promised to reverse the trend. Mann proved a point when he had his swearing-in done at the paternal hamlet of revolutionary Independence hero, Bhagat Singh. A good start will however not be a guarantee to a smooth sail. Mann has no administrative experience but similar was the case with Narendra Modi when he started as Gujarat CM.

AAP is the only regional party that has power in two states now. This gives it a major clout. More than this, the party that functions on the anti-corruption platform and proved its mettle will, increasingly, have a universal appeal in the present Indian context of freewheeling corruption. The scenario is much worse today than when the anti-corruption movement was started a decade ago by Kejriwal and Anna Hazare. What gave AAP the acceptability in Punjab now is also the same; set against the corruption of the Congress and the SAD. However, one can only hope that the chemistry between Kejriwal and Mann will keep working to the advantage of the AAP and Punjab.

Have we failed the Constitution or has it failed us?

By Patricia Mukhim

This month the MDA Government celebrated 4 years of its chequered existence. Ironically on that particular day, The Shillong Times photographer captured a picture of the Chief Minister's vehicle parked just beside two women hawkers eking out their livelihood for the day. These gutsy women fighting against all odds live their lives one day at a time. They can't plan ahead because only those with cash also have the luxury of planning for the future of their children. At the moment the picture is bleak as ever. It's somewhat like a dystopian

those words are facetious. They are meant to delude the citizenry. Why I say this is because there is no accountability mechanism in the system. One example is the inordinate delay in black-topping the road leading to New Shillong which would have been unacceptable in any other state. No one would tolerate the dust that has now created so much allergies to residents around the area. Yet you find institutions like NEIGRIHMS, IIM, NEIAH and others silently suffering this mess!

detailed project report (DPR) and without taking the adjoining villages and the MLA of the area into confidence, how can the Government even think of acquiring a landfill or any land for that matter? A landfill while environmentally unsustainable is imperative since there is no alternative as yet. But landfills could pollute water bodies and the soil in the surrounding areas. Hence, they need to be located in areas that are at a distance from human habitations. Unless communities are taken into

feelings of dread when he contemplated the "depravity of human nature." Most of those who cogitate on the present state of governance in Meghalaya dread what the future of the next generation will be and the one after them. Most citizens want change but to effect that change there must be a band of dedicated political volunteers who will travel across the state to launch an "Awareness Mission." If the Government can boast of the Mission Lakadong and Milk Mission then citizens too should start their Mission Election 2023. We cannot allow people to be



nightmare for many of Meghalaya's citizens. The few that benefit from Government largesse are the only ones that trumpet the Government's achievements. The others see no flicker of hope.

The recent announcement that Meghalaya has come up with a mining plan following the MMDR Act 1957 and that prospecting for coal is soon going to be underway must delight the coal barons. The rest of us must look forward to a bleaker environment while the black diamond is gouged out of the earth while acid mine drainage continues to pollute the rivers – our only lifeline. People here forget that most of the ministers, the coal barons and mine owners and buccaneer businessmen have alternative arrangements in place and can migrate to safer countries once Meghalaya becomes an unliveable part of the planet. Its all of us who voted for these skilful practitioners of politics – the men and women of expansive personal tastes; some with a variegated political past – who will stew in our own juices.

Often when listening to their sophistry in the Assembly one wonders how seamlessly they don the mask of Jekyll and Hyde. The fact that they can flirt around with the English language gives them the license to flaunt their sophism. Those of us who know empty rhetoric from plain-speak also know that

If there is just a sliver of hope these days then that's because we have a Kamikaze squad of Trinamool Congress MLAs who keep the Government on its feet. They have been working tirelessly to study the deficiencies in delivery of various schemes, especially the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) and the solid waste management landfill in Ri Bhoi. The PHED Minister tried to be clever by half when asked why at some places PVC or plastic pipes are used to draw potable water to homes while in others the zinc coated galvanised iron pipes have been used. His reply was that the question was too technical to be answered in the House. This is misleading because the House is where the ministers have to give an account of every rupee of public money spent, to the public who are the real rulers of this country. What a farce this is! The MLAs in the Opposition represent the public. Hence every question deserves an answer in the House. Nothing is too technical for us the public to understand. In Garo Hills it was found that in most homes water never flowed from the pipes that were connected to their homes or compounds.

The case of the proposed landfill in Ri Bhoi district is even more curious because the Urban Affairs Minister was indulging in evasion and equivocation. Without a confidence in planning such a landfill and explained why it is needed, Government will face bottlenecks later on. There is no alternative to transparency in governance. But transparency is always in short supply in the MDA Government.

When the MDA presented its list of achievements it omitted the negatives. These unfortunately pertain to the health status and the welfare of women and children. This is a constituency that does not get the attention of the House. Questions raised are all about spending in key infrastructural sectors. Investment in human development is not a priority.

Onlookers at the performance of this Government tend to go into bouts of depression. The signs of non-performance in critical human development sectors are glaring. Does even a single minister really care about the poor socio-economic indicators in half of the population who are women? Who raised any questions on anemia afflicting 56% of women in the child-bearing age? Who cares about the poor single mothers? All the VIPs strut around in style. They remain untouched by the stark poverty around them. All are drunk with power.

Samuel Adams once said, "Ambitions and lust for power are predominant passions in the breasts of most men." Patrick Henry admitted to

misled just because they do not have enough information about the performance of their elected MLAs.

The architect of the Indian Constitution, Dr BR Ambedkar was well aware that the Constitution adopted by cutting and pasting from western democracies was ill-suited to Indian democracy with its huge disparities and its caste, class and religious divisions. We see today that the Constitution is being eroded on a daily basis when the rights of citizens to good governance are trampled upon. Ambedkar was aware that a time would come when India would be led by ambitious demagogues. That time has well and truly arrived. The demagogues are our English speaking yuppies and their servile camp followers who follow the money trail.

A governance system that pushes more and more people into the poverty trap and renders more people landless than they were ever before, cannot be equitable. A governance system that patronises the affluent and has allowed a culture of impunity in trade and commerce – such that revenue that should accrue to the government is funnelled into private pockets can only be called anti-people. But even as we rue the many faults of the present Government we don't see the alternatives emerging. And that is called the tyranny of a Hobson's choice!

Yours etc.,
D Bhatia,
Guwahati

Hijab verdict

Editor,
The Karnataka High Court's hijab verdict is against the religious pluralism in the country. In fact, wearing hijab is not an issue. Some fringe elements raked up hijab wearing to get political advantage in the recently held Assembly elections. As a consequence, there has been a big controversy over the wearing of hijab in the premises of educational institutions. Thousands of Muslim students have been following this religious practice for a long time. Some students with the support of political leaders dragged the matter of religious practices into educational institutions and disrupted their functioning. Instead of settling the matter, the Karnataka government banned hijab. The Karnataka High Court's verdict is in favour of the state government ban.

not easy. Those who support the wearing of hijab argue that it does not create any problems for educational system or the state. It must be understood that in many cultures men and women cover their hair. Covering of hair does not affect teaching in the classroom. As part of following Covid-appropriate behaviour, all have to wear masks. It is for the good of people. Similarly, if a particular religion requires its followers to conform to some practices, they can follow it.

Unity in diversity is an essential aspect of the people of India. Enforcing uniformity in dress, food and culture is against the general interests of the nation. A particular community cannot be discriminated against and treated badly. It is against the concept of plurality. All are equal in the country. People should not be treated as superior or inferior. They should have equal rights and freedom.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS
Kollam

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Commonalities between Gulf crisis and Russia's Ukraine war

By James M Dorsey

The Ukraine crisis may constitute a more impactful, historic watershed than the 1989 fall of the Berlin wall in the mind of Singapore Foreign Affairs Minister Vivian Balakrishnan. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is "perhaps even a bigger moment than the fall of the Berlin Wall," Balakrishnan said.

"We believe we are at an inflection point," he added. "Little Singapore is standing up for principles and expressing a hope for the rules of engagement for this new era."

In a break with diplomatic tradition, Singapore joined Western nations in sanctioning Russia, the first Southeast Asian nation to do so in the absence of a United Nations Security Council resolution.

Balakrishnan may well be right even if the Berlin wall sparked the end of communism as an ideology rather than a power-driven political system, while Ukraine is likely to take Russia out of the race for global power in an emerging bi- or multipolar world order.

Despite the characterisa-

violations of international law opens the door to ever more egregious trespasses, including massive violations of human rights.

The analogies between the Ukraine and Gulf crises are most evident in the demands put forward in both incidents. Like the UAE and Saudi Arabia, Russia has put maximalist demands on the table that would subject Ukraine to its foreign, defence, and domestic policies and bend the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to its will.

At the time, the UAE and Saudi Arabia demanded that Qatar cut its ties to Islamists, shutter the free-wheeling Al Jazeera television network, expel Turkish troops, and effectively break relations with Iran.

Similarly, Russia demands that NATO withdraw from member states on Russia's borders and that Ukraine halt its resistance to the invasion, alter its constitution to ensure that Ukraine cannot become a member of the European Union and/or NATO, and recognise Russia's annexation of Crimea and the Russia-supported



tion of the Ukraine crisis as one that pits democracy against autocracy and the fact that the vast majority of nations that have taken action against Russia happen to be democracies, the stakes in the crisis are really about adherence to international law irrespective of a country's political system.

That is evident in the diddling of countries like China, India, and the United Arab Emirates that have tried to straddle a middle ground. So have Israel and Turkey, exploiting their attempts to mediate an end to the Ukraine crisis.

China has struggled to uphold its long-standing principle of rejection of the interference in the affairs of others with its close partnership with Russia that was further cemented during a visit to Beijing in early February by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed told Putin in a March 1 phone call, on the back of Emirati interference in multiple countries, including Libya and Yemen, that "Russia has a right to ensure national security." Bin Zayed was referring to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Short of the war, the destruction, and the massive loss of life, Ukraine is in many ways similar to the Gulf crisis in which the UAE, together with Saudi Arabia, led a 3.5-year-long economic and diplomatic boycott of Qatar that, like the Russian invasion, was designed to hollow out the sovereignty of a neighbouring state.

Russia's invasion constitutes the third time in a decade after the 2017-2021 Gulf crisis and the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea that autocratic states have sought to ignore international law and brutally impose their will on a neighbour.

In that sense, Balakrishnan's equation of the invasion with the Berlin wall hits the nail on the head. It also suggests that failure to act immediately to stop

breakaway republics of Donetsk and Lugansk.

Qatari resilience in rejecting the UAE-Saudi demands and its ability to compensate for the fallout of the boycott ultimately persuaded the two states to drop their demands and lift the embargo in January 2021.

In what appears to be a manoeuvre similar to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's recognition that Ukraine is unlikely to become a NATO member and may not want to do so given NATO's refusal to impose a no-fly zone, Qatar at the time quietly made concessions that fell far short of Emirati-Saudi demands and did not fundamentally alter the Gulf state's policies.

Islamists, including members of the Muslim Brotherhood, were asked to relocate to Istanbul and London while Al Jazeera toned down its more critical coverage of the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Virtually absent in this week's Al Jazeera newscasts was any reporting of the execution of 81 people in the kingdom, many of them Shiite activists. However, the Al Jazeera English website did report the executions. They are believed to have prompted Iran's suspension of Iraqi-sponsored talks with Saudi Arabia designed to reduce tensions between the two regional rivals.

The failure of the Saudi-UAE-led boycott may have shown the limits of their power, but ending it without the ability to claim success did not threaten the survival of the two countries' rulers. However, finding a face-saving solution to the Ukraine crisis that ultimately does not endanger the position of Mr. Putin could prove a lot more complicated.

The international community and Qatar were willing to give Bin Zayed and his Saudi counterpart, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, a pass. That luxury is unlikely to be accorded to Putin. (IPA Service)

By arrangement with the *Arabian Post*

Letters to the Editor

More on 'hellish' roads

Editor,
Much has been written and opinions given through this paper on bad roads and road construction in Shillong city, not to speak of rural roads. I fully agree with my friend Sanjeeb Kakoty and W. Passah who had given a rejoinder on his letter. We are all concerned with public property and assets, since such roads come once in 50 years or so. The current double-laning of Mawroh - Mawkyroh road leading up to ISBT which has been long awaited is under way. Thanks to the PWD (Roads) for making this happen. However, I would once again point out as a lay person that the quality of work is not up to the standard laid down for road construction. I have seen many roads constructed, while passing through the length and breadth of this state. All I can say is that this road is of very poor quality. Roads constructed by renowned Companies/Groups as per specifications are always good. Currently we do not know who the contractors undertaking this important task are. This road will be very

busy and traffic will be enormous once it is completed. I do not know how long the road will last and the public would be the losers and sufferers. I would request the PWD (Roads) to please conduct a proper spot inspection and constant supervision to oversee the quality of work. Further, roads will not last in the absence of drains. Please see that drains are simultaneously constructed so that rain water will not erode the roads. I would request the engineers and subordinate officers of PWD to act immediately as this road is under construction even as I write this letter. Please do not leave the work to the "contractors" alone. All we want to see are good quality roads in our State and not "hellish" roads in future.

Yours etc.,
Reward Rymbai,
Via email

Police killings and silence of the majority

Editor,
Once again, accused persons (they might have been the actual persons who might have committed crimes, but still they were accused) were

killed in Tangla, Guwahati, etc., in police firing. Such news has become very common of late. Very frequently, we hear and read in the media that a few people accused of crimes like drug trafficking, rape, etc. allegedly tried to flee from the custody of Assam Police, and then either got killed or injured when police fired on them. Almost all such incidents happen during the night. This is an extremely pathetic commentary on the Assam Police. Repeated incidents of these types cannot be normal nor natural. This was not the case till in the recent past. It also puts a question mark on the efficiency of the Assam Police. First, if fleeing from the Police custody is truly happening regularly, then obviously the police personnel are ill-trained or are incapable of handling people in custody. Secondly, if the police are using brute force, and trying to get rid of accused persons by using firearms, then these are heinous acts.

In Mumbai, Policemen like Pradeep Sharma, Sachin Vaze, etc. are bad examples. These are instances of policemen becoming a law unto themselves. Whether we like it or not, the rule of law has to prevail and established

procedures must be followed in letter and spirit by the Police. It is the judicial courts that pronounce whether an accused is guilty or not. The whole world, including us in India, were shaken when a black man George Floyd was suffocated to death by Minneapolis policemen on May 25, 2020. The four officers involved in the manslaughter were fired immediately, and Derek Chauvin, the prime accused was sent to prison for 22.5 years. Meanwhile, Pradeep Sharma and Sachin Vaze, who were in privileged positions earlier, within and outside the Mumbai police, were arrested and are being investigated for various acts of omissions and commissions.

It is high time that the civil administration, human rights organizations, and of course, the judiciary took note of these incidents in Assam, and ensure that the due process of law is followed especially by the police. Otherwise, matters may spiral out of hand and we would be left feeling sorry for ourselves in future.

What is more pathetic is that the vast majority of the populace of Assam and the north-eastern parts of the country seem to be accepting these in silence. The conse-

"If you take no risks, you will suffer no defeats. But if you take no risks, you win no victories."

— Richard M. Nixon

The Shillong Times

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One foot in the Govt, the other in politics

THE allegations that an engineer of the Public Works Department (PWD) of the State Government is joining a political party should become a matter of public discourse. That he intends to contest from constituency considered the most cerebral one is interesting. It is bad enough that government officials already nurse political ambitions and no sooner are they retired than they immediately join a political party and fight elections. By now the public is aware that the rhetoric of "serving the people," is duplicitous. The whole idea of being in politics is to wield power. And some bureaucrats and technocrats want to enjoy the best of both worlds. This is unhealthy for democracy. But in Meghalaya, the voters seem to ignore these conflicts of interest. Some bureaucrats with an eye on politics use their time in office to either cultivate a constituency using their positions and clout or make enough money to finance their political ambitions. No candidate is so imprudent as to dig into his/her personal savings to fight elections.

Shillong North Constituency already has a beeline of potential candidates with at least three of them being 'about to be retired' Government employees. This is where the Constitution falls short of its utility in guarding democracy in this country. In fact, this aspect should have been taken seriously because bureaucrats tend to abuse their positions while in office if they already cast their covetous eyes on politics.

The Opposition correctly drew the attention of the House to the matter of the PWD engineer joining a political party without severing ties with his Department. According to the Meghalaya Service Conduct Rules, 2019, government employees cannot participate in political activities or be part of any political party as long as they are in service. The Opposition urged that action be taken against the PWD engineer or there could be serious ramifications in the future. More government employees will start flirting with politics even while they are in government service. However, what is shocking is that the Rajya Sabha member, WR Kharlukhi was the one who presided over the meeting to welcome the PWD engineer into the National Peoples' Party (NPP). It seems that the NPP State President is ready to count his chickens before they are hatched. Time and again Kharlukhi has been speaking out of turn on several serious matters and he is likely to brush aside this matter too and ensure that the PWD engineer is able to slip through the labyrinthine rule book.

Focus on tourism transportation a boon

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

Tourism is a broad economic sector. It comprises of a number of businesses and services which are dependent and supplementary to one another. Normally when we talk about tourism, we mostly tend to focus on businesses such as food and beverages, accommodation, service quality and with a huge impetus on the attractions. In reality, the tourism sector is a wide combination of businesses which should be considered holistically while engaging in policy-making. As a development tool, it encompasses many other components such as labour, investment, agriculture, manufactured products, etc. These too are important but they are never talked about. For example, food and beverages would be non-existent

service sector and all services are demand oriented. Amidst this conceptualisation, there is one critical business/component of tourism which has never been given much importance to by Meghalaya. It is called 'transportation'. In any discussion on tourism and its planning, transportation is always pushed to the corner and never considered in the scheme of things. It is never on our minds. Let us take the case of agriculture. It is an important component of tourism. In its case, the agriculture and farmers' welfare department is taking due care for development. But for tourism transportation, there has never been any serious thought. Alas, in his budget speech of 2022-23 Chief

Minister the accommodation or restaurant or the other offerings of the place. The first point of contact is the transportation and the driver. This is the starting point of tourism. The very first 'greet, meet and welcome' of the driver is extremely valuable. A welcoming smile makes the day of a tourist. Moreover, a clean and well-presented vehicle adds to the delight and comfort. As such, the availability of appropriate transportation is critical for tourism success and the induction of dedicated vehicles can only be a boon for the stakeholders and tourism progress.

As pretty as it seems, it is not all rosy. The effectiveness of this intended transportation depends on a number of factors. It would be productive

which the tourist will have to board Meghalaya vehicles for further travel. However, that is not how a free market works. Things cannot and must not be forced. It reflects poorly on Meghalaya tourism. On the contrary, the lacuna is to be dealt by offering/supplying a quality transportation service and let the clientele choose for themselves. This is a professional way of dealing with it through the spirit of competition. The point to be noted here is that in the efforts to formalize and organize tourism in Meghalaya, we are provided with a golden opportunity through transportation. This is the missing piece of the puzzle.

In the ultimate analysis are 200 vehicles



in the absence of agricultural produce; accommodation would be incomplete without the presence of assets such as television, kitchen equipment, water heater, etc; service quality would be a non-starter without the availability of skilled labour, etc. Tourism success depends on efficiently combining all the businesses and components in policy and planning. Any piecemeal strategy such as a focus on only food or accommodation (the homestay scheme) will not bring the intended returns.

There is another reason as to why tourism is better considered as a sector. An industry is supply oriented. For example, we say automobile industry. Cars are manufactured and kept in stock and can be sold over many months in the future. The same is the case with computer hardware industry. On the contrary, tourism is demand oriented. Unless and until a tourist asks for a bowl of rice and curry, such items would not be made. Similarly, unless there is surety of a tourist checking into a homestay, guest house, hotel, resort, etc the food and beverages and all other housekeeping services would be put on hold. Apart from these points, tourism belongs to the

ter Conrad Sangma declared the launch of a new program to induct 200 luxury tourist vehicles (at 50% subsidy). It is a much needed and long delayed intervention. Well, better late than never!

Now, why is transportation such a critical part of tourism? Some examples, when a tourist goes to Sohra from Shillong he spends at least five hours in a vehicle to and fro. In cases where the tourist also depends on the driver to visit various attractions, the situation becomes more demanding as it is required of the driver to be aware of the routes. During this entire journey it is also required of the driver to be well-mannered with basic etiquette and a pleasing personality. He/she must be hospitable and informative as well. In most cases it is found that the driver is also required to function as a guide. It is in this context that the announcement by Conrad Sangma is of much significance.

Tourism transportation is a specialized service that must be provided by the passionate and enthusiastic having adequate knowledge of the destination. Importantly, it is to be noted that when a tourist goes to any destination, the first point of contact is not

enough to meet the number of tourists that come to Meghalaya? The answer is no. Research tells us that on any given holiday/weekend around 100 tourist vehicles go to Mawlynnong alone. But, there is a larger picture here. These 200 vehicles will motivate other private parties to get into the transportation business. After all, tourism development is a public-private partnership effort. This is the external effect that is most likely to happen. In addition, the local taxis that have been taking the tourist around all these years can continue to do so. Plus, there is a catch. By observing how the luxury vehicles operate they too can improve upon their service quality. All in all, this focus on tourism transportation by the government can become the single biggest factor that would enormously add to the tourism experience of the visitors. It would be like an icing on the cake of wonderful food, beverages and accommodations that Meghalaya already has to offer.

(Email: benjamin21in@yahoo.co.in; the writer teaches at NEHU)

Why make us guinea pigs?

Editor,
The news report Govt rejects AITC plea for probe into smart meter," (ST March 18, 2022) comes as no surprise. This Government has amply demonstrated its dictatorial character. In Meghalaya the price of smart meters was first billed at Rs 9000 and later after questions were raised it was brought down to Rs 3000. We are told the Asian Development Bank would be funding these smart meters while Satnam Global Infra Ltd will procure and install the meters here. Apparently Satnam wanted to get some land on lease for assembling the smart meters. But it appears these smart meters are Chinese made and buying sensitive smart meters linked to Wifi could be a national security issue. The Government of India had specifically ordered that Chinese products are not to be used.

When Prestone Tynsong became Power Minister, he halted the smart meter deal. But after a lull it is learnt that the deal is back on track. The question not asked is how can smart meters function without Wifi facilities. Does

every household in Meghalaya have Wifi facility? Wifi is site and frequency selective, meaning that if one is not connected and does not get the message from MeECL that it's the last date for payment of bills then the power will be disconnected. That's the problem with smart meters.

When the country is run by politicians that are close to corporates, such things happen. Now the Power Minister has ruled out a probe on smart meters but what happens if the public refuse to be smart-metered and insist that the Government first uses those smart meters in the homes of all ministers and Government employees? Let the MDA Government be the guinea pig. But let this Government also beware that 2023 is coming and we have a choice whether or not to be smart-metered. The smart meter may well be the MDA Government's Waterloo.

Yours etc.,
W. Passah
Ex HOD Electronics,
St. Edmund's College

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

BJP Inroad Into N-E Will states put a halt?

By Sagarneel Sinha

The Bharatiya Janata Party under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been successful in spreading its roots in the northeast. The return of the saffron party, that too with a majority for the first time, in the north-eastern state of Manipur in the recent Assembly polls shows that it is establishing itself as a major player in the region, where changing of political loyalties is common.

True that the BJP has presently four Chief Ministers in the region, but the saffron party is yet to be a major force in the other States. The party has Chief Ministers in Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura. Out of these, the party returned to power for the second time in both Assam and Manipur. In fact, the State of Assam, the largest in the region in terms of political power, has turned into a stronghold of the BJP. Now Manipur became the second State after Assam where the saffron party returned to power completing 5 years. While in Assam, the BJP is still short of a majority of just one seat, it has the majority in Manipur.

Early next year, the three north-eastern States — Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura — will go to the polls. Later in the year another State, Mizoram too will go to the polls. Out of these four states, BJP is a major player only in Tripura, where it will face the anti-incumbency test. But in the others, the party still remains a weak player.

Although in Nagaland, the party has 12 MLAs and a Deputy Chief Minister too, the truth is that it is still an emerging party. The party won 12 seats in the last Assembly polls due to its alliance with Neiphiu Rioted Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP). Nagaland is a Christian majority State and it is not an easy task for the BJP with its Hindutva ideology to gain a foothold there. Even before the last Assembly polls, there were appeals from the Nagaland Baptist Churches Council to the regional parties not to support the BJP. Despite that the saffron party won 12 seats — the highest ever number of MLAs it got in this State.

But the BJP can't deny the fact it has been on the backfoot after the killings in Mon district, where 6 mine workers were mistaken as militants and gunned down by the security forces. Later subsequent violence followed where eight villagers and one security personnel died. Since then, there has been a demand for immediate removal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). This demand isn't new but this unfortunate incident has made it a crucial issue again before the polls. Aware of the anger, the saffron party unit of the State too has joined the chorus for removal of AFSPA but New Delhi is yet to take a final decision.

The political dimensions are also changing in the State. The main Opposition party Nagaland People's Front (NPF) has joined the Neiphiu government and former Chief Minister T.R. Zeliang has become the chairman of the United Democratic Alliance (UDA). The coming together of NDPP and NPF is seen closely by the saffron party, which sees it somehow as a threat to its political expansion in the state. Recently NDPP's Neiphiu Rio himself campaigned for the NPF candidates in the Manipur polls, where NPF grabbed five seats.

Nagaland, as is known, is a sensitive State. Its people are still awaiting the results of the ongoing Naga Peace process. The Nagas are tired of the decades-old insurgency problem and now they want peace and security of their culture and identity in India. Elections come and go but the major problem of the common Nagas still

remains unsolved. In fact, NPF joined the NDPP-BJP government to facilitate the Naga Political Issue with the target to achieve an honourable and acceptable solution.

The growing demand for removal of AFSPA, closeness of NDPP-NPF and the Naga political issue makes the ground of the state difficult for the BJP. Much will depend on how politics is played out in the coming days in Manipur. Although NPF has expressed its support to the new BJP government, it remains to be seen whether the latter includes it in the new Cabinet. In the Manipur polls too, BJP and NPF, despite being allies in the State, didn't contest together.

Another state where the developments of Manipur are likely to affect is Meghalaya, which is ruled by the National Peoples' Party. Conrad Sangma's NPP contested in the Manipur polls alone and has emerged as the second-largest party by winning seven seats with a vote share of 17%. And the party too has now expressed its willingness to join the new Cabinet of the BJP in Manipur. Many local saffron leaders are opposed to this idea. NPP, along with NPF, was a partner in the previous BJP government led by N. Biren Singh. NPP's Y. Joykumar Singh even became the Deputy Chief Minister.

There were power tussles between the two allies and as a result, NPP even pulled out from the government only to join it again with the intervention of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, also the NDA chairman, and Himanta Bishwa Sarma, who heads the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), an alliance led by BJP consisting of regional parties of the region opposed to the Congress.

This apart, there have been new political equations. After the desertion of 12 Congress MLAs led by former chief minister Mukul Sangma to the Trinamool Congress, the rest of MLAs of the grand old party, later suspended by the party high command, have joined the Conrad Sangma led Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) government, where BJP too is a partner. The saffron party's MLA Sanbor Sullai is Social Welfare Minister in Sangma's cabinet. In fact, the BJP, according to local reports, was unhappy with Sangma for accepting the support of Congress MLAs without consulting with alliance partners. In the last Assembly elections, BJP contesting alone got only two seats but a good vote share of 9%, the highest it got so far.

In Mizoram, the party had contested alone in the last Assembly polls and won only one seat. It was the first time that the party opened its account in the State. In fact, the party's only MLA was Buddha Dhan Chakma, a former Congress minister who joined the BJP.

The other seat where the BJP came second is also a Chakma influenced seat. It shows that BJP has influence among Buddhist Chakmas, who are a minority in the Christian majority Mizoram. The saffron party, however, hasn't yet been successful in penetrating the Christian areas. In the recently held Manipur polls, out of 20 Christian dominated seats, the saffron party won 7 and came second in another 7 seats. This is, no doubt, a big achievement for it in the northeast, where it is still struggling to become a major player in Christian majority States like Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram. The party is still viewed by many as "anti-Christian" in the region and it remains to be seen if the BJP, after its success in Manipur, is able to gain a foothold in these seats by cashing on the card of development. Time will tell. ---/NFA

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Letters to the Editor

Traffic woes and possible solutions

Editor,
There has been much talk and debate surrounding the traffic congestion in the State capital. The scenario will progressively get worse in the future. It is dreadful to think what the situation will look like if some drastic action is not taken by the authorities.

Desperate situations call for radical and innovative solutions. One of the possible solutions is the introduction of Cable Cars technology to ferry commuters in and around the city. In the city of Medellin, Columbia, for example, cable cars were introduced in 2004 as a means of urban transportation. The cable cars connected the hillside neighbourhoods and it demonstrated that the cable car technology is viable and is an affordable mode of transport. The relative low cost of construction and operation attracted the interest of many countries especially in Europe.

The World Bank in 2020 published a study "Urban Aerial Cable Cars as Mass Transit System". The study

includes a description of the main characteristics of the infrastructure, travel demand, and the business model for construction and operation. The World Bank is very keen to fund such projects as it recognises the challenges and the problems of urban transportation.

The city of Medellin is dotted with hills and is situated at an elevation of 1,495 meters above sea level which is very similar to Shillong. A decade ago, Shillong was referred to, as a town but today it is a city. The city continues to grow and so has the population. The need of the citizens is continuously changing and so is the culture and the life style of the people. The authorities need to recognise these changes which are glaringly taking place right in front of our very own eyes.

Taking cue from the city of Medellin, the idea of cable cars as a means of transportation is definitely possible to be introduced in the city. All it needs is the will power and determination of the authorities. In our State particularly, implementation will not be a hurdle if the communities (Dorbars) are involved.

There are various business models for the construction and operation of the

cable car project.

1. The Public Works model, which is put out to tender the execution of works, with state operation and maintenance.

2. Public-Private partnership model for operations and maintenance.

Cable cars in Shillong can start from Laitkor with stop overs at Madanring, Nongthymmai, Laitumkhrak, Khyndai Lad, Iew duh and the last point at Mawlai and back to Laikor. In fact Cable Cars can be very much a part of the much talked 'Smart City Project'. The introduction of cable cars will greatly benefit not only the residents of the city but also for those from the adjoining places like Sohra, Ri Bhoi areas, Smit and others who travel in and out of the city mostly for trading and other businesses. Speaking to several cabbies in the city about the prospect of cable car technology, I was rather surprised that they are very supportive of the idea as it will ease traffic congestion and they can operate more trips. In fact, the cable car operation will not affect the operations of the local taxis or any other transportation.

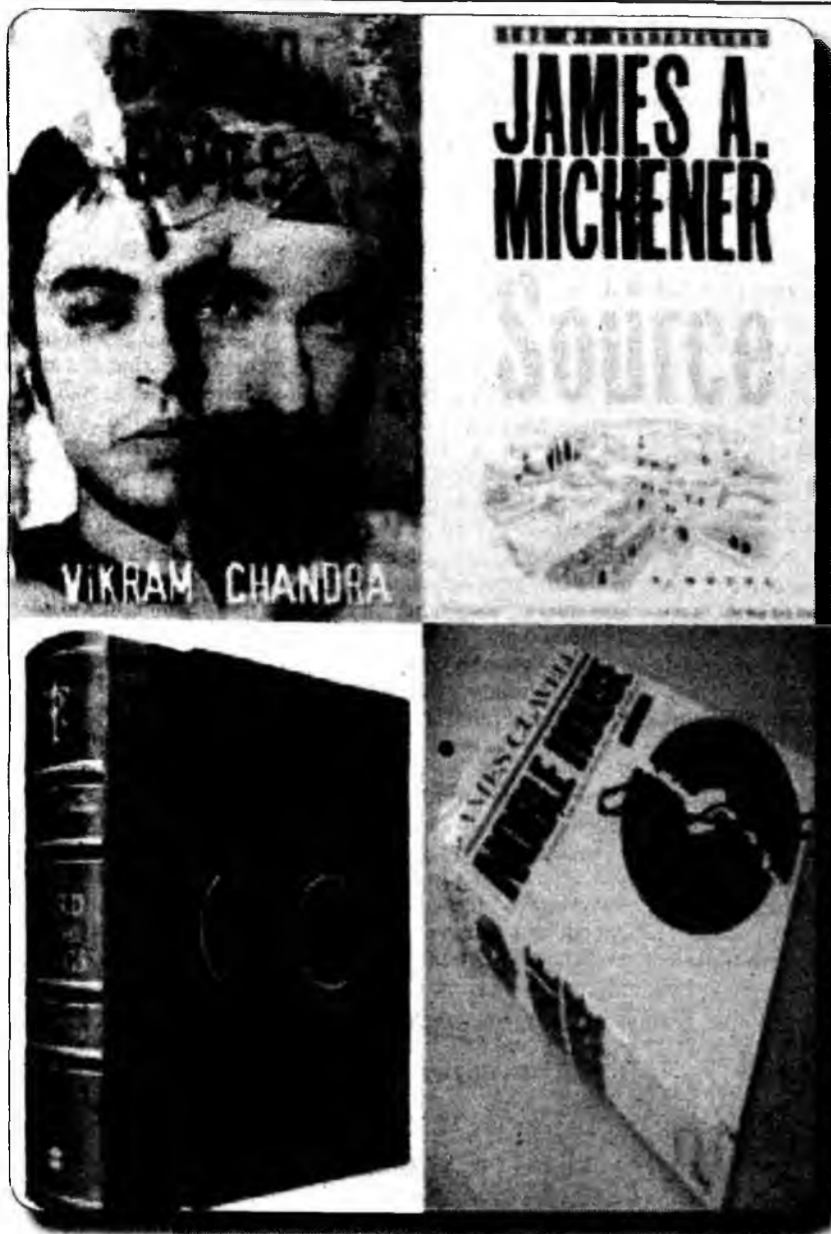
The project will not occupy large spaces of land and

therefore there should not be any apprehension about displacement of residents as in the case of road widening. The technology is also pollution free and will generate employment in the area of operations.

There will be costs involved but it must not be perceived as expenditure but rather an investment for the benefit of the larger population. The World Bank as mentioned above can partly fund the project. Surely the Government and other authorities have sufficient experience on fund raising.

It is high time the citizens of Shillong lead a life that is less stressful, breathe a less polluted air and become more productive. If successful, this can be a model of urban transportation for the rest of the country. Our State has shown since time immemorial how we protect our forests (Sacred Groves) and erect living roots to connect and all this through our traditional knowledge and wisdom. Surely the cable car technology can be a success if we are determined to serve the people of the city and the State at large.

Yours etc.,
Albert Andrew Nongrum,
Via email



By Vikas Datta

Certain news portals may have a small blurb next to an article headline that tells the reader the time it will take them to read it – usually five minutes or less. The feature, which can be found on some online editing tools too, seems a rather telling indictment of our contemporary time-stressed, hyper-regimented life, but it is unclear why it's confined to reading only.

Supposing this trend gets translated to books as well? Will it work on what are known, in the literary realm, as "doorstoppers", or works so thick and heavy, say over 500 to 1,000 pages or more, that they can be used as the eponymous article.

For such books, the reading time will need to be measured in

weeks, or months, and for the casual, not very committed, readers, it could stretch to a year.

While many comprehensive and leading dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and textbooks, from various realms of sciences to law to computer languages, are doorstoppers, the category is still common in fiction. These must be differentiated from omnibus editions in which two or three "medium-sized" works of an author, or even more than one author, are printed together.

Doorstoppers in fiction usually comprise what we call literary classics, say George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (nearly 900 pages), or Count Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (more than 1,000 pages in most editions), or Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (nearly or over 1,000 pages, depending on

Doorstoppers – Books that provide physical exercise and a mental workout

the edition).

They can also be about titanic conflicts between good and evil – everything from Alexander Dumas' grand revenge saga *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1,000 pages plus in most editions) to the Harry Potter series (particularly, the last four instalments, with *The Order of the Phoenix* being 700-800 pages, depending on the edition), to grand sweeps of history, spanning several generations, as by authors such as James Michener and James Clavell, or romances (Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With The Wind*, 900-1,000 pages), or a mixture of all, say MM Kaye's *The Far Pavilions* (over 950 pages).

And you can count on them to have tons of characters – *The Count of Monte Cristo* begins with half a dozen and goes on to have three dozen prominent ones by the time it gets into high gear. Others have no shortage and some helpfully have a list of characters, usually at the beginning, to help you keep track.

The advent of technology has made actual doorstoppers rather rare, as e-readers and tablets can accommodate a whole host of the bulkiest books, saving avid readers the chore of lugging them around – though some aficionados still do. Owing these is also a mark of pride for fervent book owners for the gravitas they confer upon their bookshelves.

Let us look at some doorstoppers across various genres.

As mentioned, literary classics, by the likes of Tolstoy – whose family name derives from the Russian word "tolstii" (meaning thick or stout), or by his compatriot Fyodor Dostoyevsky, or others, such as Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo, or Dumas, turn out to be doorstoppers, since they were paid by the page, and seem to have made the most of it. Most of their famous works began as serial instalments, so they did not consciously – it can be assumed – set out to write heavy tomes.

Dumas was a master. His *The*

Three Musketeers is the first of the three novels that comprise the D'Artagnan Romances, and was followed by *Twenty Years After* – both are at least 700 pages-plus in most editions. The final instalment, *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*, is usually divided into three, or more, books – the last being *The Man in the Iron Mask*, and each one of them is over 700-800 pages long.

Dickens was not far behind – of his 14 completed novels, eight, including *The Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *David Copperfield*, and *Our Mutual Friend* are well over 800 pages in most editions, and some span 1,000 pages plus with annotations and footnotes.

But the tradition continues beyond the 19th century.

JRR Tolkien's epic high fantasy adventure *The Lord of the Rings*, well-known due to the films, is a prime example.

Though Tolkien wanted it published as one, it was eventually published as three volumes of two books each – *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King* – between July 1954 and October 1955, due to various reasons, such as paper shortage, high production costs, and the publishers' uncertainty about its reception.

Happily, the publishers subsequently published it together – a special hardcover and illustrated edition that came out in 2021 consisted of 1,248 pages each and a paperback, 1,216 pages.

Even before him, there was Kathleen Winsor's bestselling historical romance *Forever Amber* (1944), set in mid 17th-century England when the monarchy was restored under Charles II. It tells of orphaned Amber St. Clare, who makes her way up in society by sleeping with and/or marrying successively richer and more important men, while nursing her unattainable love. It was promptly censored by the Catholic Church, making it a best-seller.

What keeps the book, which is 992 pages in its Penguin paperback edition, from being a forerunner of Jackie Collins or, say, Shobha De is the meticulous historical research covering Restoration fashion, and titbits, such as how the tea habit took over England, as well as contemporary politics, and public disasters, including the plague and the Great Fire of London.

Austrian writer Robert Musil's modernist work *The Man Without Qualities* (first published in 1930 in German; 1953 in English) is a quasi-allegorical, existential – and satirical – look at the Austro-Hungarian Hapsburg empire in its twilight era, just before World War I.

The principal protagonist is a rather vague, ambivalent, and indifferent mathematician named Ulrich, the "man without qualities", who depends on the world to mould him. The work also shows how a celebration of international peace and imperial unity leads to national chauvinism, war, and collapse.

It was unfinished, but the English version is over 1,150 pages, while the original German one, over 2,100.

After "normal-size" works such as the inter-racial love story *Sayonara* (1954) and depiction of a radically different Afghanistan in *Caravans* (1963), Michener began producing doorstoppers with his multi-generational pageants set in a specific geographical area.

Hawaii (1959) is 1,136 pages in paperback; *The Source* (1965), where a team of archaeologists excavate a mound in Israel, and their story is interspersed with an account from each level they unearth, is 1,104 pages in paperback; *Caribbean* (1989), spanning from Columbus to Castro or thereabouts, is around 900 pages.

Several other works in this tradition, whether dealing with a specific American state – *Texas* (1,472 pages), *Alaska* (1,152) or *Colorado* (1,104) – or countries such as *Poland* (around 700

pages), or *South Africa* (1,200), are also bulky reads.

Francis Edward Wintle a.k.a. Edward Rutherford also follows the same pattern, moving through the millennia of whatever area he dwells upon, featuring lots and lots of characters and not stinting on details. *Russka: The Novel of Russia* (1991) is 1,024 pages long; *London* (1997), the story of the city from Roman times to the present, covers 1,328 pages; and *New York* (900 to 1,050 pages in various paperback editions).

The last four books of Clavell's *Asian Saga* are more than 1,000 pages long, including *Shogun* (1975), set in the Japan of the 1600s, is 1,136 pages, and *Noble House* (1981), which is about Hong Kong in the 1960s, is 1,296 pages – though the latter's timespan, after an interlude from the past, is a few days only.

The penchant for doorstoppers still persists.

Horror maestro Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series started with *The Dark Tower: The Gunslinger* (1982) at a modest 225 or so pages, but *The Dark Tower IV: Wizard and Glass* (1997) went up to 887 pages, and the last – *The Dark Tower VII: The Dark Tower* (2004) – stretched to 845.

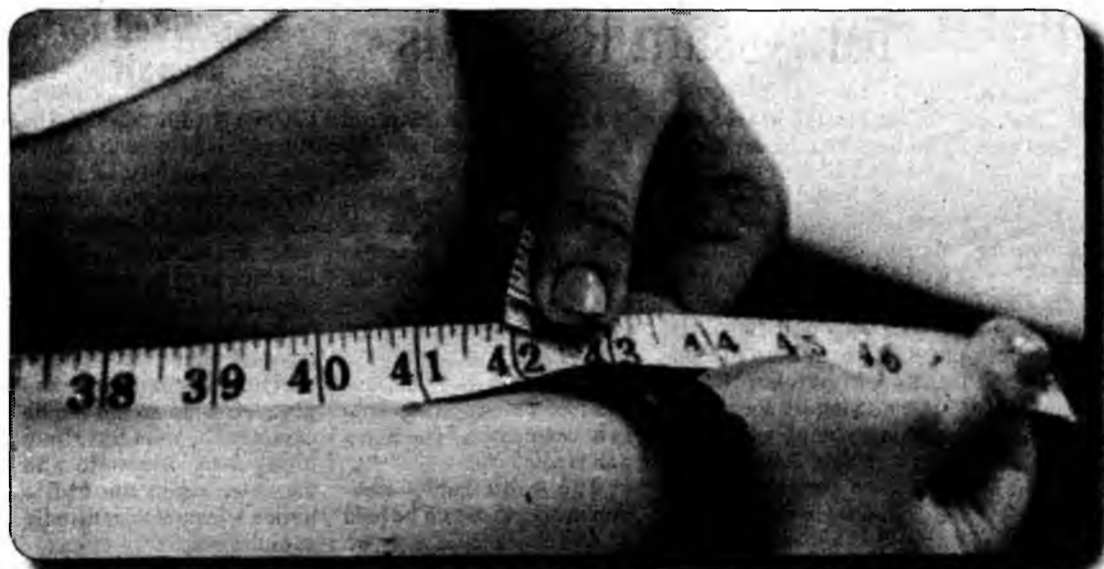
Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* saga's fourth part, *Breaking Dawn* (2008), is well over 700 pages.

Some Indian writers also qualify. Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993) can run to 1,500 pages in some editions, while Vikram Chandra's Mumbai crime saga, *Sacred Games* (2006), is nearly or over 1,000 pages, depending on the edition.

Doorstoppers, besides satiating avid readers, can also serve as makeshift exercise equipment – just holding them up to read will work wonders for hand and arm muscles and wrist flexibility, and even as a weapon, giving an entirely new meaning to the idiom "throw the book at".

Who said books only catered to the mind?

Diets that don't work for women



Whether we want to accept it or not, biologically men and women are very different. One of the important differences is in the way men and women use and store fat. Men on average have about 3 per cent essential fat as part of their composition – women have 12 per cent.

Essential fat is a percentage of total body fat mass that is necessary for insulation, protection of our vital organs, vitamin storage and building key cell messengers like steroids that are necessary for effective cell communication. Without this fat, the body does not function properly and our immune and neurological systems get affected.

Women have four times as much essential fat. Stored fat in women is actually beneficial to overall health. A baseline of 12 per cent of essential fat protects women from type two diabetes and even heart disease. This is important to understand because:

It helps with expectations and goal setting when you choose weight loss programmes:

Striving for 20 per cent body fat is unhealthy

There are three popular diets in the world: Keto Diet, Intermittent Fasting, and GM Diet.

Unfortunately, these diets are not helpful especially for women who are thinking of significant weight loss (more than 15-20 kgs) and maintaining it permanently.

Let's look at these diet plans in detail:

Keto Diet: The ketogenic diet is a low carb,

high-fat diet. Restricting carbs and increasing fat intake can lead to ketosis, a metabolic state in which your body relies primarily on fat for energy instead of carbs.

"Women's bodies always resist losing fat as it is essential for pregnancy and lactation, and it's essential."

Carb intake in the keto diet is typically limited to fewer than 50 grams per day, which can cause shock to women's bodies. When the carb quotient depletes, it switches to ketones and fat for fuel at the start of this eating pattern, women's brain and metabolism starts resisting fat loss.

It results in a complete imbalance leading to hormonal and metabolic changes.

Also, Keto-type diets usually work only for a short term and can have side effects such as headaches, dizziness, fatigue, nausea, and constipation.

Further, most of the initial weight loss is water weight. Once the body enters ketosis, we begin to lose muscle, become extremely fatigued, and eventually enter starvation mode which actually makes it even harder to lose weight.

A keto diet does more harm than good to the majority of women especially if they have any underlying medical conditions like PCOS, Irregular menses or Infertility.

Intermittent Fasting: Fasting is a practice that involves completely abstaining from eating or avoiding certain foods for a fixed period. In recent years, intermittent fasting has become increasingly popular with people looking to lose weight.

During studies, it was found that although intermittent fasting produced favourable results in people who were overweight or obese, women who tried it, had the following negative effects:

- Severe mood swings
- Extreme hunger
- Low energy/fatigue
- Obsessive thoughts about food
- Overeating on days without restricted calories
- Depression
- Anger

Most women exhibit such behaviours in the first few weeks of intermittent fasting. It is also observed that by restricting calorie intake in this manner, it may interfere with their menstrual cycles.

GM Diet: The GM diet aims to help people lose weight by focusing on a specific food or food group each day for a week. The GM diet consists of a 7-day meal plan. Each day focuses on a specific food or food group.

Although the idea of substantial weight loss within a short period may seem attractive, the GM diet does come with risks which are:

Lacks vital nutrients: Women following the GM diet may not get enough of certain important food groups, such as healthy fats and protein.

This diet may also lack essential vitamins and minerals that come with eating a wide variety of healthful foods.

Short-term weight loss: The GM diet is not a sustainable long-term weight-loss strategy. A woman may regain weight once they stop following the diet.

One reason for this is that the diet does not necessarily teach techniques for healthy cooking or eating which is essential for long-term weight maintenance.

Other risks which are very common and can be aggravated in women in a few weeks include dehydration, headaches, fatigue, muscle weakness and inability to concentrate.

In a nutshell, balanced calorie intake – macronutrients like carbs, proteins, fats, and micronutrients like vitamins and minerals which are essential for pregnancy, lactation and overall health of the women.

Hence, eating a balanced meal during weight loss is advised. (IANSLife)

Managing exam pressure with a positive approach

Students in India are preparing for the upcoming exam period as schools reopen and resume pre-Covid activity. As they transition from remote examination methods to being physically present in the examination room, many students may experience stress or face pressure.

Pressure is spreading from students to parents, affecting Indian households. The good news is that students, teachers, and parents are all in it together and can overcome exam stress.

Eirini Petratou, Senior User Research Manager at BIC Cello, shares a few tips on how to manage exam anxiety:

Create your own to-do-list/study plan: Chart out your own unique study schedule to make exam preparation time easier to manage. Make sure that you plan your schedule in a way that suits your studying habits and ensures that you're fully focused when studying/preparing. What works for you might not work for someone else. Your planning should include all requirements and materials needed for you to get the exercise done properly and reach new heights.

Write to Learn: Use the 'write to learn' method has proved to be one of the most effective ways to prepare for exams and retain information. As students go back to school for offline learning, it's crucial that they get used to putting pen to paper, it helps in activating photographic memory.

Companies such as BIC Cello design pens to ensure that students can write for long periods of time without adding pressure onto their fingers and wrists – making learning easier and less strenuous.

Remain active and healthy at all times: Leading a healthy and active lifestyle is said to reduce stress and anxiety levels as well as enhance

brain function and activity. An unhealthy body results in a lack of concentration which consequently elevates stress levels.

Generally, and especially during exam period, ensure that you drink a lot of water, consume healthy food, and take part in physical activity daily.

In its latest School Contact program BIC Cello emphasised how Hand Yoga can strengthen muscles used for writing reducing stress on hands and ultimately contributing towards a healthier and more relaxed body.

Regulate your sleeping patterns: Sleep deprivation is worse than insomnia. Lack of sleep reduces the brain's ability to retain information. A minimum of eight to nine hours of sleep is required to ensure that the brain and the body get sufficient rest.

Similarly, being on gadgets for too long before bed reduces the brain's ability to read, retain, and recall information. It is crucial to program the body to sleep and wake up at the same time every day. This ensures higher productivity and sharper brain function.

Adopt and maintain a positive mindset: Mental health and status has a detrimental impact on everything that we do. Maintaining a positive mindset and approach specifically during exam period ensures high levels of concentration and enhances mental abilities to effectively solve problems, think creatively, and cope with challenging situations.

Exams, while sometimes stressful, help to develop discipline, sharpen brain activity, improve memory, foster a healthy competitive spirit, and boost self-confidence.

Remember to approach this year's exam period with a positive attitude and remain calm to ensure you ace them! (IANSLife)

Message in a Movie

Ratan Bhattacharjee sniffs the political intent behind the right-wing promotion of *The Kashmir Files*

By Ratan Bhattacharjee

Italian film director Bernardo Bertolucci once said, "I am no longer interested in making political films. There is something old-fashioned about them. Now young people don't care for politics." Young people may not care for Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri's film, *The Kashmir Files*, but the Bharatiya Janata Party leaders are all mesmerised by the film for its political message. Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a clarion call to his partymen to rally behind the film.

Today there should be no doubt that it is a highly motivated political film with BJP leader Mithun Chakraborty playing a role in it. And the film is being used to rake up the Hindutva issue once again by Modi and his BJP comrades with an eye on the 2024 Lok Sabha elections after the recent victory in four states. So, each and every slogan in the film is facing big controversy. 'Desh ke gaddaro ko, goli maro salo ko' is one such slogan. It is not clear who the gaddars (traitors) are.

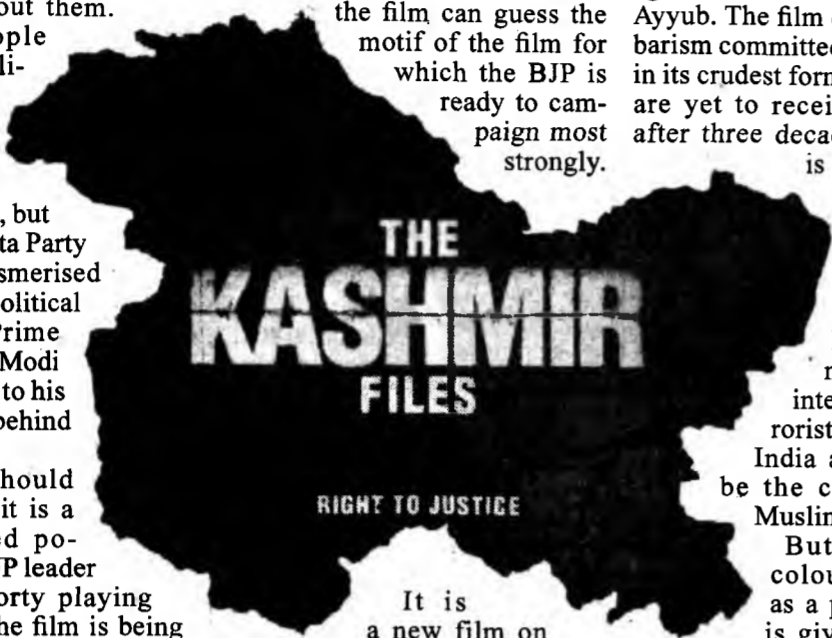
Very few films have come out on Kashmir and the controversial issues in Kashmir. After the fervid anti-COVID campaign, this clarion call for supporting *The Kashmir Files* is the next serious campaign for "truth and freedom of expression" by Modi. Each and every thing about the film is motivated and anyone can read the subtext beneath the main show. It is not surprising that *The Washington Post* columnist, Rana Ayyub read the subtext and regarded the

slogan as something against Indian Muslims in general even though there was no mention of the word Muslim or any religious identity. No need to blame Ayyub as even a common watcher of the film can guess the motif of the film for which the BJP is ready to campaign most strongly.

It is strongly objected that Indian Muslims are often equated with traitors. Even the slogan calling for the glory of Mother India (*Bharat Mata ki jai*) is poised against Muslims in the opinion of Ayyub. The film depicted the barbarism committed against the KPs in its crudest form and the victims are yet to receive justice even after three decades. The slogan is intended for the people responsible for this age-long torture on the Hindus and not for Indian Muslims. It is more specifically intended for the terrorists and enemies of India and they cannot be the common Indian Muslims.

But the political colour that the BJP as a party in the row is giving to it seems to have created all the confusion. With the BJP accused of stoking the Gujarat riots, this overenthusiastic justification of the film seems rather unusual and many are suspicious of the film's tenor. A small-budget film with no big stars became a superhit in the first week of its release and triggered more polarised opinions than Padmavati released a few years ago. One big reason is the very name of Kashmir that is a controversial subject.

The movie delves into the history of Kashmir, a restive region along India's border with Pakistan that has long been a sensitive subject. The Muslim-majority valley has seen armed insurgency against Indian rule since the late 1980s. What is tragic is that the Kashmiri Hindus have been continuously



It is a new film on the exodus of Hindus, specifically Kashmiri Pandits or KPs, from the Kashmir Valley in the 1990s which has kicked up a storm in India with the BJP weighing in on its behalf. Never before did a prime minister root for a movie. In the context of *The Kashmir Files*, even Modi who is otherwise is alleged to be against freedom of expression, tells BJP parliamentarians to "stand up for those bringing out the truth" in the film.

The Kashmir Files, written and directed by Agnihotri and released on March 11, revolves around a university student who discovers his Kashmiri Hindu parents were killed by Islamist militants and not in an accident as his grandfather told him. Apart from Chakraborty, the film stars Anupam Kher, Darshan Kumar and Pallavi Joshi among others.



targeted, especially the upper caste KPs who were a minority group. But this is never to include all the Muslims of Kashmir or India.

The BJP government revoked Kashmir's constitutionally-guaranteed autonomy in 2019. The party used the conflicted region as a poll plank and took a great initiative to focus on the issue of the Hindu exodus.

Very few writers or film directors had earlier focused on the exodus before this film which was to be released before the Republic Day. It was postponed due to the Omicron wave before the assembly election campaign in five states kicked in. Modi is taking a swipe at those who were against the release of *The Kashmir Files* by relating it to the issue of 'freedom of expression' while the country knows that his government has scant respect for the pluralistic ethos of India.

The global KP diaspora raised funds for the film and promoted it on Times Square, the world's

most expensive and prestigious advertising site.

We don't know the consequences of making the issue of Kashmir genocide being mainstreamed but according to Agnihotri, this will make his country proud at the global level. People are watching the film but what they are more interested in watching how a film is made a political tool with even the Prime Minister into it.

Modi referred to the reluctance in presenting history and historical figures in the right perspectives as in the case of the delayed recognition of Mahatma Gandhi. He slammed the "ecosystem that is involved in burying the truths" and urged his party MPs to stand up for those who bring out "truths that have been suppressed for years". But what is the truth behind all campaign for truth, no one knows yet.

(Ratan Bhattacharjee is a senior academician and multi-lingual columnist)



'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MAR 20, 2022

Moon trine Saturn on your solar return chart and it will give mixed results. You will need to look after your health well. Your BP, Sugar levels etc. may increase. You need to take care of your diet. And also do your exercise and walking regularly. Also take your medicine in time. Keep your expenses under control. You also need to control your speech and anger. There is no need to fall into much trouble. Also stay away from disputes. You will be able to help others better if your approach is practical. You will also come in contact with important and influence persons. Take business and investment related decisions wisely. You will get lot of respect from juniors in family and workplace. You will get good job offers. Lovebirds will plan to get married. You will feel relaxed. You will also do your work smoothly. You will also go on a trip with family.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It will be a prosperous week for you. You will experiment with new ideas. You will be innovative too. You will also start new works. You will have problems to start with but they will be resolved quickly. You will be so much busy in work that you won't be able to give time and attention to your family. Your financial position will remain stable. New business opportunities will come to you. Those who are looking for new jobs will find suitable openings. Court cases too will be solved by some mediator. Family members will show lot of respect and love which will prove good. Work will expand. Time will be favorable. Working women will excel in their work. A person can spread falsehood against you but no one will believe him. Your noble deeds will bring you lot of name and fame.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

It is a week to get lot of honour and prestige. You will witness growth in your life. You will keep your bosses in good humour and develop nice relations with your colleagues. You will also handle work related issue tactfully. You will also solve problems with ease. These are profitable days. Your business will grow. You will bring important changes in the way you think and look at things. You will also see yourself on the glorious path to success. You will take part enthusiastically in engagement or wedding function. You will also have lots of love and affection for children. You will earn lot of money. You will also fulfill your material needs. You can purchase costly items for your house. You will fulfill relative's expectations. You will be a position of strength and will have the ability to change things with your efforts. Whatever work you do and whatever feeling you have will give you strength and happiness.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

A very favorable week is in store for you. Students will study with focus and determination. Good events are bound to take place. The time will be important for those events to which you are emotionally connected. You will work hard to complete your tasks. Your peers and supporters will back you fully. You will take part enthusiastically in engagement or wedding function. You will also have lots of love and affection for children. You will earn lot of money. You will also fulfill your material needs. You can purchase costly items for your house. You will fulfill relative's expectations. You will be a position of strength and will have the ability to change things with your efforts. Whatever work you do and whatever feeling you have will give you strength and happiness.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Some special work will get completed from your hands. You will be busy in some special work. It will give you lot of name and fame as your prestige too will be at stake. Time will move in your favor. You will have lot of profits in your business and profession. Your meetings with some important person will enhance your reputation. You will have the support of your family. Your performance will be good in exams and interviews. There will be a constant flow of income. Your liberal and flexible attitude will win you lot of admirers and friends. You will be busy in some family function. Your workload will be excess but you will not complain. Your contacts with high officials or political persons will grow.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

The week is starting very fabulously for you. You will participate in business activities. Your thoughts will be centered on earning money. Despite hardships and difficulties you will not lose courage and enthusiasm. Success is written in the books for you. You will disappoint none and your name and fame will rise. There are strong chances of money benefits as well. You will earn money in your job and business. Your rivals will get defeated. You will also read knowledge and enhancing literature. Your romantic and love life will be wonderful. Love mates will enjoy wonderful bonding. You will read knowledge providing literature. Senior officials will be happy with your work. Court cases will be settled in your favor. You will be cheerful by the visiting guests.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23)

A good news will welcome you at your workplace. It will lift your spirits and you will be positive. Your fortunes will be on the rise. New job/business opportunities will come to you. Personal and official busy schedule will increase. You will be popular and in demand amongst your colleagues. You will face challenges with guts. There are chances of profits and happiness equally. Government related work will get re-

solved. You will also come in contact with a political celebrity. You will have plans for the future, which will be workable. Enemies and opponents will get defeated. You will get a pleasant news from somewhere. The graph of your respect, prestige, fame, glory and reputation will be going up. Official works will get completed. Money will flow in. Husband and wife will share amazing bonding.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

God's grace is on you. You will get victory in a court matter. Your source of income will rise. You will also have profits in partnership. Your hard work and wisdom will pay off. You will reach new level of success with your creative ability and talent. You will be man with the midas touch. You will be getting full support of your bosses. You will also enjoy a wonderful love life. You will also be busy with your family. Your planetary position will inspire you to try new things in life. You will be given important responsibilities. You will also find solutions by conversations with your seniors. You will also receive help up money from somewhere. You will be in strong and powerful situation financially. Right decision in your business will take you through. You will also get a pleasant news from somewhere.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Things are turning in your favor. There will be positive change in your thinking for life. You will plan expansion in your business. The more you work hard, more will your profit be. You will get relieved from the tension of money shortage. Your business decisions will prove to be correct. In business and work, you will have special achievements, but there will be satisfaction for work. There will be an increase in work efficiency and work capacity. You will purchase new things for your house. Some old problem will get sorted out. Differences of opinion will be resolved between couples. There is strong possibility of money gains. Your elders will bless you. Love mates will enjoy perfect bonding. You will get a good news from somewhere.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

There will be mental peace. You will also help other people a lot. Your name and prestige will rise. You will be much loved. You will try to do best in works. Your behavior will be good with everyone. You will be serious about your future in your romantic ties. You will have plans to get married. You will be motivated about your tasks and do well in your job/work. There is strong possibility of money gains. Your health will also improve. Students will do well and get job of their choice. Your doubts and fear will get removed. You will spend time in enhancing literature. You will get good news related to property. Auspicious functions will take place.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

The going will be good. You will get the support of your bosses. You will also overcome challenges and difficulties you have. You will fight with determination and self confidence and get success. You will have financial gains. Business conditions will be stronger. You will also get back your struck money from somewhere. Your work efficiency and skills too will increase. You will also defeat your enemies and opponents with ease. You will also spend quality time with your family. Time will be spent on recreation and entertainment. You will get proposals for marriage. You will also meet a person of your liking. Love relations will bloom. You will have an attitude to help others. You will have contacts with top level officials. You will have benefits in your business.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You will buy expensive household items. The results of work done with a purpose and systematically will bring positive results. Take your work seriously. You will get a pleasant news about your sixth and kin. You will also get success in love affairs. Your partner will understand your feelings. You will be busy in business and not be happy with your attitude. You will also meet a close friend of yours after a long time. You will be cheerful in your relationship with your spouse. Students will excel in studies. There will be pleasant atmosphere at home. Your health will also improve. You will go far ahead on the path of progress with your sincerity.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You will be caught in lot of activities this week. There will be arrival of guests and relatives. You will not interfere in other's affairs. You will also invest your money wisely. You will have elders' blessings and affection. You will be successful in balancing the work and family. There is possibility of purchasing new household items. The results of your efforts in business will be felt in the long run. Property matters will get resolved with ease. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your mate. Your brothers will give you lot of respect. You will take work as a mission. Love birds will enjoy company of each other. You will be cheerful. Your health will also improve. You will also plan to start a new business in partnership, association or collaboration.

Amidi: Embroidering for change



In a fitting homage to the ongoing commemoration of 30 years of friendship between India and Israel, the Israel Embassy created a special show in collaboration with designer Sahil Kochhar, the European Union, and Khushii to commemorate women coming together for social change.

"Amidi" - infinite, beautiful, and magnificent - was the best way to characterise the women who walked the runway in a stunning capsule collection designed Kochhar complemented their attractiveness. Minister of External Affairs and Culture for India, Meenakshi Lekhi, was also present to encourage and support the endeavour.

Speaking on the occasion, Gilon said, "Women and their power to drive social change needs to be celebrated across the different strata of society that they come from. Empowering a woman is equal to empowering a family. With this beautiful fashion showcase and this incredible group of powerful women coming from different fabrics of society, Amidi has been able to stitch together a beautiful narrative for social change through fashion."

But this wasn't your typical fashion show; the runway was transformed into a platform for bringing together women from all walks of life and allowing some of Khushii's most brilliant ladies to share their inspiring experiences.

Taking centre stage were nine women who with the help of local NGO Khushii, despite their

personal setbacks and challenges, have shown a unique determination to become successful and independent. These women are now helping others in their community to become successful and independent as well. Together with them were diplomats from embassies as well as members of the European Union Delegation, walking alongside and applauding their spirit and strength.

Working together on the show has given the young women a great sense of empowerment and the funds raised will further help in empowering and skill building of more girls from across communities.

Talking about the collection, Kochhar said, "I am very happy to come together with the Embassy of Israel for this very special initiative. This collection is personal and unique to me. It is a tribute to womanhood in all its forms coming together to celebrate these very special girls. I hope these young girls feel their very best while walking down the ramp as the stars that they really are."

The celebration was hosted by the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium in his mansion, which was designed by noted Indian artist Satish Gujral and provided the perfect backdrop for the occasion.

About the participating girls from Khushii Foundation Riya Kumari is one of three siblings and is from Azadpur, Delhi. Currently she is completing her second year from IGNOU. She as-

pires to be an independent woman who takes care of her family. She is studying towards becoming a nurse.

Hailing from Mukund, Bihar, 23-year-old Ruchi is highly passionate about stitching her own clothes or even suits for others and has trained herself in the art for the last 6 years. Through the constant love and support of her family, Ruchi imparts her knowledge to three students under her wing and hopes to pursue more opportunities in the stitching industry.

Laadli is altruistic in nature. Determined to be able to help others as much as she can while thinking about herself the least, Laadli is a hard-working, sincere child. She has completed a GDA course and is interested in improving her skills in the field of design.

Babita, a 29-year-old woman, first discovered the Khushii NGO while working in an anganwadi. After her marriage, she encountered several problems. She was encouraged to pursue a GDA course. After completing it, she is now interested in working in either the field of nursing or any other field where she can help others. She says she will always want to stay associated with Khushii.

Nisha is interested in the field of tailoring and stitching. She completed a course for the same at Khushii and is looking to gain experience in this industry so that she can explore her interests as well as guide others.

Poonam is curious about everything new that she comes across and is eager to learn more about it. She also took a tailoring course at Khushii to learn more about it.

Manu is currently pursuing an MA from IGNOU. She has also completed a GDA course and is interested in being an independent, working woman so that she can support her mother, the way she supported her.

Kritika has just completed the twelfth grade and has taken an interest in stitching. She is a quick learner and aspires to be an independent working woman. (LANSlife)

"Everyone has their good and bad days.
You just have to go with the flow and make
the most of whatever comes your way."

— Andrea Jeremiah

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No.218 SHILLONG, MONDAY, MARCH 21, 2022

Way forward for Congress

THERE is little reason, yet, to suspect that there is strong dissidence in the Congress party. What has come to be known as G23 is a set of Congress leaders who are at best trying to act as a corrective force within the organisational set-up. Democracy grants them as much freedom; and the Congress high command, meaning essentially the "family", has been adopting a conciliatory approach to the way these senior leaders are meeting and confabulating. It happened again after the results of the five-state assembly polls were out. This defeat was something that the Congressmen themselves could not reconcile to. The BJP made mincemeat out of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh – a far cry from the Grand Old Party's positioning there till the 1990s. The Congress lost power in Punjab and did badly in Uttarakhand, Manipur and Goa. Under the circumstances, the rank and file of the party is dis-spirited.

However, the problem for Congressmen as a whole, including the G23, is that they have no go other than remaining inside the party and flogging its central leadership into action mode. Ghulam Nabi Azad who met party chief Sonia Gandhi after the meeting has made this clear. There, he said, is no demand for a change of leader. It is well-accepted that Sonia Gandhi would remain as the interim chief, a resolution that the CWC has made at its post-poll meeting too. The CWC also stressed on having the organisational election and the selection or election of the new president. Everyone is convinced even today that there cannot be a Congress without the Nehru (Gandhi) family at its apex. The family enjoys a huge clout because of the stellar contributions it made before and after India's Independence; the martyrdom of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi for the cause of the nation further cementing this family legacy.

Fact is also that there is no other credible leader, as of now, for Congressmen to rally around. The family is the glue that binds Congressmen into one cohesive whole. Scams and allegations of corruption at all levels during the UPA-periods have tainted the image of the Congress and the family too. Rahul Gandhi does not have the 'macho' image of Narendra Modi. But, his shaping up as a responsible politician is steady. The strength of the Nehru family and the Congress that they lead is also their all-encompassing and accommodative nature – a sentiment that's so vital for a nation like India, a mosaic of different religions, races, regions, castes, communities and cultures.

Roberts Hospital: A Century of Service to The People

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

The inauguration of the Welsh Mission Hospital on March 25, 1922, began with the hymn about hope and healing- "Oh Thou through suffering perfect make...In hours of sickness, grief and pain. No sufferer turns to thee in vain". The atmosphere on the Ceredig Hills at Jaiaiw was filled with the splendid voices of students' choir that sang beautifully under the leadership of Ms A.W Thomas. The inauguration was also attended by the Hindus, Mohammedans, Khasis, Europeans and Eurasians.

The Hospital, which is also fondly and popularly known as the Robert's Hospital, is attaining hundred years of service. It is recorded that the Maharani of the erstwhile Princely State of Gwalior, the tea planters of Assam would make visits to the Hospital for treatment and also the Booker Prize Winner and au-

thor of God of Small Things, Arundhati Roy was born here. However, the story of Robert's Hospital is not about the Maharani or tea planters nor that of the renowned author, rather it is the zeal and selfless service for the health and wellbeing of the people, especially the poor and needy. We are indebted to the workers of the Hospital and those who had served humanity via this Hospital in the past 100 years.

The Medical Mission of the Welsh Presbyterian in the Khasi Hills owed its origin to Dr Owen Richards, the first missionary doctor (1843-44). But the medical works of the Welsh Presbyterian began to take shape after the arrival of Dr Griffiths in 1878-79 who had started two medical stations at Mawphlang and Laitlyngkot and trained a few locals in medical works.

In fact, Dr H. Gordon Roberts was dissuaded from establishing the Hospital as there was not enough work and nor was there any surgical work to be done. Moreover, like in the preceding decades, the native Khasis remained averse to modern medicine. Therefore, the people were not willing to be treated inside the Hospital. This was the initial hurdle and during his address at the British Medical Association, Assam Branch, in 1926, Dr H. Gordon Roberts not only acknowledged the fact that people resisted the idea of in-patient treatment, but also embraced the need and challenges to explain the importance of medical treatment in the Hospital in furtherance of better health care. According to Dr S P Sengupta,

"...he was more impressed by the necessity for making adequate in-patient provision in order to secure the best results in many cases." Nevertheless, he prevailed upon the Mission and eventually began his journey in the Hospital works.

Armed with the residues of fund collected for the earthquake victims in the Khasi Hills in 1897, Dr Roberts began to construct the Hospital building in Jaiaiw in 1917. He also went to England and asked for permission to mobilize funds for the Hospital. His project won many hearts in the Church in Wales and the people gladly responded to his appeal and he collected £ 30,000. Since the early part of the 20th century the ingenuity of indigenous Khasis were manifold and according to Dr R.

Arthur Hughes, "he (Roberts) had a collective of Khasi engineers with him who had an inborn talent in mechanical and engineering works. With ease they grasped the mechanical works and could fix anything, from assembling an X-ray machine to setting up a diesel machine or a boiler or steam laundry. They were self-taught individuals who sought to conquer new fields." As early as 1924 local Khasis, like Lesibon, Derila Paley, Estella Nongsteng and Iwelibon Tiewtaby joined the nursing school and aimed to serve in the Hospital. Yet another local genius, Dr Drin Singh Hynniewta, joined the Hospital in 1928.

Perhaps no resolution was taken by the Presbyterian Church in Khasi & Jaintia Hills to establish the Mission Hospital in Shillong. However, in the Assembly meeting held in the Mawkhar Presbyterian Church, Shillong in March 1923, it was resolved that the Presbyteries would collect funds for the Hospital Mission and a Committee was formed for this purpose. And the Mawphlang-Khadsawpra Presbytery was the first to respond to the call and during its Presbytery Meeting held in Mawthawp-dah Church in April 1923 it resolved to collect offerings for the Hospital of Dr Roberts at Jaiaiw. It was decided to begin the collection from the current year and the different circles and sub-districts were given the liberty to deliberate and decide about the collections." Similarly, in 1925 during the Assembly in Sohra it was resolved that, "For other needs of the Hospitals in Jaiaiw and Jowai, the Pres-

byterian Churches across the Khasi-Jaintia Hills will dedicate one Sunday service for both the Hospitals. During the Hospital Sunday service, the faithful are exhorted to pray for and preach about the Hospital and also offerings would be collected for the Hospitals".

The resolutions taken in 1923 and 1925 respectively were significant and clearly indicated that the Presbyterian Assembly fully endorsed and participated in the medical works of Dr H. Gordon Roberts in Shillong. The resolutions also expounded the core Presbyterian principles of self-reliance and self-rule and that the Roberts Hospital is a community owned Medical Institution which is founded on the Christian values of serving the sick, the poor and needy. Over

the centuries the members of the Presbyterian Church in Khasi & Jaintia Hills and a cross section of the society contributed immensely through their tithes, offerings and donations, besides their indomitable services to the Hospital.

Before the last batch of Welsh Missionaries left the country for good in 1969, the mantle of managing the affairs of the Hospital was already handed over to the natives and Dr E.C Syngkon was appointed as Senior Medical Officer and Dr S.P Sengupta as Chief surgical officer respectively. During the Synod Meeting held in Pariong in March 1969, Dr R. Arthur Hughes presented for the last time the report and narrated the great feat of the Hospital since its inception. The evolution in medical science and its efficacy had tremendously improved the health and well-being of the people. In the past, the condition of healthcare was such that 9 out of 10 patients would die from diseases and many would become paralysed or insane even if they survived. But today it has reversed and 9 out of 10 patients would be cured if those diseases were diagnosed and treated on time. Earlier we consoled ourselves when faced with such dilemma that death was the will of God, but now we could say with enormous faith that good health and healing was also God's will, not just death. For the future, Dr Hughes counted on the zeal, expertise and wisdom of the native professionals like Dr Romily Basaiawmoit, Dr Frank Niangti, Dr Jerisim

workers and mass exodus of doctors, the last of which happened in 2015-16. The ad-hoc and patchwork approaches to fix the problems had never worked until 2016 when the Special Business Session of the KJP Assembly held in August resolved to constitute the Special Committee in order to examine and propose new ideas for overhauling the system of governance and management. In turn the Special Committee sought the help of three experts namely, Dr P. Lyngkhol, Dr Faith Rangad and Dr Sunil Kaul and after an in-depth study they proposed a slew of reforms which are tenable and practicable.

The dreams for the Hospital to provide hope and healing are alive as ever. Unambiguously, Dr R. Arthur Hughes reported to the Church in Wales that, "the Mission Hospital had to perpetually exist. In spite of the efforts made by the Government to establish as many public hospitals and to produce doctors, the Hospital established by the Church and which was well managed along the Christian spirit of love, sacrifice and compassion could serve better and meet the needs and challenges of health care".

The Roberts Hospital should remain the peoples' Hospital and forever provide access to free and affordable health care. The Hospital was serving those patients who cannot pay the full charges and also those who were not able to pay anything. To remain true to its calling, the Church Body must ensure that transparency and accountability prevail in the governance and management of the Hospital.

Dr S.S Sharma etc. He made special mention about the new knowledge in the fields of Gynaecology & Obstetrics and Medicine which Dr E.C Syngkon had gained and the experience of Dr Orientcey Roy in the field of anaesthetics. Thus, the Hospital was equipped with trained and experienced local professionals who would take the mission into new heights.

In 1972 the budget estimates of the Hospital stood at Rs 10.62 lakhs. The Children's ward and Out-patient Department were opened the same year to mark the fiftieth anniversary. Also, the layout plan for the construction of Operation theatre and Surgical ward was prepared. However, over the decades the Hospital was entangled in systemic failures and suffered from governance and management deficiencies. On several occasions it faced the flak of

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Indian Missile in Pakistan Much ado about nothing!

By Dr D.K Giri

On 10th March, the Director General of Inter-Service Intelligence public relations confirmed and alleged in a press conference that a flying object launched from Sirsa, Haryana landed on 9th at Mian Channu, in the North-West of Multan. Apparently, it damaged some civilian property and is under examination by Pakistani scientists. Pakistan, as expected, summoned the Indian Chief of Mission in Islamabad and admonished him voicing, 'strong condemnation of this blatant violation of Pakistani airspace.' India promptly admitted that a missile has indeed gone off accidentally from Indian territory and deeply regretted the incident but the story does not end here.

In the climate of deep mistrust and suspicion prevailing between the two countries, a mountain is made out of a mole hill. The machines and missiles are run by human beings and the possibility of error is endless. Major nuclear countries like Russia, Japan, China, US, France -- all have experienced nuclear accidents, but leaders and experts did not apportion blame to anyone.

In this case it is not so. Beijing the 'eternal' critique of India has jumped into the fray nudging Pakistan to demand a thorough enquiry, usually a devious tactic of fishing in troubled waters. Beijing wants to sound important in the region, but its own conduct at home and on the borders, it shares with neighbours leave a lot to desire.

Worse, the social media in both countries have spun outlandish and incredible theories on the incident. As a sample, 'India had deliberately fired the missile to test Pakistan's missile defence readiness'. The second one is even more far-fetched; that India had fired the missile in order to scare Pakistan from doing anything silly in the Kashmir borders.

The above speculation was fuelled by Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's dash to Moscow immediately after Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine. It is also a common sense that no responsible country will risk firing a modern missile without a warhead to test the enemy's readiness and risk it falling into inimical hands.

It is pertinent to look at the human error dimension in this sad incident. While it somewhat questions Indian handling of strategic weapons and launching protocols, the hard fact seen world over is that human errors are commonplace. To use a slice of statistics, since 1950, there have been 32 recorded nuclear weapons accidents --launching, firing, detonating, theft or loss. To date, six nuclear weapons have been lost and never been recovered.

In 90s and of late, Washington complained that China posed a direct threat to the United States because, for several decades, it has systematically stolen the United States nuclear weapons design information. In the 1970s, the United States through the CIA reported that Uranium from its nuclear fuel-processing plant was stolen and found in Israel.

However, the above examples do not dilute or automatically defuse the tension between New Delhi and Islamabad. Thanks to restrain exercised by Pakistan and the innocuous nature of the missile, the incident did not lead to an escalation to a nuclear level. Interestingly, the response time between the United States and Russia for an ICBM launch is above 25 minutes; but in the case of India Pakistan which are contiguous countries, it is much less. According to the reports, the Indian missile was in the air for over 7 minutes before it crashed near Multan, which is one of Pakistan's nuclear weapons sites. It could have

easily prompted Pakistan to retaliate.

It is not clear whether there is any forewarning between India and Pakistan on any test or drills with ballistic or cruise missile under the prevailing agreement. At any rate, both the countries have behaved commendably. Pakistan did not retaliate as India instantly admitted the slip and regretted. This showed the maturity of the leadership which should persist for the sake of strategic stability in the sub-continent.

The missile story would not be complete without referring to the United States. It has endorsed India's version on the missile and has supported New Delhi. The State Department spokesperson Ned Price told reporters at his daily news conference on 14th March, "We have no indication as you also heard from our Indian partner that this incident was anything other than an accident." He added, "We refer you of course to the Indian Ministry of Defence for any follow up. They issued a statement on March 9th to explain precisely what had happened. We don't have a comment beyond that."

A small incident can trigger speculations and diplomatic scrambles. Such is the international climate. The political climate has become worse after the invasion of Ukraine by its big neighbour Russia. The international community is standing by; the western powers are clandestinely supporting the victim with weapons and sanctions against the invader. Is that adequate?

The matter of deep concern is that war is being made a tool for promotion of national interest. The countries in South Asia, explosive as it is, with unremitting enmity between India and Pakistan. The missile incident should be put to bed without further rancour.

China's interference is uncalled for. Their patronising suggestion that India and Pakistan should sort things out, is not in the good taste. India and Pakistan are capable of solving their tensions bilaterally. In fact, they had done so on the missile episode until China popped in with the unwanted advice for a thorough probe.

Admittedly, the India-Pakistan tensions have been escalated by the meddling of big powers in the region. They had found an opportunity to trade in arms with both countries plunging them into an unnecessary, unaffordable arms race. It is a challenge for the ingenuity of the leaders in the region to build peace, security and goodwill.

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, a sportsman by training, made good sounds as he took over. He identified the common enemy in the region to be poverty. We wished he could continue that spirit, but alas, the Pakistani army, which has a vested interest in continuation of the conflict, tied his hands and like his predecessors he played into their hands.

So obviously, there are much larger issues than the accidental landing of the missile in Pak territory. This incident should be buried sooner than later, and no further bickering is called for. India has expressed regret, and should offer to pay for the damages if needed. It is in the interest of both New Delhi and Islamabad to build normalcy between them, and handle the third countries with great caution and care. More importantly, do not let the small issues become big and bothersome. If Russia and Ukraine have common ancestry, India and Pakistan were one people, one country, not so long ago. They must invoke the common past to moderate the shared present. —INFA
(The writer is Prof. International Politics, JIMMC)



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Letters to the Editor

Unjustified calling of sealed quotations

Editor,
With reference to the subject cited above, I wish to bring to public notice that an advertisement was published in this newspaper on February 28, calling for sealed tender notice by the Office of the State Rural Employment Society, Meghalaya for a printing job. Being a representative of one of the firms that submitted the sealed tender, after a few weeks, I went to inquire about the status of the tender for which I was directed to the room of a lady who informed me that the sealed tender had been opened by the office without calling the tenderers and the work has already been allotted to a firm with the so-called lowest bid. When I

pointed it out to her that this was not the right procedure, she informed me that they have been practicing this for the past 3 to 4 years. When I enquired about the lowest bid amount of the firm that was awarded the work since it's my right to know as one of the tenderers, she replied that she didn't have that information with her. This is a clear case of blatant malpractice by this office.

Yours etc.,
Andy Mutyen,
Via email

A deeper study on the hellish road beyond Itshyrwat

Editor,
After reading The Shillong Times with regards to the condition of the road beyond Itshyrwat by many concerned citizens, for those

who travel on this road every day, it's a nightmare no doubt. Forget about cleaning cars because the road is so dusty even patients' traveling to NEIGRIHMS for health issues have to cling to dear life not because of illness but the dusty road. For a common person like me who cannot afford a "Lamborghini" I can even smell the dust even while inside a cab while travelling on this road. Coming from Umpling side one can see the dust rising like that in the current Ukraine war.

A pertinent question which crops up in the mind of every normal person is, how can this happen where the Government House (Secretariat) is only 4 Kms away? What are the conditions of roads which are 40 kms away if this road located in the capital city of the state can deteriorate to this extent? If things carry one like this, in no time this road will become not a dusty but muddy road. It is understood that

the Dhar Brothers' Company bagged the tender for the work as stated in the article. So without any delay the verdict is - This is a cocktail of Businessmen + Politician + Cabinet Ministers + Contractors equals CORRUPTION! This formula is not very difficult to understand. In fact many want to implement it or are trying to be in a position to implement it they want a Lamborghini. Now, who is going to bell the cat? Or will everyone turn the other way because the cat had turned into a man eater?

When Conrad Sangma became the Chief Minister of the State, I for one was very optimistic of seeing a fresh mind and a young and energetic young man taking up the mantle to lead the State in the right direction for a better change. Here is a person with a Masters in Finance, coming from a well to do family and not at all a stranger to politics. But four years down the line it does

appear things are not good. How can our state end up in the hands of few individuals who do whatever they like without any respect for any law or common sense? Tinted glass vehicles are roaming the streets with oversized tyres breaking not only the law of the land but commonsense too. Are we really living in an age of the rich and the mighty?

As per the rule book, the site engineer is supposed to be on site during construction of roads etc., to supervise the work so that the contractor will provide quality products and the work should be as per the specifications and time schedule laid down in the estimates. But when the contractor is himself very close to the head of the Public Works Department what can the poor engineer do? What will happen to the engineer if he tries to intervene is known to everyone. NEIGRIHMS was once the third cleanest Health In-

stitution in the country but now because of the MDA government it becomes a nightmare for people to visit. The contractor or the minister or the super-rich don't have any regards for the havoc caused by this dusty road and care less about the houses starting from Itshyrwat to Mawpdang including a cabinet minister's house, where dust rains on their roof like volcano ashes.

Perhaps it's time for the Honorable High Court to take cognizance of this madness and show these concerned individuals that they are servants, not masters of the public.

Yours etc.,
A.Rani,
Via email

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"Controversial disputes are a part of democratic culture."

— Angela Merkel

The Shillong Times

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Giving the devil his due

THE Assam-Meghalaya border dispute is a 50-year-old problem. On this, the leaders of the Hill State Movement and those succeeding them have to shoulder the blame for not paying due attention to the matter before the state was carved out of Assam. That required a pragmatic, long-term vision for Meghalaya which unfortunately was missing. Meghalaya was governed without any policy until 1988. Assam cannot be blamed for encroaching on what was previously its territories. Whenever and wherever land changes hands between individuals or states both parties are very clear about the boundaries. While having a separate state was an important agenda, what's equally important is to mark out the boundaries by consulting the maps and areas of influence under the Syiems at the time. Boundaries even between countries remain fluid at the best of times and are often resolved through a process of give and take. Any attempt at rigidity is fraught.

In this aspect the MDA Government must be credited for going the extra mile in trying to settle the boundary issue after a series of consultations with people living in the areas under dispute. This is perhaps the first time that the matter has escalated to the political level. In the past the task of resolving the boundary dispute was left to the bureaucracy. Several rounds of talks were held at the level of the Chief Secretaries of Assam and Meghalaya but with little or no outcomes. The talks were not sustained. They came up intermittently only when the matter would be raised in the Assembly after border skirmishes are reported.

It is commonplace for any government to want to claim credit for its work. For the MDA, solving the long-pending border dispute would be a feather in their cap and a success story to claim for the 2023 elections. However, it appears that the constituents of the MDA are divided on this issue. The UDP General Secretary has raised a point of contention stating that Government should not go against the wishes of the border residents. Border residents usually prefer to have amorphous boundaries that allow them to take advantage of opportunities from both states. Border residents as much as anyone else in the far-flung areas of Meghalaya want better roads so they can market their farm produce more efficiently. Meghalaya should have used soft skills to give the border residents the necessary identity documents but as some residents have themselves stated, it is always more difficult to get their Aadhar cards or EPIC from the Meghalaya side whereas Assam facilitates that process. Be that as it may, the border issue should stop being a political football where every political party will either claim credit if the matter is resolved or will promise to resolve this fifty-year old problem, yet again during the election campaign. Politicians should stop making political capital out of human misery which is what the residents at the border face.

The Tekton's Inspiration

By Albert Thyrniang

Last weekend the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, the Anglican Church and some in the Lutheran Church venerated Saint Joseph, the legal husband of Mary and the foster father of Jesus. Information on the first century Jewish saint is drawn from the first Gospel (Mathew), the third Gospel (Luke), the patristic writings and the 'not be fully reliable' apocryphal literatures. Popes' encyclical letters and official Church's document are also a source of reflection. Given the composition of population of the state the appearance of 'Yosef' (in Hebrew) could be appropriate.

The first virtue of Joseph is that he was a 'just man'. This is the implicit quality stated by the Scripture. After marriage, which in all likelihood took place at Nazareth, before they came together, Mary was already with a child. In shock, "Joseph her husband, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to put her away quietly" (Mathew 1:19).

"Just" means "righteous," "upright," "virtuous" or simply "good". Because of his goodness he spared the shame on Mary and saved her from being stoned, as per the custom of the time, for having an 'affair' outside marriage. Many of us Church leaders were on the pulpit on March 19 last, the referred feast day, the significance of which supersedes the sobriety of Lenten Season and perhaps even delivered sermons thoughtful of implications. Perhaps, for listeners too the impact of the 'protector of the universal Church' ends once they step out of the Church doors. Do we deserve to be called "just", "righteous," "upright" and "virtuous"?

To be 'just' also means to be 'honest'. The most visible challenge of honesty is concerning financial matters. Without a doubt, there is secrecy and non-transparency in its dealing. Money, much of which is cash, is handled by pastors, in many cases singly. Accountability is obscure. This is not a wild observation. Feedback comes from the public. Many concerned members wonder as to what to do with this anomaly. Should they choose to be whistle-blowers or should they continue to remain silent, suppressing their conscience? I was told that during a discussion on 'Synodality of the Church' lay people asked, "Why are we asked to be good? Look at priests! Are they there to do business?"

In the classical language, Latin 'to be just' is 'suum cuique' meaning "to each

his/her own" or "may all get their due." Joseph did justice to his work. He fulfilled his responsibilities of protecting Mary and Jesus and providing for them. In the same meeting participants observed, "Priests and nuns are mainly in schools. They no longer visit villages and homes. They even refuse to administer to the sick and the dying. Being in schools is lucrative. They don't do justice to their calling."

We have witnessed the exodus of 12 Congress MLAs. The five remaining Congress legislators have shifted to the ruling camp in open defiance of their party's dictate. It is an acknowledgement of their failure to do justice as Opposition representatives. They claim that once they supported the MDA government, their constituencies have benefited. This means that the government is unfair to the Opposition. But should it be so? If the Opposition does not flag this injustice, then who will? Why were they mum for four years? For their failure to do justice to their role they chose the easy way out.

In one video Ampareen Lyngdoh was heard saying, "We are now (after joining the MDA government) in a better place. Officials (bureaucrats) look at us differently," implying that more projects and schemes for their constituencies are allotted and cleared in offices. This is quite disturbing. Why should bureaucrats favour only MLAs of the ruling parties? Bureaucrats are meant to implement schemes across the state irrespective of whether the area falls within the jurisdiction of an MLA in the Ruling Party or the Opposition. Moreover, if bureaucrats are indifferent to the Opposition MLAs then what about the ordinary citizens? Bureaucrats cannot be dictated by politics. They are to serve the common people. If bureaucrats assist only the most powerful and influential individuals, then it is the duty of the Opposition to lodge complaints.

These days we watch the most blatant form of dishonesty – hypocrisy. The USA proclaims it is against Russia for invading Ukraine. But it is the US which pushed Russia and Ukraine to war. The most powerful nation has taken NATO to the doorsteps of the geographically largest country. Should the Russian leader watch while the West threatens its safety and security? Most importantly the US has gained tonnes of dollars out of the destruction in Ukraine. Even as Ukrainian children and citizens die American defence stocks have skyrocketed in the market. Public and private defence companies – manufacturing guns and bombs – will make windfall profits thanks to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Who says the US and the West want peace? War is good business.

The US and the western countries condemn Russia for the atrocities in Ukraine but they themselves perpetrated much bigger atrocities in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq and elsewhere. FIFA and UEFA have banned all Russian sports. Why did the associations not exercise their authority against the serial invader and perpetrator of atrocities – the US? The same can be said on economic sanctions.

St. Joseph is a model for workers. He was a tekton, meaning a mechanic in general or a carpenter in particular. St. Justin chose the latter interpretation which has been accepted by the Church. Therefore, Jesus is called the 'carpenter's son' in the Gospels. The Bethlehem-born saintly craftsman earned his living in the city of David via his profession. He provided for his family when he later moved to Nazareth, Egypt and finally back to Nazareth, with his trade. In 1955, in response to the communist sponsored "May Day" celebrations for workers, the church instituted the feast of St. Joseph to stress on the dignity of human labour and to teach that 'Work is to develop our talents and abilities, to put it at the service of society...and the family.'

St. Joseph was a skilled carpenter. He imparted his skills to his son, Jesus. The need today is skills acquisition. Unemployment today is worsened due to the lack of skills in young people. Many educated unemployed are probably unskilled and untrained. They may be graduates or post-graduates in general disciplines holding BA, B.Com, B.Sc, MA, M.Com, M.Sc degrees but are out of job. Jobs for such categories are saturated. Even professionals who have cleared MBA, MBBS or nursing courses are struggling. So today there is no other way but to move to skill-based education.

We could also ask the jobless BA, B.Com, B. Sc, MA, M. Com, M. Sc passers whether they have mastered the general language and arithmetic skills, namely, speaking, reading, writing and calculating, sufficiently. In my limited experience, during interviews for teaching posts and other interactions these basic skills are acutely lacking. If youth

have these necessary skills, I believe there is no dearth of jobs. Of course, I do not mean government jobs. The government cannot provide jobs for all its citizens. Even if the Reservation Policy is revamped little difference will be felt. Private undertakings, enterprises, online jobs, jobs in the social media bring more money than government jobs.

Speaking of communication skills we were embarrassed by some ministers during the budget session. The Urban Affairs minister, Sniawbhalang Dhar did not seem to understand the questions asked by Umroi MLA George Lyngdoh and kept on repeating the same answer over and over again. Worse was the Sports minister, Banteidor Lyngdoh's answer, "The National Games won't go anywhere from our state. If not this year, maybe next year or maybe the coming year but the state will definitely host the National Games." It was a comedy! The minister was also clueless as to what to do with the infrastructure (still to be built) after the games are over. Clearly some ministers lack the knowledge and the skill to be in the office. But we are helpless. Politics prerequisites no special skill. It is not a profession.

St. Joseph was supposedly much older than Mary when they married. Unreliable sources suggest that Joseph was in his 80s or even 90s while Mary was about 15. The Catholic Church teaches the two had a chaste marriage. Mary had vowed to be a virgin. Joseph never violated her. He respected her dignity.

The rapes, abuses and exploitation today question the mentality towards women. Women are seen as sex objects. Abominable abuses are committed also by Church men against women and children. One of the trends today all over the world is the sugar-daddy sugar-baby relationships/services. Websites are available. Rich older men pay for college and university expenses of young women in exchange for sexual favours. Recently, a principal of a university told an assembly that there are a lot of sugar-daddies in Guwahati city. One is unaware of the situation in Shillong. There were reports some years ago of young girls who come to Shillong at the call of politicians. Though women are able to achieve their goals, sugar-daddy, sugar-baby activities are a form sexual exploitation.

Joseph can provide loads of inspiration but space constraint compels me to rest my case here today.

Albert.thyrniang74@gmail.com

Imran Khan braces himself for no-trust vote
Opposition upbeat as more PTI members in dissenting mood

By Sankar Ray

The more the Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan Niazi zooms in on 25 March (if not earlier), the fateful voting for no-confidence motion at the National Assembly, the more rattled is the hierarchical order of the main ruling party, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), headed by the PM. As if sensing that his prime ministerial existence is threatened, Imran Khan seems to have forgotten that once he was committed to play with a straight bat when he led the Pakistan Test cricket team and is now swinging with a cross bat to stay on.

With some 20 members defecting to the opposition, Pakistan PM Imran Khan's ruling PTI party, the future of the federal government has entered a zone of uncertainty. The PTI strength being reduced to 155 MNAs in the PTI kitty, political analysts in Pakistan too sense uncertainty of PTI's continuance in future, especially with King Khan at the helm. In contrast, the opposition comprising the PML(N) and

Spearheading the Opposition, he stated that people would not trust them. "Your children will be unable to find spouses and they will be ridiculed at school. You are destroying the future of your children by accepting this money."

However, dissidence inside the PTI is raging. Dissident lawmakers of PTI are coming out into the open. Unnerved PTI party bureaucrats resort to vitriolic language to shame them. Education Minister of Punjab Dr Murad Raas wrote on Twitter "Sindh House has been turned into a Political Brothel. Political prostitutes are running in and out of this Brothel. Head Pimp – Asif Ali Bemaaree." "Strangely enough, the throwing away of political etiquette in Pakistan's parliamentary polity wasn't kick-started by Dr Raas. It was initiated by an Imran-adherent Aalia Hamza, PTI's MNA and parliamentary secretary for commerce, industries and production. She abused PTI dissenters as 'worse



smaller allies are assured support from over more than 160 MNAs.

King Khan's discomfiture is due to the military establishment's reported move to ask the former cricketer to step down, although the PM is a pet of Pak army top brass. General Qamar Javed Bajwa, has sounded Imran Khan to step down after the ensuing conference of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation in Islamabad this month. Fresh grist to the mill of political cauldron is the suggestion to the premier from one of the founders of PTI and an MNA Najeeb Haroon, a doyen among Pakistan's civil engineers, who feels that the PM's quit gesture will ease current political turmoil. "The country can no longer sustain instability and PM Imran Khan must shed his stubbornness and somebody else from

than prostitutes.' She added. Sindh House was operating 'like a brothel... 'pimps are sitting there.'

'Imranocracy' has been brewing for nearly two years. The first expression of anger had burst out through the petition en masse from women journalists in 2020 when they also called on the PTI government to act against trolls associated with the ruling party who indulged in abusive campaigns, sometimes even resorting to threats of murder and sexual violence. There was no positive response from the government. On the contrary, abusive campaigns were aggravated. Signatories were witch-hunted. Pity was that the PTI bureaucracy inspired the attackers against the journalists who were critical of PTI governance. 'The premier had smelt a rat in end-January this year

and had lost his cool in a TV programme Aap Ka Wazir-e-Azam, Aap Kay Saath, he awkwardly warned his opponents in and out of PTI. In case, he would be out of power, he would make their life hell. "You will not find a place to hide if I take to the streets...I will just need to nudge people and others will be running to London as well to join the ones who already are there" he quipped.

The dramatic turn against Imran Khan took place a week ago when a dozen MNAs expressed their lack of confidence in him. The military establishment that pushed the PTI supreme off the grace, is half inside and other half in the wings – a sign of quit notice to King Khan. It was evident when the Pakistan Army spokesperson told the media last week that the military would remain neutral. A visibly angry Khan retorted at a rally in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa: humans take sides and "only animals are neutral". The Army ignored Khan's barb. (IPA Service)

"The country can no longer sustain instability and PM Imran Khan must shed his stubbornness and somebody else from within the party be brought forward as the prime ministerial candidate."

within the party be brought forward as the prime ministerial candidate," he told a leading TV news channel of Pakistan.

Whether Imran Khan will gracefully step down is to be awaited. There is, however, no sign of his willingness to give up the schism inside the PTI. Which is why he keeps lambasting the Opposition which tabled the no-confidence motion. He branded the Pakistan Peoples Party co-chairperson Asif Ali Zardari, Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) president Shehbaz Sharif and Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam (Fazlul) Pakistan chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman as "three stoolers" from the opposition, accusing them of "stealing" for years and facing corruption cases.

"The judiciary, Election Commission of Pakistan and the nation are observing the situation. The veil has been lifted from the eyes of the nation... opposition leaders would 'badly lose this match'," he added. But King Khan is irrepressible.

Letters to the Editor

Education must promote a secular spirit

Editor,
Close on the heels of the Karnataka High Court hijab verdict upholding the ban on wearing hijab on the premises of educational institutions, the Karnataka government has made a decision to introduce the Bhagavad Gita in the school syllabus in the next academic year. The government's decision has sparked off another controversy in the state after the ban on wearing hijab.

True, the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita have enormous significance. On the other hand, it cannot be included as a subject in the school syllabus. It is a sacred book of the Hindus like the Mahabharata or Ramayana. What is the logic of introducing it in schools where students belonging to other religions also study? Is it right to force them to study the teachings of the Gita against their will? Education must not be mixed with religion. Education must inculcate secularism in students, not communalism. India is a country of religious pluralism. When the Gita becomes a part of school syllabus, what about the Koran and the Bible? Do the students belonging to Islam and Christian religions have to study the Gita instead of their sacred books? This is another case

of religious discrimination and segregation.

Education is imparted for character formation and personality development. It widens students' outlook and develops positive attitudes in them. While people have the right to follow religions of their choice, it must not become a part of studies in schools. Religion and holy books are meant for making people morally good whereas education transcends beyond that. It is not meant for developing faith in students. It develops a scientific temper in students and enables them to perceive things rationally and develop clear perceptions. Invoking religious feelings among school children is dangerous. Sanctity of educational institutions must be preserved; centres must never become centres of communalism.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

Freedom of religion is a right

Editor,
Shillong, and Meghalaya as a whole, has a Christian majority population. Sentiments regarding religion are strong in the country, and the same can be said about our state. While it's best to have a secular view on issues, it's difficult to avoid certain things. Not everything advocated by religious communities can be deemed right, or

even ignored. Only recently, the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Shillong have had their members and leaders "visit" houses of particular members. These members are specifically those that have not attended the church for a while, so the church decided to take up the responsibility and make the people know their sins! Several of them, in groups, visit these homes and stand outside the houses, singing aloud—songs of repentance and forgiveness. Isn't this, in a way, shaming the people? Is not religion, and church-going as well, a choice? Must such a promulgation be allowed by the church leaders?

Where is the thin line between breach of peace, trespassing, harassment and religious advocacy?

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

Hard earned academic excellence compromised

Editor,
The year 1972 began with the inauguration of Meghalaya State but not without two Himalayan blunders – the boundary issues and the Reservation Policy which till date haunt the government and the people of Meghalaya, who see no hope of the blunders getting resolved any time soon. We lost the Kupli river to Assam as no

leader knew the riverine law by which the three tributaries viz Myntang, Mynriang and Umiumere are our birthright. For this, Assam wittingly claimed the low ground for power generation and we managed to get just 6% power for our 3 rivers. And with HSPDP confessing that there was stealing and plundering in the bygone days by us over Assam and the reconciliation policy of give and take, our people at the borders have lost all hope from the MDA govt.

The second blunder is the 40-40-20 % reservation policy, raked up by the Khnam MLA of Shillong North Constituency, Adelbert Nongrum. It was an emotional plea with his 'no intention to create divide among brothers and sisters or ill feelings,' clarification. He was right as all of us who happened to be part of the Hill State Movement, agreed on grounds that academically there is no denial that the Khasi-Pnar people then had an edge over Garos. Sadly, our leaders who have never tasted victory, and were too joyous had forgotten to put a timeline on such reservations, say, till 1980.

I joined as a college teacher in 1974 and retired in 2011. 37 years gave me plenty of opportunities to study the impact of the blunder. During admissions to PU Sc (2 year course) the perception was that the 20% reservation for non-tribals had made the state lose many deserving non-tribal stu-

dents, and I thank them for their silent sacrifices.

By 1972 the Higher Secondary School performance was the platform for all our doctor aspirants. And competition was at its peak. Those days Classes 11 and 12 were taught by experienced teachers purposely planted by principals as these are the years of conceptual science teaching to cope with the challenges of the scientific world.

Fresh teachers had to reconcile to teaching pure science at the undergraduate level. Of course many who did not want to study medicine studied B.Sc. The results were fantastic and those doctors from the 1970s to 2018 had proven their worth. But what pained us the teachers was that in selection of students to different medical colleges through the Directorate of Health Services the reservation policy was found to suffer from great flaws. Many Khasi-Pnar students with much higher scores were deprived by Garo students of far lower scores. So the Khasi-Pnar students had to opt for Veterinary or BPharm.

Had the students lost out to others in Engineering or Agriculture it would have not been such a great loss. But Medicine is about treating patients. It is a critical course which requires academic excellence in Physics (like theory of blood pressure, clinical thermometers, qualitative explanations of Spygmanometer, Endos-

copy, PET), Chemistry and Biology.

It is sheer waste of a medical seat when selected students that are unable to cope with Medicine surrender their seats but not after depriving the deserving Khasi Pnar students. It is unfortunate that the DHS never bothers to check the progress of the students who are deputed to study Medicine. Some take more than 5 years to complete, and some even up to 8 years because they fail in between the semesters!

Adelbert Nongrum in his pleading in the House did not dwell only on medical seats but for government employment as well. That such a critical matter should be defeated by voice vote without even a discussion is a matter of great serious concern. What did our so-called "jeid jaitnyriew," MLAs do? And for our Garo MLAs not humbly accepting that the 1972 reservation policy is a Himalayan blunder goes to show that reason and the humble arguments by the Shillong North MLA have no place in today's democracy. And worst these same lawmakers would return in 2023!

Yours etc.,
W. Passah,
Nongkrem

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

"It's being in the right place at the right time and taking advantage of your opportunities."

— Lee Majors

The Shillong Times

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Inside Lanka, Pakistan

INDIA'S neighbours Pakistan and Sri Lanka are faced with serious financial and political odds. A change of government in Pakistan is said to be a near-certainty. With serious financial troubles and skyrocketing prices of essentials in Sri Lanka, the people are already in the streets, up in arms against the government headed by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

In Pakistan, the Imran Khan-led government is tottering. Mismanagement of the economy is cited as the prime reason. Khan's relief package for industries and a populist cut in fuel and electricity charges have allegedly hurt the national economy. Cash-strapped Pakistan is knocking at international funding agencies and close friend China for support. However, Pakistan continues to be in the grey list of the Financial Action Task Force in relation to its failure to control terrorist activities. This will stand in the way of it obtaining loans from the IMF. Under the circumstances, with the all-powerful military scheming to see Khan's exit from power, the political situation in Pakistan today is set for a deep churning. A replacement for Khan at the head of the political establishment there can only be worse for India as there is no strong leader in Pakistan today to keep the military under some check. Notably, it is principally the military that is guiding the anti-India offensives through its own instruments like terrorism in what amounts to an ongoing proxy war.

Rajapaksa, like Khan, is alleged to have harmed Sri Lanka's economy. The first major step he took after winning the election in 2019 was to substantially cut the Value Added Tax (VAT), saying the fall in prices of commodities could result in activation of the markets and more purchases of goods by the people. This, he reasoned, could enliven the economy. The reverse happened. Worse, the Covid season has brought the money-spinning tourism sector there to its heels and also hurt exports of tea and other commodities. A 15 per cent devaluation of Sri Lankan rupee in the hope the nation would thus get more funds flow from abroad only resulted in a market upheaval and fresh inflationary trends. Prices of essentials like milk and rice skyrocketed. China extended it a loan of 250 crore dollar last year and India extended about the same amount as its help this year. But, the financial drift could not be checked and Sri Lanka is now seeking IMF loans – which it tried to avoid in the past – to temporarily overcome the impasse. For any government, managing the economy well means half the job done. How these parallel situations will play out in the long run is anybody's guess.

Time for 'rank and yank' in bureaucracy

By Jagdish Rattanani

A deputy commissioner of police in Mumbai has gone missing and has now moved the courts for anticipatory bail after complaints that he sought to extort Rs. 10 lakhs a month from angadias who run a uniquely Indian courier system that delivers high value packages, including cash and diamonds, sans any paperwork. Angadias reflect tradition and ingenuity in finding unique solutions to unique problems in the Indian context, bypassing prying eyes of government agencies and delivering high value cargo with a precision that "professionals" like DHL and BlueDart and FedEx cannot or will not deliver. It is their standing that has brought them a hearing and led to the decision to first transfer and then suspend the DCP, Dr Saurabh Tripathi, an IPS officer with a medical degree in dermatology. The case is not particularly shocking in

in Maharashtra is a political slugfest between the ruling alliance in Maharashtra led by the Shiv Sena and the BJP which was outsmarted, is out of power in the State and is seeking to get even in an alleged witch hunt using central agencies.

But beyond this immediate game is a larger national problem centred around holding bureaucrats to account for their misdeeds and taking swift and exemplary action against a class used to unbridled power, humongous perks and almost unlimited ways and means to get away with little accountability. This is one important part of a larger problem that combines gross inefficiency, insensitivity and ingenuity in bending the rules to feed an ugly bureaucratic-business nexus, with or without political chiming, to rob ordinary citizens of

bring to book all those who fail tests of accountability and integrity. Yes, it is not as simple as that. Of course, the protections are meant to guard against the bureaucracy being pushed to do wrong. But where have these protections worked? In effect, we have the worst of both worlds – across bureaucratic services. The bureaucracy is more than willing to toe the establishment demands – almost always, unflinchingly and can even come up with ingenious defences of the indefensible. Take just one example from the IPS: police encounter killings, euphemisms for killings in cold blood. No IPS Officers' Association condemns it. The police have a hand in perpetuating it. It may serve short term ends but breaks down governance structures in the long run.

signals with suspensions, a full range of investigations by all arms of the government and a quick sacking. We need to throw the kitchen sink at the officers who have disgraced themselves and the service, as in the case of Maharashtra here.

To achieve this, we need a very different approach from the ministry of home Affairs, which refused at one point to share information on IPS officers retired or dismissed. The ministry later said 13 officers were retired and five dismissed since 2014. In Parliament, Union Minister Jitendra Singh is on record as saying that two IAS officers have been dismissed and nine IPS officers suspended on corruption charges in the 2014-2019 period. Sanction for prosecution for corruption was granted against 23 IAS officers and four IPS officers.

The BJP has done better



Pending cases on bureaucrats..

the Mumbai context, which has a former Commissioner of Police, Param Bir Singh, being investigated in a complex and still unexplained case of dynamite sticks being planted near the home of Mukesh Ambani, a host of other allegations and linkages to a murder. Another IPS officer, Ms. Rashmi Shukla, is being investigated for her role in illegal wiretaps of several politicians and power-brokers when posted at the intelligence department in Maharashtra in 2019.

What is to be done in these cases? Investigations continue to be notoriously slow and the process of removal and prosecution of black sheep is as arduous as ever in a country that still, like it was under the British system, affords undue protections and defences to the bureaucracy. It is interesting that a Maharashtra minister who exposed some of the wrongs in the case of the arrest of Shah Rukh Khan's son in a narcotics case is behind bars but the officers who, clearly seen in the light of evidence, were on an extortion racket, roam free even now. The disgraced former Commissioner of Police in Mumbai is not yet behind bars either; he obtained interim relief from the Supreme Court. Complicating matters

their due. The handling of the Covid-19 pandemic and the demonetisation saga, while political blunders, also showed the worst sides of the bureaucracy seen in lathi charging of ordinary people going to withdraw petty cash and poor services at hospitals. This compounded a political disaster with bureaucratic mismanagement heaping misery on ordinary citizens.

This must change. Now may be a good time to make some changes to the service rules at the national level, particularly by a party that believes in opening the bureaucracy to new thinking and ideas. Part of the solution lies in administrative reforms but a large part also rests in taking away sinecures that enable most if not all bureaucrats complete their tenures and retire – irrespective of their accomplishments or lack thereof. When a public servant knows that it is almost impossible to get him or her out and into jail, governance will be frustrated by bureaucratic intransigence, incompetence and worse.

The BJP move in support of lateral hiring is based on the view broadly that we must make it easier to hire talent at all levels but concomitant with that is the idea that we must make it easier to fire and

In short, a bureaucratic order meant to be independent has signed up for any project it is asked to execute, offering political solace to a given political establishment and feeding on all round corruption in return. It comes at a huge cost to the people of India. It was Atal Behari Vajpayee who said at a National Development Council meeting in 1999, "People often perceive the bureaucracy as an agent of exploitation rather than a provider of service. Corruption has become a low risk and high reward activity."

If this has to change, we will need to bring in tough steps to hold the bureaucracy to account. Instead of time guaranteed promotions (cut in stone, seniority-based, after completion of 4, 9, 13, 16, 25 and 30 years, you become eligible for the next pay scale!), retirement at a fixed age of 60, which most bureaucrats go on to complete, we need a policy of "rank and yank" – an annual ranking and firing of the bottom ranks on a bipartisan framework agreed by all political players. We need accountability sans political vengeance. With this framework, when corruption shows up, it should be possible to send strong

in preparing lists of those who are inefficient or corrupt. Fifty IRS officers have been compulsorily retired. Their tax returns deserve to be scrutinised. These are laudable steps. We need more. 'Rank and yank' as a forced system of ranking will ensure that large numbers are yanked out every year and the pressure of performance and giving a clean administration will then begin to bite and hopefully help deliver some results. At the very least, flagrant violations will cease, excesses will come under control and a cleaning up process can begin.

One report notes that there are a total of 71 sets of rules and regulations, formally drafted and followed, to govern the IAS, plus another 23 for various States. Many of these offer protections, promise promotions and determine careers. And it is this system that has now drafted a new labour code that will take away the protection of workers in industry and make it easy to hire and fire workers on the shopfloor, a contrast as telling as it is baffling.

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

SC panel report on farm laws reveals awkward facts

By Sushil Kutty

But for this one panel member, who could not bear to see his hard work swept under the carpet, nobody would have known the "truth" about the three farm laws. The three farm laws were opposed by a big chunk of farmers, but says a SC-appointed panel, there was a "silent majority" of farmers who supported the three farm laws and wanted them to stay.

It is another matter that the naysayers had their way and the "farmer protests" took precedence. Today, as the "truth" is out, everybody who followed the farmers' protests are stunned. Then, when the protests rang loud and clear, even the judiciary appeared to have stood mute. Above all, the mainstream media, which gave a veil of authenticity to the "lie" that the majority of farmers opposed the farm laws. For more than a year, the media covered Delhi's borders and kept the farmers' protests alive with daily doses of saturation coverage.

They made heroes out of an assortment of farmer

Centre and Prime Minister Narendra Modi were not aware of the panel report, and its recommendations. Looking back, one can only marvel at the act put up by Prime Minister Modi in November 2021, when he sought "forgiveness" and with a sad face, and sadder words, repealed the three farm laws.

Is it that Modi does not care for the "silent majority"? And how could "sabka saath, sabka vikas and sabka vishwas" be so "unfair" to the overwhelming majority? Most of all, why did Modi apologize to the Tikait camp, which he knew did not represent the majority of the farmers, what was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's game-plan?

The moral of the story for India's Great Unwashed is that even the best of them can be fooled by an accomplished politician when that politician is in full flow and is in a position so high that his every word carries with it the weight of conviction and honesty. That morning in November 2021, every-



leaders, whose statements got wide coverage as the farmers refused to put an end to their 'squat' protests. Even the spate of kisan deaths and "criminal incidents" did not matter to the hack hordes which chased farmer leaders from dawn to dusk.

Occasionally, somebody somewhere did point out that Tikait and his farmers did not speak for the majority of the farmer community, but that voice was never heard and broadcast with the same force and conviction as was the daily mishmash dished out by "the farmers".

The Supreme Court heard

body who heard Modi must have heard the sincerity in his voice and actions, and believed his every single word!

Today, all one can think is that the Prime Minister of India made a clean getaway that early morning in November 2021, when he repealed the three farm laws and jolted the "silent majority" who wanted the three farm laws to stay?

It smacks of untruthfulness from the one who never tires of claiming that he speaks for the oppressed and the downtrodden, that he is their 'pradhan sevak'

What happened to the three farm laws is now history. They no longer exist. The Modi Government repealed them in November 2021, months short of the recently concluded five state assembly elections. This, when the Supreme Court-appointed panel had recommended that the farm laws should stay as the "majority" of farm unions supported them, and that "a repeal or a long suspension" would be "unfair to this silent majority."

the three farm laws issue and stayed their working, which should have stayed the farmers' protests, too. But it did not, the farmers only took it as a hint to further intensify the agitation. Whether the top court even took note is hard to guess, but it did appoint a committee to look into the three farm laws which were at the centre of all the commotion.

What happened to the three farm laws is now history. They no longer exist. The Modi Government repealed them in November 2021, months short of the recently concluded five state assembly elections. This, when the Supreme Court-appointed panel had recommended that the farm laws should stay as the "majority" of farm unions supported them, and that "a repeal or a long suspension" would be "unfair to this silent majority."

and trusted 'chowkidar'? Not that the farmers who protested the farm laws got what they wanted. They took a toll of 700 dead, and they are still waiting for the Prime Minister's promised MSP!

The Supreme Court-appointed committee's report says 61 farmer organisations, representing 3.3 crore farmers, supported the farm laws. Anil Ghanwat, the panel member who released the report, says "only 13.3 per cent of the stakeholders were not in favour of the three farm laws."

Around 85.7 per cent of the farmer organisations representing around 3.3-crore farmers fully supported the laws." The committee recommended that a repeal of the laws would be unfair to the "silent supporters." The Modi Government chose to ignore; the media did not try to find the truth. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Meghalaya @ 50 @ the crossroads

Editor,
A detestable but expected occurrence befell me while I was riding back home from work. As expected an escort team of one vehicle barged its way through traffic. Since I was riding a two wheeler, I felt I was not a hindrance to the VIP vehicle and it's escort team, so I continued riding at normal speed. It seems like the VIP has a train to catch since both the drivers drove like they were in a mad rush to the finishing line. Then after riding another 500 metres or so, both the cars finally overtook me and as expected a shrill voice shouting from the backseat of the escort vehicle hurled unspeakable words at me.

After the cars overtook me, I saw that the wording at the back of the car read as Chairman of Meghalaya New and Renewable Energy Development Agency(MNREDA). So the guy is obviously one of the most important VIP's in the

state government machinery and he has every right to storm his way through traffic. He probably has a very important meeting to attend hence the mad rush through the infamous Shillong rush hour.

As a state and a people we're at the crossroads, yes literally at the crossroads. Meghalaya at 50 is beset with an insurmountable set of complex problems. The down and out energy sector has hogged the limelight for the past couple of years or so for all the wrong reasons. Clean and renewable energy is the energy of the future, hence the importance of an agency like MNREDA.

The focus for the next decade or so should be on building human capital, maximum budget allocation and on forging brilliant minds and tapping the resourcefulness of our young population. The next important sector is the unorganised sector. The unorganised sector in fact could be the key that could unlock the full potential of our youths and our struggling economy.

We also need to address the anomaly in the inequitable youth policy formulated

at the inception of the state of Meghalaya. Khasi-Jaintia youths need leaders who will stand up for their inborn rights as equal citizens of the state of Meghalaya. We also need Khasi Jaintia leaders who are passionate about the progress of our State as a whole.

Tapping the untapped human capital and clean energy and redressing the inequitable youth policy should be the main focus starting from next year. Without a changed mindset we'll continue to remain at the bottom of every human development index ranking.

Yours etc.,
Gary Marbaniang,
Via email

On Robert's Hospital

Editor,
Rev Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh's article on the Welsh Mission Hospital (ST March 20, 2022) was an informative and well documented history of the renowned Hospital at that time. The hospital had reached its peak when Dr. R.A Hughes, a well-known

surgeon was in-charge. I was in contact with this hospital since the time of Dr. Hughes. The hospital was well known not only in the North East but far and wide up to Calcutta. He was a dedicated doctor for whom duty always came first and I could see his dedication to "Service above Self."

I recall an incident which proves his loyalty to his profession and to the call of duty when a patient known to our family came all the way from Manipur to be treated for some infection in his leg. One evening the Doctor had to attend a very important annual Church function along with his wife. While he was getting ready for the same the nurse immediately called him and told him that gangrene had set in and an operation was urgently required. Dr Hughes told his wife to attend the Church function while he attended to the patient. He knew that if an operation for amputation of his leg was not done immediately the patient would die. He immediately got the patient removed to the operation theatre and amputated his leg and thereby saved his life. Such was his dedi-

cation and sincerity towards his profession. There were many such instances when Dr Hughes rendered yeoman's service.

After him came Dr Chatterjee who was also a brilliant surgeon who had performed surgery on my father and uncles.

After him I don't remember who came to lead the hospital in the Surgical Department but I vividly remember Dr S.P. Sen Gupta a specialist surgeon and on his request the Rotary Club of Shillong furnished the Children's Ward by raising money through a Walkathon. The Rotary Club also donated Gastroscope to the Hospital where (L) MM Jacob then Governor of Meghalaya attended the function as a Chief Guest. Similarly, the last renowned doctor who I remember was Dr. G.K. Das the retired Surgeon Superintendent of Civil Hospital Shillong. Although armed only with an MBBS degree he was famous for his surgical stints and used to give guidance to other doctors on surgical matters.

I had no further contact with the hospital after that and only name I remember is

that of Dr E.C. Syngkon. He was an efficient Gynaecologist who was instrumental in the birth of my sons. He served there until his retirement.

I will not forget the services of Dr S.S. Sharma who was the anaesthesiologist of the hospital who assisted the surgeons with his skilful anaesthetics experience.

I will also be failing in my duties if I don't mention the dedicated staff of the hospital Bah Thu (Mr Thomas) in the X-Ray Department and his assistant (I forget his name). The Nursing Staff of whom I remember Sister Nuriel were strict Matrons but very kind hearted.

These in a nutshell are my memories of the Hospital which was an institution of service known for its dedication towards the patients.

Yours etc.,
S L Singhania
Shillong -1

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

"Patience is not simply the ability to wait - it's how we behave while we're waiting."

— Joyce Meyer

The Shillong Times

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HSPDP's convoluted defence on coal mining

THE HSPDP is a coalition partner in the present Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) Government and anti-incumbency must be attributed to all the coalition partners which includes the NPP, UDP, PDF and HSPDP. None of the coalition partners can wash their hands off any act of mal-governance in the past four years. Some political parties that did not get a share from the booty of illegal coal mining might find the burden of four years of the illegal trade something they might have to explain to their constituents but above all to their political rivals. It is learnt that 2023 will find many young, articulate, conscious and principled contenders to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly who wish to contest not to win but to create mass awareness about the venality of using money to buy votes and how this is taking the state to the doldrums. This will be an election to watch out because it will no longer be business as usual for the old timers who have become too comfortable in their seats and their bluster inside the Assembly. Their behaviour reeks of arrogance and a couldn't-care-less attitude and a cocksureness that nothing and no one can defeat them.

The question that these young contenders raise is: If a set of people want to serve the constituents as they proclaim they do, then why do they spend crores of rupees and where do these crores come from if not from the public funds because political parties in Meghalaya don't mobilise enrolment drives where those enrolled pay their annual fees. Also these fresh contenders raise many pertinent questions about the pace of development and where most of the development funds are parked. They are not there just for occupying the seat of power but have a desire to bring change. Whether or not that change can be effected depends on their power to mobilise public opinion and to bring about behavioural change among voters. And therein lies the rub. Voters have been pampered and expect their pound of flesh because they don't reason that their on each of their votes hinges the fate of Meghalaya and its people and their future.

The HSPDP may not be involved in illegal mining of coal but they are essentially a West Khasi Hills based political party where coal is being regularly mined and transported. Hence they are complicit by the very fact that they say nothing about this malfeasance and continue to turn a blind eye towards this illegality which has claimed several lives by the very nature of the rat hole mining which goes against the MMDR Act, 1957 which the Supreme Court has unequivocally stated that Meghalaya should follow.

Kashmiri Pandits: Time for 'Truth Files' and Justice

By Rajdeep Sardesai

Long before Kashmir Files, there was Parzania, a film that relives the trauma of a Parsee family who lost their teenage son in the 2002 Gujarat riots. Just before the film was to be released in Ahmedabad, the director Rahul Dholakia was 'summoned' by the multiplex theatre association and told that the national award winning film could be shown only if 'cleared' by the local Bajrang Dal leader, Babu Bajrangji. The notorious Bajrangji is accused of leading murderous mobs in the 2002 Gujarat violence. With the Gujarat government refusing to intervene, Dholakia had little option but to withdraw the film. Prime minister Narendra Modi who now hails Kashmir Files for bringing out the 'truth' and urges his party MPs to encourage people to watch the film was Gujarat chief minister at the time.

The immutable 'truth' is that netas and their partisan cheerleaders cutting across party lines are unwilling to face upto the inconvenient truths of history. Make a film on the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom and be sure that the Congress party will raise a red flag. A 'Bengal Files' film that highlights political violence is unlikely to be screened in that state. A 'Kerala Files' on the Kannur political murders will be almost certainly blocked by the Left front government. And a 'Gujarat Files' on the 2002 violence will never see the light of day in a BJP-ruled political universe. The history of this country's cinema is strewn with cases of films being censored and banned, the limits of artistic freedom being settled by existing power equations.

Where the Kashmir Files stands out is that this is a rarest of rare instances where a ruling political party is using untrammelled state power to actively promote a privately made film. From entertainment tax waivers to booking theatres at subsidized rates to even giving government employees a day off to watch the film, never before in recent times has a political leadership and its affiliate groups so brazenly used commercial cinema for public mobilization in a manner where the lines between state propa-

ganda and cinematic narratives are totally blurred. Nor should the state's explicit patronage of Kashmir Files come as a surprise. After all, the core storyline of the film neatly fits in with a dominant majoritarian political ideology that sees the Muslim, within and across the border, as the principal 'enemy'. The horror of the 1989-90 killings and exodus of Kashmiri Pandits pits 'barbaric' Islamism versus 'peace-loving' Hinduism in a manner that is stark and real. The fact is that the awful winter of that defining year in Kashmir's tryst with violence did witness the targeted killings of Kashmiri Hindus by Pakistan-sponsored terror groups. Rekindling those images for a 'new' India can only feed into the prevailing

fully acknowledged by a liberal-intelligentsia. But while a film may be therapeutic for the victims, can it really bring about genuine change, a sense of justice and finally reconciliation? This is where Kashmir's complicated blood-soaked history cannot be reduced to a one-sided political drama without providing relevant context and perspective. How, for example, does one correct the seeming amnesia over the Kashmiri Pandit exodus without any reference to other important aspects of Kashmir's frozen turbulence, be it Delhi-Srinagar political intrigue, rigged elections, state brutalities, historical demands for greater autonomy or indeed, azaadi?

In the last three decades, the Congress, BJP and third made by an unapologetic BJP supporter that builds on the 'Muslim as terrorist' theme without any nuance and by peddling dangerous half-truths rather than actually ensure justice to the victims of terror or untangle the hugely problematic Kashmiri knot. Not just justice for grieving Kashmiri Pandit families but also for Kashmiri Muslims, hundreds of whom have died while being trapped in the cross-hairs of terror and retributive violence. Unfortunately, a post 1990 generation - around half of this country's citizenry is born after that landmark year - would seem to have little time to seek historical accuracy on polarizing issues. Remember that 1990 was a pre-24x7 news tv era, an India in slow motion that didn't get trapped in the breathless cycle of daily breaking news.

Instead fed on a diet of competitive propaganda, post-truth twists and hyper-nationalism, this is a 'new' India that gets its 'facts' from WhatsApp forwards, social media influencers and sixty second viral videos. A 'new' India where films on Godse attract far more attention than writings on Gandhi. Caught between a rising tide of Islamic extremism and a 'Hindu awakening', it is almost as if an entire generation is being driven by fear and hatred of the 'other' and not compassion and harmony. Would anyone for example be allowed to document the stories of worthy attempts made by well-intentioned Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits at peaceful co-existence without being branded as 'anti-national'? The truth-telling mirror must show all sides - good, bad and ugly - before it can attempt to heal the festering sores of a fractured past.



Islamophobic hate politics that has already ruptured society. For many Kashmiri Hindu families, who were uprooted from their homes and literally pushed into refugee camps, a film like this can be an emotionally cathartic experience, a chance to have their agonizing story told to a wider audience. After all, while focusing on the 'alienation' of the Kashmiri Muslim from the national mainstream, there has been surely less attention paid to the persecution of the Kashmiri Hindu even though several eyewitness accounts have been recorded and published. Kashmiri Pandit families, therefore, have a right to feel aggrieved that their plight has never been

front governments have all been in power at the Centre but failed to rehabilitate Kashmiri Pandit families or indeed prosecute most of their killers. What does it say, for example, about our criminal justice system that one of the original poster-boys of Kashmiri 'azaadi', Yasin Malik has only been charged now as late as 2020 for the murder of four Indian Air Force officers in a 1990 terror attack? Recall that successive governments in Delhi - BJP and Congress - saw Malik, who has been in and out of jail, as a stakeholder in the Kashmir dialogue. Which is also why it is so much easier to cover up for the failings of the Indian state by promoting a film

peaceful co-existence without being branded as 'anti-national'? The truth-telling mirror must show all sides - good, bad and ugly - before it can attempt to heal the festering sores of a fractured past. Post-script: A few years ago, a super-hit film 'Bajrangji Bhaijaan' made a stab at promoting Indo-Pak peace and friendship. One evocative dialogue stays with me: 'Nafrat phailana bahut aasan hai, pyar baatna mushkil' (it is easier to incite hatred than spread love). That holds true for politically aligned filmmakers as it does for vote bank politicians. (The writer is senior journalist and author. Mail: rajdeepsardesai32@gmail.com)

Early Detection of Breast Cancer - Closing the Gap!

By Dr Geeta Kadayaprath MS FRCS

The incidence of breast cancer is on the rise and what is alarming is that it has now succeeded cervical cancer as the number one cancer on our country. In the last 10 years, the incidence has gone up from 1 lac new cases to 1.8 lac new cases a year. The urban incidence is much higher than the rural incidence, indicating there is something wrong with our environment, the food we eat, the air we breathe and the water we drink. Our lifestyle and the stress of our fast moving lives is not helping the cause much either. Our best chance against cancer is early detection. Early detection will happen only if each lady is breast aware and learns the right method of performing a Breast Self Examination (BSE) starting at the age of 20 and doing it every month, a week after periods or on a fixed day if menopause has been attained. The West may condemn the use of BSE as a screening tool but in a country like ours where there is no Screening policy and access to Mammogram machines is poor as also a huge dearth of trained professional to read mammograms, the relevance of BSE is not lost on us. Our challenge is that we still see about 60% of breast cancers in advanced cases and familiarity with the breast will help us catch the disease early. An annual visit to the Clinician for a thorough examination of breasts after the age of 40 has shown to

mainstay of treatment in early breast cancer. It is possible to save the breast in suitable cases. Surgery is followed by chemotherapy but if the biology of disease is favorable, one may escape chemotherapy. This happens in about 10-20% of cases. Radiotherapy is required whenever the breasts are conserved and also in advanced cases of breast cancer. With intensive research in the field of breast cancer, newer targeted and hormonal treatments are available, to allow for personalized treatment.

How Does One Access Treatment? Once a diagnosis of breast cancer is made, one is advised to go ahead with the multimodality treatment of the disease (a combination of surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, targeted treatment, hormonal treatment, immunotherapy etc) basis the stage and biology of disease. It sounds doable in places where the facilities are available in terms of the manpower and technology. The expense associated with treatment can make the entire exercise prohibitive. The theme of this year's World Cancer Day was very apt - 'Close The Gap'. While Tier 1 cities have adequate facilities and Tier 2 cities are picking up, the same cannot be said about the entire country. Skilling younger colleagues and working on affordable solutions innovations will definitely help to close the gap.



be of benefit in diagnosing cancer early. In a recent publication by the Tata Memorial Hospital, comparing two groups of women, one who underwent clinical examination by trained personnel once a year and two, those who did not, it was found that in the group undergoing annual clinical examination, early detection of cancer reduced the risk of dying from breast cancer by 30% in those women over the age of 50 years, compared to the other group.

How Is The Indian Association of Surgical Oncology (IASO) Engaged In 'Closing The Gap'? IASO, as the largest Surgical Oncology association, is leaving no stone unturned to reach out to young, aspiring surgeons with interest in Surgical Oncology and engage with them to work towards creating a workforce, well equipped to offer uniform care across the board. There are various regional CMEs being held other than the Annual NATCON and the IASO MIDCON every year. The focus is also on Subspecialties, so that one can upskill himself or herself in his or her area of interest earlier than later. With several national and international fellowships being awarded to meritorious young oncologists basis the original research they submit to the Annual conference, every year, the opportunities are many. Becoming a member of the IASO opens up various possibilities of honing one's skills and delivering the same at their workplace. The IASO MIDCON being held in Shillong, is a testimony of the commitment that IASO has, in creating a level playing field across the country. **The Fight Against Cancer is Everyone's Collective Responsibility!!** (The writer is Sr. Director, Oncoplastic Breast Surgeon, Max Hospital, Delhi. This paper is being presented at the MIDCON IASO 2022-Midterm Conference of Surgical Oncology scheduled for March 25-27, 2022 at the State Convention Centre, Shillong)

Letters to the Editor

VIPs cooking up a jam

Editor, Traffic is in the mind of every Shillongite today. Even after the end of the Budget session, it still continues. Why? We all know the reasons. Rapid urbanisation, terrible roads and pathetic public transport are the main problems. But what else? I would say politicians and their blaring sirens. The Union Government banned the red beacon a while back. However, the siren still continues. Every time there is traffic jam, a big black car starts blasting the siren and pressing on the horn, with another big car trying to keep up with it. This is a common occurrence and every Shillongite has a story of an ML 01 ploughing through heavy traffic with its loud siren. How are our legislators and leaders supposed to come up with solutions when they are all riding their big black SUVs and totally out of touch with the situation faced by the general public? Solution? BAN THE SIREN. Let the politicians and bureaucrats also suffer this nightmare of their own making. Let them be late for their appointments too. Then only we may see better and speedy solutions to our collective nightmare. Yours etc., E. Sohtun, Shillong - 6

MUDA- In a perpetual state of denial

Editor, The MDA Government's sudden clarification and reply on the MUDA shopping complex issues immediately after the Budget Session 2022 is LAUGHABLE. Anyone entering and transacting inside MUDA shopping complex, Khyndailad, Shillong understands what exactly is the reality there. SIX years ago the BENAMI business matter was brought to public domain through newspapers and the last of them was penned down on October 1, 2021 as a special article in The Shillong Times and we have literally NEVER heard anything from the concerned authorities. On Saturday, March 19, 2022, I was rather amused with what I read in The Shillong Times. I have a few questions and suggestions to the Government and the concerned department. Firstly, who gave the clarification through the newspaper? It only states that the current MDA Government claims so. Is it the Minister concerned or is it the Head of the Department concerned? What questions were raised and by whom? Is this clarification an answer? If there was no question then WHY a reply? What is the Government trying to HIDE? I, and so many other people know for a fact that this is a

cover up attempt in the sole interest of the Khasi people who are protecting the non-Khasi sub-tenants. A blatant attempt to BURY the truth! Secondly, as claimed in the release, we understand that the claimant has completely denied the fact that there is a sub-letting mode of operation that is going on in the complex and also a claim that some stalls are run by 'Managers' who have been hired by the existing stall owners. Now my question is simple and precise. When this entire project was to tackle unemployment, it means that the stall owners who were earlier UNEMPLOYED, now not only run their own businesses but have become so financially sound that they can afford to hire non-tribal managers and even pay them handsome salaries. Wow! So how come they are still under the unemployed bracket and are they still deserving of this scheme? This clearly indicates that they have better and more lucrative things to do as on date and that they have overcome the 'unemployed status' and are successfully involved in other businesses. Perhaps some of them have even got Government jobs. Should that not open opportunities for the current unemployed youth if the now affluent are made to surrender the stalls? Is it not high time that they give up their unemployed status for the future of the JAITBYNRIEW? However, what is more important is

that after the stalls are surrendered, fresh allotments should not be diverted and preference should on no account be given to relatives of MLAs, MDCs as has mostly been the case. This too calls for an investigation. I strongly believe that the rich and unemployed do not need stalls that were created to tackle unemployment. The deserving are those from weaker financial backgrounds. The statement released clearly mentioned that no financial background check was made on the part of the Authority. That in itself is a big CONFESSION and there should be an instant attempt made to rectify this aspect of the scheme. The Authority must ascertain the financial status of an unemployed youth and identify deserving beneficiaries. If the unemployed youth are financially secure they won't need a stall where they will employ managers. Give the under-privileged and financially weaker sections of the society an opportunity. I am also intrigued with the statement that the type of business is mentioned at the time of allotment. So now who has an EXPLANATION as to why we have witnessed change of business in the past years of operation. Not once, not twice, some stalls have changed the business operations numerous times Was that intimidated to MUDA and written permission obtained? We need to clearly understand what is the reason behind change

of business? DOES THE CONTRACT HAVE PROVISION FOR CHANGE OF BUSINESS? If no, then isn't this a clear violation of the signed contract? In such a case I feel this needs to be looked into and necessary rectifications made? Also, I fail to understand what MUDA means by, "socially not acceptable businesses" not being allowed inside the Complex. Can MUDA authorities also care to explain why dozens of "Teer counters" dot the MUDA shopping complex in Khyndailad? Have the Authorities concerned ever noticed the "shop-in-shop" arrangements housing "Teer counters" in many of the stalls in question? Have the MUDA authorities issued the required No Objection Certificates for the holder of the Teer counter LICENSES? If no, then how did the SUB-LETTERS get the Teer counter license from the Sales Tax Authorities? And again, if the answer is "No", then should not the MUDA Authorities write to the Sales Tax Department to revoke the said "Teer" licenses? Also, has MUDA verified the "TEER LICENSE" holders' names with that of the stall holders' names? Over 90% as reported in earlier newspaper articles clearly indicate that STALLS at the complex are run by NON-TRIBALS who could even be of FOREIGN ORIGIN. As mentioned in earlier write ups, TAX EVASION is fatal to the overall

ECONOMY of the STATE and the COUNTRY as a whole. This matter needs to be investigated. To me and many others who stand with me on this matter, a change in business is a CLEAR INDICATION of change of OWNERSHIP, and of course I am referring to the BENAMI system that is ongoing. Much controversy has been created about the subletting of stalls over the past years through different newspapers. A response after six long years is fishy to me. This response as well is a clear indication that they do not want to dig into the matter. What is MUDA afraid of finding? What is the TRUTH behind the stalls functioning in the MUDA SHOPPING COMPLEX? We need answers! If the Authority is afraid then I feel it is time they allow other competent authorities like the CBI-Anti Corruption Cell or the Income Tax Vigilance Department to intervene and unearth the irregularities. Needless to say, a lot of black money is being generated by these BENAMI businesses and that too in a Government-run shopping complex. What a shame! MUDA has a lot to answer for! Yours etc., Rupert Lyngdoh, Via email

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

"Life is a gift, and it offers us the privilege, opportunity, and responsibility to give something back by becoming more."

— Tony Robbins

The Shillong Times

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China and India

THE past guides us to the present and the future. Too much importance need not be attached to China's positive signals to India like the planned visit by its foreign minister Wang Yi — after his presence at the Organisation of Islamic Countries meet in Pakistan and a stopover in Kabul. Expectations were that this would lead to a reciprocal visit by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to Beijing and Prime Minister Modi's participation in the BRICS summit as also a Russia-China-India trilateral on the sidelines. In other words, a thaw in the strained relations between India and China is envisaged.

Wang Yi had visited India in 2019 to readjust bilateral relations a while after China's 2017 intrusions in Doklam, Bhutan, that was challenged by India. In 2020 came the Chinese attack on the Indian military in a crude manner in Galwan Valley, Ladakh. There have been several incursions from the Chinese side thereafter too. The worst-ever was the Chinese attack on India in 1962, when it annexed large swathes of land along the border regions. It proved to be a low point in then PM Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership profile. Parts of those could be where "no grass grew" as Nehru sought to play down the loss. During Rajiv Gandhi's term, China managed to restore relations with India in 1988, based on an understanding that the negatives can wait and the positives should be explored. India thereafter became one of the main markets for low-cost, low-quality Chinese products, a reason why the Indian manufacturing sector lost its energy. With the corrupt systems, the product costs in India remained high, which was Advantage China. No Indian government so far showed the nerve to seek back the lands that China annexed.

Till the turn of the Century, China was on an equal footing with India on matters of economy and military strengths. Today, Chinese strengths in such fields are five times those of India's. As India now hails its \$400 billion export profile, China has seven times this strength. For sure, there is more talk here. However, the Ukraine invasion by Russia showed that even a superpower cannot easily win a war if the rival side too has moderate strengths. With India's slow economic progress and its decadent governance systems, it will not be easy for this nation to catch up with China's economic or military might. Yet, China cannot afford to browbeat this country. India, the "beauty being wooed by all" as Xi Jinping once teasingly stated, needs to only know how and when to act.

No fresh boost to Japanese investment in India due to PM's visit

Kishida more interested in political diplomacy over Ukraine war

By Subrata Majumder

Mr Fumio Kishida is the first Prime Minister, who made physical visit to India during the COVID 19 pandemic. He is the former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's handpicked successor. His rise to the frontline was his vow to counter China's growing influence by closely working with USA and other likeminded democracies. His visit enchanted Indian counterparts with the increased

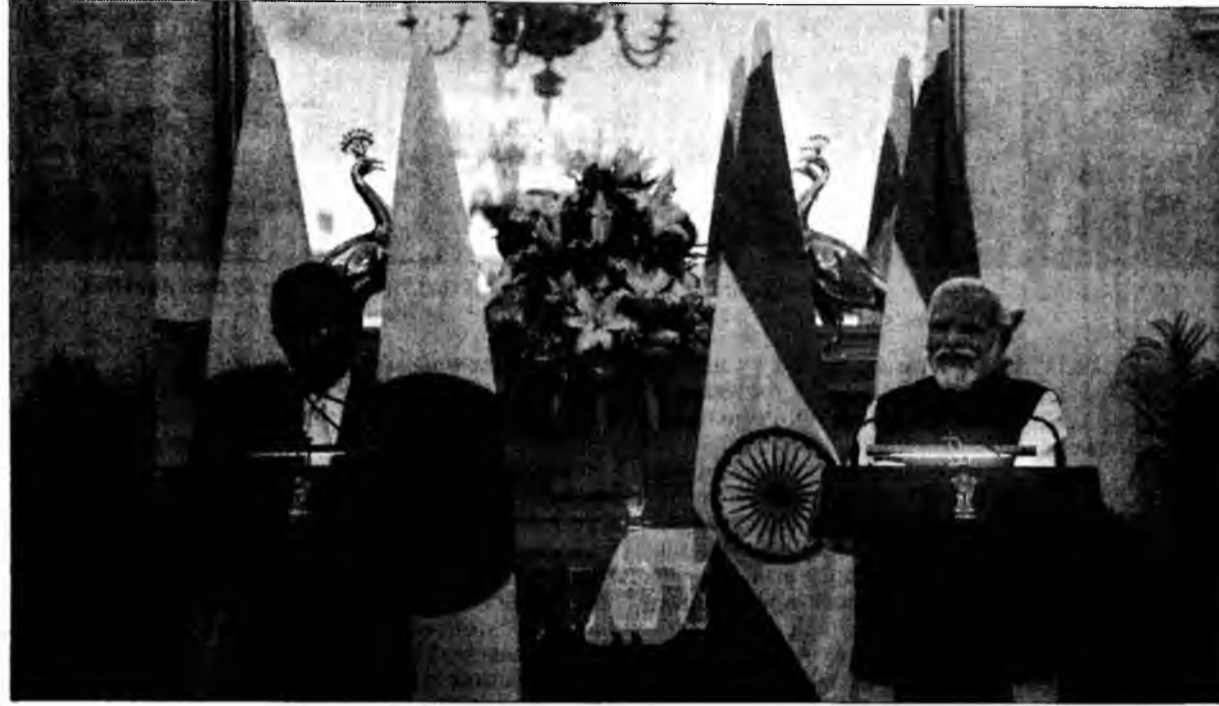
namism. Against these backdrops, silence over Japanese investment left Indian corporate sector sullen, who were agog for special challenges to restore the investment.

During pre-Covid period, Japan was one of the major foreign investors. In 2019-20, it was the third biggest investor in India. Why is it then the euphoric Japanese

stream of new dynamism. There was a paradigm shift from mere bilateral economic relation to special strategic relation, including defence and global partnership. The relations extended to joint partnership for economic development in third countries and defence cooperation. Development of AAGC project (Asia-Africa Growth

political security.

The rise of China was a major concern for India and Japan and that became vital for the two countries to come together, according to a Chinese Director. "Any loss to China is a gain to India" became a new catchphrase. India poses a challenge to become an alternative destination for low-cost manufacturing. According to a Deloitte survey, India would



Japanese economic cooperation from US \$ 33 billion to US \$ 42 billion. But, it frayed to enthrone corporate sector, as the Japanese PM preferred silence on investment in India.

The joint statement fell short of focusing on Japanese investment in India. This raised eyebrows on the urgency of Japanese Prime Minister visit to India. The world is in divided on Russia's invasion in Ukraine. Were India's abstaining from UN resolution and maintaining a "balance" policy prompted Japanese Prime Minister to visit India, coveting economic cooperation?

Japanese investment declined by 39.5 percent in 2020-21. In contrast, total FDI in India surged during COVID 19 pandemic. Arguments were leveled against the real intent of the visit when Japan incentivized its investors to decouple from China and invest in other part of Asian countries, including India.

Foreign investment is crucial for India to ensure its bounce back in the economy. Japanese Investment has been the core issue for strong economic tie between the two nations. It is known for placing India in the global map for automobile industry and transforming Indian manufacturing in technology oriented and supply chain dy-

mood turned apathetic, while USA and UK investors were upbeat? According to survey reports, the downturn in profitability and suffering of losses by large Japanese investors gloomed the Japanese sentiment. More than 50 percent of Japanese investors surveyed in India projected losses in their operating profits in 2020. This is the highest among all na-

Corridor), joint cooperation for the development of Chabahar Port in Iran, strengthening of defence cooperation for national security with MOU in Defence cooperation were the cases of a new dimension in political and economic relations towards global partnership and defence cooperation.

With the initiative of the Abe administration, a new

be the "New China" in low-cost manufacturing countries in the next five years. With China losing the powerhouse of low-cost manufacturing competitiveness, five Asia Pacific nations would emerge the choice for low-cost manufacturing destinations in place of China. They are Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and India. India would be the front-runner, the survey said.

JBIC (Japan Bank for International Cooperation) in its 31 surveys 2019, advocated India as the most attractive investment destination, leading behind China and Vietnam at second and third positions respectively. In other words, China's drop in attractiveness paved the way for India to rise to the top for investment destinations. India-Japan strategic partnership and engagement in defence cooperation demonstrate a major transformation in India-Japan relation from bilateral economy issues to political dynamism during the Abe regime. Eventually, the strategic partnership led to a spurge in Japanese investment in India.

Given these, visit of Mr Kishida seemed to have evoked less buzz. Media were reticent to hog the headlines. Japan is a strategic partner of India. But, its strategic partnership weighs more in economic partnership than raising geopolitical affinity. (IPA Service)

"Foreign investment is crucial for India to ensure its bounce back in the economy. Japanese Investment has been the core issue for strong economic tie between the two nations. It is known for placing India in the global map for automobile industry and transforming Indian manufacturing in technology oriented and supply chain dynamism."

tions of Japanese investment in the world. Ironically, the ratio of losses in China was at low margin, 19.5 percent. This reflects that even though Japanese government advocated incentives for decoupling from China and move to other Asian nations during pandemic, Japanese investors were reluctant to shift to India.

During the Abe regime, Indo-Japan relations were in

strategy for defence cooperation was adopted for 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial meetings in November 2019. Japan was the second country, after the USA, with which India had such a dialogue format. The dialogue had an eye on countering China's expansionism. Two sides provided opportunities to give the strong spine to India-Japan special strategic and global partnership in

Some Basic facts about Cancer

By Dr Arnab Gupta

Cancer is as old as mankind. It was found in the mummy of Egypt from 5000 years back. Unfortunately, even now, people are unaware about its nature, its cause, its prevention and most importantly there are several misconceptions which make the problem even more complicated.

What is Cancer?
Body has the inherent capacity of repairing a dead or damaged tissue by multiplication of cells and there is a control system for this. When there is lack of control, the cells multiply excessively and form a lump. This is called tumour. This can be benign — where the lump is slow growing, does not cause damage to the neighbouring structure and do not spread to other organs and are usually not fatal. The other type of tumour is obviously malignant (cancer), where the lump grows very rapidly, involves the neighbouring organs and can be fatal if not treated early.

What are the common types of Cancer?
In male, where tobacco addiction is a common problem, the common cancers are that of oral cavity, lung and prostate. In females, in rural population the common cancer is that of uterine cervix, whereas that of urban women is breast cancer.

What are the causes of Cancer?

Unfortunately, the causes in 2/3 of all cancers are still not clear, and several researches are going on worldwide to determine this. In 1/3, the causes are proved beyond doubt — of which the most important is tobacco in any form — smoking (Bidi, cigarette, hukka etc.) and smokeless (paan, paan masala, ghutka, khaini, jarda etc.). The other less common causative agents are diet (adulterated food, high fat and less of fruits, vegetables and vitamins, more intake of junk, fast, stored and charred food), sunlight (causes skin cancer especially in the white race), western lifestyle (lack of or delayed pregnancy and less breast feeding can cause breast cancer). For uterine cervical cancer the common causes are early and multiple children, multiple partners, low personal hygiene, infection by a virus (Human Papilloma Virus). In some cases (less than 5%), a genetic abnormality is found which can predispose to cancers in many members of the same family (mainly of breast, ovaries and bowel).

What are the symptoms of cancer?
Loss of appetite and body weight, an ulcer which is not healing, lump which is rapidly increasing, persistent change of voice, bleeding with cough, vomitus, stool or urine, intermenstrual bleeding, difficulty in swallowing etc.

Some common misconceptions:
Cancer means death. Most cancers if detected early can be cured completely.

Cancer is contagious — it is not

Biopsy can cause cancer or spread of cancer. Biopsy or any surgery does not cause a benign tumour to turn cancerous. Taking a small sample of tissue (mostly done by Fine Needle or a small punch forceps) do not cause any spread. The doctors can guide you regarding the best way of doing it. Biopsy is important before embarking on a major surgery, radiotherapy or chemotherapy as the tumour may actually be not malignant at all. Even if malignant, the treatment strategy is completely different in different kinds of cancer, so it is important to plan beforehand by knowing the nature of it.

Surgery in cancer causes spread of cancer — it is the reverse. The main treatment for most cancers in early stage is to remove the tumour along with some

good healthy tissue margins and the neighbouring glands which may be involved. Removing a tumour partially is always bad and is never advisable. If the tumour is big and when complete surgical excision is not possible, chemotherapy (anti-cancer drugs) or radiotherapy is used to reduce the size and make it operable.

Cancer is hereditary — in 95% cases they are not. So there is no need to panic if only one member in the family had cancer, as it may be just accidental. However, if there are 2 or more members who are affected, it will definitely be advisable to see an Oncologist who can assess the risks and order relevant tests.

Chemotherapy is painful and causes severe vomiting and permanent hair-loss.

Although some strong chemotherapies which are administered in advanced diseases may cause vomiting, diarrhoea, low White Cell count and hence low Immunity etc., these can be counteracted by some preventive medications. Hair-loss is only temporary and does not occur with most of the chemotherapies.

Cancer can cause a very painful death — fortunately with different medicines which are now available and also with radiotherapy in some cases; pain can be very well controlled in advanced diseases where the patient cannot be cured. A new modality is Interventional pain therapy where the nerves conducting pain to the brain can be blocked by injection at specific sites.

There is no diagnostic or treatment facility in Eastern India — this is about time people of Eastern India realize that there is no need to travel to far south or west outside India for management of cancer. It is not only expensive to travel long distances, but causes unnecessary mental stress on the patient, when they prefer to stay in their locality and get maximum support from all the near and dear ones. There are enough facilities available in Eastern India for all classes of people. You may take help of different help lines, media and internet to find out which one suits you most.

Take home messages:

Cancer is preventable by avoiding the risk factors, and can be detected early if people come forward to the doctors with symptoms mentioned above without ignoring them. There is no need to think that one should not do tests as that may cause cancer or expose the fact that he or she is harbouring cancer. On the contrary, it is prudent to detect a cancer or a pre-cancerous area which can then be completely cured. The more it is neglected the worse is the result and more aggressive and expensive will be the treatment. Many organs like breast, limbs, larynx (voice box) etc. can be preserved in early stages with the new modalities of treatment. It is not contagious, and hence it is important that the families give maximum support to the victims rather than staying away in fear.

Biopsies are advisable before embarking on a treatment and surgery is the treatment in most of the cancers in the early stage. There is no need to panic about radiotherapy and chemotherapy — in expert hands the side-effects are minimum and can improve the results significantly. Even in advanced stages symptom control can be well achieved with the Palliative care team and different Support groups. Together we must fight to remove all the misconceptions and try and prevent this potentially preventable and curable disease.

(The writer is Immediate Past President of IASO, Medical Director & Prof in Dept of Surgical Oncology, Saroj Gupta Cancer Centre & Research Institute, Thakurpukur, Kolkata)

Letters to the Editor

Why hit and run?

Editor,
"Letters to the editor" are usually interesting read. One of those published in The Shillong Times of March 22 is just as interesting — "Freedom of religion is a right." It's about a recent event in the life of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at Laitumkhrak. The writer sent his "open letter" so that all and sundry may read and know, but with the instruction to the paper that his name (assuming to be a male) be kept hidden. What a contrast! The writer alone knows the reason for this desired anonymity. We can only guess, but your guess is as good as mine. He "hit" and then ran for cover! Is this writer a member of the mentioned church? I have no idea. But he must be around when the singing was going on, or the one being sung to might have done the reporting to this writer.

Did the church leader/pastor instruct those special visitors or singers to single out such people and shame them for their "sin" by singing "songs of repentance and forgiveness" in front of their homes? Then the writer in-

serts this question: "Should church leaders allow such an exercise?" The question implies that the leaders of this church were fully aware of such an exercise and gave their tacit approval to it.

Furthermore, the writer also equates prolonged non-church attendance with sin. But where did this unbiblical, unchristian teaching about this so-called sin come from? Certainly not from the SDA church; nor from any other church, for crying out loud. Is this writer guilty of putting words into the church's mouth to make it look bad or even to shame the church? Does this writer know those "visitors" or singers by name and face (at least one or two of them) so we can promptly verify with them the truth or falsehood of his allegations against them? Could it be that this "sin" of non-church attendance is an invention of the writer himself who turned it into an "ear" by which to lift the SDA church — his church? Two wrongs do not make a right!

Yes, freedom of religion is a right, but shaming someone in the name of religion is not a right. It is harassment. The question is: Did those singers really do that?

Was that their intention for visiting and singing to those members?

Certainly, there is no thin line between peace and trespassing. The latter is not even a distant cousin of the former. They are opposites. If the one that had been visited with such songs felt harassed, a more Christian or lovable thing to do would be to approach the church pastor and lodge a protest or an objection for such an unchristian tactic of naming and shaming. But then such a method is far and away from being a "religious advocacy." You have to be out of your mind to adopt this method for spreading your religion. Not only is it not smart, but it is also stupid and dumb.

Yours etc.,
Boxer Kharbeng,
Via email

How apathetic is our Govt!

Editor,
It was with dismay that I read that the news report, "Assembly snubs bill on welfare of kids with disability," (ST March 11, 2022). It is now 12 days and not a single mention has been made in your paper since then of this

matter. It seems that only Bah George B. Lyngdoh has read and understood that India too is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The People with Disabilities Act (PWD) was enacted by the Government of India in 2016 after ratifying the UNCRPD in 2007 and the Mental Health Care Act came in 2017. Does Meghalaya fall out of the purview of these legislations is a question we must ask of our legislators. Does it need another PIL to move the government to recognise that there are laws that protect the disabled?

Congratulations to Bah George who needs the full support of the care-givers of those with disabilities. Perhaps our legislators need to refresh their knowledge on disability and to accept that the disabled are not children of a lesser God.

The trigger for today's letter is your headline that "Teachers hit streets." Are these the public servants we put in their seats that teachers have to take this step to seek redressal? Do the disabled too have to take this step? I ask all those affected by disability to please step forward and support Bah George B. Lyngdoh when

he reintroduces this Bill, as I feel he must.

Yours etc.,
Dr. Sandi Syiem,
SANKER, Shillong-8

India battles pollution

Editor,
In spite of all advancements in different sectors, India continues to be in pathetic state in air pollution levels. India ranks 5th in the top five most polluted countries in the world. For the fourth consecutive year, Delhi continues to be the most polluted capital in the world. According to the world Air Quality Report 2021, 35 of the 50 cities with the worst air quality are in India. As a matter of fact, none of the cities in India meets the prescribed World Health Organization air quality standards.

India must take a leaf out of China's book and tackle air pollution problem. Despite being the most populated country in the world, China has made progress in controlling air pollution. In contrast, tackling air pollution continues to be an insurmountable problem in India. Traffic exhaust, factory emissions, smoke from

stubble burning, construction dust, solid fuel use — all these contribute to high air pollution.

Notwithstanding the fact that there are anti-pollution laws in India, they are not strictly enforced. When cities succeed in controlling air pollution to some extent, pollution in rural areas continues unabated. Without proper coordination between city and rural areas, pollution cannot be tackled. Urbanites find it difficult to convince farmers to use less polluting practices. Similarly, rural people cannot convince urban people to drive less. Considering the ill effects of high air pollution, the government needs to take drastic measures to control it. We need to shift to renewable sources of energy. Given that air pollution causes diseases and deaths and adversely affects normal life, stringent measures need to be taken to combat it.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Via email

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"If you know the enemy and know yourself you need not fear the results of a hundred battles."

— Sun Tzu

The Shillong Times

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BJP's dilemma in Meghalaya

THE BJP has two MLAs supporting the NPP-led MDA Government in Meghalaya. Like the other coalition partners, namely the UDP, HSPDP, PDF and NCP the BJP too will by association face anti-incumbency in Meghalaya. Surprisingly, the two BJP MLAs don't seem too worried as they believe they will be elected, no matter what the circumstances. This has made them laid back. The two MLAs have said nothing on illegal mining and transportation of schemes. At one time the BJP's state president had raised issues on the different scams that had surfaced like the smart meter scam, rice scam among others. He was soon silenced by being given political appointments with perks etc. And that essentially is the problem of the BJP in Meghalaya. While the central leadership harps on development and clean governance and the Prime Minister works overtime to ensure that benefits from the different schemes reach the people, the BJP in Meghalaya is not connected to the people. In fact, the Party is far removed from the people and their problems.

The South Shillong MLA cares only about his constituency and is not bothered about Meghalaya's poor development indices. Poverty is growing and the health indices are nothing to write home about. Pynthorumkhrah MLA, AL Hek started to raise Cain and lost his ministerial position but not his perks because he was soon appointed Advisor to the Chief Minister a post held by many political heavyweights. The only BJP leader takes his Party position seriously is Bernard Marak, the BJP MDC from Garo Hills. He has been questioning the manner in which central schemes are implemented as they have not reached the targeted beneficiaries even while the MDA Government is taking mileage from the schemes.

In the past the BJP party members had expressed their disenchantment against their Party President, Ernest Mawrie but that too has died down. While other political parties have geared up for the elections scheduled for February 2023 and many have left their original parties to join a new party or an existing one, no one so far has shown any inclination to join the BJP. On the contrary, the BJP seems to have lost whatever foothold it had in the past in Meghalaya. While BJP-ruled states in the North East like Manipur, Tripura and Assam have made great strides as far as development is concerned, Meghalaya, a BJP coalition partner, remains a laggard in this aspect. Some of the contentious problems such as poor road communication remain unresolved. The BJP has no road-map to solving any problem in Meghalaya. It has not submitted a single policy paper to the Government. Is Prime Minister Modi even bothered about this land of clouds?

Japanese PM in Delhi to create supply chains

By Dr D.K Giri

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida was in Delhi to attend the 14th India-Japan summit. Notably, this was his first visit abroad after taking over as head of the Government. Since that first country happened to be India, observers are alluding to the significance Japan attaches to its bilateralism with New Delhi. Be that as it may, will the summit, taking place after three years, create new supply chains for the world economy? This is the call of the times as alternatives to the existing supply chains held by China are direly sought by world economies.

Recall that India-Japan bilateral relations grew by leaps and bounds since 2006 when the two signed the 'strategic and global partnership'. The bilateral summits are occasions for boosting trade and investment, and this Summit last week (19th-20th March) took place after three years. The 2019 Summit in which former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was to attend got cancelled due to the anti-CAA agitation in Assam. And subsequent summits in 2020-21 were cancelled because of the pandemic.

In 2014, under the Investment Promotion Partnership, Japan made an investment of 3.5 trillion JPY (28 billion USD). Had the summits taken place in the last three years, there could have been more investments. Fumio Kishida has made a commitment of 5 trillion JPY (42 billion USD) to be invested in India. This investment is aimed at deepening the Indo-Japanese collaboration in the face of Chinese dominance in the region and shall cover a wide range of activities involving Japanese finance and skilled Indian labour, and is expected to build supply chains.

In this visit, six major agreements were signed between India and Japan, covering various sectors -- mainly digital security and green technologies. The agreements are: Memorandum of cooperation in the field of cyber-security, the activities envisaged are information sharing, capacity building and cybercity co-operation; loans from Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), under which there will be seven loans from JICA to the tune of Rs 20,400 crore for projects in connectivity, water supply and sewage, horticulture, healthcare and biodiversity conservation; amendment to the India-Japan comprehensive economic partnership, which relates to certification of origin of fish surimi.

The fourth agreement is

memorandum of cooperation on decentralising domestic waste water management, wherein Japan will transfer the 'Johkasou' technology for waste-water treatment. This technology is used in places where sewage disposal is not developed. The fifth is the India-Japan industrial competitiveness partnership roadmap for two industrial partnerships signed in No-

All the above sound quite encouraging as the third and the fourth biggest economies in Asia begin to deepen their collaboration. Indeed, Japanese capital and India's labour force as well as market will form a formidable combination for economic activities and both countries and in the 3rd country. But the matter of concern is the divergence of positions and



memorandum of cooperation on decentralising domestic waste water management, wherein Japan will transfer the 'Johkasou' technology for waste-water treatment. This technology is used in places where sewage disposal is not developed. The fifth is the India-Japan industrial competitiveness partnership roadmap for two industrial partnerships signed in No-

perceptions on security and strategic issues.

Under Shinzo Abe, Japan amended its Constitution to engage militarily in international relations and security issues. Tokyo also has been taking clear positions on strategic and security matters. Take for example, Japan's active involvement in QUAD. It has also taken a clear and categorical position on Russian invasion of Ukraine, whereas New Delhi has been disappointingly evasive on it. New Delhi has been abstaining from voting in condemning Russia or naming it as aggressor.

From available reports, Japan is nudging India to be more vocal on the war launched by Russia. While New Delhi and Tokyo are on the same page, vis-à-vis China, on Ukraine they are divergent. Kishida told a joint news conference on Saturday that "Russia's invasion ...

shakes the very foundations of the international order and must be dealt with firmly". Whereas Prime Minister Modi talked about dialogue and diplomacy to resolve the Ukrainian tangle.

The joint statement issued after the Summit, did not name Russia. It "emphasised the need for all countries to seek peaceful resolution of disputes in accordance with international law without resorting to threat or use of force or any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo".

In the past, India was known for its commitment to international norms and practices of democracy within the country. Although India's economy was not growing so rapidly to commensurate with its potential, it was known for upholding robust democratic politics inside and for a rule-based order outside in international politics. Currently, the reverse trend is being noticed. New Delhi seems to do smart business with other countries, including Russia. India continues to buy oil and weapons from Russia which is at war with its neighbour.

Interestingly Japan, which was part of the Axis Powers in the Second World War, built its economy systematically as it was political shackled by post-war restrictions. It is now opening up to the world more assertively in politics and security issues. New Delhi on the other hand emerged as an independent political power in the Third World in 1947, when it got decolonised. Since the 1990s, with the opening up of the economy, India seems to be forging ahead in building its economic growth, overseas trade, self-reliance, self-preservation and so on. But, politically, especially, on China and Russia, New Delhi has been fumbling.

It may be in order that after Kishida's visit during which Modi would have talked on a range of issues, that the Indian Prime Minister takes a leaf out of the Japanese book and reaffirm its international political identity by speaking up on major international developments. New Delhi's tacit support to Russia in the Ukraine war and espousal of democracy and diplomacy do not go hand in hand. New Delhi must have the closest collaboration with Japan as they share security concerns relating to Beijing. This collaboration should extend to Afghanistan, Myanmar and other South-Asian and South-East Asian countries. The ball is certainly in New Delhi's court. —INFA

(The writer is Prof. of International Politics, JIM-MC)

How to contain India's TB pandemic

By Sanjana Brahmawar Mohan & Pavitra Mohan

India ushers in World Tuberculosis day in 2022 on 24 March with mixed feelings. As the COVID pandemic (hopefully) wanes, how are we seeing the other major infection that has silently and surely continued to wreak havoc in the lives of millions of Indians, year after year? TB is our silent pandemic; away from the headlines, it rages on.

The early months of the pandemic saw much discussion around COVID leading to a drop in identification of new tuberculosis (TB) infection, and growing malnutrition, both of which are associated with a risk of increasing the burden of TB. It is estimated that this decline in access to services and an increase in malnutrition will lead to almost 0.1 million additional deaths due to TB in the coming years. TB is identified as one of India's major public health problems. Around 1.8 million people developed TB in India according to the union health ministry's India TB Report 2021. And over 0.4 million died due to TB in India in the year 2020, according to the World Health Organization. Globally, India accounted for 26% of the new cases, and over 34% of the deaths due to TB.

For patients suffering from TB in large parts of rural India, the Primary Health Centres are by far the most accessible health facilities. Yet the PHCs take care of only a small proportion of the overall burden of TB. Many are understaffed, and many lack essential diagnostic capabilities. Despite these shortcomings, the PHCs can play a larger role if they are geared to build trust. This requires a greater attention to the patients, thorough examination, respectful behaviour, and kind words. Alongside, strengthening primary health centers in general, and equipping them to diagnose and manage patients with tuberculosis in particular, will go a long way in promoting access and helping patients navigate what today are largely unresponsive health systems.

Enhance diagnostics
Guidelines from the Indian government call for evaluation of all those with coughs for two weeks or more, for TB. This guidance has emerged from decades of careful attention and its importance cannot be overstated. We have seen many healthy-looking patients diagnosed with TB, only because as per the recommendations, the sputum test was performed. On the ground, we often see patients being denied these tests, for reasons that the patient "does not look tubercular", or "looks healthy". Many such patients subsequently go back home, to return after a few weeks or months with severe disease.

It is thus essential to adhere to the guidance for testing for TB, however healthy or well the patient may appear. Major constraints in diagnosing TB are the availability of chest radiography, sputum testing and cartridge-based nucleic acid amplification test (CBNAAT), close enough and easily enough. Patients with suspected TB continue to make several trips to different places and spend enormous amounts of money and time to be able to get themselves tested.

In the absence of easy availability, many private practitioners start treatment without the necessary tests, and many public providers delay the management of the disease. The patients suffer, and also transmit the infection to others during this time. There is a need to urgently expand the diagnostic capabilities, specifically x-ray machines, sputum microscopic testing, and CBNAAT machines. We would need to ensure that x-ray machines are available close enough and affordable. For much of rural India, this would mean that we need to have x-ray diagnostic facilities at PHCs.

While the last decade has seen many advances in

the tests for TB making it easier to detect TB as well as identify drug resistance, the process for collecting the sputum sample has remained unchanged. The onus for sample collection still rests with the patient, who may have to travel a few kms (such as when visiting a PHC), or even 50 kms or more (to the CHC or district hospital, for tests such as the CBNAAT). Sometimes even after making this arduous journey the test is denied as the sample collection for the day may be complete, or the technician is away, or the cartridges are finished, or the machine out of order. With a lot of resources diverted towards COVID, and the laboratory technicians busy with COVID testing, such denials are now seen even more often. No wonder then that several patients drop out after this contact.

A simple solution to this problem is to transport the sample itself: the patients can deposit their sputum sample at the PHC, from where the PHC staff can transport it to the diagnostic facility. There is strong evidence that such transport of sputum samples helps significantly in improving the detection with much convenience. We need to expand the active transport of sputum urgently.

Improve living conditions of migrants

TB is an infectious as well as a social disease. Its close relationship with determinants including livelihoods, nutrition, gender, and culture, influence who will develop the disease as well as the severity thereof. The relationship between TB, informal work and labour-migration is a case in point. South Rajasthan, where we work as physicians, is a rain scarce and food scarce region - malnutrition levels among children and adults are high, and many young men migrate to cities for employment. Poor nutrition levels, exposure to hazardous work, such as stone carving and mining; and living in overcrowded conditions while in cities, lead to high levels of tuberculosis among the migrant workers. Once infected, the disease also transmits to the family members. The deadly combination affects young men the most leading to reduced work capacity, loss of work, worsening disease, and finally death. Many also contract silicosis.

Treatment and recovery from TB will be incomplete if the determinants are also not addressed. The Poshan scheme of the TB programme provides cash transfers towards nutrition and is a welcome move. However, the amount is inadequate for a nutritious diet and the scheme is also fraught with delays and omissions. Ensuring a nutritious diet will require cash transfers, nutritious food through the PDS, and measures such as promoting farming and poultry, especially in high-migration areas. Efforts will also be needed to influence deep-rooted practices and customs related to nutrition, such as not consuming eggs and animal products (especially among women), and stopping all sour foods and ghee/oil once the treatment has begun. It is imperative to make the workplaces safer, and reduce or ameliorate the risk of lung damage and development of irreversible conditions such as Silicosis.

Impacting TB across its lifecycle

These steps have the potential to influence the disease and outcomes at the different steps in the lifecycle of the disease: by increasing linkages with public health systems, higher case detections, and improving treatment outcomes among those diagnosed with TB.

(The writers are doctors and co-founders of Basic Healthcare Services, a Rajasthan-based non-profit that runs primary healthcare centres) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

On being fair

Editor,
Apropos of the editorial "Giving the devil his due" (ST Match 22, 2022), it is plain truth put forth by the editor on the border differences between Assam and Meghalaya that "the leaders of the Hill State Movement and those succeeding them have to shoulder the blame for not paying due attention to the matter before the State was carved out of Assam". Truly the vision of these leaders was missing. Could it be that they were too excited they got the State and subsequently power? I have with me a copy of the letter No.60-PMO/79 dated New Delhi January 5, 1979 written by late Shri Morarji Desai, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India which was addressed to the Hon'ble Chief Minister Meghalaya, late Darwin Diengdoh Pugh wherein the Prime Minister of India advised the Chief Minister thus, "In your case it should be easier still as most of the disputes relate to physical demarcation of the boundary in accordance with accepted survey maps. The services of the Survey of India could be utilized by you to get the boundary demarcated clearly on the

ground. Any other assistance you may need from us in this regard will also be made available". If Mr Pugh had taken follow up action on the advice of the then Prime Minister, the so called border dispute that we are talking about today could have been solved 43 years ago. But politicising ensured that Pugh's APHLC led government which lasted only for 1 year 57 days from 10 March 1978 to 6th May 1979 was brought down by none but an APHLC leader himself on May 6, 1979. The matter ended there without any further action but eventually was followed up by as the Editor put it by "Several rounds of talks held at the level of the Chief Secretaries of Assam and Meghalaya but with little or no outcomes".

This reminds me of Ayn Rand a Russian-born American author and philosopher in her book "Atlas Shrugged" when she said "The bureaucrat's tool is fear and fear of the unknown while the businessman's tool is an incentive and an economic value".

Having extensively toured the lowlands of West Khasi Hills contiguous to Kamrup District specifically in the Rambrai-Jyngam region from 1996-1998 when the NEC contemplated to

study the feasibility of linking Rambrai by an inter-state road to Chaygoan in Kamrup District, Assam and between 2012 and 2021 for political purposes, I would vouch for the statement of the editor "Border residents usually prefer to have amorphous boundaries that allow them to take advantage of opportunities from both States. Border residents as much as anyone else in the far flung areas of Meghalaya want better roads so they can market their farm produce more efficiently. Meghalaya should have used soft skills to give border residents the necessary identity documents but as some residents have themselves stated, it is always more difficult to get their Aadhar cards or EPIC from Meghalaya side whereas Assam facilitates that process". I agree hundred percent with the editor that "Border issues should stop being a political football and politicians should stop making political capital out of human misery which is what the residents at the borders face".

The MDA government led by Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma deserves applause for the initiative he has taken to get the border dispute with Assam resolved amicably when all the past leaders be it

the APHLC, Congress, HPU and UDP failed miserably but entrusted the task to, in the words of Mary Clark, Economist, UNIFAD, "God in a small Kingdom", without any outcome for the last fifty years.

Conrad's government has been transparent and accommodative to consultation with stakeholders in trying to get over this big headache which he inherited from the past for lack of action then. I hope under his stewardship the borders are finally and properly demarcated by ensuring that 12.18 % of the geographical area of Meghalaya under differences with Assam is secured in the interest of peace and development along the 885 KM border with Assam and for a good neighbourly relation with the people of Assam. I wish him well in his endeavour. It is heartening that his government has earmarked Rs 5 crore for the development of inter-state border areas of Meghalaya contiguous to Assam. However this amount needs to be enhanced to Rs 100 crore in the years to come. Further, the government of Meghalaya should also engage consultants who can prepare viable schemes and projects for infrastructure development for the people

residing in the border areas of Assam-Meghalaya.

There is no dearth of fund from the Government of India from Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR) and the 10% Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) of 54 Ministries of the Government of India which is meant for the development of the NE Region. The kind of resources from these two sources annually is to the tune of Rs 60,000 to 70,000 crore. This money should be tapped by having in place good economically viable projects for development of border areas which will give a boost to the rural border economy.

Yours etc
V.K. Lyngdoh,
Via email

PUC Certificates

Editor,
Pollution under Control (PUC) certificate is an important document that any vehicle owner should have, along-with valid car registration and insurance documents. However, getting a PUC certificate (PUCC), which is required every six or twelve months, is not easy in a place like Shillong,

Guwahati, etc. The PUC certificate issuing stations are very few, compared to the vehicle population in these cities. For the convenience of the law-abiding citizens, the following few suggestions are offered for acceptance by the State and Union Governments: (1) Those who are otherwise regular in updating/getting PUC certificate, but unable to get the latest one on time should not be penalized, but should be directed to get the PUCC at the earliest. (2) Vehicle owners may be allowed to get a PUCC certificate in advance, but the PUCC can be considered effective from the next due date (just like in car insurance) for a fresh PUCC. (3) A grace period of 21 days may be allowed from the last due date to get a new/fresh PUCC. (4) It would be even better if getting PUCC is done away with, and random checks are introduced to check pollution emitted by vehicles.

Yours etc.,
D Bhutia,
Guwahati

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Five emerging food trends

Since the pandemic, people all over the world have made it a point to eat healthily and make wise lifestyle choices. Gone are the days when there were only a few food items created to satisfy one's appetite.

People today are looking for food options that allow them to experiment with flavour and new ingredients, try vibrant cultural dishes, and provide better health for both the body and the planet.

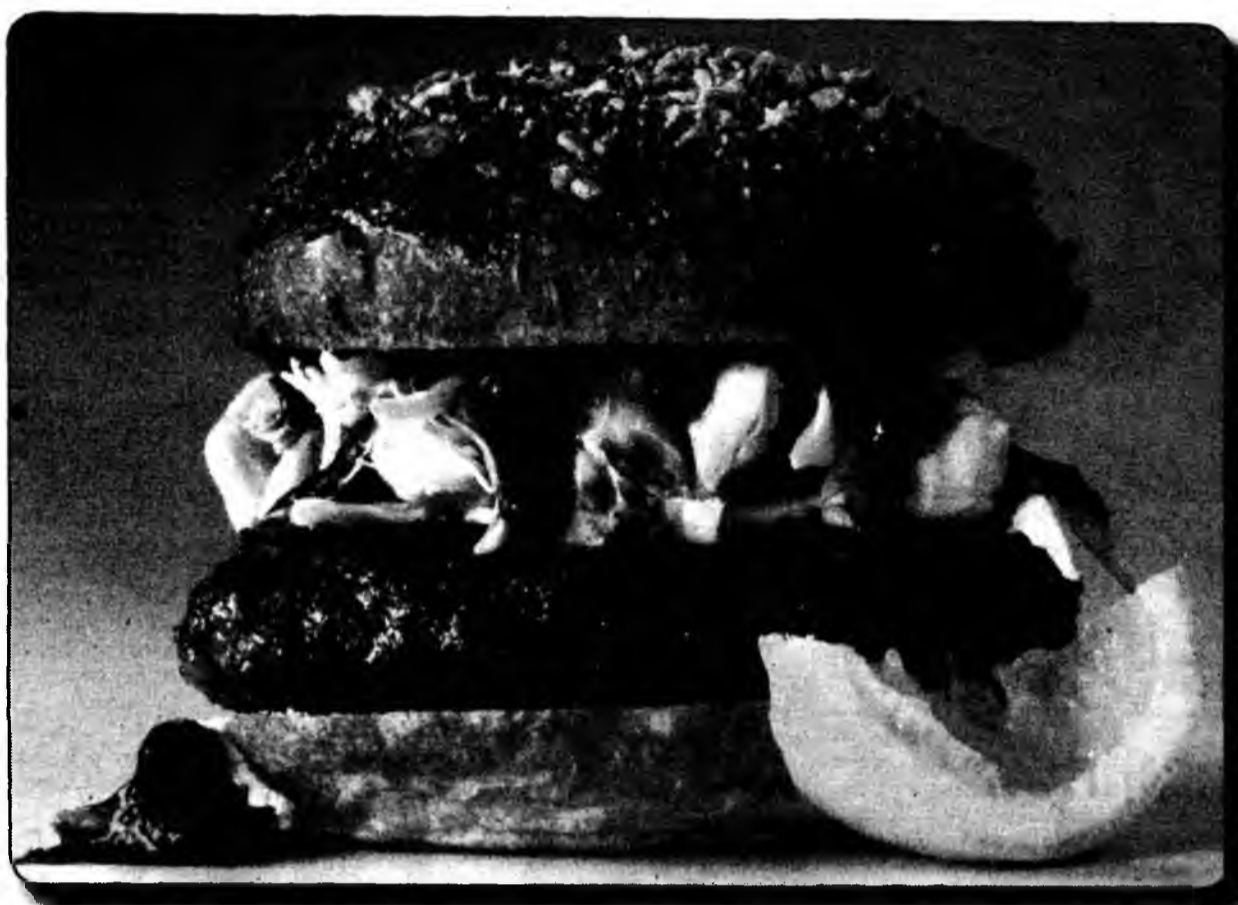
The pandemic has altered people's eating habits, and some unconventional food innovations have given way to significant global trends. Isthara Parks, a forerunner in smart food courts, has identified the key food trends that will change the way we dine in the coming years.

PLANT-BASED MEALS

A global crisis and two consecutive lockdowns have necessitated a rethinking of food options. Health and well-being have become a priority, and there has been a significant rethinking of what people eat and how it affects the environment. Plant-based diets and veganism have progressed from a food trend to a globally recognised lifestyle. As more people choose plant-based meals, the food industry is gradually introducing new innovations and options in the segment for people who prefer clean, plant-based food items. Reducetarianism is causing people to consume less meat and opt for vegan substitutes in order to live a healthier lifestyle. With more affordable, ready-to-cook plant-based meal options on the market, this is poised to become a long-term sustainable trend.

READY TO COOK MEALS

With many workplaces resuming work from home, people are exhausted from returning home



and preparing a full meal. With rapid urbanisation, shifting millennial behavioural patterns, and shifting taste preferences, there is a growing demand for ready-to-cook/eat meals. Ready-to-cook marinated meats, pre-measured ingredient meals, and even instant ramen are now fairly common in most kitchens due to the ease of cooking that they provide. Furthermore, these pre-packaged meals are relatively healthy, require little effort, and are inexpensive. The food industry is also jumping on board, introducing new items that are tailored to the Indian palate, such as burgers and pizzas, as well as idlis and vadas. Meals that are ready to cook have been prepared.

COMFORT MEALS

People are going to miss the comfort of their homes, as well as the comfort of home cooked meals, as corporations return to full-time work from the office and colleges begin to reopen. Many people will also be returning to their workplaces, resulting in an increased demand and craving for comfort, home-cooked food. While they are away from their families and homes, they will seek solace in the form of comfort food to rekindle a sense of home. Since the pandemic, there has been an increase in demand for home tiffin and home-cooked meals, as they tend to fill the need for comfort and warmth during these unprecedented times.

People are also gravitating toward home-cooked comfort meals.

'SNACK'ED IT

Today, a large portion of the population prefers to eat healthier snacks rather than sweet, fatty, and high-carbohydrate snacks. Protein bars, oatmeal cookies, high protein muesli, gluten-free protein munchies, roasted protein sticks, and other similar items can be found in shopping carts almost every month. People have slowly but steadily realised that, as much as we enjoy eating snacks, it is also important to do so mindfully and sensibly. High-protein snacks are becoming increasingly popular among millennials as a healthy alternative that can also serve as



a meal replacement for busy millennial workers. People want easy access to snack options, and smart food courts like Isthara provide a variety of snack options across the office and campus.

WAKE AND BAKE

Baked goods are popular, owing to their flavour and convenience. People experimented with a variety of recipes as a result of the pandemic, with baking being the most popular. Many people are also experimenting with and diversifying baked goods in order to make them a complete meal option. As food-blogging on Instagram and TikTok food trends have become a 'thing,' creators and even full-time corporate em-

ployees want to stand out by creating something unique. Baking has been a large-scale interest, hobby, and emerging long-term trend, ranging from baking cakes, pastries, cookies, and brownies to making frozen desserts, pies, tarts, puddings, and chocolate confections.

Cafeteria food is expected to play a significant role in student and employee retention. Isthara, a smart food court, provides multi-vendor, multi-cuisine options for colleges and workplaces to meet growing needs and emerging food trends. Going forward, these food trends will change the way people eat, and some of them will become dining norms in the coming years. (IANS/Slife)

Sufism: Kashmir's firm legacy of coexistence

For centuries the common bond of tolerance, coexistence, compassion and brotherhood has sustained the cohesion of Kashmir's society. The binding cement of this cohesion and amity between the local Muslims and the Pandits has been their deep and unshaken belief in Sufism.

he was a mystic, poet and spiritual teacher who influenced the vast majority of people across the communities.

It is because of Sheikh Nooruddin Wali's universal acceptance that he continues to be known as the patron saint of Kashmir. He renounced Worldly life at the age of 30 and

Ded. Whether the saint imbibed spirituality and tolerance through the milk of his foster mother or not, the undeniable fact is that in their message for mutual coexistence, peace, compassion and enlightenment, the poems of the two are indistinguishable.

The influence of Sheikh Nooruddin Wali has been so strong that the most benevolent Sultan of Kashmir, Zainul Abidin known as 'Badshah' (The Great King) commissioned a tomb for the saint's body in 1438 when the saint passed away.

In 2005, the Government of India renamed Srinagar airport as Sheikh ul-Alam International Airport and granted it international status.

That the saint was far ahead of the times is proved by just one of his couplets in which he said 'Ann Poshe Teli Yeli Wan Pashe' (Food will last only as long as the forests last).

Members of the two communities have thronged the Char-e-Sharief shrine in central Budgam district where the saint is buried. Pandits till their exodus from the Valley would invoke the saint's blessings on the birth of the newborn. The Muslims would carry children to the shrine to return with the saint's blessings for the future.

The shrine at Char-e-Sharief was burnt down during a gunfight between the Pakistani militant commander Mast Gul and the security forces on May 11, 1995. Mast Gul along with 150 associate militants had converted the shrine into a fortified bunker, the security forces said.

For the followers of the 'Wahabi' school of thought, who believe in strait-laced concept of Islam, veneration for saints and visiting their tombs and shrines is a practice that needs to be purged.

To the common Kashmiri, the Wahabi interpretation has remained unacceptable for centuries and it is precisely for this reason that Kashmir has been called 'Peer Waar' (The abide of saints and Sufis).

The essence of the teachings of Sheikh ul-Alam and Lal Ded has best been summed up in an Urdu couplet by poet, Sarshar Sailani: "Chaman mein Ikhtilat-e-rang-o-bu se baat banti hai/ Ham hi ham hein, to Kya ham hein, tum hi tum ho, to kya tum ho (It is the variance of colour and fragrance that imparts majesty to the garden/ If you and I exist in isolation that would make wilderness not a riot of colour and fragrance)". (IANS)



The patron saint, who preached and propagated this eclectic culture, was Sheikh Nooruddin Wali called 'Alamdar-e-Kashmir' and 'Sheikh ul-Alam' by local Muslims and 'Nund Rishi' or 'Nund Laal' by the local Pandits. Nund Rishi was born in 1377 in Qaimoh village of Kulgam district.

Legend says he refused to be breastfed by his mother and it was Laleshwari, the Pandit mystic, who breastfed Nund Rishi. Revered equally by both the communities of Kashmir,

retired to a cave for meditation in Qaimoh village.

He spread his teachings through poems known locally as 'Shruks'. Each such poem has six lines and evolves around religious themes, morality and peace. Interestingly, Laleshwari, known popularly as 'Lal Ded' who was the saint's foster mother, was also a poetess.

Many scholars argue that Nund Rishi was the spiritual disciple of his foster mother Lal

6th edition of India Art Festival to be unveiled in Delhi



After nearly two years of the pandemic, the India Art Festival (IAF), a contemporary art fair held annually in Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru, has returned. The sixth edition of the India Art Festival, to be held from the 7th to the 10th of April 2022 at the Constitution Club of India, will provide a platform for dialogue and collaborations between art galleries, dealers, and buyers, as well as artists, interior designers, architects, and art connoisseurs.

The India Art Festival, known for its massive popularity, provides a unique glimpse of evolving Indian art over the years, as well as curated insights into the cultural landscapes of neighbouring states. The Festival is in collaboration with several art galleries, assists independent artists in gaining recognition by providing a platform on which they can collaborate with countless master artists. Furthermore, it allows these artists to showcase their work to a wide range of audiences and prospective patrons, as well as develop their network and assess their potential markets.

It provides a unique opportunity for buyers and the rest of the audience to interact directly with the artists and learn more about their lives and work. The event brings together galleries, artists, private foundations, art charities, artists collectives, national institutions, cultural events, and festivals to allow both local and international audiences to engage in new ways with the South Asian region's cultural history and development.

A total of 450 artists, including 200 master artists represented by 25 art galleries and 250 independent artists, will present 3,500 works of art at the event, which will be displayed at 80 booths. At the "Artists Pavilion," emerging independent artists as well as experienced and established ones from across India will display their work, creating an outstanding panorama of the contemporary Indian art scene. Seema Kohli, Jogen Chowdhury, Neeraj Goswami, Sudhir Patwardhan, and others are among the master artists whose work will be displayed. (IANS/Slife)

#FiveFilmsForFreedom returns for its eighth year

The British Council, in partnership with BFI Flare: London LGBTQIA+ Film Festival, will make available five LGBTIQ+ themed short films to watch online for free, over an 11-day period.

Between March 16 and 27, a collection of stories from countries such as India, China, the UK, Croatia and Panama will be presented in #FiveFilmsForFreedom.

Through these films, the audience will get to know more about the emerging LGBTQIA+ cinema across the world and understand the life and challenges faced by the community with themes including immigration, intimacy and isolation.

In India, the British Council has partnered with The Queer Muslim Project, South Asia's largest virtual network of Queer, Muslim and allied individuals, to celebrate and amplify the films.

In addition to the films being shown online, they will be screened across various cities such as Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Kharapur, Kolkata and Guwahati.

The offline screenings are being co-hosted with some of the largest LGBTQIA+ student-led groups across three premier Indian universities. The curation also includes a series of reels and Instagram Live with popular Queer creators and youth media platforms, such as 'Yuvaa' and 'We the Young India and Gaysi Family', along with roundtable discussions featuring renowned filmmakers, and open mics.

Over 17 million people from more than 200 countries have viewed the #FiveFilmsForFreedom programme since its launch in 2015. This continues to include online engagement in countries where homosexuality can be prosecuted and, in some cases, punishable

by death.

The campaign further addresses the language barrier typically associated with international content, by providing subtitles in local languages such as Hindi.

Mumbai filmmaker Arun Fulara's debut short film 'Sunday' is part of this year's #FiveFilmsForFreedom selection. The film,

To see the film transcend borders and touch so many people across the world is a testimony to how similar we all are, whatever culture and nationality we may belong to.

"The film started its journey just as the pandemic began and has, therefore, I feel, touched a raw nerve in these times of forced isolation and distancing. Being a part of the #FiveFilmsForFreedom campaign is a huge honour and deeply gratifying for our small team. While I am extremely glad that people across the world will now be able to see our film, I hope there comes a time when stories like this cease to be a reality."

Other films include British-Nigerian Director Joy Gharoro-Akpojotor's short film 'For Love', which focuses on illegal immigrant N. Kechi and the unique challenges she faces due to her sexual identity; Croatian comic artist and animation-director Marko DjeAika's animation film 'All Those Sensations In My Belly', which follows the story of trans gir Matia's transition and her quest for love; Panamanian Director Judith Corro's first film as scriptwriter and director, 'Birthday Boy' (Vuelta al Sol), a story about parents denying their son's identity as a young trans man; and Chinese Director Hao Zhou's 'Frozen Out', an experimental short film that combines scenes from rural Iowa and rural China to explore anxiety, dislocation and self-exile.

Jonathan Kennedy, Director-Arts India, British Council, said, "Throughout the world, #FiveFilmsForFreedom presents diverse and unique stories from some cutting edge LGBTIQ+ filmmakers. With our partners in India and the UK, we aim to achieve greater empathy for and solidarity with the LGBTIQ+ community with thought-provoking short dramas on film." (IANS)



Biden and Harris: The 'widening rift'



A new book claims there is a 'widening rift' between US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, Daily Mail reported. The claims are made in forthcoming book, "This Will Not Pass: Trump, Biden and the Battle for America's Future", by Alexander Burns and Jonathan Martin.

The new book emerges as Biden's approval ratings dropped to a new low of 40 per cent this week.

The book, which will be out in May, is twisting the knife by alleging that the widespread public perception of Kamala Harris as imperious, insecure and out of her depth is shared even in the White House, Daily Mail reported.

According to leaked excerpts of the book to Politico, the relationship between the Biden and Harris camps is getting worse and is now characterised by anger, mutual contempt and turf wars, the report said.

A senator close to her said Harris' "frustration is up in the stratosphere" and she's told White House aides in "frank terms" that she doesn't want her remit to be restricted to a few issues "mainly associated with women and black Americans", Daily Mail reported.

Biden insiders, meanwhile, prefer a different explanation: The Vice President is simply not up to the job. Harris has gone so far as to complain that White House staff were not standing up when she entered a room, the report said.

"Some of Harris' advisers believed the President's almost entirely white inner circle did not show the VP the respect she deserved," the book says, Daily Mail reported.

"Harris is worried that Biden's staff looked down on her; she fixated on real and perceived snubs in ways the West Wing found tedious." Harris also clashed with the President's office over her foreign policy role, the authors claim. Her team had wanted her to oversee America's relationship with Scandinavian countries - an obviously fairly easy job.

But as Barack Obama's VP, Biden had taken on Central America - a far bigger challenge, as it includes the problem of illegal immigration across the Mexican border.

The Biden camp felt it only reasonable that Harris did the same, alongside overseeing voting reform - another tricky responsibility, albeit one she'd asked for.

The book - whose allegations the administration has done little to dispute beyond noting they are "unattributed" - claims that Biden staff have grown tired of complaints by the VP and her cheerleaders that she's been set up to fail (although why Biden would want to do that appears less clear), Daily Mail reported. (IANS)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambi

Sunday, MAR 27, 2022

Moon sextile Mercury on your solar return chart and it will give excellent results. You will have monetary gains. You will also recover your money given as loan to some persons. New job/business offers will come. You will give top priority to work that is pending for a long time. Your personality will also develop. Your bosses and colleagues will support you fully. You will also clinch a major business deal. You will get emotional in love and family ties. The support and caring of your life partner will take you out of your tensions. You will also move towards your objective with determination and courage. You will be under the glare of publicity. You will also wield considerable influence at your work place and business. You will take guidance from your seniors. You will also guide your siblings and enjoy wonderful bonding with them.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

A work which was incomplete for as long time will get completed. It will give you lot of mental satisfaction. Your old problems will also get sorted out. This is the time for social gatherings. A marriage proposal will get accepted in your family. You will also exchange thoughts and information with your colleagues. You will also give lot of time to your work. Your life will appear to come back on track. You will also hold discussions with your family members. Your siblings will play an important role. Exchange of thoughts will lead to better understanding of things. You will have good health. You will be in the right direction of your goals. Work related trips will keep you occupied. You will move forward and progress in life. Your popularity too will rise.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

It will be a good week for you. You will get opportunity to earn money. Your fortune will rise. You will also get busy in your work. Mentally you will be ready to do any work. Seniors will also meet unexpected situations in life. Some strange feelings will come to your mind. It will be a knowledge gaining time period. You will learn a lot of new things in life. You will also learn new skills. You will get success in competitions/interviews. You will also consider proposals for jobs. Those who are single will plan to get married. You will take care of your close ones benefits without any selfish reasons. Your legal matters will get solved. You may purchase a new house or a new vehicle. You will also take some important decisions quickly.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Some person will come in your life all of a sudden. It is going to be a very pleasing and long lasting relation. You will also plan to get married to this person. There may be some problems and troubles at your workplace which you have not anticipated. You will have had your share of ups and downs. Even some opponents will get active. But your peers and bosses will fully support you. The time will be indicating victory in your work. You will also attend parties and social gatherings. You will also make lot of new friends. You will also get attracted to meditation and prayers. You will also get the sweet results of your work and your work will get completed in time. You will move forward and progress in your life.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

The time will be suitable. You will catch the attention of people in authority. Some stranger will try to take advantage of your liberal attitude. But you will remain alert and watchful. You will understand the motive of that person very well. You will also spend money in maintenance of your vehicle and buy expensive items for your house. The officers will be happy with you at your work place. You will be busy in maintenance of property. Business will also rise and flourish. You will also spend time with your family. There will be opportunities to move forward and progress. You will be healthy and jovial. You will also gain lot of money. You will be happy meeting a person of your liking. You will get success in love affairs. You will get lot of positives out of this relation. Marriage is likely.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

The week will turn out to be fruitful for you. You will give top priority to your work and personal relations. You will also get lot of good will of people who matter a lot to you. There will be affinity between siblings. They will understand you and also support you. You will also gain some property. You will find yourself on top. Income will be good. You will behave equally with everyone. Students will be busy in their studies. You will be in a working mood. You will also get success in love matters. Love partners will enjoy wonderful bonding. They will also plan about their future. You will also invest in shares, debentures and bonds. The time will be painful. You will enjoy time with your family and friends. You will be in a relax mood. Elders support and guidance will help you a lot.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

The beginning of the week will be pleasant. In the middle of the week you will get results of efforts made by you. And towards the end of the week you will take break from work and enjoy some relaxing time with your family. You will get best pleasures in life. You will have no shortage

of money and will also plan to buy something for your family. You will take care of your family members. You will be happy and do every work as per their wishes. Your family elders will bless you. You will also find a new meaning to your life and help poor and the needy. You will want full dedication from your own people, which you will have. You will be lost in your thoughts. You will like talking less with anyone. You will try to achieve something new.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

Most of the days this week will be all profit days. You will earn a lot and make lot of money. You will get success in business/work. You will be a winner everywhere. This is also a time for recreation. You will also have arrival of guests. They will be happy with your hospitality. You will also have to run a lot for some government related work which will be got done eventually. A tricky situation might emerge at your work place which you will handle with lot of patience and intelligence. You will remain in good books of your bosses. A person with whom you will like to settle down in life will accept your marriage proposal. But you will also have a discussion with your family elders in this matter. Your investments will bring good results. Your enemies and opponents will get defeated.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

It will be a victory granting week for you. Your official works will get done. You will also make good progress in your job/business. You will also get a regular income. Family, entertainment, personal talks, work and even children's issues will keep you pre-occupied. Your property disputes in the family will get resolved. You will also have discussions with your family members. You will leave your stubborn attitude behind and will get better results in the end. You will complete your pending tasks. New projects will get completed. All the relationships will warm up, even though competition as well. You would like to remain in the spot light and will enjoy all the attention you seek and get.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

You will be praised for your favorite work. Your efforts will win you applause from your colleagues. Even your bosses will be impressed by you. You will also get excellent results for efforts made by you. A news related to your children will lift your morale. Students will perform well in studies. You will have full support of your life partner. Husband and wife will understand each other well. You will also get rid of old diseases. You will have new means of income. You will become more prosperous. You will do your duty rightly. You will also overcome your rivals and enemies in business. Held up works will get completed. You will also take household work seriously. Your personality will emerge in totality.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You will feel mentally healthy and happy. You will get success in your work/business. Income will be good. You will enjoy your relationship with your spouse/partner. You need to take care that it does not affect your career. Some business rivals will target you. You need to be alert and also take extra care. You will also take your work seriously and will complete it in time. You will also listen to suggestion from your boss. Court cases will be moving towards resolution of disputes. You will be flexible and ready for a compromise. It suits your interests and will save your time and money. Works will be done related to land, housing and commercial property. You will also plan to buy something new. Business related travel will be successful.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You will get promoted in your job. You will also plan a new business venture. You will also get a good news from somewhere. Bachelors will have marriage proposals. New investments opportunity will come to you. Your family will have lot of expectations from you. And you will not let them down. You will face every situation very bravely. All the problems of career, job and business will be over one by one. You will enjoy your new found status. Your work capacity and work efficiency will increase. Your self confidence will rise. Your fame and respect will increase. Your focus will be on profit gains.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

Your honour and prestige will rise. You will witness growth in your career. You will also tackle the situation at work place skillfully using your tact and wisdom. You will also like to take some rest from work and spend time with your family members. It will lift your morale and spirits. You will also have profitable days in business. You will also see yourself on the glorious path to success. You will also make important changes in your way of doing things. You will also get back your money and landed property. You will also have the ability to make people work and you will use your communication skills to the best of your advantage. You will meet an influential person and will get your work done. You will enjoy and do self analysis.

Here's how parents can help their child prepare for exam

By Dr. Sridhar G



One of the defining responsibilities of parents is to enable their children to realise their potential. Both the students and their families are inordinately anxious in the days leading up to examinations. Parents are concerned about their children's academic achievement, the amount of time they spend studying, and the degree to which success or failure may influence their children's future. In fact, parents frequently experience the same, if not higher, levels of tension and worry as their children during examinations!

A parent should ideally serve as a facilitator for their kids throughout tests, inspiring and helping them release tension when needed. Because they have more one-on-one time with their children, parents play the most important role in assisting children in dealing with examination stress.

The following are some methods that parents may adopt to get constructively involved in their child's academic life and help them prepare for tests better:

Positively motivate the kids: Although well-timed motivation and encouragement to perform well in the exam is beneficial, pressuring the youngster to study "more" or "better" is counter-productive. Exam anxiety is exacerbated by undue parental pressure. Parents who wish to help reduce test anxiety should understand how to motivate them appropriately.

Avoid additional mental strain. Pressuring your children to achieve exceptional grades all the time may cause emotional pain. Maintain a cool and controlled demeanour as a parent and emphasise the importance of studying for them to attain their future objectives. If they are unable to concentrate and study, gently inquire as to why they are unable to do so and assist them in overcoming distractions and developing concentration skills.

Give your children ample attention. Children, in many circumstances, do not communicate their worries to others and keep them to themselves. Hence, recognise the symptoms of discomfort and spend extra time with them to get a better understanding of their present state of mind. Assure them that they are consistently supported and motivated, making them feel valued and appreciated.

Assist in developing efficient exam strategies: help children develop a plan to finish their syllabus. If one approach does not seem to be working, try another. Do not force the kids to follow an unfavourable or unduly taxing regimen.

Help children maintain a healthy daily routine. Ensure that your child maintains a healthy balance between his schooling and his recreational activities. This will help them get enough rest before they begin studying for their next exam. Encourage them to avoid late-night study sessions, but if they believe that's when they'll learn the most, go ahead and let them.

Distractions should be identified and managed: every student is distracted in some manner; all you have to do is figure out what is interfering with your child's education and solve it effectively. Rather than completely removing something your child likes.

Pay attention post-exams: Listen to your child's work and let them discuss it without passing any judgments. Avoid being pedantic in pointing out errors. This is the time when your child needs someone to talk to about his or her thoughts, concerns, and anxieties.

Ensure that your child maintains contact with his or her peers and relatives. Give space to your child if you think he or she shouldn't be bothered. To some extent, this is true, but it is also critical for kids to interact with their peers and other people to keep their spirits up. Social isolation can be detrimental to children. As a parent, it is crucial to help children build a foundation of self-motivation and self-reliance so that they can withstand greater challenges at different stages of life. (IANSLife)

"Believe that life is worth living and your belief will help create the fact."

—William James

The Shillong Times

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Trade unions, vested interests

THE end of another weekend is followed by a two-day nationwide strike by trade unions backed principally by the Congress and the Left. The 'provocation' or the 'excuse' for this work-stoppage is the 'wrong' economic policies of the central government. This has been the standard excuse for nationwide work stoppage. The Left was at it even when the Congress was in power. Clearly no purpose was ever served by such strikes. Rather, the obverse happens; the economy will take a fresh hit due to the production loss. The Left, which is now at ground zero vis-à-vis its diminishing popular support, often organises such work stoppages and also hartals and bandhs to prove that it's still a force to contend with. It cites vague reasons like "anti-people, anti-labour" policies of the government(s), "price rise" etc as reasons for such indulgences.

Now, being in the opposition, it is incumbent on the Congress party too to take on the government. The Left, having lost its individuality, is seen as the 'B' team for the Congress. The question here is whether the 'wrong' economic policies of the Centre affect only the working class represented by these trade unions. The salaried workforce, both white and blue are a class by themselves and are represented by trade unions. They form not more than 20 per cent of the population and are mostly a well-heeled lot as in the case of government employees, banking sector workforce and the like. The point to note is, the more they get, the more they demand. Their aggressiveness is set against the voiceless 80 per cent of the population. Fact is, salaries and pensions are not the only benefits to them. They get a whole lot of perquisites and every government grants them more at the cost of the national exchequer — effectively, an affront to the interests of the common citizens.

The central obsession of the Narendra Modi government through the past eight years has been its own survival and winning of elections. A prerequisite for this is to avoid taking any strong step against organised interest groups. Much-needed reforms are not attempted at or are abandoned as in the farm laws. As the government vacillates, the nation suffers. Worse, even the rootless left, the farmer organisations entrenched in a couple of states etc., are all allowed to "indulge." The two-day strike now is another occasion for the workforce to rejoice as it yet again ensures them a four-day holiday at a stretch. With the Covid phase somewhat over, the pent-up negative energies of India's vested interests will now have their full flow, be they in the streets or elsewhere.

Waste brought to the Assembly yet no solution in sight

By H H Mohrmen

As a citizen of Jowai town, I was very much ashamed that the issue of waste in my town had to be discussed in the Assembly. One hopes that this will be the last time that the legislators will have to discuss garbage in the august House. The problem which has unnecessarily been protracted for more than a year now has reached a situation where one can see no solution in the very near future. Till date the people of this town are in a dilemma because despite the debate in the House, neither the Jowai Municipal Board nor the Department of Urban Affairs is able to come up with a permanent solution to this problem.

The JMB and Department of Urban Affairs seem clueless

As I write this piece for TST, garbage in Jowai piled up particularly at the three locations, one in front of the DC's office, the other in front of Thomas Jones college and the third at lawthymme, near the Kiang Nangbah stadium. As summer approaches the waste accumulated has generated a foul smell and house flies have started to swarm the area which will in turn be a health hazard for the people nearby.

The sad part is that none of the concern departments; neither the Jowai Municipal Board nor the Department of Urban Affairs is able to provide a long-lasting solution to the problem. Even the MLA and the MDCs who represents the different constituencies in the town have not come up with a possible solution to the problem. In fact, from the answer of the Minister in Charge of Urban Affairs in the House, it is obvious that even the Department is not even clear if they want a landfill or are planning to systematically manage the waste generated by the town folks.

Location of the waste heaps

All the waste mounds which have come up in the town are located in the place which is either near the market or a busy thoroughfare which is also a threat to the well-being of the people in the area. Few days ago there was report that the garbage heap which is located near Thomas Jones College caught fire and had it not been for the prompt arrival of the fire service, the shops near the area would have been gutted.

The waste collected is also a health hazard to the people who are selling their wares in the shops in the markets nearby. The poor hawkers and small shops owners have

no other option but to bear the stench and the unhealthy situation of their work place.

At the household level people in the town have no other option but to resort to open-air burning of their waste in spite of it being illegal. In the absence of a proper waste disposal system, waste will naturally end up in the water bodies. Traditionally Myntdu is known as 'ka tawiar ka takan' but now it also has to carry human filth.

River Myntdu at the receiving end

Once the rainy season starts the waste dumped by the locals will ultimately make its way to the river through the different drains in the town. Myntdu which flows around Jowai and is still being worshipped as a divine guardian angel will suffer the first onslaught once



the monsoon starts. Myntdu River will have to bear the brunt of the waste problem that the town is encountering. The river will have to suffer for the failure of the Government and in the process it will also affect the water supply of the town which is being pumped from the same river downstream of the market area.

Khuid Yaka Wah Myntdu Organisation's Initiative

In Jowai, the town is fortunate to have two organizations which have tirelessly worked for the protection of this important river. The Jaitia Fishing and Environment Protection Association and the newly formed Khuid Yaka Wah Myntdu Organisation are playing their part in protecting the river Myntdu. In the recent meeting with the Sen Kyntah of the Dorbar Chnong Dulong, Jowai, K.L. Pariat president of the KYWM organization lamented about the way waste is being haphazardly dumped which indicates that the spiritual bond that people have with the river is broken now.

The first initiative taken by the organization to help mitigate the waste problem in Jowai was by organizing the meeting of the women groups of Jowai on March 18 at Lion Mission Compound community hall. In the meeting this writer shared ideas on how to turn the adversity into an opportunity and turn waste to wealth.

Waste to Wealth

Along with the support of the Society for Urban and Rural Empowerment, we have been able to turn kitchen waste to pig feed using Bokashi method. And on an average each household could produce approximately 10 kg of pig feed per week which is being sold at Rs. 7 per kg. Other biodegradables are also converted to compost using Vermi, Berkley or even natural composting processes while plastic bottles and con-

tainers, papers and cardboard are being sold to the waste collectors. SURE has reached out to the different communities to create awareness about the possibility of starting waste economy in the town. The possibility of converting kitchen waste to pig feed was successfully pilot tested and it has benefitted both the generator 'of waste and the end users who are the pig farm owners. In the meeting with the Women's league of the Dorbar Chnong Dulong it was found that some members of the community have already started making compost from kitchen waste using vermi-composting method. But in all this effort disposing plastics and snacks wrapper remains the most challenging task.

Lesson for all from Lumputhoi

Lumputhoi is a small hamlet under eleka Rymbai of East Jaitia hills district with a population of about 1200. A Facebook post on March 23 by S. Lyngdoh General Secretary Dorbar Chnong demonstrated how

the village disposed its plastics. They were able to do away with the plastic menace which has played havoc everywhere by disposing it in an eco-friendly manner. First of all awareness was conducted by Village Water and Sanitation Committee on October 3, 2021. On the same day prizes were distributed to winners who can collect the largest amount of plastic waste. Prizes to the winners of the one year plastic collection competition which was started in 2020 was distributed on October 3. In fact, the District Administration informed that the collection was part of the plastic festival and Swachha Hi Seva program organized by the DC's office East Jaitia Hills. 3061 kg of plastics was collected from the 21 villages from both Khliehriat and Saipung blocks and the same was handed over to Bharat Dalmia Cement plant at Thangskai village.

The lesson for the JMB and the Urban Department of Meghalaya is that single use plastics and snack wrappers which are urban nuisances can be sent to the cement plants to be disposed off in its boilers unit. Facebook friend H. Nonglang posted that as per NGT orders Government and local authorities should insist that cement plants buy and use RDF (refuse derived fuel) as fuel in their respective plants. The lesson for those at the helm of power is, if waste is segregated biodegradable waste can be converted to animal feed or compost and single use plastic and snack wrappers can be sent for use by cement plants.

Waste management rather than landfill

It is obvious that getting landfills for both Jowai and Shillong is a herculean task for the government, because there is so much protest from the local people in the area. One can sympathise with the protestors for the simple fact that landfills affect water bodies and it is almost impossible to stop open-air burning. Therefore segregation of waste generated from the town is the only option to solve this long pending problem. The problem that Jowai town is experiencing now is only a precursor to what is going to happen in the other urban areas in the state. The approach therefore is how to manage waste rather than just trying to arrange landfills. The goal is to achieve zero waste but the next best thing is to minimize the amount of waste that has to go to the landfill.

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Implications of the decline of the Almighty Petro Dollar

By Ajit Ranade

India's export performance this year will be very impressive. The manufactured goods exports will cross 400 billion dollars, the highest ever. This is more than 40 percent higher than last year, and five times the growth of our GDP. It was made possible due to a focused approach by the Commerce Ministry, which had given targets product-wise and country-wise and these were tracked closely. Even the various export promotion councils (EPC's) for textiles, apparel, engineering goods and chemicals were given targets. The government also launched the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme which has inbuilt export incentives. The major export products have been petrol and diesel, gems and jewelry, engineering goods and chemicals. It must be kept in mind that to export 100 dollars' worth of refined petroleum we import 90 dollars' worth of crude oil. Hence just as exports have done well, so have imports gone up. Imports of products like crude oil and mobile phones are close to 600 billion dollars. The import of gold too crossed 1000 tonnes which means an outflow of 70 billion dollars of foreign exchange. The total trade deficit this fiscal year will probably reach 200 billion dollars.

And the countries which import oil and gas from Russia are not going to suddenly switch to other suppliers, most notably countries like Germany, and even India. So, the Russians are offering steep discounts in the price of oil to its customers. India imports less than 1 percent of its crude oil requirement from Russia. But if it is getting oil at half the price, at a time when the oil price has crossed 100 dollars per barrel and threatens to hurt the Indian economy, why not take advantage of the offer? Indeed, this is in India's interest, and will help tame inflation and keep the trade and fiscal deficit in check. The Russians will be happy to see some of their oil being evacuated. But India cannot pay the Russians in dollars (even though India too has a very large pile of dollar denominated foreign exchange) since the dollar payment has to have a leg in New York clearing, which the Americans will obstruct. So, India and Russia have worked out a Rupee-Ruble trade deal, where India pays for its oil imports in rupees to Russia, and the Russians in turn use those rupees to buy their Indian goods and imports. This will work perfectly if our imports and exports to Russia are evenly balanced. Unfortunately, they are imbalanced. So, we

The major export products have been petrol and diesel, gems and jewelry, engineering goods and chemicals. It must be kept in mind that to export 100 dollars' worth of refined petroleum we import 90 dollars' worth of crude oil. Hence just as exports have done well, so have imports gone up. Imports of products like crude oil and mobile phones are close to 600 billion dollars.

That represents the dollar shortage i.e. the excess of imports over exports of goods and merchandise. Thankfully the country earns dollars even from the exports of services, chiefly software, i.e. IT and IT enabled services. In addition, there is tourism (which has gone down due to the pandemic) and remittances. India is also the highest recipient of inbound remittances, which is about 80 billion dollars (about as much as what goes out for gold imports). Hence after counting dollar earnings from services, we have a smaller deficit. But still there is a deficit of dollars. How does that gap get plugged? That is by the inflow of capital flows from investors who put dollars in the stock market, private equity and loans.

The international flow of dollars and balance of payments adjustment are okay in peacetime. But the Ukraine war has put a spanner in the works. Stiff sanctions led by the United States, imposed on Russia means Russian exports cannot be paid in dollars. That's because the payment has to go through New York clearing, and the U.S. refuses to honor any claim from Russian exporters. Even the overseas dollar wealth of Russian oligarchs and elite are being frozen and not denied access. The U.S. will surely put pressure on Swiss banks to freeze Russian wealth in that country. Suddenly for the Russians, their big pile of 630 billion dollars in foreign exchange is looking worthless. That stock of forex is stored in the form of U.S. government issued treasury bonds, or bonds from the European Union. These bonds can be encashed from those respective sovereign entities, or by trading. But if the sovereign nations who issued those bonds refuse to honour the claim, or repudiate the request for redemption, then those bonds become worthless.

Of course, Russia is not taking this lying down. Oil and gas are its major export

have to find more goods to export to Russia, so that they can use the rupee payment which we make, to buy more stuff from us. We have used a similar arrangement for trade with Iran too, when it was under sanctions.

The Saudi Arabians made a deal with the Americans during the Nixon era, that they would only invoice their oil exports in dollars. That has been the source of global dominance of the dollar. During the mid 1970's after the first oil shock, the earnings of Saudi Arabia and other Middle East oil producers were so very large and all in dollars, that they were unable to absorb all the windfall gain. This was even after spending lavishly on arms and ammunition. So those dollars got deposited in Wall Street and recycled as hefty loans to South America, which eventually led to the debt crisis there. This was the story of petro dollars and their dominance. There are the first cracks now visible in that dollar edifice, built on what became known as the "petro dollar". The Saudis for the first time have agreed to sell oil to China in exchange for Chinese currency (which will presumably be used to buy Chinese exports). This is similar to the India-Russia rupee ruble trade. In this Saudi oil sale in yuan to China deal takes off, then other countries may ask for similar treatment. This will surely shake the ground beneath the dollar's hegemony. We don't quite have a global currency, nor is there yet a viable alternative to the U.S. dollar. The world will collectively be worse off if we go back to a quasi-barter economy, by mutually exchanging each other's currency. But given current trends it looks like the dollar's undisputed status as "king" of the trading and invoicing world, is being challenged.

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

Letters to the Editor

Umiam bridge in danger!

Editor,
The Umiam bridge which is the lifeline of Shillong that has served and is still serving us beyond its life and age needs to be taken care of or else we are sure to meet with a catastrophe. Keeping in mind the importance of this bridge one fails to understand why governments both past and present are ignoring this most essential matter that will cripple and cut Shillong off from the rest of the country? Sadly, it is now true that politics is no longer a platform to serve the state and its people but a means to serve the self. Yet can our politicians be a little conscientious and for once gear themselves up to work for those who have got them to that seat in the government?

The Umiam bridge is aged and overworked. Doesn't it deserve care? If not for this lifeless bridge can't our legislators think of the condition of the people of the state in case any catastrophe occurs? How long will it then take for the people to be reconnected to the rest of the world? It is a known fact that the people of Shillong travel to Guwahati for medical treatment. In such circumstances, especially medical emergencies travelling via West Khasi Hills will be the

only way left but what about the number of hours that it will take? Here I'm reminded of the Umpling bridge that has been under construction for three years now and is yet to be functional. Well, that's the state of affairs in Meghalaya and that's the sad plight of the people. Be that as it may, one urges the present Government to create history by saving the Umiam bridge, and thereby save lives and save the state.

Yours etc.,
Jenniefer Dkhar,
Via email

Politics & Religion — a deadly mix

Editor,
What is most feared is the misconception of the faithfuls, especially the Presbyterians vis-à-vis the witty politicians who seem more emboldened to use religion as a cloak for their vices. This is now in full exhibition in Khanduli where gratitude was publicly expressed to the sitting MLA and upcoming candidate for the 2023 election, Sniawbhalang Dhar. Yes Presbyterians in doing this are ignorantly faultless, but sadly they never realise the bait dangled in from of them before the election. They publicly expressed gratitude for favours done when hat should have been confined

within the premise of that church. By doing so the church has willy-nilly made the battle-ground an unfair, unequal space candidates without money power cannot afford to contest elections.

Will religious leaders please put a halt to all these politico-religious connections for this is a sure way of demotivating those that want to save Meghalaya from the edge of the vertical precipice it is standing on now with no hope of rising but only the fear of plunging into a bottomless pit.

Large gatherings in the month of March every year are an advantage for politicians. These religious frills should not be allowed to become political platforms for mercenary politicians. These very same politicians have dragged behind the much-deserved progress, endeavour and stability of our wretched state by a century. Look at our roads, rivers with once potable water now beyond redemption, dumping places that have remained static for centuries since the era of night soil scavengers, and the eternal, almost unsolvable traffic snarls, borne with pain by the common citizens for far too long. Then there's illegal mining and transportation of coal hushed up with no enforcement in sight to put a full stop to this illegality. Leave religion alone for God's sake.

Yours etc.,
J. Kharmih
Via email

The Kashmir files

Editor,
While watching the recent movie The Kashmir files, several members of the audience could not help shedding tears. I was also one of them. Of course, I have wiped my tears dry, but the heart is still weeping. I also have viewed several video clippings going round in which members of the audience were overwhelmed with emotions. Some even sobbed hysterically, particularly those who had suffered or witnessed the cruelty and bloodshed in the early 1990s. How can one bear to see small kids and hapless mothers being shot dead in cold blood?

As the scenes in the movie haunted me, I prayed and threw my questions at God above. How on earth can so-called believers in a particular faith take the life of another human just because of a difference of faith? How can every chant of holy phrases spell disaster for others that don't belong to the faith? Is the pathway to God not strewn with flowers of compassion and love rather than the thorns of hatred and enmity? I am confused.

Is compassion for others and purity of heart not the

fundamental doctrine of all religions? Is the omniscient super-soul not approached with the hymn of devotion instead of the roar of bigotry? How can hurting the weak and hapless please any God? If it is so I will stop praying to God and also stop calling him the CREATOR. I rather prefer to die as an atheist with compassion than believing in God and nursing hatred for others.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong

Marital rape is rape

Editor,
There is a common misconception that after a man and a woman get married, the wife must be subservient to the husband. This is totally wrong. In married life, neither the husband nor the wife is superior or inferior to the other. Both of them have equal rights and autonomy. Also, there is an assumption that when the husband makes physical advances, the wife must surrender herself before him, whether she likes it or not. Similarly, orthodox people believe that a husband has the right to forcibly have sex with his wife and it is her duty not to resist it.

When rape charges are brought against husbands by wives, they are rejected by courts because accord-

ing to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code, if a wife is not under 18 years of age, sexual intercourse between the husband and wife is not rape. Although there have been demands from different sections of people that marital rape should be treated as rape, nothing much has been done. However, some judgements consider marital rape as a heinous crime and treat it as any other kind of rape.

Against this backdrop, the judgement of the Karnataka High Court assumes significance. The Court rejected the husband's plea and said, "a man is a man, a rape is a rape." True, the Court verdict is strong and unambiguous. In fact, this is an example of judiciary's intervention in law making when legislature fails in it. When legislature fails to deal with controversial social issues like marital rape, the judiciary does the job. It is a fact that Indian women are more likely to face sexual violence from their husbands than from others. Marital rape must be criminalised and the perpetrators must face legal consequences.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

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.

"Production is the only answer to inflation."

— Chester Bowles

The Shillong Times

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NEIGRIHMS orphaned

THE news that a premier medical institution meant to be of the standard of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), once acknowledged as a centre of excellence is now reduced to a state where its resident doctors have to buy water in tankers from private water vendors actually reflects poorly on Meghalaya the host state. It appears that the bore wells that once provided water have gone dry. The reasons for that are not far to seek. Denuded forests and unregulated drilling of bore-wells by private individuals will soon have a devastating effect on Meghalaya's aquifers. But other than the dwindling water supply, there are other issues plaguing NEIGRIHMS, such as the stagnation of tenure of doctors, prompting quite a good number of them to leave for greener pastures. The establishment of another AIIMS level hospital in Assam has meant the opening up of opportunities for many of the specialists and super-specialists. This is certainly not good news for NEIGRIHMS.

This premier health Institution has suffered from having directors with no vision and leadership qualities in the past. During their tenures the Institution was brought to its nadir. In a Healthcare Institution with research as a priority sector the Director is responsible not just for medical supervision and overall regulation of all medical facets that may affect the institutional healthcare system but also to drive research. Hence professionalism in healthcare facilities is a minimal requirement with no scope for compromises considering that healthcare is a matter of life or death. The Director cannot be burdened with the task of supervising the lower-level staff. This is the task of the administration. But with an engineer appointed as administrator the focus has been on construction work rather than managing human resources.

The Director of a Medical Institution is expected to nurture values such as respect, fairness, integrity, responsibility, mindfulness, and professionalism. These values have been eroded with the appointment of directors that have no understanding of the local cultural values. Some have instead imposed a cultural baggage they have brought with them from their previous positions. Hence it was that during the tenure of a particular director, any form of non-vegetarian cuisine was banned from the canteen menu. This matter was taken up by no less than a public representative of Meghalaya. With the appointment of Dr Nalin Mehta in September 2021, things have improved significantly but righting the wrongs of the past takes time and effort. However, considering that Meghalaya is the state where NEIGRIHMS is located, it is incumbent upon the State Government to be more proactive in providing the bare essentials to this premier Institution, water being one.

NEP 2020 and Globalisation of Indian Higher Education: Some Reflections

By Bhagirathi Panda

These days in academics, government and the larger society, the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) is being regularly discussed and analysed. One of the important objectives of the NEP 2020, particularly with respect to higher education, is to make it global. The question that arises is what does it mean to be global? In other words what are the evolving critical characteristics or elements that make a higher education system global? The next important question is, why do we need to make our higher education system global? This question essentially relates to the rationale and desirability of making our higher education arrangement global. If we could answer both these questions with confidence and relevance (which we have tried to do here in subsequent analyses), then naturally the third question pertains to the challenges that we would face in undertaking this exercise. Having identified the multiple challenges and analysed them in their contexts, we could then suggest some ways forward. However, all these four exercises, require a prelude in the form of understanding the current status of higher education in our country and identified regions with respect to some fundamental indicators.

We start with the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education. As per the report of All India Survey on Higher Education, 2020 (AISHE 2020), the GER in higher education (regular mode of education only) stands at 27.1% for the whole country as against USA's 88%, Germany's 70% and China's 54.4%. Within the country, when it comes to the North Eastern Region (NER), out of the eight states, five states viz. Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura are having GER lower than the national average. Another important indicator is Pupil-Teacher Ratio, which simply shows how many students are there per one teacher. Here, the Indian average is 29 as against USA's 12, Sweden's 12.1, Russia's 10.1 and China's 19.1. When it comes to the NER, again five states viz. Assam, Arunachal, Meghalaya, Tripura and Sikkim have pupil-teacher ratios that are worse than the national average. Accreditation is an important characteristic of global higher education. In the country less than 30% of our higher educational institutions are accredited, whereas at the global level in USA more than 90% of the tertiary educational institutions are accredited. Total number of foreign students enrolled in Indian higher educational institutions in 2020 was only 49,348. Majority of these enrolled students and scholars, come through bilateral exchange arrangements. Hardly 2-3% of them come

spending their own money. Research is an important component of global higher education. In our country for the last two decades the allocation in R&D has been hovering around 0.6-0.7% of GDP, against USA's 2.8%, China's 2.1%, Israel's 4.3% and South Korea's 4.2%. India has 216.2 researchers per 1 million inhabitants against 1,200 in China and 4,300 in the US. Total citations in the year 2018 for Indian research papers was 4.27 million against 66.45 million for USA and 19.35 million for China. During 2018, the number of research papers published by Indian scholars was 0.52 million, against 3.8 million for USA and 2.06

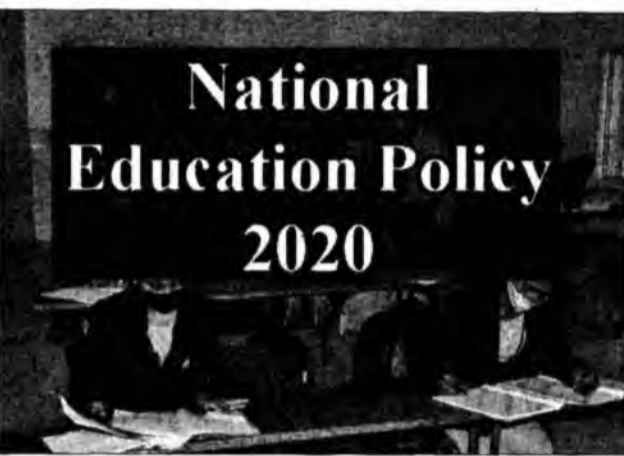
balising our higher education. We could see broadly two rationales here—the rationale of remaining relevant in the context of emergence of crucial macro global driving forces such as the arrival of the knowledge economy, competition, revolution in technology and declining public investment in higher education. The second is the powerful economic rationale of education as a service emerging as a key strategic reform and development agenda of many developed and emerging economies. When one looks at the global growth practice and strategy, one comes across a distinct pattern in the strategy of the developed countries and the

and economic rationales that we need to prepare ourselves to become a global power in export of educational services. This will not be possible unless we ensure the standard global practices and values in higher education. NEP 2020 therefore very rightly mentions internationalisation of our higher education system as one of its prime objectives. However, to realise this objective, we have a number of challenges to overcome. None of the universities and institutions from India are in the list of top two hundred universities in the world. This results in graduates with low employability, a common feature of higher education in India. We have to create world class physical infrastructure. Faculty shortage is a big setback. Faculty shortages and the inability of the state educational system to attract and retain well-qualified teachers have been posing challenges to quality education for many decades.

The profile of our faculties and students needs to be global. We continue with outdated and rigid curriculum mainly focused on imparting theoretical knowledge bereft of creativity. There exist huge gaps between industry requirements and what the higher educational institutions teach in terms of their curriculum. This needs to be taken care of. Pedagogy and assessment are focused on input and rote learning. We need to provide opportunities to students to develop a wider range of transversal skills, including critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving and collaborative working. The important tasks cut-out for us would be to promote global collaboration, ensure diversity and flexibility, establish peer to peer connect in teaching and research, encourage endowment culture, build in motivational and experiential learning, ensure increased public-private partnership and value proposition in our higher education.

The NEP 2020 stipulations on transforming the regulatory system of higher education by establishing four verticals having distinct functions of regulation, accreditation, funding, and academic standard setting; establishing of a National Research Foundation (NRF) and creating more multidisciplinary universities and colleges are steps in the right direction. Globalisation of Indian higher education is fundamentally about benchmarking global quality, infrastructure, institutions and practices along with the unique Indianness in our higher education arrangement. This requires serious partnership with government, academia, market, community and civil society. Are we ready for it?

(The author teaches at the department of economics, NEHU. He can be reached out at bhagirathi2@yahoo.co.in)



million for China.

With this prelude in mind, let us examine the critical elements of global higher educational system including the changing prototypes. Global education system in terms of its practice is marked by competition among students, presence of global students and faculty, autonomy and accreditation, ranking, multidisciplinary learning and research, collaboration with global institutions, public-private partnership, credit transfers and employability. In terms of its content and pedagogy, it provides for multidisciplinary learning and research, better connect between theory and empirics, peer to peer connect, curriculum linked to societal problem solving, experiential learning and continuous and comprehensive real-time assessment. The changing prototypes include (i) the student and teacher being replaced by learner and mentor, (ii) fixed time teaching being replaced by teaching on demand, (iii) provision of reading materials by the teacher being replaced by mapping learning outcomes, (iv) one time training being replaced by life long training through skill formation and (v) one time learning being replaced by lifelong opportunity. When we compare our present state of higher education with these benchmarked characteristics, we do find some of them are non-existent and some of them are sub-optimal.

Let us now answer the question relating to the imperative and rationale of glo-

same is also being adopted by emerging economies such as China. Industrial revolution brought in huge economic gains to western Europe and the manufacturing sector contributed the lion's share of the GDPs of many of the European countries in the eighteenth and early and mid-twentieth century. Subsequently rise in labour cost of production in these economies led to shift in world manufacturing base from western Europe to countries and regions such as USA, Japan, South East Asia including South Korea and China in that order. Europe and USA thus started compensating their loss in manufacturing by exporting services such as finance and insurance, tourism and recently education. During the year 2019-20, USA's economy received \$38.96 billion in exporting education services leading to creation of over 415,990 U.S. jobs. Of late, China has started aggressively exporting education services, once it realised that its competitiveness in manufacturing may not continue long. And in this direction it has undertaken complete revamp of its higher education landscape trying to make it world class by benchmarking global practices and attributes. Recently (before Covid-19) there has been an increase in the number of Indian students going to China for higher education. Currently, there are more than 15,000 Indian students who are pursuing tertiary education in China.

It is against the background of both the relevance

High Fuel Prices

Subsidies vital, check prices

By Shivaji Sarkar

The country needs a new approach on prices, taxes and issues of progress. It wants to control prices as often the leaders proclaim and then go on increasing every bit that is under the administrative control. India must rethink introducing fuel subsidies to boost manufacturing and other activities that could bring more revenue to the nation's kitty. Cut in prices to generate more manufactured goods sales and revenues.

Post-poll, fuel prices are rising almost 85 to 90 paise a day on the plea of rising crude prices. But the companies did not reduce prices when crude prices crashed to a virtual zero during the pandemic. The high fuel prices have stoked inflation as transport prices spiral making goods and commodities expensive when the people need relief.

The administration says that the petroleum companies decide the prices but despite supposed 'genuine' needs they freeze prices for over a month during elections. It may be a coincidence but that is repeated poll to poll.

True that the Ukrainian situation has put the country in a difficult situation but wisely it could firm up an agreement with Russia for continued fuel supply. That is prudent though was not easy in an era of US-led sanctions. The balancing act is possible because of India's moral authority under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the corps of diplomats.

The world can see that Sri Lanka has failed in do-

cane growers. This apart ethanol is not supposed to be engine-friendly with its high moisture.

The Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2021 on which battery recharging is to be based would make coal and power dearer. Besides, more use of batteries will lead to higher coal generated power production causing heavy emission pollution and spike power rates. Power workers are planning two-day strike shortly against the bill as it encourages privatisation.

In the months leading up to the Covid-19 pandemic, US oil production hit an all-time high of just below 13 million barrels per day (BPD). As the pandemic unfolded, demand collapsed, and production followed. By May 2020, oil production had dropped by more than 3 million BPD to 9.7 million BPD.

India's domestic crude oil production has steadily decreased in recent years. In 2013-14, Indian companies produced 37.8 million tonnes of crude oil and condensate. That dropped to 32.2 million tonnes in 2019-20, a sharp slide of 15 per cent. India produced 35.68 MTs of crude petroleum in 2017-18.

During the last over 15 years it was noticed that as petrol prices rise, the economy gets into a spin. Under the World Bank and IMF pressure India gave up subsidies causing immense harm to the poor, middle and small enterprises, prices of commodities. A little subsidy, not direct benefit helps every section of the society.



ing it and again Indian Oil has to come to its rescue by continuing fuel supplies and keep running its power plants. Sri Lanka is in deep economic crisis. Rice is being sold there for Rs 500 a kg and all commodity prices are soaring. Inflation spikes to 14 per cent. India has over 13 per cent wholesale and 6 per cent retail inflation. Income level in India is either thawed or post-covid at a low level. Lanka got into the crisis as it deliberately chose to go into Chinese orbit to keep off India. Its main foreign exchange reserves shrunk due to reckless borrowings from China to finance infrastructure projects, according to Hong Kong Post.

Successful governments in India have been using petroleum as a tax-spinner forgetting that even a paise hike on petrol has cascading effects on the entire economy. Since the UPA times the economy is dependent on taxes on fuel leading to its collapse to 'mahngai dain'. The successive administration should have learnt and corrected it. The problem accelerated as domestic production plummeted to around 20 per cent and dependence on imports increased causing the rupee to slide beyond Rs 76.

It has led to overall price spiral. Wholesale and retail prices are going beyond the toleration level. Sunflower oil jumps by 20 per cent to Rs 182, soya oil sells at Rs 162, dearer by 10 per cent; and palm oil Rs 151.80 dearer by 13.65 per cent. Mustard oil, wheat, rice, pulses rise by over two per cent. Textiles and other commodities are also becoming dearer.

Alternate fuel like ethanol, processed largely from sugarcane, is being proposed for mixing with petrol. It is likely to make sugar expensive. It is a myth that it would sell cheap. Processing cost is high. Ethanol production can, according to US studies, cause air, water pollution, soil erosion and habitat loss. It is being seen to benefit Maharashtra

Small hair cut is always preferable than its total loss. It is a myth that India has a rich class of people and the middle class is able to fend for itself.

There is nothing like a middle class, except that it is slightly above the poverty level. A bumpy situation hits it hard. Overall subsidies benefit a larger population and help the economy keep prices under check. The nation unfortunately continued with the policies of Manmohan Singh instead of correcting it.

India needs to understand the Lankan stress on infra that drained its resources. India must go slow on infra now. Infrastructure builds expensive assets with a higher recurring expenditure that stresses the economy severely. Had it conserved its reserves, put off expensive infrastructure projects, Lanka could have avoided getting into the mess. Increased money supply, infra investments and depreciation of the rupee stoked inflation there.

The Ukrainian situation has disturbed the oil supplies across the world. India has hedged it for now with the promise of Russian supplies. World leaders could have influenced Russian leader Vladimir Putin to put cease of Ukraine and not go into a full-fledged war. Today, it has put Europe into a tinder box. For the folly of the NATO and European countries, poor countries like India suffer the most.

The symptoms of Lankan and Indian economy are not different except that India has the capacity and the size to sustain which Lanka does not have. It would be prudent on the part of India to reintroduce subsidies on petrol as alternate energy is yet not available. It would change the dynamics of economy, generate more revenue and can do better if infra is put in the backburner and manufacturing is boosted to give the economy a kick-start. ---INFA

Letters to the Editor

Inquiry won't save one precious year

Editor

While thanking the NGOs of Garo Hills for their deep concern for the 15 students who could not appear for their SSLC owing to their not being issued admit cards by the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE), and because of which an inquiry is being conducted by the Deputy Commissioner, West Garo Hills, it is important that the students do not miss an academic year. The poor students devastated by the school's/MBOSE's callousness still have a good chance to appear in the remaining subjects. We are reminded of a similar case that happened with NEET 2021 where two girls were given two mismatched papers - Answer Paper (P) and the Test Paper (Q). The girls brought that to the notice of the two invigilators, who instead of

correcting their mistakes, shouted at the girls and even threatened them with stern action as they 'disturbed' the ongoing examination.

The girls approached the Mumbai High Court which at once ordered the National Testing Agency) to reconduct examination within 48 hours announcement and for the results to be immediately announced. The delay of two weeks for the NEET result to appear was due to this case.

If justice was served to two examinees in Mumbai for an all-India examination we see no reason why our 15 students should miss one precious year for no fault of theirs. And only one paper was missed, so if urgency is observed, the 15 students could appear in the remaining papers to save whole re-examination process. I request the NGOs of Garo Hills and Khasi and Jaintia Hills to unite to fight this case in the High Court if need be. The urgency is not in the inquiry but on how not to miss one academic year.

Yours etc.,
W. Passah,
Via email

A humanitarian gesture!

Editor,

No kudos is enough for the Russian journalist and 2021 Nobel Peace laureate Dmitry Muratov for his decision to donate his Nobel medal for auction so as to raise funds for the Ukrainian refugees. We are all aware how the minimum voice of protest --- be it a peaceful slogan shouting or simple inscription of "NO WAR" --- are being tamed with an iron hand in Russia with even children, women or senior citizens not being spared from detention, imprisonment and severe punishment. Muratov is editor-in-chief of The Novaya Gazeta newspaper which was already facing the ire of Kremlin for a long time for daring to criticise the policies of the State or

Vladimir Putin. Now in these times of "Special Military Operations" (actually barbaric unilateral aggression) with all sane countries of the world providing all forms of support to the brutally-attacked Ukraine; the "super-sensitive" Russian State is in no mood to view "dissent" from the lens of forgiveness. So Muratov is well aware of the severe consequences he might have to encounter, thanks to his unique sacrifice of even the prized Nobel medal drawing international attention. Yet he has not hesitated to take this extreme step despite residing in Russia and thereby endangering his freedom, safety, career, future and even life just to respond to his Call of Conscience and offer financial/moral assistance to the assaulted people of foreign vintage i.e. the Ukrainian refugees!

Dmitry Muratov has practically proved through sheer action that humanity is infinite times greater than blind rabid "nationalism"!

So instead of uttering zealous rhetoric of "My Russia is Great" and supporting the aggression akin to the dark medieval ages, Muratov can protest against his very own (in terms of mere passport) so as to embrace God's own i.e. human beings of the world (that too persecuted) by transcending the narrow definition of "Nation".

Javed Akhtar while attending the Kolkata Literary Meet, sang peans of Urdu and its evolving secular literature and Indian credentials surpassing all divides of Hinduism and Islam. On the other hand, Akhtar also stressed "Languages belong to regions, not religions. Ten crore Muslims (of erstwhile East Pakistan) told seven crore Muslims (of erstwhile West Pakistan) that we will not learn Urdu at the cost of Bengali. I love Urdu the way you love Bengali but I respect and salute those people who defended Bengali. For them, that was their mother-tongue, which was far more important than their

religion." Unfortunately, the harbingers of "Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan" are not only hell bent on according "Islamic" stamp upon Urdu, but also dare to impose Hindi upon multi-lingual democratic India in the name of "national integrity"!

How many people raise their voice to speak up for the "alien" victims when the perpetrators of violence are of their own national or linguistic stock? Herein lies the special significance and greatness of the thought process of Muratov and Akhtar! Let people of all demographic credentials equally bloom and prosper in God's borderless world with mutual respect and love.

Yours etc.,
Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata

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

"Failure is not a single, cataclysmic event. You don't fail overnight. Instead, failure is a few errors in judgement, repeated every day."

— Jim Rohn

The Shillong Times

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India after 2024

TWO years is a long time when it comes to new winds blowing in national politics. Yet, the fact is also that time is running short for the Modi-led central government. It has just two years left before the next parliament elections are called in 2024. When Modi started his innings in 2014, he had said he aimed at two terms in office. The people granted him a second term too with a thumping majority in Parliament to enable him to change the fate of India for the better. The Covid pandemic came as an excuse for the loss of steam for Modi's performance in his second term. The reality is that India has not changed in any significant way in the two terms of the Modi government.

Questions have begun to be raised about the future course of politics in the run-up to the 2024 general elections. The fact on the ground, now, is that the BJP has grown itself into an unassailable political force, a view reinforced by the results of the five-state assembly polls. Four states went into its kitty with the lone exception of Punjab. The mood is palpably downbeat not just in the Congress but also in the camps of regional chiefs Mamata Banerjee and Chandrashekar Rao, who at different levels were hoping to unseat Modi and grab the gaddi in Delhi. This takes the nation to the question as to the likely complexion of the next central government. A year after 2024, Modi would cross the age bar of 75 he set for BJP leaders to be holding positions in public life. He had prescribed a Margdarshak Mandal for those leaders who crossed this bar, to which were packed off veterans like LK Advani, MM Joshi and Jaswant Singh in 2014. By the same token, a similar fate might await Modi too. This however is not to say that Modi is reaching his political expiry date. He could still bring votes to BJP by loose invocations of the nation's poor, the way Indira Gandhi courted or fooled such large segments of the population.

It would be premature to hazard a guess as to who could, in the event, fill the PM shoes for the BJP after the 2024 polls. Curiously, in the reckoning in the national capital's discussion circuits this week is a new name, Yogi Adityanath, who took charge as UP CM for a second term. This is not to ignore the veterans in Modi's own team, but to stress that the wind could blow in a different direction too.

Case of the Mawhati MLA & our collective response

By Albert Thyrianiang

In 2018 in an election rally in Mawhati Dasakhiatbha Lamare, the then NPP candidate ridiculed his rivals for saying that he would plant pumpkins in Ri Bhoi and then flee to Jaintia Hills. Lamare then promised the crowd that he would work tirelessly for Mawhati. Four years later the warning of his opponents has come true. The second richest MLA with over Rs 40 crore worth of assets, second only to Metbah Lyngdoh with Rs 87 crore, has abandoned the constituency which sent him to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly for the first time. Only that the Transport and Public Works Department (Buildings) minister has not escaped to his place of origin but to Nongkrem in East Khasi Hills. The Class 12 passed legislator, who recently made news for being North East's first owner of the super luxury car, Lamborghini whose stunning red hue attracted the gaze of passers-by in Shillong streets, announced his decision recently while hosting a football match in Powlakrai.

The owner of 15 vehicles, excluding the latest possession, Lamborghini but including a BMW and a Fortuner explained the reasons for his migration to Nongkrem. He said Mawhati is too far from Shillong. As an MLA and a minister he is stuck in the capital working for his constituency. This forced him to be away from his voters. So he prudently decided to shift to Nongkrem which is closer to Shillong and will enable him to work for the constituency. That was the honourable MLA's explanation. He also admitted that Mawhati is too big for him to serve satisfactorily.

This writer spoke to a few voters of Mawhati. They tell a different story. They reveal that the 'real' reason for the escape is because he was unable to fulfil the promises made for the constituency, particularly the failure to repair the existing wretched roads and to construct new ones. A visibly perturbed voter said that Lamare was elected on the basis of generous promises that he would black-top the roads through his road construction company even prior to sanction from the state government. Another one pointed out that the main election assurance was to convert the Umsning-Jagiroad road into a two-laned highway. A voter who invited the scribe to visit his village says the ride from

Umsning to Umsiang is akin to "shong kali kulai" (a horse ride). Today, neither have the roads been repaired nor the construction of the UJ road commenced. Fearing the wrath of the people in 2023 the 29 year young representative has run away to Nongkrem. His Lamborghini can travel to Nongkrem and not in Mawhati area.

Two weeks ago the minister met the Mawhati NPP workers and informed them that the works for 80 km UJ road would start soon. He blamed the World Bank rules for the delay. Accepting his failure he asked pardon from his electorate. Anticipating a backlash, the four year old MLA took resort to flimsy excuses. People term his action a betrayal. When pointed out the reason the minister is trumpeting, a former supporter asked, "Did the MLA not know that Mawhati is far from Shillong before contesting? Did he not know that Mawhati is a big constituency?"

Now the test is on Nongkrem. What will be the voters' response? Will they welcome him? Will they research into the reasons for the eastward transfer? Will they entertain his explanation? Will they be awestruck by the same promises that were broken in Mawhati? Will they trust a man who has orphaned his own 'child' halfway? Will Nongkrem learn from the bitter experience of Mawhati? Will Nongkrem select someone whom Mawhati will probably reject? Will the electorate vote on the basis of good leadership? Will they vote on principles? Or will they be tempted by wealth and money for votes?

Lamare's challengers will include Ardent Basak, the architect of the new political party, 'Voice of the People Party' (VPP) besides others. The November 2021 born party has been harping on bringing in 'real change', clean and transparent governance. It is a new brand of politics — something like the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) only that the Kejriwal party had the huge advantage of the Anna Hazare movement against the then highly perceived corrupt UPA government in 2012. For VPP there is no high profile protest to capitalise on. APP, an alternative to the both the BJP and the Congress, captured power in Delhi in its electoral debut in 2013. Recently it tasted victory in Punjab. Will VPP have the same fairy tale? The focus of attention for the youngest

political entity will be Nongkrem. Will the narrative of Basaiawmoit who collects donations in buckets from supporters be successful? Or will the financial muscle of the likes of Dasakhiatbha Lamare ultimately triumph? If Basaiawmoit loses in Nongkrem not only will VPP's existence be in doubt but also the storyline of a new politics will be lost without taking off.

VPP has identified 15 impressive names for the 2023 elections that include university lecturers, college professors and reverends. But will VPP come up with a vision and road map for the state? Will it have a short-term and long-term plan? Or will the party speak in general terms like other parties? Will the above novices be able to galvanise the more than 17.68 lakh voters in the state? Will they succeed in changing the political discourse to critical issues, performance and policies? Will they compel parties and candidates to keep pace with their 'progressive' thought? Will VPP lead the way so that people see illegal coal and scams as issue of real concerns? Will VPP make a dent in the political consciousness?

Illegal rat-hole mining and transportation has dogged the state all throughout the reign of the MDA government. Tragedies, notably at Ksan in December 2018 that killed 15 miners, at Sorkari in January 2021 that devoured six labourers and this month at Nengchigen that slayed two persons, have occurred. Activists were killed and attacked, coal loaded trucks were seized; the government was fined by NGT. FIRs were filed, proofs were documented and the matter discussed in the Assembly. But the government took it lightly to institute no independent inquiry. The Meghalaya High Court had to step in through its suo moto case impacted by reports on Nengchigen's illegal mining.

Alleged corruption includes the education scam, 'multi-crore MeECL scams, the food grain scam and even COVID-19 scam. Adding to these are the 'job' scams in different departments that have been obtained via RTI. Now, the forefront electoral discourses in 2023 should be on this mis-governance. But will that happen? Irregularities and lawlessness we have witnessed in the last 4 years and more should decide the outcome of winners and losers. But will they be? Will

hardships of ASHA and teachers be a consideration? Will winnability (whatever that means) be the usual deciding factor? Will money power still be the predominant dynamic? Will VPP at least initiate a new trend different from the past?

We may go into the next election bereft of good political leadership. The NPP has Conrad Sangma. The TMC has Mukul Sangma, the former two-time chief minister. The Congress has none as of now. All MLAs have deserted the state's chief, Vincent Pala. We don't even know whether he will contest in 2023. The UDP has many equals but none above the rest. The other regional parties are of lesser stature. Except the chief minister, his deputy Prestone Tynsong, Lakmen Rymbui and James Sangma, other ministers are obscure. They don't even answer questions in the Assembly. When they do answer, they make a mess of it.

Should we talk of some individuals? Prestone Tynsong is a senior minister and a four-time MLA. He was a chief minister hopeful in the last election. He could assume the same aspiration in the next election too. But what is his vision for the state. What has been his unique contribution? Is he a state figure? He is known more for his humour at gatherings. He does not keep his tongue in check. He bragged about beating up non-tribals in his youth; asked the activist Angela Rangad to train in MATI, advised citizens to be vegetarians and threatened taxi drivers of ignoring them in favour of others.

AL Hek is another veteran. He has been a minister non-stop until recently when he lost his chair to Sanbor Shulai. He is known more for shifting alliances between the two diametrically different parties, the Congress and the BJP. Besides being helpful to people what are his key initiatives as MLA? What is his dream for the state?

These questions creep up because it looks like there is a huge political leadership deficit in the state. A quick glance confirms this crisis. Will good leaders emerge post 2023? Will the VPP throw up leaders with a difference? Will the new faces of the Congress provide the solution? Or will any other source fill in the gap? Political parties propose names but it is we who are the bosses. Will Nongkrem be a fit example for a case study as to what kind of leaders we elect?

albert.thyrianiang74@gmail.com

Move for a dedicated Indian Environment Services within Civil Services

Centre has to take a decision after a review of all aspects

By Harsh Mahaseth and Gauri Goel

The discourse that arose in the Supreme Court in January this year about the creation of an Indian Environment Services has its origins in a report by a high-level committee that was headed by former Cabinet Secretary T.S.R. Subramanian. The committee was established in August 2014 to suggest amendments to six laws related to the environment. The committee in its report tried to balance the imperatives of development that cause the least damage to the environment. To formulate the report, the committee had consulted with related stakeholders.

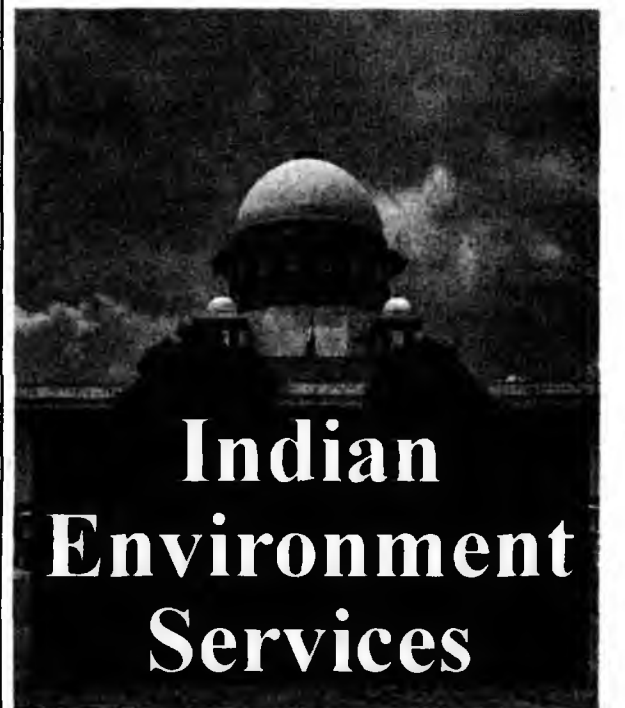
The report recommended another leg of the All India Service relating to environment management for approval of environmental projects, one at the union level and the other at the state level. The National Green Tribunal was given the role of judicial review over them.

There were a lot of concerns on the report, but the intention of the report was to create an instrument for remove the crutches given to corrupt administrators through the environment laws.

ay's notion of generalised work done by one official; however the modern era, based on a socio-economic model of high specialisation, cannot survive on this.

The IAS is filled with people without the requisite specialized skills and qualifications to successfully accomplish their tasks. The exam for recruitment, even though highly difficult, is generalised by the choice of two subjects and one common general knowledge section. The best officers sometimes end up doing jobs that they are not trained in. This does not mean that we do not find good administrators, but that it is not the norm of the industry. This was lamented by the PM when he posed the question "Can babus do everything?" (babu is a euphemism for bureaucrats). There was a proposed functional field for specialisation that was recommended in 1970 by India's first Administrative Reforms Commission, but like the Subramanian Committee suggestions, it was never implemented in full.

There is need of an active bureaucracy for the implementation of environment policy. These administrators



Indian Environment Services

A parliament standing committee on July 2015 in Raja Sabha rejected the recommendation of the report on the grounds that the present legal framework and architecture that was created to protect the environment would be weakened through its implementation. Even though it was rejected, it brought to light the grave scenario of environmental governance, and the need for better implementation on the ground of laws that seemingly just exist on paper. The union government did not constitute another committee, as suggested by the standing committee, for the laws.

It did in time implement a few suggestions of the committee that were related to specific laws, but not the ones that change the whole administration and management relating to the implementation of environment laws. It has since been simplifying laws which were under a lot of scrutiny from environmental groups, showing that the government was not entirely opposed to the recommendations.

The criticisms of the Indian bureaucracy as echoed by the Indian Prime Minister (PM) in his speech to the Lok Sabha in 2021 supports the suggestion of a specialised service for environment in the Indian Administrative Service [IAS]. The IAS is generalised to do all the tasks relating to even niche branches of administrations, wherein a graduate can take policy decisions related to subjects such as defence and aerospace. The IAS were founded on the colonial government's Council of India's law member T.B. Macaul-

need to be aware of their responsibility, which can be made effective if a service dedicated to the environment is created. The challenge of climate change would then be able to be effectively approached through the bureaucracy.

The discourse on the possibility of a new environment service has restarted again after the public interest litigation filed by advocate Samar Vijay Singh before the Supreme Court. He wants the recommendation of the Subramanian committee to be implemented into the law. His argument relates to the problem of effective coordination amongst the ministries, and the lack of trained personnel in the administration regarding environmental policies. His petition further stated that even though India possesses a comprehensive policy framework, its implementation has not come to fruition. Moreover, it has sought for setting up of an academy to train officers for the administration.

However, the new Indian Environment Service may overlap with the existing Indian Forest Service, and could challenge the federal structure of the civil services. The Supreme Court expressed that such a policy decision is out of the hands of the judiciary, and needed to be handled by the government. It did send an inquiry on the issue of whether the government is proposing to go with the recommendations of the committee or not. It remains to be seen how and when the union government responds to the same. (IPA Service) Courtesy: The Leaflet

Letters to the Editor

Change a pipe dream in Meghalaya politics

Editor,

With political aspirants flocking towards the NPP in droves, the Party could well get an absolute majority in 2023. That would give the NPP complete liberty to rule Meghalaya the way it wants to. The UDP is unlikely to win too many seats; so too the PDF and HSPDP. According to the local grapevine some from the PDF and even the BJP too may join the NPP. For the BJP MLAs it's easier to convince people to vote for NPP instead of having to explain to voters that BJP is not anti-Christian; or anti-beef or anti-church. In the 2023 elections there might not be a single BJP MLA elected. No one is talking about the BJP now. The NPP is the most coveted Party. It's almost as if they have woven a magic web.

After the Assembly sessions the TMC MLAs have gone into hibernation. Naturally they must be busy enrolling members but we don't hear of too many want-

ing to join the TMC to fight the next elections. This is a Party with baggage. After seeing the fisticuffs between the TMC and BJP MLAs in the Assembly one begins to wonder if a similar situation of violence and mayhem will erupt in Meghalaya too. Hopefully not, since it is not common in the tribal culture for adults, who are supposedly leaders to have physical fights in the Assembly.

Personally I am unsure how many seats the TMC will get in Meghalaya but I am sure they won't be able to make a dent in Meghalaya politics. The Congress is already ready out in the cold unless the newly joined members fight and win elections which is doubtful. So, the road is clear for the NPP to make a re-entry into Meghalaya politics. The only question that remains is who will be the next CM? Will it be Conrad Sangma yet again or Prestone Tynsong? Or will it be the man from Jaintia Hills, Sniawbhalang Dhar? In case the last one becomes the next CM, Meghalaya will be a full-fledged Corporation and all of us citizens will be its labourers who will work towards ensuring that maximum profits accrue to the Chairman and Managing Director of the Corporation.

Would that not be nice especially if each Meghalaya has a job no matter even if it is just sweeping the courtyards of the Company? At least there won't be any unemployment in Meghalaya beginning 2023 March!

Yours etc.,
KL Nonglait,
Via email

Peace hath her victories no less than war

Editor,

Apropos of the letter, "A humanitarian gesture" by Kajal Chatterjee, (ST March 29, 2022) it is one of the greatest humanitarian gestures from someone who FR

Powell describes in his poem as, "They are slaves who fear to speak / For the fallen and the weak / They are slaves who dare not choose / Scoffing anger and abuse /

Rather in silence shrink / From the truth they needs must think / They are slaves who dare not be / In the right with two or three.

The man is Dimitri Muratov, the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize winner. He has donated the medal for auction to help

the millions of refugees comprising women young and old, men above fighting age, children, and babies, all who unfortunately have turned refugees overnight when a man who is out of his senses and bereft of human instincts, suddenly turned berserk and declared war on Ukraine.

That noble gesture had drowned out a major chunk of pain from all those who still have even an ounce of humanity left; those who witness daily the horrifying scenes of the consequences that have propped out of the man who had violated all the rules of the Geneva Convention and International Human Rights.

Our prayers go out for Volodymyr Zelenski and the people of Ukraine and the spirited fighters who love their motherland. "Dulce et decorum pro patria mori" in English "Sweet and dignified to die for the motherland." Let us forget all the war correspondents, with just a life jacket, they are the ones who expose the horrifying nature of the war. We wish those who lost their lives to rest in eternal peace.

Let us also gather enough strength and courage to not sit on the fence when we have to make a choice between good and evil!

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem
Shillong -14

Futile strike by trade unionists

Editor,
The all-India strike on March 28 and 29 called by some trade unions citing the Narendra Modi government's policies which are affecting workers, farmers and people, has hit normal life in many states in the country. There is no denying the fact that trade unions have the right to protest over unacceptable policies of the government. On the other hand, it is not right to force people to observe the strike against their will. People have the right to join or not to join the strike. Those who do not cooperate with the strike must not be ill-treated or coerced into joining the strike.

Protests and strikes are an integral part of a democracy. People have the right to express their opinions against unacceptable policies and speak out against wrong decisions of the government. However, the ways of conducting such strikes must not

cause hardships to people. Shut-downs and keeping vehicles off the road for 48 hours will adversely affect normal life. While a section of the people working in the organised sector may enjoy two days off work, those who are in the unorganised sector, labourers and daily wagers will suffer a lot due to it.

The unionists who organise such strikes must realise the futility of such striking methods. They must wake up to reality and devise striking methods that are not against people's interests. It must be understood that such strikes will have an impact on the already flagging economy which is just slowly recovering. Enforcing shutdown at this time is irresponsible and irrational. Instead of resorting to such protest methods, trade unionists must work unitedly for employees' welfare. They must strive to improve the status of their lives.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

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

"Dreams are real as long as they last.
Can we say more of life?"

— Havelock Ellis

The Shillong Times

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Enquiry report into MeECL affairs

FINALLY the enquiry into various charges pertaining to the MeECL affairs is complete. The Committee has submitted its report to the State Chief Minister. As per the Commission of Enquiry Act 1952, an Enquiry Commission is appointed by the State or Central Government to gather data or facts regarding a specific matter of public importance. In the case of the MeECL the demand for enquiry by the Opposition Congress since 2020 is with regards to the implementation of smart meters which allegedly were of Chinese make and did not meet the specifications as mandated by the Central Electricity Authority, Government of India. The terms of reference of the Enquiry Committee into the MeECL affairs included amongst others (a) to inquire into, record findings and make recommendations concerning procurement; AT&C losses; human resources management aspects of functioning of MeECL and its subsidiary companies viz., Meghalaya Power Generation Corporation Ltd (MePGCL), Meghalaya Power Transmission Corporation Ltd (MePTCL) and Meghalaya Power Distribution Corporation Ltd (MePDCL).

The Committee comprised the former director, Rural Electrification Corporation who is also the Technical Member of the Committee, Retired Justice RN Mishra (Chairman) and Manoj Kumar (IAS retired) who is the Administrative member. The enquiry into the MeECL is termed "independent" but how can any enquiry paid from the public exchequer ever be fair and independent and not in favour of the Government which is a majority shareholder in the Power Corporation? Enquiry Commissions/Committees are by nature problematic. Since the time that Meghalaya came into existence several such Committees were instituted to look into cases of encounter killings such as the one at Nongshiliang which was headed by senior Supreme Court advocate KTS Tulsi and later the cold-blooded killing of Fullmoon Dhar which also was headed by Tulsi. Much money was spent but the Committee failed to indict any police personnel or to term the incidents as fake encounters. In the end it's a needless waste of public resources.

As per the Commission of Enquiry Act, the findings need not be made public but they can be acquired through the Right to Information (RTI). In the past too a Commission of Enquiry was set up to fix responsibility on the shooting incidents at Tura and Williamnagar in September 2005 where four and five protestors respectively were shot by police while demonstrating on the MBOSE issue. The final enquiry report came in 2007, two years after the incident and no one was indicted. If a report is submitted to the Government and not made public it would be futile to assume that the same Government would indict itself. Enquiry Committees therefore are a wild goose chase meant to cool public tempers, knowing fully well that public memory is short.

Mei-Ramew Café: A vehicle to promote NUS (Neglected and Underutilized Species)

Bhogtoram Mawroh and Janak Preet Singh

Currently, 75 percent of the world's food is generated from only 12 plants and five animal species despite around 250,000 to 300,000 known edible plant species in the world and 150 to 200 species already being used by humans for food. An implication of this increasing homogenization has been the continued marginalization of what are known as NUS or Neglected and Underutilized Species, many of which are highly nutritious and have great potential for adaptation to climate change. According to Stefano Padulosi, Phrag Roy and Francisco J. Rosado-May in their 2019 report 'Supporting Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture through Neglected and Underutilized Species - Operational Framework' the term NUS was firstly developed by the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute/IPGRI (predecessor of Bioversity International) to refer to plant species (wild, or semi- or fully domesticated) left at the margins of R&D. 'Neglected' underlines the low level of research investments made on them when compared with mainstream commodity crops, whereas 'underutilized' alludes to their untapped livelihood potential. In Meghalaya, these refer to the many traditional food plants (both wild and cultivated) that are found to be part of the Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems but have become marginalized over the years.

The 2018 participatory mapping exercise cum Dietary Diversity Score (DDS) Survey undertaken by NES-FAS/North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society in 32 villages of Meghalaya and Nagaland revealed that while the local indigenous communities still harbour a great deal of agrobiodiversity – an average of more than 200 food plants per village, the dietary diversity was very low, i.e., daily diet was homogenous and lack many food groups, especially food rich in micronutrients. This could have devastating repercussions for the food security and food sovereignty of the communities apart from making them highly vulnerable to climate change. To counter these threats, making NUS or traditional food plants (which includes wild edibles) part of the general narrative is an important strategy. These food plants are an integral part of local cultures and are increasingly in the spotlight of efforts for revitalizing local traditional food cultures. In this regard the efforts of Ms Plantina Mujai and Ms Dial Mukhtieh to promote traditional Bhoi-Khasi cuisines through their Mei-Ramew Cafés are highly noteworthy.

The Mei-Ramew Café is an indigenous café and a community owned food enterprise promoted by NES-FAS that serves local food and encourages innovation in

local recipes with maximum use of locally available ingredients. Plantina and Dial are residents of Khweng (a village in the Bhoirombong C & RD Block) and have been running their own food shops for many years now. Plantina, the senior of the two, began cooking and serving food in 1992. Initially the shop was located at the spot where people from Mynri (a neighbouring village) would gather with their polo (bamboo baskets). With the coming of the road, she shifted her shop to the present location, near the taxi stop. In spite of changing the location, customers continue to come to her shop because they enjoy the traditional dishes made from local ingredients. Dial initially entered the food business by preparing food at home and selling it to the

tradition of the Khasis, it was the grandmothers who taught Kong Plantina and Kong Dial to cook traditional dishes. When she was 13 years old, Kong Plantina had gone to stay with her grandmother in Syntiewmaw, her ancestral village. It was here that her grandmother taught her to cook traditional dishes and collect wild foods from the forest. Similarly, Dial was taught to cook by her grandmother who was known to be an excellent cook in the village. However, with age, her eyesight began failing and she could teach her granddaughter only through instructions. Impressed by the cooking her grandmother encouraged Dial to start her own food shop. In a manner, the respective Mei-Ramew Cafés are homage to their grandmothers who had



other shops and households in the village. But when she got married, she decided to set up her own food shop.

While both Plantina and Dial are now cooking and serving exclusively traditional foods, they did not begin as such. Plantina's first business was getting goods from the village to sell in the market and the other way round. In those days, barter was the main mode of transaction. People from the community would bring local rice and in return she would give them the vegetables and charcoal she had got from the market. Sometimes she would also bring rice from the market to sell in the village. Gradually, she veered towards the food business which she has been continuing since. Kong Dial, on the other hand, began with the food business but was selling both traditional and non-traditional snacks like samosas, long, momo etc., for which she got the training from RRTC (Rural Resource and Training Centre), Uman. With NESFAS' intervention, she shifted her menu to more local centric food. She now serves traditional foods exclusively.

True to the matriarchal

passed the baton of tradition to their granddaughters.

Though both Plantina and Dial are adept at traditional Bhoi-Khasi cuisines, they have been making innovations in order to add variety to the menu and cater to the demand of their customers. In the past, wild edibles would be cooked only with ktung (dry fish). Now, Plantina serves them with pork and taro. Recently, she has started preparing and selling ice cream made of jajew (Roselle - Begonia spp.), tamarind and soh shang (wild olive or bastard oleaster). Similarly, in order to make phadieng (tapioca) more palatable to her children, Dial came up with the idea of a phadieng cake during one Christmas which subsequently became quite popular in the village as well. She is also skilled with cooking in bamboo tubes known as tyndong. The mushroom rice prepared by Plantina and Dial are out of this world. Over the years, both have made more than dozens of such innovations.

One of the important ingredients in all the dishes that Plantina and Dial prepare are wild edibles, gathered from the home gardens, paddy

fields and the forest. The report 'Supporting Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture through Neglected and Underutilized Species - Operational Framework' mentions NUS like wild mango in India and African leafy vegetables like spider plant, jute mallow and nettles as having excellent nutritional values and being high especially in Vitamin-A and iron. In this context, Plantina has an interesting story about the nutritional and medical properties of jamahek (Rhynchotechum ellipticum). Sometime ago, one of her relatives was admitted in the hospital and was informed that he needed a blood transfusion. Since the family was financially weak, he was brought back to the village. At home, the grandmother asked the family to make the young man eat jamahek regularly in his meals. Very soon he recovered completely without requiring to go back to the hospital.

Plantina and Dial have been part of NESFAS' Mei-Ramew Café initiative, the former especially since 2013. After having adopted the concept, Dial also renamed her shop as Dial Mukhtieh's Mei-Ramew Café in 2019. In the past they had received training from RRTC with MBDA (Meghalaya Basin Development Authority) and ICAR (Indian Council of Agricultural Research) also providing them support in the form of training and platform to sell their food. Dial, in fact won the first prize during the 2022 International Women's Day celebrations organized by ICAR-KVK. The local MLA, George Lyngdoh, also gave her financial support for fixing the roof of her café. During the 2022 SHG Mela organized at Bhoirombong, both Plantina and Dial were invited to sell their food.

In the context of Meghalaya, traditional foods or NUS are important in the Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems which has great potential to tackle not just the problem of malnutrition but also climate change. This was globally acknowledged when the 'Insights on sustainability and resilience from the front line of climate change' which is a case study from Meghalaya won the 2021 Best in the World Sustainability Report Award. The Mei-Ramew Cafés of Plantina and Dial are important interventions in that regard to be supported and emulated.

P.S: Plantina Mujai and Dial Mukhtieh also take orders for catering. Those interested can reach them in their village (Khweng) or contact NESFAS.

About the writers: Bhogtoram Mawroh is a Senior Associate, Research and Knowledge Management at NESFAS and can be reached at bhogtoram.nesfas@gmail.com. Janak Preet Singh is Senior Associate, Livelihood at NESFAS and can be reached at janak.nesfas@gmail.com

Naive to expect a response from this Intellectual society!

By Sunil Kumar Arora

On March 25 last a noble and well respected psychiatrist, Dr Sandi Syiem wrote a letter to the editor in response to The Shillong Times report, "Assembly snubs bill on welfare of kids with special needs" (ST March 11, 2022). I have mixed feelings on this issue. On the one hand I rue the lack of empathy of the law makers and on the other hand I am amused that Dr Sandi could be so naive as to expect any different response from them or even from this mature, intellectual society. Mature and intellectual to the extent that words like empathy, kindness, social responsibility etc. are gurgitation from their venomous, selfish hearts for the sake of PR or elitist stand. Synonymous with Akira Kurosawa using silence and sound not just to produce compelling visuals in "Throne of Blood" or in "Yojimbo" but more importantly granting gravitas and transcendence to the absolutely common subjects in there.

I view the highly regarded Dr Syiem somewhat naive here because in the current context when our political leaders after having spent crores of rupees in numerous ill-conceived projects as was sportingly admitted by our Transport Minister (your 16th March, "FlyBig plan was a mistake, Transport minister admits") they now race to recover the huge personal investments made before the previous elections with the sole view to fatten

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) treaty, so naturally legal and social frameworks are being constantly updated and improved upon to look after the unfortunate children and other patients in empathic and responsible manner. I also explained to the curious, high intellectuals in the meet there, that the Indian Govt. has almost finalized a new set of rules (later to be passed as "Mental Healthcare Act 2017") to provide for mental healthcare and services for persons with mental illness and to protect, promote and fulfil the rights of such persons during delivery of mental healthcare and services and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. I proudly explained to the audience there, that very soon we in India would have formal bodies involving domain experts as well as caregivers and allied partners to play an active role in formulation as well as execution of related policies. But now on hindsight I feel that I too was naive, rather a big immature fool, in believing what I said there. For over five years now, I'm aware that there isn't any progress in forming even the State Mental Health Authority.

I now understand that neither these unfortunate children with special needs, nor their poor, unfortunate families matter much to the society or to the political establishment, just because

I proudly explained to the audience there, that very soon we in India would have formal bodies involving domain experts as well as caregivers and allied partners to play an active role in formulation as well as execution of related policies. But now on hindsight I feel that I too was naive, rather a big immature fool, in believing what I said there. For over five years now, I'm aware that there isn't any progress in forming even the State Mental Health Authority.

their corpus before the forthcoming elections in a society quick to point fingers at one and all with the begging bowl in the other hand for more and more freebies, cash included when electing their political representatives. Yes, once in a while we do have exceptions. For instance I am not sure, what made George Lyngdoh to introduce such a noble bill for protection and welfare of children with special needs? Perhaps again I dare to say (with due respect), that George Lyngdoh too was being naive in daring to try and initiate such a humane law which for once could at least herald safety and some improvement in the lives of the unfortunate children with special needs. Understandably, our other political leaders in their true wisdom, from their high pedestal of powers in state assembly shot down the proposal without even wasting a few minutes of their valuable time discussing any such seemingly laughable effort.

I remember that a few years back when I was invited to speak in a world meet at Dept. of Health Administration & Policy in George Mason University (Virginia, USA) and if I remember correctly it was Nancy Antracite, the Director and President at WorldVista, who casually enquired if there was any formal legal framework in place in India to take care of people with special needs like Autistic children or people who might have been mentally or psychologically broken down, and I confidently explained that since India is a signatory to the 1989 UN Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the 2006 United Nations

they are not in position to return the favours either as electoral votes or any other profitable deed. So, in a society, which raises a big hue and cry at the slightest discomfort of religious leaders or religious institutions in the name of afterlife forget that to be a true Christian (or true Hindu or true Muslim etc), one not only needs to attend church services or their respective religious events regularly but more importantly act in line with the proponents of their respective religious leaders. If even the religious leaders cannot give their voice to the unfortunate children then who else could we expect to take the lead in these difficult times?

I just wish and pray that perhaps George Lyngdoh will be naive again and reintroduce the Bill at the next earliest opportunity.

My sincere apologies to any and all who might have been offended by my silly ramblings (though I have no intentions to offend anyone), let me take the liberty of aborting these ramblings, with this verse from Matthew 19:21-23 - Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasures in heaven; and come, follow me." But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions. Jesus said to his disciples, "Most certainly I say to you, a rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty."

(The writer is Health-Sevak and can be reached at sunil@healthsevak.com, digitiger@gmail.com)

Letters to the Editor

MBOSE clarification

Editor,
In response to W Pasah's write up in the letter to the Editor dated March 29, 2022 under the caption "Inquiry won't save one precious year" the undersigned would like to inform that the term "callousness" on the part of MBOSE is uncalled for. It is the sole responsibility of the school to register their students at Class IX and ensure they fill up their examination forms for the SSLC examination. MBOSE cannot be held responsible for the callousness of an institution towards its students. Further it is for information of all concerned that MBOSE had immediately taken necessary action.
Yours etc.,
T R Laloo
Controller of Examinations,
Meghalaya Board of School Education,
Tura

BJP's Pyrrhic victory!

Editor,
In the last Assembly elections to the five states in the country, the BJP has won in four states. Consequently to this victory there was an unprecedented euphoria in the BJP camps across all the saffron-ruled states. To add icing to the cake, our Prime Minister Modi had taken a triumphalist procession on a visit to his home state of Gujarat in the aftermath of the outcome of the said elections. In parallel, on an objective analysis of the definitive outcomes of the seats won at the said hustings we can perceptively have an insight that in UP the BJP's seats have surprisingly gone down from around 325 in 2017 to around 273 this year after a gap of five years; a loss of substantive 50 seats or thereabouts. This infers that while it won around 81% of seats in 2017 the same has plummeted to 61%. However, for the return to power the BJP must have been thankful to Owaisi's

party, AMIM, on the sly, where around 165 seats were won by the saffron party, the margins of victory ranged from mere 200 to 2000 and these are incidentally in the minority dominated areas! Some political pundits have naturally concluded that there was a tacit understanding between Owaisi and the BJP. A similar template of Bihar's last state elections was now recast in UP. Had Owaisi not been in the fray, the SP and RLD combination could have upped the ante against the BJP.

And while taking stock of the Uttarakhand results, we find that in 2017 the BJP had won 57 out of the total 70 seats but in the last elections its seats strength has come down to mere 45. And wonders never cease that even the incumbent Chief Minister PS Dhama had to bite the dust as he was vanquished by a Congress rival from Khatima Assembly seat!

In respect of the Goa election results it's believed that the core reason for BJP victory is because of the substantive split of opposition

votes that paved the way for BJP's unlikely triumph securing just half of the total number of seats. In Punjab the BJP was nearly obliterated. Manipur was the only state where BJP could notch up a simple majority. Suffice it to say that the BJP's victory this time can be aptly dubbed as just a Pyrrhic victory.
Yours etc.,
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Via email

Unnecessary harassment by GPO Shillong

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily I would like to express my grievance against the authority of the General Post Office Shillong regarding their restriction of not allowing any vehicles from outside into their campus. I just want to ask whether the campus of the postal department is someone's private property or if it stands to render service to the people, because if someone has to go for some official work in the post of-

take, they are not allowed to take their vehicles inside. On March 29, I faced a similar problem when they did not allow me in with my bike. As a result one of my important work remained undone. And the location of the office is such that I could not even park outside the gate as the Traffic Police could clamp the wheels any time. I believe the same problems are being faced by many members of the public. In this regard I would like to ask the authorities whether such a ridiculous decision is an official order from the higher authorities in Delhi or from the local authorities in Shillong.

In case it's the former, we as members of the public have the right to see the order which needs to be published in the newspapers and other media platforms. Moreover in case a senior citizen needs to visit the post office, where will he/she park their vehicle? Or do the Postal authorities expect them to park their vehicles in Police Bazar and come walking all the way. On enquiring about the parking restriction I was informed by

one of the persons stationed near the gate that some people just park their vehicles and disappear. In that case they should properly enquire and if needed check the documents but should allow those vehicles or two wheelers that have genuine reasons to visit the Post office to park there. Such restrictions can be imposed on a private property but the Post Office is a public utility and as such it is incumbent upon the authorities to look after the comfort of the public and stop such unnecessary harassment. They should realize that no one visits the post office or any public office unnecessarily but for some genuine work-related reasons. The Postal authorities should take steps to rectify this 'no parking inside the premises' order.

Yours etc.,
Premankur Dam,
Shillong-4

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