

National nuggets

Mother Nature gets rights and duties from HC

MADURAI (TN), April 30: The Madras High Court has invoked the “parens patriae jurisdiction” to declare Mother Nature as a ‘Living Being’ with all corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a living person, in order to preserve and conserve them. “It is right time to declare/confer juristic status to the ‘Mother Nature’”. Therefore this Court by invoking “parens patriae jurisdiction” is hereby declaring the “Mother Nature” as a “Living Being” having legal entity/legal person/juristic person/juridical person/moral person/artificial person having the status of a legal person, with all corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a living person, in order to preserve and conserve them,” Justice S Srimathy said. (PTI)

Man gets life for wife's murder

RAIPUR, April 30: A court in Chhattisgarh's Raipur sentenced a 44-year-old man to life imprisonment for murdering his wife over a minor dispute in 2019. The court of VIII additional district and sessions judge Shrikant Shrivastava on Friday found the accused Jagatpal Singh guilty and sentenced him to life imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs 1,000 on him. The accused hails from Rajnandgaon district and was working at a farmhouse located on VIP Road under Telibandha police station limits. According to the prosecution, the incident took place at the farmhouse on July 5, 2019. Singh bludgeoned his wife Meena Bai to death with a wooden plank following a dispute over a minor issue. The victim was employed as a guard at the farmhouse, it was stated. (PTI)

Thane postman booked

THANE, April 30: An offence has been registered against a postman for allegedly misplacing over 200 EPIC cards of voters in Maharashtra's Thane district, police said on Saturday. A case has been registered against Akash Bhoir (27), a contracted postman, under section 427 of the IPC and Indian Public Document Act, inspector R B Pawar (crime) of Kona-gaon police station under the Bhiwandi division said. As per a complaint lodged by a postmaster, the accused was given the EPIC cards for delivery and while taking them on a motorcycle in February, he misplaced 211 cards between Pimpalghar and Rajnoli, the official said. The EPIC cards have not been traced as yet and further probe is underway, he added. (PTI)

Three minors drown in Tapi

SURAT, April 30: Three children drowned after getting dragged away into Tapi river water in Surat city of Gujarat, police said on Saturday. The three minors from Iqbal Nagar slum area in the city were playing on the bank of Tapi river near a causeway in Rander locality of the city on Friday evening when the mishap occurred, a police official said. “The trio drowned due to a sudden rise in water level of the river near the causeway as a result of a high tide in the Arabian sea,” the Rander police station official said. Bodies of two of the deceased were fished out late in the evening, while that of Sania Sheikh (14) was found Saturday morning. (PTI)

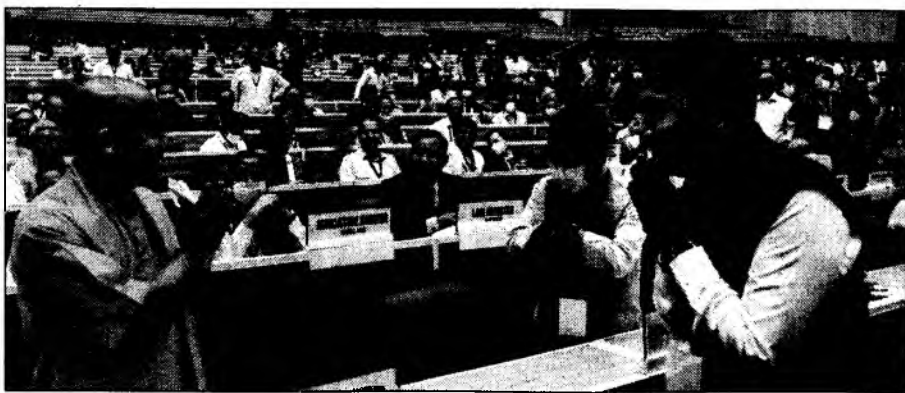
PM urges CMs, HCs to prioritise cases of 3.5 lakh poor undertrials

NEW DELHI, April 30: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said there are nearly 3.5 lakh undertrials in jail - mostly from poor or ordinary families - and appealed to all chief ministers and chief justices of high courts to prioritise their cases on bases of humanitarian sensibility and law.

The Prime Minister was speaking at the Joint Conference of Chief Ministers and Chief Justices of High Courts, which was also attended by Chief Justice N. V. Ramana, Law Minister Kiren Rijiju, Minister of State for Law and Justice S.P. Singh Baghel and Supreme Court judges.

The Prime Minister insisted that judicial reform is not merely a policy matter and human sensitivities are involved and they should be kept in the centre of all the deliberations.

He pointed out there are about 3.5 lakh prisoners in the country who are under trial and are in jail, most of whom are from poor or ordinary families.



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath greets Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant during a joint conference of CMs of states & Chief Justices of High Courts, at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi, on Saturday. (PTI)

“In every district, there is a committee headed by the District Judge, so that these cases can be reviewed and wherever possible, such prisoners may be released on bail. I would appeal to all Chief Ministers and Chief Justices of High Courts to give priority to these matters on the basis of humanitarian sensibility and law”, he added.

He said that 75 years of Independence have continuously clarified the roles and

responsibilities of both the judiciary and the executive.

The Prime Minister also talked about the complexities and obsolescence in laws.

He said in 2015, the government identified 1,800 laws which had become irrelevant and 1,450 laws have already been repealed.

Noting that only 75 such laws have been removed by the states, Prime Minister Modi said: “I would urge all the Chief Ministers that for the rights of the citizens

of their state and for their ease of living, definitely steps should be taken in this direction.”

The Prime Minister said it is important to promote local languages in the courts so that people of the country feel connected with the judicial process and their faith in the same increases.

He said that people's right to judicial process will strengthen by this and local languages are being promoted in technical education

also.

The Prime Minister emphasised that the government is working hard to reduce delay in justice delivery and efforts are being made to increase the judicial strength and improve the judicial infrastructure.

The Prime Minister said “in our country, while the role of the judiciary is that of the guardian of the constitution, the legislature represents the aspirations of the citizens. I believe that this confluence and balance of these two branches of the Constitution will prepare the roadmap for an effective and time-bound judicial system in the country”.

He said the government considers the possibilities of technology in the judicial system as an essential part of the Digital India mission and appealed to the chief ministers and chief justices of high courts to take it forward.

In addition, the Prime Minister cited the success of digital transactions in small towns and even in villages of India as well. (PTI)

Govt biggest litigant, says CJI Ramana

NEW DELHI, April 30: In the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Ministers of states, Chief Justice of India NV Ramana on Saturday said it is the government which is the biggest litigant accounting for nearly 50 per cent of the cases.

Addressing the Joint Conference of Chief Ministers and Chief Justices of High Courts at Vigyan Bhawan here, Justice Ramana said: “If service laws are applied fairly in matters of seniority, pension and so on, no employee will be compelled to go to courts. It is a well acknowledged fact that the governments are the biggest litigants accounting for nearly 50 per cent of the cases.” The CJI said that if various government departments function in accordance with the law the courts would not be burdened.

Ramana said that if police investigations are fair, if illegal arrests and custodial torture come to an end, then no victim will have to approach the courts.

‘PIL has become personal interest litigation’

Chief Justice NV Ramana

on Saturday expressed concern over frivolous litigations in courts and said the concept of PIL has now turned into personal interest litigation and is at times being misused to stall projects or put pressure on public authorities.

Speaking at a joint conference of chief ministers and chief justices of high courts, Ramana said abiding by law and the Constitution is key to good governance.

PM Narendra Modi inaugurated the conference.

“The rising number of frivolous litigations is an area of concern. For example, the well-meaning concept of public interest litigation is at times turning into personal interest litigation. No doubt, PIL has served a lot of public interest. However, it is sometimes being misused to stall projects or pressurise public authorities.

“These days, PIL has become a tool for those who want to settle political scores or corporate rivalry. Realising the potential for misuse, courts are now highly cautious in entertaining the same,” Ramana said. (Agencies)

Who will you blame now?: Rahul slams PM over power crisis

NEW DELHI, April 30: Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Saturday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the current power crisis and asked whom would he blame for his failure on this front.

He asked whether PM Modi would blame former premier Jawaharlal Nehru, state governments or the people of the country for this power crisis.

“The prime minister's promises and intentions have always been disconnected. Modi ji, who will you blame for your failure in this power crisis? Nehru ji or states or people?” Gandhi asked in a tweet in Hindi.

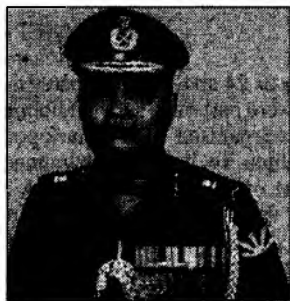
He also tagged a video

showing past speeches of Prime Minister Modi promising in 2015 to make electricity available 24 hours across the country and claiming in 2017 that one no longer heard headlines of power crisis or coal crisis.

The video clip of nearly one minute highlights news headlines of the current power crisis with a businessman saying he can't even sleep after a day's labour.

With large parts of the country facing long power cuts, the opposition Congress had said on Friday the central government's mismanagement and mismanagement is the factor that led to this “artificial” crisis in the scorching summer. (PTI)

Gen Manoj Pande is new Army chief



NEW DELHI, April 30: Gen Manoj Pande took charge as the 29th Chief of the Army Staff on Saturday after incumbent Gen MM Naravane retired from service.

Gen Pande, who was serving as the vice chief, became the first officer from the Corps of Engineers to helm the force.

Before taking charge as vice chief of the Army on February 1, Gen Pande was

heading the Eastern Army Command, tasked with guarding the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh sectors.

Gen Pande took charge of the Army at a time India is facing myriad security challenges, including along the borders with China and Pakistan.

As the Army chief, he will also have to coordinate with the Navy and the Indian Air Force on the government's plan to roll out theatre commands. Gen Pande also served as the Commander-in-Chief of the Andaman and Nicobar Command (CIN-CAN), which is India's only tri-services command. (PTI)

He was commissioned in the Corps of Engineers (The Bombay Sappers) in December 1982. (PTI)

Patiala clashes: 3 senior police officers shunted out

Internet services suspended in dist

PATIALA, April 30: The Punjab government on Saturday shunted out three senior police officials, including an inspector general, and suspended mobile internet and SMS services in Patiala district, a day after clashes between two groups over an anti-Khalistan march left four people injured.

The AAP government in the state transferred the inspector general of police (IG) Patiala Range, the Patiala senior superintendent of police and the Patiala superintendent of police with immediate effect.

A spokesperson of the

Chief Minister's Office said Mukhwinder Singh Chinnha has been appointed as the new IG-Patiala while Deepak Parik will be the new Patiala SSP. Wazir Singh has been appointed as the new superintendent of police of Patiala.

Chinnha replaces Rakesh Agrawal as IG (Patiala Range) while Parik takes over the post of SSP-Patiala from Nanak Singh.

Police and district administration authorities on Saturday claimed that the situation is under control and peaceful in the city.

Heavy police security has been deployed at the site of the clashes outside the Kali Mata temple here.

Various Hindu outfits had given a call for a bandh in protest against the Friday

incident. Several markets in Patiala city remained shut on Saturday.

Representatives of some Hindu outfits lifted their ‘dharma’ outside the temple and deferred their proposed protest march after police and district administration assured them of action within two days against those who were behind the disturbance and violence on Friday.

The groups had clashed over the anti-Khalistan march, hurling stones at each other and brandishing swords. This is the first major law and order incident in the state under the Bhagwant Mann-led state government. Opposition parties had attacked the AAP-led regime, alleging that the law and order had collapsed. (PTI)

Hottest April in 122 years for northwest, central India: IMD

NEW DELHI, April 30: Northwest and central India experienced their hottest April in 122 years with average maximum temperatures reaching 35.9 and 37.78 degrees Celsius respectively, the weather office said on Saturday.

Addressing a press conference, India Meteorological Department Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said northwest and west central parts of the country - Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana - will continue to experience above normal temperatures in May as well.

Nights would be warmer in May in most parts of the country, except some regions of south peninsular India, Mohapatra said.

The average temperatures observed pan-India for April was 35.05 degrees, which was the fourth highest in 122 years, he said.

“The average rainfall in May 2022 over the country is most likely to be above normal,” Mohapatra said.

However, parts of northwest and north-east India as well as the extreme southeast

Peninsula are expected to get below normal rainfall in May, he said.

The high temperatures in March and April were attributed to “continuously scanty rainfall activity”, he said.

In March, northwest India recorded a deficit in rainfall of around 89 per cent, while the deficit was nearly 83 per cent in April, mainly on account of feeble and dry western disturbances, Mohapatra said.

North India witnessed six western disturbances but they were mostly feeble and moved across the higher parts of the Himalayas, he said, adding the last three western disturbances caused strong winds in parts of Delhi and duststorms over Rajasthan in April. It is however, interesting to note that while these regions of the nation are undergoing severe conditions, other states are experiencing medium to heavy rainfall continually.

India, particularly north-west and western parts of the country, has been reeling under intense heatwave conditions for the past few weeks. (PTI)

Khargone: Cops nab one more

KHARGONE (MP), April 30: Police have arrested a man for supplying a pistol to a person, who used it for firing at Superintendent of Police (SP) Siddharth Choudhary during the violence on Ram Navami in Madhya Pradesh's Khargone, an official said on Saturday.

“Toofan Singh Sikligar, who supplied arms to Mohsin accused of firing at Khargone SP, was arrested. Based on the information given by him during his interrogation, six others involved in supplying arms were also arrested,” IPS officer Ankit Jaiswal informed. (PTI)

Firefighting operations continue at Delhi's landfill site

NEW DELHI, April 30: Fire fighting operations are still going on to douse the blaze that broke out in north Delhi's Bhalswa landfill site earlier this week, officials said on Saturday.

Five fire tenders are still working on the spot to douse the flames, they said.

A massive fire broke out at the site on Tuesday evening. Several videos showed the blaze churning out dense plumes of smoke and turning the sky hazy grey.

Local residents on Wednesday said the thick smoke was choking them.

The cause of the fire is yet to be ascertained.

An official had said rising temperatures lead to the formation of “extremely flam-

mable” methane gas at the dumping yards.

On Friday, a police complaint was filed by those residing near Bhalswa landfill site against the North Delhi Municipal Corporation.

The residents filed the complaint at the Bhalswa Dairy police station, demanding legal action against North Delhi Mayor Raja Iqbal Singh, Deputy Mayor Archana Dilip Singh and North MCD standing committee vice-chairman Vijay Kumar Bhagat.

Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Wednesday blamed “corruption” in the municipal corporation for the frequent fires at landfill sites in the city, saying the BJP-ruled civic bodies should have used bulldozers to clear the mountains of garbage. (PTI)

Over thousand Indian peacekeepers in South Sudan awarded UN medals

UNITED NATIONS, April 30: Over 1,100 Indian peacekeepers serving with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) were awarded UN medals, honouring them for their exceptional service in the strife-torn East African country.

The UNMISS “peacekeepers don't ‘just’ protect civilians. Some 1,160 troops from #India in #SouthSudan also rehabilitate roads, build the capacity of local communities and give medical treatment to humans & animals.

For that they deserve @ UN medals,” the UNMISS said in a tweet on Thursday.

The 1,160 Indian peacekeepers currently serving in Upper Nile State were honoured with UN medals “for their outstanding and multifaceted work”, including protecting civilians, performing engineering assignments and providing health services to



humans and animals, a news report posted on the UNMISS website said.

The news report said that Indian engineering troops have rehabilitated key roads in the state, including the 75-kilometre long route from Malakal to Abwong via Baliet.

It added that the Indian contingent is also “well known, and beloved” for its frequent mobile veterinary clinics in different parts of Upper Nile State that provide veterinary services, which

are otherwise rarely available to cattle owners, for cows, goats, donkeys, sheep and other animals in the country.

Recently, the vets treated about 1,749 animals in Renk in just two days, it said.

“We have a strong belief in supporting income-generating activities, like vocational trainings.

With skills, one can earn money and feed a family,” Commander of the contingent Colonel Vijay Rawat was quoted as saying in the UNMISS news report.

“In December last year, we organised trainings in carpentry, masonry and on how to make use of rain and water, and we hope that participants will be able to make a living.

We want to be remembered for having left positive memories among the people living here,” Rawat said.

The contingent also held

computer literacy workshops for girls and boys.

“It is an honour to receive this medal, which will embellish my uniform for the rest of my career.

We provide medical services to peacekeepers and the local population, but we also share our knowledge on prevention of diseases and gender-based violence,” the report quoted Major Pooja Nair, a doctor and one of only two women in the current Indian contingent, as saying.

India is one of the largest troop-contributing countries to UN peacekeeping missions.

Currently, it is worth mentioning that, an impressive total of 2,385 Indian military personnel, the number that is second-highest after Rwanda, along with a total of 30 police personnel are deployed with the UN mission in South Sudan. (PTI)



Rickshaw pullers rest under a tree on a hot summer afternoon, in New Delhi, on Saturday. (PTI)

Take care of your body. It's the only place you have to live.

—Jim Rohn

The Shillong Times

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Judiciary and its ills

A rare interface between the executive and judiciary in Delhi this past week gained national attention mainly for the observations made by Chief Justice of India, Justice NV Ramana. Among other things, he asserted that the higher judiciary, the last word on contentious matters, will not come in the way of good governance – or governance done “in accordance with law.” He told the inaugural session of the joint meeting of chief ministers and high court chief justices that it is also important that both executive and judiciary did not cross the Lakshman Rekha – the sacred dividing line between the roles of the two major arms of Indian democracy.

What must be admitted is that both the executive and judiciary more or less do not cross this dividing line, also as strong public disapproval will follow in such an eventuality. The nation is alert. At the same time, there often are feelings that the judiciary is standing in the way of speedier growth of the nation. Rules are rules; but interpretation is where problems arise. Freedom of individual is paramount as per the Indian Constitution. But a question is whether this stretches to a level wherein one individual or group can stall a major developmental initiative of the government by citing his or her rights. There are many instances of a highway project or similar projects getting stalled for years due to stay obtained by individuals or groups against land takeover or against demolitions. The promise by the CJI that the judiciary will not stand in the way of good governance must be seen in this context.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi who addressed the meeting stressed that justice must be easy to get and judicial decisions should be made without delay. He also spoke about the sad plight of 3.5 lakh under-trial prisoners, mostly coming from the disadvantaged or poor sections languishing in different jails of the country for many years. The PM should know the scenario has only worsened in the past eight years of his rule. Crores of cases are pending in courts indefinitely for long years. Most cases are dragged for up to 10 or 20 years. Those even from well-off families can ill afford the expenses and the waste of time fighting cases unendingly. There is no guarantee that justice will ultimately be delivered in one's own lifetime. Exhortations from the pulpit alone cannot change things for the better. Modi has just two more years to complete his second successive term. He skirted the cause of judicial reforms. There is little to expect from him or this government in the coming few months, anyway.

Letters to the Editor

Need to revisit CUET

Editor,
As a concerned stakeholder I take this opportunity to request the government of Meghalaya to reconsider its decision of making the CUET mandatory now.

Firstly, the decision to implement CUET was taken without consulting all stakeholders. In Meghalaya, the 10+2 section has been de-linked in many of the colleges so how can a meeting of the Education Minister, education department officials, NEHU officials and Principals of colleges only decide on the matter with an expectation that colleges reach out to students. There are many rural and urban Higher Secondary schools in the state which are the feeders schools for colleges but these stakeholders that are the ones that can reach out to students appearing for CUET for admission into UG courses in colleges were never called to such a meeting.

Secondly, the present CUET syllabus which is based on NCERT texts has 3 vital components namely Language, Subject domain and the General test. Subjects offered by MBOSE such as Education, Statistics, Philosophy, Khasi, Garo do not figure in the subject domain component of CUET. To add to the problems, the present MBOSE policy of taking best of five subjects to clear the SSLC exams is

a policy that has to be questioned, because Mathematics and Science are no longer compulsory subjects that a candidate needs to clear in order to pass his/her class 10 Board exam. Keeping this in mind, certain pertinent questions arise. One, how can an MBOSE student perform and clear the CUET general test domain component which includes current affairs, numerical ability and reasoning especially in the absence of domain subjects? Two, is the MBOSE confident that the students at the 10+2 level are familiar with the CUET MCQ pattern?

Thirdly, I wish to add here that many must realize that the CUET, if made applicable by NEHU, will also apply to our final semester college students. Hence, these students also need to be made aware of the same at the earliest.

Though I agree with the many who have opined that the CUETs' MCQ pattern does not determine an aspirant's performance in the said course opted for by them, I would also like to point out here that the CUET has its merits too. One, the CUET, if implemented all over the country will enable the students of Meghalaya to seek admission in any college outside the state by appearing in only one Entrance Test. Two, the CUET will save precious time and money for such students who otherwise have to limit themselves and choose which college entrance exam to appear for. Three, the

CUET marking will also ensure a uniform and standard test mechanism unlike the present system where 10+2 marks which vary and differ depending on the Board, are a determining factor. Four, having seen a few of the CUET mock papers in the NTA website, I am of the opinion that the CUET exam will familiarize our students with the question pattern of many competitive exams that they may later choose to appear for in order to be gainfully employed.

Therefore, I urge upon those at the helm of affairs who declare that 'education is a priority' to articulate the same in action. The hasty decision on CUET must be revisited and the government together with all stakeholders must reflect on all aspects. Let us prepare our students. We cannot expect them to perform, if they are unprepared. We require changes to be made in the existing education system.

One, there is a need for the government to seriously consider revamping and restructuring the MBOSE syllabus for all classes apart from doing away with this policy that was adopted with an aim to inflate the pass percentage at the SSLC level. Two, it is also imperative that the government invest and set up the digital technology infrastructure needed for CUET so as to accommodate to every student to appear for the CUET. Three, the government together with

all stakeholders must ensure that the present curriculum in place from KG to PG is revised and restructured to equip and enable the students to compete with others.

Yours etc.,
A. Basaiawmot,
Via email

Electricity woes in New Shillong

Editor,

The power crisis faced by Meghalaya needs no introduction. It is the child of those in power who pocket public money and those that continue to sit in the bureaucracy without doing anything for the betterment of the state. For the residents of New Shillong, Mawdiangdiang and adjoining areas, however, the power crisis has been an affair that has been going on for over five years.

This supposed next-gen city that the Government of Meghalaya is looking to create as the state's new capital is unfortunately also the area where electricity is shut off as soon as the slightest of rain starts pouring from the skies. This nuisance has been going on for years now. Every year, the residents think that MeECL will get its act together and ensure continuous supply of electricity, and every year these lethargic bodies amuse us with their abject indifference.

This is not a one-off affair. Every time there is the slightest downpour, electricity is shut off and only restored

after multiple hours – leaving citizens to suffer in the corresponding period. Why is it that the electricity board cannot fix this issue? Is it blind, deaf or both? For a fact, we know it to be shameless. What else explains the respective authorities' absolute apathy towards New Shillong Township?

First it was the road. Now, as the rainy season sets in, it is the fragile electricity supply. How much will the residents of New Shillong be made to suffer? If no requisite action is taken by authorities even after the publication of this letter, they must be prepared to brace for impact. There is only so much nonsense ordinary citizens will put up with.

Yours etc.,
Sanbeer Singh Ranhotra,
Senior Columnist
TFI Media Group
Via email

Row over Hindi

Editor,

Given the fabric of tribal ethnicity in Meghalaya, imposing Hindi as a compulsory second language up to Class -X will definitely be a tall order. It will be good if the Centre does not act like Gradgrind of Charles Dickens and dictate terms to the states without considering the ground realities. However, Hindi as the third language till Class-8, as also pointed out by Patricia Mukhim in her article "Will the Government of Meghalaya grow a spine" (ST 29

airs was also made so that the building by-laws in the state can be changed to suit the deal. If the allegation is true then the maximum number of storeys in a building that can be constructed in the state has been increased from Ground plus four to Ground plus nine. In layman's language now anybody can construct a ten-storeyed building in the state. If this is indeed the case then what about the oft repeated fact that Meghalaya is located in a very sensitive seismic zone? Is it true that the building by-laws were amended just to accommodate the ten-storeyed buildings located in the disputed area that a certain powerful individual in the state has acquired?

What the Deputy Chief Minister didn't say is important

In his response to the state Congress president's allegation, Deputy Chief Minister, Prestone Tynsong not only voluntarily named the family but put his foot in his mouth when he also said that Pala made these allegations out of jealousy because the family are much richer than him now. But what Prestone Tynsong did not say is that it is now clear that the MLAs of the NPP are in the government to enrich themselves only. They are in the government to get richer by the day even if it means bending the laws to suit their interests.

Las Vegas of the East

This government instead of trying to hold on to the land in the border with Guwahati and make them extensions of Meghalaya into Guwahati just like Haryana and UP did with the National Capital Region of Delhi, is instead giving it up for a song. No doubt it is a complete sellout of prime locations while only holding on to a piece of land where an incomplete hotel stands. Like a deck of cards the government's plans started tumbling down and from reports in the press, it now appears that the government is also planning to provide a license for starting a casino in the hotel. Now Meghalaya has already legalized Thoh tim or Teer which is one form of gambling, the state also has large numbers of wine stores and now we are going to allow open gambling in casinos. The government says that the casinos will only cater to the tourists who visit the state. In short, the government is saying that the state will have two rules - one for the tourists and one for the locals. One for the area in the vicinity of Guwahati and another for the rest of the state; is that even legal?

Allegations made by the MPCC President
Serious damage to the settlement of the dispute was done by the statement made by the Meghalaya Congress President and Lok Sabha MP Vincent H Palawho (without naming anybody) alleged that the settlement was only agreed upon to benefit certain powerful people who are at the helm of power in the state. He alleged that the reallocation of portfolios of the Department of Urban Af-

Is the NPP-led MDA hitting a roadblock?

By H H Mohrmen

land for construction of its party's office. The plush NPP office is being constructed on government land in a prime location of Shillong. It is true that we cannot find fault with the NPP for building its own party office except for the fact that it was constructed on government land in the prime locality of the state capital. But the question for the leaders of the regional parties particularly the two prominent parties in the state which are much older than the NPP is - does it not occur to them that they have been taken for a ride by their junior partner?

How can we trust the regional parties which claim that they love the jaidbyrniew and the state, when obviously they do not even love their own party? If the leaders of parties like the HSPDP and

reaching a stalemate now. In this case the government is in a 'between the devil and the deep sea,' like situation. If the government agrees to their demand they will be seen as appeasing the community and if they don't, there will be no solution to the issue.

The Inter-state border issue

The other issue that the MDA government had hoped to solve is the inter-state border dispute with Assam. This issue which both the Chief Ministers claim has the irrevocable seal of the Union Home Minister is being opposed by different sections of the population. From the people who live in the disputed area, to the Hima and Raid and even the Khasi Hills District Council all are against the agreement signed by the two chief min-

Now Meghalaya has already legalized Thoh tim or Teer which is one form of gambling, the state also has large numbers of wine stores and now we are going to allow open gambling in casinos. The government says that the casinos will only cater to the tourists who visit the state. In short, the government is saying that the state will have two rules - one for the tourists and one for the locals.

the UDP do not see the need for having their own permanent office even after they have existed for decades, then that speaks a lot about the leadership in these parties. To state what is already obvious, it looks like they are only interested in their individual progress and care very little for their respective parties. They are only interested in winning the next election and do not care even if their parties cease to exist by the next election. This is how selfish our politicians in the regional parties are and yet they claim that they remain in the party because they have principles to maintain.

The Them Iewmawlong issue

The MDA government has all along hoped to be able to relocate the people who live in the disputed area and solve the issue once and for all, but it looks like this matter is not going anywhere now. The demand made by the community currently living in the area during its meeting with the state government is what contributes to the matter

Coal Shortage Worsened by Ukraine and an Unprecedented Heat Wave

By Ajit Ranade

The bulk of India's electricity comes from burning coal. This coal has to go from the minefields to the electricity generating plants. It travels by rail and road, mostly the former. The total annual demand for coal in India is close to 1 billion tonnes and is expected to rise to 1.5 billion by 2030. The domestic production by the government owned Coal India Limited was 622 million tonnes during the last fiscal year 2021-22. This was a record. In fact, the actual coal dispatched from CIL mines, was even higher at 662 million tonnes, due to prior inventory. To transport this huge amount of coal, and also imported coal from the ports to the generating plants, the railways haulage also reached new records. Over and above CIL production, there is private mining production of coal too, thanks to liberalisation in mining policy, and also captive mining which utilises coal for uses like producing steel and aluminium. Even then the country has to depend on more than 200 million tonnes of coal imports from places like Indonesia, Australia and South Africa. Despite such efforts, there is a shortage of coal which leads to energy shortage.

This is happening even after India's great push to install solar electricity. The

Thus, in order to ensure that coal reaches these plants in a timely fashion, the railways are taking unprecedented measures. The railways have cancelled passenger trains to make way for coal rakes to travel from mining areas to power plants. The cancellations include 753 trips across 21 trains till the end of May. More such measures might be necessary if the heat wave does not relent. The cumulative shortage of power if it exceeds 2.5 billion units, will call for power cuts. In some parts of India long hours of power outage cannot be ruled out. Of course, typically the metros and large cities will be spared the worst of the power cuts, and smaller towns and villages will bear the brunt. The coal crisis also means that non-power sector users, like aluminium and steel producers, textile and paper industry, sponge iron and some fertiliser units will be denied coal, which may affect their production. This is a complex optimisation exercise involving coal movement, railway train, rake planning and power outage planning.

The situation has been aggravated by the Ukraine conflict. As gas from Russia becomes unavailable or boycotted, the Europeans and Americans will burn more coal. The price of



international coal from Australia is usually 100 dollars per tonne, but thanks to the Ukraine war, coal prices spiked up to a shocking 440 dollars, as there were supply worries. Of course, the price of natural gas, the other fuel used for home heating in Europe has gone through the roof. So, coal-based energy at these high prices is still cheaper. The global demand for coal has risen 9 percent during 2021, to an all-time high of nearly 8 billion tonnes. It will rise by another 2 percent in 2022, even as there are fears of a recession and stagflation. The price of coal in India has shot up too, especially manifest in the e-auctions conducted by the exchanges. So, we have the twin scourge of power outage and a surge in prices. The power exchanges recorded prices of 12 rupees per unit of electricity, which normally is around 3 or 4.

One consequence of excessive dependence on coal is the implication for global warming and the net zero targets announced for emissions, most recently in the Glasgow Summit. As we wait for renewables like solar power and hydrogen to become economic and available in abundance, the world may have to explore an increase in nuclear energy. Countries like France and Japan are largely dependent on nuclear power, although after the Fukushima accident, there was a temporary stoppage. That freeze on nuclear power expansion needs to be re-examined, and India too must keep the nuclear expansion option open.

As if the commodity inflation due to oil and other materials wasn't bad enough, we now have to contemplate getting singed by the shortage of coal and expensive electricity. Looks like it's going to be hot, sweaty summer.

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

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

"Every little thing counts in a crisis."

--- Jawaharlal Nehru

The Shillong Times

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Confusion in the MDA

AS the State inches closer to the polls the constituents of the MDA seem to be getting at one another's throats. The BJP is a constituent of the NPP-led, MDA Government, but BJP leader AL Hek has expressed concern about the recent Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Assam and Meghalaya on the swapping of areas under dispute at the borders between the two states. What's ironic is that the MoU was sanctified by none other than Union Home Minister, Amit Shah and has also got the blessings of Prime Minister Modi. The Prime Minister has in fact touted the recent mutually agreed settlement between the two states of Assam and Meghalaya as a model of good neighbourly relations which could be extended to resolving the disputes between Assam and Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Last year the border skirmish between Mizoram and Assam had threatened to turn into a civil war. Assam and Nagaland have indulged in cross border firing many times.

Within Meghalaya, Chief Minister Conrad Sangma sees the resolution of the long-standing border dispute to be a feather in the cap of the MDA Government with the HSPDP backing him up all the way. The UDP has been airing its views vis-à-vis the border dispute resolution but in a manner that reeks of ambivalence and a wishy-washiness that's typical of a party that wants to be in the Government but has no spine to stand up for what it believes in because the spoils of power are far more attractive than the dog house. The People's Democratic Front (PDF) has no MLA from the border areas and hence is silent on the border issue. In fact the PDF has been a silent partner and the most acquiescent.

It is in Garo Hills that the rancour against the MoU with Assam is most vehement because land is a precious commodity and ceding even an inch of land which is to have been part of Meghalaya ancestrally is a recipe for disaster. The NPP from all indications seems to have lost traction in Garo Hills with some even expressing their doubts if Conrad Sangma would still be elected from his Tura constituency. Such is the disaffection of the people of Garo Hills. But considering that the NPP has been playing around with the Garo Hills District Council, the agitation by the staff against non-payment of salaries et al, it is no wonder that the NPP has lost its sheen. Ironically the NPP which is seen as a Garo Hills based entity, now has more takers in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. The Khasi Hills District Council where the UDP and NPP are partners, has meanwhile decided to go to court on the MoU with Assam even while the NPP MDCs have opted out of this decision. This lack of consensus on the border dispute resolution threatens to become a major election plank in 2023.

What Meghalaya really needs before the 2023 elections

By Toki Blah

come. I say this with all the command at my disposal and my disappointment as to why the so-called "Saviors of the Jaitbynriew" have never seen fit to create public awareness over this regrettable perception on the Right to vote.

So let us not waste time but come to the crux of the matter and that is "What should the voter expect and demand from candidates and parties that come to solicit his/her vote for 2023". Due to lack of space let me tick off four fundamental issues that affect us most. First and foremost is the plan or vision the candidate and his party have over education. Quality and appropriate education has always been Meghalaya's forte and pride. A casual uninspiring approach to education by all Govts, that lacked intelligent foresight and imagination, has helped pull down this pride of Meghalaya from the pedestal it once occupied. The question to be asked by the public is very simple. What are the plans of the candidate or his party to revive the quality of education in Meghalaya? How appropriate is CUET for Education in Tribal Meghalaya? How does he plan to enforce teacher-stake-holdership in education? What are the plans for improving primary education especially in our rural areas? What life skills or livelihood options will his perception of education have for the students of the state? These are questions that I doubt have ever been asked by the public on campaigning individuals who come and seek their vote. My request to the enlightened voter is to please ask such questions simply because the prospects of future generations and of the state itself will depend on it.

Next should be questions on the priority the candidate and his party has on Public Health and general health care facilities for the people of the state especially our rural areas. This question should cut across both urban and rural sectors. Health and health care cannot be left to the mercy of Doctors alone but it needs a sense of dedication, commitment and a sense of direction which only a robust practical Health Policy can provide. Since politicians are lawmakers and policy makers, they should

be ready to enlighten the public of their take on how to provide wholesome and effective health care to all. To march forward the state needs strong, healthy and educated citizens. The public should not miss this opportunity to make our legislators aware of the need for a viable Health Care Policy. Conjoined with health should be the candidate's vision on social welfare, the provision of safe potable drinking water to all habitations within the state. A state policy on gender related ailments such as anemia among women and the raising social problems of abandoned single mothers needs urgent Govt cognizance. With a tendency of people to move towards urbanization, we need the politicians' conception on how to deal with major urban issues such as waste disposal, traffic management, water and electricity supply and of course the equally important issue of urban housing for those migrating from the rural to urban centers.

Now 80% of Meghalaya's population live in the rural areas and are dependent on Rural economic activities and agriculture to make ends meet for them and their families. We have noted with dismay the low budget allocation made to Agriculture and Rural Development. Successive state Govts seem content to let sleeping dogs lie as far as rural development and agriculture is concerned. For example 40% or more of our upland farmers depend on jhum cultivation for food security and this traditional form of upland agriculture continues to thrive despite Govt and ADC neglect. So does any party have an Upland Agriculture opinion on Jhum that is based on research to improve and stabilize Jhum rather than just ignoring the practice? Dr Dhruvad Choudhury a renowned International expert on Jhum is a citizen of this state. Has anybody bothered to get his views on a subject that affects our upland agriculturalists?

Now there is also this growing apathy and reluctance to question our politicians' stand on the question of corruption in high offices of Government. We seldom hear of an enlightened electorate

pushing for an answer from reluctant political candidates on this issue. It suits the politician well and he walks away to form the next Govt under the impression that the public is OK if politicians dip their fingers into the public exchequer. Perhaps this is what emboldens MLAs and Ministers to practice corruption; ignore governance; scorn the Rule of Law and more repulsive, the rising trend of businessmen turned politicians to turn the Secretariat into a "dukan" for buying and selling favours or unethical profits to enhance their personal businesses. The public must be tough and robust to root out corrupt practices in governance otherwise Meghalaya will continue to remain a "Bimaru" state. Whether we want development or not will lie in our wisdom in choosing efficient leaders with foresight. We are in the mess we are today because of electing MLAs who are "banias" (traders) at heart who have no hesitation in buying your EPIC for Rs 10,000 and then helping themselves to crores from the Public Exchequer, from benefits meant for you and me. In the end it is amazing that dirty politics has managed to take root in a society that prides itself on the concept of "Ka Tip Brieu, Tip Blei" (the ethos of being rational and sensible, the ability to tell apart Right from Wrong).

Perhaps it is unfair to term politics as dirty as all of us are social and political animals. Politics is necessary to promote the wellbeing of society and the community. The problem arises out of politics and political players who view politics only as a means to an end, on how to win and grab power. A lot of this kind of depraved politics prevails and is encouraged here in Meghalaya. The first casualty in this style of politics is the "mandate to serve." It goes flying out of the window. Secondly it is a system of public service that shuns long term vision or planning, where visionaries and statesmen are rejected. Preference is given to people with short term goals where often such goals are based solely on self interest. So Dear Reader it is high time for us as an electorate to introspect as to the type of leadership we want for ourselves. Our fate is in our hands, not in our stars anymore.

Electricity blackout across the country exposes faulty policies

Economic recovery and livelihoods at unprecedented risks

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

"Netaji, do you know the meaning of converting UP into Gujarat? It means 24-hour electricity, no power cut for 365 days in every village and street. You can't do it. You don't have the guts to turn UP into Gujarat. It takes a 56-inch chest," Narendra Modi said amidst rapturous applause and sloganeering by his supporters at Maanbela area in Gorakhpur on January 24, 2014. He had said this accepting the challenge thrown by Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav in an earlier election rally in Varanasi. Narendra Modi won the election and became Prime Minister of the country. Now after eight years of his rule, India has fallen into unprecedented energy crisis, and we are facing hours of electricity blackout across the country despite his claims of a 56-inch chest and good governance which are obviously false.

There is no sign that India can overcome this energy crisis in the near future. The chief reason is the coal crisis in the country, a sector which is regulated by the Centre, and hence is responsible for the crisis. There is little stock of coal with coal mining companies and with

GW. Obviously it is too little to supplement the electricity needed.

No wonder that Electricity supply fell short of the demand by 1.88 billion units, or 1.6 per cent, during the first 27 days of April, the worst monthly shortfall in over six years according to the federal grid regulator POSOCO data. The data also shows that power cuts in five states, including Rajasthan and Haryana in the north and Andhra Pradesh in the south were the worst in over six years.

The power crisis has struck the country at a time when the economy has just begun reviving after two years of the pandemic. The pickup in economic activities has actually increased the electricity demand at the fastest pace in nearly four decades. The crisis has already disrupted agricultural and allied activities such as food processing. Industrial activities have also been disrupted with power cuts showing an increasing trend. Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, and Rajasthan have officially restricted industrial activities. There is every possibility of large scale industrial disruption due to



the thermal power stations. Moreover, peak-power demand in the country has surged to a record high on April 28, and is expected to rise by as much as 8 per cent next month, the Union Ministry of Power has said. Additionally, a shortage of trains to transport coal is exacerbating the supply crisis of coal. The Power Secretary of India has said this week that train availability was 6 per cent lower than required. Railways is again with the Centre and hence responsible for bad performance.

Another problem added to the electricity crisis is that the chief reservoirs in our country have too little water to meet the needs of our hydroelectric power generation units. Live storage of water in India's major reservoirs has been dipping continuously amid early and intense heat waves as well as deficient pre-monsoon rainfall. The storage levels in 140 major reservoirs fell to 39 per cent of their cumulative capacity from 50 percent from March 17-April 21 with a 2-3 per cent dip every week. These reservoirs had live storage of only 68.739 billion cubic meter (BMC) against the total capacity of 175.957 BMC on April 21. Therefore, we cannot even hope for any relief from hydroelectric power for at least two months.

The Modi government has also been boasting too much about the development of renewable resources, and has been credited for several flagship programmes. There are ambitious targets to achieve 175 GW by end of 2022, but total installed renewable energy capacity stands at about 151 GW by December 2021, which also includes the large hydro generation units. Solar energy installed capacity is 49.5

power cuts, both scheduled and unscheduled. Rajasthan has scheduled four hours of power cuts for factories.

The Centre has still been claiming that they have taken sufficient measures to increase the coal supplies to power plants, but the factual position at the thermal power stations does not substantiate this claim. The Union government has asked the states to step up their imports for the next three years to build up inventories, but in the meantime thermal power plants across the country are grappling with coal shortage. The National Power Portal's daily coal report also shows an acute shortage of coal at power plants.

How grim the situation is can be imagined even by the power supply position in the National Capital Delhi. Delhi government has even warned of a possible setback in providing uninterrupted electricity supply to important establishments including Metro trains and hospitals. The reason stated for this is shortage of coal at power stations feeding electricity to Delhi. Delhi government has even written to the Centre requesting it to ensure adequate coal availability.

In brief, the electricity supply disruption has adversely affected almost every activity including households, businesses, industries, banking, internet, and even emergency services as in hospitals despite Modi's boast eight years ago referring "24-hour electricity, no power cut for 356 days in every village and street" and his 56 inch chest. No one, except a sycophant, can applaud him for such a bad performance that the present electricity crisis has revealed, which has threatened even energy security of the country. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

No hope of healing

Editor,

Apropos of the letter, "Electric woes in Shillong" by Ranbir Singh Ranhotra, (ST May 2, 2022), I am pained to inform the public that these woes would continue unabated.

With the power scenario remaining stagnant at 214 MW since 1990 and even the Leshka (run of the river) project having to depend on the monsoon we must brace ourselves for dark days ahead. Over and above the requirements of domestic consumers there are the 10 power guzzling cement plants and 4 steel plants. Meghalaya is actually power-starved and in a crisis but the government is simply pushing on from one day to the next hoping for a miracle.

The MDA Government has no policy on how to run these power guzzling plants. Each cement plant consumes 118 MWhr per month. There are 10 such cement plants. For the benefit of laypersons 118 MWhr per month is the bill paid by domestic consumers in villages with 250 KWhr of 470 households, in rural areas with minimum luxury. So 10 plants is equivalent to 4700 households or an entire village. Four steel plants consume power equivalent to 1200 households.

Had the MDA Government been strict with the law that each cement plant should have its own captive power plants to generate its own

power needs (a legal need of these plants), Meghalaya would not feel the present woes. Herein lies the NGT ban conspiracy theory. If these plants say they use the captive power plants which are fired by coal so not to bring woes to domestic consumers, then the NGT would pounce on them. And if they say that they are not using captive power plants on account of the NGT ban on coal mining the residents of Greater Shillong or those drawing power from the same grid would pounce on them and charge these cement plants of committing theft from the grid that is supposed to feed the domestic consumer.

The voltage at peak hours is a dismal 170 as against 220 (normal). This increases the bill 2 by two times. The current increase plus the machine efficiency decrease tends to inflate the bill. With the smart meter it may go up by three times. As domestic consumers of electricity we are being heavily duped. It would not be wrong to say that we would experience more such woes in this coming monsoon, with the Umiam Lake unable to generate power to the full capacity.

And what about our smart meters which were intended to reduce transmission and distribution losses? What is the status of the smart metering process today? Will the Government inform us of the correct position rather than leaving us to do our own guess work. The MDA Government has to come clean on the status of the

power scenario in Meghalaya today.

Yours etc

James Carey Wahlang
Shillong 14.

KHADC in a crisis

Editor,

The recent MoU signed between the two Chief Ministers of Assam and Meghalaya has opened up a Pandora's box. The status quo that was maintained all this while from both sides stressed on one important thing that is if any social or community development were to be undertaken by any side, the other party would intimate the neighbouring state provided that it was "beneficial" for the people. However, such an arrangement had its pros and cons wherein people had dual voting rights and a number of illegal migrants also got themselves enrolled in the electoral rolls. The recent letter of the 11 NPP MDCs showing support to the MoU throws up a number of questions for the ruling MDA Government in the state and the principal position of the MDCs of the KHADC. It shows that the 11 NPP MDCs have abandoned their rightful duty to stand with their constituents in such times and where land is the subject matter the very Council has abdicated and abandoned its constitutional duty. If the Himas and Raids are to be left to fend for themselves then why do we still need such MDCs to ask for votes in 2024?

Yours etc...
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar,
Via email

Human activities hurt the environment

Editor,

According to a recent UN report, human activities have already altered 70% of the earth's land surface and degraded up to 40% of it. The report says that food systems cause 80% of deforestation, 29% of greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity loss. The authors of the report from the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) point out that never before in modern history has man faced such risks and hazards. If such activities of man are perpetuated, an area almost the size of South Africa could be degraded by 2050. On the other hand, if land is protected and restored it could lead to the creation of 4m km2 of new natural areas by 2050.

It must be noted that the report comes just a few days before the UNCCD's COP15 scheduled to be held in Abidjan, Ivory Coast from 9 to 20 May this year. It is hoped that COP 15 will strengthen the fight against desertification, land degradation and drought. The UN is observing the decade from 2021 to 2030 as the decade of Ecosystem Restoration with the aim of preventing, stopping and reversing

ecosystem degradation. The UN expects governments to offer practicable responses to the challenges of land degradation, climate change and biodiversity loss.

The report says that global land restoration commitments will cost a substantial amount of money. As most developing countries cannot meet these costs, they would need extra financial support from developed countries.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

Colossal collapse of the Congress

Editor,
Judging from the latest political developments in the country, the grand old party, which has ruled the country for almost 70 years, has suffered a series of reverses from state to parliamentary elections held during last eight years except in some bye-elections. It is certain that this party is not going to regain its past glory any time in next five years or in the near future at the Centre and in the state unless it knows how to reform itself and adapt and adopt itself to the changing times. Just recently, the High Command of the party has requested inputs from Prashant Kishor, the election strategist in India, to suggest ways and means and strategies to be adopted by the Party to enable it to return to power? We do not know whether the party bosses paid him for his services or if he offered

his advice gratis. Having sat for almost one week with top leaders of the Congress and laying out plans and strategies for the grand old party, he understood that it is futile and a waste of time to spend more of his precious time and energies with the stoic dead wood of the party top bosses. He clearly understood that the earlier he distances himself from this party the better it is for him. His diplomatic comment after the exercise was, "In my opinion, more than me, the party needs leadership and collective will to fix the deep-rooted structural problems through transformational reforms". It was understood that the present set of top leaders of the party underestimated and belittled K.P but at the same time they clearly found it hard to adopt the strategies he suggested for it meant affecting sweeping reforms within the Party by infusing youth and new dynamism which will cost dearly for those following the old school of thought. Most are exceedingly self-seeking and a liability to the Party. They do not support any leadership outside the Gandhi family and hence they stand in the way of leadership change that will usher in new leadership of the ambitious intelligent youth and the masses of Indian voters.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Sr. Journalist,
Shillong- 2.

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"I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past."
—Thomas Jefferson

The Shillong Times

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Global diplomacy revisited

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi is back with his global engagements in the backdrop of the positive vibes that the post-Covid scenario has provided to both India and the global community. The first leg of Modi's three-day, three-nation tour had him in Germany, followed by stopovers in Denmark and France. The Europe trip is bound to provide occasion to the Prime Minister to have fresh rounds of discussions on bilateral matters and other issues of global importance, including the Russian war in Ukraine.

Bilateral agreements form the main part of such high-level visits and Modi, on his part, has added a new dimension to them by meeting with the Indian diaspora. As the PM did in the past during his visits to the US, the UAE and several other nations, he addressed an impressive crowd of Indians in Berlin. Getting such grand occasions is a matter of both pride and joy for the Indians settled abroad. They feel reassured that they are cared for and wanted back home. During his diplomatic engagements, from the very start, the PM walked a tight-rope when it came to discussing matters like Ukraine. He stressed that India sought a peaceful resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. India and Germany are caught in between the pressures from Russia on the one side and the US-led West on the other. India can neither oppose the war nor back Russia to the hilt. National interests are intertwined with global concerns. India's long infatuation with the USSR continued at a lesser scale after the Republic's disintegration and arrival of Vladimir Putin at the head of Russia. At the same time, India cozied up to the US in more significant ways since the turn of the century. A non-aligned approach had been the hallmark of Indian diplomacy all along. Modi too could not change the scenario. There are those who see merit in such a diplomacy but it could also present a future scenario when India will have no one to look up to for solid support in the event of a war with, say, China.

With the Covid-19 restrictions almost over and since international engagements will see a major push forward in the coming months, the Prime Minister can be expected to carry forward his global diplomacy with renewed vigour. The nation would watch eagerly as to what good comes out of such high-profile visits. The past eight years of the Modi rule have not seen any significant achievements for India on the foreign affairs front.

Letters to the Editor

Organising not promoting the motive behind Meghalaya Games 2022

Editor,
The Meghalaya Games 2022 were launched on the May 2, 2022. The idea behind holding such sporting events is to tap, discover and promote hidden sporting talent of the State. It is an event organized by the Meghalaya Olympic Association to encourage sports persons of Meghalaya to step forward and put their best foot forward in showing their team or individual sporting skills. To support this concept different District Sporting Associations have enthusiastically sent their best performers to Shillong, the State Capital in the hope that it is an event aimed at promoting faculty each district has. As it now appears that the State Olympic Association of Meghalaya working in close cahoots with the Director of Sports, Govt of Meghalaya do not share such sentiments for their athletes. They appear to be more interested in organizing such events (because of the huge funds involved in expenditure that can be fudged) than in promoting sporting talent, which they feel should be left to God to manage.

Photos of the conditions

of the accommodation at Polo, earmarked to house athletes from outside Shillong has now gone viral on social media. It reveals sleeping quarters on a bare concrete floor covered with dirty water from a leaking roof, bathroom with faucets that don't work (apparent from pictures of the conditions of the sinks in such bathrooms and the fact that athletes have to resort to outside taps for their daily ablutions) and dirty overflowing commodes in toilets that appear to have never been cleaned. In one word, the pictures show living conditions that are filthy, soiled and highly unhygienic unfit even of animals to live in. And these are the living conditions, the authorities tasked with promoting sporting talent in Meghalaya, provide to our young budding sportsmen? A local wit quipped "It is literal defecating over the human rights of our athletes!" It is criminal and highly unprofessional. The living conditions described above are aimed more at destroying human dignity, lowering Human Rights and are downright demeaning. In no way can they be imagined to be amenities to promote sports or any human activity.

After all is said and done about the above, one is further dismayed at the weak, feeble couldn't care less attitude of the Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma, when the

scam (for it is no less than a total rip-off of the 2.2 Crores earmarked for the event and an open case of unscrupulous attempt at corruption) was brought to his notice. His reaction to this swindle is a mild tweet, "Not acceptable at all. Have asked officials to rectify" My Dear CM, it is these very officials, right from the Sports Minister, Commissioner cum Secretary Sports, Sports Director, Chairman and General Secretary of the Meghalaya Sports Olympic Association who are individually and collectively involved in this shameful act of sheer negligence that stinks highly of a connived plot to loot the Govt in the name of providing accommodation for Meghalaya Games athletes 2022. What they claim and the reality on the ground is there for all to see. This is no time to be politically correct. Heads must roll. You are instead asking the thief to catch himself? It will not do. The prestige of the people of Meghalaya together with the officials of all District Sporting Associations is at stake. There is only one way of dealing with corruption and sleaze. Take immediate drastic action! It is what is expected of you. Set up an enquiry into the matter that might even lead to criminal charges against officials and officers involved. In the meanwhile I appeal to all District Sports Associations to immediately

recall all the athletes they have sent to Shillong. These are human beings you have sent. You just simply cannot allow them to wallow in conditions unfit even for a pig! Fifthly, I call upon all the public to raise their protest on this shameful scandal. Enough is enough. Time to put a stop to all this looting of public funds that is increasing in frequency in our state.

Yours etc.,
Benjamin Kshiar,
Via email

Bengal's culture of violence

Editor,
The TMC Government in Bengal has recently completed its first year in office of its new term which however, has captured the headlines mostly for non-palatable issues. TMC is a Bengal centric political party which like other political parties having roots in Bengal believes in the culture of violence as manifested by numerous acts of intimidation, arson, rape and other forms of brutality which are well documented resulting in regular intervention of judiciary, CBI, Women's Commission, Human Rights Commission and Minority Commissions which are trying to rein in such undemocratic activities. All forms of violence however, is not new to Bengal which is continuing unabated for over fifty years if one takes the Naxal

movement in the sixties as the starting point. Over the years people of Bengal have accepted 'violence' as their new culture jettisoning the 'bhadralok culture' which peaked in the nineteenth century. Intelligentsia and media generally put the blame on the political parties for the culture of violence prevalent in Bengal but ignore the basic fact that the political parties being inanimate institutions are incapable of perpetrating violence. It is the people of the State who as members or supporters of political parties are actually executing the acts of violence against their own fellow people and as such it can be safely inferred that the people of Bengal are solely responsible for the deaths and mayhem that one encounters regularly in the state for over half a century. One has to bear in mind that this 'culture of violence' of Bengal cannot be stopped with regime change because the believers and perpetrators of violence would vote for a new party but their inner soul will remain rooted to violence as is evident from the fact that although TMC has uprooted the Communist's three-decade long rule, it failed to deracinate the culture of violence. As such, the onus is entirely on the people of Bengal whether to shun violence or to live happily with it as it appears today.

Yours etc.,
D. Bhattacharjee,
Shillong-1

Inhuman treatment of sportspersons

Editor,
The Meghalaya State Olympic Association (MSOA), being the organisers and the host should take responsibility for the worst arrangements they have made for the sportspersons in this ongoing Meghalaya Games. Is this the way to train for the run up to the North-east games and National Games? And HubNews, shame on you for twisting the whole issue and showing clean toilets to the public when the Chief Minister himself has taken cognizance of the ugly truth. What Godi Media you have made of yourself? What are the other arrangements have you made if all the sportspersons walk out of the games since they are being treated as no less than animals?

Education and Sports were never given priority in our state. Those who have made it have done so through individual struggles. To depend on the Government for these two sectors is like asking for the moon. Only when we strive hard will we reach the goal on our own. The Government is there only to take pride in whatever people have achieved through their individual efforts.

Yours etc.,
L.A. Sangma,
Tura

Mind-boggling education scenery in the state

By Torist Mark

"Speaker surprised by classification of schools" reads The Shillong Times headline of May 1, 2022. The Speaker questioned the logic of previous governments behind the classification. History will bear witness that this was done over the years to suit the political powers. It's unfortunate that every government is just satisfied to inherit the problem without any sincere effort to solve it. The State Education Policy 2009 did say, "the existing multi-layered system of grant in aid which is highly skewed in favour of the institutions under the deficit system is undesirable and should be progressively abolished by reducing the categories of grants in aid. The ultimate goal in this area is to have a uniform system for grants-in-aid." The matter not only ended there. It became more complicated.

Now we have government schools, deficit schools, adhoc schools, improved adhoc schools, SSA schools, RMSA schools, and private schools. Not satisfied with this confusion we still have single teacher primary schools, schools with excess teachers and schools with less teachers and government schools with two heads in the same building, one for Upper Primary and one for Secondary; one is a government-run; the other is a non-government school. To top it all we have the FASTOM (Federation of All Schools Teachers of Meghalaya) threatening the government with the Sword of Damocles. With the NEET (which has deprived medical seats to most of our toppers), now comes the CUET which will further aggravate the education situation. Education in the state is really mind boggling even to the enlightened.

Let us look at the educational facilities in the state. According to the 2017-18 data which will not differ much now, there were altogether 9310 Primary schools, 3549 Upper Primary schools and 1281 Secondary schools in all Government and Non-Government categories. The total number of teachers was 54,688. The break-up was 9368 (S), 17322 (UP) and 27998 (P). The Government teachers are approximately 25,806 and Non-Government 28,882. The average teachers per school were 3 for Primary, 5 for Upper Primary and 7 for Secondary.

Once there was a talk of rationalization of education which will bring in quality education. This will involve physical and finan-

cial resources. The financial aspect of different categories as elaborated above will need to scale down to only two categories Government and Government-aided. The physical aspect is more sensitive. For instance, when there are three primary schools in a village of different management, one with two teachers, one with three teachers and one with a single teacher and if a primary school has five classes, ideally we should combine the three schools into one school with 6 existing teachers. One teacher for one class will bring in quality education. To achieve this will take a great deal of coercive persuasion especially of faith-based management. Similarly in the case of Upper Primary schools, we could improve the quality of education and infrastructure to a large extent and reduce costs at the same time. This is more prevalent in the area of Primary and Upper Primary education.

Coming to the financial aspects. Inside the classroom, dedicated teachers whose only interests are their students are oblivious of the pay and the perks they receive. Its only when they enter the common room or at the end of the month that they begin to wonder why parents or the management are blind to the sweat and the services they have rendered. It all started when the private schools signed a contract with the teachers that the only condition is for a monthly salary that is mutually agreed upon. This contract becomes complicated when the school starts getting government grants. Monthly payment or non-payment to the teacher is linked with getting government grants. Its obvious that the management is responsible for breaking the contract and cannot blame the government for non-receipt of the grant in time. To the government a grant is only a grant. If they don't have the money the grant can be denied, reduced or delayed. The poor teacher is left in the lurch. Either he has to choose another school or change his profession. The die-hard will take to the streets to agitate against the government. Legally, the government should address this issue with the management, the appointment authority to restrain their employees. It has no legal right to discipline them.

One would agree that the government is seen in a bad light whenever teachers come out in the streets to de-

mand their hard-earned salary which is due to them. Public has all the sympathy for them. Nobody thinks of the original contract the management had with the teachers. Who broke this sacrosanct contract? The teachers or the management? Fortunately or unfortunately the government becomes the victim in this tussle and it is unnecessarily dragged into many court cases involving the teachers of these school managements. There are two basic reasons for this. In terms of grants in aid, sometimes the govt. has taken more than it can chew, and in most cases it is due more to reasons of politics than educational or economics. In terms of control it has taken the unnecessary responsibility of approving their appointments. One wonders if this amounts to abrogating the contract the management had with the teacher.

On further analysis, more than 70 % of institutions in the state are non-government institutions. These institutions paid some teachers other than those teachers receiving grants-in-aid. The government should be grateful to these NGOs that they have undertaken to share the bulk of the burden. One can imagine how much the government would have to spend on infrastructure and other expenditures in running these institutions, let alone the salaries. The issue is to examine how the government can improve these non-government institutions and also to examine how to streamline funding so that we have only one type of funding and other service conditions in these non-government institutions. One plausible route is to provincialise non-government schools into government ones whenever possible. Rationalisation and streamlining then can be done by amalgamating or winding up some schools and transferring teachers according to need. They will be subjected to government service conduct rules.

For non-government schools funding will be uniform. The rate is calculated at pay and DA of government pay scales corresponding to teachers of HSS, SS, UPS and LPS. The quantum of the grant is determined by the number of teachers the school is entitled to. This is calculated at the ratio 1:30 (teacher : students ratio) including Head and Asst Head. Deficit schools used to receive DA and other allowances. These extra allowanc-

es will be treated as personal grants which cease when the incumbent retires or resigns. For social security benefits all teachers should enroll in the National Pension Scheme. There was a cabinet decision to create a corpus fund for teachers' salaries. One rupee of every litre of fuel sold was to go to this fund. A survey of only two petrol pumps in the city informed that they sold about 6000 to 7000 litres a day. One may calculate how much funds are available from all petrol pumps in the state.

The next question is the system of checks and balances and service rules of teachers. There should not be any ambiguity that the grant is given in the name of the school and not the teachers. The management is responsible for the utilization of the grant-in-aid and running of the schools according to government management rules. The contract or appointment letter to the teacher should be duly documented. The government is only to lay down minimum educational qualifications. It will have no hand in approving or disapproving the teacher's appointment. The teachers are the employees of the management and they are accountable to it. The management rules will lay down conditions of discipline, termination etc., and if there is dispute, the court will be the final authority to dispose of such cases.

The management is also subject to management rules of the government. One important condition is that the school should have its own land and building and have an endowment or reserve fund equivalent to four months salary. The grant may be withdrawn if they violate management provisions. The provisions will also include disciplining their employees and students. The grant may be withdrawn if the school becomes unviable after being given due opportunity to correct itself.

Now that the government has shared all the burden of the salary, the infrastructure and other requirements of the school have to be provided for by the management. RTE rules do not allow school fees but do not prevent parents from giving goodwill donation to improve their schools.

In order to iron out the nitty gritty of financial implications and other modalities it is prudent to set up a Committee/Commission to go into all these aspects.

(The author was former Director, Education, Govt of Meghalaya)

Reassess health and other risks and plan to avoid catastrophe
India running fast toward unprecedented extreme heat conditions

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

Only a few days after the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) alerted that extreme heat was gripping large parts of India and Pakistan impacting hundreds of millions of people in one of the most densely populated parts of the world, the images of land surface captured by INSAT 3D, Copernicus Sentinel 3 and a NASA satellite indicated that land surface temperature over pockets of northwest India reached 55 degree Celsius and even crossed 60 degree Celsius over some pockets.

This unprecedented rise in temperature was not even expected by the scientists observing the climate change across the world, that too soon. As for India, the Director General of India Meteorological Department (IMD) M Mohapatra has said that the data should not be trusted before conducting ground verification. "Satellite observations are taken from 36,000 km away from the surface. They can be misleading if not verified. The record highest land temperature was taken in Rajasthan which was 52.6 degree C. This data can create fear and panic so we should act responsibly," he said.

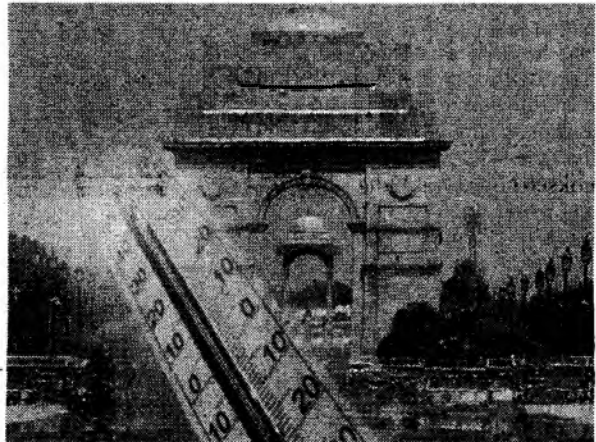
DG IMD's statement may have some validity on the scale of temperature as indicated by the several satellites, still the extreme heat conditions are still impacting

plan of action. And year after year, we face the same crisis, exacerbating with passage of time.

It is premature to attribute the extreme heat solely to climate change, WMO have said. However, it is consistent with what we expect in a changing climate. Heatwaves are more frequent and more intense and starting earlier than in the past. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its Sixth Assessment Report, said that heatwaves and humid heat stress will be more intense and frequent in South Asia this century.

The Union Ministry of Earth Sciences has recently issued a document which says that the frequency of warm extremes over India has increased during 1951-2015, with accelerated warming trends during the recent 30 years period 1986-2015. Significant warning is observed for the warmest day, warmest night and coldest night since 1986. The pre-monsoon heatwave frequency, duration, intensity and areal coverage over India are projected to substantially increase during the twenty-first century.

India recorded its warmest March on record, with an average maximum temperature of 33.1 degree Celsius or 1.86 degree Celsius above the long term average. Heatwaves do occur in April but



millions of people which has been exacerbated by the electricity and water crisis which were the result of the extreme heat wave conditions.

Though the images of satellites indicated the surface temperature, not the air temperature, people in general were able to withstand it. Even then the atmospheric temperatures in many places in north India were in the range of 40 - 47.2 degree Celsius, which is considered very high.

That is why the Centre has issued advisories to the states to monitor the heatwave conditions and review the health emergency preparedness for any eventualities. Which will obviously not work due to the power crisis across the country coupled with several other crises such as availability of potable water.

India needs more than mere advisories. The national meteorological and hydrological departments are said to be working closely with health and disaster management agencies to roll out health action plans in the present situation but these are too little to successfully tackle the situation.

Heatwaves have multiple and cascading impacts not just on human health, but also on ecosystems, agriculture, water, energy supplies and even key sectors of the economy. WMO has always been emphasizing on multi-hazard planning so that the services may reach the most vulnerable, but India's efforts are nowhere compared to the challenge we are facing now.

IMD had said on April 28 that maximum temperatures reached 43-46 degree Celsius in widespread areas and the intense heat will continue until May 2. Such information is given every year, along with the subsequent electricity, water, and other crises. However, after little showers it is forgotten on the government level along with the need of a comprehensive

are less common, but May is usually the month of excessively high temperatures.

However, the satellite images recording the surface temperature goes beyond all assessment, since 60 degree Celsius means even melting of roads and several other infrastructure, what to say about the catastrophe it may bring to all living beings including humans. It should be noted that on April 29, the surface temperatures were recorded by the satellites in absence of cloud cover and 10:30 AM. It has been claimed by satellite scientists that the measurements were accurate. As per the European Space Agency the surface temperature in Jaipur and Ahmedabad reached 47 degree Celsius while the hottest temperatures recorded southeast and southwest of Ahmedabad with maximum land surface temperatures of around 65 degree Celsius.

Obviously the data is unprecedented, and India urgently needs to plan something else than what is already in place. Only heat health action plans would not be sufficient. India has established a national framework for heat action plan through the National Disaster Management Authority which coordinates a network of state disaster response agencies and city leaders to prepare for soaring temperatures and ensure that everyone is aware of heatwave Do's and Don'ts. It provides only limited relief.

India needs large scale forestation and implementation of measures against climate change at such an unprecedented speed as the unprecedented level of rise in temperature that has struck the country. The rise in surface temperature could push up the entire atmospheric temperature in a very short time. India must run the race against climate change now to avoid the impending catastrophe. (IPA Service)

"Where the willingness is great,
the difficulties cannot be great."

— Niccolò Machiavelli

The Shillong Times

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Sporting Spirit Intact

ON May 2, last the sportspersons from Garo Hills who came with lots of enthusiasm to take part in the Meghalaya Games were shocked to find the condition of the place where they were being lodged. Those depressing pictures which could have killed the sporting spirit of even the keenest athlete surprisingly did not deter them from continuing with their respective games. Perhaps their shock at the sight of the toilets, which is worse than that of a public toilet that has not been cleaned in years, was cushioned by the fact that the Chief Minister himself went and visited the venue the moment he saw the distressing sight. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma rushed to the JN Stadium where the athletes from Garo Hills were lodged and spoke to them. He also assured them that they would be put up elsewhere at a more habitable place such as a hotel. Now the Chief Minister cannot be blamed for this pathetic sight of a lodging for sports persons because there is a Minister in Charge of Sports whose brief it is to have physically inspected the place. Doing so is not below his dignity because it also sends a message to the laid back officials of the Sports Department that they cannot take their jobs for granted. In fact the late PA Sangma was all for such surprise checks by ministers. Leaders have to be on ground zero. They cannot be rushing around with sirens blaring not knowing what is really happening in real time.

The Sports Minister later said that the living conditions of the athletes was unacceptable. So, who is he saying that to? At the end of the day he is responsible for everything that happens under his watch. The Meghalaya Government is fortunate that this was not a national game scenario where athletes from across the country would be coming. If that had been the case the shocking pictures of the toilets and the living conditions of the athletes would have been national news and the subject of discussion nationally.

After that disgraceful episode people are watching to see if there is a shake-up in the Sports Department and in the various sports associations promoted by the Government. If this does not happen then it would be seen as a big cover-up by the Government for the inefficiency, ineptitude and callousness of its officials. It is a saving grace that the Chief Minister is a young man who responded with alacrity by being physically present at the ghoulish scene and calming the nerves of the athletes. It is also fortunate that our athletes are long-suffering and have not taken umbrage at the manner of treatment they received. That they are performing with such gusto shows their sporting spirit. But that large-heartedness of the athletes should not be taken advantage of.

Thousands of fish were found dead in 2014 in one of our rivers in the Jaintia Hills district. In the Fisheries department, we were alarmed to learn that the fish died due to Endosulfan pesticide poisoning. Someone was sinister enough to poison the fish in a flowing river, and we felt that the matter was too serious to let it go without a policy response. After a few months of consultations with the Agriculture Department, a decision was made at the level of the Chief Minister that the State should stop subsidising chemical fertilisers and pesticides because, for one, (1) the State had already initiated steps to become an organic state, and for the other, (2) the dangers posed by the chemicals to the animal and human health were just too many to be brushed aside. Since then, despite the opportunistic vendors and populist pressures, the Agriculture Department steadfastly upheld this policy. It was and continues to be the right thing to do — the State cannot subsidise the agents of death.

Chemical fertilisers and pesticides are inevitable for modern crop production systems. Or, so some crop scientists and industry would want us to believe. It is a blatant lie. We can get as much production and productivity with natural farming, and that was how the country's farmers produced weather-appropriate food for centuries. It was just the bluff of the profiteering MNCs and their agents that we could not do intensive agriculture without chemical compounds. And it needs to be called.

By 2014, the State of Sikkim was vigorously moving toward becoming fully organic by banning the sale of chemical fertilisers and pesticides; our State had already begun the implementation of the Government of India's scheme MOVCDNER (Mission Organic for the Value Chain Development for the North-Eastern Region). And now, as I write this, the Government of India has already declared that the entire north-eastern region should become organic by 2030. So, the limited point was — if we could not ban the sale of such harmful chemicals, like the way Sikkim did, at least we should not subsidise them. So it was a conscious choice made at the highest level of the government to stop subsidising the chemi-

Pesticides cause Cancers: Wake up, Meghalaya!

By K.N.Kumar

cal fertilizers and pesticides. And what was the impact of our decision to abolish the subsidisation of chemical fertilisers and pesticides?

This decision reduced the State's chemical fertiliser consumption by 56.69% since 2014 without impacting our food security. It has also gradually led to increased demand and usage of bio-fertilisers in the State of Meghalaya, a redeeming feature. It opened up opportunities for the local youth to set up bio-product manufacturing units. Kerala, one of the more advanced states of our country, too made a similar effort to reduce its chemical fertiliser consumption and reported a decline from 87 Kg/ha. (2015-16) to 36.49 Kg/ha in 2019-20. Meghalaya has to be far more alert because the fragile ecosystems of hilly



states are far more vulnerable to the unbridled use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

A bit of legal awareness is required here. As of March 2021, 293 Insecticides/Pesticides are registered for use in our country under section 9(3) of the Insecticides Act, 1968. More than 115 of these are 'highly hazardous', meaning that they can cause severe long-term effects like cancers, hormone disorders, and reproductive and developmental disorders in human beings. Insecticides are classified as carcinogens (compounds that cause cancer) by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. Herbicides and pesticides are carcinogenic and tumour promoters. The tragedy is that 66 pesticides banned or restricted in the US and Europe were permitted in India for several years until 2021 when India banned 46 highly hazardous pesticides and refused registrations for 18 more. Understandably, there is enormous pressure on the government not to persist with the policy because the pesticide business in our country is nearly a 50,000-crore rupee market,

and the lobby of the vendors and agents is powerful and extends up to the village level. The Insecticide Act incidentally was introduced in our country when food insecurity was high, but it is no longer the case. We are now in an era of agricultural surpluses. So, the argument for banning these chemical pesticides and fertilisers is more urgent than ever. What should we care about? The health of the people of the state or the money to be made by the Vendors and Agents?

It is now settled that chemical pesticides are known carcinogens and chemical fertilisers destroy the soil flora and fauna. Continuous use of chemical fertilisers destroys soil fertility and productivity and lowers the nutritional standards of our foods. Worse, the chemical

pesticide residues find a way to enter the bodies of both humans and animals through water, food grains, fruits, vegetables and meat. A study indicates that the pesticide residues in the available soft drinks market are twenty-four times higher than the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS). The levels of pesticide residue Lindane exceeded the BIS standards by 140 times in some samples. Chlorpyrifos was 200 times more than the BIS standard in a sample obtained from a town in the country.

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death worldwide, with over eight million people succumbing to the disease every year. Notably, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) predicts an increase in new cancer cases from 19.3 million to 30.2 million per year by 2040. According to the National Centre for Disease Informatics and Research of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Meghalaya tops the country in cancers. Some ghastly distinction, indeed! Cancer ranks among the top five leading causes of death

in our State. East Khasi Hills district is the second-worst in cancer deaths in the whole country, the first being Aizawl, Mizoram. The NE region's cancers are nasopharynx (the passageway in the throat), oesophagus, stomach, liver, gallbladder, larynx, lung, breast, and cervix. In its report on the health sector, the CAG observed that the cancer incidence in the State has increased by 30 per cent in just four years.

There is a scientifically demonstrated association between susceptibility to cancer and direct and indirect pesticide exposure. The literature reveals that work-related exposure to agricultural pesticides increases the risk for 45 different types of cancer. Farmworkers are at the most significant risk of pesticide-induced diseases. The journal 'Occupational and Environmental Medicine' indicates that farmworkers and persons exposed to high levels of pesticides have an increased risk of developing brain tumours. Furthermore, farmworkers' children too are at risk as their immune system response is more vulnerable to pesticide exposure.

The cause-and-effect research concerning the seepage of pesticides into our vegetables and fruits, and meat is hardly done with the required scientific rigour in our State, so most are unaware, and the ones who are aware — do not care. Unfortunately, some unscrupulous among us even want to promote chemical fertilisers and pesticides because they will gain financially. Considering that cancer is a significant risk to human health and a global issue, my argument is not limited to research, which should be the basis for public policy in the ordinary course. One need not wait for years to confirm what we already know through research. I will argue that a state like Meghalaya, with its pristine, susceptible, and fragile ecosystem, must go for a complete ban on the sale and use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers. The farmers are with us because they always knew this was the right thing to do, most citizens are with us because they are aware that they are turning out to be innocent victims, and the civil society understands this to be in the right direction. Then who is not with us? Your guess is as good as mine.

(The author is Chairman, Meghalaya Farmers' Empowerment Commission)

Hindi Vs Others

What about minority languages?

By Sagarneel Sinha

India is a diverse country where many languages and dialects are spoken. According to a report of the 2011 census, there are around 19500 languages or dialects spoken. Only 22 of these are recognised in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution as the official languages. There is no national language, although a section believes that "Hindi" is.

Recently a popular Bollywood actor Ajay Devgan created a controversy when he tweeted that Hindi is the national language. Uttar Pradesh Minister Sanjay Nishad, supremo of NISHAD party, claiming to represent the communities of fishermen and boatmen and an ally of BJP, said, as reported in the media, that those who don't speak Hindi should leave the country!

When it is very clear in the Constitution of the country that there is no national language, then why do some public figures keep saying that "Hindi is the national language"? First of all, let's agree that Hindi is the most popular language and is the most understood one in the country. Although in the 2011 census around 44% identified Hindi as their mother tongue, there is also a section which understands Hindi, despite the fact that it isn't their mother tongue. Out of them, many can even speak the language. So, those who argue that not even a half of the nation's population speak Hindi aren't exactly right as over half of the population understands it. However, this doesn't give the language a national status.

Trust our politicians not to lose an opportunity to woo and strengthen their vote bank, even if it means joining the bandwagon of the language debate without understanding its intricacies. That's the reason that a politician from the Hindi belt doesn't even think twice before saying that those who don't speak Hindi are "foreigners". Then there are politicians from the South to convey the message, as loudly as possible, that the imposition of Hindi is completely wrong and they are proud speakers of Tamil or Malayalam or Telugu or Kannada, depending on the State of that politician. How can politicians from West Bengal stay away from such debates which automatically provide them a platform "to show how much they love Bengali"?

No doubt that India is a land of many languages, this tradition has to be preserved, and no language should be imposed on any State or any region. But unfortunately for the politicians, be it from the north to south or east to west, the row triggered by the language debate is more often seen as an opportunity to polarise the voters by keeping them away from the real issues that threaten their electoral prospects. The ultimate aim is to win elections by painting a language as an evil, and this "evil language" varies from States to regions.

This is not to say that no language faces any issue in this country. There are dogged controversies. For example, say the Assamese language, one of the 22 official languages. The last census in 2011 revealed that only 48% of Assam's population speak Assamese, meaning that it is no longer spoken by the majority. This is definitely a matter of concern.

But apart from 22 official languages, there are many other languages or dialects which are fighting for their existence. Sadly, in the debate of language politics, these don't find a mention. One such language is Bishnupriya Manipuri, the mother tongue of this writer. The speakers are largely concentrated in Assam, particularly

in Barak Valley, and Tripura, apart from a few districts of Manipur like Jiribam.

Although the Left Front government in Tripura then introduced the Bishnupriya Manipuri language at primary levels in areas dominated by the community in the State in 1995, it wasn't introduced in Assam then. This led to protests called the Bishnupriya Manipuri Bhasa Andolan in 1996 in the Barak Valley where a young woman activist called Sudeshna Sinha sacrificed her life, as a result of police firing, for the recognition of her mother tongue. The date was March 16, commemorated every year by the Bishnupriya Manipuri community.

Later in 2001, the Assam government finally introduced the Bishnupriya Manipuri at primary levels in areas of the Barak Valley where the community dominates. Yet the language still faces many difficulties. A major issue is that in the Census the name of the community isn't properly represented. Instead of Bishnupriya Manipuri, the Census has identified Bishnupuriya as a "language", upsetting the community. Umpteen demands have been made by their organisations to rectify this mistake.

Another demand is to include the language into the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, apart from the ST-Plain status and an autonomous council in the satellite system for the Bishnupriya Manipuris in community-dominated localities of Assam, Tripura and Manipur. Unfortunately many political parties aren't interested as the community isn't a significant vote bank in either of the three States.

Then there are Nepali-speaking Gorkhas in Darjeeling Hills of West Bengal who have often raised their voice against the imposition of Bengali and demanding recognition of their language. The State's Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who otherwise is very vocal against imposition of Hindi in her State, has been criticised by the Gorkhas for doing the same to them. Then there are regional and tribal languages such as Gondi, Chhattisgarhi, Garo, Kokborok, Kamatapuri, Bhojpuri, Lepcha, Mizo, Ho, Angika and many others, which seek inclusion in the Eighth Schedule.

If Hindi is made compulsory in the present three language policy, other than English, an important language, it is likely to be challenging for the minority languages. For example, in Tripura, if this policy is introduced, it is likely to leave no space for Kokborok, the language of the majority of tribals, as the third language would be Bengali, the State's dominant language. This is likely to create resentment among the tribals.

In my old village school, three languages are taught — Bengali, English and Sanskrit. There is a fourth — Bishnupriya Manipuri but only for students of the community. If Hindi, a language already the most popular and which doesn't need to be imposed, is introduced, one language has to be replaced. Is learning Sanskrit, another endangered language and a key to India's ancient treasure of knowledge, not important? Or is learning Bishnupriya Manipuri not significant for its community?

The fact is that many local languages are on the verge of extinction and such a loss would have an adverse impact on age old traditions and culture, among others. The language debate should focus on larger and critical issues. Let's not turn Hindi versus Others into yet another vote bank politics. Can there be restraint before it damages the diverse social fabric?—INFA

Letters to the Editor

Meghalaya Games 2022!

Editor,
For a while, I thought the sledgehammering letters written by Benjamin Kshiar and L.A. Sangma which appeared in this newspaper (ST May 4, 2022) was sufficient bashing for the pigsty like and inhuman arrangements made for our young and valuable sports persons of our state participating at the extravaganza called-Meghalaya Games 2022. However, I want to reiterate here that the whole meaning of holding the Games was totally misplaced and intentionally executed by the Chief Patron of the games, the Sports Minister, the Sports officials and the officials of the Meghalaya State Olympic Association. It is very clear that they all connived to use this event to make hay while the sun shines at the cost of the innocent young boys and girls of our state participating in the games. I can very well imagine the type of food they got or whether they got any food at all and the types of logistics arranged for them: This is too much to bear for all Meghalayans. We must all demand that the heads responsible for this saga must roll right from the head of state and all the rest. If you cannot give the best to our upcoming sports stars who are our children, please, for God's sake, do not make them sacrificial lambs while

you, yourself, enjoy in your ivory towers and seek accommodations whenever you require in not less than five star hotels.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Sr. Journalist,
Shillong-2.

Why this anti-Bengali rant?

Editor,
This is in response to the highly biased and prejudiced, racist and anti-Bengali letter of D. Bhattacharjee titled "Bengal's culture of violence" (May 4, 2022). So Bengal has captured the headlines "mostly for unpalatable issues"! Perhaps the very recent communal violence in New Delhi, Gujarat Uttar Pradesh and various other states (revolving around the Ram Navami muscle-flexing) were extremely "palatable" weren't they? However, if such issues are hidden under the carpet by the Godi-media, it wouldn't hit the headlines obviously! Karnataka's tirade against hijab, halal, azaan are also "extremely palatable" it would seem. So to the atrocities against Dalits in North Indian states!

I am only mentioning what has happened in recent times. If the saga of last 4-5 years, namely killings in the name of "Gomata", murder of innocents in the name of "honour" and "love jihad", annihilation of Gauri

Lankesh, the 2020 New Delhi communal carnage, Unnao-Hathras-Budaun etc are covered then it would exceed even the Mahabharata! "Goli Maro" and thereafter shoots innocent, non-violent NRC-CAA protesters but there is no punishment for such "brave" leaders! What a great place our national capital is! The open calls to take up arms against Muslims by "religious" leaders seem to be palatable to Bhattacharjee. Why? Because those have not happened in Bengal! Since the last 8 years, civilised countries of the world have time and again been shocked about the series of developments in India. None of such barbaric and horrendous incidents happened in Bengal; rather they happened in the rest of India from Haryana to Karnataka, Gujarat to Assam! However all these things are extremely "palatable" and so wouldn't merit headlines! Headlines should be reserved only for Bengal. Sweep the scandals of all states under the carpet and character-assassinate only Bengal. Bravo!

Even today rampant character-assassination is reserved for Mamata Banerjee, TMC, West Bengal Government and West Bengal only! But now the whole Bengali community is being tarnished with a "violent" colour — "their inner soul will remain rooted to violence"! What a barbaric specimen of blatant racism and crude anti-Bengalism. Going by Bhattacharjee's

rants then Hindi-speakers Gujaratis Marathis Kannadigas Malayalees Tamils, Asomiyas Khasis and all other Indian communities are paragons of divinity and virtue and messengers of peace. Would Bhattacharjee dare to character-assassinate any non-Bengali community in such a barbaric way? However, if it is granted that 2002 Gujarat pogrom, murder of Jinnahs to Pehlu Khans, annihilation of M M Kalburgis to Pansares, burning Bengali Afrazool Khan to death in Rajasthan on charges of fictitious "Love Jihad", gangrapes and spine-chilling murders in Uttar Pradesh or Kathua, flogging of Dalits in Una Gujarat, open call of taking arms against Muslims form specimen of "non-violence" "compassion" and "love" — then of course the whole Bengali community is "violence-personified"!

Let me enlighten D. Bhattacharjee that we true-blue Bengali Bhadrakols are extremely proud of ourselves for our impeccable secularism and scientific temperament; thanks to which we can reside above all pettiness of communalism, racism, casteism or "honour killings." Also, we feel proud of being residents of a state which is untouched by the barbarities of riots, pogroms, mythical "love jihad", untouchability (unlike Rajasthan or Tamil Nadu, Bengal doesn't reserve crematoriums for "upper caste"), assault on mosques or churches,

"Gomata"-related killings or annihilation of secular rationalists! If Bhattacharjee honestly examines his soul and has courage of conviction he should also criticise the series of ugly and violent incidents in the rest of India and put the onus entirely on the people of the country whether to shun violence or to live happily with it as it appears today.

Yours etc.,
Kajal Chatterjee,
Kolkata

Temperature rise

Editor,
Satellite images of land surface that indicate temperatures between 55 and 60 degree Celsius over areas of north west India lend credence to the World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) recent warning that extreme heat was gripping large parts of India and Pakistan. In fact, this unusual rise in temperature has perplexed the scientists who have been observing climate change across the world.

The Central government has taken steps to monitor the heatwave conditions and review the health emergency preparations. On the other hand, at the time of such a crisis India needs more than that. The National Meteorological and Hydrological departments are working in unison with health and disaster management agencies

to implement plans for dealing with the crisis. In fact, without a comprehensive approach the crisis created by extreme rise in temperature cannot be resolved. Heat waves pose a multi-dimensional threat. It has impacts on health, ecosystem, agriculture, water, energy sources and different sectors. In fact, India's efforts to ease the crisis is not proportionate to the challenges posed by heat waves. Even though information about high temperatures is given by IMD every year, the government fails to devise and implement comprehensive plans. Consequently, we face the same crisis every year.

It is a fact that heatwaves are related to climate change. On the other hand, climate change alone is not the cause of heat waves. Given that 60 degree Celsius can damage infrastructure and cause serious health problems to living beings, we need to be alert. We need to change our lifestyles to suit extreme heat. Working hours, study time, construction of buildings and other ways of our lives need to be adapted to suit extreme heat conditions.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

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"Let us move from the era of confrontation to the era of negotiation."

--- Richard M. Nixon

The Shillong Times

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New push for CAA

UNION Home Minister Amit Shah has fired a fresh salvo by announcing on Thursday that the central government will implement the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) once the Covid19 spread ends. The "promise" is also that citizenship rights will be extended to "all our brothers and sisters" – meaning the Hindu migrants from Bangladesh. At the receiving end of this resolve will be the large army of Muslims who have come over to India in the past several years, whose deportation mainly from Assam and West Bengal will be done by the Centre once the CAA implementation is carried forward.

The anti-CAA protests in Delhi before the start of the Covid season had gained considerable backing from the minority community and support to it came also from the Indian Left, while the Congress took a cautious stand. The agitation turned violent at one turn leading to some deaths and injuries to many. However, the scare about the Covid-spread halted the government drive to implement CAA and NRC (national registry of citizens); and the agitation ended in a whimper. Here is guarantee that a fresh bout of protests could erupt in the North and the East, in particular, over this resolve to push the CAA. As a matter of fact, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) as also the creation of a registry therein cannot be faulted for the reason that a government that means business cannot allow wholesale migration of people or labour from neighbouring nations. India is believed to have had an influx of over five crore people from Bangladesh over a period of time, post the Mukti-Bahini movement that set itself against the Pakistani domination of the eastern Bengali-speaking province. The Liberation having been achieved with the help of India in 1971, and in the face of the Pakistani Army's atrocities against the Hindu population there, India welcomed people from there with open arms. In due course of time, the borders being porous and without any security check for most part, the influx of Bangladeshis carried on unhindered until recently. It was after the Modi government came to power in Delhi that the eastern borders were provided with security cover.

Be that as it may, India must accept its failure to check the influx for long years. This calls for a humanitarian approach vis-à-vis those who have come here and settled down for years and started a full life. The Modi government faced flak for the religious discrimination that the CAA allegedly sought to introduce vis-à-vis the migrant issues. This has made the task of the central government more complicated.

When we think government we think corruption. But there are several studies that inform us that 'incompetence' is the major cause of poor governance and of course that enables corruption. In a state with high levels of literacy and several PhD holders, it is appalling to note that we elect semi-literate or illiterate people to represent us in the legislature in the 21st century. I am not demeaning the half/literate or illiterate but considering that our fates are in their hands and the kind of laws they legislate, it is in my own enlightened self-interest that I should elect someone who can read a balance sheet; who will go through the CAG observations year after year and haul up civil servants who fail to perform and deliver.

What's ironic is that while we have high expectations from our children and expect them to touch the stars and glide the futuristic world seamlessly, we have no such ambitions from our elected representatives. Why so? Is it because we are resigned to our fates and know that nothing good can come out of politics? Hence, we not only distance ourselves from this 'art of the possible' but also believe it to be beyond our ken because we don't have money to burn in order to buy votes? So, we have the kind of MLAs/ministers we have today who literally struggle to understand the basic nuances of governance. Because of their own incompetence, many of our politicians tend to rely heavily on bureaucrats to guide them in decision-making. Most MLAs are simply unable to deep dive into any issue or to analyse dispassionately a file that comes before them. The few that are educated, (some of them abroad) and in no less a field of study than management, which, hopefully includes human resource management, seem to have lost that cutting edge after entering politics. Sadly, very few institutions train people in political management and governance. Politics is a different ballgame and that's why the MIT World Peace University, Pune, has a course called "Studies on Governance." Several politicians are enrolled in that course.

Politics is not corporate management. In the corporate world you have the luxury of choosing the best brains and paying them a tidy package. In politics you can't choose people to work for you. You have to make do with who the people elect.

And if money is the guiding factor in every election then naturally you will have MLAs that stumble when they have to read even what their officers have meticulously prepared. But politics in Meghalaya has tolerated incompetence, inefficiency, lack of accountability and worse, because we have all given up expecting anything better. Every government that comes in seems to perform worse than its predecessor. The irony is that every single MLA also runs a business. The question is - are they running their businesses the way they are handling the state? Would they allow their businesses to run at a loss year after year? But that seems alright for the State. The pathetic human development indices of Meghalaya especially in the area of women and child health and of the 41% of single women headed households where 42 % of the population live (NFHS 2021) speak volumes about the failure to address this single most disturbing aspect of development or its absence.

But this article is about the monumental shame that the Sports & Youth Affairs Department has single-handedly managed to put the state through. And sadly, no heads have rolled as yet! What's to stop the Chief Minister from dropping the Sports Minister and call explanation from the Director of Sports and Youth Affairs and other officials for their utter incompetence and distance from the situation on the ground. This is a clear case of apathy towards their respective duties. A blame game is already on but the public should not allow this case to be forgotten. We need an accountability mechanism in place.

While corruption among public servants causes harm and is a killjoy for governance it is simplistic to believe that corruption alone is the principal cause for poor governance. More than corruption it is incompetence that haunts governments the most. We all know how difficult it is to run an organisation that comprises incompetent people. Service delivery is the first casualty. And I wonder if people have noticed this but incompetent people are also very insecure people. If they are in decision-making positions, they will take the wrong decisions to protect their backs and discard the right decision to improve service delivery. We have seen many

such incompetent people heading departments and playing the blame game each time something goes wrong. Leaders don't pass the buck. They take responsibility for the organisation/department when something goes wrong. They don't blame the underlings down the ladder.

The cost of losses on account of incompetence has not been assessed in this country. Prime Minister Modi had adopted a scheme of compulsorily retiring non-performing officials. I am sure there would be many in Meghalaya. Such have become dead wood that are being paid for their incompetence. There is no punishment for incompetence but the damage to governance is far, far greater than the 'leakages' due to corruption.

Dr Rajesh Kasturirangan, Associate Professor, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, who has done extensive research on governance says he is not convinced that corruption is responsible for poor governance. From published evidence, China seems as corrupt as India but the governance in the two countries differs by leaps and bounds. Kasturirangan says the that perhaps the difference is between enabling corruption and disabling corruption, which in other words means that the Chinese take bribes and get the job done while Indians take the money and run. In many countries, corruption is the price of doing business, but there is no reason why corrupt officials shouldn't deliver the goods.

The 4th Meghalaya Games (by the way other sister states in the North East are into the 12th or 13th edition) has shown us the huge talent pool in sports and games. Watching the Karatekas perform at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) stadium on Thursday was pure joy. Kids as young as 5-6 years and the seniors are already playing the game with the intensity it demands. They are physically fit and if well trained they will give any competitor a run for their money. Speaking with the General Secretary of the All Karate-Do Association, Ksan Kupar Warjri one learnt that these bright and promising young athletes soon drop out of the game because their parents feel there is no future in pursuing sports in Meghalaya. Yet those who train in Karate, he told me, are also mentally strong and focussed because that's what the game demands. As a result many

of them take up professional courses like engineering and medicine and do well in these subjects because Karate is a game demanding speed, accuracy, quick reflexes, a sharp response mechanism but above all discipline.

When one looks at the teeming number of participants in the various games numbering over 2,600 athletes and the hopes and dreams in their eyes one wonders if they will ever be able to reach the pinnacle of success through intense coaching and the financing required for their trips to international events. Here I want to raise an important point. Where are the industries, especially the cement companies investing their corporate social responsibility (CSR) which is 2 % of their profits? How transparent is this transaction? Which human development institutions have these corporate entities created? Paying money surreptitiously to sundry pressure groups is not CSR. These companies have to be held to account. They should be told to invest in the Meghalaya Olympics Association and that body must be made accountable for how it uses funds.

Interestingly, the Indian Olympic Association has set a cash prize of Rs 75 lakh for gold medalists, Rs 40 lakh for silver and Rs 25 lakh for bronze. But what pushes the athletes to aim for the stars are the steep cash prizes announced by the state governments to those athletes that have won medals at the recent Tokyo Olympics. The highest rewards are announced by Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Chandigarh at Rs 6 crore each for gold winners, Rs 4 crore for silver and Rs 2 crore and Rs 2.5 crore respectively for bronze. When will we in Meghalaya be able to produce an Olympian? Does the Government care enough to set aside a decent budget for sports? Government needs to remember that sports is known to build the physical and mental discipline of youth. It is perhaps the best way to wean youth away from all the other evils that threaten to destroy them. The role of the Government is to think along those lines.

This time when political parties come to ask for our votes we have to all question them (a) if they have a vision for Sports and Youth Affairs (b) what that vision is and (c) how will they translate that vision on the ground. Sports needs a big fillip and it's time the Government does course correction. If music is given prominence then sports too deserves a bigger budget. Period.

What kind of change do we want?

By Bansharailang Pyngrope

The above is a question I ask myself and my colleagues in our politically affiliated students' unions. Are we working towards replacing the present leaders of our incumbent government with a different set of leaders who would also function in the same way? Or are we capable of a wider or expansive outlook?

This pandemic has brought some realizations of how broken our system has become, how terribly immediate our problems are and how desperately a solution is being sought for. Looking back at the peak of the lockdown, we were awakened to the horrific situation prevailing around us due to the shortage of food, shortage of medical facilities both basic and specialised, unorganised civic amenities, etc.

In fact there were inadequacies of every basic necessity except for the outsourcing human population. But the stream of life goes on. Despite living at a time in history where our political, economic and social fabric is being stretched to its maximum limit, somehow life adapts and goes on. We humans have this unique quality of living in the memories of the past and unknowingly slipping the present into the same past. I, a child of yesterday, am now exposed to the world and all of its intricately deep-rooted problems and strive for their solutions in a world of infinite possibilities.

Politically, our country's very idea of democracy is being challenged at the very deepest level. Academically, changes are being made in the school syllabus leading to changes in the learning process of the new and future generation. They are being moulded to think a certain way which is killing the very soul of an Indian- the freedom to choose how we wish to think. Economically, we are at a stage where wealth and poverty prominently walk side by side on the same pathway; the disparity being apparent yet oblivious. Never has the economic gap been so wide between members of our very own society. Socially, we instantly see the difference of attitude in each other. While a section of our society works towards unity while some sections play along the lines of disrupting it. There is a constant pull and push, but the sound of the voice that pushes us away from each other feels louder than the voice of our hearts which calls us to pull each other close, to understand that we are all human, we all yearn to be loved and respected, that in all our hearts, there is more good than evil. Hence, the superficial differences are all founded on the inequalities that are based on privileges and opportunities offered selectively to a few among the society.

But how do we fix these deep-rooted problems? How are we going to change? Every member of the society is responsible, but I am nobody to tell anyone what to do, except myself and taking steps to set a good example for change. Being part of a political party, I am aware of the age-old tradition where privileges are enjoyed by party workers when their own party is in power. This is where we can make changes and be different from others. We the party workers need to be aware that these very privileges or vested interests are the weeds that suffocate and destroy the very root of progressive development. We need to uproot the so-called tradition; we need to go deeper to find out if we

actually have any chance of fighting the impending problems like climate change and environmental degradation caused by depletion of natural resources, over population, economic disparity and unemployment problem. Without convincing ourselves first, that we need a revolutionary change in the system we are living in, we cannot expect that these deep-rooted problems would be solved. And we might just end up leaving this world, in a worse condition than the world we inherited from our previous generations.

While our destinies have brought us all to this period of time where there's undemocratic politics, widening economic gaps and a disrupted social unity, yet if there exists any light at the end of tunnel, any hope for mankind, then it is humankind itself. It is all up to us, humans who throughout history have shown that we are capable of conquering the highest peak, and to do miraculous things.

Our state, our country was founded by people who fought against all odds to achieve what was very tough then. If the pandemic has showed us our flaws, it has also demonstrated our strengths- doctors, health workers, civil society groups, political parties, dorbar shnong, religious institutions all came together to fight the pandemic, to support the underprivileged sections of our society affected by the lockdown with whatever was within their capacities. We saw the human spirit in full pomp! YouTube has shown how creative and talented people of our state are, from musicians, vloggers, comedians, etc to our athletes making us all proud performing at their best.

We have so many entrepreneurs, great thinkers, writers, orators, teachers, religious leaders and many more who are constantly trying to make the world a better place. Our young generation is getting more educated, minds are getting broader as each day passes, but we all need guidance and leaders who will inspire the good in each one of us; leaders who will be role models for the younger generation; leaders who will put the values of an integral society before themselves!

Meghalaya is known for its ethical and deeply principled people who live by values passed down from generations. Meghalaya has been known for its integrity, it's beauty and it's huge potential. We can all comment that all political parties are the same, but actually every political party is different and we all can be part of any of these political parties that our principles are aligned with and which we believe represent our aspirations for the state and country at its best. In a democracy, we all have important roles to play. Government employees, journalists, students, teachers, parents, business persons etc., each have our roles which we are to perform judiciously because what we do today, will impact our future generations. Elections are a festival in a Democracy which is celebrated and participated in only once in five years. Now all of that depends on our mental make-up. We can either be on-lookers and wait optimistically for the order of the universe to bring about the ultimate triumph of virtue over evil or instead with a far-sighted attitude, be the change and carry the burden on our own shoulders and work together towards a better tomorrow for all.

Letters to the Editor

Painful pleas of students: Is anyone listening?

Editor,

The meeting of Meghalaya CM with the Union Education Minister vis a vis the CUET and the CM's report thereafter has resulted in confusion worse confounded. Thanks to social media, we can see them the questions being thrown at the CM about their gloomy future. Some asked if they could get back the exam fees since they don't want to write the test. Matters were made worse when Conrad Sangma, with all honest intentions, tried to lend a helping hand in matters of CUET without realising that only two colleges in Meghalaya are state-sponsored. These two colleges cannot accommodate all UG aspirants. Not only that, many students who can afford to wish to study outside in prominent colleges.

The fear of the Delhi University professors about the mismatch of textbooks in a country as vast as India compounded with the fact that rural students are yet

to be computer literate does not seem to bother the UGC seated in the national capital. Most critical was the observation of D. Rajesh Thapa that while CUET was still under discussions, National Testing Agency (NTA) with coaching centres and guide books had already jumped in to coach some schools with the MCQs. Is this fair when millions are yet to understand what CUET MCQs will look like.

That old resolute determination of the govt to ban tuitions is complete forgotten today. Students of this era live in the world of spoon-feeding coaching centres in urban areas that have made our school learning irrelevant. And Conrad Sangma with little idea on which are state aided or sponsored, fell into the trap, and our UG aspirants are now in deep confusion.

It is unfortunate that despite dissent expressed by several learned educationist against CUET, the UGC simply bulldozed it's way. And considering that the North East has no voice in Parliament we are left abandoned. And I dare say that in the same manner that NEET has disappointed our high scorers, there will be great disappointment all over

India for those not habituated to NTA's MCQs.

On hindsight looking at the birth of NEHU in 1974, did we blunder when we opted for a Central University instead of a State University? And going by the bulldozing conduct of UGC from time to time, the appropriate answer is YES. We did. And it's a huge blunder! The result is being felt right now since with 13 languages allowed, barring Khasi, Mizo, Naga et al and those from South India we are a drop in the sea of CUET. This Act therefore is already discriminatory in terms of languages allowed.

There are no quick solutions for Meghalaya because since 1972, we did not give priority to education. Had we been conscientious and adopted judicious monitoring and used the coal revenue to fund education by now we would have possessed a State University of our own. Also if we had shed off that maddening phrase "Foreigner... Influx of Outside Scientists and Technocrats" phobia by the three in the Secretariat viz Planning, Personnel and Finance (not from pressure groups) we would have done much better.

This bandwagon of anti-outsider is the reason for

missing the Central Agricultural University twice offered by UPA in 2010. If there was a vision our children will not land in this sea of uncertainty and gloom. Our lack of concern and also lack of respect for education be it in the way we treat teachers for SSA, contractual or Ad-hoc post and with no plan whatsoever to build Medical, Engineering colleges has finally boomeranged. Are we looking at the Waterloo of Meghalaya? And who is the Napoleon Bonaparte here?

Yours etc
W. Passah,
Via email

NEHU: Anomalies galore

Editor,

As concerned stakeholders we would like to bring to the attention of all regarding the anomalies in the functioning of the esteemed North Eastern Hill University Examination Department.

The NEHU Ordinances OC-15 Amended Provision on Academic Calendar of the University under section

26 (1) (q) of the NEHU Act 1973 states that "The University will have at least 180 days of actual teaching in a year, with at least 90 teaching days in a semester".

Keeping this mandate in mind let me now proceed. The last NEHU Theory Odd semester examination began on the 3.02.2022 and ended on the 21.02.2022. This theory examination was followed by Practical examinations. Further, on 7.03.2022 a letter bearing No:EX:UG:MISC: Academic Calendar:2022:254 was issued by the Deputy Registrar (Exams) of NEHU notifying all affiliated colleges that the regular classes for the Even semester is to begin from 18.02.2022. Let me point out here that the Odd semester theory examinations as per the NEHU notified routine were still on and the practical exams had not even begun.

Therefore, most affiliated colleges actually began their teaching session for the present Even Semester only on March 2022.

Now keeping in mind the mandated actual teaching days of 90 days per semester as stated above NEHU has issued a notification dated May 2, 2022 bearing No: FEX/AR/UG-PROG/2019-

22/3260 notifying Theory examinations for the Even Semester from 25.05.2022.

In light of the above and keeping in mind the dates I fail to rationalize as to how can NEHU schedule and notify examination dates for the Even semester for UG students to be held from 25.05.2022 when the 90 actual teaching days criteria is not fulfilled? Kindly do the simple math. From the date of the last odd semester exam 2022 ie 21.02.2022 till the date of the present even semester exam ie 25.05.2022 there are 92 days which also includes Sundays as well as other national and state holidays. So where are the 90 actual teaching days as mandated? Further, even if NEHU officials go as per the notified calendar I wonder if classes for the next Even semester can be held while exams of the Odd semesters are going on?

Yours etc.
Concerned Teachers (Name withheld on request)
Via email

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"The fibers of all things have their tension and are strained like the strings of an instrument."

— Henry David Thoreau

The Shillong Times

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WHO's credibility questioned

THE World Health Organization (WHO) estimates released on May 5, claims that India's Covid deaths between January 2020 to December 2021 at 4.81 lakhs was grossly under-reported. The actual figure cited by WHO is over 47 lakhs which is ten times the number officially released by India. As expected the Modi Government has contested the WHO figures and alluded to its being antagonistic towards India. Some doctors in India too have called the WHO report preposterous while others that have no ideological leanings have said that the truth could lie anywhere in the middle but that the official figures released by India are an attempt to hide the truth. They point to the dead bodies floating in the Ganga River because there was no firewood to cremate the bodies. These doctors who have adopted a neutral stand also claim that reportage on Covid deaths from most states were faulty or under-reported. Those contesting the WHO figures also claim that the Organisation's data collection and modelling was faulty as the sampling was done from only 17 states. Others claim that the mathematical modelling and extrapolation was wrong.

Ironically, India is the only country out of WHO's 194 member countries to have rejected the data and to push back against these estimates. What the WHO says is that while India experienced roughly 830,000 excess deaths in 2020 (by the end of its first wave), the country saw over 3.9 million (39 lakh) excess deaths in 2021. Of these, 2.3 million (23 lakh) took place over just two months – April and May 2021 – at the height of the second wave caused by the Delta Variant. This is not the first time that India has contested data released by different international organisations whether it be on unemployment or on press freedom. Recently the international media watchdog Reporters sans frontieres (RSF) or Reporters Without Borders showed a very pitiable picture of India's press freedom ranking. This year India is ranked 150 out of 180 countries. Last year India was ranked 142. It is a matter of concern that on World Press Freedom Day, Reporters Without Borders and nine other human rights organisations asked Indian authorities to stop targeting journalists and online critics for their work. It added, "More specifically, they should stop prosecuting them under counterterrorism and sedition laws." The RSF said the Indian authorities should respect the right to freedom of expression and release any journalists detained on trumped-up or politically motivated charges for their critical reporting and stop targeting them and muzzling independent media. India was very critical of this report too and cast aspersions on the RSF, calling it anti-India. The point is how long can India live in denial and to what effect.

Letters to the Editor

Reckless administration

NEHU

Editor,

The manner in which NEHU's is conducting the administration of the affiliated colleges is unsystematic and autocratic with each passing day. Whether it is CUET-2022 or conducting semester examinations, the University neither co-ordinates nor takes the stakeholders from the affiliated colleges into confidence before arriving at any decision. It is pertinent to recall a meeting, held on 21st April 2022, which was convened by the University on the pretext of inviting suggestions from the Principals of all the colleges and deliberating on the emerging issues of CUET-2022. The Principals of affiliated colleges attended the meeting. The State Education Minister was also present along with some stakeholders from NEHU including the Vice-chancellor who left the meeting halfway. But, the meeting did not go on as expected and suggestions from the Principals went unheard. It was just to inform the Principals of the colleges that NEHU had already given its consent to UGC and Ministry of Education, Govt of India, to make CUET mandatory for admission to all the affiliated colleges. It was an austere show of diktat over the colleges that people of the region are taken for granted.

Being the lone university to which over 60 colleges in Meghalaya are affiliated, the administrators must pay heed to the crucial problems facing the students of the re-

gion unlike students of other universities and colleges in India. What was the purpose of calling the meeting when the matter was already decided? Moreover, there is a lot of misinformation/communication gap between the colleges and the University with regard to conduct of exams and implementation of academic calendar. The odd semester exams were concluded on February 21, but to the surprise of colleges the even semester exam schedule has been given. The even semesters' exam will commence from May 25, 2022. Teachers and students got hardly three month's time for regular classes. Normally, a semester is of six months duration. Students are agonising as they are at the receiving end of such inconsiderate and hasty decisions, but there is no voice to convey their suffering to the administrators of NEHU that take arbitrary decisions.

The University came into existence in 1974 with the sole aim of catering to the educational needs of the region and to sustain the colleges in the state. It has become a matter to be reviewed seriously whether the University has relegated this sole objective to the background. The colleges are not given information whether the upcoming semester exams will be held online or offline. When persons from some colleges call up through the Controller of Examinations (COE) office's contact number and inquire about it, the staff of that Department who picks up the call says the Exam department has not finalized whether exams will be conducted online or offline. The examination

Right attitude to workers remain at the document level

By Albert Thyrniang

The other day was the International Workers' Day, known as May Day. Labour Day, the celebration of the working classes, in popularity has overtaken the other May Day, the ancient northern hemisphere spring festival, also celebrated on May 1. International Workers' Day was born of the Haymarket affair that took place on May 4, 1886. A peaceful rally in support of striking workers' demand for an eight-hour work day turned fatal when a bomb was thrown at the police on duty. The ensuing gunfire resulted in the death of 7 police officers and 4 civilians and is hence hailed as the 'Haymarket martyrs'. Many protesters were given harsh sentences, including life imprisonment. The tragedy gave a big boost to workers who were campaigning for eight-hour work policy and better wages and working conditions. Subsequently May Day became an annual event all over the world to raise awareness on the rights of workers and to lay stress on the dignity of labour.

Work is an essential part of human existence. It is indispensable to earning a living. It is supposed to be the only way to make money. Work gives a sense of usefulness and worth to an individual. Even a rich person works because that is the nature of humans.

The reason to engage in work is, of course, not limited to individual dimension. The social, economic, historical, ethical, aesthetic angle and the philosophical and theological foundation provide the basis for the significance of work.

Obviously an over-all perspective of work is not possible in this 1000 word essay but in a nutshell the Christian theology may be presented thus. Work is biblical. Found in the creation narrative of Genesis the most important human activity is considered part of the original human vocation as God instructed the 'first humans' to "tilt the earth." St. Paul's letters and the Gospels illustrate the scriptural evidence for work as an inherent part of being human. Further in theology, work is seen as 'cooperation with God' in the on-going creation. As creation is not a finished product, human beings are called co-creators to make the world better in every way. Work is also assigned an eschatological significance. The futuristic God's new creation depends on the work we do here on

earth at present. The eternal world depends on the work performed in temporal world. This realisation is supposed to give meaning to our work.

Six documents of the Church are referred in this connection. In the encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum*, 1891, Pope Leo XIII called on the faithful to "save unfortunate working people from the cruelty of men of greed, who use human beings as mere instruments for money-making, condemned excessive labour and argued for a just living wages while endorsing the formation of "workingmen's unions". After Leo XIII it is revealing to know that Gaudium Et Spes, 1965, *Laborem Exercens*, 1981, *Economic Justice for All*, 1986 and *Caritas Veritate*, 2009 all promote workers' associations. In 1931 Pope Pius XI wrote the *Quadragesimo Anno* to express concern about the unjust distribution of wealth and huge disparity between the few exceedingly rich and the unnumbered 'property-less'. This year May Day was on a Sunday. The feast of St. Joseph the Worker, went by without being noticed in many a religious setting. The backbone of the Church (in fact of any religion and the society at large) are the workers. It is saddening that they are not acknowledged and even remembered. Ordinary people may not be aware of the gymnastics of philosophy and theology but they are the ones who make families, the society and human existence better. This writer has been at a centre in Karbi Anglong. Stories of the 80s and 90s are told of how the new settlers faced multiple evictions. Poverty was at its peak. People had hardly anything to eat. Sickness abounded. Dwellings were the most modest. In 2022, not that one sees rapid progress but inhabitants are in slightly better situation by dint of hard work. Bamboos and thatched houses are gradually giving way to RCC buildings.

These days the 'annual' Easter blessing is on. It can be hectic. But it is an opportunity to interact with every family. You could see and feel the struggle to survive and to uplift themselves. In the area I reside it is overwhelming to discover that in every household there is at least one member working in the metros of Mumbai, Bangalore, Delhi etc. In many cases mothers and fathers leave behind kids with their grandmothers. Video calls

cannot substitute for the physical warmth. However, it is they who construct concrete houses for their family and bear the expenses for the education of their children. In the meantime, I don't know whether my sprinkling with holy water and raising of hands bring blessing but I am blessed. The poor with two tiny rooms and a petite kitchen is all that they have at a makeshift table.

Another set of workers are in Meghalaya's notorious mining fields. The NGT ban has not stopped rat hole mining. People are in action. It is the most open kept secret. The other day a 'mahajon' (trader) in Shillong area who came home for Easter, said, 'before the police came we are warned to leave the place.' He informed that illegal mining and transportation is business as usual. I have also visited at least two men who escaped death but are crippled due to accidents in coal mines in Jaintia Hills. The Meghalaya High Court has to intervene as the government is least interested in carrying out the orders of the highest court of the land.

The government, the biggest public body, is to work for the general welfare. But what we see today is to the contrary. Even for removing of garbage the court has to come in. With the stay in the recruitment process, the border issue could also be settled by the court. Has Meghalaya become a state run by the court?

In every village leaders ask, "Will you bless the houses of those who are not married? What about those who sell liquor? Will we go into the houses of those living in adultery? And shall we bypass the 'apostates' or non-church goers? These questions are asked not only in rural areas. Even in Shillong animated discussions take place on these issues I am told. It is amazing that in the 21st century these sentiments are still relevant. Who started avoiding unmarried families? Who initiated the boycott of liquor sellers? Who ostracized the adulterers and apostates? These questions were prevalent when we were kids, almost 50 year also. Should we continue with the same mentality? Clergymen should work to make the lives of their faithful easier rather than exert physical and psychological punishment where there is none. There is nothing in the code of

The Congress bandwagon effect

By Chiranjib Haldar

A growing bonhomie between two partners need not always culminate in a relationship. Just as courting often don't translate into nuptials, the partnership between poll strategist Prashant Kishor and the Congress has fizzled out. For nearly two years, the two have been holding parleys, discussing, articulating galore and manoeuvring but any chance of a fruition has just faded out. Many from the Congress have actually called Prashant Kishor the impresario, ideologically agnostic or opportunistic. There may have been a lot of drastic changes Prashant Kishor wanted and the Congress stalwarts were not in sync with those.

Many analysts are curious to know whether it was Prashant Kishor's loss in rejecting the Congress when the party was already at its nadir or was his threadbare capability as a planner overestimated. One line of thought has been that if he joined the grand old dame of Indian polity, it would be restored to its former glory. So, was Prashant Kishor trying to be a panacea to all ills befitting the party, one who could turn around its sinking fortunes? After this drama unfolded and wrapped up, the century old satirical assertion that the more things change they remain the same, seemed to be an apt aphorism for the Congress.

The Congress party not undergoing radical transformation in tune with the times is indeed a momentous denouement for Indian democracy. If any Indian political party needs to alter its ethos and go in for a paradigm shift, it is the Congress. The party still remains complacent despite terrible setbacks and political humiliation. The existential crisis within the party that panelists always debated about in primetime television shows seems real. Being nostalgic about governing the nation for 54 of its 75 years since independence and misconstruing a national footprint for popularity or still having leaders of opposition in many states is merely delusional. It seems to be embedded in the psyche of the party.

Many within the Congress were enthusiastic that if Prashant Kishor actually evolved a winning strategy for the once illustrious party, it would wake up from its deepest slumber. A section of the party leadership saw Prashant Kishor as a strategist like Prashant Kishor could have sowed the urgent fillip to change. The Congress suffers from a decaying leadership in many states which turned a cropper in election after election.

Most diehard Congressmen still have many in the higher echelons of the country, opine that the only party which has a track record of establishing India's democratic institutions would peter out of the political landscape if governance within the party remains lackadaisical. It is not wishful thinking that the grand old party desperately needs a metamorphosis both structural and organisational.

There are those who feel Prashant Kishor could have been one of the disruptors brought in to enervate the party. He could have facilitated the wake-up call and given the cadres a booster dose against organisational apathy. The Empowered Committee set up by the Congress is dysfunctional since it has most Rajya Sabha MPs who may not have the wherewithal to win polls. The leadership has to identify potential winners because ultimately it is electoral victories more than ideological prowess that can help regain its glory. There

seems to be a tug-of-war in the Congress. Status quoists within the party shun any kind of experimentation pitched against those in favour of change and who always oppose freezing the organisation in a time warp. True, change has to be dramatic and not incremental to overhaul a mammoth organisation. Prashant Kishor could have been one of the many catalysts for the party. Perhaps, Prashant Kishor may have got it wrong in terms of political brinkmanship. In politics, one can't just nurture and groom political leaders like brands and in the forefront be a leader, especially in an organisation like the Congress. Prashant Kishor may have visualised his role play in a manner antithetical to a gamechanger. Perhaps, he wanted to have his cake and eat it too. He also hobnobbed with K. Chandrasekhar Rao in Telangana simultaneously which was an eyesore for the Gandhis since the Congress and TRS are at loggerheads. When the Congress initially started warming up to him, there was his own organisation I-PAC lurking in the background with its business interests. The party was aware that it needed an antidote for its revival.

Some commentators opined that Rahul Gandhi was totally opposed to the deal with Prashant Kishor because of a lack of trust and conviction. The outpourings were also there on social media that the party needed a Chanakya, not a business manager. The G-23 went a step further. It stressed that bringing on Prashant Kishor was only a camouflage to put a lid on any leadership change in the party which the Group had demanded. In the end, there was a frenetic blunting of the edges. The sycophants within the party Prashant Kishor wanted to ease out, craftily got him ousted in a game of political one-upmanship. We often hear from critics that the party think-tank is encircled by the old caucus and may not be advising the hierarchy in earnest. Truth is, many esteemed members of the G-23 were actually members of the Congress Working Committee and never asked for inner party democracy or organisational elections when they were at the helm of affairs. Ultimately to survive in politics, a party needs to be in power and win the hustings. India has undergone a metamorphosis in the sense that it is far more technologically advanced than it was in the hazy socialist days where power emanated from select quarters. It is a social media literate nation now where dissemination, public opinion and expectations galore cannot be brushed aside with ideology and past credentials. A political party cannot remain frozen in a time warp and insulated from change.

After the party's Lok Sabha debacle in 2019, Rahul Gandhi had stated 'It is a habit in India that the powerful cling to power, no one sacrifices power. But we will not defeat our opponents without sacrificing the desire for power and fighting a deeper ideological battle.' That was his predicament. The Congress party still believes that it is the only durable, enduring brand and people would embrace it again once they see through the fallacies of the current dispensation. Congress loyalists cutting across factions are unanimous that the party needs to resolve its existential, ideological, organisational crisis first. Though Prashant Kishor was not a fixit to these crises, the Congress party's failure to join hands with him showed it was averse to change and dismisses any kind of change agent or facilitator as an enemy satrap.

(The writer is a commentator on politics and society.)

Cabbies: Daylight extortionists?

Editor,

I love walking not only because of the physical benefits it provides but simply because it is something that I love to do. For whatever distance I may have to cover, walking seems to be the best way for me except under certain circumstances, for instance, if I need to travel further than Shillong or if it were an emergency, only then would I board public transport. And with the traffic jams in Shillong not seeming to get better, walking would likely seem to be a viable option.

However, recently, I had to use public transport, specifically a cab due to the ongoing rains in Shillong and also because I was trying to avoid getting sick as everyone around me seems to be catching a cold or a sore throat due to the changing weather. I have not travelled in a cab for some time especially since the pandemic and also because of my love for walking. As I got in the cab, there was already a passenger inside and the

cab driver filled it up to its seating capacity of 5 persons. When I reached my destination, I took out a 50 rupee note and handed it to the driver who surprisingly handed me back a 10 rupee note. I asked him how much the cab fare from Malki to Nongthymmai was and he answered that it was 40 rupees which to my knowledge used to be 20 rupees. My brother lives in Laitkor and cab fares from Laitkor to Nongthymmai used to be 20 rupees per head, which to my surprise is now 50 rupees per head.

Last month, I met someone who was travelling from Motphran to Madanrying. I was shocked when they told me the cab driver had charged Rs 80 per head. Some cabs even stack passengers like bags of potatoes. As far as I can remember, cab fares were initially hiked during the pandemic due to the reduced seating capacity and so that the cab drivers should not have to suffer unduly due to the pandemic. However, now seating capacities have returned to the normal 5 passengers, then why are cab fares being hiked? Should the fares also not reduce as the hike was due to the reduction in seating capacity.

Some drivers complain that the hike in petrol prices pokes a hole in their pockets, but isn't that true of passengers too, especially if one has to commute daily by using public transport? This is one reason why many choose to travel by bus or the mini SPTS buses in Shillong as their rates are more reasonable than cabs.

Another trend of the cabbies in Shillong is to refuse

to ferry a passenger to his/her destination. There are certain cities in India where you can just get in a cab and they take you anywhere you want to go without having to ask them first. The same goes for countries outside India. Cabs in Shillong, however have fastidious drivers who refuse to go to certain locations on the plea that there's "too much traffic jam" or "if I went there, I would lose trips as I would be able to cover two trips if I went elsewhere".

I have had one too many encounters of cabbies refusing to take me to a specific destination but if I say I will reserve the entire cab the driver would readily drop me there at a cost arbitrarily decided by him. If this is not daylight extortion, then what is?

It is therefore incumbent upon the Transport Department to set a specific rate and to ensure that passengers are not ripped off. While the sharp hike in petrol prices does affect cab drivers there has to be a rationale for raising fares so that the middle class which has to use public transport daily is not fleeced.

Yours etc.,
Cassandra Gathpho
Shillong - 14

Dereliction of duty

Editor,

The lack of synergy across all departments has been exposed yet again with the latest images of the appalling conditions meted to the sportspersons preparing for the Meghalaya Games. The visuals have spread like wildfire. 50 years of state-

hood and zero preparedness shows that the officials, babus and a sports minister who keeps on having a gala time whenever he speaks in the Assembly reminds me of the book *Tharoorosaurus* written by Shashi Tharoor and a word 'Kakistocracy' meaning a government which is ruled by incompetent individuals. This is exactly what fits into the picture. Instead, the Sports Department should have acted as professional ambassadors for the game to create a positive image for Northeast India.

Sports and its various disciplines are something which western nations are serious about and on top of their game because practice is 365 days. Politics is left out of the picture, thereby creating a seamless support system from top to bottom. Enough of words; deeds matter because what is reflected in the current scenario is the start of the blame game. Our sports persons from the state deserve quality training, logistics and good dietary management to make them winners. Former Navy SEAL Brent Gleeson, speaking on leadership mentions that integrity matters on and off the battlefield. Alas! there are ample examples of leaders in our state who lack both integrity and accountability. Definitely this is a wake-up call for the state and heads should start rolling.

Yours etc.,
Christopher Gathpho,
Shillong-10

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

Shesher Kabita and Brookside

Shillong, specifically Brookside Bungalow plays an important role in *Shesher Kabita*, a classic novel by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore.

The bungalow finds no mention in the book but its natural surroundings – the eucalyptus and pine trees – mentioned in several chapters riding the sweet and tragic memories of Amit and Labanya, the lead characters of the novel.

One of Shillong's landmarks, Brookside is an isolated bungalow situated on a zig-zag road, surrounded by hillocks and with the cool, meandering and gurgling Umshyrpi flowing past. The serenity of the area creates an atmosphere of meditation for philosophers and thinkers. No wonder, Tagore was captivated during his first visit to Shillong in 1919.

Tagore's love for nature and the solitude that Brookside offered rejuvenated him and lessened his agony during his three-week stay. In the poetic environs of Shillong, he regained his lost youth and created the romantic 'Shesher Kabita' that travels from love at first sight for the hero and ends in a tragic farewell.

During that time, Tagore did not compose any new novels, dramas or poems. But it is more than certain that he sketched the entire plot of *Shesher Kabita* in Shillong. The English version of the book, translated by Krishna Kripalini in 1956, is titled 'Farewell, My Friend'.

Here are some excerpts from the book:

'Amit Roy, a very smart and stylish England returned young Barrister from Calcutta, came to visit Shillong to enjoy the solitude of the hills. His father was also a formidable Barrister in Calcutta who left enough patrimony. The family was over sophisticated with which Amit could not compromise.

Amit had two sisters whose pet names were Cessie and Lissie; from head to heel they were absolutely the latest brand... Amit maintained a gulf of difference with them in his style and smartness.

'Being disgusted with city life, Amit reached Shillong to spend the days in idle fancying and sight-seeing, etc. He was a born philosopher and poet, and a great lover of the Sanskrit poet Kalidasa.

While Amit was driving his car through a zigzag road, on the Shillong hill, reached a blind curve and suddenly saw a car rushing up the opposite way. There was no room to pass. Amit pulled the brake but before it could work, there was a big collision! But no catastrophe!

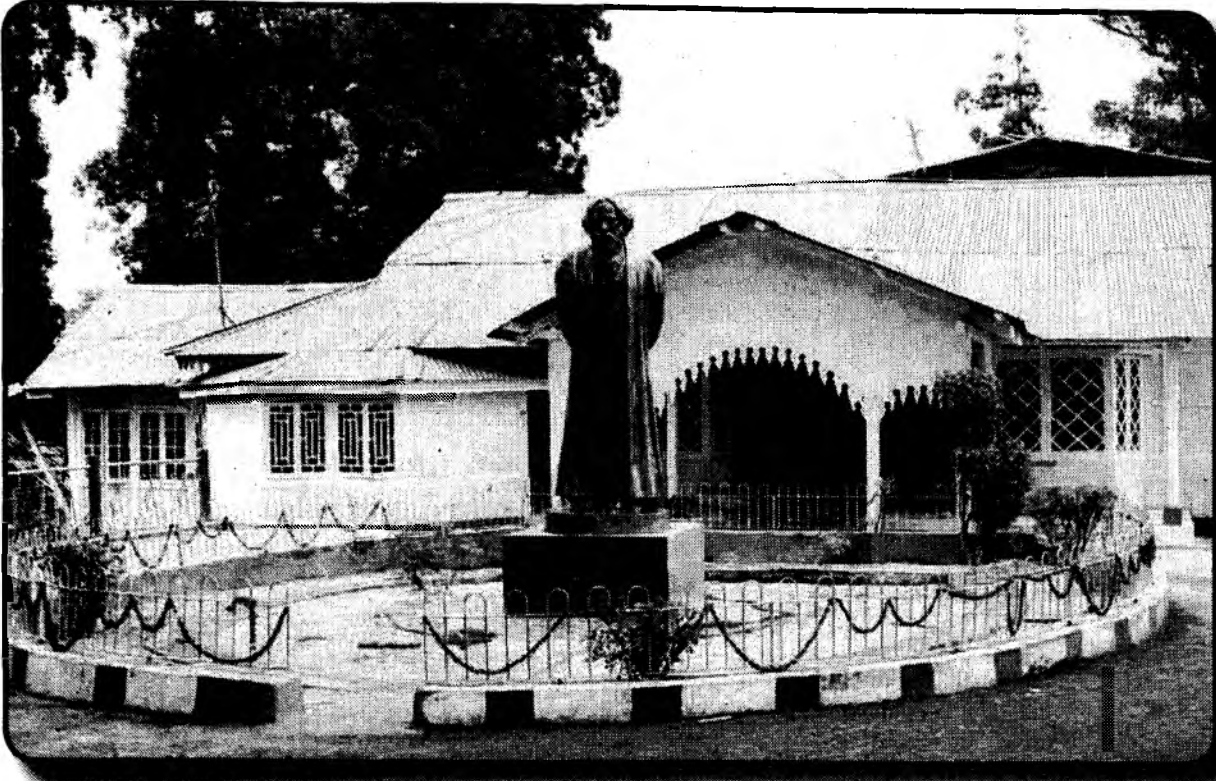
'The other car jerked back a little and came to rest against the mountainside. A maiden stepped out of the car and halted. She was clad in a white sari. Amit saw a rare vision! A unique serene beauty! Against the sombre background of imminent death, she flashed like a figure etched by lightning-luminously isolated from the surrounding gloom.

'Leaving his hat inside the car, Amit came out and stood before her, speechless like one awaiting punishment. The maiden seemed touched by this pose of helplessness! At last, Amit managed to mumble, "I'm sorry, I bungled."

'She laughed. "No bungling. Just a mishap, and I started it"... By way of apology the girl added,

Though the car had not been seriously damaged, it would take some time to get into running order; and Amit humbly proposed to reach the girl to her destined place; she agreed after mild hesitation.

Uma Purkayastha waxes eloquent on a classic novel by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore



'That was the first introduction and the girl named Labanya requested Amit to visit their place sometimes.

'Here is the first meeting of Amit and Labanya, which led to the rapid romantic development of the couple, but cruel destiny could not unite them.

'Amit became a regular visitor to Labanya's place. Yogamaya, aunt of Labanya, her guardian also heartily liked Amit for his refined, gentle smartness and for his wise literary discussions in particular.

Though Labanya was very reserved and limited in her emotional expression, she cherished a good respectful love for Amit, the philosopher. Yogamaya inspired her not to disregard such a genius as Amit.

'Gradually, the relation between Amit, and Labanya became closer, their reciprocal address was shortened to 'Mita' and 'Banya' which were confined to them only; and a day came Yogamaya, overwhelmed with joy taking Labanya's right hand and placed it over Amit's hand, blessed "May your union abide". Amit and Labanya bowed to Yogamaya. It was settled that the wedding would take place very shortly.

'While Amit was floating upon joy and imaginations on new, new, colourful plans and ideas to make their wedded life something special, a great disaster was brewing! Amit's sister Cissie and her friend Katie Mitter, hurried to Shillong to enquire about Amit. Amit reported it to Labanya and uttered, "My paradise is lost! Farewell to my unfurnished heaven!"

'Katie and Cissie paid a surprise visit to Laban-

ya's house and there was some misunderstanding! The ultra-modern unmannerly ladies showed a very indecent and insulting attitude towards Yogamaya and Labanya. Yogamaya felt embarrassed! At that critical moment, Amit reached there, could study the situation; and ignoring his sister and her friend, entered inside to take Labanya in his clasp, introduced her to Katie and Cissie and declared that they were going to be wedded by the next month. Here is the big collision!

'Blood rushed to Katie's head, her eyes became red and she felt like kicking the very ground under her feet. Actually, long back Amit had an affair with Katie and he presented her with a gold ring as a token of their love.

'Amit could not make it clear to Labanya that long years back, the person on whose finger he had put the ring, and the person who flung it back today – are not the same! There was a gulf of difference with which Amit could not compromise! Amit could find his dream life partner in Labanya which he could not part with.

'Labanya could realise the pain in Katie and she could not compromise with Amit's argument, rather advised him very coolly to attend to Katie and Cissie and to take them for a week's trip to Cherrapunjee to keep Katie amused. Labanya, all through, advocated in favour of Katie's womanly sentiment, which, she felt, was ignored by Amit. Labanya appealed that the inner bond between them (Amit and Labanya) did not wait for any token or proof, it was something heavenly and immortal! 'Let my love be untainted by any external mark or shadow'. She exclaimed!

'With the fullness of her love, Labanya requested Amit to accompany his sister and her friend.

Amit returned after seven days from Cherrapunjee and rushed to Labanya, but found the house was closed! Everyone had left! There was nothing to indicate where they had gone. Amit stood under the familiar Eucalyptus tree; with a bleak heart and began to pace to and fro. The familiar gardener came and saluted and asked, "Shall I open the house? Would you like to go in?"

'Yes, replied Amit, after a slight hesitation. 'He went into Labanya's sitting room. The table chair and shelf were there, but the books were missing. A damp emptiness filled the room, unable to answer his questions, held in a trance that would never be broken. Amit could find solace nowhere! He wrote his last words to Labanya:

*'Invisible, your image unchanging
in my eyes, In the unseen chamber
of my heart, you abide forever.
I've found the stone that turns
all into gold, The void in me
you yourself have filled,
Dark was life when I discovered
you in the heart's shrine
The lighted lamp you had left
as your parting gift.
Separation, like sacred fire, revealed,
in the glow of sorrow
Love's image divine'.*

■Mita

Ultimately Amit was married to Katie. Amit says, "What binds me to Katie, is love, but this love is like fixed water in a vessel; which I shall daily draw and use; but the love which enchants me towards Labanya is boundless and vast as an ocean which cannot be brought indoors... my heart will swim there eternally..."

'After a few months, Amit received an invitation card of Labanya's marriage, along with a letter in verse from Labanya, addressed to Amit, as (only the last few lines, original in Bengali):

*Dear friend, can you hear
the wheels of time?
Rolling in ceaseless motion.
These ruthless wheels have
Torn me from your side
And flung me far away,
Across a thousand deaths,
The supreme truth of my being this,
My Love, death-conquering, My gift to you im-
perishable, unchanging Immortal! Let me be borne
away by the changing tide... The gift remains. My
friend, farewell!
What I gave you was your own gift.
Fuller your acceptance, the deeper my debt!
Farewell My Friend, Farewell!"*

■Banya

The story ends here with the poet weaving their immortal love through separation.

Shesher Kabita was completed and published by Tagore in 1928, but there is no doubt that the germination of the novel happened during his stay in Brookside Bungalow nine years before. The description of the blind curve where Amit and Labanya met during a collision fits Riblong's Zigzag Road to a T.

Miraculous Misdeeds!

Locked room crimes and their significance for humans

By Vikas Datta

Why do we like crime? Like, that is, in the sense of why we are attracted to reports of lurid incidents in our newspapers and TV bulletins — or WhatsApp forwards or YouTube channels — or, for that matter, the relevance of a steady diet of good vs evil in almost every form of cultural expression — religious or literary — we were/are exposed to, and why for many book readers, mystery fiction is entrancing.

It is only the last facet that falls within the scope of this piece, and let us try to answer it before proceeding further.

There can be a few reasons why mystery fiction — in its depiction, effect, and denouement of crime — appeals to those who would themselves stick to the straight and narrow moral path in their own lives otherwise.

The first is the vicarious pleasure we get from 'overseeing' such a legal and/or moral transgression being conducted by someone else, and second, there is more vicarious pleasure from seeing the disorder engendered by a crime being dissipated, order restored, and the violator punished.

The third is more significant — puzzles intrigue the human mind, and what can be more intricate puzzles than the "whodunits" or "howdunits" that make up the most of mystery fiction. For now, let us take up the second one, in its most baffling avatar — the "locked room crime/mystery".

A staple of the genre, locked room crimes, usually murder, are those committed in circumstances

under which it was seemingly impossible for the perpetrator to commit the crime, or evade detection, in entering/exiting the scene — say, in the case of a person found deceased in a windowless room sealed from the inside. Like in other classic detective fiction, the readers are normally presented with all the clues, so as to solve the mystery before the solution is revealed in a dramatic climax.

A good locked room mystery provides pleasure from trying to solve the puzzle before it is revealed, and from a satisfyingly logical solution, but those that are not well thought-of, or properly executed or explained, will only lead to the reader feeling unsatisfied or cheated.

Also, they don't have to be murders or take place in locked rooms, but just be crimes that seem to be impossible at first glance, and give the impression that they were committed by a dangerous, supernatural entity who can defy natural/physical laws of nature by walking through walls or vanishing into thin air with solid objects like the murder weapon or valuables.

Some examples of the latter span from *King Ottokar's Sceptre* (1939), where Tintin's casual amble in front of a toy store makes him realise how the article in question was stolen without any of the suspects having left the area, and it persists right down to Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2005), where a journalist is probing a four-decade-old disappearance of a young woman from an island with only one way of ingress.

The original locked room mystery, which also happens to be the first modern mystery, is Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), where a corpse is found inside a room locked from the inside. According to the story, several witnesses say they heard the voices of a possible suspect, but the killer is nowhere to be found when the room is opened.

The room has a chimney — but it is too narrow for any human, and the room's two windows are not just locked, but also held closed by a nail, which is impossible to replace from the outside.

Subsequently, Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes investigated at least three locked room mysteries — in his second novel, *The Sign of Four*, and in stories such as *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, which raises several key points on agency and observation, and then the seminal *The Adventure of the Empty House*, which announces his reappearance into the world.

Israel Zangwill's *The Big Bow Mystery* (1892), *The Problem of Cell 13* (1905) by Jacques Futrelle, featuring his redoubtable *Thinking Machine* detective Augustus S.F.X. Van Dusen, and *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* (1907) by French journalist and author Gaston Leroux are also some good examples, as are some of G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown stories, especially *The Oracle of the Dog*, S. S. Van Dine's *The Canary Murder Case* (1927), Ellery Queen's *The Chinese Orange Mystery* (1934), and railway engineer-turned-'fair play' mystery practitioner Freeman Wills Crofts in *The End of*

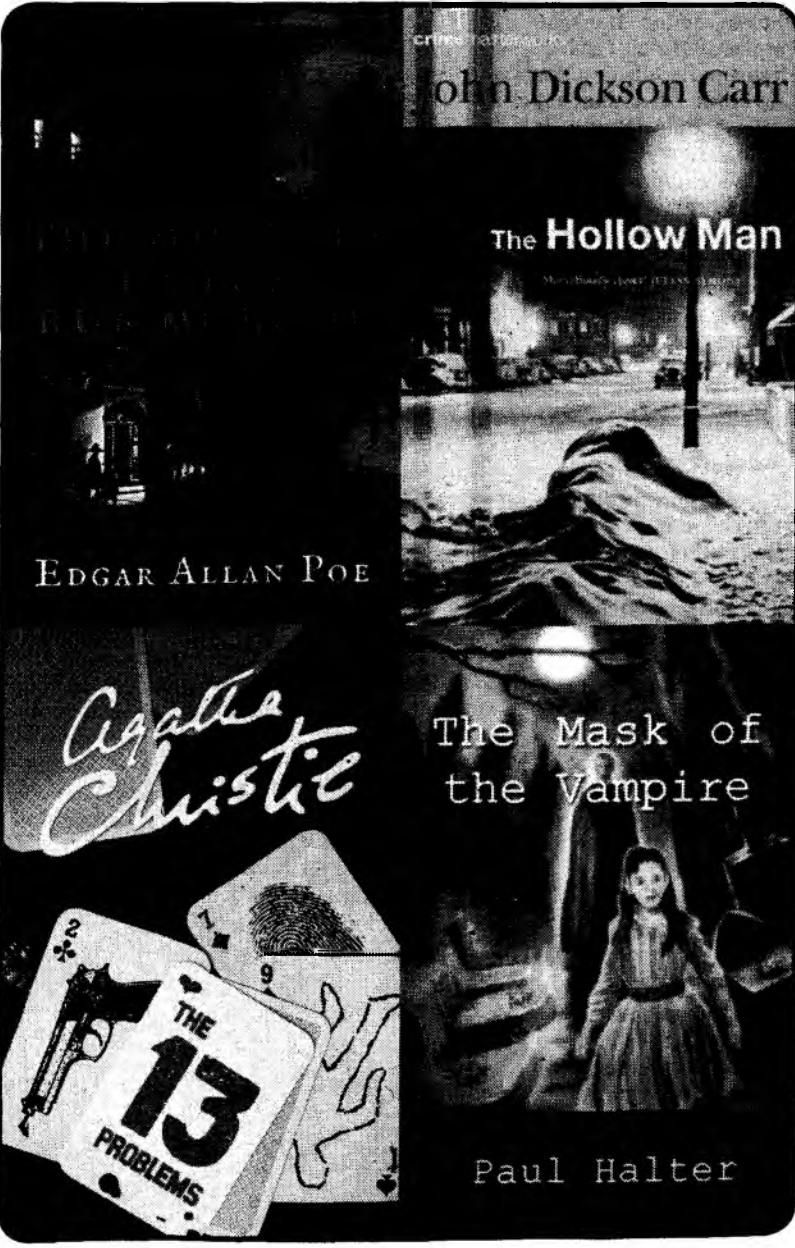
Andrew Harrison (1938).

Agatha Christie, who is not only the most-read woman crime fiction author, but possibly the most-read author beyond gender or genre, was also quite enamoured with this plot device but used it more in short stories, eg *The Thirteen Problems/The Tuesday Club Murders* (1931), than in her novels.

It was Anglophile American author John Dickson Carr, however, who is the acknowledged master of this genre with his expertise in chronicling the impossible crime: the locked room murder, with the doors and windows locked and bolted on the inside, the victim struck down or vanishing into thin air in front of startled witnesses, the corpse found in snow or mud, without a single footprint around the body, and so on.

There are many more — Edward Hoch's mysterious Simon Ark, who says he is a 2,000-year-old Coptic priest, probes a number of inexplicable crimes attributed to Satan but have more mundane or earthly causes; French author Paul Halter is known for his range now available in English, while "impossible/locked room mysteries" can be found in several incongruous places — *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, as far as the murder of Amelia Bones is concerned, for the Muggles, that is, and the reader knows better — or one of the initial deaths in Umberto Eco's medieval thriller *The Name of the Rose* (1983).

It is necessary to return to Carr and his *The Hollow Man/The Three Coffins* (1935), which apart from being a superlative example of the craft, also sees



Dr Fell actually give a lecture on the different ways a locked room mystery can be created.

Taking care to avoid spoilers, it can be said that these include a natural event that seems/is made to seem mysterious, or confusion being created deliberately by the perpetrator by misleading the witnesses, or the ingenuity of the human mind in making a contriv-

ance for the crime that suggests human presence, and so on.

And in all this, the fallibility of human senses is one of the three important issues that make locked room/impossible crimes important beyond a mere pleasure for readers.

(The author can be contacted at vikas.d@ians.in)

To mother, with love from the kitchen



Mothers always cook for all their kids, this Mother's Day make her feel special with some super tasty delicacies curated by Chef Manish Mehrotra.

Almond & Cherry Kulfi

Ingredients
Fresh cherries, pitted 2 cups
Water 1/2 cup
Almond milk 4 cups
Condensed milk 1/2cup
Heavy cream 1/2cup
Sugar 1/2 cup
Almond meal 1/2 cup
Toasted almond flakes 1 tbsps

Method:
Place cherries, water and 1/4 cup sugar in a pan over low flame, cook, stirring 5-6, minutes till the cherries soften and mixture thickens. allow to cool and set aside.
In a pan, add almond milk and put it on a low flame, keep on

stirring; do not let the almond milk burn. the milk will start to thicken.

Once it becomes half the volume add the almond meal, condensed milk and sugar and mix them well. allow it cool slightly and stir in the heavy cream. strain the mixture.

Add cooked cherry compote and mix well. allow the kulfi mixture to cool, pour it into kulfi moulds or small bowls and freeze them.

Demould the kulfi and serve it garnished with toasted almond flakes.

Badam Milk Mousse, Almond Biscotti

Ingredients
For badam milk mousse
Almond flakes 45 gms
Almond milk 150 ml
White chocolate 425 gm
Bakery cream 400 ml
Egg yolk 5 no

Fine sugar 50 gm
Saffron 1/2 gm
Cardamom powder 1/4 tsp

For biscotti
Unsalted butter 75 gms
Castor sugar 100 gms
Egg 1 no.
Refined flour 150 gm
Baking soda 1 gm
Baking powder 3 gm
Almond with skin 50 gm
Almond powder 25 gm
Zest of lemon 1 no.

Method:
For-badam milk mousse
Roast almonds flakes in pre-heated oven at 180 degree celsius for 4 minutes or till golden in colour.

Heat almond milk. add white chocolate and make ganache. add saffron threads and green cardamom powder, mix it thoroughly. Whisk yolks and sugar till creamy consistency. Beat bakery cream to ribbon

consistency.
Fold the ganache in beaten yolk and then fold the beaten cream into it.

Pour mousse in a cup and chill, till it sets.
Garnish mousse with slivers of almonds and almond biscotti.

For biscotti
Roughly chop almonds with skin.
Lightly cream butter and sugar in a mixing bowl. add egg to bowl and again cream it.

Add refined flour, baking soda, baking powder, lemon zest and almond powder to it mixture and mix it thoroughly

Fold in roughly chopped almonds.
Shape the mixture like a french loaf and bake it at 180 celsius for 20 minutes.

Cool the loaf, cut it into thin slices and bake it at 150 celsius for 8 to 10 minutes or till crisp. (IANSlife)

Your friend by the Zodiac sign

By the time we grow up, friendship gets very complicated. Many lose the person they were once too close to and some become best friends forever in a literal sense. If you go by zodiac signs, then here is a list which will tell you the signs that make the best of friends, according to Pandit Jagannath Guruji - Celebrity Astrologer, Prophetier, Philanthropist and Author:

Aries: Aries are independent and Sagittarians offer that space to them. Together they can have the best of journeys. Their adventures can give you tons of stories that may inspire many other friends.

Taurus: Taurus are often attracted to Virgo. They can be seen sitting together appreciating how well organised everything around them is. If they own Instagram accounts, you may find many food stories of them together.

Gemini: Geminis are best handled by Librans. They are balanced out by the latter. They may even become besties with Aquarius folk because they revel in the intelligent talks you have to offer.

Cancer: These emotionally tense zodiac signs are great with Scorpios in a very interesting way. Serious feelings and energized conversations are very much mutual.

Leo: Leos gel best with a fellow Leo because both understand the page they are on. Both love the spotlight and neither of you knows ow to work with light and

dark contradictions. Neither of you judges each other and that makes a lot of difference.

Virgo: Virgos would make best friends with Capricorns. Being organised and meticulous is what both live on so what more do we need here?

Libra: Librans and Aquarians gel well. The tuning is so wild that it can make many people jealous. Both value each other and that is what friends are.

Scorpio: It is strange in some sense but if you look at it closely, it is very obvious, Scorpios and Pisces tend to make amazing friehds. There is no judgment and the latter gets the passionate side of a Scorpio.

Sagittarius: Sagittarians seek adventure and a Leo pal fits into this picture. The latter indulges them in taking those umpteen

selfies, celebrating each step during that freaky trek. Their camaraderie is what many of us seek but rarely get.

Capricorn: They make best friends with Taurus. Both can make things happen and they love the spirit indeed.

Aquarius: Aquarians and Gemini make the best of friends. The intelligence and the connections are rarely found and there is always so much for them to talk about.

Pisces: Pisces and Cancerians go hand in hand. Both are sympathetic and care about emotions. Both can be that rock for each other and who doesn't want a friendship of that calibre. (IANSlife)



'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MAY 8, 2022

Moon trine Venus on your solar return chart and it will give excellent results. Your actions will change the course of your life. You will rise in your work and race ahead of others. You will take major decisions after giving a lot of thought. Even your close people will give you lot of support and encouragement. You need to work on your strengths. Decisions taken impulsively may yield moderate results. You will also have monetary gains. Your name and fame will rise. Your noble deeds will make you popular. You can get married to a person of your choice. Your family will support you. Any judicial matter in courts will be resolved gradually with someone's intervention. You will also make lot of new friends. You will be creative and with a broad outlook. You will outshine everyone with your amazing personality.

Libra: (September 23- Libra 23)
You will get lot of respect and pride. Those who were expecting promotion for a long time will get wonderful news about their progress. You will not give loan to anyone without evaluating its pros and cons. Your routine work will also get done easily with the cooperation of your family members. All those work you start now will be successful. As you will be busy with your work, it will keep you busy. But you will have no complaints. And you will be very happy about whole thing. Time is to work together with your colleagues and achieve your goals. You will also be praised for your efforts. Your seniors will be happy with your performance. You will receive a pleasant news at home. A marriage proposal will come which you will think about very seriously. You will not get emotional in love matters. And will take correct decisions. You will be on course to rebuild your relations with relatives.

Taurus: (April 21- May 21)
The placement of Jupiter and Saturn will give money profits. Your hurdles will get removed automatically. Students will get admission in course of their choice. You will feel happiness all around you. Peace and harmony will prevail in family ties. You will feel extreme peace in your heart. Family members will come close to each other and also give lot of respect. You will have full energy and force. Your main focus will be around personal matters and personal benefit. You will be extremely busy in work. Your business will also prosper and flourish. You will have monetary gains. You will also develop interest in sports and other activities. You will be enthusiastic about the whole thing. Life will be spent merrily. You will also get involved in social and cultural activities.

Gemini: (May 22- June 21)
Time is very favorable for you. You will be able to finish your work in time. Your bosses and colleagues will help you a lot. You will also get good business orders. Your overseas contracts will also work in your favor. Students will get admission in courses/institutes of their choice. You will also feel confident about lot of things. You will be over enthusiastic to get your work done. Your approach will be business like and you will complete your work without bothering others. Your hard work will not go waste and you will get excellent results. Your focus will be on yourself. You will work with lot of devotion. You will enjoy peaceful time with your mate. You will fulfill your family responsibilities in the manner expected from you. You will do your work systematically.

Cancer: (June 22- July 22)
The time is suitable. Money and wealth will keep coming you will accomplish a lot in your job/work. Those who are looking for new job will get success. Your sincerity will start paying and you will get support from your colleagues and bosses. A misunderstanding with your business partner will get removed. You will be helping lot of needy persons. You will have dialogues which will help you to move ahead in life. Peace and harmony will prevail in family relations. You will have better compatibility with life partner and children. You will be getting lot of respect. Life is preparing to give you something big. The time will be of new opportunities, adventures and new hopes. You will participate actively in family matters. You will have profits in business and job. Love affairs will bloom. Friends will support you.

Leo: (July 23- August 23)
A very rewarding time period is in your hands. Your old disease will get cured. You will be outgoing and attend lot of social gatherings. You will exchange lot of thoughts and information. Your siblings will play an important role in it. You will also earn lot of money through your efforts. In this period your fortune will favor you totally. You will also enjoy a very good health. You will be in the right direction about your goal. You will have opportunities to earn money. Love birds will enjoy wonderful bonding. You will also be busy in your personal life. Mentally you will be prepared to undertake any task. Seniors will also contemplate about their future. Your close people will also work with you. Your interest will not clash with theirs. You will also learn new skills. You will not reveal of your syllabus and prepare yourself for coming exams.

Virgo: (August 24- September 22)
The time period is very promising. You will get new job/business offers. You need to be careful in your business dealings. Some person who is a stranger may try to cheat you but you will learn about his intention and catch him in time. You will also spend money on renovation of your house. You should get your vehicle maintained from time to time. And you will have no problems. Your seniors will be happy with you at your workplace.

You will be busy in domestic matters. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. There will be chances to move forward and progress. You will be healthy and jovial. You will also get lot of money. You will also be happy by meeting someone. Your business competitors will give you a tough time. Keep an eye on their activities. You will also meet an important personality. The time will be very auspicious.

Scorpio: (October 24- November 22)
It is going to be an amazing week. You will meet an influential person who will open the doors of progress for you. You will suddenly find that life is preparing to give you a lot of things. You will get lot of success but not before putting lot of hard work. You will take important decisions related to your career. You will also have mental peace. Your tensions and problems will get removed. You will complete your work with full dedication. You will also enjoy nice relationship with your spouse. You will be full of enthusiasm and excitement. You will also leave your business competitors far behind. There will be greater inflow of money. You will also defeat your opponents. Your government related work will get done. Your influence and status will increase.

Sagittarius: (November 23- December 23)
The entire week will give you excellent results. You will be involved in different types of activities. This is the best time to kick start a new project. You will look for success of money to fund your projects. You will explore new contacts and enter new contacts and enter into dialogues. You will also be able to recover your blocked money. Legal matters will be solved. Family expectations will be more from you. You will enjoy perfect bonding with your spouse. Lovemates will have a nice time. You will also come up to the expectations of your relatives. You will also do something special for your family. You will have your parents' affection and blessings. The circle of friends and known persons will increase. You will think about a job change. You will avoid controversy in your work.

Capricorn: (December 22- January 20)
It will be a money giving week. You will get plenty of opportunities to race ahead in your life. Your expectations and hopes will touch sky. You will achieve your goals and objectives with your courage and determination. You will also initiate a dialogue with your bosses. You will use your communication skills to the best of your advantage. You will also initiate a dialogue with your spouse and friends. You will adopt a flexible attitude with people in order to achieve success. Financial matters will take precedence. You will also look after your business well. Your creative talents will come to the fore. You will also look after your children's well. You will also get attracted to fashion, films and glamour. As a result, you will also spend a lot of money. You will desist from doing anything that you consider is wrong. There will be lots of love and good will in the family.

Aquarius: (January 21- February 18)
You will fight for your pride and respect. And will get lot of success too. No one will be able to ignore your views. You will earn lot of money. And also your name and fame too will grow. You will also make new investments. But don't give loan to anyone. You won't get your money back. You will also do your routine work very easily. Whatever work you will start, you will have success. You will be getting success in love matters. A suitable marriage proposal too will come to you. You will be extremely busy in your work. You will cooperate with your colleagues and work together with them. You will also be praised for your work. Students will excel in their studies. You will do business tactfully. You will be steady in your style of working. You will have support of your family, friends and co-workers.

Pisces: (February 19- March 20)
It will be a busy week ahead. You will remain busy with family. You will be occupied by family affairs. But you will not let your work suffer as a result. A sudden encounter with an unknown person can develop into a deep bond that can end in marriage. Students need to study more to get success in exams. You will also take important decisions in your work/business. Some financial related matters will be resolved. Take care of your diet. Some small health related matters may trouble you. You will do new experiments in your business and make it grow many folds. There will be preparations for a auspicious function at your place. You will see mixed side of life. Your family members and loved ones will be with you. There will be sadness and happiness, good and bad feelings.

Of Teen Turbulence

Stuti Changle chronicles a storyline of teenage experiences, set in lockdown

By N. Lothungbeni Humtsoe

National best-selling author, Stuti Changle, unveils her new novel, *Where the Sun Never Sets*. Published by Penguin Random House India. Set in the context of COVID-19 lockdown, the novel is a riveting personal account of unforgettable childhood dreams, turbulent teenage years, complicated close relationships, human resilience, and the exceptional power of hope.

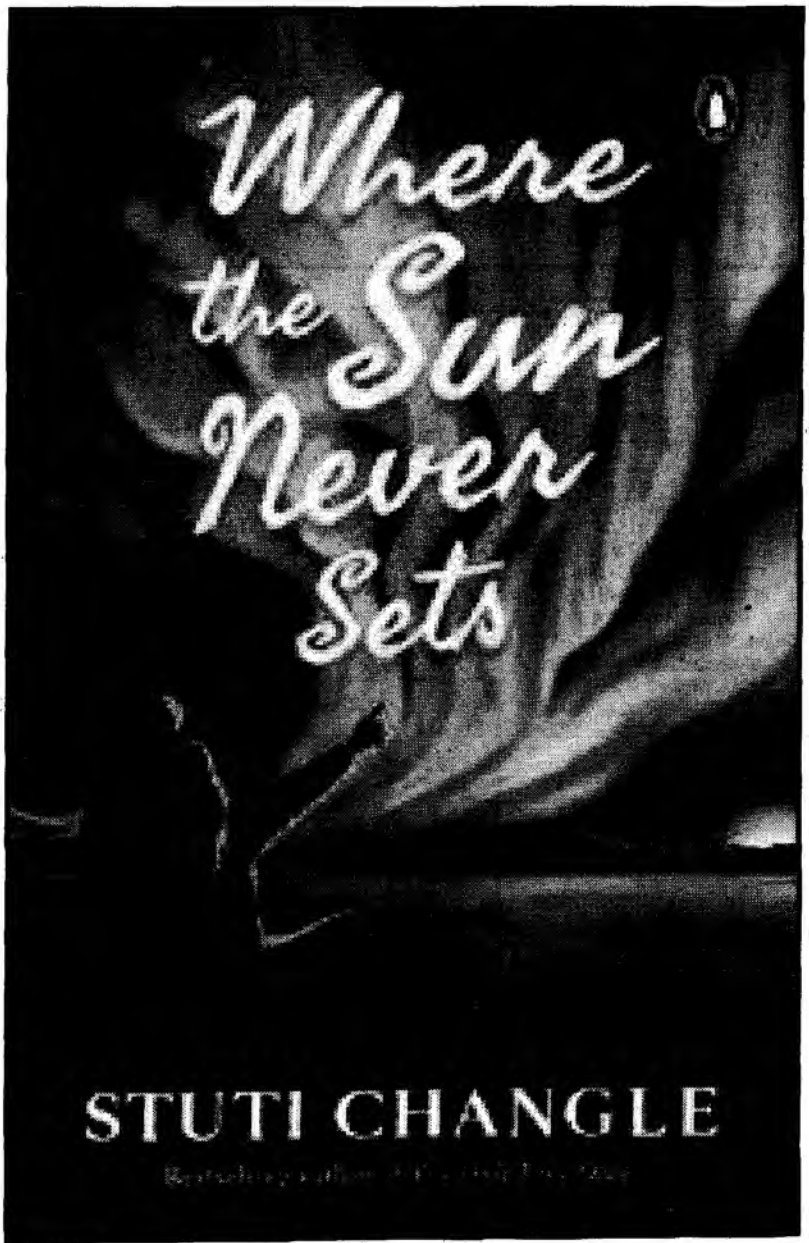
Stuti Changle, author of 'On the Open Road' and best-selling title, *You Only Live Once*, captures the journey of the protagonist, Iiti, who is forced to move back to her hometown of Mussoorie amid worldwide lockdown to work on her first movie script. As she time travels through her old diary which documented her years of experience, she is compelled to take a decision for herself — to live in the nightmares of her past or to create her own path. The novel narrates her chance encounter with her first love, Nishit, reunion with her estranged best friend, Shelly, and nights spent reading her well-kept diary, make her best memories and worst nightmares come to life.

Speaking about the book, national best-selling author Stuti Changle, says, "Set in the COVID-19 lockdown, my new book is a heart-touching story with relatable characters that will help my readers find hope in the darkest of times."

It chronicles a storyline of teenage experiences, fulfillment of childhood dreams and the never-ending journey of growing up. With an adventure of a lifetime during the lockdown, it is a captivating narration of a journey of introspection. It implores the readers to believe, create their own path, re-write their own stories and to always have hope.

Milee Ashwarya, Publisher, Ebury Publishing and Vintage, Penguin Random House India, says, "Stuti Changle is a best-selling writer of popular

fiction. Her new book, *Where the Sun Never Sets*, is an inspirational fiction about never giving up on your dreams. I am delighted to publish it, and



I hope the readers continue to shower their love on Stuti."

The novel scheduled to release towards the end of May 2022 and is currently available on pre-order on e-commerce websites. (IANSlife)

*"In three words I can sum up everything
I've learned about life: it goes on."*

— Robert Frost

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIV No. 266 SHILLONG, MONDAY, MAY 9, 2022

Nation, Education

A review undertaken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi vis-à-vis the National Educational Policy 2020 on Saturday occasioned the floating of some new concepts. Among other things, the PM stressed on developing a hybrid model of education. The policy that was introduced two years ago has allowed full-fledged online courses and raised the permissible online content for education to 40 per cent. What is envisaged is a mix of direct schooling and online study, the possibilities of which were amply explored during the last two years of Covid pandemic. Necessity is the mother of invention; and the Covid phase had helped the education sector explore something that had not been practiced with any seriousness in the past. Both students and teachers are now exposed to online system of education. Over a period of time, this is going to be more widespread even as direct schooling has its great advantages.

The PM has also said this hybrid online and offline system should ensure students are not over-exposed to technology. At the same time, he has proposed a system where students at secondary school level can engage farmers in their regions and be of help to them by doing soil testing in school labs. This will help farmers know what kind of crops are best suited for their soils. It is about half a century ago that degree courses in agriculture were started. These produced large numbers of agriculture officers. Complaints from farmers are that they are shirking responsibilities like soil testing; and instead sit and spend all their time in offices, dealing with files, and not fields – meaning no legwork and no direct engagement with farmers.

By contrast, the Gram Sevaks, the simple, humble field-level staff of the olden times, had visited the farms and guided farmers in many respects. Today's agriculture officers, like other bureaucrats, have developed a British Raj mindset. Field visits are not insisted on for agricultural officers, even as this makes all the difference. Now, if the students and school labs can be of help to farmers, it should be a welcome step forward to boost the agriculture scene in the country. Another idea mooted by the PM was to use indigenously developed toys to develop conceptual skills in students. Education is becoming more and more an exercise in mugging up lessons for examinations and vomiting them into answer-sheets. The spirit of inquiry is lacking in the new generation of students. Hope is that the National Education Policy 2020 will change the scenario for the better.

Letters to the Editor

Political violence by any group condemnable

Editor,
I read the sharp reactions of Kajal Chatterjee in his letter to the editor on Bengal's culture of violence (ST May 5, 2022). Chatterjee was responding to D. Bhattacharjee's letter which appeared on May 4, 2022 in the same paper. Kajal Chatterjee as a true-blue Bengali is well within his rights to react to the views and comments of the former on Bengal's culture of violence and the latter also is well within his rights to express his views and comments on the violence that continues to take place in Bengal over the last fifty years or so which include 30 years of CPM's regime and continues to the reign of the present dispensation. Yes, what D. Bhattacharjee has written in his letter is correct and the ruling parties would not have come to power in Bengal without the tacit support of the people so also the culture of violence would not have thrived without the backing of the people because violence happens in Bengal mostly due to the high-handedness of the

party/parties in power.

It is also a fact that D. Bhattacharjee has not mentioned anything in his letter about the violence that has taken place in other parts of India except in Bengal. That does not mean that he swept them under the carpet. The people of Bengal should be ashamed about the frequent occurrences of violence in their state perpetrated mostly by the cadres of the ruling dispensation during and post elections like during the CPM regime and the present regime. Even now the same culture is continuing unabated in Bengal which even people from outside and from Bengal are fed up of, I presume. The present people of Bengal especially the true-blue Bengali Bhattacharjee said should eschew and shun violence of any sort and forthwith withdraw support to the political party that indulges in, encourages, supports and continues to promote violence to further vested political interests. It seems Bengal's political power has fallen into the hands of those who pollute the demography and polity of Bengal who find Bengal their home after migrating from across the borders with the tacit support of the

ing parties of the state. If it is so it is unfortunate indeed. Whither the good name of the once glorious Bengal?

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Sr.Journalist,
Shillong-2.

Ka Phan Nonglait: First Khasi woman freedom fighter

Editor,
It is great news that finally a book on Ka Phan Nonglait, the first Khasi woman freedom fighter authored by supreme court lawyer Daniel Stone Lyngdoh a descendant of Phan Nonglait has been released. According to the book (S.T. dated April 30, 22) "Phan Nonglait not only assisted freedom fighter U Tirot Sing Syiem against the British but was also instrumental in killing 32 British soldiers".

It may be recalled that the Maitshaphrang together with the Seng Samla Jaiaw Laitdoh had staged a Street Play titled, "Ka Drama jong ka Phan Nonglait" in different localities of Shillong and in Nongkhaw village in the years 1994 and 1995 to highlight her contributions in the freedom struggle.

With the release of this book we urge both the Central and the State government to give due recognition to Ka Phan Nonglait as one of the great freedom fighters of the country.

Yours etc.,
Michael N.Syiem,
Via email

WHO not infallible

Editor,
The editorial "WHO's credibility questioned" (ST Saturday May 7, 2022) is bold and apt. There are three degrees of lying – lies, damned lies and statistics. "Facts" are different from "truth" and nobody has a monopoly on "truth" and only morons live in a delusional denial mode. Judging the activities of the World Health Organization at the beginning of the so-called pandemic only fools would believe WHO if one scrutinizes its activities discerningly. But in a world where few make things happen, many simply watch things happen while the overwhelming majority do not know what is happening, as lies overshadow things. However, those who dishonour freedom of expression can do so at their

own peril.

Yours etc.
V.K.Lyngdoh,
Via email

Whither press freedom

Editor,
The World press Freedom Index paints a grim picture of press freedom around the world. Freedom of the press is of paramount importance in democratic societies as it has an impact on the functioning of government, protecting people's rights, fighting corruption, holding government accountable, changing wrong policies of government, ensuring justice and so on. Threats, coercion, pressure, intimidation, censorship, harassment and so on negatively impact the functioning of journalists and the media.

By faring very badly, India has cut a sorry figure in the 2022 World Press Freedom Index. India has fallen eight places from 142 to 150 in the index of 180 countries. India was labelled "poor" together with Brazil, Mexico and Russia. The report pointed out that India is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists trying to do their jobs judiciously.

perceived attack from the rebels. The Jaintia rebels were not only left alone in their fight against the mighty British Empire but they were even betrayed by their own people.

The worldview of the Jaintias during Kiang Nangbah's time

In the last part of 1800 AD the tribal people were still aloof in the hills and had very little interaction with the outside world. Their closest neighbours were the people in the plains of what is now known as Bangladesh. The proximity with this section of the population is also because this part of the plains area was then part of the same Jaintia kingdom.

The Jaintia kings who had ruled the kingdom from the 1500s were one of the very few flourishing tribal monarchies. They were one of the few kingdoms in North East India that minted their own coins. So undoubtedly those at the helm of power would have a better worldview than their subjects in the hills area. The general assumption is that the Pnar and the War of that time would not have known anything beyond Jaintiapur or Sylhet, or at the most their worldview would be limited to Calcutta only. But the records from the correspondence of the British military officers stationed in the region and their superiors in Calcutta prove all this wrong.

Major Haughton in his correspondence with the officers in Calcutta said that the rebels were campaigning to enroll fighters to join the rebellion. He said that the rebels sent messages to call for others to join and fight the British. The tactics used to enroll such volunteers was either by persuasion or by threatening those who were skeptical or those who worked against the rebellion. It also mentioned that the rebels knew about the military party which advanced from the area and sent a detachment for North Cachar to create disturbances in the region.

The interesting information shared by Haughton was that the rebels even boasted that they had sent messages to the King of Burmah/Burma and the Emperor of Russia for assistance. This simple information tells us of the worldviews of the people at that time and that their knowledge was not limited to the areas neighbouring the kingdom. It testifies to the fact that the Jaintia rebels knew that the British government was indeed very powerful, but they also knew of other empires which were equally powerful.

hmmohrmen67@gmail.com

How murderous is it when politics means more than people

By Toki Blah

Reading KN Kumar's article "Pesticides cause Cancers: wake up Meghalaya!" (ST May 5, 2023) is akin to reading some gruesome horror story where the characters of the story are slowly devoured by some horrible unknown, alien pestilence. What makes the article that much more horrifying, is the fact that, such a fate seems to be on the offing for the people of Meghalaya and their children and grand children. The article speaks of the conscious policy of past Governments of Meghalaya to reduce, to whatever extent possible, the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides by farmers of this hilly NE state. This was done by doing away with the subsidy to farmers for purchasing such poison for their crops. This policy was implemented based on the irrefutable evidence that use of such pesticides and fertilizers on the vegetables

on reversing the good judgment of his predecessors for a few miserable votes he expects to buy. Fueling the whole process at every level is the temptation to make money at whatever cost. One understands the desperate need for funds on the eve of the 2023 polls but should this be done over our dead bodies? Is conscience, the sense of right and wrong, the principles of High Office and pledge of office to uphold the interest of the common man to be so easily bartered off simply so that one can win an election? Is it worth it? Is this why we elect people to such high offices that make policies?

Then one could counter with the argument that the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers are basic package components of the Green Revolution. True, but the Green Revolution was never meant nor designed



we eat is directly related to the high incidence of cancer in the State.

Kumar, currently Chairman Meghalaya Farmers Empowerment Commission ought to know what he is talking about and has put up this early dire warning because it seems there is a file, moving at a very fast pace in the corridors of the Meghalaya Secretariat, to reintroduce the dangerous subsidy on chemical fertilizers and pesticides. It would seem that the wisdom and caution of former informed heads of the Agriculture Department is now ready to be thrown to the winds – winds that comes in the form of Pesticide Companies who are desperate for the reintroduction of such poisons into our farming system and who are ready to pay huge amounts to whosoever is willing to help them. It seems they have now locked on to a very vulnerable target.

There are some hidden, unspoken truths that need to be exposed in relation to this hideous conspiracy to poison the communities of both the Hynniewtrep and Achi people of Meghalaya. A basic question must be asked as to who in their right minds would want to inflict such pain, suffering and misery on our innocent people and why. The answer is not difficult to find. First there are the retail commission agents, present in every Block and village, who earn a commission by peddling such venom. These are local businessmen who would be most anxious to continue with their cancer causing trade and who would be pressurizing their politician to revive the government subsidy on pesticides. Then there are the chemical pesticides and fertilizer companies desperate to increase sales of their products regardless of the human pain and suffering it might cause. And at the end of the line the most important person, the one who decides

for upland agriculture such as ours. As a matter of fact it is the Agriculture policy of the Government of India to promote organic agriculture for the hilly uplands of the NE. It makes better sense both from the health point of view of the people as well as the income generating potential of Organic farming. Meghalaya should be following this trend and actually ask for more funds for such a paradigm change in agriculture strategy. There is a huge market for organic products. There will be an increase in flow of funds for organic farming from the centre which will greatly benefit our small marginal upland farmers but very little would be left available for the politicians. Therefore, since it fails to line political pockets, a policy that refuses to subsidize "agents of death" is now to be dismantled!

Now, since when has the welfare of the common man been subjugated by profits of uncaring MNCs (Multinational Companies)? Is this the policy of the MDA Govt? From the public health point of view and from the health angle of the citizens of Meghalaya the strategy must not be left to the whims and fancies of one politician and one Department alone. Does this move have the approval of the Cabinet? Doubtful if the attention of the Chief Minister has been brought to the rapidly developing affairs in the Department of Agriculture. Now the cat is out of the bag! The public must raise their voices and the common man's concern must be heard. The Chief Minister must act. He must immediately ask for the file on the subject. The health and general welfare of the people of Meghalaya is at stake. The Government must reconsider the matter and make that public!

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

*"Surprises are everywhere in life.
And they usually come from misjudging
people for being less than they appear."*
— Brownell Landrum

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LXIV No.266 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MAY 10, 2022

What's with the Meghalaya Games

IF the sordid experience of the athletes one day prior to the Games is not enough, the end proved even more disastrous with not enough medals to go around. Call it bad planning and execution with inexperienced people at the helm or simply a case of not doing enough homework but the damage is done. In the first instance, the fact that a pressure group was allowed to dictate terms about who should be the members of the Meghalaya State Olympics Association (MSOA) and that only indigenous tribes should hold office of sports associations and the fact that those running the sports associations kowtowed to that demand is a primary signal that sports is being looked at with a communal prism which is the antithesis to the idea of sports itself which allows a equal playground for all. When the athletes leave the state to perform elsewhere they have to compete with the best. Sports brooks no partiality, no ethnocentrism or communalism. It demands the best from the athletes in all the games and therefore the best is also expected from those running sports associations irrespective of what community they come from.

Experience counts. When an indigenous tribal person falls seriously ill, does he/she go looking for a doctor of the same tribe? If that is the case why do people leave the State and go outside for treatment? If they have no qualms about seeking treatment from the best doctors no matter their community or religion then why bring in such prejudices in sports? With this sort of attitude Sports is bound to suffer because incompetence is compounded when experienced people are axed.

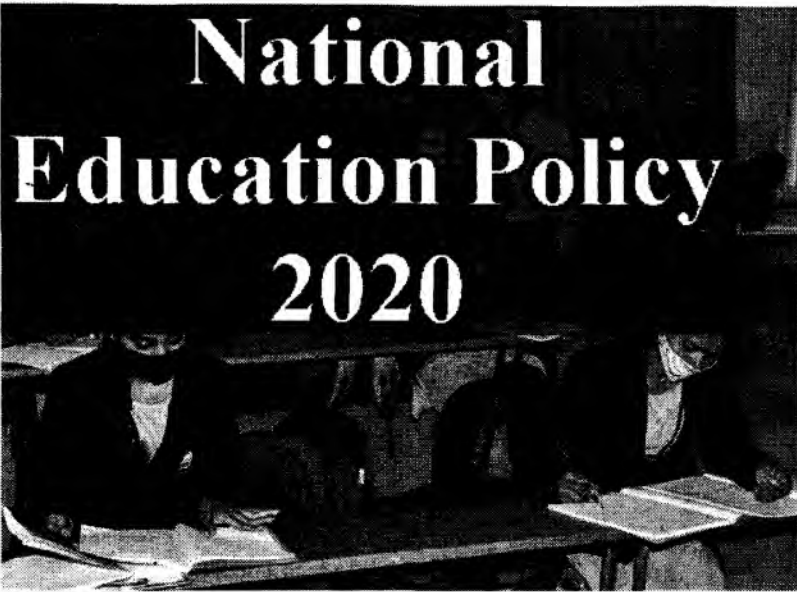
It is not for nothing that in other states of India there are undergraduate courses in Sports Management. B-Schools also have specialization courses on Sports Management because the job requires a high degree of proficiency that brooks no failure or last-minute errors. Is there any person in the MSOA who has such a degree? Among the subjects covered in the Course are (1) Sports management policy (2) Sponsorship, marketing, and merchandise of sports (3) Sports finance & business (4) Sports law (5) Sports ethics (6) Sports organization (7) Sports event staging (8) Sports media communication and (9) Sports broadcasting among others. Do we have even one person qualified in Sports Management? And if Meghalaya doesn't have one, should it not hire one such person? The MDA Government cannot deal with another fiasco during the National Games. That's too close to the elections! The Meghalaya Games had virtually no corporate sponsorship because there's no one to tap into that. It's time the Meghalaya Government uses professionals to head the Sports Department and Associations.

Common University Entrance Test (CUET) is only one of the several measures that the central government is planning to steamroll as part of the New Education Policy 2020. NEP has the approval of the Central Cabinet. But for reasons not known, it is not placed for threadbare discussion in the Parliament. Thanks to the media coverage and the thousands of official and academic workshops, people have developed some vague idea about the policy. However, the details of the policy, its need, feasibility and likely impact are not clear to most of them. Not sure whether the key members who are part of the committees in charge of implementing the policy in the state government, university and college levels have better knowledge of NEP, or they also just rely on the media reports. Of late we are witness to the anxiety and confusions around CUET which finally compelled the state government to seek exemption from the Centre. If we expect that such a situation should not repeat, it is necessary that all stakeholders—NEHU, state government, colleges, communities, parents and students—have a fair idea of the agenda of NEP, 2020, and have a realistic understanding of what could be implemented in the state of Meghalaya.

Before one owns or rejects the policy, it is necessary to understand what changes the NEP seeks to initiate. NEP 2020 seeks to overhaul the entire education system from pre-primary school to doctoral program. It seeks to introduce major changes in the curricula, syllabi, teaching methods, research focus, and administration of institutions of higher education (HEIs). The NEP aims to increase the General enrolment ratio, which was about 27 percent in 2019-20 to 50 percent by 2035. It proposes a four-year degree and one/ two-year PG program with options for entry and exit after every year. What one gains by exiting with a certificate or diploma is not clear, as a degree is a minimum qualification for most jobs. It talks of making education multidisciplinary. But by multidisciplinary, NEP 2020 does not mean encouraging emerging multidisciplinary fields of study like geo-physics, bio-chemistry, bio-technology, political economy, political sociology, etc. According to NEP, making it multidisciplinary means giving the

option for the students to take a subject like Physics as major, music as minor, and cookery as a vocational subject. Curricula proposed under NEP for degree and PG courses will include a fixed number of allied, non-allied, and vocational subjects.

Under NEP, the number of papers and number of credits that the students have to complete for getting a degree is much more than what it is there at the moment. The students are given the option to secure up to 40 percent of the total credits from online courses offered by other universities and institutions through platforms such as MOOCs and SWAYAM. The NEP document names this option of choosing any combination of subjects as a CBCS model / cafeteria approach. As part of NEP 2020, the government proposes creation of a



centralized Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) to preserve all the credits that the student earns over the period and award the degree, diploma, or certificate. Similarly, changes are proposed in the curricula, syllabi, and administration of the Ph.D. courses. Further, NEP recommends the use of digital technology and recommends blended mode for teaching and research. NEP also proposes to grant autonomy to the colleges with high NAAC grade to design independently their own courses and even award the degrees to the students. At the highest level, NEP proposes new regulatory bodies to monitor the administration and accreditation of the HEIs in the country. It seeks to increase the enrolment in HEIs to 50 percent by facilitating the entry of private and foreign investments in education fields.

These being the major proposals under NEP 2020, let us now look at the state of higher education in Meghalaya. The state has only one central university, and a few HEIs

such as IIM, NEIGRIHMS, etc., which are under central government. Though there is a demand for a state university, it has not materialized till date. The Department of Education, Government of Meghalaya looks after the administrative and financial aspects of the colleges in the state. According to the Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, there are six government colleges, 15 deficit colleges, 8 colleges with a lump-sum grant, and 26 private and self-financing colleges. All these colleges are affiliated to NEHU, which looks after affiliation, academic and examination related matters. According to the College Development Council of NEHU, out of the 79 colleges that are affiliated to NEHU, about 30 have permanent affiliation, and others only have temporary affiliation. Most colleges that

have temporary affiliation are located in non-urban areas. Government and Deficit colleges in Shillong and Tura have reasonably good infrastructure, but most others lack minimum infrastructure and man-power. Most disciplines in the degree colleges have an average of five teachers. In some, they have to even teach higher secondary courses. For different reasons, the UG syllabi have not been updated for over a decade. There are backward areas where the infrastructure and internet services are bad. The present state of higher education in Meghalaya leaves question marks on the possibility of implementing the reforms, such as four-year degree, blended mode of teaching, cafeteria approach and transfer of credits.

NEHU can give academic inputs for improvement in higher education. It can take charge of PG departments directly under its control. But for the UG courses, the execution or non-execution of the NEP depends on the initiatives from the colleges

and the government of Meghalaya. If we look at the national scenario, the BJP ruled states are going ahead with implementing the NEP. But non-BJP states like Kerala, Tamilnadu, Bengal, etc., expressed their reservations against the NEP. They have pointed out that although education is a Concurrent List; the states were never consulted in drafting the NEP. Some accuse its proposals as contrary to the constitutional values and social justice, and apprehend that NEP paves the way for commercialization and saffronization of education. These non-BJP states set up separate committees under the chairmanship of well-known educationists to make suggestions for educational development in their states. While Karnataka had its own expert committee, which suggested several initiatives to implement the NEP, the AAP government in Delhi went ahead with major school reforms with no reference to the NEP.

A tribal dominant state like Meghalaya, with limited resources, has its own problems and limitations. It can neither overlook the concerns, needs and apprehensions of its people, nor ignore the responsibility of improving the educational standard in the state. Meghalaya cannot afford to ape Karnataka, or Kerala, which are at different levels of social, educational and economic development. Meghalaya has to evaluate the pros and cons of each of the NEP proposals, and see what is practical, necessary and best suited for the state and its people. To start the process, the state government may consider appointing a committee with well-known educationists, who are conversant not only with the educational policies of the state and central governments, but are also aware of the ground realities in the state. The Committee may consult different stakeholders, including NEHU, and come out with its own vision plan for the development of education in the state. The college managements, teachers' associations and students' bodies should give inputs for devising the state policy on higher education. With an open mind, all of us need to engage in a healthy debate and help give shape to a progressive and meaningful educational policy, taking selectively positive inputs from NEP 2020. All this exercise takes time. It is better that Meghalaya makes steady progress, and not make the situation worse by taking hasty decisions.

Each of the NEP proposals, and see what is practical, necessary and best suited for the state and its people. To start the process, the state government may consider appointing a committee with well-known educationists, who are conversant not only with the educational policies of the state and central governments, but are also aware of the ground realities in the state. The Committee may consult different stakeholders, including NEHU, and come out with its own vision plan for the development of education in the state. The college managements, teachers' associations and students' bodies should give inputs for devising the state policy on higher education. With an open mind, all of us need to engage in a healthy debate and help give shape to a progressive and meaningful educational policy, taking selectively positive inputs from NEP 2020. All this exercise takes time. It is better that Meghalaya makes steady progress, and not make the situation worse by taking hasty decisions.

A Nudge on Waste Management

By Maitphang Syiem

"There is no such thing as 'away.' When we throw anything away, it must go somewhere," stated Annie Leonard. For a fraction of a second your mind would probably be boggled but the lines clearly speak on what we conventionally perceive about solid waste. We consume things but don't introspect much because the latter part is always garbage to be chucked out wherever we want. Like the latest slogan, "Ha Ri Lajong, Katba Mon" and all of it will either be littered around with none of us to even own it. The crux of the matter is how we perceive waste which is generated from our daily consumption.

Our attitude towards waste is far from what is expected and the probable reason might be that our "waste" is never ours and we don't own it post consumption, because it is useless. Now the point of introspection is when we consume things we should also own what is left behind and perhaps think what can be done about it, but that usually never happens. The conventional way is to use and throw. But just spare a thought on the "throw" part. Can we look for an out of the box solution? Just think about it and before you decide you may ponder on these lines "There is nothing as garbage but useful things in the wrong place". Alex Steffen. Mind-boggling right? How can garbage be useful when it is garbage? Please laugh out loud at this juncture but the point here is that we need to change our attitudes and behavior towards "waste." Why not think of something at our own local or personal level to transform our own generated waste to something useful which perhaps may benefit our ecology? We may never know what good can come out of it if we change our actions towards it in an unconventional way. "Your Garbage Transformed, is your Gift". Yehuda Berg.

We discuss forms of pollution and pollution is increasing at an unprecedented rate along with the growing population. This translates to increasing consumerism which also increases the different kinds of wastes. We need to be informed. Scientifically there are two sources of pollution, point source and non-point source and particularly with solid wastes, our households, centers etc are the point sources for the majority of the wastes that is generated and which lands up in landfills. Hence understanding this source is practical for all of us to mitigate the amount of garbage that we generate because if we can locally tackle this at source we are one step ahead in solving the underlying crises of solid waste management.

The other important part for us to understand is also on the carrying capacity of our landfills. For how long can our landfills keep on carrying the load? They have already reached a saturation point. Hence, understanding and tackling the source of wastes will reduce the load of our landfills and help them to sustain longer. So the approach is to reduce the waste at source which will lead to reducing the load on them. Practically speaking, we cannot avoid consumption of goods and products. Human wants and needs are unlimited and as long as we are here we are bound to consume things and generate waste post consumption as we are dwelling in a consumer-driven society. The important part here is how we look deeper into our consumerist lifestyle because this lifestyle will also decide the quantity of waste we produce. Let's therefore introspect on that and find the best suitable ways and

means that will reduce our "waste footprints." Concerning this crucial subject of discussion and to also take the bull by the horns following the 5R's (Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Rot (Composting) is imperative for all of us to solve the problem of solid waste. The 5R's concept was pioneered by a well-known US environmental activist Bea Johnson and ironically it all started from her kitchen right at the point source. That led to a movement and lifestyle called the "zero waste home" and it did work for her. They were able to cut down on waste. The learning here is that if it worked for her, it should probably work for us as well if we try. As stated earlier, we dwell in a consumer driven society and may perhaps not be able to achieve absolute zero waste but we will also not be way behind if we put our heart and soul into this matter. Though it sounds unrealistic it should be an idealistic goal to try and achieve.

Time is changing and the issue of solid waste management is indeed a menace if we do not put our actions and attitudes into a re-engineering process. The issue calls for collective responsibility of every individual, be it young or old. We have to own the problem and take collective steps to solve it. It starts with each one of us to look for unconventional ways and solutions and to seek help if required to solve this persistent problem.

The most important part here is the "Behavioral change", Information, Education and Communication means educating ourselves and the younger generations to understand waste and how to achieve an idealistic goal of zero waste is imperative. We must all converge around a solution else we will be leaving a bad legacy. Reducing waste at source should be a daily and not a one-time activity. Communities should commit themselves to a near zero waste philosophy. This will solve half of the problem. On this we need to be pro-active and own up the problem and also be accountable for it. Let the controlling authorities do their part; we need to do ours even better as it is a ubiquitous and collective problem.

In this regard concerned citizens should also be aware of the second phase of Swachh Bharat Mission, which is now SBM-U 2.0 which was launched by the Government of India on 1st Oct 2021 with an ultimate vision of achieving garbage free cities. Guidelines and frameworks have been published by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and it is imperative that one should know of this as it is already a major program which will definitely have a holistic impact on waste management. One of the major focus is on "Behaviour Change" which is ultimately the need of the hour. This emanates from "Behavioural Economics Theory" called "Nudge Theory" - a theory well acclaimed, developed and introduced by the Noble Laureate Economist Richard Thaler. We might want to dive deeper in to this. Briefly the theory speaks on active thinking and heuristic process which perhaps may help us take better decisions on reducing "waste footprint" if applied.

To conclude let us remind ourselves of Bob Dylan's words - Come gather 'round, people/ Wherever you roam/ And admit that the waters/ Around you have grown/ And accept it that soon You'll be drenched to the bone/ If your time to you is worth savin'/ And you better start swimmin'/ Or you'll sink like a stone/ For the times they are a-changin'.

(The writer is a Geospatial Technology Expert, maitphangsyiem@gmail.com)

Letters to the Editor

Umiam bridge needs immediate action

Editor,
With reference to the news item "High Court wants Umiam bridge work to start soon" (ST May 4, 2022), as a citizen of the state I now see a ray of hope that with the intervention of the High Court, perhaps the state government may be forced to start work on the bridge. Governments then and now have ignored this lifeline of Shillong for way too long. The bridge has and is still serving us way beyond its age and needs urgent care. It is irksome to look at the lackadaisical attitude of our state government which cares very little about the people of the state. Once in power our representatives are less attentive towards issues affecting the people but are more concerned about their personal well-being and wealth gathering. They try to make the most of what

they can accumulate and lay their hands on. It's a trend among governments then and now! But can those in authority for once be alert and conscientious? Imagine the catastrophe in case of a mishap. How long will the bridge hold on? There should not and cannot be any further delay to the construction of the bridge before Shillong meets with its doom. Take the matter seriously for the good of all.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

State Sports needs drastic improvement

Editor,
I agree with some of the points on an article written by Patricia Mukhim captioned 'Incompetence the forerunner to corruption' (ST May 6, 2022) pointing out the crisis that haunts the State Sports Department and its wings. We have heard so much about the State Sports Policy and State

Youth Policy but honestly no one has even seen or read the Policy/Policies as it is not put up on the public domain for interested citizens to engage with. It is ironic that a few people sitting in their cozy rooms should frame and design such policies without diving to ground zero. The recent Meghalaya Games held in Shillong were more of a showpiece. The Games should have been held in various districts to make them more "community centric." No one has even sought accountability about some of the indoor sports complex that were built but not been used and hence have remained idle investments. The aspiring athletes along with their parents complained of bad food. To add salt to injury the athletes who won different games on the last day did not get their medals as those were in short supply. What a shame that they had to go home empty-handed. My advice would be to please do a SWOT analysis before hosting such events lest it turns out to be an embarrassment to the state. Sports

is not about money alone but money is needed for the best infrastructure. The money allocated for Sports should be audited. Sports is more about the spirit of competition and participation.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar
Via email

Accepting the bitter truth

Editor,
This is a reply to the article "Why this anti-Bengali rant?" by Kajal Chatterjee where the writer is hellbent on framing the responsibility of all riots in the country upon just one community. Perhaps the names of the five main accused in the Delhi riots have not been publicized by extremely secular media channels. Although the writer has left no stone unturned to mention the incidents where the supposed responsibility is being labelled on the Hindu community, there is a suspicious silence on his part when it comes to mentioning the killings done on "Sar tan

se juda" slogans.

We must remind ourselves about the bloodshed and agony faced by the citizens of Bengal under the communist government. The list of such heart wrenching crimes is incomplete without mentioning the Sainbari murders, Bijon Setu massacre, Nanoor massacre as well as Nandigram massacre. Another addition to this list is the Marichjhapi massacre perpetrated under none other than Jyoti Basu, the then Chief Minister of Bengal. All of this contradicts the fact that the state was never touched by barbarities of riots as stated by the writer. It is doubtful whether this tradition has come to an end under the TMC government. The manner in which false voting occurs in the state as well as the brutality that unfolds after the end of polling sessions have done little to remove the doubt. It is also shameful to mention the innumerable accounts of crimes on women, most startling of which was the account of the rape survivor of post-poll violence where

a 60 year old woman was gang-raped in front of her grandson allegedly by TMC workers.

Clearly all of these incidents contradict the fanciful portrayal of the state by Chatterjee. It is also a curious scenario that people are trying to cover up this blatant barbarity just because of political motives rather than accepting the truth and taking measures to improve the situation. Whenever there is a mention of such incidents, the heads of Bengalis residing outside the state hangs in shame. It is therefore quite natural to question this absolutely stupefying culture of barbarism that has infected the state and has put the respect of all educated Bengalis at stake throughout the world.

Yours etc.,
P Bhattacharya
Shillong- 4

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

"A whole stack of memories never equal one little hope."
— Charles M. Schulz
The Shillong Times

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Khalistanis, again

THE scenario within Punjab and its neighbourhood is now a matter of some concern. The pro-Khalistan outfit, Sikh for Justice, has taken responsibility for the daring rocket-propelled grenade attack on the Intelligence headquarters in Mohali, Punjab, on Monday night. It has also claimed responsibility for the recent raising of the Khalistan flag at the Dharamshala assembly complex in Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Pradesh was in the spotlight after the state banned use of Khalistan flags on vehicles. The open advocacy for Khalistan through a social media post by a senior politician in Himachal, Harpreet Singh Bedi, has come as another provocation to the nation.

Curiously, the uptick in militancy in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh happens in the aftermath of the assembly polls, a change of government and the installation of an AAP government led by popular entertainer Bhagwant Singh Mann in Punjab. This does not however mean Mann or his government has anything to do with these offensives. Rather, the chief minister's nationalistic credentials are beyond doubt. The AAP however cannot ignore the fact that Bedi was a former AAP leader. While the party is now set to stretch itself out to all-India level, its leader Arvind Kejriwal must be mindful as to whom he keeps company with. Notably, the pro-Khalistan elements have issued a threat to Himachal Pradesh chief minister Jairam Thakur that it would turn the assembly poll on June 6 into a Khalistan Referendum 20-20. All these are perhaps just kite-flying and things so far seem to be well under control.

Sikhs are among the most-patriotic of Indians, vouched also by their prominent presence in the Indian military services. The Sikh Regiment has always been India's pride. Despite all these, the Khalistan movement sprouted in Punjab and played mayhem there for some years leading also to the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the consequent Delhi riots. Large numbers of Sikhs lost their lives. Thereafter, a sense of insecurity gripped the community and large numbers of its youths migrated to Canada, which is today Sikhs' second home. Khalistan militancy was funded by sections of overseas Sikhs and more prominently by the ISI of Pakistan. They are still not tired. However, militancy is not a winning proposition anymore. The pro-Kashmiri outfits have learnt it the hard way; so did the Khalistanis. State power today is such that such offensives are bound to fail in the long run as had happened with the LTTE too. At best, they shed blood and made life miserable for some regions for some time.

Meghalaya Games 2022 Goof Up: More Than Meets the Eye

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

Not even sports capitalism can salvage the sordid affairs of sports in Meghalaya. Despite the decades of extraction of wealth from coal and other natural resources, neither a standard sports arena nor a premier football team has been established in the mineral and forest rich regions of the State. Following economic liberalization and the implementation of the single window policy, scores of cement plants were given licenses and other big investments from outside the State were allowed along with subsidies. In August 2013 the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs granted Rs 89.09 crores as subsidy to one cement plant in Meghalaya under the Central Capital Investment Subsidy Scheme 2007. But what do we get in return? The contributions toward the society through Corporate Social Responsibility is dismal as compared with the profits these cement plants or other investors are making out of the wealth of the people of Meghalaya. Perhaps, they sponsor only the political parties and during the 2018-19 elections a few cement plants in East Jaintia Hills donated 4.22 crores to the Bharatiya Janata Party.

This writer does not subscribe to sports capitalism on ethical grounds and according to Michael P. Kerrigan, athletes should not be reduced to commodities and exploited for financial gain of owners, corporate sponsors and not respected for their human dignity. Also, the spectators can't be treated as consumers. The win at all costs, the profit and market driven sports activities had generated sundry scandals, from athletes fixing results to gambling to using of steroids and other performance enhancing substance.

Since the past 50 years, whatever the achievements in the field of sports in the State has to be credited to the efforts made by individuals and communities (both indigenous and non-indigenous). Let us take the case of soccer, the most popular sport in the State; it was the commitment and endeavour of a few individuals, whose efforts had not only improved the standard of playing but more importantly it has helped sustain the game to date amidst various hardships. The community-based sports clubs/associations were the major factor in the development of sports discipline like football in the

State, but today their role and contribution are diminishing as the Government or Sports Authority (s) and Sports bodies had totally ignored them and failed to engage them, especially during the period when the business model in sports was introduced and private players laid major stakes.

As per the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution of India, sports, entertainment and amusement fall under the State List and State can legislate on matters that relate to sporting activities. Thus the State Sports Policy initiated in 2008 was redrafted in 2019 and among other objectives stated in the policy are - (a) to create and maintain State level facilities with State of the art infrastructure, residential and other facilities (b) to create a pool of qualified manpower for sports management, coaches, athletes, referees, etc, (c) to integrate competitive sports in the education system by linking performance based credit transfer in the academic curriculum (d) to propose a framework for creating employment opportunities for sports persons (e) to establish scientific sports facilities in order to support and carry out advance level research and development in sports (f) to recognise, encourage, train and support talents in sports (g) to encourage participation of women in sports and games and (h) to facilitate the participation of the 'Para athletes' in sports and games.

The policy also enlisted 37 sports disciplines which are to be prioritised on the basis of various criteria. For example, the disciplines which have national presence, the popularity of a sports discipline and the medal winning capabilities may also be taken up for selecting the Sports Discipline. The policy also stated the allocation of quotas for government jobs and admissions in schools, colleges and universities for those who excel in sports. It has earmarked 5% quota for admissions in Higher Secondary Schools, Colleges and Universities respectively. Since 2006, the Government had already allocated 2% of Government jobs to sports persons vide No. PER AR 150/88/152 dt 30/10/2006. For the sake of talents and to make sports highly competitive which in effect will improve sports, the quotas should be opened for all

sportspersons in the State irrespective of caste and community. Further, the selection must be just, fair and non-discriminatory. However, in the last two decades, how many appointments in jobs and admissions in schools, colleges and universities have been accorded on sports quota?

Despite the lofty objectives and tall claims, the conditions and performance of sports in the State is pathetic. The local or community-based sports clubs are struggling to meet the basic and necessary requirements to participate in official sports activities. Various State/District sports Associations are cash strapped. Every year they have to run from pillar to post and beg for funds and logistics to be able to organize their annual tournaments. Many athletes, especially in individual sports disciplines like Table Tennis, Badminton, Karate, Judo, Boxing etc are self-supporting. Besides, there are not enough facilities and support system to provide state of the art training to athletes. The lack of major sports facilities is the major reason for the low performance of Meghalaya's athletes at the Regional and National levels. Even the State Capital has no state-of-the-art sports facilities till date. For example, the State's shuttlers are depending on two major facilities in the Capital, one in U Tirot Sing Indoor Sports or erst while National State Sports Council of Assam (NSCA) stadium at Lachumiere and the other is at the J.N Sports Complex Polo. Unilaterally, the Government decided to dismantle the former and convert it into an Administrative Complex and has named it as U Tirot Sing Bhavan. The work order had already been allotted and all Sports Associations' offices located inside U Tirot Sing Indoor stadium, including the office of the State Sports Council, had been relocated. The J.N Sports Complex too is out of bounds for sportspersons as the same is being occupied for non-sports purposes like elections and housing for para military forces periodically. Henceforth, where will the State shuttlers play and train themselves?

The recent controversies on the inhumane and unhygienic accommodation provided for the athletes who participated in the 4th

Meghalaya Games 2022 represent the larger picture of the deteriorating conditions of sports in the State. Those pictures and videos of unlivable conditions are nothing but a reflection of the rot in the sports management in the State. Here, the Meghalaya State Olympic Association (MSOA) and the Department concerned have many questions to answer and now that the games had concluded they must make public the white paper on the Meghalaya Games 2022. They must account for the 2.23 crores which was sanctioned for the Games and every penny spent should be counted and made public.

The major drawback of the Meghalaya Sports Policy is the proposed jumbo jet committee to be headed by the Chief Minister and fourteen other Ministers, who are in-charge of various departments, as members. It is stated in the policy that for the successful implementation of the policy an inter-ministerial and inter agency structure is needed for policy directions, setting the agenda and mobilizing resources for sports development in the State. On the contrary sports persons and members of Sports Associations or State Olympic Association will be mere invitees and nominated members. It's a fact that at any given time, more than 90% of the Ministers and their bureaucrats who have to decide on sports related matters have little or no knowledge about sports and that in a State like Meghalaya in which Sports bodies are already plagued by non-sportspersons such a Committee is adding to the problems.

What the Government can do for the best interest of Sports is to legislate a viable law on sports and support for its proper implementation. At the same time there is the need for total revamp of all Sports Associations in the State, including the apex body, the Meghalaya State Olympic Association. The revamping should be primarily based on four principles, (i) that Sport Associations be headed by sportspersons (ii) for sports to survive and grow we have to give way to professionalism (iii) pure talent should be the underlying criterion for selection of sportspersons in any discipline and (iv) system of checks and balances must be in place to ensure accountability and transparency in management and governance of Sports bodies.

Slaying a demon called inflation

By Jagdish Rattanani

As the price of tomatoes nears Rs.100 a kilo, it is time to bring some of the strong vocabulary on inflation that was in vogue with some of the old-time central bankers. Savak Tarapore, the illustrious former deputy governor of the RBI, never minced words. He wrote way back in 2007: "Tolerating inflation is like dancing with the devil and those who argue against strong monetary measures to control inflation are the sinners of society." The noted Prof. P R Brahmananda had said: "Not caring about inflation is like going into battle without caring for the wounded, the dying and the dead."

So, the policy repo rate hike of 40 basis points, from 4.0% to 4.40%, announced at an unscheduled Monetary

growth." If the MPC crosses the 2% to 4% band on either side, it fails. If the average inflation level for three quarters in a row breaches the tolerance band, the MPC must explain its failure and how and when it can correct the situation. Some say there is a risk that this might happen for the first time in the history of the MPC, given that inflation for the coming months is expected to be above 6%, the monsoons are an unknown factor yet and the international geo-political situation is on a boil. Fuel prices can be expected to go much higher. So, expect more rate hikes in the coming months; the demon on inflation will not be slayed easily.

The numbers and finer points of policy, however, never tell the full story of



Policy Committee (MPC) meeting called May 2-4, barely a month after the same MPC met and decided to keep the status quo (on April 6-8) is nothing short of a dramatic event. At the April meeting, the MPC knew that Jan and Feb 2022 retail inflation numbers had breached the upper tolerance level of 6% -- they came in at 6.01% and 6.07% respectively. The March 2022 retail inflation numbers, which arrived later on April 12, confirmed the uptrend by coming in at 6.95%. The unscheduled hike in repo rate along with a simultaneous Cash Reserve Ratio hike of 50 basis points to suck out "excess" liquidity, is a strong signal now that priorities have changed from protecting, supporting and even pushing growth while closely watching if not tolerating inflation to attacking inflation at the cost of growth. In theory, repo rate changes are expected to transmit (though in practice they may not always do so appropriately or speedily enough) through the money market to the entire the financial system, which, in turn, influences aggregate demand -- a key determinant of inflation and growth, as the RBI puts it.

What happened to cause a sudden reversal of rate action?

The April inflation number was probably a key trigger, or something more out on the horizon that caused the discomfort and indicated more pain is coming. Whatever the reason, the fact is that inflation, which in the language of the ordinary person is a measure of the rising prices of goods and services, now takes on a new focus as it has reached levels that it can no longer be handled tentatively.

Under the current policy that goes by the acronym of FIT, or Flexible Inflation Targeting, the MPC (which is not the RBI though it is influenced by the RBI since three of the six members are from the central bank) has to keep inflation at an average of 4%, with a leeway of two percentage points up or down, so that inflation between 2% to 6% is the range within which the MPC meets its mandate. The MPC has to achieve this while keeping in mind the objective of growth. In the words of the RBI: "The primary objective of monetary policy is to maintain price stability while keeping in mind the objective of growth. Price stability is a necessary precondition to sustainable

what is being felt in the market. To an ordinary citizen, any talk of inflation dynamics, the Ukraine war, a repo rate hike or an accompanying CRR rise to suck out liquidity, as was announced, have little meaning because the wallet is strained at every visit to buy staples. This pain cannot be easily understood by policy makers. Felt or lived inflation is inevitably worse than reported inflation. Inflation at work has therefore to be seen in the heat and dust of the markets, in the decisions that countless Indians make today to buy less or even turn away because prices are unaffordable. Prices are higher than they come across in press releases and data sheets. Ask any common person on the street and the heat of raging prices stands out.

What this demands now is not merely the technical and forced corrections that must be injected at top speed to stop the situation from deteriorating but a political leadership that responds to the pressures on the common citizen. It should be clear by now that the failed project on the farm laws sought to bring in monumental change against the wishes of the majority at precisely the wrong time. The intended scrapping of the laws against hoarding (and the strife the laws caused among farmers) could have made it even more difficult to control prices. Similarly, the new labour code will make it easier for businesses to hire and fire, making firms more efficient but exposing workers to the vagaries of the market, with nothing to fall back on.

In a recent report, the RBI wrote that economic progress rides on seven wheels - aggregate demand; aggregate supply; institutions; macroeconomic stability and policy coordination; productivity and technological progress; structural conditions; and sustainability. Seven is an odd number of wheels for a vehicle to move on. The missing eighth wheel is a sensitivity to the poor and a commitment to uplift every citizen so that the benefits of growth, slower if it be, are more evenly distributed. When it comes to making policy, it is important to realise that often "the choice is not between inflation and growth but between inflation and the distribution of income," to quote S S Tarapore.

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

Letters to the Editor

Continued abysmal performance of Congress

Editor,
The story of the Congress fortune in the immediate future - 2022, 2023 and 2024 does not seem to inspire much hope. The Congress High Command and the rank and file of the party everywhere in India are demoralised. No amount of effort for its revival can work because the High Command of the party refuses its total overhaul - from the topmost level of the Party. In fact, Sonia Gandhi, in spite of her long years as President of Party, has not been able to build second or third rung leaders from among the rank and file of the Party. Today the Congress is nowhere near the leadership, dynamism and mass following of her mother-in-law, Indira Gandhi. As far as Sonia Gandhi's children Rahul and Priyanka are concerned, they have failed to make an impact on the Indian electorate. They don't inspire confidence in voters, and least of all in their beleaguered party workers.

Ain if we turn to the Congress bigwigs who gravitate around the Gandhis, most of them, are deadwood and have no more vigour, dynamism, attraction and appeal to the millions of new, aspiring, ambitious, dynamic voters of progressive India. They have no more hope in this grand old party because they have seen

enough of it. The dismal performance of the monolithic old party started in 2014 and has only deteriorated further in 2019 in the Parliamentary elections. Again, in Assembly elections held since then (2019), out of 17 states the Congress has failed to win any state on its own. Except for Maharashtra where it won quite a few seats, in Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu it became a mere junior partner by winning insignificant seats. In some states like Uttar Pradesh, the Party was able to win only in single digits.

In the General Elections to the Lok Sabha slated for 2024, the party may face another rout if the present state of the Congress is any indication. It will be very difficult for the Congress to win seats in Uttar Pradesh, Assam and the other Northern states, West Bengal, Orissa, Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Goa but it may fare a little better in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Himachal Pradesh. However, judging from the present political strength of the Party and its dismal performance, the Congress will take a long time to revive and return to power provided it humbly admits its mistakes and adopts drastic steps even to the point of doing away with the power circus of the Gandhi family.

There is however, no magic wand, not even that of Prashant Kishor to propel

Congress to power at least in 2024 or in the near future in the Centre because the political space of the Congress has been replaced by the Regional Parties in different states and regions including the advent of AAP and owing to the political might of the RSS-Bajrang Dal-VHP-BJP combine. The Congress has to blame itself for not changing itself with the changing times.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Sr. Journalist,
Shillong-3.

Delayed diagnosis & nervous trouble-shooting

Editor,
The Meghalaya High Court should be appreciated for having taken the Umiang dam to the ICU. In the 80s, when Nongthymmai bridge became the first casualty to the new trade doctrine of pay for 15 tons and carry 45 tons, no eyebrows were raised. More apathetic were the trucks rerouted through Umpling, Polo and Mawlai, without any fear of those low tonne bridges. It was a miracle that all these bridges, being short span plus well-constructed, were able to survive. From 1980 until the time when the NH6 was completed, the dam was tortured with 45 tons of Tata 1210 trucks, and then with 60 tons of 12 and 16 wheelers. It could then heave a sigh of relief till Dwar-U-ksuid Bailey bridge and worse, a

private contractor was allowed to build it with NHA's silent spectator snapped into two.

Let this bedlam arising out of the dam teach the enforcement agencies be they traffic police or MVIs to stick to the law henceforth. The following suggestions may be considered.

(1) Let the new bridge be far from the dam as no matter how careful the construction executed, the tremors may be felt. And not to forget that the dam generates 174 MW of power.

(2) The idea of a 12 or 16 wheelers, having to be contented with 10 axle weight is controversial. Plus the past conduct of the certified weigh bridges, in response to the High Court order when the Dwar-u-Ksuid had snapped in which many trucks failed to climb the Laitkor gradient, or Puriang from the Barak valley side, smacks of political intervention.

(3) It is imperative that trucks to Barak valley or vice versa, and those to West and East Jaintia (vice versa) use the Jorabat - Nowgong-Haflong route to Silchar and (vice versa) and those bound for East and West Jaintia Hills should use Haflong to 8th mile. And should these influential truckers complain about the distance let them know that diesel consumption wise, these routes are much more less expensive. And if the High Court is tough, they have to comply. (4) For Shillong, let there be a transit point somewhere at Lad Umroi. All 12 and 16 wheelers would shed off

their load to be transported on the 709 or 407 TATA or other pick-up vans till Shillong. And let there be judicious traffic police to not harass these small vehicles as is often heard.

The suggestions are not easy to follow, but if the ministers are really concerned about the dam and the public they ought to implement them. Finally, let our ministers and those in the administration learn one important lesson, "A spark neglected burns the house."

Yours etc.,
W. Passah
Nongkrem

On sedition law

Editor,
Authorities have brought sedition charges against citizens on flimsy grounds in the last five years. A law that originated in the colonial era to punish freedom fighters like Gandhi is now abused by governments to quell dissent and free speech. In fact, this law has been weaponised as a tool to suppress dissent and free speech. The Chief justice of India N.V. Ramana had expressed his concern about its misuse. Arbitrary enforcement of such an outdated law has sparked off a debate on sedition law and its misuse.

What is the logic of using a law used by the British to suppress dissent and imprison freedom fighters in post independent India? Critics of sedition law say that such a draconian law is a threat to democracy. People

have the right to free speech and expression. Judgements of governments by people is a unique feature of democracy. It helps expose the drawbacks of governments. It also helps governments to make changes in governance and bring welfare programmes. Instead of trying to suppress public criticisms, a democratic government must introspect, realise its mistakes and move in the right direction. Punishing people who oppose wrong policies is against democratic principles. It is worrisome that several sedition cases have been filed after protests against wrong policies of the government. However, conviction rate in sedition cases is very low. It shows that the law is intentionally used to suppress dissent. As there is no clear definition of sedition law, it is used by the police to falsely accuse people. Further, it is very difficult to get bail in sedition cases.

Free speech and expression are enshrined in the Constitution. Such liberties are strengths of democracy. Judicial intervention is a must for changing this draconian law. Abolishing this law may be difficult. On the other hand, its indiscriminate use can be limited.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

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“Everyone enjoys doing the kind of work for which he is best suited.”

—Napoleon Hill

The Shillong Times

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Sedition law on temporary pause

AFTER much hemming and hawing and a stiff defence by the Solicitor General defending the Central Government’s stances on why the sedition law is imperative to curb “disaffection against the state,” a day before the May 10 hearing the Government takes an about turn. Prime Minister Modi belatedly realized that the sedition law was being misused by the states and that such a law should have no place in an India observing 75 years of freedom. This delayed realization however did not result in a complete disowning of the sedition law by the executive. Time was sought for a better understanding of how to check anti-nationals and terrorists as if the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) was not enough to incarcerate persons booked under that Act. That a colonial law dating back to the 1800s and which was examined by a 5-bench judge way back in 1962 at a time when India was just 15 years old as an independent country only 12 years old as a republic, should continue to this day is a matter of regret. In fact sedition is not the only archaic colonial baggage. We also have the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) enacted by the British to curb the Indian resistance movement.

For India to rely heavily on colonial laws to deal with its own people shows a lack of discernment and an inability to decolonise the mind. It also demeans the ability of the parliament of this country and the collective minds of its jurists to enact better, more enlightened laws that are not subject to abuse. Between 2010 and 2020, there have been 13,306 sedition cases filed against different individuals which includes activists and media persons which includes cartoonists and artists. Amongst them was the late Fr Stan Swamy who worked for tribal rights. That a state would incarcerate a priest that works at empowering tribals should have alerted all Indians at the impunity at which the sedition law is being abused. In the case of those accused of the Bhima Koregaon case their computers have been fed with a virus that strengthens the case of the state against them. In all of these cases the police have been used across states to carry out the diktat of the ruling Party. Criticism against the government by way of a tweet or a Facebook post is taken as seditious. Critiquing the Government is the duty of the media whose freedom has incidentally been greatly curtailed in these tortuous times when media houses have by and large learnt to self regulate lest they face sedition charges that hang over their heads like the sword of Damocles.

Mahatma Gandhi had termed Section 124(A) of the sedition law under which he spent six years in jail as the “Prince among the political sections of the Indian Penal Code designed to suppress the liberty of the citizen.” For now, the Supreme Court has kept sedition on pause and told states not to file cases under this law and if filed then the courts would ensure that the matter is treated as per the apex court directives. This respite is until July 3 after which the apex court will take a longer view on hearing from the Government.

Letters to the Editor

Sports a neglected sector in West Garo Hills

Editor,
I would like to share some thoughts on the present conditions of Sports in Garo Hills, Meghalaya. To start with, under the Department of Sports and Youth Affairs of Meghalaya a District Sports Office in every district has been set up where coaches and sports staff have been appointed wherever the District Sports Office (DSO) is located here in Garo Hills. All of them have been appointed particularly for contributing in their fields of expertise in helping and growing the sports amongst the youths of Garo Hills. But the sad part is that most of the so-called coaches or sports instructors are inactive throughout the year. Some are not even physically fit to be able to fulfil their coaching duties. Most of the staff of each DSO office are seen to be active only during January 26, August 15, Wangala Festival or when some sports cum

exhibition matches are held just to entertain the general public. Otherwise it’s hard to see them coming forward and diligently imparting their expertise in the form of coaching on a regular basis.
Being hardcore sports enthusiast, the people of Garo Hills looks suited for contact sports say Judo, Boxing, Taekwondo, Kick Boxing, Wrestling, Long distance running and of course football. Not only this, I find games like Badminton being seriously played and followed at Williamnagar and Tura Indoor stadium even though both haven’t seen a coach till date from the inauguration of the said Indoor halls which is really hard to digest. Even without a Badminton Coach, Cyrus from Williamnagar won Gold in Badminton in the under-19 Boys Singles at the Meghalaya Games 2022 which speaks volume of the love for the game and dedication of the Association which has done a commendable job. Not only this, but sportspersons from Garo Hills won medals in Boxing, Taekwondo, Golf and Shooting events for which

The Umiam Hydel Project: A Geological Marvel

By Dr. Eladbor Laloo

‘For if you remain completely silent at this time..... deliverance will arise.....’ - Book of Esther 4:14 (NKV).
I was a young boy when the Umiam Hydel Project was inaugurated in 1966. I vividly remember from newspaper reports that the life span of the Umiam Hydel Project is 50 years. I thought that after 50 years, the dam would be dismantled and a new one constructed. In 1977, I was able to visualize the 50 year life span of the Hydel Project. It was while I was in my 4th Year Applied Geology in the ‘Indian School of Mines’, Dhanbad, where ‘case history’ of dams, with geological problems and designs worldwide, including the Umiam Lake was part of the syllabus in the Engineering Geology Course. I developed a keen interest in it as it was in my ‘home state’, and accessed a lot of data and information.

The Investigation of the Umiam Hydel Project was entrusted to the Engineering Geology Division, Geological Survey of India, (GSI). GSI was entrusted with the work for: (i) Foundation study for design and construction of a concrete dam 71.93 metres high, and 170.67metres long (Main Dam). (ii). Geological study alignment for a tunnel of 2134 metres long to reach the Power House, (from main reservoir to turbine) (iii). To prevent the escape of reservoir water through the low lying areas two earthen dams of 28 metres high and 464 metres long (before reaching the Umroi Airport junction from Shillong), and 15 metres high, and 168 metres long (on the way to Union Christian College) (iv). Geological and structural study of the reservoir area spread over 10 sq km., which includes a total catchment area of 221 sqkm. The problem dealt with here is of the Reservoir and the Main Dam.

Geological investigation: The Geological Investigation work was started in November 1956. Geological mapping and exploratory drilling was carried out to determine the “geological and structural parameters” of the rock formation in the area. In September 1962 the final work was completed and a detailed Project Report (DPR) was finalized.

Geology of the Area: The terms used are purely technical. The rock-types have to be described to understand the write-up. Based on geological mapping and exploratory drilling, the rock types are quartzites, (similar to the ones in the Demthring stone quarry), phyllites, and conglomerate. (loosely cemented boulders) and metadolites (commonly called metamorphic rocks, which we learnt in secondary school) The rocks are folded and in places faulted (cracks developed). At the main damsite, rocks exposed are hard quartzite and softer phyllites. Tunneling of the Dam was done through quartzites, metamorphosed conglomerate, and

meta-dolerite.
Seismicity: Meghalaya then a composite state of Assam experienced a series of earthquakes. The Shillong earthquake of 1897, the Dhubri earthquake 1930, Lakhimpur earthquake 1950. The 1st and the 3rd earthquake was felt up to a distance of 45,32,500 sq km and 29,26,700 sqkm., respectively. The intensity according to the modified Mercalli scale for 1897 was X and in 1950 was VI. Considering these figures, a very high Seismic Factor (SF- needed to be computed for structures to be designed to withstand the forces and deformation caused by earthquakes) is given for the Umiam Dam which is only 16 km from Shillong. The Seismic Factor considered for vertical and horizontal direction is 0.1 and 0.282 respectively. The horizontal factor is twice the figure for the Bhakra Nangal Dam over river Sutlej in Punjab commissioned in 1963. As regards the adequacy of this value, Dr. Okamoto of Japan was of the opinion that the ‘Umiam Project Co-efficient’ of 0.2 was sufficient. His observation in the recent earthquake in Japan, that acceleration is less on hard and crystalline rocks, and, as Umiam Dam foundation is based on such rocks (hard and crystalline quartzites) it will not be subjected to heavy acceleration and can resist the vibration.

Faults: ‘Fault’ is defined as a crack with displacement. At one time, a single block of land surface is at the same level. When a crack develops it gives rise to two separate blocks and displaces the rocks. When separated, the rock creates an instability and in due course of time, one of the blocks gives way and is displaced to lower levels. Where are these faults? We are going to deal with the major ones which have created an impact in the present condition of the Umiam Reservoir. (i). A major one is from the relative displacement of the conglomerate bed of the old road, along the 49th and 50th milestone on the Guwahati- Shillong road. (This part is now under water and can be seen when the reservoir water level is very low, in the month of April.) (ii). A series of faults are found in the phyllites of the Guwahati- Shillong road. This area is along the present day road section starting well ahead of the ‘Toyota, Ford, Mahindra Showroom’ and runs up to the main Dam site and beyond. As per definition of ‘fault’ above, the area of the ‘Toyota, Ford, Mahindra Showroom’ and the bed of the Umiam Reservoir are a single mass, at the same height and level (millions of years ago). Due to faults, it down-thrown the earth mass to the level of the bottom of the present day Umiam Reservoir. (iii). The ‘damsite’ is traversed by another fault. This fault has given rise to

several minor faults. (iv). Drilling along the course of the Umiam river gave evidence of a fault along the river. A major fault passes through west of Sumer Hills. Geologically, no dam is to be constructed on a fault-plane. But all rivers are fault-planes, and hence the problem.
What happens when a fault occurs? It causes a rock-displacement of the formation. When a rock-displacement occurs one block slips downwards and the rubbing of the two rock surfaces during displacement generates a very high temperature causing the rocks on both sides of the fault-planes to be crushed and mylonitised (reduced to powder). When this happens, it causes fragmented boulders and a huge void (open space) between the two rock surfaces. With such conditions at the bottom of the Reservoir and the Main Dam, can it hold water? The answer is ‘no.’ Hence, it requires a geological and technical treatment, known as ‘grouting’
Defects of the foundation rocks and their treatment: The following areas were outlined for treatment. (i). The main fault zone at the central part of the Dam site and other minor faults and crushed zones. (ii). Rocks which are extremely joined. (iii). Open joints. (iv). Fractures and seepage. (v). Soft phyllites.

How the treatment was done? Removal of crushed, soft rocks for a depth of two to three times the width was recommended to expose the fresh rock surface. Both sides of the fault plane were excavated; all broken rock pieces were removed. Later, the excavated part was sealed with ‘cement concrete’ of specific proportion to prevent leakage. Grouting with angle holes from both upstream and downstream parts penetrating the fault zone was carried out.

Can a cementing material last forever? During the earthquake of 1897, Ward’s Lake, Shillong, was erased to the ground. It was reconstructed with stone masonry, lime and sand as cementing materials. Around fifteen years back the level of the lake was below the optimum level as the cementing material of the dam had decayed and was leaking heavily. The old cementing material was removed by compressed air and filled by ‘epoxy’ as a cementing material using compressed air between the sandstones. The leakage stopped. This proved that cementing material in any case has its life span.

The cementing material of the Umiam Lake, compounded by high pressure with the volume of water, has its life span as well. At the inaugural speech it was stated that 50 years is the life span of the ‘cementing material,’ but within 45 years the reservoir is leaking. During its lifespan, it was presumed

that enough ‘silt’ (geologically, defined as the finest disintegration of quartz) had accumulated. Geologically, it is the ‘silt’ that has been the mainstay of the lake. ‘Silt’ deposited in the cracks of decaying cementing material has partly sealed the leakage. As a field geologist for 36 years, I can say that leaks in the bottom of the steel tanks for drilling operations are sealed by filling them with six inches of soil cover.

Due to low volume of water in Umiam Lake, some environmentalists had recommended de-siltation to increase the life span of the Umiam Lake to 100 years., another one suggested its increase to a lifespan of 400 years. In February 2008, the Union Ministry for Environment & Forest, put Pushkar Lake, existing since the 4th Century in Ajmer, Rajasthan, on the list of the National Lake Conservation Project (NLCP). Tetra Tech India Limited prepared a DPR. for de-siltation. Rs. 48.3 crore was sanctioned. Water and Power Consultancy Services of India completed the de-siltation, and the lake dried up. The proposal was opposed by geologists of the State Department, who foretold that the lake would run dry as de-silting leads to leakage. Others attributed it to environmental problems. In May 2012, due to low rainfall, Umiam Lake the level of the Lake was pathetically low. I visited the Myntdu-Leshka Project; the lake was at its optimum. The same is the case of the Kopili Project. Is it an environmental problem?

The Dy. C.M, Prestone Tynson, in his press briefing, announced that a second bridge would be constructed spanning the army boating facility to Nehru Park. Based on the above facts, let us not destabilize the equilibrium of the Umiam Lake and the Main Dam. Let us not shake the floor of the Lake, it may cause a catastrophe, if the floor leaks. It is not an ideal location for the second bridge. With due humility, it is suggested that the proposed bridge be located downstream, somewhere near the Industrial Area. Let a ‘cantilever’ bridge be designed with no pillars in the Umiam River to maintain overall equilibrium in the area since the ‘fault plane’ continues all along the Umiam. The Jadukata Bridge – a cantilever bridge created history for the State. Here are the excerpts.
“When in Meghalaya visit the Jadukata bridge. The longest span cantilever bridge in India. When it comes to beauty, it’s not just one of the most gorgeous bridges in the country but in the world.” Can we redo it?

Finally, let us base our confidence and hope in the Umiam Hydel Project. It was constructed after computing all geological, structural, seismic data, consultancy with experts from the world’s highest seismic zones all put together.

(The author is former Jr. Director (Geology) DMR, Shillong)

Flip-flops fail as all proceedings ordered held in abeyance Supreme Court sees through govt’s game on seditions law

By K Raveendran

The Narendra Modi government has received a real snub from the Supreme Court, which has overruled the Centres’ objections and stayed all proceedings in sedition cases. A bench headed by Chief Justice NV Ramana also directed on Wednesday that all pending cases, appeals and proceedings with respect to charges framed for sedition be kept in abeyance. Those who have been booked under the law or are in jail can now seek bail from the appropriate courts.

The landmark Supreme Court decision comes after a lot of flip-flop on the issue by the government, which all along defended the draconian law as an essential tool to protect the nation. The court has thrown out all its objections and decided to stay all proceedings until the validity of the colonial era law is decided for good.

The government’s diabolism on the issue was obvious throughout. And even when it offered to review and reconsider the law in line with the mood in the court, the affidavit it filed in this regard smacked of vulgarity. The affidavit said the government has decided to re-examine and reconsider the provisions of Section 124 A of the sedition law “in the spirit of Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav (75 years of Independence) and the vision of PM Narendra Modi”.

It is a common practice, particularly in the Gulf monarchies, to announce remission of punishment on auspicious occasions, like religious events such as Ramadan. Such gestures have been shown even in India, where state governments have followed the practice in cutting short jail terms, though mostly for political prisoners belonging to the ruling parties. But it is perhaps for the first time that one is hearing about a whole law being dropped to mark an occasion.

While it does raise doubts about the government’s real intent, it also amounted to indirectly acknowledging that the seditions law is against the spirit of ‘Azadi’, but it nevertheless showed no inclination to let go of it. The British clamped down the seditions law as a repressive tool against the subjects of their colony, and it continued application would mean that the successor government considers itself to be as alien as the colonisers.

The second consideration cited by the affidavit to reconsider the law, which is PM Narendra Modi’s vision is equally bewildering. The existence of a law or its repeal cannot be based on the whims and fancy, the so-called vision, of a ruler, but warranted by the soundness of the underlying legal principle. Anything other than this is frivolous, as far as a law is concerned. So, when the Supreme Court decides that all cases must be held in abeyance, it is obvious

that it has more reasons than the PM’s so-called vision or the occasion of celebration to throw out the government arguments as it considers it a bad law.

No doubt, Modi has of late been singing paeans of individual liberty and freedom. As is wont, Modi says one thing, but his government does quite another. Whether it is commitment to the poor or the inclusiveness of ‘sab ke saath’, the consistency is not in adherence, but in variance. The policies of his government have seen the rich grow richer and the poor become poorer, just as the inclusiveness of ‘sab’ has been more and more selective.

There was further evidence of the government’s diabolism when it informed the court that it was not ready to drop the cases already booked under the law, as suggested by the apex court. In fact, the government has staged somersault on the issue after it promised the court that it would defer hearing of the petitions till it reviews the law and arrives at a final decision.

In fact, it has advanced another specious argument for persisting with its stand. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta has told the court that a cognizable offence cannot be prevented from being registered and that once a cognizable offence was committed, it may not be proper to stay the effect of the provision either by the Centre or the court. Therefore, the draft that the Centre is preparing suggests selecting a responsible officer for scrutiny, and his satisfaction is subject to judicial review. The government is deliberately ignoring the fact that an act becomes a cognizable offence only when it is made so and that it is within the powers of the government to make an act an offence in the first place; cognizable or not is a subsequent consideration.

Again, the mischief in making an officer of the government responsible for the decision is not too clever to be missed either. There is judicial review, but the review is about the satisfaction of the officer concerned. As long as the officer is satisfied, the court has nothing to do with the decision.

The government’s new-found love for liberty has also not been above board. After stoutly defending the seditions law in the court, it suddenly struck a conciliatory note, sensing the mood in the court and promising to do a review, pending a final decision on the issue. It had also agreed that until that is done, the existing cases need to be held in abeyance, as the court had itself suggested. But it was an about-turn when the government replied to the court’s queries. But obviously, the court has not fallen for the make-belief exercise. (IPA Service)

held at Tura as announced by our Chief Minister, Conrad K. Sangma.

Yours etc.,
Jordan Ch. Marak,
Via email

Lum Shyllong blunder!

Editor,
The caption of this letter may remotely allude to that famous non-fiction book, ‘The Himalayan Blunder’ penned by the late Brigadier, John P Dalvi, who outlined the angry truth of India’s crushing military disaster in the Sino-India war of 1962. Conversely, the core implication of my critique is to conjure up the couldn’t-care-less stance of the then Hynniewtrep representatives regarding the share of job-quota reservations pegged at 40% for Khasi-Jaintia combined and 40% for the Garos respectively. Those leaders in question had been perchance in a tearing hurry to get plum positions in the newly born state whereby they might have kept mum at this critical issue that has ad-

verse consequences for their ‘jaithynriew’ in the process. It was undubitably a gargantuan blunder!

Interestingly, the North Shillong MLA, Adelbert Nongrum had recently brought into the limelight the hitherto flaws of this reservation regimen in Meghalaya, as he averred that the same could have been contextualised on the strength of population structure amongst the three principal tribes of Meghalaya and not on the existing format. A good number of our frustrated jobless youths could not have agreed more with what the North Shillong MLA contended. However, the Meghalaya State Assembly in its session has reportedly rejected such a proposal, thus sticking to the status quo!

Additionally, the Garos too wouldn’t bear to see any redo of the extant reservation quota if it impinges on their social interests. To bring home this contention, we had witnessed how, if my memory serves me right, in the 2000s they had vehemently objected to the purported move by the then dispensation to relocate the

office of MBOSE from Tura to Shillong. In that agitation some even sacrificed their lives against the proposed maneuver. I can’t see why such reverberations would not re-explode if any bid is made to recast the current reservations regime. Hence, any move to alter the same is next to impossible, and those who fancy a realignment to this effect shall end up crying over spilt milk for the die had since been cast; or as Julius Caesar had asserted ‘Alea iacta est’ in the year 49 BC. In a word, this festering issue has turned irreversible!

Perhaps, just perhaps, to usher in a repatriation of over fifty years of the ongoing widespread discontentment amongst the Hynniewtrep jobless youths, a viable option, as I’ve been given to understand is to see that Meghalaya is bifurcated into the Hynniewtrep and the Achik states. And in the fullness of time, many opine, would be a win-win situation for the communities in question in overall holistic terms. Pertaining to this narrative, and in my interactions with some state government offi-

cials I’ve been informed that staff from Garo districts are constrained to travel to their respective Shillong head offices just to settle official exigencies like countersigning of Muster roll bills, acquisition of funds, submission of varied leaves, leave travel concession admissible before retirement, warranting fast track endorsement. Regrettably some have been deprived owing to procedural delay, final submission of pension papers and such other unforeseeable circumstances. For these official responsibilities, staff from Garo Hills have had to traverse hundreds of kilometers to Shillong, thus leading to loss of precious time, money etc. Essentially, therefore the Garos having their own capital in Tura would ameliorate these impediments for good. And arguably, in the fitness of things, the bifurcation of Meghalaya based on the foregoing concerns may perhaps end up as Shakespeare’s play ‘All’s well that ends well’!

Yours etc.,
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Via email

"Depression is the inability
to construct a future."

— Rollo May

The Shillong Times

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Taj Mahal as target

THE democratic system today draws its central or moral sustenance from the judiciary – more so as the political leaderships are failing to look at and decide on matters from the perspective of merit. All of the judiciary might not necessarily be impartial or fair in their approaches. Yet, overall, the Indian judicial system displays a maturity that is a guarantee to the existence of this nation as a civilized society. An instance is the dismissal of a petition by the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court that had sought the setting up of a fact-finding committee to study and publish the “real” history of Taj Mahal.

The petitioner, the media in-charge of the BJP in Ayodhya, also wanted opening of the closed 20 rooms in Taj Mahal to enable him go in and study the records, if any, kept there. Curiously, the petitioner had not done his homework before approaching the court. His counsel’s plea to adjourn the court proceedings to get at some facts, and the outright drubbing from the court, were proof of the casualness with which the petitioner presented his case. Worse, the obsession of the BJP leader might mean he or the BJP is seeking to open another front against Muslims – after demolishing the Babri Masjid and winning the right over the land in Ayodhya where it stood.

The BJP and other RSS outfits won this right after massive riots, bloodshed and disruption of life across northern states for years. The fight over a dilapidated mosque and a small patch of land sadly divided the Indian society vertically. The BJP outreach now is allegedly to list out more monuments for “grab”. Even as the Mogul invasion of the northern landmass had been a painful chapter in Indian history, all what had been done ages ago need not be revisited or a post-mortem done for partisan ends. Taj Mahal remains as the principal pride of India and the only monument from this country listed among the Seven Wonders of the World. By ignoring recorded facts and raising the communal temperature, the BJP and its allied entities will only be doing another disservice to the nation both short-term and long-term. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had declared when he took charge in 2014 that the Indian Constitution will be his Bhagavad Gita and he has generally been cautious thereafter against raising the communal temperature. The likes of Pravin Togadia have been tamed. The PM must stay the course for the good of the nation and get the BJP to act in positive ways.

The pinching iron-clad irony of our current state of affairs: An observation

By Ubahunlang D Tmar

Where do we stand now in the 50 years of our Statehood on the socio-political and economic development front? Does our trajectory of growth resemble any cold war era, ‘banana republic’ in South America or ‘tin-pot little African dictatorship’? Are we growing, stagnating or regressing? What we can read, sense and feel from social media and community interactions is that we are at present boiling, agitating and at each other’s throats. There is definitely a dormant pent-up societal restlessness and aggression which despises authority. It’s a ticking-bomb. Our daily traffic jam is a good metaphor of our present predicament of where we are heading and how we are behaving.

The youth are restless; the elderly are fed up. Some have resigned to their own cabins of existence. There is also a lethargy towards anything that has got to do with governance and politics. With the exception of pressure groups and NGOs, it seems society at large has become indifferent and has decided to stay away from participating in the socio-cultural, political and economic development of our polity; its every man/woman for himself/herself. Life has become a struggle especially to those at the lower stratum of society. As a society we have become numb and accepted our putrid and debased political environment. We have accommodated corruption and given it our own justification. We are more interested in reading memes to temporarily satisfy our minds and tormented existence. Our collective consciousness has degraded to the point where discussion of issues is no longer comprehensible or intelligent. We are swept by emotions. We prefer leaders who entertain and take a posture without any substance. We have abandoned critical reasoning. We qualify leaders from the grassroots to the state level on the basis of their talk not work.

We have elected leaders, some of them holding cabinet posts and other portfolios, that cannot even speak succinctly and fluently, forget about policy framing. Judging from the assembly deliberations, discussions, interviews we see on YouTube media channels, we can fairly and safely assume that

most of our present public representatives don’t display or exhibit a capability, capacity or the sensitive intelligent comprehension of the future. We all have willingly conducted and allowed ourselves to be led into the abyss of destruction and societal chaos. We as an electorate are to blame for the fate we are in today. We have reaped what we sowed.

Our politics resembles the carcass of a dead society, only scavengers and opportunists munching and biting carelessly at every meat and bone. Election has become a cult festival instead of a sane civil deliberation and participation under the parameters of our Constitution. Democracy is dumb and dead the moment money become the centre and medium of exchange. Proceeding from this assertion, we can say, election now is also akin to the tendering process of who will control, sell and utilise the assets and resources of our State. Election is a commercial enterprise under the garb of social issues and development. This only leads to the emergence of crony capitalism and shoddy mercantilism.

Planning, Policy, Development:

In this hullabaloo of financial stress and economic stagnation, where is the Meghalaya State Planning Board? Does it still exist? Has it become bored? What has it done to address or highlight our economic condition? As an advisory board, how many fruitful discussions and meetings have they engaged in? What is its cogent, data-based advice? We would like to know and read the deliberations and recommendations of the Planning Board and it’s views on the state economic development and growth? Recently, we read about the 98 million dollar loan for tourism which roughly amounts to more than Rs 730 crores, which will likely put more future financial stress on the state and its people. We have had experiences in the past of schemes based on loans and credit systems. We need to know what we have gained and what lessons we have learnt. For example, the Strawberry Project in the State has put more burden on the strawberry farmers. There are those who have abandoned strawberry farming and shifted to other forms of farming. Apart from labour cost, every farming season farmers have to buy strawberry seeds, (this adds to the cost of strawberry), since they cannot replant the old seeds. Traditionally for other indigenous crops, farmers keep their own seeds and replant them, but not with strawberries. This is what I learnt from an interaction with some strawberry farmers at Sohliya. The question is, how much money has been spent on the strawberry project. Who gains more from this project? A study on this project or similar projects and the income distribution will highlight issues and throw light on grassroots developmental experiences.

Development initiatives need to have strong grassroots foundations, accommodating localised attributes and sensitivity to the local psyche and mentality. The same goes for tourism planning. We can’t rely on outside fly-by-night think-tanks to make a policy, project, blueprint on something they cannot fully grasp, measure or understand. They need to accommodate the local natural and socio-cultural environment. People themselves are the drivers and catalysts of development. Once we lay down for them an enabling environment to experiment and dialogue, they will flourish. Armchair planning exercises and table-based policy drafting and execution have no practical uses. Development specialists have asserted this fact, on theory and praxis of development. Development is a process that requires auditing, monitoring and inspection. The political display of ribbon cutting, foundation stone erection, tree sapling planting, once in a blue moon are banal. Site visits are not preconditions for development. Further, planning and policy making should be in sync with reality and must be data driven. Development is a constitutional, administrative obligation and a God given right to every citizen.

Teachers’ plight:

Coming to the FASCOM agitation, despite earning a paltry amount of monthly salary here we have teachers (ad hoc/private) who are articulate and rely on fact-based arguments, adopting a decent and civil approach but have been forced to come to the streets and express their plight. The education sector mess has been created by our elected leaders who earned hundred times more than the teachers who mould and motivate our children and future generation. To realise our present financial burden and state fiscal policy, let’s take only one crude example. If I’m not mistaken ad hoc teachers earn a fixed amount of Rs 12,000 per month. Juxtapose this amount spent on a government vehicle for petrol/diesel per month. Are these government vehicles utilised only for government duty? If we can get the comparative value, we will know where we stand.

The teachers have even opened their hearts and minds for a sane, intelligent and civil interaction (meeting) with the authorities. They are willing to negotiate on the salary. They know and understand the financial situation. They deserve an increment looking at the rate of inflation. At the time of writing this article it seems that the Government chose to lie low and not take the teachers’ problem as a top priority. Interestingly, in the NPP manifesto, education is a top priority. If a Wharton educated CM cannot address or tackle this education management mess but is quick to sign a memorandum to solve a complicated border issue, definitely people must question and are questioning this government on its lapses. Is it insensitivity or apathy? If that is not the case, then who runs the Government? The whole world acknowledges that education and health are the key sectors for long-term social and economic development. We can’t achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) without addressing the education infrastructure and quality. There are no quick-fixes to development and sustainable revenue generation.

Any authority that despises or neglects education has no intention for good governance or the existence of a civil society. Good governance is a form and character of good education. Teachers/intellectuals joining politics and participating in political debates enhances good governance. This Government has failed miserably in governance on all fronts.

Seeking a cure for the plastic pandemic

By Ishan Chauhan

Large sections of the Indian subcontinent starting from Balochistan and Sindh in Pakistan all the way to Odisha and Bihar in eastern India are experiencing extreme heat. Such heat waves in India are expected to increase in duration and become three to four times more common in the future. This marker of climate catastrophe has not spared the Earth’s poles, the Arctic and Antarctic regions are getting more heat than ever before, even though it is the beginning of winter in the south polar region. One of the most visible examples of this climate calamity and the havoc being caused to the planet is identified as plastic pollution, so much so that recently a majority of the world concentrated solely on plastic and adopted a resolution to curb its spread.

Heads of State, environment ministers and other representatives from 175 nations focussed on the threat of plastic and endorsed a historic resolution at the UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi in March this year to end plastic pollution. The resolution, based on three initial draft resolutions from various nations, addressed the full lifecycle of plastic, its production, design and disposal and established an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) which will work on a legally binding instrument looking at diverse alternatives to address the problem of plastics. Also looked at will be the design of reusable, recyclable products and materials with international collaboration

The Indian government did admit to the country’s part in the plastic problem saying India’s plastic waste generation has more than doubled in the last five years with an average annual increase of 21.8 per cent. Responding to a query raised in the Lok Sabha in December 2021 Minister of State for Environment Ashwini Choubey said that more than 34 lakh tons of plastic waste was generated in 2019-20 and 30.59 lakh tons in 2018-19. This is more than double the quantity of plastic waste produced -15.89 lakh tons - in 2015-16. A frightening 79% of the plastic produced the world over, enters the environment as waste and a minuscule 9% is all that is recycled.

In an earlier study published in the Science Journal, researchers quantified the amount of plastic entering oceans from the coastlines of 192 countries. Of the 275 million metric tons (MT) of plastic waste generated by 192 countries in 2010, nearly 8.8 million MT entered the world’s oceans and seas. The study placed India (rank 12) in the list of top 20 disburers of plastic waste into the high seas from their coastlines. China ranked first, followed by countries in Southeast, South Asia and Africa, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh among them. “The top 20 countries, including India, account for 83% of all the mismanaged waste available to enter the ocean,” according to Dr. Jenna Jambeck, lead author of the study and professor of environmental engineering at the University

“Plastics have a strong relationship with climate change. They contribute about 3.8% of global emissions, nearly double that of the aviation sector. In a fairly short period of time from 1907 to the present day, it has travelled from a wondrous discovery to a poisonous reality.”

facilitating access to technology. In conjunction with the first session of the INC by this year-end, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) will convene a forum to share knowledge and best practices in different parts of the world.

Plastics have a strong relationship with climate change. They contribute about 3.8% of global emissions, nearly double that of the aviation sector. In a fairly short period of time from 1907 to the present day, it has travelled from a wondrous discovery to a poisonous reality.

From local beaches to the distant Arctic, plastic products are choking the oceans and killing wildlife. The pervasiveness of the pollution caused by plastic, WWF says, is at a point where by 2050 there may be more plastic than fish in the ocean. More recently, there have been images of divers fishing up plastic masks dumped in the ocean, many of them single-use plastics, worn during the Covid pandemic. India has been identified at the helm of the top ten countries polluting the oceans with plastic. A recent study done by the UK-based packaging group RAJA (an amalgam of the founders’ names Rachel Marcovici and Janine Rocher) found India to be the worst country for plastic waste in the oceans in 2020, with some 126.5 million kg of plastic per year being dumped. The weight of plastic waste dumped by India is equivalent to the weight of over 250 thousand bottlenose dolphins, one of the most commonly found dolphin species in the ocean. Despite the United States producing double the amount of India’s plastic waste annually (42 billion kg), only 2.4 million kg of it ends up in the oceans. But this could be on account of the US exporting its plastic waste to African or South East Asian countries.

of Georgia, US. Dr. Jambeck is internationally recognised for her research on plastic waste in the ocean.

Though India holds a prominent position among plastic waste generators the country has not taken a strong position in the battle against polluting plastic. Although among the 175 countries that adopted an end to plastic pollution resolution, India seemed to hold back stating that countries should be allowed to decide the actions to be taken voluntarily. India also said that amidst this push for reduction of plastic, developing countries should be allowed to set down their own goals in line with their development plans. This stand is in contrast with India’s past efforts to bring the problem to the fore, especially in 2019 at the United Nations Environment Assembly.

While it is unclear how effective the move initiated in Nairobi will be, India must take a stronger role in curbing plastic waste especially as it is a frontline producer. The collective push against plastic comes against a backdrop of conflict and geopolitical turmoil and can be showcased as “multilateral cooperation at its best,” as President of the UN Environment Assembly and Norway’s Minister for Climate and the Environment, Espen Barth Eide puts it. “Plastic pollution has grown into an epidemic. With today’s resolution we are officially on track for a cure,” says Eide. He and others from the participating nations classify the groundbreaking resolution taken in Nairobi entitled “End Plastic Pollution: Towards an internationally legally binding instrument” as “historic”. India must play a more central role in this historic effort.

(The writer is an independent researcher and author) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Wrong priorities of MDA Govt

Editor,

Given this government's tendency to wear its religion on its sleeve - albeit only when it suits them - why does it have to take criticism from religious bodies and pressure groups to drive home the point that gambling is not exactly 'good' for the State? Surely they cannot pretend that casinos are only about revenue generation and that the safeguards they envisage are just delusional. Why doesn't the government focus its attention on issues that need urgent solutions? The plight of teachers, social inequalities, shrinking forests, illegal coal transportation, traffic congestion, garbage disposal, dying rivers choked by plastic...to name but a few. All is not well with Meghalaya which has been on dwindling life support for a very long time.

Perhaps it is because casinos sound glamorous and carry with them the glitz and dazzle of metropolitan hubs that they are seized upon by the moneyed leaders of our state. Government approval of casinos is in stark contrast to the dismal support for the recent Meghalaya Games. I bet if even one or two of the athletes possessed a touch of celebrity, the red carpet would have been rolled out for them and five-star treatment doled out to show how much this government cares. But all the athletes brought with them was talent, hard work, idealism, determination, self-belief - qualities that cannot be translated into money and therefore would merit little government time and care. If this is how we treat our own then we will still have to look elsewhere for lessons in respect and honour.

Yours etc.
Janet Hujon
Via email

Undue negligence of the State Education Department

Editor,

Being a person concerned for the people and student community of the state, I am deeply pained to see the utter negligence of the State Education Department in discharging its obligatory duty with sensitivity with regards to the issues that directly concern students' careers and functioning of educational institutions in the state. Earlier, the state education department circulated a wide notice containing the government's comprehensive guidelines regarding the Covid-19 protocols that the educational institutes in Meghalaya have to abide by. According to the guidelines, certain restrictions in the functioning of colleges such as allowing only fifty percent of students to attend in a day, allotting classes on alternate days, restricting the presence of students to four hours time per day etc., were made mandatory. But ever since the Covid pandemic situation has significantly improved, some colleges have started functioning in full swing forgoing the guidelines, whereas some other colleges have still adhered to the guidelines.

The colleges are not enlightened whether the earlier government guidelines are still in force or revoked. This has led to the emergence of questions in the minds of students such as, “Why is our college not conducting normal classes whereas other colleges are back to normal? There is no uniformity in the functioning of colleges in Meghalaya because of this miscommunication. Some colleges have not resumed normal classes as they are adhering to government guidelines as they are apprehensive of possible penalties. It is a detrimental negligence of the concerned authorities in the State Education Department that keeps the college administration in the dark. The Government should come out with a fresh notice to address this issue. The matter should be taken seriously and with all the sensitivity required.

Yours etc.,
Wanjop U Laloo,
Via email

Money is not everything

Editor,

I write to question if Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg are appropriate role models for the youth of Shillong, as was stated recently. Young people today are growing up in a confusing world that is at its all-time height of worldliness. Materialism and body consciousness rule the day. Money is the new God of modernity, with technology, its handmaid. Adding to the burden of this critical historical moment, we have all the existential crises that youth, in particular, are susceptible to. Young people do not yet understand the purpose of life. They do not yet have faith or wisdom. To push them further into the bottomless swamp of worldliness is to destroy them. If, instead, they are encouraged in the direction of ethics and self-purification, they will naturally become effective entrepreneurs. Zuckerberg and Musk hardly qualify as heroes or role models. If anything, theirs is the kind of mindset to avoid. A lifetime's adoration of money from a very young age is hardly something Shillong youth should emulate. Instead, they should focus on that which money cannot purchase -- moral character.

Yours etc.,
Deepa Majumdar,
Via email

FASTOM demands justified: Govt please accede

Editor,

The demands of the Federation of All Ad-hoc Schools of Meghalaya (FASTOM) of enhancement of pay from the present slab to Rs.18,000 and an annual increment of just 5 per cent is peanuts. By paying only this much for the valuable, dedicated, untiring services of the school teachers is not only exploitation but in fact it is an insult to our respected teachers. To demand deficit pay scales for the Ad-hoc teachers is not wrong but it might not be feasible. How much salary are the MLAs, Ministers, the officers and the useless political appointees paid per month from the public exchequer? Again, there is enough government money to pay crore of rupees for government appointees and also for useless government festivals, like the Cherry Blossom, Megong, Dawki River festival and also other fruitless government spending just for ministers and officials to make hay while the sun shines while claiming that there's no money to pay school teachers. The majority of teachers get their salaries after a gap of five-six months or even longer. Enough is enough please!

MDA Government, where is your priority and responsibility? Where do you spend the taxes, royalties, cess, CSR collections, illegal collections from illegal transportation of coal trucks, illegal mining of coal, limestone, sand stones etc? Or does all this money go into private pockets? How long will you indulge in looting and plundering the state revenues and resources? Remember the time for reckoning is already on the threshold and very soon you will be seeking your mandate from the voters. I earnestly appeal to all voters of Meghalaya to vote only for those who are responsible, efficient, capable, transparent and who can deliver real governance. And please let us not allow our upcoming public representatives to continue to loot and plunder the wealth of the state for another 50 years even as the state remains high and dry.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Sr. Journalist,
Shillong-2

Rejoinder from MeECL

Editor,

Apropos of the letter to

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

Chronicle of a war foretold?

A century-old conflict and its lessons for today

By Vikas Datta

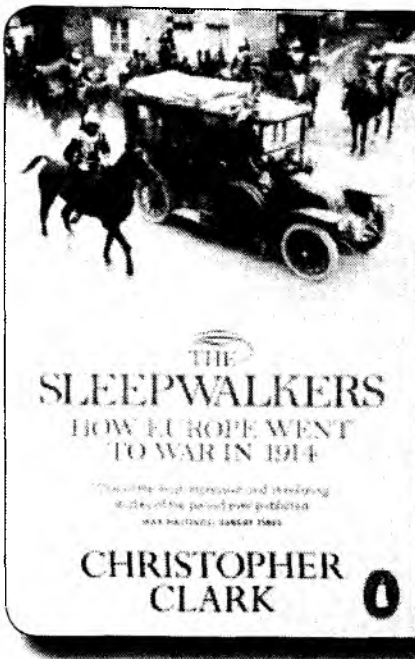
After years of secret and not-so-secret alliances, bids to secure areas of influence and lucrative commercial deals, and even the odd land grab, war breaks out in one remote corner of Europe and slowly draws in other powers, big and small, near and far, till most of the world is caught up in the conflagration. Is it a description of what we are seeing in Ukraine now?

Not exactly. This was the state of Europe over a century ago, in the years leading up to the First World War. Of course, there are several differences in the situation and conditions then and now, which are inevitable, but there are also a lot of startling similarities, especially where mindsets, aspirations, and choices of statesmen (there were all men then) are concerned.

This aspect – how attitudes and perceptions influence our choices and what consequences they might lead to – is what we need to study and learn from.

And that is where history, usually dismissed as an academic subject or contested and distorted for political gain, comes in to help. “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it,” philosopher George Santayana had observed as the 20th century dawned and his words still ring true as nations, who do not even have a remote stake in the ongoing Russian-Ukraine conflict, are impacted – with the resulting ramifications and reverberations for their people.

We all know “what” happened due to the First World War – the social and political upheaval as four mighty empires crumbled, the rise of ideologies like an assertive, and even, strident nationalism, leave alone communism and fascism, and the loss of an almost entire



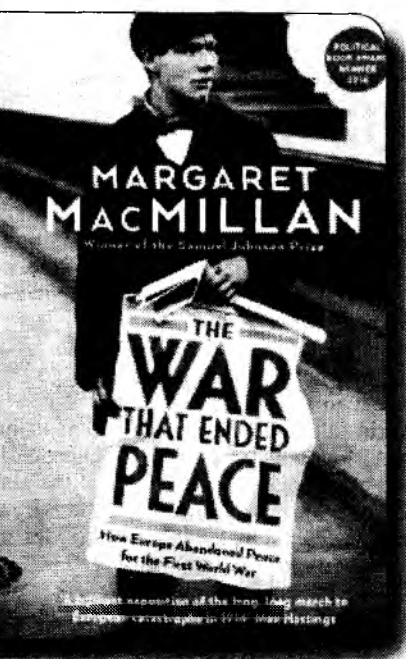
generation of not only the best and the brightest, but the capable and essential, among the other outcomes, that would result in a more ruinous and destructive war just two decades hence.

Also known is “why” the war broke out – a complex chain of threats and actions and counter-threats and counter-actions following the assassination of the Austrian Archduke – and heir-apparent – Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo.

However, as two insightful contemporary historians contend, it is “how” World War I began that we need to know and draw appropriate lessons from for the here and now.

Let’s see these two books first, and a few other related works.

UK-based Australian historian Christopher Clark’s *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914*, came out in 2012, two years before the WWI centenary but more significantly before this year which also saw a semi-violent regime change and consequent territorial annexation that gradually



developed into what we are seeing in Ukraine today.

Clark provides an engrossing account of the causes of the war – some stemming back into the previous century. The historian, whose area of expertise is modern Germany, and whose works include *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (2006) and *Kaiser Wilhelm II: A Life in Power* (2000), shows why “how” is more important.

“Questions of why and how are logically inseparable, but lead us in different directions,” Clark writes.

“The question of how invites us to look closely at the sequences of interactions that produced certain outcomes. By contrast, the question of why invites us to go in search of remote and categorical causes.”

And this, Clark points out, may bring a “certain analytical clarity” but has a “distorting effect, because it creates the illusion of a steady building causal pressure ... political actors become mere ex-ecutors of forces long established

and beyond their control”.

His account does begin with a royal assassination – though not of the Austrian Archduke, but of a higher potentate, Serbia’s King Alexander and his consort in 1903, to focus on the relationship between the two principal protagonists – Austria-Hungary and Serbia – whose quarrel led to the war, before going to ask four seminal questions, including one concerning what led to the polarisation of Europe into two opposed blocs, and why an international system that seemed to be entering an era of detente produce a general war?

But as Clark contends, the events of the month preceding the war’s outbreak only make sense when one doesn’t simply revisit the sequence of prior events, but “we need to understand how these events were experienced and woven into narratives that structured perception and motivated behaviour”.

Don’t these evoke a resonance now when we see the Russian-Ukrainian conflict?

Equally significant is Canadian historian Margaret MacMillan’s *The War That Ended Peace: How Europe Abandoned Peace for the First World War* (2013) as it also predates this watershed year of 2014. It also follows the same trajectory as Clark, in examining how the continent that deemed itself as the epitome of global civilisation could descend to such barbarity as she sketches in her introduction.

MacMillan, who also reveals her own personal connection to the “dark and dreadful chapter in our history” – noting how both her grandfathers fought in the war – one in the Middle East with the Indian Army, and the other as a Canadian doctor in a field hospital on the Western Front – goes to question what could have led to this outcome.

And she notes that there are many reasons cited – the arms race, rigid military plans, economic rivalry, trade wars – but also trans-border movement of ideas and emotions, including “nationalism with its unsavoury riders of hatred and contempt for others; fears, of loss or revolution,

of terrorists and anarchists; hopes, for change or a better world; the demands of honour and manliness which meant not backing down or appearing weak ...”

Don’t all these appear familiar now too?

But MacMillan, whose other works include *Women of the Raj: The Mothers, Wives, and Daughters of the British Empire in India* (1988), *The Uses and Abuses of History* (2008), and *War: How Conflict Shaped Us* (2020), notes that while “forces, ideas, prejudices, institutions, conflicts” are relevant, so are the individuals.

“It was Europe’s and the world’s tragedy in retrospect that none of the key players in 1914 were great and imaginative leaders who had the courage to stand out against the pressures building up for war,” she maintains.

She also notes how to claim the war was inevitable “is dangerous thinking, especially in a time like our own, which in some ways, not all, resembles that vanished world of the years before 1914”.

MacMillan notes, stressing how the pre-WWI gambit of bluff and counter-bluff easily changed from a game to reality: “Our world is facing similar challenges, some revolutionary and ideological such as the rise of militant religions or social protest movements, others coming from the stress between rising and declining nations such as China and the United States. We need to think carefully about how wars can happen and about how we can maintain the peace.”

Anyone who wants to study the detailed happenings of July 1914 should pick Gordon Martel’s *The Month That Changed The World: July 1914 and WWI*, where he says he doesn’t want to present another book on the origins of the war, or point a finger at who caused it, but to just trace “how it happened: how those responsible for making fateful choices – the monarchs and politicians, diplomats and strategists – grappled with the situation and failed to resolve it without war.”

All this should have plenty of lessons for contemporary politicians – and us.

Summer escapes

Do you consider yourself a city kid who grew up in a city? Have you always been on the go, ready to take on the world in your own special way? Have you recently sought an escape, an escape that will transport you to another world?

Here is a list of excursions that are perfectly tailored to your ‘out of town’ experience:

Munjoh, Andaman

Enjoy your private time as you dine under the starlit tropical sky in an incredibly romantic setting. Munjoh’s private shorefront awaits you with a candle-lit dinner full of delicacies and a devoted private butler.

Coconut Lagoon Backwaters, Kerala

There’s only one way to get to Coconut Lagoon over the water. Coconut lagoon is located upon the Vembanad lake, one of India’s largest inland lakes with its own distinctive ecology that supports a plethora of natural life.

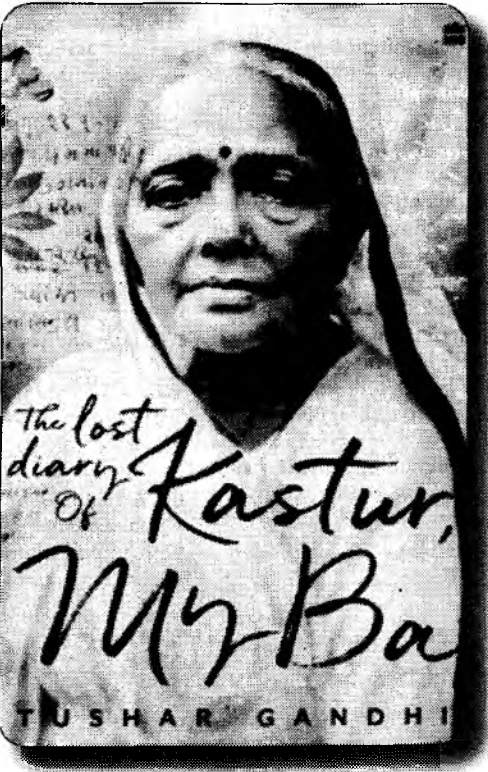
Kanha Earth Lodge, Madhya Pradesh

Kanha earth lodge is nestled in a small tribal hamlet bordering Kanha’s buffer zone, and it occupies less than 5 per cent of the 16 acres of natural forest that surrounds it. The lodge and its furnishings are built and designed with local waste wood and recycled wood, exemplifying the highest standards in green architecture. With everything so close to nature, you’ll undoubtedly feel the serenity of a vacation.

La Mangrove, Goa

La Mangrove is a place where you can be completely authentic. From yoga enthusiasts to party-goers, and lounge lizards to lazy loungers, people of all ages, backgrounds, and nationalities are welcome. La Mangrove boasts of being a perfect home base to explore the rich diversity of Goa, away from all the hustle and bustle, with the goal of bringing vacationers closer to nature. (IANSLife)

Tushar Gandhi presents great-grandmother Kasturba Gandhi as a woman of substance



A century-and-a-half after her birth, *The Lost Diary of Kastur, My Ba* (HarperCollins) by her great-grandson Tushar Gandhi finally presents Kasturba as her own person, a woman of substance.

Rare photos of Kasturba and Mahatma Gandhi are an added bonus, as the reader gets to hear from Kasturba, in her own words, for the first time, providing through day-to-day activities a peek into what it was like to be married to the Mahatma.

It surfaced a couple of years ago when the staff of the Gandhi Research Foundation in Jalgaon found a deteriorating and damaged diary at the Kasturba Ashram, Indore.

It turned out to be a 135-page diary written by Kasturba, from January to September 1933. Somewhat like Kasturba, her diary lay forgotten and neglected. This book is a reproduction of the diary, accompanied by a transcription of what she wrote in Gujarati, along with an English translation by

Tushar.

All her life, Kasturba was considered uneducated. Initially, when Tushar spoke about the diary to family members, they refused to believe that there could be such a thing, the common refrain being: “She was illiterate. She could not write.”

As Tushar read Kasturba’s diary, this assumption was dispelled. It provided a glimpse into who she was – an individual, a companion and a Satyagrahi in her own right.

Here was a woman who was witnessing history being made, observing and understanding the process and participating in it, too. It also tells of her two imprisonments that year, not because she was Bapu’s spouse but because she was offering satyagraha herself.

“Kasturba was unlettered. She could not write. All her life and post her death Kastur was always dismissed as being uneducated and unable to comprehend the written word. This book is testament to Kastur Gandhi nee Kapadia dispelling the notion in the form of a

well-articulated daily diary. Most of her writing is from the time she was a satyagrahi imprisoned for the colonial government for her individual acts of defiance, showing us her world not only as Gandhi’s shadow, but her own person, in her own words,” Tushar said.

Swati Chopra, Executive Editor, HarperCollins India, said: “Kasturba Gandhi has always been known as the Mahatma’s wife, spouse to a man who towered over contemporary India’s history. Though narratives about Mahatma Gandhi have spoken of her, we have never before heard her speak, in her own voice. This book is perhaps the only such opportunity we will have, given that it is based on a diary she wrote, possibly the only one she ever did.”

“Lost for years, it was ser-

endipitously discovered by her great-grandson, Tushar Gandhi. The book encapsulates the diary pages, written in her own hand, alongside the original Gujarati text and an English translation and contextualisation. It includes rare photos of Kasturba and Mahatma Gandhi, and is sure to delight readers everywhere,” Chopra added.

Tushar is the grandson of Kasturba and Mahatma Gandhi’s second son Manilal and daughter-in-law Sushila, and son of Sunanda and Arun Gandhi. He is the founder-president of the Mahatma Gandhi Foundation, president of the Lok Seva Trust and director of the Gandhi Research Foundation, Jalgaon.

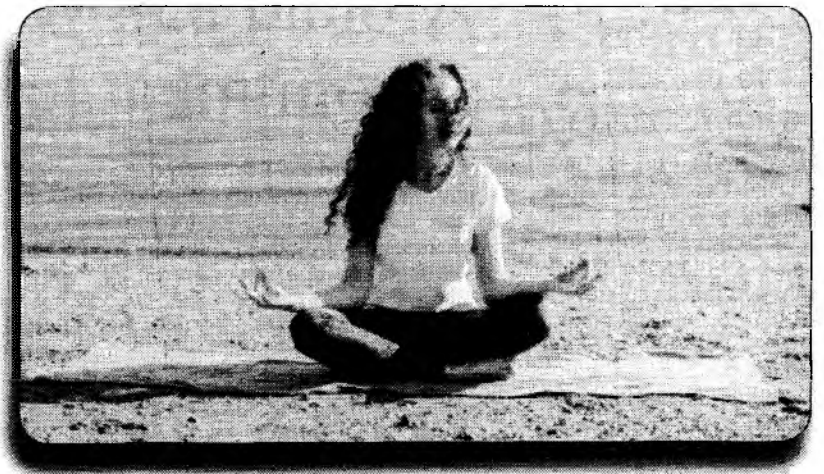
His first book, *Let’s Kill Gandhi!*, was published in 2007, with a revised edition in 2021.

Tushar has dedicated his life to preserving, celebrating and keeping alive the legacy he was born into. In 1996, when he discovered an urn containing Mahatma Gandhi’s ashes lying forgotten in a bank vault in Odisha, he obtained an order from the Supreme Court and immersed the ashes at the Triveni Sangam at Allahabad on January 30, 1997. In 2005,

on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the historic Dandi March, Tushar walked the 387-km path from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi; this resulted in Prime Minister Manmohan Singh declaring the entire path as India’s first historic heritage route.

Tushar continues to write and speak for all those still struggling for their fundamental human rights. He lives in Mumbai with his wife Sonal, son Vivan and daughter Kasturi, who is named after her great-great-grandmother. (IANS)

Bye-Bye Travel Anxiety!



We all enjoy travelling, and now that the world has opened up as a result of the pandemic, everyone has a reason to travel even more, almost with a vengeance!

However, travel can be very stressful on both the body and the mind. Travelling disrupts our routine, time zone differences can disrupt sleep patterns, and simply being in a new location can push us out of our comfort zone. Anxiety begins to creep in at this point, causing imbalances and disturbances in our physical, emotional, and mental bodies.

Jenil Dholakia, Holistic Yoga and Well-being Coach shares five ways in which yoga can help you manage travel anxiety:

Take deep breaths: Allow the breath to be your best friend before and during your journey. Simply remember to take deep belly breaths whenever you feel overwhelmed by any situation. Deeply inhale through the nose and slowly exhale through the mouth. After 5-10 breaths, you will be in a much better position to deal with the situation.

Yoga on the go: Long flights and car/bus rides can cause stiffness and soreness. Stretches and poses for stress relief include neck rolls to the left and right, shoulder rotations clockwise and anticlockwise, spinal stretches - lateral and twisting, seated marjariasana/cat pose, Uttanasana/standing forward fold, and Adho mukha svanasana/downward facing dog pose. It is critical to restore joint mobility

after prolonged sitting.

Mindful mornings: Set aside at least ten minutes each morning to sit in silence. Simply close your eyes and bring your attention to the present moment. Beginning the day in this manner will assist you in calming your thoughts, controlling your anxiety, and preparing you to go through the day in a balanced state of mind. You can conclude the meditation by saying aloud, “I am ready to face the day and I choose to go with the flow.” This will train your subconscious mind to be mindful all day.

Viparaita Karni / Legs up the wall pose: After a long day, this is a great pose to jump into when you’re exhausted, especially if your legs are tired from all the walking. Simply lie on your back on the floor and raise your legs to form a capital L shape against the wall. If you hold this pose for 5 minutes before going to bed, you will fall asleep like a baby.

Nature connection: Spending time in nature is the most healing thing you can do. Spend some time outside of your daily routine in a park or near a natural body. Turn off your phone and surrender with all of your senses.

See the various colours and patterns around you, listen to the sounds of birds, waterfalls, and rivers, smell the various fragrances of flowers and trees, touch the soft grass and leaves, and fully immerse yourself in nature’s beauty.

Allow nature to heal, recharge, and uplift you. (IANSLife)

TREES AREN'T A CLIMATE CHANGE CURE-ALL



When people talk about ways to slow climate change, they often mention trees, and for good reason. Forests take up a large amount of the planet-warming carbon dioxide that people put into the atmosphere when they burn fossil fuels. But will trees keep up that pace as global temperatures rise? With companies increasingly investing in forests as offsets, saying it cancels out their continuing greenhouse gas emissions, that's a multibillion-dollar question.

The results of two studies published in the journals *Science* and *Ecology Letters* on May 12, 2022 – one focused on growth, the other on death – raise new

questions about how much the world can rely on forests to store increasing amounts of carbon in a warming future. Ecologist William Anderegg, who was involved in both studies, explains why.

What does the new research tell us about trees and their ability to store carbon?

The future of forests is on a knife's edge, with a tug of war between two very important forces: the benefits trees get from increasing levels of carbon dioxide and the stresses they face from the climate, such as heat, drought, fires, pests and pathogens.

Those climate stresses are increasing a lot faster as the planet

warms than scientists had expected. We're seeing immense wildfires and drought-driven forest die-offs much sooner than anyone had anticipated. When those trees die, that carbon goes back into the atmosphere. We're also seeing evidence that the benefits trees get from higher levels of carbon dioxide in a warming world may be more limited than people realize.

This tells us it's probably not a great idea to count on forests for a widespread carbon sink through the 21st century, particularly if societies don't reduce their emissions.

Trees and forests do all sorts of other amazing things – they clean the air and water, and they provide

economic value in terms of timber and tourism and pollination. So, understanding how they will grow matters for many reasons.

There's an argument that, with more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, trees will simply grow more and lock that carbon away. What did your study find? Two key things affect tree growth: photosynthesis, which is how trees turn sunlight and carbon dioxide into food, and the process of cell division and expansion.

There's been a long-standing debate about which is the biggest driver of tree growth.

A good metaphor here is a cart with two horses. The cart moving down the road is the tree growing,

and there are two horses attached, but we don't know which is actually doing the work of pulling the cart. One horse is photosynthesis. That makes a lot of intuitive sense – it's where all the carbon comes from for building cells. But we know there's another horse – in order to grow more wood, trees have to grow layers of cells, and the cells have to expand and divide. That cell growth process is very sensitive to climate changes and tends to shut down when conditions are dry.

People assume that photosynthesis is the dominant process almost everywhere. But we found stronger evidence that these cellular processes that are sensitive to drought actually do more to drive or limit growth.

We used tree ring data from thousands of trees across the US and Europe and measurements of photosynthesis from towers in nearby forests to check whether tree growth and photosynthesis were correlated over time. If they followed the same pattern, increasing or decreasing in the same years, that would have suggested photosynthesis was the horse pulling the cart. Instead, we found no correlation.

That suggests that droughts, rather than the amount of carbon dioxide in the air, may have the biggest impact on how quickly trees grow in the future. We're already seeing more frequent and severe droughts in many regions.

What did you learn about the risk of tree death in the future?

In the other study, we found that lowering global greenhouse gas emissions could have a huge impact for avoiding damage to forests from wildfires, drought and insects.

We used years of satellite observations, climate data and a network of about 450,000 tree plots across the US where each tree is monitored for climate stress and survival. With that historical data,

we built statistical models of the risk US trees face from wildfires, insects and climate stress, primarily related to drought. Then we looked at what might happen under future climate scenarios, with high carbon emissions, medium emissions and low emissions.

The big picture: As the planet warms, wildfire risk increases substantially over the current century, especially in the Western U.S. In a scenario with medium emissions, wildfire risk is projected to increase by a factor of four. Drought and insect risks increase by about 50% to 80%.

What does this mean for the use of carbon offsets?

Together these studies suggest that the benefits carbon dioxide has for growth won't be nearly as large as people thought, and the risk of climate stress, particularly wildfire, drought and insects, will be much larger than people anticipate.

That has huge implications for using forests as carbon offsets.

So far, carbon offset protocols and markets have not really grappled with this updated scientific understanding of the risks that forests face from climate change. This tells us that climate policymakers and offset developers need to be very careful about how they count on forest offsets to deliver benefits.

The more hopeful message is that our actions in the next decade matter enormously. If we can rein in the speed of climate change and take a lower-emissions path, that does a huge amount to lower risk and increase the benefits. This isn't a "throw up our hands and panic" situation – it is our chance to take steps that make sure resilient and sustainable forests last for the future.

What we do with our own emissions and efforts to slow climate change matters immensely for the future of forests. (*The Conversation*)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MAY 15, 2022

Moon is parallel to Saturn on your solar return chart. It will turn out to be a good year. You will be energetic and enthusiastic. You will get success in exams. You will make good use of your communication skills. You will also develop your contact with people. These are balanced days. There will be profits in property related matters. You will get some construction done in your house. You will do your best to give a good impression with your wisdom. You will prevent a loss of someone. You might get busy in reading some knowledge enhancing literature. New job offers will come. Your business will also prosper and flourish. The difficulties you were facing in your business will come to an end. The time is progressive but you will get results according to your personal efforts. You will be happy to meet an old friend of yours. Family ties will be very important for you.

Aries (March 21 - April 20)
It is time to rebuild your old ties. You will share your sentiments and feelings with one of your friends. Your meeting with an influential person will pave the way for your success. You will do your work with lot of sincerity. You will have monetary gains from somewhere and you might also be given a new responsibility at work. You will also reach new heights of success on the basis of your creativity. You will also receive money that was not recovered due to some reasons. You will also take to research in a big way. There will be some obstacles in the work about to be accomplished. You will develop a liking for some person. You will also remain active socially. You will listen to people's problems very sympathetically and try to find solutions for them.

Taurus (April 21 - May 21)
You will meet an old friend or relative of yours and feel unhappy about it. You might attend a party or party. You will get some respite from worries. Your work will also get completed soon due to your team efforts. Long pending disputes and problems will be settled. Your personality will grow and you will get credit for lot of things. You will establish a good balance with your partner and business people. You will also make plans to expand your business. Something important regarding your children will take place. Students will plan to take admission in institutes/courses of their choice. There are full chances of being successful in competitive examinations. You will invest in your children, and will get the love of your parents as well. You will also communicate well with your colleagues.

Gemini (May 22 - June 21)
It will be a great week. You will be kept busy. You will negotiate business contracts. But be cautious before signing any document. Read carefully or you might get cheated. You also need to spend your money properly. God's blessings will tide you over your difficulties. You will spend for good cause also. Your helping nature will be visible to all. You will get lot of praise also. You will have the company of your friends. Husband and wife will have great understanding. You will also come across people who think on the same line as you do. You will also come in contact with people having the same ideology. Students will do well in their studies. You will also show love towards in-laws and will establish good relations with them. You will be happy obtaining some material things and securing gains. Your thoughts will be positive and you will accomplish your targets.

Cancer (June 22 - July 22)
Money that was about to be received will be stuck somewhere. But no need to get worried about it. A good news at your workplace will lift your spirits. Your apprehensions will get removed. A meeting with some important person will fill you with enthusiasm and energy. You will also listen to people's problems and try to resolve them. You will also be known for your dedication and sincerity in the workplace. Those doing jobs will get their desired work. Your financial position will be better than before. Your government related work will get done easily. You will get the company of some senior official. You will also be very ambitious at this time. You will be highly extolled and will have interest in spirituality and meditation.

Leo (July 23 - August 23)
A person may be jealous of your progress. It will be a cause of some tension. You will accomplish daily tasks with great ease and get the help of your colleagues and other people. You will also meet lot of people and will be socially active too. You will be full of energy. You will get success in love matters. These are property gaining days. You will prepare to undertake new responsibilities. You will have capacity and confidence to bring tasks to conclusion. But before doing any work do your home work properly. Only then you will be successful. You will be praised and get support in full steam and you will feel better. You will achieve your objectives. Ties in the family will improve. If you are diabetic, keep control of your diet.

Virgo (August 24 - September 22)
Your whole time this week will be spent in fun and laughter. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your family members. Husband and wife will also understand the feelings of each other. You will once again get down to work with enthusiasm and vigour. You will also get the blessings and affection of your elders. The health related problems that

had been there for a long time will come to an end. You will be busy with your family. A meeting with an important person will prove beneficial for you. At work, you will make plans and work accordingly. Success will definitely be yours. You will also get over from all problems with your intelligence and discretion. Your respect and prestige will increase. There will be a positive change in the planetary position and beneficial events will take place.

Libra (September 23 - October 23)
You will have a dispute with a close person will upset you a bit. But there is no reason to take tension. Things do happen against our wishes at times. You will manage to even out things gradually. You may clinch a vital business deal. You will also plan to buy an expensive household item. Certain domestic issues will keep you involved. In your work you will get expected results. With your humility and with the gift of the gab you will make everyone favor you. Your family peace and prosperity will increase. You will give much value to your emotions for the family members and relatives. You may have an argument with your siblings on the issue of family property division. Your progeny's educational and matrimonial prospects may be a matter of vital importance for you. Financially you will be satisfied with your overall progress.

Scorpio (October 24 - November 22)
These are wonderful days. There will be chances of gains and even you will work hard for it. You may be busy in amassing wealth. Your prestige will increase and also will rise your fortune. You will develop excellent connections in your business. You will get the best of everything. Your responsibilities will increase. The situation is good for merchants and traders. You will be successful in whatever work you do. You will meet old friends on meeting whom your memories will be revived and you will share your feelings. Your mind will be satisfied. You will develop a capacity to remain happy. You will speak out such a truth that need not have been revealed. You will be victorious in everything. The happiness of the winning will reflect in your face. You will also plan out with your family for an outing and have a really good time.

Sagittarius (November 23 - December 23)
You will be busy in your work, money and wealth will keep coming. You will feel happy and prosperous. The responsibility of work and family will increase but you will have no qualms. You will manage your responsibilities well. You will participate in a marriage function. You will also concentrate on a better lifestyle without taking stress. Happiness will radiate from the house. Property related disputes will get solved. Your hard work will pay off. All your works will get completed in time. Your own people will come to your help when needed most. You will be able to pay attention to your business. Old memories will be refreshed with some old friends. Old tensions will also come to an end. At work your superiors will be happy with your work. You could be promoted too.

Capricorn (December 22 - January 20)
You will get full credit for your work. Your worthy efforts will get recognized. Your name and fame will spread far and wide. With hard work you may achieve something vital. You will also take care for your social obligations which is a must. You will use your experience to expand your business and will get lot of success. You may touch a peak of success, as this phase is quite favorable. Your family members and colleagues will extend their full support to you. Your time will be utilized in worthy pursuits. Your progeny's matrimonial prospects may get postponed. You will also have to undertake a business journey all of a sudden. You will use your experience and expertise to expand your business and you will get lot of success too.

Aquarius (January 21 - February 18)
This week will be very wonderful for you. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will enjoy material comfort and affection from your mother as well. You may get a promotion in service. You will work on your strategy reaching greater heights professionally while also discharging your domestic duties and responsibilities. You may have your house redecorated and white washed. Change in service is also not ruled out. Your leadership qualities may reflect your personality. You could get a promotion in your job. You will look after your family very well. Your earnings will increase and your name and fame will rise. Don't be hasty in your decisions and keep yourself cool, wait patiently for things to move in right direction.

Pisces (February 19 - March 20)
You will be able to discharge your professional duties well. You will also take your domestic responsibilities too seriously. May also fulfill some of your ambitions. It will be a high time to fulfill your contractual commitment. You will also develop avid interest in meditation, spiritual activities and prayers. With a cool and peaceful mind you may dwell happily meeting your personal and social obligations. You will also look for new job/business opportunities. You will strive to achieve your aim. You will complete your pending jobs. May also go on a journey to a far off place. Students living far off from their families may fare well. Utilize your time judiciously. Your investments will bring excellent results.

Incredible train journeys around the world you must experience

Trains are an excellent way to travel the world, taking you through truly spectacular scenery that is often inaccessible by other modes of transportation and at a pace that allows you to take in the scenery.

On the eve of National Train Day, *Booking.com* shares a list of stunning train destination landscapes from around the world for everyone to enjoy. From straw mats on a bamboo track to a coal-powered steam train chugging through the Himalayas, save these incredible train journeys for your next trip.

Darjeeling 'Toy Train', India

The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway rumbles through the misty mountains with a shrill whistle and plumes of steam and smoke billowing from its coal engine. This locomotive, affectionately known as the 'Toy Train,' has been transporting tea and passengers up the steep inclines of the Lower Himalayas since the late 1800s; an engineering feat at the time that still impresses today.

The blue carriages of the train skim buildings and traffic by inches along the old Hill Cart Road as it travels from Darjeeling to Ghum, India's highest train station. Before unfolding to reveal breathtaking views of terraced tea plantations and the snow-capped Himalayas. Stay at the Dekeling Resort, which has a view of the Darjeeling Hills and the Kanchenjunga Range.

Battambang Bamboo Train, Cambodia

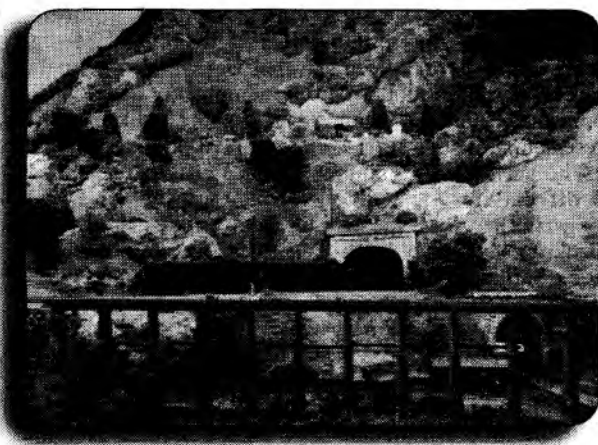
The Battambang Bamboo Train is a warm-weather toboggan ride powered by a small motorcycle engine. The infamous 'bamboo train,' located in the northwestern part of Cambodia, is a piece of back-to-basics engineering for thrill-seeking travellers. You'll be hurtling through rice paddies and over rickety bridges at up to 40km per hour while perched on straw mats laid across a bamboo platform.

Hold on tight with the wind in your hair and try to take in the tropical Cambodian scenery as you speed by. Ramchang is a budget-friendly, orange-and-yellow-painted guesthouse in the heart of Battambang.

Puffing Billy, Australia

Puffing Billy in Australia is an unforgettable experience because you can dangle your legs out the window of an old steam train as it chugs through a verdant mountain range. The path takes you through the Dandenong Mountains and the Yarra Valley, past cascades, creeks, and lime-green ferns, with sunlight filtering through tall, thin gum and mountain ash trees.

The Monbulk Trestle Bridge, an old timber bridge that carries the train out of Belgrave and towards Menzies Creek, is probably the most photogenic



part of the train journey. It's also only an hour's drive from Melbourne, so bring a picnic for a relaxing and whimsical afternoon in the bush. Make this highly-rated apartment in Melbourne's South Yarra your home base.

Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, United States of America

The Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railway tracks follow the Animas River through wilderness inaccessible by road, and are a heritage railroad cutting through some of Colorado's most epic scenery. The railway was built in 1882, but steam locomotives are still used today, albeit for tourists who want to take in the breathtaking scenery. You'll see river canyons, pine-covered valleys, waterfalls, snowy peaks, and if you're lucky, elk, deer, and moose.

Choose from open-air viewing gondola carriages to take in the fresh mountain air, or sit in one of the Historical Narration cars to hear on-board narrators in period costume discuss the railroad's and the region's history. The journey takes three and a half hours each way, and you can board at either end, so plan accordingly.

The Presidential Train, Portugal

For more than a century, the Presidential Train, Portugal's crown jewel, has hosted kings, presidents, heads of state, and popes. The Presidential Train, built in 1890, is a time capsule in which passengers travel through history with a special aroma and purposeful music.

The Presidential Train, which travels from Porto to Quinta do Vesuvio on the eastern shore of the Douro Valley, brings together the world's best chefs with the world's freshest food, paired with wines from the region. While waiting for meal service, passengers can unwind in private cabins and gaze out the windows at the golden valley.

(National Train Day is celebrated on the second Saturday in May annually.) (*IANSLife*)

"The purpose of training is to tighten up the slack, toughen the body, and polish the spirit."
—Morihei Ueshiba

The Shillong Times

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Rahul to the fore

THE Chintan Shivar in Udaipur signals the start of the 2024 general election push by the Congress party. The main plan announced by its leader Rahul Gandhi at the conclave attended by over 400 senior party leaders from across the country is his nation-wide Yatra from October to reconnect the party with the people. October was also the time set for the completion of the organizational polls. Overall, the Chintan Shivar turned out to be a build-up for Rahul Gandhi. His selection or election as Congress president is just a matter of time.

The party has made the right moves in several respects as it brain-stormed in the past three days about its future. The 'One leader, one post' rule has been agreed upon, more or less. The 'one family, one ticket' norm was backed by Rahul Gandhi, stressing that at any rate more members from the same family cannot contest polls without them having worked for the party for, say, a minimum of five years. The Nav Sankalp roadmap that the party laid out will mean massive reforms for the Congress, including the setting of an age-bar for leaders to hold positions. Congress also plans to ensure the SC-STs, BCs and the minorities would get half the space in all party committees – an attempt to neutralize the BJP's influence among the poor and weaker sections. The idea is to win back the poor and the disadvantaged on to the side of the Congress. Equally importantly, reform of the organisation will also make the Congress look young – filling its ranks with youth power – and this is advantage Rahul.

In the evolving scenario, it is likely that the next parliament polls could as well be a presidential form of contest between two principal adversaries – Rahul Gandhi and PM Modi, irrespective of whether or not Modi will seek a third term. The PM has made it clear that he does not intend to call it a day too soon; a warning to PM post aspirants within the BJP or the central government. By all reckoning, the Rahul Yatra that starts in October is programmed in ways that would put Rahul Gandhi as the principal challenger to the BJP in 2024. He has stressed that the regional parties cannot carry conviction in the coming polls also as they do not have any ideology to uphold, unlike the Congress. The regional parties were, obviously, banking on the complacency of the Congress leadership to get its act together. A change to this scenario, as is envisaged now, will make a big difference, though the BJP still remains unassailable.

Teachers' Protest Is Noble: Their Demands Must Be Met

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

The history of modern Education in the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills is about one hundred ninety years old only and it can be traced to the days when Alexander B Lish of the Serampore Mission had opened a School in Sohra in 1832. Thereafter, in 1841 Thomas Jones, the first missionary of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Foreign Missions began his evangelisation in the Hills and established three schools at Mawmluh, Sohra and Mawmai in 1842. Further he was also instrumental in sowing the seeds of development of the Khasi language and transformed the Sohra dialect into the written language by the usage of Roman alphabets. Throughout the 20th century wherever the Gospel was preached primary schools were set up by the Presbyterian, Catholic and Baptist Missions respectively. Thus, Education in the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills is essentially a private enterprise for the larger public good.

For a long time Education was considered as a noble vocation and the missionary approach to education was the dominant feature. The general perception is that education and teaching are upstanding enterprises and those in the field must commit to it wholeheartedly, but teachers are humans and citizens too and they are equally entitled to their rights. During British rule, the Government had established Zilla School and subsequently merged the same with the Normal School and Mission High School to form the Shillong Government High School in 1891. However, after Independence and under the Constitution the State assumed the role of a significant player in providing free and quality education to all. The 86th Constitutional amendment pronounced Education as a Fundamental Right and inserted Article 21 A to this effect. In 2012 the Right to Education was also enacted to ensure that every child has the right to free and compulsory education.

In Meghalaya the majority of schools are run and managed by faith-based groups and the Christian Missions are pioneers in the field. Of course, today the situation has vastly changed and the Mission's run schools are being substantially aided/supported by the State by way of the deficit system of grant in aid etc. Nonetheless, in the past decade or two the State also witnessed an increasing number of educational institutions established

by private citizens right from the primary up to university level. As per Government data, the State has a literacy rate of 74.43% and there are up to 6612 primary, upper primary, secondary and higher secondary schools in Meghalaya. The State has the highest enrolment from class I to XII which is 31,058 per one lakh population and has 1,875 teachers per one lakh population.

Although teachers are considered as the single-most vital factor in the educational system, they are also the most neglected sections of workers in the State. Teachers in Meghalaya can be divided into several categories viz, Gov-

April 2019 during the annual convention of the Workers' Power of Meghalaya (WPM), this writer had the opportunity to interact with private school teachers who had come to attend the workers' convention. Their plight is obvious - their monthly income is way below the minimum wage of an unskilled labourer, they are denied their basic rights like casual leave, maternity leave, earned and medical leave and do not even have provident fund etc. These are the basic rights that every teacher is entitled to and if he or she is denied them, then there is a serious problem in the system which has to be addressed immediately. As



ernment, Deficit and Ad-hoc, those employed under the SSA and RMSA schemes and exclusively private school teachers. This existing multi-layered system in education in the State is creating disparities and inequalities among the teachers. The private school teachers (including those in Religious/Church run schools) are by far the most exploited than Government or aided teachers. In her paper entitled, The Plight of Non-Government Teachers in India, Swaleha Sindh highlighted several pertinent issues that private school teachers in India are facing, viz, (i) private school teachers have no mechanism to redress their grievances (ii) they get a fraction of the salary of government school teachers (iii) they also face a different recruitment and reward structure from those at government schools (iv) they are forced to sign bonds and agreements by the school administrations... and in case they leave, their salaries of months together is devoured and cut off by the school authorities.

The above issues also hold true for the private school teachers in Meghalaya. In

Swaleha Sindh rightly put it, "this affects the teacher's motivation to educate and causes good teachers to leave the profession. These in turn would produce negative effects in student's learning. To improve the quality of education it is essential to pay special attention to teachers and to implement policies to attract, motivate and retain the most talented individuals in the profession."

In the recent past, the streets of Shillong are replete with agitated teachers, from the Association of SSA school teachers to Federation of All School Teachers of Meghalaya, who have been clamouring for their basic right to living wages and various entitlements. The teachers' led agitation also reflects the deplorable condition of the education system in the State. Unlike other plum departments, "Education is neither a profitable portfolio nor can one make a fast buck from it, so no one seems to take keen interest and thus it is left to rot". The Minister for Education categorically stated that the State requires Rs 29 crore per month to pay the salaries of SSA teachers and meanwhile the budget

allocation for education in the State for the year 2021-22 is Rs 980 crores whereby Rs 435 crores of the total budget will be tapped from the State resources.

The budget allocation for education is relatively small as compared to the need for providing quality and free education to all. While analysing the Government's data it is found that in Meghalaya there are about 9,31,740 students and 56,250 teachers respectively. Now, let us presume that each teacher earns Rs 20,000 per month as income which amounts to Rs 2,40,000 per annum. Thus, the annual expenditure on salaries or the 56,250 numbers of teachers in the State amounts to Rs 1350 crore. Whereas the budget allocation is only Rs 980 crore, leaving a shortfall of about Rs 370 crore. Where will the expenditures for infrastructures and maintenance etc., come from? Besides, the state has to generate Rs 29 crore per month to meet the State's share for the salary of SSA teachers. Besides Health care, Education is one sector which the State has to give top-most priority to in governance and planning.

The discrimination and the sin of unfair treatment towards teachers should end. All the teachers of Meghalaya, from Private to Government aided to Government schools, must raise a war cry for "Justice, Equality and Dignity" and proclaim their rights for living wages, free health care, education and decent housing. The teachers of Meghalaya must be justly and fairly treated in every aspect and their demands must be met. The State Government must immediately adopt a policy towards providing a living wage to all teachers, implement equal pay for equal work, raise the salaries of all the teachers in the State as per law and by law institute a Private School Regulatory body in order to protect the private school teachers against exploitation.

The Government of Meghalaya has stated in its policy, "To create conditions, which will help motivate and inspire teachers along constructive and creative lines. Their pay, service conditions and fair retirement benefits have to commensurate with their social and professional responsibilities." This cannot remain in paper only. The State must act. It is the duty and the pivotal role of the State to provide free and quality education and it can only happen if teachers are paid justly.

Fighting Inflation Will Need Monetary, Fiscal and Administrative measures

By Ajit Ranade

There is a well-known debate among economic policy makers regarding a more efficient way of giving government subsidies. Should it be in kind or in cash? The proponents of the in cash method prefer a direct money transfer to the poor, and then the poor are free to use that cash as they wish to. When the Jan Dhan Yojana was rolled out, opening no-frills bank accounts to now nearly 450 million people, direct money transfers became easy. This was also because bank networks are electronically linked. Direct cash support rather than in-kind support is more efficient in many cases. But since March 2020, the government has been giving in-kind benefits, as food rather than cash. The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) gives 5 kilos of food grain (wheat or rice) and 1 kilo of pulses free, per person per month, to every household holding a ration card. This welfare scheme is the largest food security scheme in the world, having now fed an estimated 800 million people.

Initially the scheme was to expire in a few months in 2020 itself, but has been repeatedly extended, and is now set to be discontinued from September 2022. The point is that the subsidy is given in kind, not in cash. During the time that food prices are going up, and wheat prices have gone sky high, imagine the plight of the poor if they had got only cash and not food grain instead? The inherent weakness of in-cash subsidy schemes is that they do not protect the recipient from inflation. Of course, there could be other problems with cash

monetary measures undertaken by the Reserve Bank of India. The government also took the bold decision of an abrupt U-turn regarding wheat exports, by banning such exports to ensure domestic food security. Of course, it is awkward for India to announce to the world that it would "feed the world" and not restrict wheat exports in March, and within two months do an about turn. This was necessitated due to the realisation that there is a steep drop in wheat yields this year, and we may not have adequate surplus for exports.

For its part the RBI too did an abrupt U-turn earlier this month by suddenly raising interest rates and the cash reserve ratio (CRR). The raising of the CRR resulted in the removal of 12 percent of liquidity i.e. nearly 90,000 crore of money supply. This abrupt tightening of the monetary stance was quite contrary to what the RBI has been saying for many years. It was the first tightening measure since 2018. During the pandemic period, the RBI provided plenty of liquidity, estimated at 8 percent of the GDP, kept interest rates very low, and also helped with other measures like the loan repayment moratorium.

But while the RBI's accommodative policies might have helped the economy, the excess liquidity did have some perverse effects. One was the funds poured into the stock market (and also housing) leading to a possible bubble. The increase in stock market wealth goes mainly to the rich, and that wealth remains untaxed since those are unrealised

The increase in stock market wealth goes mainly to the rich, and that wealth remains untaxed since those are unrealised gains. So, it does not help the fiscal deficit. The other perverse effect was that inflation remained too high, even prior to the pandemic.

deposits, like a wrong deposit in another bank account, or cyber fraud etc. In case of grain distribution, it is given in-kind so its value does not get eroded by inflation. There is however, a huge logistical challenge for the government to ensure that the grain and cereal reaches every nook and corner of the country, without leakage or corruption. But on this front, especially with the help of State governments the food distribution has been reasonably successful.

The food entitlement in PMGKAY follows from the National Food Security Act passed in 2013. The latter envisaged in-kind benefits of grain, to be sold at prices of rupees 3, 2 and 1 a kilo for rice, wheat and coarse cereal respectively. The PMGKAY made it completely free, and to a large extent helped ensure food security, during the pandemic when jobs and livelihoods were lost. It is speculated that the welfare scheme also had an impact on several State election outcomes.

The 'in kind' food distribution scheme is an example of an administratively complex arrangement which was most appropriate at a time of the pandemic and food inflation. It helped address food security as well as food price stability (since the recipients were protected from food inflation).

As we grapple with the severe impact of oil price inflation caused by the war in Ukraine, and high commodity inflation, at least for food inflation the government might have to extend the PMGKAY. But bear in mind that the scheme will entail a steep fiscal cost, being the difference of procuring the grain at high prices, and giving it away free, plus the cost of storage and transportation. Even then this fiscal cost and administrative measure is more effective than merely

gains. So, it does not help the fiscal deficit. The other perverse effect was that inflation remained too high, even prior to the pandemic. For more than two years, the average inflation rate has been close to 6 percent, which is the upper band of tolerance for the RBI's Monetary Policy Committee. The wholesale price index inflation has been 14 percent for more than a year. Why did it not tighten much earlier, by raising rates? But if those forbearance, perhaps keeping in mind the weak economic recovery, or perhaps because it wanted to help the government's borrowing program. The biggest borrower by far in the banking system is the government of India, and keeping interest rates low, helps it. The annual borrowing requirement is close to 14 trillion this year alone. The total sovereign debt has already climbed close to 90 percent of the GDP. So even a one percent rise in interest rates could spell an additional interest burden of close to 70 thousand crores. No wonder the rate hike decision has great significance. The RBI must have finally agreed to bite the bullet, for not only is inflation galloping, but the rupee dollar exchange rate is also sliding down. So, to attract more dollars into the bond market, the interest rates in India need to be higher than in the US.

Clearly, we face multiple challenges of inflation management, of food security and of staving off recessionary fears as investors become cautious. It is going to be a difficult year for economic policy, and all tools including fiscal, monetary and administrative controls will be needed to keep inflation low.

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

Letters to the Editor

The Silence of the Doomed

Editor,
A young lady, to be more specific, one of the dynamic faculty members of Martin Luther Christian University, gave a quote that really stunned me. It was a quote from the King James Bible, Proverbs Chapter 29 verse 18 which is so appropriate, so apt, so fitting with the times we live in, especially in relation to Good Governance by our Rulers (in Meghalaya's case, elected MLAs and representatives that form the Government of the day and Lawmakers that constitute the Legislative Assembly). Yes many of us too are asking, "Where is the vision for Meghalaya?". At present there appears to be none. Politically active youngsters and the various groups they belong to seem more concerned at sealing off Meghalaya from the rest of the world. That is the limited vision these young people have. A vision driven by fear and trepidation of the outside world. Then come the politicians and the institutions they belong to (Read Political parties, both National and Regional). They exist Devoid of any vision for the state and its people. Their eyesight is simply focused on "How to come to power. Period!" It has resulted in dummies and worse in thieves and looters of the exchequer, that has

smear the reputation of the state with all types of scams and rip-off scandals.
The wonder, no a better word would be bewilderment and amazement, is at the lack of public reaction from the electorate, especially the intelligentsia of Meghalaya on the perverse style of functioning of our political system. Political integrity and quality has degenerated to a level Meghalaya's founding fathers had never dreamt of. Politics has been turned from a noble profession of providing good governance to a legalised form of swindling people's money. I say this with all the authority I have! Why have our indigenous traditional institutions that profess to uphold our value systems remained quiet and silent? There is the Church, a powerful institution that could have addressed the ills that afflict society, but has chosen to remain mute and voiceless to the chaos that afflicts our society. The time to speak out has arrived. The word of God exemplified in the verses from the Proverbs quoted above, gives the Church and its clergy the authority to speak out on the lack of vision; lack of principles; absence of ethics in the political system that governs us today. If we continue to keep silent, we will perish. It is as simple as that. Does this simple fact require any further clarification? I think not.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

Excuses galore by MDA Govt

Editor,
The weak excuses elicited by the MDA Government vis a vis the traffic nightmare in Shillong is pathetic to state the least. The Government has actually thrown up its hands for being unable to come to grips with the challenges of traffic in Shillong. Citizens buy vehicles, because there's not a reliable public transport system in Shillong and non-existent ones in other towns of Meghalaya. Street lighting is totally absent in Shillong and other urban centres of Meghalaya. Being in one's own car is a safety precaution.
In the last 50 years how many new roads were constructed in and around Shillong? Has that important infrastructure factor ever been addressed? Not really. In new localities which have come up, are the roads wide enough? Foresight is required so that bottlenecks are avoided. The ADCs need to realise that too. Tura is going the same way with traffic snarls even though most schools in Tura do have their respective school transport system and we are comparatively in a less stressful situation than Shillong.
A few years ago a certain minister in charge of Education in Shillong must introduce buses for their students. Indeed, it was an extremely

bright suggestion, but none of the leading educational institutions in Shillong opted for buses. A few weeks later, the same minister had visited Tura and I brought up the issue of having an IMPROVED SCHOOL BUS system in Tura. The minister flatly refused to entertain the suggestion. To which I then remarked, "You are the Education Minister of Meghalaya and not Shillong alone."

When are we going to start thinking on a larger scale? Even after 50 years of statehood, we still haven't yet thought of ourselves beyond Khasi, Jaintia, Garo, Hajong, Koch or non-tribals. The identity of being "Meghalayan" is proving to be an alien concept to the people of the Abode of Clouds. This thought was stated in the inaugural edition of The Meghalayan newspaper early this year by Ms Kimberly D'Brass Momin. When are we going to grow beyond the tribal roots? When?

For the last 50 years in Meghalaya, a piecemeal approach to development has occurred. There is no clarity on major policies and with such a lackadaisical manner of functioning, it's no wonder that Meghalaya is the 5th poorest state in India. Unfortunately, the youth of Meghalaya do not see any light at the end of the tunnel.

I would love the political parties to do some soul searching and ask the question, "When can we see a

rainbow in the Meghalayan sky?"

Yours etc.,
Sincerely,
Tyrone D'Brass,
Tura.

It's a materialistic world

Editor,
While expressing our deepest condolences to the family of Subhankar Pratim Deb, with prayers for the soul of the deceased, our thoughts also go to the IIM faculty and staff who had lost a colleague. My suggestion to reduce the occurrence of such tragic accidents which have become commonplace in Meghalaya is to revive and strengthen the Accident Tribunal.

What has happened to the Accident Tribunals that take action after a judicial order has imposed proper fines on the errant driver? Any driver that violates the rules deserves a befitting lesson. Above all the family members of the victim deserve financial assistance. But tragically, as of today, the follow up is absent and drivers behave with impunity. In the past the traffic police and Motor Vehicle Inspectors (MVIs) enforced the MV acts and daily check the road worthiness and passenger worthiness of vehicles for an accident-free journey. Today MVIs are invisible and the violators get away scot-free

to create more tragic news.

The only solution is to employ speed governors. It was practised in the past when speed was never an issue, but the Department loved to play safe. In Assam, the elephant corridor has a device linked to the internet at the District Transport Office (DTO). Any threatening speed is warned by blinking lights and if trespassed the driver immediately gets a message telling him the amount of fine and which police station to pay to, as well as penalties such as seizure of driving license etc.. The driver's phone number along with the registration plates are linked to computers at the DTO much like the Fastag.

India is a vast country and speed limits vary from state to state or terrain wise. The speedometer and odometer should be linked nation-wide. Speed cannot be reduced by speed breakers as drivers today execute high jump stunts. The registration plates at the front and rear must be clear and not smeared with mud as happens in hit and run cases.

If the centre and states are really interested in saving lives then speed governors are the only solution. Enough of deaths by accidents!

Yours etc.,
W. Passah
Nongkrem

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“As long as we persevere and endure,
we can get anything we want.”
— Mike Tyson

The Shillong Times

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NFHS-5, controversies galore

THE National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5 which was carried out in 2019-2020 calls Meghalaya a ‘matriarchal’ society. The Khasi, Jaintia and Garo people still believe they are a matrilineal society where lineage is from the mother’s clan line. Harini Natarajan who has studied the work of several sociologists, including the German scholar Heide Abendroth Goettner has explained the essence of matriarchy in an article titled ‘What Is Matriarchy? A Brief History Of Matriarchal Societies.’ Natarajan says, “matriarchy is a system that revolves around the principle of mother-rule in which mothers or females are at the top of the power structure. They dominate in roles of moral authority, political leadership, social privilege, and control of property. For a social system to be viewed as a matriarchy, it would need the support of a culture that defined women’s dominance as desirable and legitimate.” Going by the above definition of matriarchy, Meghalaya hardly qualifies as one. Here women are not included in traditional institutions (Dorbar Shnong) which are male-centric grass-roots governance institutions. This exclusion of women from the Dorbar Shnong is a live issue.

Another contradiction in this survey relates to land ownership in Meghalaya. The earlier findings by the Socio-Economic Caste Survey, 2011 is that 76 % of rural Meghalaya is landless. It would be prudent to believe that if the picture in 2011 was so bleak then it would have only aggravated with time. NFHS -5 finds that 70 percent of households own a house (76%) of rural households and 48% of urban households). The survey also says overall, 33 percent of all households in Meghalaya own agricultural land. The 33% could well be urban elite that own agricultural land for contract farming.

The NFHS-5 fieldwork for Meghalaya was conducted in all 11 districts of the state between July 8, 2019 to November 15, 2019 by IQVIA Consulting and Information Services India Pvt. Ltd. Information was collected from 10,148 households, 13,089 women age 15-49 (including 1,965 women interviewed in PSUs in the state module), and 1,824 men age 15-54. Some findings however are of concern if they reflect the ground realities. One is that only 33% of the population have an Aadhar Card. This confirms the poor enrolment into the electoral rolls of the state and poor voting percentage in certain rural constituencies as most people consider the Aadhar Card to be taboo. In terms of household composition, the NFHS-5 finds that in Meghalaya, over three-quarters (78%) of the households are in rural areas. On average, households comprise of 4.8 members. But what’s also shocking to learn is that 41% of households are headed by women, with 42 percent of the population living in female-headed households. Does the Government of Meghalaya pay attention to the NFHS survey data? Or is this just another statistic?

Four-year degree:
Boon or bane

By H. Srikanth

reers in the corporate sector. But one is not sure whether the model could be replicated to all parts of India, ignoring the stark class and regional differences.

An effective implementation of the four-year degree courses on the lines proposed by NEP 2020 requires good infrastructure and qualified personnel. Multidisciplinary teaching using the CBCS and cafeteria approach make sense only when the UG colleges offer courses in sciences, commerce, arts and humanities. The colleges need to have the re-

is it possible to introduce a Four-Year degree course in the state?

Now let us examine the Exit and Entry approach that the NEP offers. What do the students gain by opting out of the degree course after one year with a certificate, or with a diploma after two years? Would these dropouts be able to secure a job anywhere with the certificate and diploma? In countries like India, the students’ dropout is mainly because of economic reasons. With the ongoing privatization and commercialization of education, it is becoming



sources and capabilities to offer meaningful vocational courses. The students need to be rich enough to bear the additional expenses to offer online courses, or to study in multiple institutions to earn the credits. To be able to guide the research in the fourth year, it is essential that all UG teachers have a M Phil or a PhD. degree. But on the ground, over ninety percent of the teachers employed in the UG colleges have only a PG degree. They do not

difficult even for middle-class families to send their wards to good colleges. The proposed restructuring of degree courses will impose additional financial burden on the poor and middle-class parents, and compel many students to quit in the middle of their studies with certificates and diplomas which have no market value. Not sure whether the students who drop out in the middle will ever enter colleges again to complete their degree. If the government really intends

“In a state like Meghalaya, where the majority are tribal people with a humble economic background, the students hardly opt for online courses through MOOCS and SWAYAM platforms, as taking the online courses involves additional expenditure.”

have any research degree and research experience to guide research at degree level. Further, most colleges in both urban and semi-urban areas only have temporary affiliation and lack resources. The college management mostly prefers to run UG courses in humanities and social sciences, and can’t afford to run degree courses in sciences and commerce. They have little resources and cannot afford to provide computer and internet facilities to the students. Digital infrastructure and internet access in the remote areas are highly inadequate. With such constraints,

to increase and retain the enrolment in higher education, then it should provide subsidized education and offer scholarships to the needy students. Multiple exit and entry options are no real options. Further, in a state like Meghalaya, where the majority are tribal people with a humble economic background, the students hardly opt for online courses through MOOCS and SWAYAM platforms, as taking the online courses involves additional expenditure. Most online courses are offered for six months and their schedule does not match with NEHU’s semes-

ter calendar. Even at the PG level, there are hardly any takers for these online courses. The students find it more comfortable to pursue offline courses within the campus. The students here don’t find it attractive to accumulate credits from different sources and to look towards the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) to calculate the total credits.

The NEP gives a false hope as if doing vocational courses as part of the degree will boost the students’ employment opportunities. In a country where even those who have done Polytechnic, B Tech and other technical and management courses are unemployed, or underemployed, it is an illusion to hope that by doing an additional vocational course at degree level, one could have secure and sustainable jobs. Most UG colleges in the state do not have means or expertise to provide training in vocational courses. Even the courses offered by Skill Development departments of the state have little market value. There are no major industries or institutions in the state to get hands-on vocational training for the students. Too much of an emphasis on vocational courses and non-allied subjects deviates the students’ attention from the main course in which they seek to master and excel. As the saying goes, the Jack of all trades is a master of none.

True, all is not fine with higher education. Higher education in the state needs reforms. But the reforms should be such that they benefit not only the privileged elite but also the students with little means. Educational policies should be made keeping in view the needs and capabilities of the stakeholders. But the problem in India is that the policies are conceived and imposed from above. The central government enforces their will on the state governments. The UGC and Ministry of Education dictate their decisions on the universities, and the universities impose them on the UG colleges. We surrender the responsibility of decision making to the wisdom of our superiors and learn to implement mechanically the policies thrust upon us. When issues like pay, promotions, positions, etc., become priority, who has any time for critical and rational thinking on issues related to quality of education? One only hopes the university, colleges and government take cognizance of the state of higher education in Meghalaya before they roll out the Four-Year degree model in the UG colleges.

(H Srikanth teaches Political Science in NEHU. He can be reached at hskant@gmail.com)

High Trucker Costs

Retail inflation highest

By Shivaji Sarkar

Galloping inflation needs to be immediately checked. It hurts the government more than the common man, creating a cycle that hits everyone and adding further to the inflation. Retail inflation touches 7.79 per cent, the highest since September 2014 and the wholesale index remains over 14 per cent. It has made food inflation go beyond tolerable limits and so too the travel and transportation expenses.

The policies need scrutiny as the subsidy regime is reversed by high taxes on fuel, road sector and commodities through various instruments such as GST, excise duties, VAT, road, agriculture and other cesses, toll and consequent rise in prices. The policy makers blame it on international factors like the Ukraine war but are unable to explain how it causes severe rise in vegetable prices, home grown wheat flour and myriad such products. Pulses rise by 17 per cent.

The government itself is in a quandary on the prices and needs to discuss issues that can bring down its bill on expenditure and cost of investments. That is possible through moderation of prices. On an average it has gone

and other input costs. They transfer it to the consumers, who respond by a further stickier consumption.

Despite a \$400 million export, the RBI is concerned as global price rises may lower demands. Imports have surged. The balance of trade is unfavourable and reducing imports is difficult. The rising rupee against the dollar or fear of contraction of rupee is worrisome as the forex kitty has shrunk to \$597 billion from \$642 billion. In the week ending April 29, foreign currency assets fell by \$1.110 billion to \$532.82 billion. Meanwhile, gold reserves dipped by \$1.164 billion to \$41.60 billion. The SDR reserves stood at \$18.3 billion lower by \$362 million. The country’s reserve position in the International Monetary Fund is at \$5.001 billion lower by \$59 million in the week ending April 29.

A 10 per cent rise in fuel prices raises 12.78 per cent of production costs in the road transport sector, says study of Dhani Setyawan of Indonesian Ministry of Finance. In addition, there is also indirect impact to the sector by 5.13 per cent. The indirect impact is induced by



beyond the Reserve Bank of India tolerance limit reset at 6 per cent. Rapid, sustained inflation harms families by wiping out their wage gains and eroding savings. It also rocks consumer confidence, and businesses.

The rupee falling against the dollar is yet another cause for concern. It virtually imports inflation, and this is difficult to contain unless domestic steps raise the purchasing power of the rupee. Instead that is being eroded, as the rupee touches Rs 77.34 to a dollar. It makes petrol, coal and essential imports expensive.

Freight rates on grand trunk routes have already shot up by an average 3-4 per cent month-on-month, according to the Indian Foundation of Transport Research & Training. The recurrent increase in the fuel prices singe into the margins of small and large transporters and will force them to pass on the hike to their customers. This in turn is set to make the prices of daily consumables and other goods dearer, impact consumption and slow the economic growth, the study says.

An Indonesian study finds that the increasing fuel prices have a devastating impact on the transportation sector. If we do not check this, the rising oil prices would cause a slowdown. Two recessions that occurred in the 1970s started the myth that oil prices can cause recessions. Of course, a small correction has been made to the monetary policy by a small raise in repo rates. As per RBI’s own calculations, almost every 5 per cent depreciation in the rupee adds about 10-15 bps to the inflation. The RBI move to check it also has a cost.

Transportation and input costs have hit even the largest Unilever. It is seen in reducing the size and quantity in each of the small packs. A 10-rupee dish cleaner now has 135 grams compared to 155 grams three months ago or so. A Haldiram aloo bhujia now has 42 grams against 55 grams. Dabur has reduced grammage. Britannia has passed on 65 per cent of incremental input costs all through 2021-22. Every category has had inflationary headwinds, says Sanjay Singhal, of ITC’s dairy and beverages unit. The manufacturers are hit by a cycle of rises from petroleum, toll, transport to edible oil

the changes of other sector product prices.

The Fitch agency says that the hiking of natural gas prices for ONGC and Oil India to \$6.1 per million British thermal units from \$2.1 may be good news as their profitability would increase. Reliance would have higher profitability as the rate of KG-D6 has gone up to \$ 9.9 per mmBtu from \$6.1. Once again it will have a deleterious impact on transport costs.

A study on impact of toll system by Kedar Nath Pande in the International Advanced Research Journal, says, according to the National Motorists Association it is an inefficient approach, worse it fosters corruption, political patronage and discourages needed improvements on the rest of the non-toll highway system. Toll is the second largest expense of transporters at Rs 4 to 5 lakh a year per truck. The average usage of trucks has remained the same whereas costs have increased, and transporter margins are at an all-time low, Pande says much of it due to the tolls. But NH Fee rules 2008 of reducing tax after 60 per cent cost realisation is never implemented.

The DNA story observes that toll collection is a huge profit-making mechanism, as per the police. It cites the instance of Pune-Ahmednagar toll gate at Perne Phata. The government’s investment on the stretch was about Rs 10 crore. The road was started with an expected profit of Rs 24 crore in 10 years. It collected Rs 394 crore as toll and has paid Rs 1.55 crore to the government. Similar irregularities detected in Tamil Nadu. The government is collecting on an average Rs 3.6 lakh crore through various petrol cesses and as per National Highways Authority of India, it directly collects Rs 38000 crore at toll gates a year.

Each of these also impact government expenses. These go up every year following a myth that inflation helps the government earn more. In reality, there is more erosion to revenue, increased hardships at every level and the resultant slowdown adds to the problems. Lower the inflation, higher the demand and happiness in the country. Reviewing taxes and tolls will help the government earn more.---INFA

Letters to the Editor

Are we prepared for CUET?

Editor,
The introduction of the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) has raised a much-needed debate in the country as regard its practicality and impact on the students. It is evident that the government is considering the fact that there are too many graduates and post-graduates in the country today who are still jobless for the fact that job saturation has set in. In other words, only the deserving can go ahead in their quest for qualifications. This educational policy adopted by the government has its pros and cons. In itself it is a method to urge students to work harder and perform better in their secondary and higher secondary education. However, as of today, students coming from rural settings especially in our tribal areas, are at a great disadvantage if this policy is implemented. Let me list down a few difficulties associated with this policy.

First of all, we have not achieved a “uniform quality

education” in most parts of our country particularly in Northeast India. There is a huge gap of educational quality between urban and rural schools. In most of our rural schools, especially government schools, education is in shambles. There are very few qualified teachers, no proper facilities not even sufficient classrooms. The so called “smart classroom” which is available to urban schools, is unthinkable for rural schools. In many government schools, there is insufficient number of teachers to properly manage the schools or provide good education. Students themselves in rural areas, are deprived of many privileges their urban counterparts enjoy. I have seen rural students who have to walk many kilometers to and fro day in and day out. There are no school buses available to them while their counterparts in the urban settings have every means of transport. With so many “schools of excellence” present in the cities, urban students have easy access to quality education. Take for example the state of Meghalaya where all good schools and colleges are located only in Shillong and Tura. When we go out of these places into

the interior of the state, we see the miserable condition of school education. The consequence of all these disparities, is the scandalous gap of quality between urban and rural education. This is the reason why rural students who come from families that are a little better off, continue to migrate to the cities in order to pursue quality education. What about the majority of poor students who remain in their villages?

Secondly, our rural students who are generally weak in English in comparison to urban students, will be at a greater disadvantage in such national entrance tests since they would have to do it in English. Many times they may even find it difficult to comprehend the questions and much less to answer them. The fact that our mother tongues (Khasi and Garo languages) have not entered the Eight Schedule, makes our students ineligible to write in their own mother tongues. Rural students of other states whose languages have been recognized would be in a better position as they could write in their own mother tongues, be it Bodo, Assamese, Manipuri, Hindi or Bengali etc. Is this not a

double injustice to our rural youth? Many of our Khasi and Garo students would be left out of colleges and universities and probably our colleges and universities would be filled with non-tribal students who would definitely perform better in CUET. Do the leaders of our state desire to see such development?

Considering all these inequalities in educational privileges, I feel that CUET could turn into a Common University Elimination Test. What we will witness will be the large number of rural tribal students who would have to terminate their education at Class XII. What will happen to the future of these students? It is like closing the door to their dreams and aspirations. I fear that this situation would lead to disorientation of these youth who would probably end up in anti-social activities. As it is now, CUET would spell the doom of our tribal youth. Some opine that this would shake off the self-complacency of our tribal youth and it would be good for them. But my argument is that the discrepancies that exist in our educational system between the rural and the urban settings, are reason

enough not to rush for the implementation of CUET.

Unless and until we are able to provide equal opportunities for quality education to all our rural tribal youth, CUET becomes an unjust educational policy that is meant to victimize the poor and the unprivileged. I hope the government will not be immune to the plight of our rural youth and reconsider the implementation of such policies.

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie sdb,
Via email

State held to ransom by politicians

Editor,
We are thankful to Dr Eladbor Laloo for his timely article on the Umiam reservoir (ST May 12, 2022) and his warning not to dabble with it. Our politicians are in the habit of opening their mouths and ending up in gaffes. Indeed, a little learning is a very dangerous thing. Many of our failed projects would have been otherwise had professionals been allowed to exercise

their minds and execute them instead of bending all the rules to suit those holding political power. How many files have been pushed in the corridor of powers suppressing or setting aside professional/ethical advice? The amount of money and the cut or commission is paramount to any other issue be it the environment or the health of the people. Consider how smoothly the cement company files, the coke factory files, the illegal mining files etc., have passed through without a whimper. Mr Toki Blah mentioned the fertilizer/pesticide file waiting to be passed in spite of scientific evidence that they are detrimental to the health of the people and the environment. Multi-national Corporations(MNCs) and big moneyed people play important roles in impoverishing the people by this invisible slow death. Wake up people!

Yours etc
Torist Mark
Via email

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*"Weakness of attitude becomes
weakness of character."*

--- Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

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Engaging Nepal

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Nepal this week was the first after relations between the two nations got seriously strained over a border row in 2020 and the fifth visit by Modi through his two terms as PM. All is not as rosy now as it had been with the India-Nepal relations when King Birendra ruled this Himalayan nation. The old bonhomie and fraternal relations between Kathmandu and New Delhi began showing strains from the very start of the ushering in of democracy – and end of the monarchy – there by 2008. After the palace coup that saw the assassination of benevolent King Birendra in 2001, his brother Gyanendra ascended the throne but he failed to enjoy the people's trust. The Communists and others waiting in the wings took power and Nepal is passing through a period of internal political strife and frequent change of governments. In between, what hurt India was also the arrival of China there as a fly in the ointment. It might be more than a coincidence that the day of arrival of Prime Minister Modi there also saw his Nepalese counterpart, Sher Bahadur Deuba inaugurating the country's second international airport, built by Nepal with Chinese help in Lumbini -- the birthplace of Lord Buddha. It signified the changing times and the new geopolitical equations at work.

While Modi received a warm welcome in Nepal, the PM described it as a spiritual journey in the context of the Buddhist and Hindu religious links between the two nations. The reference was also to mythology, the marital linkage between Lord Ram and his consort Sita from Nepal. The Shilanyas done by the PM for the India International Centre for Buddhist Culture and Heritage at Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha came after a period of cooling off of the diplomatic relations between the two countries. Several bilateral agreements in the fields of power, education etc have been signed during the PM's visit. All these must have their positive bearing for future relations. Yet, the bad blood created by the Modi government's past responses vis-à-vis the change of the Constitution from Nepal being a Hindu nation to a secular one and of the economic blockade during the Madhesi agitation by Indian-origin people settled in the plains there had left a trail of bitterness. While Afghanistan is a different ball game in view of the Islamic influence, it will do well for India to care for Nepal in more positive ways because of the deeper religious, cultural and geographic links.

The issue of legalised gambling in Meghalaya is of much concern for the church. Now, some pressure groups and political parties have started to join the protest. Keeping these developments in mind, it is important to draw the line somewhere. Who are the genuine complainants and should be listened to? The pressure groups are not really concerned whether gambling is legalised or not. If they are really so, then they should make a bigger noise on the matter. The political parties are just opportunistic and any protest they make is with the knowledge that the church is an important vote bank in Meghalaya. It may not be too visible in Shillong and other towns. But, in villages there have been instances where the church in itself directs the faithful to vote or not vote a particular candidate(s). As such, the brief here is only the church and the state government while factoring the socio-cultural fabric of the people at large.

At the outset, legalised gambling must not be equated with the promotion and encouragement of the activity. They are in truth two different things. Simply because gambling is legalised it does not mean that there will be a mushrooming of gambling parlours. On the contrary, it would discourage those who are in the lookout to open a gambling parlour just for the sake of exploiting money from the people. It would bring in professionalism and control on the activities of a gambling business. This is the biggest advantage of legalised gambling. Under the Meghalaya Regulation of Gaming Act, 2021, license would be issued after due diligence and once operational the gambling parlour would have to abide by the rules and directions as laid down.

Rules on operational procedures are critical in ensuring the interest of the client is protected. Now, there is scope for punitive action if any gambling parlour contravenes the regulations especially in terms of conduct of games and betting. Importantly, age limit for entry can be properly enforced; opening and close

timings adhered to, along with a check on unruly behaviour/excessive drinking, etc. Moreover, localities/areas can be identified beforehand which are appropriate or admissible for setting up of a gambling business. Till today, there is no proper estimate on the economic value of the gambling sector. This is revenue foregone by the state. Legalising it would keep a tab on the number of gambling businesses and their activities and thereby generate returns through taxes.

From a practical view-



point, gambling is basically classified into two - One 'a game of skill' and Two, 'a game of chance'. Today, the game of skill is very common amongst the youth. For example, the English Premier League is very popular and many do play its fantasy football. Depending upon the fantasy team that one selects and plays, one can win points and at the end of it all receive rewards. A similar example for cricket is Dream 11. Moreover, many are already exposed to gambling through online platforms such as Parimatch, betway, 22bet, etc. All of these international platforms allow payments in Indian rupees. In terms of reviews, Parimatch is found to be very popular in India as it provides a whole range of games and betting whereby a participant can bet with an amount as low as Rs. 10/- . Incidentally today, the top bet happening in Parimatch sports is whether Manchester City or Liverpool will win the premier league on 22nd May, 2022. Hence, the real issue is not primarily only of a gambling parlour

as a physical structure. It is about the many who are already involved in online gaming/gambling through their gadgets. Point being, the involvement in a game of skill has the potential to percolate into partaking in a game of chance (explicit gambling). For safeguarding against such pitfalls, legalised gambling can help keep a check on the involvement of youth. In addition, there are many who do gambling as a hobby. These people too are stakeholders and must be included in this debate.

The church has raised the issue of 'morality'. Gambling is immoral and the person who indulges in it is frowned upon. On logical thought, the making of such rigid relationships is problematic. What about corruption, exploitation, extortion, violence, intimidation, etc? Are these not immoral? Morality is not institutional; rather, it is personal. If you like, morality is subjective too. Hence, it would be better if this view of institutionalising a personality trait as an argument against legalised gambling is done away with. The other term used by the church is 'nefarious activities'. To be blunt, it would mean acts such as drinking, unruly behaviour, trouble making, exploitation, prostitution, etc. Yes, it is agreed. These are major concerns indeed. But, are we not already having these problems? It is unfair to just equate everything negative with gambling. For example, take the problem of prostitution. All that one needs to do is take an evening walk in the dark alleys of Khyndai Lad (Police Bazar). Well, one might argue that the problem

has become so rampant now as the sex workers do not have any legal rights. Legalised gambling can help curb this problem. A gambling parlour must be only for game of skill/ chance and nothing more.

In the recent discourse, two rather bizarre arguments have come forth. Firstly, is to allow only tourists into the gambling parlours. This is the most outlandish premise that one can think of. As a business enterprise how would one distinguish between a local and a tourist? By definition, a person from Shillong who goes to Ri-Bhoi district and stays there for a night is also a tourist. What is to be done in such a case? It is like shooting oneself on the foot. The best way forward is regulation to check that only the eligible ones can enter a gambling parlour. Secondly, the image of the people of Meghalaya will be hampered. Well, most people will agree that it is already hampered. Why associate gambling to it? Gambling in itself will not add much to the negative image as much as corruption and unemployment has done. Plus, many people have made Meghalaya a weekend destination for partying and drinking across its hotels, resorts, etc. This goes against the very principle of experience-based and high-end tourism. This is a more important issue that needs redressal because of the sheer numbers it involves. In legalised gambling, licences will be accorded to a few. As far as drinking and merrymaking is concerned, it is open to all.

In the end, gambling is already popular in Meghalaya. The teer counters are aplenty in most localities. It is a game of chance with certain elements of skill such as interpreting dreams. The already existing gambling parlours are also of a good number. Hence, it would be more advantageous to legalise the entire sector not only in terms of money but also in terms of controlling their functioning and their activities. This will also help keep a check on the perceived negative impacts on the socio-cultural fabric.

(The writer teaches at NEHU. Email: benjamin21-in@yahoo.co.in)

LIC and its IPO

By Dechen Bhutia

The Life Insurance Corporation of India, popularly known as LIC, was established on September 1, 1956 by the then Jawaharlal Nehru Government by nationalizing the life insurance business in India, and by amalgamating around 245 life insurance companies that existed at that point in time in India, through LIC Act 1956. One such life insurance company was Bhaskar Insurance Company headquartered in Guwahati, Assam. A primary reason given by the Union Government for the move to nationalize the life insurance industry was the need for long term funds required for the development and economic growth of the country. After over 65 years of existence of LIC, few would actually doubt about it fulfilling its obligation in this respect. In a span of around two to three decades after its birth, LIC became a household name in India, thanks largely to its spirited army of agents. Many times, the agents themselves became members of extended families who could be trusted and consulted, for an array of personal and family issues like those of marriage, match-making, investments, travel, etc.

After the insurance sector was re-opened for private players in 2000, LIC evolved to become an even more trusted organization, taking on multinational companies head-on in competition. There are few organizations worth their salt that have stood their ground as public sector undertaking and fully government owned, till date. After over two decades of opening up of the insurance sector, as mentioned above, LIC is the market leader in life business in India with a market share of 74.58% in policies as of March 31, 2021 (source: Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India, IRDAI). In the last two months of the previous financial year 2021-22, LIC outpaced its private peers with a wide margin to improve its market share at the end of the financial year (source: IRDAI website).

One of the strengths of LIC is because people trust its claim settlements, which remains one of the best both in terms of perception and reality. In 2020-21 financial year, LIC settled 229.15 lakh claims, and the total payout amounted to a whopping INR 1, 47, 754 crores (source: LIC website), over a period of just one year. One of its strengths is its distribution network, with around 3,800 offices and 42,000 franchisee offices, in the form of Life Plus, Premium Points, etc. as on 31st March 2021. This is besides tie ups with around 70 banks, including foreign ones, spanning the length and breadth of the country. Additionally, LIC's mainstay are its marketing intermediaries or Agents who numbered 13.53 lakhs as of 31st March 2021. Agents are the pillars of the stupendous growth of LIC. This is a dedicated group, and has remained loyal to LIC. Even after over two decades of opening up of the insurance industry in India, LIC's nearest rival in agency strength, ICICI-Prudence has around 2 lakh agents.

LIC is also a premier global conglomerate with presence in fourteen countries that include the United Kingdom, Qatar, Oman, Singapore, Bangladesh, Mauritius and Sri Lanka. Its notional share from First Premium Income from foreign operations stand at 3.19% as on 31st March, 2021. As of the same day, LIC's asset was worth INR 38, 04,610 crores, with a life fund of INR 34, 36,686 (source: LIC's press release). As per the survey report released by Brand Finance Insurance 100, LIC ranked the 3rd largest and 10th most valuable brand in the entire world. This is not a mean achievement by a public sector entity in India.

LIC's Golden Jubilee Foundation Trust (LIC GJF), the philanthropic and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) arm of LIC, was

established in 2006, as part of its Golden Jubilee Celebrations. The Foundation contributes towards poverty relief and distress, advancement of education, medical relief and provision for any other objects of general public utility. The Foundation has supported projects ranging from construction of hospitals, school buildings and classrooms, libraries, computer centers, old age homes, hostel buildings for children in tribal areas, vocational training centers for differently abled persons, empowerment of women for livelihood generation so as to provide infrastructural facilities to needy persons in different pockets of the country, etc.

LIC's Golden Jubilee Scholarship Scheme is a unique example of Community Development activity wherein Scholarships are awarded to meritorious students from economically weaker sections of society, to provide them with better opportunities for higher education. LIC also ventured into auxiliary financial services such as LIC Credit Cards, LIC Mutual Funds, Pension Funds, LIC Housing Finance, etc. Accolades and awards are part of LIC's regular routine.

In her budget speech, 2020-21, Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, announced disinvestment of LIC's shares to the public. After many pauses, stops, Covid-19 crisis, and market turmoil, the actual divestment of 3.5% equity shares started on May 2, 2022. The anchor investor portion was fully subscribed on day one itself. Deliberations are ongoing about LIC's share sale. There is a lot of media hype on this. LIC also upped the ante for popularizing the Initial Public Offering (IPO) through its field force as also by massive messaging splashed all over the media. There was speculation of its market valuation being touted to reach INR 14 lakh crore, making it, arguably the largest company in India by market valuation. However, the Russia-Ukraine crisis put paid to all such speculations as the Indian equity markets corrected from its earlier highs. Moreover, many foreign institutional investors were forced to withdraw investments in India to re-deploy these in other markets, including the US market, primarily because of the Ukraine-Russia war as also because of the hawkish stand of the US Federal Reserve. This compelled the Union Government to downsize the offer and lower the market valuation of LIC in accordance with the present global political-economic crisis. Even at these scaled down levels, this IPO of LIC would be the largest ever in the Indian bourses, and the world's fifth largest IPO for 2022.

There are several advantages in being an LIC customer and equity shareholder. Equity market is not everyone's cup of tea because of the risks and complexities involved. However, medium to long term prospects of LIC as a listed company appear decent. LIC would be forced to change track to increase the value of its shares and its shareholders. Certain amendments have also been made in the LIC Act 1956 to increase the surplus share of its shareholders over a period of two to three years to 10%, from the current levels of 5%. The increase in non-participating portfolio of products would also likely enhance returns to shareholders. Being a market leader, LIC can dictate terms to the market to its own advantage. However, there are also a few risks. The Union Government may intervene time and again, as it had done on numerous occasions earlier, to compel LIC to bail itself out or to lend at below market rates. Bureaucratic functioning of LIC may affect its efficiency. However, overall, LIC seems to be in safe hands as of now. LIC's presence in online and digital marketing as also in the banc-assurance channel seems limited.

Letters to the Editor

Water blues and apathy of PHED

Editor,

There is an acute water shortage faced by many homes in the Lumdingsoh (Motinagar) area of Shillong. It is now over 4 months that my tenants and I, along with many other neighbours, have been combatting this crisis that has disrupted our daily lives. We have children, the elderly, and nursing mothers living with us, and each day is a challenge due to the water crisis in the locality. To add to the misery, there has been no help provided or concern shown by the Headman, who has (unfortunately) proven himself to be the embodiment of cruel apathy and crippling impotence, as such display of lack of leadership cuts a sorry figure. Whenever he is approached via call or in-person to discuss the matter, he is quick to excuse himself on grounds of being out of station, which, by the way, is for most parts of the year. At times he perfunctorily asks us to contact the locality plumber. For the record, our locality has no 'active' plumber and residents are left to fend for themselves because a salaried plumber (living off funds from locality residents) decides to take a 'vacation' from the troubles faced by people and keeps his phone switched off.

It is painful to witness the overflow and wastage of water from several leaking pipes of the locality, while in the same area, residents are losing sleep over water

paucity. We are purchasing water every alternate day, while our less-privileged tenants and neighbours are having to run their homes on two precious buckets of water a day. We are desperate, but unwavering in our fight for access to our basic right to water and sanitation that is fundamental to human dignity.

While the world watches the new year unfold with it the devastating saga of clashes between world powers, I appeal to fellow Meghalayans – before we empathize with our brothers and sisters thousands of kilometres away with well-intentioned tweets and hashtags, let us first break the curse of oblivion and aloofness over matters that concern our immediate neighbours. To speak up, when it matters, is the first step.

Yours etc.,
M. Bhattacharya
Via email

Need proper maintenance to our picnic spots

Editor,
Meghalaya is blessed with beautiful natural picnic spots where thousands of tourists converge every day. Our locals earn their livelihoods from serving tourists who come to visit our picnic spots. The pandemic had ruined the livelihoods of many who depend on tourists but with normalcy returning tourists are pouring in but the tourist spots are full of garbage and without any dis-

posal system in place. As a local I am ashamed and saddened that many of our tourist spots charge high entry fees but don't maintain the venues. Tourists have started complaining about the high costs and non-maintenance. One wrong impression from a tourist can discourage hundreds of tourists who wish to visit our state just because of our apathy. Last month a tourist asked me for a washroom at Noh-Ka-Likai but to my surprise the washroom is not maintained. It was dirty and had no water facility. This situation will deter tourists from visiting Meghalaya and the locals will be the losers. Why are entry fees collected if not for maintaining the tourist spots? And who is keeping a tab on all this? If the entry fees are reasonable and well maintained tourists will revisit. Alas! Most people look at immediate profit that can destroy our future.

Yours etc.,
Aiborlang Nongsiej,
Mawkyrwat

Meghalaya State Competitive Exams: Whither transparency?

Editor,

The Letter to the editor, 'MPSC needs Comprehensive reforms' (ST April 14, 2022) which referred to a news report by BJP State Vice President, Bernard N Marak calling for reforms in the recruitment process, is thought provoking. I would like to express my views on how the MPSC can bring

transparency, efficiency, and productive results by adopting some of the transparency measures in the entire recruitment process and the conduct of examinations. Many competitive Exams such as AIEEE (Now JEE), PMT (Now NEET), IBPS, SSC, UPSC, GATE, NIELIT, NIC, ICAR, State Competitive Exams, etc. almost all follow the same procedures, which result in more transparent and unambiguous results based purely on merit. The main reasons that competitive exams in Meghalaya, whether conducted by MPSC, DSC, or Departmental, are being questioned on their transparency is because they adopt the same old methods adopted 5 years ago and will continue to adopt that even 5 years hence.

Referring to the Office Memorandum(OMs) issued by the Personnel and Administrative Reforms(B) Department, to both the DSC and MPSC, there is no rule pointed out in the OMs where the State Level Competitive Exams should refrain from adopting transparency measures in the conduct of examinations. While the manner they conduct the exams may be 100% transparent, does that transparency reflect in the selection of candidates? The Big Question here is how does one justify the effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency in the entire examination and recruitment system?

Many feel that this should be a two-way communication (Bi-Communication) process. We are in the age of 'DIGITISATION', hence conducting online exams in

our State is next to impossible due to many factors. I don't think digitization and online exams are the only ways to ensure transparency. It's just to speed up the entire exam procedure, create a hassle-free environment and quick turnaround time, etc.

There are many ways of adopting transparency measures if the MPSC, DSC etc., want to even within the present pattern of conducting exams. Transparency measures that can be adopted are as follows: a) Having answers keys for different sets of question papers on the official website after the exams. Knowing the answer keys, candidates can evaluate their own performance and they will know their strengths and weaknesses in the subject matter. b) Platforms that allow the candidate to file a representation with regards to the objections/challenges for wrongly printed questions or answers or any contradictory questions/answers found in the question paper. This will help in the marking systems. c) Details of the cut off notification before the next rounds. d) Details of marks secured by the candidate in the main exams before the personal interview f) Details of final results containing the Name, Roll Number, Marks, etc of each candidate.

If these transparency measures are adopted and the detailed results are published in the Official Website then no one can question the transparency in conduct of examination. There will also be no allegations of nepotism, favoritism, or malpractices in the entire recruitment system. There

will be no scope for filing RTI or to knock on the doors of the Court for its intervention. With these measures, I feel as a candidate that the amount I pay for each exam is justified as the process is unambiguous and transparent. Unfortunately, our State Level Exams by MPSC/ DSC, etc. have not adopted even a single transparency measure except the DSC East Garo Hills which declared the Answers Key for the Post of Grade IV held on March 12, 2022). Kudos to the Chairperson, Member Secretary, and the entire members of the DSC East Garo Hills.

True that each recruiting agency abides by the rules and regulations of the Office Memorandum(OMs) issued by the Personnel and Administrative Reforms Department, but having read the OMs there is no rule which prevents the above institutions from releasing the answers keys or from adopting any one of the above transparency measures. As Quoted by the Dalai Lama, "A lack of transparency results in distrust and a deep sense of insecurity."

To conclude, our State Level Competitive Exams organised by the MPSC, DSC need not just urgent and comprehensive reforms but a complete transformation!

Yours etc.,
C.L.Kynshi,
Via email

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"Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be."
— Abraham Lincoln
The Shillong Times
Vol No: LXIV No. 276 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MAY 19, 2022

Serious conflicts of interest
WHEREAS there are strict rules in the bureaucracy about what constitutes conflict of interest, the political class get away with impunity from this ethical dilemma. However, in Meghalaya bureaucrats and police officials too don't care much about steering clear of the conflict of interest zone. In Meghalaya it is common to hear of police officers and bureaucrats also owning coal mines and doing business without batting an eyelid. All politicians also do business and take up contract work either in their own name or do a benami business. That the Minister for Transport and his uncle the PWD Minister should also be shareholders of a construction company that is undertaking most of the roads and building construction work in the state should have constituted a direct conflict of interest but no one seems to care – not the Chief Minister, nor the public. It's almost as if it is expected that ministers should hold an office of profit in the private sector. As a result the quality of the roads and buildings leave much to be desired. Think of the engineers working under the ministers. How can they tell their own minister that a particular road or bridge that's been built is of sub-standard quality? That happens because engineers cannot certify a road or building to be not in compliance with the rules because the moment they do that they will be transferred out of their comfort zones. Hence it's a quid pro quo all the way.

The current PHED minister too is a contractor and we can imagine how the Jal Jeevan Mission is being implemented. We also wonder if there is a state level expert committee looking at the quality of work of the PWD and PHED. Without any evaluation and monitoring agency to go into the quality of the works how can the bills be cleared? The road in Ampati Garo Hills was recently shown to be of very inferior quality with the gravel not bound by bitumen, because too little of the latter was used, again for the contractor to make profit. Firstly, contractors doing such work should be black-listed. Second, they should be questioned why they do such shoddy work.

Undoubtedly, Meghalaya has yet to produce a political party that will bar its members from engaging in business once they are elected. But more than that it is the electorate which should shun these businessmen-politicians because they are the reason why the State is lagging behind and why most of our roads need yearly repair.

Letters to the Editor

Time to audit the MBDA

Editor,
The much-touted IBDLP program was the brainchild of the former CM Dr Mukul Sangma along with his small team who provoked the idea of integrating village communities, livelihoods and environment - a perfect blend of modern and natural adaptations. However, his exit transformed the IBDLP currently known as Meghalaya Basin Development Authority or MBDA into a non-governmental organization with government support as a professional institution. Of late this organization began deviating from its core foundation and more towards money-making with less than 50 percent visibility of any realistic socio-economic transformation. Under MBDA there are various wings and sections each with their own work profile and funding components. The organization has become a hub for consultants from outside the state and some even from within with no experience at all, which puts a big question mark on the efficiency, transparency, productivity and reliability of their interventions. MBDA as of today has become a place for corruption and lack of direction. Their funding partners include JICA, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and other agencies. Perhaps it is time to have a public audit of all its work and the impact of the projects in these past years.

Yours etc,
Chesterfield Khongwar
Shillong - 2

Needed more empathetic policing

Editor,
Through this letter I would like to draw the attention of the readers of this esteemed newspaper regarding many incidents taking place in Jaiaw and its neighbouring localities. As a youth leader born and brought up here, I take it as my sole responsibility to pen down my views over the deteriorating image of Jaiaw today. It is being considered as a no safe-zone for government vehicles, non-tribals and tourists who're visiting here for various purposes. It really pains me to watch this locality which once used to harbour great leaders, intellectuals and distinguished figures like late Bah Neil Nongkynrih, Bah Micheal Syiem, Late Bah Hoover Hynniewta among others. It was a locality known for its cleanliness, high literacy rate and peaceful residential areas but now it is being viewed as an area that is unsafe for citizens from within the state and outside to visit. Solving this issue requires a collective effort from every section of the society such as the Dorbar Shnong, Seng Samla, Seng Kynthei, Seng Longkmei, faith-based organizations, the youth and pressure groups if we really want a permanent solution to this ongoing scenario that we are unfortunately witnessing these days and which is being highlighted in various electronic and print media.

There are many factors which have led to all of this. Personally, I believe the

Rahul damages cause of opposition unity with Udaipur statement
Sonia must intervene to salvage Congress-regional parties relations

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has struck a big blow to the efforts of the opposition parties towards forming a combined front to take on the ruling BJP in the Lok Sabha polls in 2024. Gandhi said in the Congress Chintan Shivir in Udaipur that the Congress is the only alternative to the BJP and the regional parties cannot be the face of the opposition. His view is that the regional parties have no ideology and only the Congress, with its strong ideology, is in a position to fight the BJP.

Rahul's comments are not only politically ill-timed but also factually wrong. Already, the regional parties like the RJD, Trinamool Congress and the JD(S) have reacted angrily. Others like NCP, DMK and Shiv Sena are also feeling the same way. At a time when the Congress president Sonia Gandhi is talking of an alliance of the political parties who are opposed to the BJP rule and underlining the importance of removing the Narendra Modi government from power in the coming Lok Sabha polls, Rahul Gandhi has created a mess. His comments have generated an unnecessary rift between the Congress and the regional parties which are fighting the BJP.

The Congress is the largest opposition party in the country in the anti-BJP camp. Nobody disagrees with that, but the ground reality is that in the last eight years since Narendra Modi took over as the prime minister, the Congress strength has declined steeply, while the regional parties have emerged stronger. Different political parties have varying ideologies, but these parties have fought BJP and defeated them, while the Congress has been defeated in most of the direct fights with the BJP.

Let us look at the facts. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the Congress and the BJP were contestants in 374 seats; the Congress lost in 92 per cent of the seats where it fought the BJP. As against the Congress, other regional parties did much better by fighting the BJP in their respective states. As of now, the Congress runs the state governments on its own in

two — Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh — and is a partner in the ruling coalition in three states, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Jharkhand. The party lost Punjab to AAP in the latest assembly elections and witnessed its worst performance ever in the crucial Uttar Pradesh assembly polls getting only two seats out of the total of 403.

Rahul Gandhi may feel that only the Congress has the ideology to fight BJP, but in all the states which went to polls in the last two years, the regional parties fared much better in defeating the BJP compared to the 'ideology-driven' Congress. In Bengal, in the 2021 assembly elec-



tions, the BJP mobilised all its muscle power and huge financial resources to dethrone the Trinamool government, but it faced its worst defeat. Trinamool got more seats — 213

and winning. In Kerala, the CPI(M)-led Left Front is fighting to keep BJP out and has been successful. In Tamil Nadu, the alliance under the DMK-supreme MK Stalin is doing a fantastic job in keeping the BJP and its ally AIADMK at bay. In fact, the substantially weakened Congress has seats in Lok Sabha in 2019 polls from Tamil Nadu, courtesy DMK, its alliance partner.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, there were 250 direct fights between the Congress and the BJP, and the Congress won just six seats. This itself tells the real story of the preparedness of the Congress in taking on the BJP. In Uttar

Pradesh, out of 80 Lok Sabha seats, the Congress got only one in direct fight against the BJP; in Bihar, the party got one out of 40; in Madhya Pradesh, one out of 28; in

"Different political parties have varying ideologies, but these parties have fought BJP and defeated them, while the Congress has been defeated in most of the direct fights with the BJP."

Chhattisgarh, it got two out of 11; and one in Jharkhand out of 14. In other states like Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi and Himachal, the party got zero seats in 2019 elections. However, last year, the Congress got one Lok Sabha seat in Himachal in the by-election. An analysis of the Congress seats in Lok Sabha now shows that out of its 53 members, 28 are from southern states alone. 15 are from Kerala, 8 from Tamil

Nadu, three from Telangana and one each from Karnataka and Puducherry. In two states, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the Congress got seats due to combined strength of its alliance partners; otherwise, the 2019 tally would have been much lower. This stark reality that the Congress is not the natural party of governance anymore and it has to treat its alliance partners, especially the powerful regional parties with respect, should be recognized by Rahul Gandhi if he really means to work with the regional parties to take on the Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Udaipur Chintan Shivir has laid no clear line on alliances to face the challenge of the BJP in the coming Lok Sabha elections. The poll strategist Prashant Kishor in his recent presentation to the Congress Party underlined the immediate need for finalising the alliance strategy taking into account the strength of the party in the respective states. This can be a three-point strategy. First, there are states where the Congress is the main party contesting the BJP like Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh. In these states, the Congress will be the arbiter and it will depend on the Congress to choose small allies if any. Second, there are states where the Congress is dominant along with another strong ally, like Karnataka. Here the Congress and the other ally have to come to some understanding. And the third category is where the Congress is a minority partner like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Jharkhand where the participating parties will have to decide on the basis of actual strength of the parties at ground level.

There will be states also where the Congress will have to fight with the regional parties, like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and West Bengal. The party will have to do that, but the objective should be to form an understanding in the post Lok Sabha election scenario. The Congress leadership has to show maximum flexibility in dealing with the regional parties if the GoP really wants to emerge as the front runner of the opposition alliance. Rahul Gandhi cannot do that with his latest approach. (IPA Service)

involved in burglary, drugs peddling etc is not a wise approach. Using coercive approaches against certain individuals or groups while applying friendly policing on other illegal activities will automatically be viewed as an apartheid policy that can have undesirable consequences in the long run.

Amidst all of this, the Dorbar Shnong Jaiaw Pylun under the chairmanship of a competent former police officer who's spearheading this with experience, maturity and unbiased approach along with other civil society groups are the reason where we can hope for a better days ahead and a permanent solution because only those who live in there will understand how to deal with internal problems of the locality. External intervention can sometimes be mistaken for aggression that will only add fuel to the fire. Everyone has to play their role in bringing peace and tranquility again to our locality by putting aside all differences but working towards one common goal. Nothing is impossible if we can sit together across the table with the willingness to find a permanent solution and mechanisms to put a halt to all unruly behaviour.

As the President of the Jaiaw Ehrngiew Transport Society (JETS) we had also held a meeting on the May 7, 2022 and decided that we shall extend our support and cooperation to the Dorbar Shnong Jaiaw Pylun in its efforts to address the pressing issues that our community is going through.

Yours etc,
Pynskhemlang W Uriah,
President,
Jaiaw Ehrngiew Transport Society

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Disgraceful cracks in ISBT

Editor,
If the newly inaugurated ISBT at Mawiong is really leaking, then it is a case of serious concern for the state, "Blacklist contractors if found guilty after probe" (ST May 18, 2022). There must be something fishy cooking in the pot of the contract. But that's nothing strange because most contractors in Meghalaya use sub-standard materials while constructing buildings, structures, bridges and roads. Often the roads are repaired without deeply hacking and scrubbing them. This is totally wrong. Many roads repaired in Meghalaya do not last longer than a week. Is this not criminal?

Such devious styles of working have taken a toll on the state for decades. The fact that only certain unscrupulous contractors are awarded the work orders itself is very questionable. The former Chief Minister has also raised his voice against these glaring irregularities. One hopes the Administration will show zero tolerance for corruption and plug all holes and cracks for good. We need to learn from past mistakes and not let a few crackpots squeeze the state's resources dry.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong

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Gyan Vapi to set new course for Indian politics

By Shivaji Sarkar

A chance test case for Shringar Gauri puja outside, the survey for it and the surprise discovery of Shivalinga supposedly the creator and destructor at the old temple of Lord Vishwanath or GyanVapi has charged the political scenario with a religious fervour possibly giving a boost to the preparation for 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Would it make the Congress effort at Udaipur futile and boost up the votaries of Hindutva for a new stretch of political success? It definitely would firm up the religious thrust of Indian politics. Varanasi is the city of Shiv. Adages are there that Shiv used to visit this city from his Himalayan home every year. None possibly expected that the Shiv would come out of a dirty 'vaju' tank in all his manifestation to energise his devotees.

It may be the beginning of a new judicial process that unravels the murky medieval Indian history marked by many demolitions of temples, atrocities and killings. The Gyanvapi can have impact in at least ten different places, where the medieval rulers had taken recourse to extreme brutality of converting religious structures by killing thousands. These are — Kashi Vishwanath-Gyan Vapi in the oldest living city of Varanasi; Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah - 5000-year-old; Rudra Mahalay in Patan, Gujarat; Bhojshala Saraswati Mandir - Kamal Maula mosque at Bhoshala in MP; Adinath Temple - Adina mosque at Pandua, West Bengal; Bhadra Kali Temple - Jama Masjid in Ahmedabad, Gujarat; Vijay Temple - Bijamandal mosque, Vidisha, MP; 27 Hindu and Jain Temples - Quawwatal-ul-Islam Qutb Minar complex; Somnath and Ramjanmabhoomi Temple - now restored.

The Gyan Vapi re-ignites the issue that was supposed to have been settled with the judgment of the Ramjanmabhoomi temple by the Supreme Court. The five Supreme Court judges took note of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act of 1991 that laid down that all shrines will be preserved as inherited by independent India on 15 August 1947. The law made an exception for Ayodhya as it was already an ongoing dispute. Nothing else was deserving of an exception, nor was it legally or constitutionally possible, the judges wrote.

The quick scenario change in the Gyan Vapi incident may raise the question of the validity of the enactment of the Places of Worship law by the Narasimha Rao government. Sentiments are high not only in Varanasi but all over. Seemingly non-partisan people like PK Roy, former executive director, Airports Authority of India in Kolkata; Lalima Aneja Dang, a senior radio producer; Priyadarshi Dutt, author, commentator; former editor of Doordashan Prabhhat Dabral are all charged and advising that it is prudent to settle and not react on this emotive issue. Former Vice Chancellor of Nagpur University SN Pathan and another Vice Chancellor Firoz Bakht Ahmed have appealed to the minorities to correct the steps and maintain harmony. Left leaning Dabral says minorities must rethink despots like Aurangzeb and instead have consideration for the nation and sort it out.

The one common question the non-political elite ask is how could someone treat the revered Shivalinga with such contempt that they established the wash-tank above that. It is difficult to say that it would have the same manifestation and

feelings until the elections or not. The sentiments expressed speak volumes of the hurt feelings.

The nation may recall that since 1949, the Babri structure in all purposes was Ram temple. Emotive issues are not forgotten. That led to the demolition of the structure in 1992. The way the GyanVapi is flaring up now with a non-issue of the plea for right to worship Shringar Gauri images sculpted on the outer wall of the Gyan Vapi to appointment of commissioners to do the survey of the premises and the discovery of Shivalinga indicates that the issue of demolition by Aurangzeb on Sept 2, 1669 can widely impact the course of Indian politics. The Hindutva-oriented parties would have ease in accessing the voters. Those not, would have to find a new political peg to remain relevant and vibrant.

It could start with Hyderabad's Bhagyalakshmi temple. The TRS of Chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao may have to take a stand on the crucial Bhagyalakshmi temple in the Charminar complex. Rao, facing the pincer attacks of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Home Minister Amit Shah may have to stir with deftness. The others and even MIM may pitch in to make the Telangana assembly elections interesting.

Whether Gujarat would like to take up the Bhadrakali and Rudra Mahalaya issues, or Madhya Pradesh ignite the Vidisha and Bojshala or not, developments in the ensuing days would reveal. While in MP and Gujarat, the BJP will try to keep it low key but the opposition is also keen on proving its loyalty to Hindus and can try sailing on it as BJP may look for a chance in Bengal to peg on Adinath, Pandua.

Alok Kumar, president of VHP, an eminent lawyer, is categorical, "There has been no change in the status of the religious structure since 1947, and Hindus have always performed puja at the site" calling it Gyan-Vapi Mandir. VHP national spokesperson Vinod Bansal said the faces of those who were trying to "hide the truth" have been "painted black" with the "findings".

Two days ago at the Udaipur chintan meet Congress supported the 1947 law regarding Gyan Vapi. Today so far it has not come out with a similar supportive statement. In the BJP-only Sangeet Som has threatened a replay of the 1992 'Babri demolition'. But the BJP is happy at the Varanasi court developments giving it time, extending the restrictions at the Gyan Vapi. They being the rulers in UP are acting with caution so that the gains take them to the logical conclusion. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is personally observing each of the developments. J&K PDP leader Mehbooba Mufti slammed the BJP for stoking the fires. It is simple. MIM leader A Owaisi says he is in pain. The Gyan Vapi will decide the religious fervour of Indian politics. The parties not aligned to BJP's view have the challenge to tailor out new strategies. The minorities are in a dilemma. They are not keen on sailing with it or giving up but the voices within are advising them not to get into another confrontation and to solve the matter prudently. Which ever way it develops it would keep Indian politics warm and parties would have to stir cautiously to chart their way to the 2024 Lok Sabha and many assembly elections before that. The churning continues and the nation hopes that solution would emerge for a prosperous, peaceful nation.

"Making a wrong decision is understandable. Refusing to search continually for learning is not."
— Phil Crosby
The Shillong Times
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Defections, political circus
SELF-interest guides politicians of today; not ideology that forms the base and the sine qua non for every political establishment. Politicians are changing their colour with the ease of a chameleon, as is seen in the case of former Punjab PCC chief Sunil Jakhar who, three days after he quit the Congress, was welcomed with open arms by the central BJP leadership. Instances are one too many, as in the case of two young and aspiring politicians – Hardik Patel in Gujarat and Kanhaiya Kumar in Bihar. A poster boy for the CPI, Kumar ditched it and joined the Congress, only to march out of it too within months. Patel, who sought to uphold the cause of his community in Gujarat, ended up in the Congress and became its state-level working president, only to quit it and badmouth it now, saying its leaders are casteist and corrupt. Hints are that he would side with the BJP. Several Congressmen, including legislators, have in recent times quit the Congress party as it fell on bad times. Some have found sanctuary in the TMC, as in Meghalaya and Goa, and others elsewhere where the pastures were greener.

The anti-defection law brought in by Rajiv Gandhi when he was prime minister in the 1980s had stemmed the rot for some years vis-a-vis elected leaders changing their allegiance from one party to another – a situation that had created frequent fall of governments. A stage came when legislators sold themselves out for crores. While the scenario changed for the better, the loopholes in the law are now being exploited by cunning politicians. While the Speaker is vested with powers to disqualify such legislators, there is no time-limit set in the law for him to take a decision. With the result, such cases are kept dragging on for years, as Vice President Venkaiah Naidu recently pointed out and called for suitable amendments and new teeth to the legislation.

The sum and substance of all such indulgences is the disappearance of ideology from the realm of politics. Politics is so vitiated that it is a means for crooks, muscle flexors and schemers to fill their cash-chests. Reason why politics is cited as the best business today, when businessmen themselves make a business out of looting public sector banks and scooting from the scene. Such cases also drag endlessly. Politicians should not be allowed to change colour overnight and join rival political establishments. A commitment to an ideology cannot change so soon. Those who do so are taking the people for granted. Politics cannot be a circus without a ring.

Letters to the Editor

Rejoinder on empathetic policing

Editor,
Apotropos the letter of Pynskhemlang W. Uriah which appeared in your esteemed daily on May 19, 2022 under the caption "Needed more empathetic policing," I have a few points of contrast against the opinion of Mr Uriah where he advocates that unemployment drives youth crazy and makes them resort to assaults, arson and drug menace etc. According to him attacking outsiders is the result of insecurity among the youths. How can attacking outsiders solve the problem of unemployment? In fact we should not envy outsiders as long as they come to serve as wagers of their local employers. One only needs to be vigilant that the wage earner does not become the employer. Jaiaw locality still needs their services in different fields of their trades, viz; technicians who come to help Robert's Hospital to repair its highly sensitive Scanning and X-Ray machines where we don't have local experts.

The recent rise of crime rates in Jaiaw circle cannot be attributed to unemployment alone as the one who has the guts to explore can find alternate avenues. We are all aware that govern-

Did we make a serious mistake in 2018? Whither 2023

By Patricia Mukhim

Elections are eight months away but the knife-sharpening business has begun. Those used to reflecting on the current state of affairs and the political circus happening now where we have lost count of which MLA/MDC is in which political party, have developed either a deep sense of cynicism and hopelessness or are injected by some kind of adrenaline to want to change voter behaviour in 2023. Such is the disenchantment for the politics and politicians of today that even at funeral houses people no longer discuss politics. And if they do, it is with deep disgust. In this situation where the people of Meghalaya by and large seem to be engulfed by a sense of hopelessness it would be intuitive to know why this level of pessimism. What did people expect from the Conrad Sangma led MDA Government and what was not delivered?

There is in Meghalaya today a sharp split along education lines which David Brooks the New York Times columnist calls the 'Diploma Divide' leading to a nightmare aberration. One side of the divide votes for immediate financial gains. The other votes with an eye for more long term gains taking into account the future of their children and grandchildren. Alas! Although the literacy rate in Meghalaya is over 70% it does not necessarily mean that the literate can also think long term. For the large majority suffering from lack of access to healthcare, a timely assistance by way of an ambulance or payment of medical bills by the MLA/MDC will earn the lawmaker eternal gratitude. It was quite a revelation for me to learn from the MDC of Rambrat-Jyngam constituency that he spends an average of Rs 70,000 – 80,000 to pay for the ambulance bill every month. People from West Khasi Hills or other distant districts all want to come to Shillong for treatment. And mind you they won't go to Civil Hospital or Ganesh Das but to the private hospitals. Why? A public representative said people who are seriously ill know that if they go to Civil Hospital they will not come out alive. Every so often the MLA/MDC also has to pay the hospital bills at these private hospitals. Such beneficiaries are eternally mortgaged to their patron saint.

What the public of this state has never questioned is – Why is healthcare so

pathetic? Why are doctors not available at the PHCs every day? Why are medicines not given free to the poor? The health Insurance does not go too far if the health status of the family is bad which is usually the case when people suffer continued anemia and malnutrition. I would like to ask Health Minister, James Sangma if he or his family members would risk being treated at the Shillong or Tura Civil Hospital for any ailment. What prevents people from asking these pertinent questions from the Government in power? Why do we take things lying down? When will we ever rise to claim our rights and not feel that the government is doing us a favour?

Coming to Education, Meghalaya with thousands of agitating teachers, and poor infrastructure in the rural areas and with no monitoring by the District Education

ruption and the deprivation of a functioning health care system and good education not equally bad?

What the politicians have done and are doing is to keep people perpetually dependent on their largesse. Hence they don't think it important to beef up healthcare and education or to build state of the art roads and an agricultural value chain that will not make farmers dependent on the middle-men. As long as people are dependent on politicians for basic needs which ought to be taken care of by the governance system, the politicians will have them where they want them. That's how politicians win elections. So when we say that a particular MLA is good at servicing the constituency what we mean is that the MLA is able to pander to the personal needs of the constituents. Many MLAs misuse the MLA scheme since there is

"There is in Meghalaya today a sharp split along education lines which David Brooks the New York Times columnist calls the 'Diploma Divide' leading to a nightmare aberration. One side of the divide votes for immediate financial gains. The other votes with an eye for more long term gains taking into account the future of their children and grandchildren. Alas! Although the literacy rate in Meghalaya is over 70% it does not necessarily mean that the literate can also think long term."

Officers as to the attendance and quality of teaching, the fate of our students is in the doldrums. Parents who earn a fair amount quickly shift their children to private schools where teaching is a shade better or send them to Shillong at great cost to themselves. How long can this go on? Why do parents not form an association to fight for the rights of their children to quality education? This is where faith institutions come in. Is it not the role of churches and other faith institutions to empower people to question the power holders? Why is the church leadership so subservient to politicians? Why do they love to rub shoulders with politicians instead of standing between the gap on behalf of their congregation? Why do church leaders not teach people to question large scale corruption and to use the Right to Information? Why are they only against legalised gambling? Is cor-

no strict monitoring on how the money is spent.

While discussing politics and how it works in Meghalaya one was told that the voters today expect an aspiring MLA to demonstrate his spending power even before he/she contests the elections. What is it that has turned the electorate so avaricious and calculating? They have learnt with time that once elected an MLA hardly delivers so they demand that he show what all he can give before the elections. But do the voters ever wonder where that money comes from? The Bible says, "The love of money is the root of all evils." In Meghalaya this is so well demonstrated. It just goes to show that there is a huge chasm between what is preached in churches and what is practised in real life.

For most people Power is somehow elsewhere with the malevolent forces who are somewhere out there and

who will stop at nothing. For a long time politicians used fear of the outsider and pitted themselves as protectors from that outsider. Fear revives its own ideology which gets us fearful people in the binary of the oppressor and the oppressed. Fear induces a herd mentality and we begin to vote for someone who makes a hero of himself until we realise that the hero has feet of clay.

The question before us today is whether between now and February 2023 the voters who have been engaging in so many if's and what's and why's and wherefores would not have reached a point of exhaustion and whether they can still get over their fatigue, cynicism and timidity and take their own sides in the fight. Let's not forget that inflation has just made life that much more difficult for the 33% of poor people (BPL) in Meghalaya. The MDA Government has not made any attempt to reduce the affliction of this category of people and will wait for the last month before elections to shower temporary largesse on them which will play the role of an opiate.

The sad reality is that we complain about the terrible choices we make in each election cycle but never organise enough or are imaginative enough to offer ourselves the alternatives that present themselves by way of fresh sets of faces that offer to serve us without buying our votes. It is time to vote with our eyes wide open. It is time to throw out those who have turned the entire political and governance process into a "for profit" activity without fear of retribution. Until about ten years ago there was that floor of decency – a basic minimum standard of behaviour to be an accepted member of society. Today what is outrageous – such as a leak developing in a building (ISBT) inaugurated by no less than the Union Home Minister less than six months after it was made functional, as 'normal.' If we tolerate this and the sunken bridge over the Mawlai-Mawiong bypass then we are tolerating political crimes that have touched the lowest levels of decency.

Today we need to ask the right questions from the politicians who have represented us for the last four years plus. We have to do that to secure our future. We have reached a 'Now or Never' phase in our political journey. We need to act and defeat crass opportunism and greed of the elected.

The entity engages all shades and colours of consultants from outside and from the state as well whose antecedents and experiences are highly questionable. In fact they have no capabilities. Moreover, it is alleged that this entity has become a rehabilitation centre for retired government officials who are not satisfied with their pensions but want to enjoy whatever honey is left over in the government beehive. Not only that, it is also alleged that the entity indulges in rampant corruption and it becomes a milching cow of the higher-ups and those in government.

It becomes urgent, therefore, to immediately overhaul the entire Authority or remove those in higher posts responsible for crippling the MBDA and if the Entity is found to be a liability or no longer serves its purpose then it may also be abolished altogether as its existence is found to be duplicating the functioning of other government agencies/departments.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Sr. Journalist,
Shillong-2

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

Present inflationary spiral is hitting the working poor hardest Time to do away with central cesses on petroleum products

By Sanjay Roy

The country is in the grip of an inflationary spiral resulting in galloping price rise of all essential goods used by the people. This crushing price burden is making life exceedingly difficult for the rural and urban poor.

The retail inflation rate stood at 7.8 per cent for May, the highest in the past eight years; food price inflation surged to 8.38 per cent, the highest in the past seventeen months; and the wholesale price index inflation in April rose to 15.08 per cent, the highest level in the current 2011-12 series.

What do these dry statistics mean for the ordinary people, particularly the poor? In real terms, this translates into increased prices of atta, vegetables, edible oils and cooking gas. It means less to eat for the poor and lower middle class families, cutting out nutritious food for children and the inability to buy any of the goods necessary for a minimum standard of living. The price of atta, a staple of north India has increased by 13 per cent over a period of one year (May 2021-May 2022), milk costs over Rs 50 per litre, cooking oils are priced around Rs 200 per litre and the seasonal prices of vegetables have shot up.

Inflation means loss of livelihood for lakhs of people – street vendors and those surviving by running small businesses. It also hits the small and micro enterprises.



The single biggest factor in the inflationary spiral is the rise in fuel prices. The central government's policy of steady increase in central taxes on petrol, diesel and liquefied gas has led to an unprecedented increase in the price of petrol, diesel and cooking gas. This began much before and the Ukraine war has only aggravated the situation. Since fuel is a universal intermediate, the rise in prices of petrol and diesel, have had a cascading effect on prices of all commodities.

It must be underlined that cesses and surcharges constitute 96 per cent of the central excise duties of petrol and 94 per cent of diesel. The cruelest hike is that of cooking gas cylinders with the price of a domestic 14.2 kg cylinder having increased by Rs 431.50 in one year i.e., 76 per cent increase. The commercial 19 kg cylinder price is now Rs 2,397 i.e., up by 126 per cent.

The Modi government has a shockingly callous attitude to this alarming picture of inflation. On the very day the figures of retail inflation for April were released, the finance ministry sought to portray as if the poor are hurt less by higher prices as compared to the rich. In the monthly economic review report for April it is stated that "Evidence on consumption patterns further suggests that inflation in India has a lesser impact on low-income strata than on high-income groups". The report comes to this conclusion by arguing that the headline retail inflation has varying impact on different segments of the population namely, the top 20 per cent, middle 60 per cent and bottom 20 per cent according to their consumption expenditure.

The spuriousness of the conclusion can be brought out by one aspect of the analysis. The monthly economic report cleverly highlights the change in effective

rate of inflation in various consumption classes in rural and urban areas. Inflation indicates change in price; if in one year the rate is high for the urban poor and in the following year it is relatively lower, then the combined impact in terms of prices would be higher even if the effective inflation rate declines. For instance if the initial price for the urban poor was 100 with a 6.8 per cent increase in the next year it will become 106.8 and then if the effective inflation rate comes down to 5.7 per cent as the report suggests then the effective price at the end of the third year becomes 112.89 (5.7 per cent over 106.8).

So in year one the price was 100 and in year three it becomes 112.89 and this is the highest increase among all consumption classes which the report deceptively hides. For other categories the combined effect is relatively lower, although prices increased for all the groups and for rural and urban. Hence the urban poor are the worst hit even if the effective inflation rate declines from 6.8 per cent to 5.7 per cent.

The idea that inflation affects the richer people more has to be debunked. Inflation directly hits people who earn wage incomes and have low savings to fall back upon and particularly in regard to food inflation those who are net buyers of food. The rich and the upper middle classes can hedge the incomes through

financial instruments and stock markets where prices move along with the inflation rate and hence can protect their income to a large extent.

Inflation generally leads to a transfer of income from the poor to the rich as the poor have no other mechanism to compensate their loss in real income which the rich have. Corporates having control over the market would transfer the burden of higher input costs to the consumers while maintaining their rate of profits. Further, due to inflation, real interest earnings of savers decline while borrowers have to pay lower effective interest rate. Since it is the working people who are largely savers and capitalists who are largely borrowers, here also working people suffer more.

To fight price rise, the Left parties have called for a roll back of all surcharges and cesses on petroleum products which is the only way to bring the prices of petrol and diesel under control. They have also called for the strengthening of the public distribution system by supplying all essential commodities, particularly, cooking oil and pulses. Given the widespread loss of income and livelihoods which worsened during the two year Covid period, they have demanded a cash transfer of Rs 7,500 per month to all non-income tax paying families.

It is these demands to check price-rise along with the urgent steps to be taken to alleviate the problem of unemployment that should become the priority agenda for all the Left and democratic forces. The Left parties have given a call for a nationwide struggle on these demands between May 25-31. Such struggles and movements against price-rise and unemployment should be spread and intensified all over the country. (IPA Service)

law miraculously saved the Khasi communities at the border? It may be recalled that during the celebration of U Tirot Sing's death anniversary last year, another group of goons assaulted not only the driver and helper of Assam registered vehicle but they also assaulted one respected lady of the locality along with her highly educated son while unloading their construction materials in front of their home. We need to re-invent our ideologies to be at par with other people in India. Let not Jaiaw be the epicentre of unlawful activities. We don't want Jaiaw to be declared a "disturbed area" like Jammu and Kashmir just from the misadventure of some vested interests.

Yours etc.,
Bantylli K Chyne,
Via email

Legalised gambling has huge potentials

Editor,
The Special article, "The dynamics of legalized gambling" by Benjamin Lyngdoh (ST May 18, 2022) was a very interesting piece. Lyngdoh's argument is very rational and not emotive for legalizing gambling in Meghalaya. The Logical Indian, an on-line portal says

"underground betting market in India is valued at \$130 bn in 2018". Whoever does not realize that the underground betting market exists has to be an ostrich. On-line gambling has become an industry with huge potential. It could create more jobs for Indians. Deloitte India reported that the on-line gaming sector of the country is estimated to be worth Rs 20,500 crore while KPMG valued it around Rs 9,50,000 crore. India is undoubtedly losing a lot from taxation, and Punter is also at risk of losing money. This is because people betting underground cannot be protected, and there is a lack of promotion for responsible gaming.

Yours etc.
V.K. Lyngdoh,
Via email

Time to abolish MBDA

Editor,
I wish to draw the attention of the Planning Department, Meghalaya, and all the concerned people of the state about the irrelevance and liability of the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA) which was earlier called Integrated Basin Development and Livelihood Promotion (IBDLP) when it was first set up in the state by former CM, Dr Mukul Sangma with all nec-

essary inputs from Mr. RM Mishra, former Commissioner and Secretary, Planning. IBDLP received huge funds (in terms of crores of rupees) to handle in those days together with the budget cuts from various major line departments. All in the name of boosting livelihoods of the people (stakeholders) at the grassroots levels. The promotion programme suffered some infirmities and was limping initially and also many major line departments were unwilling and discontented with slicing from their budgets to converge with IBDLP. Initially the IBDLP tried to meet the core objectives of enhancing the livelihood of the people (stakeholders) but as it went along its journey it drifted and slipped. It was accused of being tempted by big funds and to make hay while the sun shines.

When IBDLP was renamed as Meghalaya Basin Development Authority MBDA it continues to handle huge funds with the help of its partners all in the name of boosting the development of the people (stakeholders) at the grassroots levels. Though the nomenclature is changed, it is still a hub of different wings and sections with their own work profile and funding components but the entity is still in shambles with old work culture, style of functioning and habits and it is far from making any dif-

Top 10 destinations for a summer getaway

It's summer, and travellers are ready to go on vacation after more than two years of staying at home. With international skies now open, this appears to be the best time for Indians to take their dream vacation.

Whether it's a 'dreamcation', a 'staycation', or a 'wellcation', if the desire to travel this summer outpaces one's finances, TNPL (travel now, pay later) service providers are making immediate vacations possible.

Travel bookings have always been stressful for travellers, especially for large-ticket trips where the entire amount is paid upfront for a vacation. Following the pandemic outbreak, travellers plan shorter trips closer to their departure date rather than months in advance. This makes their financial situation even worse.

However, by using the 'travel now, pay later' option available at POS with travel merchants, travellers can pay over time and enjoy a vacation they never thought possible.

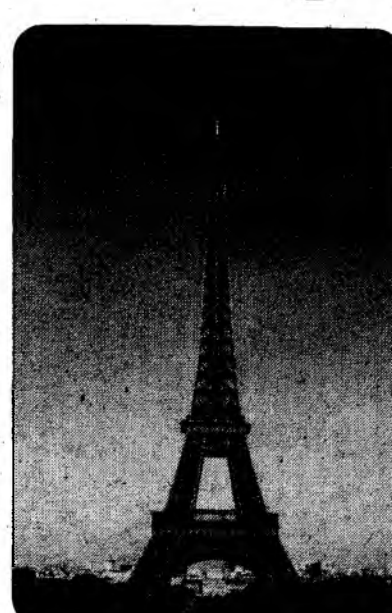
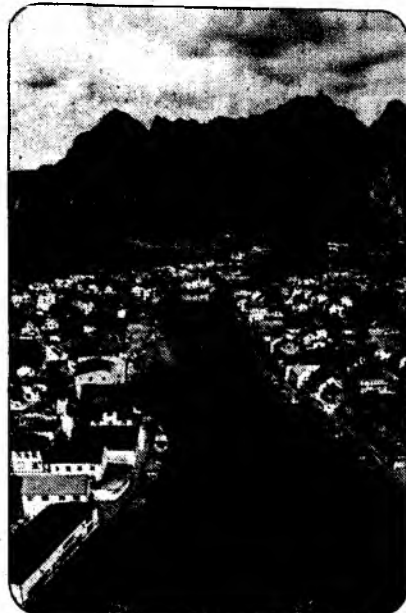
Given the ease of purchase, many international destinations are gaining popularity in the summer of 2022:

Thailand

Why settle for Goa when you can relax on a Thai beach? Travellers are choosing Thailand for its tranquility and thrill after the Thai government removed restrictions and given the benefit of being able to repay for the trip over three to six months. It's no surprise that Thailand is always at the top of the list of travel destinations. Furthermore, Thailand's vibrant nightlife attracts partygoers from all over the world.

Maldives

This summer, the popular honeymoon destination for Indians is no longer only visited by honeymoon-



more affordable by TNPL.

Switzerland

Bookings made through TNPL increased the allure of this chic tourist destination in 2022. Switzerland has breathtaking landscapes, a plethora of cultural experiences, and a plethora of sightseeing opportunities.

Indonesia

Bali is finally open for business after a long wait. With unrivalled scenic beauty and pristine beaches, as well as low prices, it is the next dream destination for anyone who hasn't travelled internationally yet. Furthermore, the annual Bali Arts Festival and Kite Festival, held in June and July, have elevated it to the top of the list for most first-time Southeast Asian visitors.

Greece

Travellers planning their first trip to Europe this year are booking for Greece through the TNPL service. Apart from the delectable cuisine, Greece's immaculate beaches and Greek mythology make it an irresistible summer travel destination.

Italy

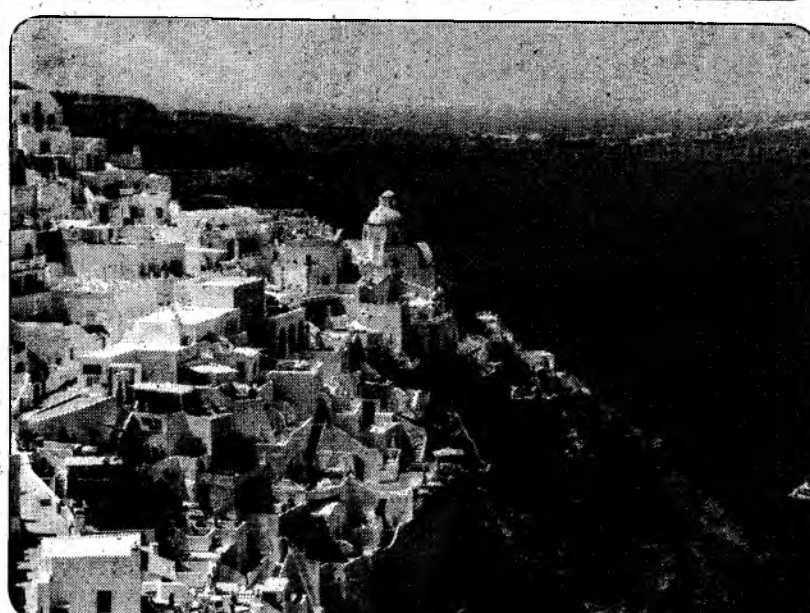
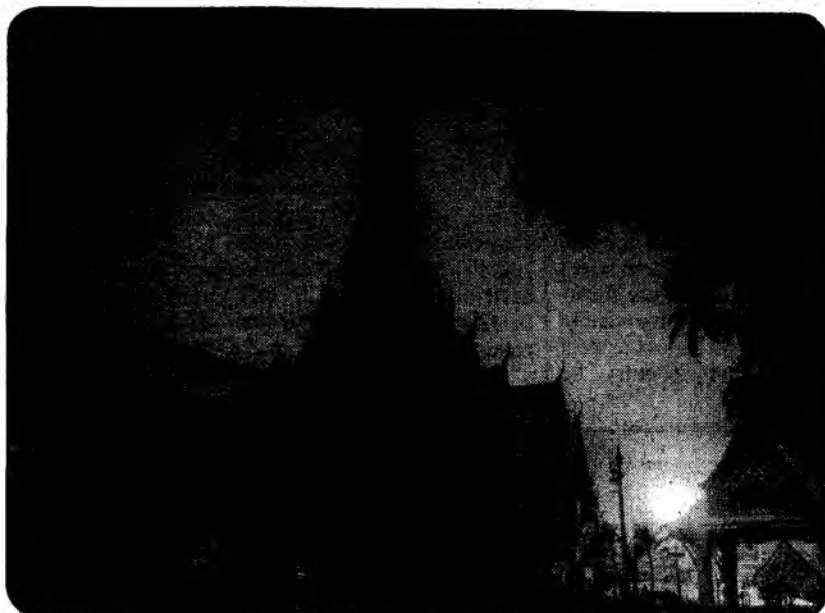
Whether it's the wonderful theatrical performances, art and heritage, or the welcoming nature of the locals, Italy is gradually becoming a must-visit destination for tourists this year.

Paris

This summer, visitors are eager to sample vintage wine and delectable cheese right in the heart of the city of love! For most tourists, experiencing everything spectacular in France's metropolitan city is a dream come true. With so many couples visiting Paris this season, 'travel now, pay later' bookings have reached an all-time high for the city. (LANSlife)

Malaysia

Malaysia, a melting pot of Asian cultures, ethnicities, and languages, is the most sought-after destination in Southeast Asia this year, trailing only Thailand. Malaysia is carving a niche among Asians this season with pocket-friendly packages made even



ers. Aside from being a popular destination for water sports and beaches, the Maldives is also a seafood lover's paradise.

Iceland

While Kashmir and Himachal have their own distinct charms, why pass up the opportunity to experience Iceland's breathtaking

scenery, waterfalls, and glacier lagoons when one can spread the cost? Previously thought to be only for wealthy visitors, the destination is now seeing an increase in bookings from non-wealthy visitors as well.

Norway

This summer, Scandinavia, par-

ticularly Norway, is gaining popularity as a tourist destination for Indians. The allure stems in large part from the diverse landscape of forests, mountains, fjords, and fields, which are a visual treat.

Furthermore, their mouthwatering seafood, fresh vegetables, and organic dairy products are popular with restaurants all over

the world.

Adventure sports that will make you feel alive



Adventure sports have always been an escape from mundane life. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a worldwide lockdown as restrictions forced people to stay indoors. The global health crisis had a huge impact on the adventure sports market, as the aviation and hospitality sectors also bore the brunt. However, with the adventure sports activities gradually opening now, it is time to set yourself free!

India is home to some stunning destinations, which in the last few years have been developed to house some thrilling adventures. Niharika Nigam, Director, Business Development at Jumpin Heights shares adventure sports activities that will help you beat the pandemic blues

and get your adrenaline pumping while exploring some gorgeous landscapes in the most novel ways possible!

Bungee jumping: Quite popular among adrenaline junkies, this extreme adventure sport will make you forget all your worries as you see the world 'upside down' (literally!).

Rishikesh in Uttarakhand touted as the adventure capital of India is home to India's highest Bungee platform standing mighty tall at a height of 83 meters. After operating over 1 lakh jumps there - a global record for adventure tourism in India, they have recently opened their second location in Goa with a whole different vibe of bungee jumping over Mayem Lake in North Goa.

Run by ex-Army officers, and with jump masters trained extensively under experts from New Zealand, they follow Australia and NZ safety standards for Bungee operations. So explore the valleys of Rishikesh or the azure lake of Goa while jumping into their infinity! Take that 'leap of faith' and earn some serious bragging rights!

Giant Swing: This is another extreme adventure, and it can be done solo as well as with two people in tandem. Jump is done from the same Bungee platform in Rishikesh. This is India's most extreme giant swing. You are fitted with a seat and chest harness which is connected to the fixed wire ropes.

On jumping, after an initial free fall, the ropes will smoothly swing you like a pendulum as you are left suspended in the mid-air. This adventure sport allows you to enjoy double the freefall of the bungee, with considerably more speed, and almost as much fear.

Flying Fox: Imagine yourself taking in the bird's eye view of the scenery around you, while being harnessed to the wire on a zip line. Asia's longest flying fox is in Rishikesh where you can fly at 140kph. Accelerate up to speeds of 160 kmph and feel the air gushing past, while you are lowered down to just 7 meters above the river level.

River rafting: Summer is here, with scorching heat increasing day by day, and what would be better than river rafting in white waters at Rishikesh or Manali! The excitement and adrenaline rush you get while riding and tumbling down the

white waters is simply unmatched! Since it is a team sport, it is great for mental health as well as overall well-being. And basically having a splendid day out in the river!

In addition to this, there is paragliding, skiing, and trekking - all available in the country - which can help rejuvenate your senses.

These adventure sports can be enthralling but physically demanding as well. It is advised you do not go for these activities under peer pressure or in questionable settings. Ensure your safety by researching the organisation handling these sports. Make sure they have solid rescue operations and safety procedures in place. Be certain of the expertise of their experts and know your own limits. It is also important to do your own research and see what criteria each of these sports demands.

The pandemic took a toll on overall physical and mental health as lockdown meant a sedentary and restricted life for most of us. Adventure sports can make you feel alive again and help you challenge yourself as these activities are a true test of mental strength. After all, "A life lived without adventure is a life wasted." (LANSlife)

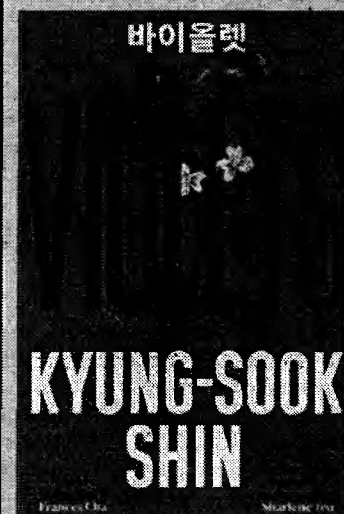
Of thwarted desire, misogyny & erasure

It is the 1970s in rural South Korea and San is alone. She finally finds a friend in a girl called Namae, until one afternoon changes everything. Following a moment of intimacy in a field of minari (a leafy green perennial herb), Namae violently rejects San, setting her on a troubling path.

It is the 1990s and San is 22, when she happens upon a job at a flower shop in Seoul's bustling city centre. Over the course of one hazy, volatile summer, San meets a curious cast of characters - the mute shop owner, a brash co-worker, kind farmers and aggressive customers - and fuelled by a quiet desperation to jump-start her life, she plunges headfirst into obsession with a passing magazine photographer. Throughout it all, San's moment with Namae continues to linger in the back of her mind.

A story of thwarted desire, misogyny and erasure, Kyung-Sook Shin's *Violets* (W&N) reveals the high stakes involved in one woman's desperate search for both autonomy and attachment in an unforgiving society.

Kyung-sook Shin is the author of numerous works of fiction and is one of South Korea's most widely read and acclaimed novelists. She has been honored with the Manhae Literature Prize, the Dong-in Literature Prize, and the Yi Sang Literary Prize, as well as France's Prix de l'Inapereu. She won the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2012 for *Please Look After Mom*, her first book to appear in English. (LANS)



French clothing line making Otaku's dreams come true

If you have a strong or obsessive interest in anime or manga, you are an Otaku. Celio, a French men's clothing line, has made it possible for Otakus to wear their favourite Naruto character with their latest collection.

Speaking to LANSlife Satyen Momaya, CEO, of Celio India, tells about Celio's collaboration with Naruto, a popular Japanese manga series.

Tell us about Celio and its journey in India?

Momaya: Founded in 1978, Celio is a French menswear brand that has become the leading men's ready-to-wear brand in Europe and many other parts of the world. The brand is present in 60 countries with more than 1,100 stores. Decoding trends, to offer smart and contemporary menswear, is the brand's forte. Celio brought a breath of freshness to the Indian fashion scene through its exclusive men's only collections oriented to the different moments of a man's life.

With a range of products that are urban,

smart, elegant and wearable, the brand provides a stylish alternative to today's discerning young male customers and thus captures effortless style for men.

It has been an exciting journey. Last 5 years, we have successfully transformed the company keeping the consumer in the centre of everything we do and bringing the freshness of French fashion in the country along with the Indian sensitive design sensibilities and also winning with consumers. We now have a strong 700+ door presence with 70 retail stores and a strong digital presence across the marketplace and DTC.

Your thoughts on Menswear fashion in India?

Momaya: Men's western wear is huge and within western wear casual and jeanswear growing even faster, we are on the cusp



of huge unorganised moving to branded men's readymade apparel and that is a huge opportunity, for western and international brands what is important is to simultaneously launch the product / fit innovation in the country as they would do it in Milan, Paris, New York or Tokyo.

Trends you've seen in menswear clothing in India and what can be expected in the

coming months?

Momaya: With social media and especially post the pandemic, global boundary barriers have been overcome and we see trends emerging globally being simultaneously adopted in the country.

Sustainability is what the millennials are now taking it more seriously than ever. Casualisation is here to stay and we will see fitness being an important consideration. Hence brands will constantly work on the silhouette, sustainable products and innovation.

Tell us about your new collection

Momaya: The collection is the duality of Sasuke and Naruto, the 2 very important characters of the anime. We play iconic patterns, the Akatsuki (red cloud) and the Naruto pattern with ramen. Naruto is a

huge fan of ramen. The iconic stuff of this collection is the Naruto silhouettes wearing Celio collection. We're very proud of this collaboration.

Upcoming collabs we can expect?

Momaya: We are working on the Korean version of the Money Heist, along with FIFA.

Future plans in India?

Momaya: We are very optimistic about the future growth potential for our brand in the country and the love we are getting from the consumers including the stronger than market recovery post the unlock is wonderful; we are working on strengthening our consumer shopping experience, and we have in place our DTC plan including a retail expansion blueprint, the second half of this year we plan to introduce a new store format and we also have accelerated our actions on the digital blueprint both consumer-facing and supporting other functions in the business. We are looking at growing revenue at a 25 per cent Plus CAGR in the next 3-4 years. (LANSlife)

"It is in your moments of decision
that your destiny is shaped."

— Tony Robbins

The Shillong Times

Vol No LXIV No.281 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MAY 24, 2022

Crisis of confidence

A crisis of confidence in the Government is what strikes at the very heart, soul and spirit of the people of Meghalaya today. The Chief Minister as the head of the MDA Government is not leading the state and its people. He is just managing the Government. This crisis is visible in the growing doubt that people of Meghalaya have about their futures and that of their offsprings. There is a loss of unity of purpose for taking the state to new heights. All these are shattered dreams. The erosion of public confidence in the future of Meghalaya is threatening to destroy its social and political fabric. People are beginning to question their own statuses as citizens and shapers of democracy. They see rulers and those in the power circuit and the cronies turning self-indulgence into a creed. In Meghalaya today human identity is no longer defined by what a person does but by what he/she owns. Meghalaya is in a state of paralysis, stagnation and drift.

The collapse of the dome at the Assembly building now under construction in the New Shillong Township is symbolic of the fall and decay of moral values that defined the people of this state. Now all those virtues have crumbled one by one to be replaced by crass opportunism and greed. All of these new character traits are embodied in the people who are put in charge of governance and of constructing the collective futures of the people of Meghalaya. When contractors are bled dry they will produce sub-standard buildings, bridges and roads. These second and third rate constructions have been exposed by the unprecedented heavy rains. Not that Meghalaya is stranger to such rains but that petty minds driven by greed forget that nature is unforgiving and will sooner than later catch up with the crime and criminals.

The engineer in charge of the Assembly building had the gumption to blame the design and weight of the dome. Why did the engineer not point out those problems at the beginning so that the weight of the dome is properly assessed and the structures on which it would stand could have been reinforced to take that weight? The Assembly is the heartbeat of democracy. The earlier building was gutted 21 years ago and the present one faces a shameful denouement. The question that arises therefore is – Can the Meghalaya Government not get anything right? From sports to education there is a crisis of confidence in the Government. Where is the anti-corruption bureau, the CBI and the Lok Ayukta in all of this?

Letters to the Editor

ST panel discussion on gambling in Meghalaya

Editor,
I was one among many who watched the panel discussion organized by The Shillong Times on the affects of gambling in Meghalaya. panel discussion organized by The Shillong Times. People watched because legalizing gambling is bound to have an impact on the socio-cultural make-up of this tribal state and people were interested to hear the pros and cons of such legalisation. The discussions left some very distinct and disturbing impressions on my mind. Hence this letter!

The first impression was that the first step taken by the MDA Government to legalise gambling in Meghalaya was preceded by nullifying the Meghalaya Prevention of Gambling Act of 1970, in 2021. The 1970 Act was then replaced by The Meghalaya Regulation of Gambling through an Ordinance in 2021. This was probably done to pave the way for the ultimate legalisation of gambling which in turn gave rise to the current controversy on whether to gamble or not to gamble. This was a bit intriguing to say the least.

Legislators of the 1970s must have had genuine reasons to come up with the Prevention of Gambling Act in Meghalaya. By nullifying the above Act, does it imply that those reasons behind the

1970 Act no longer exist or that the 1970 Act has now become irrelevant? Queries to sitting MLAs of this incumbent Legislative Assembly elicited the response that no one remembered any discussions on doing away with the 1970 Act. So, does this mean that nullifying of the 1970 Act was done surreptitiously? If so why? No explanation given! Hence the first impression from the debate is that 'dal mein kuch kala hai'!

The present Government has justified the legalization of gambling in Meghalaya on three grounds. First, it will bring much needed revenue to the State; second it will generate employment; and last that morally and ethically it was alright because locally would in no case be allowed to indulge in gaming and gambling activities. Perhaps, perfectly valid reasons, but the defense of the Government was completely trashed by those in the panel who were anti-gambling. The fault of the MDA Government is in entrusting the defense of the Gambling Act to a young NPP party member who was never involved in Cabinet decisions, nor was he clearly briefed on the merits of the case. This brings me to the second impression, which is, the MDA through its main partner the NPP, lacked the confidence to back up its own decisions, resolutions and laws in the public domain. The NPP youth representative of the Government came out clearly as an innocent sacrificial lamb, a fall guy, sent specifically to argue on behalf of a Government that

fought shy of explaining its stand before the public. Why a senior minister, ideally the taxation Minister himself, could not participate is not understood.

To be fair to the public it needed transparency from the Government on the ongoing controversy. Instead the Government's inability to explain its stand simply enforced the impression that everything is not above board; something fishy must be going on; that the general public is quite justified in smelling a rat in the MDA Government's rush to enforce the Legalisation of Gambling in Meghalaya. Sad. Really sad.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

What a shame Meghalaya!

Editor,
Fifty years of statehood and what do we have to show in terms of development and progress? A grand celebration showcasing a lot of potential with state of the art technology and a program befitting the occasion in different fields of governance, culture and plans for the future. Everything looked spectacular in the virtual space. However, let's talk reality on the ground. What have we really achieved as a state in the last 50 years? Of course there are many individuals who have brought laurels to the state be it in the field of education, sports, art and culture, music etc. but has the state and its government really

in establishing universities, institutes and laboratories. Higher education was subsidized and made accessible to hitherto marginalized sections. As Education was initially on the State List, state governments started different universities. For different historical reasons, the centre also started establishing several universities. The reasons why certain universities were brought under the control of central government, or why the central government went for establishing new universities, varied. The Central University Acts, enacted by Parliament, show that different central universities have different mandates. While some, like Delhi University and JNU, were conceived as national in their scope, some others were established to cater to the needs of particular regions. For example, the NEHU Act clearly spells out that NEHU was set up to address the social, educational and economic needs of the people of the hill areas of the northeast. Establishment of central universities in backward regions was compelled to satisfy the local aspirations for a better future.

On its part, NEHU played a positive role in extending higher education to the hill areas of the northeast. The affirmative admission policy of the university benefited the indigenous tribal communities. Today we see many students who studied in NEHU working as teachers in different colleges and universities in the region. The University and the colleges affiliated to NEHU have shaped the career of different politicians, bureaucrats and writers. During the initial years NEHU played an important role in undertaking descriptive research on history, language, literature, culture, society, politics, and flora and fauna of the region, and brought the specificity of the hill region and its people to the attention of scholars outside the region. Under some visionary Vice-Chancellors, NEHU gained recognition as one of the premier universities in the country. It is sad that NEHU which was making a steady progress met with road blocks in recent decades and some people who felt proud of their association with NEHU earlier have now started thinking differently about the University. Let

us hope that the University surmounts its problems and gets back to the right track in the years to come.

While NEHU is muddling through the quagmire, people may think of other options. The future of higher education in the state cannot and should not depend only on NEHU. The number of students aspiring to have higher education in the state has ballooned over the decades. NEHU has created several departments and increased the student intake in all departments. There has been a growing demand for higher education. UGC has not been providing funds liberally as it used to do earlier. There are hardly any new faculty positions or new buildings in recent years. Starting new departments with two or three teachers serve no public interest. The number of affiliated colleges has increased the load on the exam department and the College Development Council. NEHU cannot efficiently monitor all administrative and qualitative aspects of the UG colleges beyond a point.

All these limitations should compel the people and Government to think of establishing another credible university in the state of Meghalaya. Because of local disadvantages, no premier private universities will be interested in establishing their campus here. Even if they come forward, they would not be of any use to the region, as most people here cannot afford the fee that these private universities charge. Conversely, it also makes little sense to have sub-standard private universities which contribute little to the quality of higher education in the state. Although we know that there are a couple of private universities in the state, their mandate and the reach appear to be limited. Hence, the only alternative is to have a state university, or a university established in partnership with established philanthropic organizations dedicated to public education. Parallel to NEHU, if another credible university takes shape in the state, there will be a healthy competition. The new university can reduce the burden on NEHU to some extent and start relevant academic programs keeping in view the feasibility and the needs of the people. It also

gives the option for students and the UG colleges to decide what is best for them. When the central government tries to impose a policy which is not in the best interest of the state and its people, the state government will have the space to exercise its autonomy if it is a state university.

True, several state universities in the country faltered, because of political interventions, inadequacy of finances, and petty caste / communal politics. But one cannot conclude that all state universities in the country are bad. Well-known Calcutta University, Jadavpur University, Mumbai University, SNDT, Kerala University and University of Madras are state universities only. They are as good as the central universities. If the state government has a long-term vision and if civil society is mature and progressive, establishing another university is not impossible.

The state or state-sponsored university should not become an option to escape the diktats of the central government, or to appease local sentiments. It should be a local university with a global vision. It should protect the local interests without compromising on quality. The university should not become a centre rehabilitating the kith and kin, or end up as a site for pursuing private interests at public expense. As the interests of the students should be the topmost aim, there should not be any compromise on the quality of teachers and officers recruited. For any university, the first few decades are crucial. Experience reveals that the universities collapse when they are not in the hands of competent persons. Thinking beyond ideologies and politics, the government should ensure that only educationists with academic vision and administrative experience hold key positions, such as that of Vice-Chancellor. When Meghalaya has two good universities, they can cater to the growing aspirations of the local people and at the same time, become an educational hub, attracting students from other parts of India and even from neighbouring countries. Cynics doubt such a possibility, but visionaries will concur. Where there is a will, there is always a way.

The author teaches Political Science in NEHU. Email: hskant@gmail.com

what's going on. They're too busy jumping ship and playing musical chairs to strengthen their own five-year plans and with elections round the corner, planning their strategies to stay afloat.

Scams have become the order of the day. Citizens are fed up with the situation. So let's not kid ourselves and stop this statehood celebrations and instead focus on what needs to be done, lest our state literally goes down the drain and we become a laughing stock in the eyes of the country and the world.

Yours etc.,
Angela Lyngdoh,
Shillong -14

A request to MeECL

Editor,
The New Shillong Township is expanding and has now caught up with the suburban areas of Mawksang, Tynring and even Mawpdang. New buildings are coming up and government offices are mushrooming everywhere. Soon these areas will be part of Greater Shillong city. That would ease congestion in the city to a great extent. However, considering that these suburban villages are getting integrated into the city, it is expected that basic facilities like roads, water and electricity be provided adequately just like in other parts of the city. As of today, the road condition has improved tremendously with the completion of the extended old road. Unfortunately, electricity supply has not improved as expected.

While the three-phase current has reached Siejiong and Tynring with new cables placed, Mawpdang which is hardly a kilometer away from Tynring is still running on a single-phase line. Besides that, the line fluctuates and we face additional problem of low voltage.

Our Vendrame Institute in Mawpdang which offers computer training to rural youth, is unable to function normally because we cannot even run one computer at any time of the day. I wonder why MeECL has not extended the three-phase supply to Mawpdang when this area is also fast becoming part of New Shillong. I pity our local youth entrepreneurs who desire to set up workshops like welding and carpentry, but are unable to do so because of poor electricity supply. Consequently, these youths have to go to other villages like Siejiong and Tynring to start such workshops. In fact, the drinking water bottling plant which had operated for some years here, had to be shut down as they could not afford to meet the expenses of running a generator.

I request the MeECL authorities to look into this matter at the earliest and relieve the difficulties faced by the residents of Mawpdang.

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie,
Director, Vendrame Institute, Mawpdang

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

The shocking truth about police encounters

By Jagdish Rattanani

The nation should be shell shocked by the report of an eminent panel set up by the Supreme Court to investigate the death of four accused in the brutal rape and murder case of veterinary doctor (identified only as Ms. Disha) in Hyderabad in 2019. The panel, comprising Justice V S Sirpurkar (retired judge of the Supreme Court), Justice Rekha P Sondur Baldota (former judge of the Bombay High Court) and Dr. D R Kaarthyayan (former CBI director), begin their recommendations in the case of the "encounter" killings with the following words: "Just as mob lynching is unacceptable, so is any idea of instant justice. At any point of time, rule of law must prevail. Punishment for crime has to be only by the procedure established by law."

Their 387-page report is so thorough, meticulous and in graphic detail that it amounts to a conviction of the police and the State machinery for what clearly and beyond any shadow of doubt was a staged encounter in which four accused, three of them juveniles, were killed. Accused Jollu Shiva, Jollu Naveen and Chintakunta Chennakeshavulu were aged 17, 15 and 15 respectively, their ages conclusively proved as reported in school registers. The fact that at least two of these three were juveniles, was

are the local police and the State machinery that not only allowed and probably sanctioned at the highest level such a crime but also did not complete a full and proper investigation of a case that had shocked Telangana and the nation. In that sense, the so-called encounter quietened public anger but it did not do justice to anyone, not even the victim, because the case was not investigated fully and the real culprits probably were never at risk of being caught. The encounter that killed four accused also killed all leads; it killed investigation and it murdered the process by which justice is delivered.

The report by the eminent panel records some of the most ludicrous claims put up by the police – that when taken to the spot for recovery of material evidence, the accused threw mud into the eyes of the police escorts, that they snatched a revolver and fired at the police. One para from the long report illustrates the bankruptcy of the official narrative: "On account of the fact that the allegation of throwing of dust and earth is introduced belatedly and considering the improbabilities in the version, it is to be held that this allegation is an embellishment and introduced only to give a plausible explanation that the accused could 'escape from the custody of such a



clearly known to the police. The fourth accused killed in the "encounter", Mohammed Arif, was 26.

All the four were from poor families – truck drivers and cleaners who were picked up, it appears, not by police but by the owner of the truck that was seen in video footage as the investigation commenced. The report should also be shocking to all of India because it gives a graphic account of how the police functions, almost like rookies who have no clue about anything remotely linked to any formal investigation, let alone investigating a shocking case that led to a nation-wide public outcry.

If 75 years after independence, this is how police operations work in some of the most important cases, then questions need to be asked on the state of the nation itself. Further, the case comes not from what was once the backyards of Bhalagpur but in a thriving State capital that wants to become the technology capital of the nation and attracts investments like Amazon's largest campus anywhere in the world. These modernistic investments and infrastructure still ill at ease with governance structures that live on from pre-historic times. They mock the State, they bring ridicule to its elaborate and carefully constructed norms of due process, and they lower the standing of a nation that seeks to be a global power. It would therefore be legitimate to ask: has India progressed since independence at all or we slipping and heading toward a governance collapse?

The report should further shock the entire cadre of the Indian Police Service officers, who are considered the top echelons of the police bureaucracy but have rarely if ever spoken about the growing menace of staged encounters, the shoddiness of investigations and the lack of anything remotely professional in the functioning of the Indian police. Each and every IPS officer in the nation would hang his or her head in shame on reading this report.

Now in the dock and almost impossible to escape

large contingent of armed police party. When any such mischievous attempt is initiated by one of the accused, the entire police party would get alerted and would thwart all such attempts. Such helplessness could not have been expected even from a layman...

The report illustrates how State-sanctioned killings and mischievous attempts are done – at one level ham-handed but also unfettered by any fear of a follow up. The teams put to this task are so brutalised and confident that there will be no accountability that they care not about a cover for their killings. Linked to this of course is the political class – all parties at all levels – that want quick fixes for potential political trouble on law & order issues and to keep the economy ticking. The nexus of the political-business class stands out clearly, standing as a force called progress and prosperity against the weak and the downtrodden who have little hope of justice from such a system. This is an India-wide divide and it makes the nation weaker even though the numbers on the economic dashboard may look stronger.

The Supreme Court of India has done yeoman service by setting up the panel, which has served the nation by its detailed findings. The report should lead to immediate local area arrests of the guilty policemen but it must also trigger a rethink on the problem of police encounters. All political parties must recognise this as a dangerous decline in standards. IPS officers must speak up. We also need new administrative protocols – sending on compulsory leave top officers in the immediate chain, leading to the IPS officer in charge, as the case is investigated by a judicial panel, will end the sorry case of police encounters right away. Until then, silly stories like the accused threw mud in the eyes of the police will continue to throw mud in the eyes of the nation.

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

"When you don't take a stand against corruption you tacitly support it."
— Kamal Haasan

The Shillong Times

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No to corruption

PUNJAB today shows the way in many respects, thanks mainly to the winds of change that Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann heading the AAP government in the state since March this year has unleashed. It's a little more than two months that this government is wielding power, but a sea change as regards the cleansing of public life is evident there. The sacking of a minister after the CM got wind of his attempt to take a one per cent cut in a government tender was swift as well as affirmative. The minister was put under arrest immediately after being sacked. All this happened in no more than 10 days after the CM received a complaint about wrong-doing. In normal course, what any other CM would do is order an inquiry and buy time, if only to facilitate a clean chit to the minister. Mann and AAP have shown that they are different.

Notably, this is cited to be the second instance in this country where such a sacking of a minister has taken place over a corruption allegation. The first was when Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal sacked a minister in 2015 over corrupt charges. Point to note is, when a chief minister himself is above board, he acts in a tough manner. Allegations fly around in several states that the chief ministers themselves are hugely corrupt. The systems in India are such that they can easily get away with their act. The large army of crooks is having a hand in the honeypot. Much of the loot by politicians is done under the cover of fund collections for the respective parties; most of such money however goes into their own pockets. As in the case of Punjab now, taking a cut for every deal and for every tender has become common practice among those running governments. When ministers are corrupt, bureaucrats take the cue and feel free to engage in more corruption and bribe-taking.

To say that Mann has sent a strong message to the wider political segment or to governing establishments might be wishful thinking. The UPA periods had been known to be hugely corrupt, but the lid was off only when the CAG came up with bombshells. When an upright individual occupies such a position, there will be spilling of beans or tumbling of skeletons from the government's cupboards. That there is 'silence of the grave' now does not necessarily mean things have improved. Rather, there is every indication that the spectre of corruption is steadily growing in this country.

Meghalaya: The Dome of Corruption and Cronyism

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

The first time I heard about the dome scandal was the Teapot Dome scandal in the United States of America. The Teapot Rock or Teapot Dome is a distinctive sedimentary rock formation in Natrona County, Wyoming that lent its name to a nearby oil field and the Teapot Dome was a political scandal that took place during the Presidency of Warren G Harding between 1921 and 1922. According to the United States Senate's Report, "The Wall Street Journal had reported the secret arrangement in which the Secretary of Interior, without competitive bidding, had leased the U.S. Naval oil reserve at Teapot Dome in Wyoming to a private oil company. Thus, on April 15, 1922, the Wyoming Democratic senator John Kendrick moved a resolution against the secret deal and it set in motion one of the most significant investigations in Senate history. Initially, the Republican leadership had thought that it would be a tedious and probably futile inquiry and allowed the panel's most junior minority member, Montana Democrat Thomas Walsh, to chair the panel. The most difficult question facing the Chairman was, "How did Interior Secretary Albert Fall get so rich so quickly? Eventually, the investigation uncovered Albert Fall's shady dealings and Fall would end up as the first former cabinet officer to go to prison. This and a subsequent Senate inquiry triggered several court cases testing the extent of the Senate's investigative powers. One of those cases resulted in the landmark 1927 Supreme Court decision *McGrain v. Daugherty* that, for the first time, explicitly established Congress's right to compel witnesses to testify before its committees".

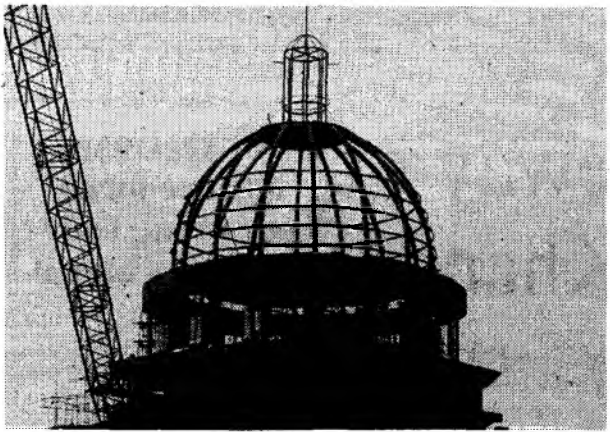
Meghalaya though relatively a small State, explodes with scams and corruption scandals from time to time. The two recent incidents of the leakage at the Inter State Bus Terminus (ISBT) in Mawiong and the collapse of the Dome of the newly constructed Meghalaya Legislative Assembly building at Mawdingdiang are clear manifestations of crony capitalism. Today in Meghalaya corruption has been normalized and is no longer a taboo or something that people are fearful to commit. I will never forget the crassness of the few Church elders and political leaders which one encountered during the campaigns for the anti-corruption legislation via Lokayukta Act, between 2011 and 2014. Till date those so-

called keepers and teachers of morality are openly denying the existential reality of corruption and are in cahoots with the political class who continue to abuse power, assert behavioural control and patronage.

In the aftermath of the fallen Dome there are several questions that I would like to post and challenge: (i) First of all the Executive Engineer of the Public Works Department, who is in-charge of the project rushed in to explain the reasons as to why the Dome had fallen. Was he authorized to respond in such a manner when it is the brief of the Minister or high-ranking officer of the Department who should be doing so? (ii) How quick he was to assess the causes of the damage and "honestly" admitted that the design his department had approved of is flawed (?) Or is he trying to underestimate the intelligence of the citizens? (iv) How did his Department

current Speaker of the State Legislative Assembly is also the President of the political party - United Democratic Party, which is the major partner in the MDA government. In the situation of an alleged scam or corruption in the construction of the newly constructed Legislative Assembly, political analysts would be reading the behaviour of the Speaker while exercising his independence and authority against any form of corruption or illegality which pertains to the construction of his Office and the Temple of Democracy.

Rightfully, the Speaker had expressed shock and dismay at the incident in which the Dome of the Temple of Democracy had fallen and with a sense of urgency had referred the matter to the High Powered Committee in order to examine, assess and report the findings. Respectfully and without malice, Mr Speaker Sir, as a citizen I would also



approve the flawed design and allow the construction to proceed? (v) Will the Executive Engineer and his Department now make public the tendering process and the allocation of all projects under his command?

In a parliamentary democracy the Office of the Speaker in particular and the Legislative Assembly in general are considered to be sacred and no human agency or otherwise can commit any act of sacrilege therein. Unlike in Great Britain, in which the Speaker gives up his/her party membership as soon as he or she assumes the office of Speaker according to the long and well-established convention, in Indian parliamentary history there is neither a rule nor convention that the Speaker of the House has to relinquish his/her party membership, except for Dr Neelam Sanjiva Reddy who formally resigned from his political party after he was elected as the Speaker and also emphasized on the independence of the Speaker. Ironically, in Meghalaya the

like to ask, being the President of the political party, which forms the current coalition government, will you be able to withstand the pulls and pushes if you were to find that government functionaries right up to the Ministerial level are involved in this alleged sacrilege against the Temple of Democracy? Not to question the authority and independence of the Speaker, as citizens we also urge upon the institution of Lokayukta to expeditiously act on the complaint made by Angela Rangad and others against the shoddy constructions of important projects like the ISBT, bridges and roads and also register suo-motu complaint on the collapse of the Dome of the under-construction Legislative Assembly building and begin the proceedings.

The state of affairs in Meghalaya today does not just involve corruption but deep cronyism where government jobs, contracts and other advantages are being awarded to family members, friends or trusted colleagues

and amongst the political class and supportive organizations. It is universally proven that in the neo-liberal era and in the name of development, corruption abounds and it is permeating every walk of life. It is an open secret that no project/work will be allotted without a cut or percentage given to an authority etc. Unlike in the West and developed countries, like in the instant case of the Teapot Dome scandal whereby the top official in the office of Interior in the USA government was indicted and prosecuted, nothing of that sort had been achieved in Meghalaya despite the fact that there were cases of corruption involving high ranking Government officials and political masters in the past few decades.

Hence, I appeal- Dear citizens and my fellow Khasi tribals, whose socio-religious, political, economic and ethical life is grounded on the concept of "kamai ia ka hok" or to earn through just and fair means and by the sweat of one's own brows, should we allow corruption and cronyism to continue to destroy our ethos? Is our Statehood so cheaply gained so as to transform it into the Dome of Corruption and Cronyism? The task, rather the mission before us, is to demythologize the political class and their usurpation. As the election in the State is not too far away, let us begin with electoral politics. That, many government officers who are due to retire and some will be taking voluntary retirement to contest the elections, are making hectic preparations and few even had the tenacity to show their faces in certain political or politically motivated government functions, shows that the rot has begun. Further, how will those officers whose intentions are to contest the up-coming elections not use their power and position to influence people to support them while serving in office? Therefore, corruption and abuse of power start early at the electoral politics for the reason that in India or Meghalaya there is no legal or constitutional provision of a cooling off period, which means that a government official cannot contest any Legislative/Parliament/District Council election within two or three years after retirement. Although there is no cooling off provision, as a conscious electorate we have the power to teach these opportunists a lesson by not electing them. At the same time we must brace ourselves for the challenge and put an end to dynastic politics which is beginning to take roots in Meghalaya.

The failing infrastructure of Meghalaya

By Patrick Kurbah

In the wee hours of Sunday, May 22, accountability of public money was stabbed once again in Meghalaya as the dome of the new assembly building at Mawdingdiang collapsed. As officials and engineers cited technical reasons for the pitiable construction, perhaps to most citizens, it was also a symbolic collapse of the overall infrastructure in the state in recent years.

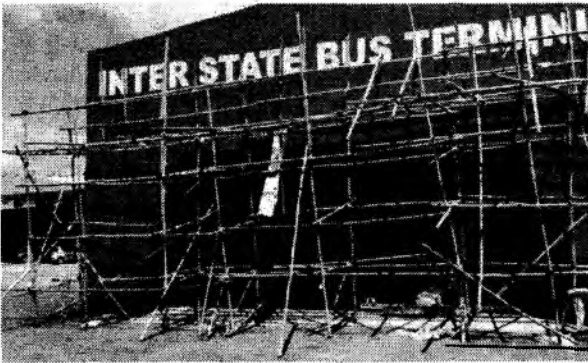
The new assembly building is therefore to be seen as the last nail in the coffin where even something, which directly concerns the legislators, could not be properly constructed. The PWD minister was nowhere to be seen. The assembly speaker, who before the media many times before to intimate the 'successful' progress of the building, went silent.

This, however is not a new phenomenon in Meghalaya. There are countless examples in the recent past which illustrate the health of governance in the state.

Recently, the ISBT project which was completed nearly a decade after it dare of sanction and was constructed by a sitting minister's family firm — the Dhar Construction Company — the Rs. 48.31-crore project has already developed cracks within a year of completion. After all the hullabaloo of having the Home Minister of the country inaugurate it, there is no roadmap now

Shillong bypass will be completed, which broke down after inauguration. No one has examined why the infrastructure was left in a dilapidated manner during the Meghalaya Games. There is no talk on why the Ganol hydro power project — which was started in 2006 — has still not reached completion, in a situation where the state is still battling power-cuts from time-to-time. The list of examples are endless. The list of accountability is non-existent.

But even as we are talking about the failure of infrastructure in Meghalaya, it is quite strange how the current MDA dispensation relies on one spokesperson for defending criticism — the Chief Minister, and sometimes his deputy. The same dispensation goes all gala when it comes to good media publicity. Of course, there can be no room for excuses for the office of the topmost public servant in a state. But it is still quite surprising that in our state, after all that is going wrong across the sectors, only one person engages with the public constantly in a cabinet of 12 ministers. The others have minimum interaction with the public or the media. Going back to the Meghalaya Games for instance, the sports minister was nowhere to be seen. Not even a formal statement had come from the office of the minister. Again, throughout the ISBT saga, the CM bore



on how to repair the infrastructure to bring it to a respectable form. Barring a few activists, no talks have been raked up otherwise on the accountability of the contractor. Moreover, officials and ministers, who would have visited the site in their red-beaconed vehicles during construction, did not bother to think on how the public would commute to-and-fro after the opening of the ISBT. Hence searching for transportation, battling the traffic and bargaining of fares have never been the experiences of VIPs in the state. How do they then understand the plight of the public who are being fleeced by mercenary taxi drivers.

The deputy chief minister of the state who is also the PWD minister-in-charge, went a step ahead to rule out the possibility for any probe into the poor quality construction and instead began assuring the public that the officers concerned would be punished for lapses. How does one figure out which officer is responsible for the lapse without a probe? Also, is the minister concerned not supposed to be held accountable? Did the project pass without his knowledge?

But this has been the model for deflecting responsibility in Meghalaya. "We are looking into the matter..." "The issue is under consideration..." "We will take steps to resolve the matter..." These are common phrases that the public are told almost on a daily basis. There is no information provided to the public on issues which cause distress in their daily lives. No one knows at this moment what has happened to the new site for shifting the Mawlai Marten garbage dumping ground, even as garbage continues to pile up across the state. No one knows when the critical Dwar Ksuid bridge on the

the brunt of public ire. Are the remaining voices in the cabinet to be heard only before the elections? Will they take no accountability for their departments?

Such is the state of governance, politics and accountability in Meghalaya, which translates into the public infrastructure we see around us today. As the public is losing track of which politician moves to which party, the public is also losing track of how many projects have failed in the past and the number of promises that have gone unfulfilled. It is even more appalling that all of this is happening in the year before elections, which is supposedly a sacred year for politicians to suddenly bump up the pace of work for optics. Everything is falling apart even as we find a reason to celebrate 50 years of the state.

Coincidentally, ours is also a state which boasts of quite a few heritage structures, which have been standing strong and sturdy even after a century. Perhaps then, when it comes to new and modern infrastructure, the common man is compelled to think of the profit-driven motives, the siphoning of money, the internal nexus, the overlooking of conflicts-of-interest and the investment in public eyewash as the reasons for failure. But who is to take accountability when all that is happening is political mud-slinging? Where does the public feature in the priority list? Has the common man been reduced to the count of a vote every five years?

It is opportune to end here with a quote of celebrated economist and Nobel laureate Milton Friedman: The government's solution to a problem is usually as bad as the problem.

(The author is an independent legal consultant in Bengaluru)

Heartening news indeed!

Editor,
The news that HH Mohrmen would be contesting the 2023 election from Jowai is good news for the state of Meghalaya. Of course, many journalists/columnists take pains to write to save this wretched state run by a man with an elusive dictatorial and bulldozing mindset and aided and abetted by the lethargic UDP, HSPDP and PDF.

Let us hope that the people of Jowai would not forget the river Myntdu now no longer potable with two powerful politicians allowing JCBs to push all road building debris into the river. People should not forget what this sitting MLA did by dumping sewage at Thomas Jones College or the FCI story with that peculiar bag of rice claimed by the Social Welfare minister to be vitamins. We wish you all the best Ma Mohrmen and hope that there will be many more who will stand on principles and not rely on money power only. Let's remember that it was the politicians who corrupted people by throwing money around during elections. Sadly, now people are addicted to money. But Meghalaya claims to be a Christian state and the Bible says - The love of money is the root of all evils.

Yours etc
F. Lyngdoh
Shillong 14

Why this lapse on part of NEHU?

Editor,
It seems that in most of the situations, NEHU ends up being in the news for the wrong reasons; most recently being the CUET fiasco followed by the Degree Exams for the final semester students. Another issue which NEHU has been sweeping under the carpet for the last two years is the affiliation of departments under the Colleges affiliated to NEHU.

When an affiliated College seeks affiliation for a subject / course of study, NEHU performs an inspection of the resources and one important criterion is the qualification of staff teaching the subject. Following the inspection, a leading College of the State was granted Permanent Affiliation for BCA Course in 2017, while it was still functioning under the Computer Sc. Department. For the purpose of getting affiliated, the teachers serving in the Dept of Computer Sc and having UGC norms were shown to be lecturers of BCA Course.

Once permanent affiliation was obtained, the College Authorities in February 2020 separated BCA from the Computer Science Department and gave it a status of an independent Department.

Thereafter, two unqualified teachers who were not NET qualified became part of the BCA department. This appointment was a clear violation of NEHU Ordinance OB-6, Regulation RB-2, since these teachers did not fulfil UGC norms. On top of it, one of these unqualified teachers was subsequently appointed as Head of Department of BCA! What is very surprising is that there are a number of candidates of our state who have the qualification and are NET qualified but apparently the College Management prefers to stay ignorant.

This matter was brought to the notice of the CDC, NEHU through an RTI and in response the CDC has admitted that there is a violation of NEHU Ordinance OB-6, Regulation RB-2. The Executive Council of NEHU has the power to withdraw permission or any affiliation from a college/institution at any time if it fails to comply with the Rules, Regulations, Statutes, Ordinances or any other directives of the University. Since now it had been established that there was a violation of NEHU Ordinance, it is surprising that the CDC / Executive Council have kept quiet for reasons best known to them! The matter had been brought to the notice of the VC, NEHU but there has been no action as yet.

It is time for NEHU and the Meghalaya Education

Department to take cognizance of this matter and institute an enquiry.

Yours etc
James Lyngdoh
Via email

Taxis looting passengers

Editor,
Through these columns, I would like to inform the aam aadmi — who are burning their pockets in order to reach the ISBT at Mawiong from Shillong to catch their destination buses. You need not depend on the local cabbies in order to reach the ISBT after paying them Rs.300 - 400. You can easily board the All Meghalaya Tourist Maxi Cab, that is, the yellow color Mahindra Maxx from Iewduh, Rilbong Point, Garikhana and get dropped at ISBT. You will be charged only Rs.30. This is while going to ISBT. While coming to Shillong from ISBT, just stand on the roadside outside the ISBT campus for the same yellow Mahindra Maxx. Don't just think that there is no communication left in this hill town barring the plundering local cabbies. You can even board the red color SPTS buses, although they have dwindled in numbers, in order to reach ISBT and back. A good public consciousness can actually prevent the local cabbies from looting unsuspecting passengers. To be aware is to be wise.

Yours etc
BC Paul
Shillong - 4

Of ISI helmet rules

Editor,
The Meghalaya Traffic Police needs to be applauded for their recent notification warning two-wheeler drivers and riders to wear only helmets that have passed the scrutiny of the Indian Standards Institute (ISI) and are therefore considered safe. Indeed, it is a good move to enlighten the public about the need to put on ISI certified helmets for their safety while riding, in place of helmets of inferior quality which are not duly certified as safe. However, I find this a bit of a knee-jerk reaction on the part of the Meghalaya Traffic Police, considering that helmets available in the market are mostly of inferior quality and their brands have not been well established. However, these very same helmets have acquired ISI marking to prove that they are fit for the roads, when actually they are not. For instance, I can bet that brands such as 'Auto Green', as demonstrated by police officials regarding the enforcement on the use of only ISI marked helmets, is one such example of an inferior quality helmet brand having the ISI mark. Such helmets tend to even put the life of riders at great risk. Hence

a thorough examination of the durability and impact resistance of the helmet is imperative before one purchases these safety gears.

Of course, there are Indian produced helmets brands such as 'Studds', 'Vega', 'Steelbird', etc which are of fine quality and meet the standard ISI norms which are advisable for purchase. But the point I am trying to make here is that beyond these fine Indian produced helmets with ISI certification, there are imported brands that are not ISI certified that are available in the market such as 'AGV', 'MT', 'Axxis', 'XLite', etc which are being used by many professional riders here. Hence the Police Department should not just treat them as unsafe. I understand that they might not meet the ISI certification norms but I can vouch that their safety ratings are far above the ISI certified ones. I therefore request the concerned authorities to review this matter of crucial importance, as it is not always that ISI marked helmets are safe, going by their quality. Foreign helmet brands are worth considering if one is concerned about safety although the laws of the land do not recognise them.

Yours etc
Mewan Pariat,
Shillong-2.

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

"We cannot command Nature except by obeying her."

—Francis Bacon

The Shillong Times

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Public response to corruption

MEGHALAYA comprises a largely reticent population that does not care enough to take up cudgels on its own behalf. Those who speak out against corruption and mal-governance are the usual suspects and are residents of Shillong city. Those in the periphery either don't have a platform to voice their concerns or don't want to be on the wrong side of the government. Most people want to keep those in government and politics in good humour in case they need to seek favours. And therein lies the rub. Democracy in this State has created a system of patronage where large sections of the population rely on public representatives for some basic needs such as paying for their medical bills, their children's school fees etc., because they have been reduced to a state of penury. Government schools don't deliver and are not supervised by the Education Department officials. Hence parents are compelled to send their kids to private schools where they have to pay for everything, from uniforms to school books to school fees. This cuts a neat hole in their pockets. Many are pushed to the point where they have to beg their MLA/MDC for money. The culture of dependency develops and public representatives cash in on this enslavement of the electorate.

The point that people miss is that it is the responsibility of public representatives to ensure that government schools work as well or better than private schools. That is a primary onus of governments in a country like India where a large section of the population is poor. It is also the duty of the Government to ensure that good healthcare facilities are provided in every village, Block and Sub-Division. This would make people self-reliant and not dependent on the MLA/MDC to pay for their hospital bills in the city. To access all these public services requires a vigilant citizenry that demands the services as a right and not as political favours. But illiteracy and ignorance of rights places our rural population at a great disadvantage. In such a situation expecting people to raise their voices against corruption is futile.

Add to the above the current inflation rate which is unprecedented. This has made life even more difficult with LPG cylinders touching an all-time high of Rs 1200. But in Meghalaya no matter how high the inflation and the cost of living there is no visible protest. People seem to have accepted everything as a norm. At one time Meghalaya had a people's rally against corruption (PRAC) that brought down a government. Perhaps it is time to start a similar movement to tackle the relentless corruption in the State.

An Andhra Bull in Meghalaya Shop!

By K.N.Kumar

Bad news possibly sells faster and better, so some good stories are either consigned to the back pages or, worse, end up in the Editor's wastepaper bin. Having seen the good and bad sides of governments for many years, I often feel that the best a government does is often submerged by the bad that gets to the Headlines. It does not matter which, but any general reference to the good work done by a government usually elicits a suspicious smirk or a disdainful look among the enlightened citizens I interact with. Unfair imbalance, perhaps, but that is the world we all live in! The democracy's critical wings - the government or the media - are just processes - neither fair nor just and most certainly, not the best. Since I didn't want to wait till the cows come home for the media to pick this story up, I decided to write about some good work done by the Animal Husbandry Department recently.

It is all about a Bull. Yes, an Andhra one at that! So please read on with an open mind and let not the smirk get in between us! Bos indicus cattle breeds are native to India. The high milk-yielding European breeds imported into India are the Bos taurus type. The key identifiable difference is the hump on the back of the Indian cattle breeds. Like the camels, the Indian oxen store food and water in their humps. Ongole is one such breed native to a town by the same name in the Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh. The bull is globally reputed for its sturdiness and majestic looks. It weighs up to half a tonne, is white in colour and thrives well in our country. It is a triple purpose breed - for draught, milk and meat. Its strength and dominating presence make this animal a traditional favourite for the Jallikattu of Tamil Nadu, the rural festivals of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and in the bullfights of Mexico and East Africa.

Regrettably, however, the Ongole declined in our country. While Brazil imported just 100 live Ongole animals from India between 1960-62 and multiplied them into millions, the Ongole population in India came down from

millions to just five lakh animals. The Indian breeds Ongole, Gir, Tarparkar, and Deoni, played a vital role in expanding the cattle wealth of Brazil from 56 million in 1965 to over 220 million in 2015, of which over 165 million are Ongole hybrids. The irony is that Brazil named the hybridized Ongole breeds Godavari, Taj Mahal, etc.; today, 65% of the global beef trade revolves around the pure or hybridized breeds derived from the Ongole breed. Brazil dominates the global trade.

India is now trying to import germplasm from Brazil to revive the Ongole breed. So much for our sense of preserving our biodiversity! Why did we fail? Because to begin with, (1) as a nation, we undervalue our natural endowments and overvalue anything western. As a result, 75 years after independence, we still behave like slaves, and (2) we don't invest in research and technology to further improve what is ours. I could go on, but I will reserve it for another day. One of the key reasons why we drove Ongole to near extinction is because we indiscriminately imported high milk-yielding breeds native to European countries. Their genetics have unequivocally destroyed the native pure-bred cattle population across the country.

Okay, so far, so bad! Then how does Meghalaya get into this story? It was the brainwave of G.H.P. Raju, the Principal Secretary, AH & Vety., who, being an Andhra man, had a clue about the Ongole breed. He conceptualized a Breed Improvement Programme on a pilot basis and managed to procure 3200 doses of FSS (Frozen Semen Straws) of Ongole Breed from the Government Farm at Lam, near Guntur (AP). Dr Amit Lamare at the Indo-Danish cattle farm at Upper Shillong is his ally in this project. The pilot project to cross the high milk-yielding Holstein Friesen (HF) cattle with Ongole breed through artificial insemination (AI) commenced in December 2020 to produce the first-generation progeny (technically, F1).

FSS technology is widely used in Cattle development programmes all over the world. Deep freezing of semen increases the life span of spermatozoa as they go into suspended animation. Transportation to any remote place in liquid nitrogen in cryo- tanks without damaging the quality is now possible. The F1 progeny will carry the genetic traits (50%) of Holstein Friesian - so they continue to be high milk yielders, while the 50% Ongole lends higher muscle mass and hence, more meat. By April 2022, two thousand doses of Ongole FSS have been sent to the 57 Stockman Centres across the state, and 780 doses of Ongole FSS have been administered to the non-descript native cattle. More than 100 calves have already been born, and more are due for delivery over the next three to four months.

Parallely, 200 doses of Ongole FSS have been earmarked for the IDP (Indo-Danish Project), Upper Shillong, to undertake the research and determine the performance of the F1 progeny on 13 parameters including the rapidity of the weight gain, feed conversion ratio, etc. Already 76 calves are born at the IDP, and their energy has to be seen to be believed. The Chief Minister will hand a dozen of these male heifers over to the model villages on 25th May 2022. They will now join the cowherds and get ready for natural servicing in due course of time. The project seeks to cover one lakh non-descript (ND) cows annually, so at least a thousand F1 males must be inducted annually over the next decade. The F1 Males will cross with the local ND cows, and the game will start changing in terms of higher milk and meat production once the next generation (F2) animals arrive in the field because the F2 animals perform better than the local animals in milk and meat. They are also easy to inseminate artificially because they are less aggressive than the local ND cows. Moreover, the heat age will come down substantially because the ND cows take up to four years to come to

heat, while the F2 hybrids may take half that time. So, the farmer will benefit from a better economic return on the capital employed because of a faster turnaround.

Whatever has happened so far is just baby steps. We have a long way to go, but the direction is right. Meghalaya has an estimated four lakh non-descript (ND) cows that are low milk and meat yielders. Ours being a milk and meat deficit state, we have much work to do before achieving a semblance of self-sufficiency. It may surprise many that almost all of our annual milk production of ten crore litres comes from just 50,000 exotic cows (mostly HF and Jersey). After the launching of Milk Mission, the number of the Dairy Cooperative Societies has increased from a mere two to 118. Likewise, we import about 50000 bovines annually to meet the state's meat needs. So, it is a matter of food security for a land-locked state with difficult logistics.

So, what should we do? There are six action points: (1) Because the solution lies in improving the breed quality of the non-descript cows of the state undertaking a mission mode approach to artificially inseminate them with the HF and Jersey for milk, and with Ongole for meat is the way forward. My compliments to the Department for thinking right. (2) Establish a Non-descript Breed Improvement Farm (NDBIF) at any suitable location in our state with a production capacity of at least a thousand F1 progeny a year. Ongole parent stock will moderately improve the milk yield but substantially improve the meat yield. (3) Incentivize the farmers who want their cows to switch from natural servicing to Artificial Insemination (4) Increase the number of private A.I. Workers substantially from the present number of about 180. (5) Reserve the HF and Jersey for the Dairy Cooperative Societies (DSC) and earmark the Ongole FSS to enhance the meat production, and (6) Encourage the private entrepreneurs to get into breed improvement business by evolving a scheme. And my sincere compliments to the Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary for doing something remarkable.

Meghalaya's malaise of corruption & its kleptocrats

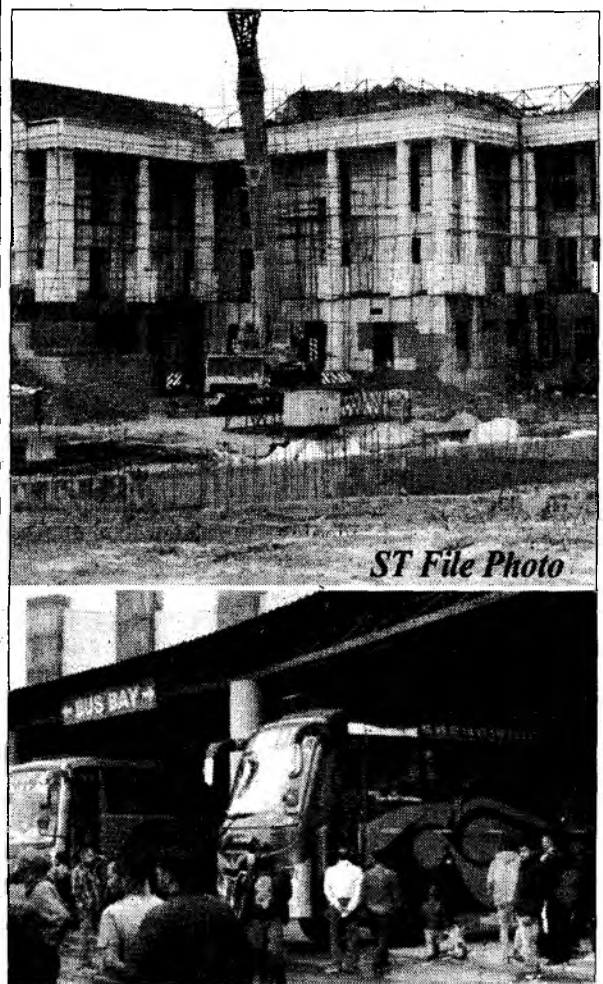
By Lyzander Sohkhlet

Meghalaya the "Abode of Clouds", "The Scotland Of the East" - the famed monsoons, the rich traditional festivals, and the dramatic terrain is the reputation that Meghalaya has. But today we talk about the other side of Meghalaya. The Meghalaya that is falling apart, right before our very own eyes. Recently, we have all read about the New Assembly, Dome collapse, The Inter-State Bus Terminus incident, and the devastating state of our roads to name a few, and the causes of these have been stated as "An inherent flaw during the design stage" or they are just blaming the weather. But we all know that this isn't just a design flaw, but systematic corruption happening right in front of us.

Corruption is normalized in Meghalaya. The illegal coal mining that goes on every day, the trucks turn turtle and vomit the coal they carry. And the government has the audacity to deny it ever happening! On May 24, 2022, a preliminary report revealed that the authorities in Meghalaya have failed to comply

2018 grew his assets from 2.9 to 6.4 crores in 5 years. Are politicians like him using their political power to appropriate the wealth of the people they govern by embezzling or misappropriating government schemes and policies? They should increase transparency by stating the kind of businesses they are in and filing appropriate documents. There are always investigations, but the reports are never made public.

However, the truth is that we are at fault for these unfortunate events happening in the state. Weren't we the ones who elected these people in the first place? The state is run by individuals that rob us in broad daylight, driving their luxury boy toys on broken eroded, pot-holed roads, driving past children that are dying from avoidable diseases, and going to bed without food because they refuse to improve our system but are ambitious about further extending their bank accounts. We're not human beings, our families



Will the Dome collapse be MDA's Waterloo?

Editor,
The old Assembly building with all its grandeur of an Assam teak structure of Burmese taste and CI sheets of that era was sadly destroyed by fire on the fateful day of January of 2001. Four generations of governments had finally culminated in the new Assembly building at Greater Shillong, with few days left for its grand inauguration. It is a modern piece of engineering though the dome is in the era of thousand years BC.

Dome were built primarily to withstand earthquakes. It was primitive engineering when the Nile possessed fine quality river sand and limestone for mortar. An egg was the guiding principle for dome structural engineering because if one tries to crack an egg vertically, one would never succeed. Hence all those arguments by the PWD or the Uttar Pradesh Institute are totally false. Our experienced architect as told, were not consulted. The dome collapsed on account of corruption that sadly has turned cancerous at the last stages with Meghalaya having a slim chance of survival.

From 2018 to Sunday May 22, 2022 saw a span of activities. In 2014, NGT banned coal mining. In a split second declaration, 34 lakhs metric ton of coal was already mined. As vast as Meghalaya is from Garo Hills to West Khasi to Jaintia Hills, it was a marvel of weights and measures

that such pin-pointed accuracy could be achieved. With the entry of the 12 and 16 wheeler trucks the new theory of Meghalaya coal turns out to be "Coal Dies By Milligram And Grows By Metric Tonnes".

The worst hit were the rat hole miners who returned home to watch their loved ones face near starvation. They soon returned to be trapped in the Ksan coal mine 14 Km from Khliehriat, the headquarter of East Jaintia Hills. 16 miners perished with no compensation whatsoever. Notwithstanding the tragedy all these activities continued and two activists wishing to expose the breach of NGT ban were seriously attacked at Wapung even while the CM refused CBI enquiry.

The other tragedy took place at Shallang. These were the publicised ones among many hushed up. The Dwarak-said Bailey Bridge is another controversy for how could NHAI leave it to a private contractor? So the bridge snapped. Prayers echoed all over Meghalaya as all the 12 and 16 wheelers were routed through the Umiam bridge over the dam. If this dam collapses Meghalaya would be plunged into darkness for one century as 174 Mw would be lost.

Corruption again became an issue when JJM was started. This time the concerned PHE minister had to request certifying engineers to be more forgiving even when low quality pipes were used. Climate Change had reduced the power of river Kynshi to give us quality sand. The result is devastating as the certifying engineers succumb to the rank and file and sup-

pliers with truckloads of fake river sand began operating. Set a thief to catch the thief requires us to mix around. The cement used for buildings was of inferior quality when the mixing ratio of cement to chips and sand needs better quality cement. The public need to be vigilant as all that glitters is not gold. But with no functioning Lok Adalat, the public are heavily duped, especially the poor and marginalized of society.

Then comes the auction of the red buses only after 9 years of carrying passengers. Most of the red buses were sold as junk to the lowest bidder. And we were silent on this as there was no follow up on the exchange between the seller and buyer. At present the carcasses of those red buses are lying next to the highway at Mawblei where stray dogs are taking shelter.

Next comes the ISBT costing over Rs 40 crore but with the roof and walls now leaking. And last but not least the DOME. It was shocking as we learned from our prominent local architects and few judicious PWD engineers that the MDA Govt engaged the wrong firm from Uttar Pradesh. Making a dome is not rocket science. Even so, if at all outside technical support was needed then IIT Kanpur, Kharagpur, Bombay could have been consulted.

The Govt's explanations were meant to deceive. With 4 cms rain and no seismic disturbance felt, the Dome yielded to its own weight. And when great men fall, the tremors are felt across India and the world too. Will this dome collapse be the Waterloo for the MDA Government? If the electorate does not remember this

incident and continues to vote for the MDA then it will be a Waterloo for Meghalaya and its people.

Yours etc.,
W. Passah,
Nongkrem

Tawdry practices: Who do we blame?

Editor,
Meghalaya seems to be suddenly swimming in troubled waters with tawdry construction works being exposed on a daily basis. Days after the revelation of the poor construction work of the ISBT building and the Mawli bypass bridge, Sunday was another revelation day with the steel dome at the newly under construction Assembly building at Mawdingdiang suffering a fateful fall as it collapsed and crumbled to dust.

Interestingly, the PWD (Buildings) Executive Engineer, Ransom Sutnga who has been overseeing the construction blamed the unfortunate incident on the weight of the dome being too much to bear for the columns and the beams. But could this not have been calculated? How much support is needed for a certain weight? It would also be wise to question the involvement of the Speaker, Metbah Lyngdoh who is also the one monitoring the construction work. Monitoring ensures that everything goes smoothly, with no defects but sad to say, the Speaker's monitoring skills need a bit of a brush-up. It was hoped that the new assembly building was going to be completed by August and scheduled to

be inaugurated by September this year. Apparently, another eight to nine months is needed to come up with another design model for the dome, which is an integral structure of the building. If this is the case, then we can surely say goodbye to the hope of seeing the inauguration of the building by this year as the month of May is already on its way out.

The shoddy construction work exposes the corrupt practices of government departments and officials who clearly seem to be unable to do their jobs well. It seems that improper and inferior construction practices are getting a stronghold in Meghalaya with everything - from buildings to roads and bridges breaking down. Construction defects are unavoidable, but unfortunately, this is happening way too often in our state which makes me wonder, why our officials and government departments are so irresponsible not to inspect that all structures are carefully designed and constructed in a manner that will not cause damage to lives and property. Meghalaya already falls under the category of 'Zone V' - a high seismic zone area and if we keep tolerating inferior construction activities then when an earthquake strikes us, we shall see buildings collapsing and roads opening up to devour us all.

The harsh reality of Meghalaya today is that we seem to have incapable leaders at the helm of affairs. Corruption has always borne its roots in various departments in Meghalaya, and this is no less for departments such as the PWD, which has always been in the limelight as one among many other depart-

ments where corrupt practices are clearly visible.

50 years of Meghalaya and such is the plight of this state. Our progress is slow and the collapsed dome is an eyesore, making us all wonder why we cannot have able leaders who are not greedy but will work for the good of the state and its people. Or is this too much to ask?

Yours etc.,
Cassandra Gathphoh
Shillong - 14

Rejoinder from MeECL

Editor,
Apropos, the letter to the editor which appeared in The Shillong Times on May 21, 2022 captioned "Complaint against MePDCL at Lapalag," the Corporation would like to issue the following clarifications:-

1. The Collection Counter at Lapalag is a site collection one and opens on due date only.

2. On that particular day the vehicle sent to pick up staff for duty, computers, printers, security staff etc., was stuck in a traffic jam.

3. Due to the above reasons, there was a delay in opening the counter. The respected consumer was agitated and in order to avoid further complications the counter was closed for some time and after the normal situation prevailed, it was opened up for the services of esteemed consumers.

Yours etc.,
Shri. A.K Jain
Public Relations Officer
MeECL, Shillong

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

with directions issued by the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to check illegal coal mining. Needless to say, the government officials were always the elephant in the room, as they are hands-in-gloves in this murky trade.

On June 10, 2021 our Education Minister himself admitted "Meghalaya is the 'worst' in school education, but things will improve." But will they really? The State's current education system is disastrous. There are more students dropping out than ever, our very own teachers are unpaid, and they are forced to the streets to air their grievances. Our educational infrastructure is in a pitiable condition. Schools are basically falling apart, and a report from the Ministry of Education states that 80-90% of government schools "are not compliant with the complete set of RTE infrastructure indicators as per the Performance Grading Index (PGI)." And on the issue of sports, the living conditions of athletes are pathetic; the toilets are in shambles, and running out of medals and we are expected to host the National Games in 2023? Do our so-called "leaders" have no shame?

While reading through reports by adria.org the asset comparison of re-contesting candidates has an estimated growth of 250%. One that really caught my eye is our very own Minister Of Urban Affairs PWD (buildings) the very Minister that is in charge of the Assembly Project whose assets grew by 39,439 % (thirty-nine thousand, four hundred and thirty-nine percent) from 2008 to 2013 and then as of

don't matter, they see you as votes to be manipulated during each election. They don't want to talk about the real issues, instead, they talk about our religion and our differences, and what is going to make us vote for him/her instead of the other. All we see today are our politicians changing jerseys that suit their personal interests.

Meghalaya's politicians are no longer politicians, but Kleptocrats. The only difference between a petty criminal and a politician is that a politician wears lavish suits and throws lavish parties. The hypocrisy is when these very people attend church every Sunday to "clear their conscience." The rampant corruption reflects the failure of the church to stand up for the truth and challenge its members, but instead become a part of the corruption.

Every conversation is about religion, every conversation is about our differences. We've just been taught to hate each other. We've been taught that the Muslims are violent and the Hindus want to take over? When we are actually going to talk about the real issues? Inflation is at its highest, petrol prices shooting through the roof. Our government is supposed to provide education, health, electricity, clean water, and affordable food. These are the basic requirements and there isn't a single thing on that list that we are getting today. The truth is that while our politicians are glittering with wealth on the surface, buying flashy cars and luxury buildings, and throwing flamboyant weddings for their children, the people are rotting underneath.

"Luck is a dividend of sweat. The more you sweat, the luckier you get."
— Ray Kroc
The Shillong Times
Vol No: LXIV No. 284 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, MAY 27, 2022

‘Seats’ and politics
THE exit of another ‘veteran’ from the Congress party in the person of Supreme Court lawyer and former Union Law Minister Kapil Sibal is by no means an earth-shaking event. This is evident also from the fact that even 10 Janpath has taken it stoically. It remains to be seen whether there will be more such resignations from the Congress party, especially of the G23 set like Ghulam Nabi Azad who are feeling uncomfortable within the Grand Old Party. They have fewer options, though. The only political establishment that has clout now at the national level is the BJP; and its ideology is far removed from that of the Congress. A Chintan Shrivastava by itself has not added any new energy to the Congress party’s weak leadership.

A politician has every right to shift his allegiance though cross-connections will have their inherent perils. The hoi polloi might vote with their feet and sans any brain power, but they are also increasingly becoming discerning, thanks to the reach of television into ordinary homes. Even the large army of India’s illiterate is now up-to-date with news. One cannot bluff his way to glory. Kapil Sibal opted to land in the wrong boat if one were to look at the character and class of the Samajwadi Party (SP) that has welcomed him into its fold. The UP-centric party is in essence a family enterprise with its base among the Backward Class Yadavs. A Jalandhar-born Punjabi of the elitist breed could be the odd man out there. The disconnect is glaring. The reason for this migration is all too obvious: the offer of a Rajya Sabha seat to the 73-year-old leader, when the Congress party is putting its old hats in retirement mode.

For the SP or Akhilesh Yadav, what benefit they get from this ‘adoption’ of a rank outsider is not clear. Sibal has no fan-following even in Delhi or Punjab and yet he could be of use to SP – to fight its cases in Supreme Court. In the process, however, both sides have shamed the political turf. So is the case with the ageing Shatrughan Sinha in the Bengali-centric Trinamool Congress, after he got out of the BJP, coursed through the Congress without any gain and reached the TMC ranks when he got an offer of a Parliament seat. The gain for TMC was that it helped Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee to project her local outfit as a national party. Suffice it to say the harm these migratory birds cause to the character of politics is huge.

Letters to the Editor

Financial prudence flies out of the window

Editor,
Sri Lanka’s financial crisis is basically a balance of payment (BOP) crisis. Imports are way higher than exports and now there is not enough money on its foreign exchange reserves to import even basic essentials. India faced a similar crisis in 1991. At the height of the BOP crisis, India’s foreign exchange reserves were sufficient to pay for only two weeks of imports.

Financial prudence should always be the name of the game. At the personal level, we Khasis have a saying, “Bam hati, kit kulai”. Eat like an elephant, carry like a horse. This saying serves as a warning for us to live within our means. Imports exceeding exports by a huge margin basically mean the same thing. A country spends more than it earns.

The NPP-led government here in Meghalaya has been borrowing left right and centre since it came to power. Financial prudence has gone out of the window. The sad part is that it looks like the UDP is a tamed partner. To the people of the State it looks like the UDP basically has no say in the matter. One of the UDP’s economic advisers is an Economics

Professor from NEHU but it looks like the ruling coalition doesn’t listen to any sound advice. Our State is going down the drain, financial prudence is thrown out of the window all because we’re too timid to take responsibility and rule. I think jingbishingjinhpihuin (jealousy) has a big role to play in preventing one from among us becoming the Chief Minister of Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,
Gary Marbaniang,
Via email.

Bags of burden

Editor,
As a concerned parent of a child studying in a private educational institution in Shillong, I am constrained to voice my disdain on the way the school is treating its children. On May 17, 2019, the Govt of Meghalaya vide its Press Release 223/19 had notified the weight of school bags for various classes. Sadly, there seems to be a total disregard for this Govt notification since the children are being forced to carry school bags much heavier than the prescribed limits set. To add to their woes, the standstill traffic of Shillong and the inclement weather force the children to shoulder their heavy bags on foot to make it to school on time. The school management should be sensitive to this atrocity on the hapless children and the Education department should enforce

this Notification strictly for the health and development of the child.

Secondly, the Notification above clearly states that Schools shall not assign homework to children except those recommended by MBOSE/ICSE/CBSE. On the contrary, children are being burdened by homework everyday even during the conduct of Tests and Exams. If there is such an enabling provision, then the school should notify the parents and students the nature of homework recommended by MBOSE. This regressive pattern of education of unwarranted homework seems to be more on the whims and fancies of the teachers to complete the syllabus.

I need to emphasize on the National Education Policy 2020 in which it has been stated that a good education institution is one in which every student feels welcomed and cared for, where a safe and stimulating environment exists, where a wide range of learning experiences are offered, and where good physical infrastructure and appropriate resources conducive to learning are available to all students. How can the foremost concept of a welcomed and cared environment exist when students are being subjected to heavy school bags and then subjugated to homework? We send our children to school to be educated and not to be exploited. A child should enjoy going

to school, instead of being traumatized.

I therefore, urge upon the school authorities through your esteemed daily to re-look on these basic issues plaguing the education system for the sake of the well being of our children.

A concerned parent,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Rejoinder

Editor,
Regarding the letter by Bantylli K Chyne captioned “Rejoinder on Empathetic Policing” (ST May 20, 2022) I would like to acknowledge the writer’s efforts in responding to my writing published in this newspaper on May 19, 2022. I have read it thoroughly and appreciate the concerned person’s sentiments, I can sense the emotions involved in responding to my views, presumably because he/she or his/her family members might have gone through such incidents in the past. But regardless, I have to remind that an act of such precipitancy and presumption would seal the downfall of the precocious intellectual forever.

As responsible youths we should be brave and bold enough to call a spade a spade without hesitation and fear of any consequences, and the truth is clear, unemployment remains the main factor behind the many home invasions, burglary and theft cases in Jaiauw.

On the instances of assault, torching of vehicles etc., pointed out by the writer, I have nothing to comment as I literally have no clue about the above-mentioned incidents. However, the narrative was painted in such a blatant manner that I feel as if the writer was hitting below the belt in calling me “narrow-minded” although it seems like the writer himself/herself was making unsubstantiated claims like blaming the acts of violence on “envy” and “psychological problems.”

The letter writer also stated that we lack local technical experts and also lack the “guts” to explore “alternative avenues.” These are delusional views often shared by the more privileged strata of our society and not by those at the ground level earning from hand to mouth. Concerning the statement the writer made regarding the youths, “sitting in Jaiauw Pdeng,” as a result of being neglected by the powers that be, the same can also be observed in areas like the Bronx and other neglected low income societies in the world. I also have to respectfully disagree with the point the writer made where he/she said, “We need to reinvent our ideologies to be at par with other people in India,” for if the goal is to merely be at par with mainland India, then we should say goodbye to our beautiful indigenous culture, our language and the clean

air and water we enjoy daily yet take for granted. The goal should be to be better than mainland India in every way; to highlight our cultural differences rather than to shun them, to promote a sense of unity in diversity rather than to merely give a bleak and privileged overview of past unfortunate incidents without any intention of providing solutions that are viable. The writer’s suggestion that our youth should attack the encroachers at Block I and II is tantamount to promoting violence and bloodshed; to build upon the already existing ideologies rather than reinventing them.

Other than the above points I bear no ill feeling nor grudge but wishes him/her nothing but good health and success in life. Nor do I wish to do a back and forth with the writer on this matter. To conclude, I will always stand firm on my principles regardless of the many criticisms I would have to endure. In situations like this, I’d rather be a mature person, preferring to be kind than right.

Yours etc.,
Pynskhemlang W. Uriah
President, Jaiauw Ehrmgiew
Transport Society
Via email

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Meghalaya Incorporated: Where are the shareholders?

By Patricia Mukhim

The Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Conrad Sangma is a self-confessed manager. He learnt entrepreneurial management from Wharton School of Business, University of Penn and completed his MBA in Finance from Imperial College London. He would have done very well in the corporate world. Alas Conrad got into politics and is turning Meghalaya into a corporation. Conrad manages the government as he would have done his own company. The problem is that the shareholders of this company are poor Meghalayans. The bureaucrat closest to Conrad who assists him in managing this company is Dr D Vijay Kumar with whom he shares a rare bonhomie who is by far the most qualified IAS officer. Vijay Kumar has a PhD in Public Policy from the Blatnavik School of Government, University of Oxford. His Doctorate was in the field of economics of education. Vijay Kumar’s research was on evaluating the impact of India’s national school choice policy on children’s outcomes and investigating related questions, central to the theoretical and empirical debates on school choice in developing countries. That’s some top-notch research and if Meghalaya Government went by his qualifications they would have asked him to manage the Education Department which is in deep shambles. I am sure Dr Vijay Kumar’s expertise would have helped Meghalaya’s poor educational indices improve but Conrad thought otherwise.

As of today, Dr Vijay Kumar is the CEO who manages the not-for-profit Company called the Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA) that has given birth to several verticals. What started off as the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority has now metamorphosed into a corporate entity. MBMA is incorporated under the Planning Department of the Government of Meghalaya and claims to be engaged in the implementation of specialised development projects focused on enhancement of natural resource management, access to finance, livelihood development, enterprise promotion, market linkages, and knowledge services. To coin the right words and phrases the Government engages consultants like KPMG, a British-Dutch multinational professional services network and one of the Big Four

accounting organizations who allegedly also manage the Chief Minister’s social media accounts. In short, KPMG’s duty is to make the government look good. One can only make a wild guess as to the amount paid to these global consultants and where the resources are drawn from.

MBMA implements projects that are received as loans from IFAD, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and any other lenders. The IFAD supported project called Megha-LAMP claims to double the incomes of farmers and improve their quality of life through focused, market oriented interventions in 1350 villages. The World Bank has funded a project called Community-Led Landscape Management Project (CLLMP). The objective of this project is to focus on strengthening community capacities for managing natural resources through a landscape approach. By now the community should have been empowered enough to come forward to prevent rampant coal and limestone mining in their areas as both these activities have devastated the environment. But no such thing has happened. The crore-pati mine owners continue to bring down forests at will because according to Meghalaya Forest Department’s definition of forest there are no more forests in the state. This makes one wonder where the CLLMP is working and if it is working at all. Till date we haven’t heard of a single community that has reclaimed barren lands and greened them up on their own initiative and with the help of the CLLMP funds.

With no one to monitor how these projects are actually executed on the ground and with very little community participation, one if left wondering whether the bald landscape has now turned green. The World Bank or ADB as lender does not care what Meghalaya does with the money as long as the loan is repaid with interest. In fact, MBMA becomes an easy place to park money and to spend on buying top model vehicles and other luxury items such as state of the art furniture and televisions with humungous screens for the higher-ups. Even newly-appointed IAS officers have learnt that in Meghalaya they are the actual rulers and they demand I-phones, I-pads, vehicles as their entitlements.

The MBMA actually makes tall claims of facilitating Community-led sustainable Natural Resource Management planning; Development of strong and resilient village economies, and Capacity Building and Training apart from enabling financial services to farmers and linking them to supply chains and also extending financial literacy. Above all the MBMA claims to build the marketing capacity of farmers and producers through inclusive supply chain development, enterprise promotion and market linkage; promotion of market driven entrepreneurship by developing a robust enabling ecosystem etc. The problem with nice-sounding words and jargons is that they are not understood by the stakeholders on the ground for whom even the word entrepreneur runs into several words in Khasi (U/ka nongsdang trei kam lajong). I am not sure how this would translate into Garo. Besides we don’t even have examples of such entrepreneurs and nor have we heard their success stories barring Smoky Falls coffee which is a bank-financed start-up and the Lakadong turmeric enterprise which is now run by local firms with some hand-holding from the Agriculture Department, courtesy some committed officers who work quietly and don’t flaunt their success stories.

The IAS is a brothers-in arms fraternity that has one another’s back so it is futile to expect anyone to blow the whistle on another. The rot will be allowed to carry on and erode the state completely until the bottom is completely scraped.

So much for the elite services but why do politicians dance to their tunes? Politicians represent the hopes and dreams of the people that elect them. Bureaucrats are doing a job for which they are more than compensated for. In a state where 37% are living below poverty line (BPL) the elite service officers are living it up with a private gym for training; a lighted stadium for them to run around (a grim reminder of the Delhi Principal Secretary Sanjeev Khirwar who walks his dog in the Thyagaraj stadium and therefore athletes have to complete their training by 7 pm). This is the level of entitlement expected by civil “servants” who have ironically succeeded in turning us

the people into their servants. Actually, it is politicians who should put these (un)civil servants in their place but they have failed to do so because most of them are so illiterate about governance that they rely heavily on these civil servants for wisdom.

What happened on Sunday last when the dome over the Assembly building collapsed is also a sign of the times. There is complete collapse of morality not just among bureaucrats (many of who are here for a tenure and for as long as it suits them after which they will go where the grass is greener in Delhi or their own home states) but also among our local technocrats who shamelessly cavort with political parties even before they have retired. The kind of theft of public goods in Meghalaya is abominable. And this is not recent. It has gone on for as long as the state was born. The PHE scandal happened in the early years of statehood but till date not a single person has been punished for daylight corruption.

Even now the inquiries into different scams have not been made public. A lot depends on how the enquiry was conducted and by whom. We the people are facing a crisis of confidence that we have not faced ever before. Meghalaya today stands as an example of a state run by a triumvirate of business, politics and bureaucracy. The people with whom the real power vests, do not feature anywhere in the scheme of things. Meghalaya today has become a family estate and politics an entitlement. There is need for a monumental shake-up. Will 2023 bring that shake-up?

As a state we face a strategic catastrophe. A cul-de-sac has been created from where there are no good avenues of easy departure. After all the scams that have blown up on our faces, a senior leader of the UDP told me that his party will do much better this time because there are so many lining up for party tickets for the 2023 election. The NPP too has become a haven for many refuge seekers. Does this mean that people are still going to vote with their eyes closed to all the scams? Only time will tell!

Let’s see if the shareholders in Meghalaya Inc rise up to claim their share of the pie that has so long been the privilege of the ruling class!

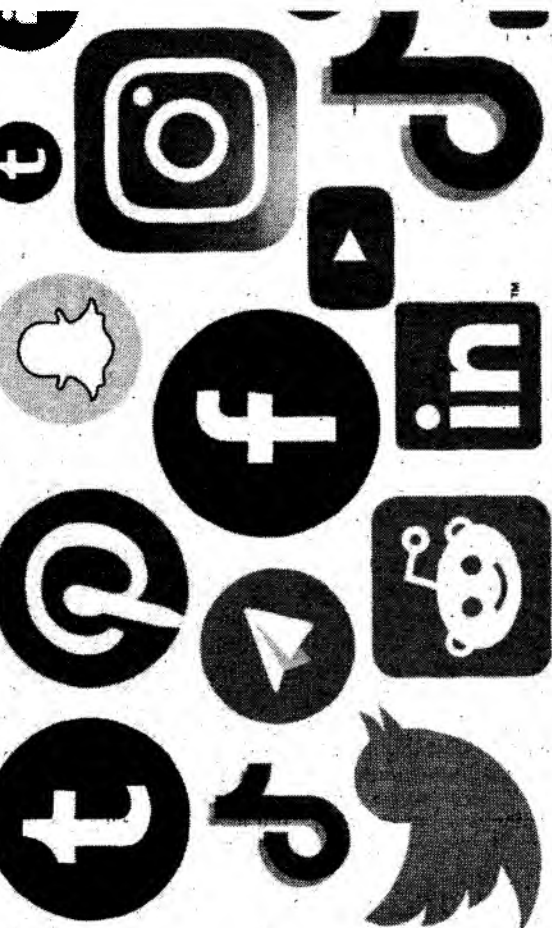
Social media capital: Future trends

By Alexander L Passah

Meghalaya, in today’s age has seen a significant increase in social media usage. This has been widely accelerated during the pandemic. Social media is no longer just a tool for socialisation but has embedded itself into various aspects of human life (education, politics, economics). In the case of Shillong, social media activity and engagement has flourished, and individuals are constantly producing and distributing content on multiple platforms.

The rise of social media has led researchers to label the current economy as the “attention economy”. The attention economy is dependent on transforming online attention and online (social) capital into monetary

paid partnership. Individuals in the state have different relationships with technology, and the digital divide is multifaceted. The digital divide is not only simply-determined by ‘access’ in terms of the haves and the have-nots. Multiple inequities exist within access to digital technology, and often structural offline inequities are carried over to the online world. The idea of equating value to social media presence and online capital is capitalistic and follows a neoliberal philosophy which is dictated by market forces. This discredits other skill sets such as critical thinking, community building and bottom-up knowledge production and obsesses over



gains. It is commendable to see the youths tap into this emerging industry within the confines of the Shillong Urban Agglomeration. This has led to an emerging online entertainment industry on platforms such as YouTube and Instagram for local content creators. However, not everyone who aspires to become an ‘internet celebrity’, ‘influencer’ or ‘content

self-presentation, branding and visual aesthetics. The trend of viewing social media content with wide viewership as the ‘social’ norm stems from the collective illusion which social media generates. People will have to be critical of the success of these projects and must not solely rely on what is curated on social media. Social media is not

It is commendable to see the youths tap into this emerging industry within the confines of the Shillong Urban Agglomeration. This has led to an emerging online entertainment industry on platforms such as YouTube and Instagram for local content creators. However, not everyone who aspires to become an ‘internet celebrity’, ‘influencer’ or ‘content creator’ can succeed. Online presence and self-branding are instrumental to capturing attention online.

creator’ can succeed. Online presence and self-branding are instrumental to capturing attention online. ‘Attention’ as a concept is highly subjective, and individuals differ profoundly in personal interests, values, beliefs, likes and dislikes.

Although various positives emerge from social media usage in terms of alternative livelihood opportunities, individuals must remain critical of social media and its relationship with development and employment. Recently, an advertisement in the state for the position of ‘project fellow’ and ‘project associate’ required individuals to ‘shoot a video demonstrating why they were the right candidate; thereafter, individuals were required to post the video on Facebook and Instagram’. The above instance is a PRIME example of how social media has seeped into employment spaces. Similarities can be drawn between the application process and the operations of brand influencers on social media. Both rely on acquiring enough social media capital to secure a

always a projection of social or economic reality and the ‘success stories’ of certain government initiatives are not always replicable on a large scale. As projects begin to recruit individuals with a strong social media presence; citizens will have to be wary of this trend as this could lead to meshing governance with digital entertainment.

The current government has prioritised investing heavily in the visual affordances of social media. This reliance on visual culture can often create an illusion of change and progress. With the state elections coming in 2023, it will be interesting to see if politicians tap into the skill sets of content creators and influencers as a means of strengthening their online presence to grasp the attention of voters through visual optics. Hence, citizens will need to critically evaluate progress through the ‘offline’ rather than depending on ‘online’ mirages.

(The writer is PhD Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, North-Eastern Hill University)

"Seeking to forget makes exile all the longer; the secret of redemption lies in remembrance."

— Richard von Weizsaecker

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MAY 28, 2022

Church as Redeemer?

IT is good to see Church leaders meeting the politicians of the State. However, this is a divided Church. Where are the Garo Church leaders and why not a single platform for what is the Body of Christ? True, this is the first time that the Church is sufficiently shaken by the corruption and scams that are surfacing every day. But is this the first time that Meghalaya is afflicted by corruption? Is sleaze in this state an uncommon phenomena that the church has awakened only now? Above all, why call the politicians if the idea is to abolish corruption? Politicians are there because people voted for them. Those politicians that attended the meeting might not win the 2023 elections. Politicians that are leading the Government and those in the cabinet that are part and parcel of the game of scams were, unsurprisingly, absent from the dialogue.

Everything that was said at the meeting is good preaching. The church feels it is easier to adopt a top-down approach and speak to the political leaders and then reach out to the masses. Reaching out to the hoi-polloi at the grassroots that are so enslaved by poverty that they will sell their souls for a couple of thousand rupees, is, perhaps the most difficult task since church leaders have not mingled with people at the last rung of the economic ladder who don't come to church in their Sunday best because they cannot afford that lifestyle. This barring a few truly chosen disciples of Christ who are with those afflicted by disasters such as floods and loss of crops by extending financial help and psychological counselling. In short to be with those who actually suffer and not just be talking down from pulpits.

This requires a behavioural change in voters who for long have been entertained during the election seasons and with freebies, songs, picnics and more. Some candidates give out hard cash as well. It's difficult for anyone who has not experienced poverty to understand that even a little monetary help goes a long way for a family living from hand to mouth. This has happened because of unequal distribution of the state's resources. This actually should have been the brief of the church. The church's mission is not just to preach but to do RTI and find out why healthcare, education, roads and other public services are so pathetic. That's what Christ would have done because he never compromised with wrongdoing. Is the Church actually following Christ's teachings today and challenging the corrupt or is the Church leadership too connected to the high and mighty to have the moral force to confront corruption.

When introspection leads to change, it has to be dramatic and not incremental to overhaul a mammoth organisation. The recent Congress brainstorming session at Udaipur and Rahul Gandhi's castigating of the ruling dispensation at the 'Idea of India' summit in London threw up more questions than answers. The decision to augment a national unification march to counter the BJP's narrative is a lofty idea. Can the Congress party already at its nadir for many years reinvent or reorient or rejig itself as a section of the moribund leadership suggested after the Udaipur huddle? If a political party seeks solace in the fact that it has already sunk to abysmal depths both electorally and organisationally and there is no trough ahead, the only way forward seems rejuvenation.

During the party's long march from the Panchmarhi enclave back in 1998 to the current Udaipur huddle, the social fabric of the nation has somewhere gone for a toss. An elocution speech to the Indian diaspora on the misdeeds of those in power or their institutional usurping cuts ice with a television audience. When the nation is enmeshed in a religious vortex on almost a daily basis, with an excavation here or a discovery there in the precincts of hallowed places of worship, imputing only institutions as arbiters of the 'deep state' may be prejudicial. No matter how much conviction and courage were there in Rahul Gandhi's twin addresses at the 'Idea of India' summit or at Cambridge, the reading on the wall is apparent. Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi's prime-ministerial stints were spent in imprinting the idea of a secular nation which fought umpteen challenges from forces of feudal, cultural and religious chauvinism. Rajiv Gandhi too avowed the nation as an ideological construct and the Congress felt that the only challenge India faced was erased during their successive UPA tenures.

One needs to be cautiously optimistic to nurture such a roadmap when the writing on the wall seems otherwise for Congress soothsayers. Instead of metamorphosing the party with crucial assembly polls coming up, what we are witnessing is a sorry state of affairs in the grand dame of Indian polity. The exit of Kapil Sibal or Hardik Patel who was being showcased in Gujarat or Balram Jakhar's volte-face or annulling off any strategic tie-up with Prashant Kishor are recent examples of setbacks to the party. A political

party which once symbolised our composite ethos cannot bring ideological supremacy or invincibility or indispensability on twitter handles or social media as proof of its acceptability.

How effective can a solo pan-national opposition party counter the might of the BJP when so many regional satraps are aspiring and hobnobbing to play the same role? The moot point being and rightly so, the Gandhis cannot leave the opposition space to other partners and play second fiddle. But an alternate rung of leaders can be projected to an electorate who are being dish out



dollops of sectarianism ad nauseum. Decades ago, the ubiquitous Ambassador and Fiat cars were a duopoly of sorts in the limited auto sector. Both these vehicles symbolised state power in the Nehruvian socialist days akin to the grand old party. Now, with the exception of Sharad Pawar's NCP and Hemant Soren's Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Congress is not even seen as a trustworthy alliance partner. The Congress patriarchs have to accept the enormity of the challenge and the diagnosis as reality. Only then can it shed off barbs such as being an outfit of sycophants and carpetbaggers.

When Rahul Gandhi asserts that the Congress party is fighting steadfast to regain the idea of India and BJP is choking the same, he is stating the obvious. But Congress can never afford to withdraw from the ideological slugfest on which the party's foundations were hoisted. Whenever the Congress is in crisis, emanating the idea of India has been a penchant for Congress presidents and leaders. Rewind to 1998 when Sonia Gandhi took over as President of a waning Congress party she opined to the All India

By Chiranjib Haldar

Congress Committee, 'We are in danger of losing our central place in the polity of our country as the natural party of governance.' To many observers, this lament may have become stale.

A common refrain still prevalent in Congress circles is that only the Congress represents the nationalist, secular, multicultural, inclusive idea of India and that space could not be snatched away albeit by any coalition leave alone regional satraps. Rahul Gandhi's diatribes at the BJP move in a clear loop like shots on news channels. He raises critical issues like federalism, widespread

powerful cling to power, no one sacrifices power. But we will not defeat our opponents without sacrificing the desire for power and fighting a deeper ideological battle.' That was his predicament. The Congress party still believes that it is the only durable, enduring brand and people would embrace it again once they see through the fallacies of the current dispensation. Congress loyalists cutting across factions are unanimous that the party needs to resolve its existential, ideological, organisational crisis first.

Ultimately to survive in politics, a party needs to be in power and win the hustings. India has undergone a metamorphosis in the sense that it is far more technologically advanced than it was in the halcyon socialist days where power emanated from select quarters. It is a social media literate nation now where dissemination, public opinion and expectations galore cannot be brushed aside with ideology and past credentials. A political party cannot remain frozen in a time warp and insulated from change with a bloated middle. We often hear from critics that the Congress party thinktank is encircled by a caucus and may not be advising the hierarchy in earnest. Truth is, many esteemed members of the G-23 were actually members of the Congress Working Committee and never asked for inner party democracy or organisational elections when they were at the helm of affairs.

The leadership has to identify potential winners because ultimately it is electoral victories more than ideological prowess that can regain its glory. There seems to be a tug-of-war in the Congress. Status quoists within the party who shun any kind of experimentation pitched against those in favour of change. The Congress party not undergoing radical transformation in tune with the times is indeed a momentous denouement for Indian democracy. If any Indian political party needs to alter its ethos and go in for a paradigm shift, it is the Congress. The party still remains complacent despite terrible setbacks and political humiliation. The existential crisis within the party that panelists always debate about in primetime television shows seems real. Being nostalgic about governing the nation for 54 of its 75 years since independence and misconstruing a national footprint for popularity or still having leaders of opposition in many states is merely delusional. It seems to be embedded in the psyche of the party.

(The writer is a commentator on politics and society.)

Taaleem-Yes; Kaleen-No

By Dr Munmun Majumdar

In his brilliant address on the 49th Foundation Day of North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Governor of Meghalaya Honorable Satya Pal Malik drew attention to the value education (Taaleem) and the utility of material wealth (Kaleen-carpet) and all that is associated with it. One understands the education sector as one that comprises early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions, as well as administrative structures, accreditation agencies, examination boards, licensing, inspection, regulatory authorities etc. Educational institutions employ hundreds of thousands of staff, and requires adequate infrastructure. It is valued by both governments and individuals, who recognize that education outcomes determine to a great extent the futures of both individuals and the nation. Growing clashes within cultures, sacrificing of values, ethics, at alter of corruption, the ongoing digital divide have drawn renewed attention to the importance of education as a strategy to create honest, socially inclusive and peaceful societies. Imparting diverse worldviews has long been recognized as a peacebuilding strategy. Experts have argued that diverse worldviews could increase understanding about and respect for those in minority be it religious, non-religious etc., which in turn could minimize the sense of alienation and the potential for radicalization of young people.

Around 90 percent of the world's students were out of schools and colleges as a result of the global pandemic. This situation cannot be without repercussions. The speed and scale of the disruption during the pandemic is unparalleled in modern history. Since its outbreak two years ago, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education systems globally, affecting the most vulnerable learners the hardest. It has increased inequalities. In its effort to support countries to mitigate the impact of closure and support learning continuity, UNESCO established the Global Education Coalition working around three central themes: Gender, connectivity and teachers.

Prolonged forced absence from educational institutions is a dangerous path for any country and can be detrimental also for the security of nations. One of the ways to cope in the uncharted times was to opt for the online mode to keep students learning. But one serious question remains is that have we prepared for the fallout from having educational institutions closed for so long? Lack of connectivity and devices excluded many students from pursuing learning remotely. Even though it is universally acknowledged that education is a fundamental human right and a foundational right, have the efforts to reach out to students through the online platform considered how many were left out? And how to address it? Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has a disproportionate impact on people, often as a result of factors such as gender, disabilities, ethnicities, socioeconomic class, race and even age. When it comes to differentiated impacts, particularly on women, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325: Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, with its prevention, participation, protection and role in relief and recovery principles provides an excellent framework for a response strategy for COVID-19.

Educational institutions are a space where socialization is encouraged and rightfully so. These spaces allow a fighting chance to receive equal economic opportunities in future. A hard reality is that for many students around the world, schools are spaces where access to food, water, safety and well-being is guaranteed. In many parts of the world, they provide the only form of nutrition and Schools' feeding programs are at times the only meal of the day for many children. The realization of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 2: Zero Hunger is often through schools as well. For many children, schools also equate to safety from physical harm and exploitation. When children are not in schools, they become easy targets. They can be abused, made to work, and exploited in many other ways. This is not to say that nothing bad ever happens to students in schools. Despite aberrations, educational institutions not only educate, they are living examples of executing and implementing micro-economy – from transport services to bookshops, to printers and publishers, to laboratory, cyber cafes, coffee houses, canteens and restaurants etc. Ultimately, educational institutions get the next generation ready for overall development. And the closure affected all of these.

Since educational institutions therefore play a very fundamental and crucial role it is important to emphasize the importance of preparing educational institutions for large-scale disruptions through strategic planning and dedication of resources. We learnt from the pandemic that it is the lines of communication between those that need and those that give should be open. This pandemic has taught us the importance of bridging digital divides and increasing connectivity, humanitarian assistance including educational technology, infrastructure etc.

There is no doubt that education is a driver of development, but corruption and underfunding often weaken this role to a great extent. While it is important to remember that corruption in the education sector is a symptom of underlying problems, yet one cannot underestimate the consequences of corruption in this sector given that it impairs development by undermining the creation of educated, competent, and ethical individuals for future leadership and the labor force etc. In short corruption contributes to poor education outcomes. Therefore, careful assessment should build upon synergies with gender analysis and human rights-based approaches to ensure that anti-corruption measures address aspects of inequity and vulnerability. Ironically, the generic argument that decision making process in India has been mired in both structural and functional flaws percolates to decisions making in education as well. And that features of a country's education system and political economy often create incentives for corruption. Since educational institutions serve social and economic functions, and there are several challenges in undertaking and imparting education that will foster a genuinely inclusive and peaceful society, teachers must be equipped to facilitate what can at times be challenging conversations. After all teachers' initiatives can be instructive to developing best practices for educational institutions.

Today, despite the Omicron variant, educational institutions have opened, supported by health and safety protocols and vaccination programs. But the costs stand to be tremendous in terms of learning losses, health and well-being and drop-outs. Prioritizing education as a public good is crucial to avoid a generational catastrophe. To be more resilient, equitable and inclusive, education systems must transform, leveraging technology to benefit all learners and building on the innovations and partnerships that had been catalyzed throughout the global pandemic and move forward from disruption to recovery and healing. While celebrating foundation day has its own place and importance it is equally important to realize that what we do today will be crucial in countering any force attempting to derail Taaleem in favor of Kaleen.

(The writer is Prof. Dept of Political Science, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong)

Govt employees in distress

Editor,
The Meghalaya State Government Employees Federation primary function is to look into the welfare of its members comprising all the employees of various state government departments. But the question is why those elected members, such as president, secretary and other members of this elected body keep silent when the members are suffering. Just to inform our dear office bearers of this body, the government till date has not cleared the dues such as dearness allowance which was due from July 2021 whereas employees of central government get their dearness allowance in due time. The office bearers are elected to look into the welfare of its members, but instead they seem to be a silent spectator and allowing the government to take us for a ride. I hope they are aware of the skyrocketing prices of essential commodities and other items as well as reopening of schools and colleges which really hit

us hard. This silence has raised eyebrows and doubts whether this Federation is really for our welfare or perhaps there is a back channel deal to keep mum and let the members suffer.

As members of this body we know that the office bearers are busy with their work but they have been elected leaders with a purpose and if they feel that they cannot perform their duties then hey better make way for a more competent one body. Why carry the shame of non-performance? We request them to take up this matter at the earliest so as to enable the members to avail the facilities entitled to them. How do we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of our Statehood when the employees are subjected to ill-treatment where their dues are not cleared on time? I think a general meeting is the need of the hour where threadbare discussion of issues is possible and also issues on the welfare of the employees can be deliberated.

Finally, perhaps this silence of the government employees is taken by the government as a sign of weakness, but truth be told there is a limit to everything and our patience is not a sign

of weakness. I request all my colleagues and fellow members is to be ready to ask questions or to hit the streets if needed be as this method of arm twisting has to be stopped once and for all.

Yours etc.,
K.Thangkhiw
Shillong - 1

Why the disparity in declaring results?

Editor,
This morning the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) declared the HSSLC Science and Commerce results. While congratulating all those successful students and wishing them well for the next phase of their career formation, I also have a few points to make. My first concern is why the majority of Class 12 students (Humanities) are always made to wait impatiently for their results. Why can't MBOSE declare the results simultaneously for all streams and thereby correct this perception that those who opt for Commerce and Science need to be given

preference as they are smarter than those who had to settle for Humanities.

In today's world students opt for subjects based on their strengths, but by sidelining students who opted for Humanities the Board is actually trying to belittle them. There needs to be a rethinking on this. In fact, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has addressed this out of date notion.

An educational board must help in removing mental cobwebs in society. The best educational practices must be adopted to make MBOSE a truly progressive board.

Can MBOSE take a positive step by declaring the HSSLC (all streams) results simultaneously from 2023?

The Board Members of MBOSE met on May 27 in Shillong and I am sure that my concern would not even have occurred to them. Hence I earnestly appeal to them to kindly take a decision in the next Board meeting that from 2023 onwards the issue of announcing the entire HSSLC results will be done simultaneously.

This simple progressive step by MBOSE will enhance its reputation and will eliminate the misconception

that 'those who settle for Humanities are second best.'

Yours etc.,
Tyron D'Brass
Tura

Why is MeECL so unmindful?

Editor,
It is very unfortunate that the MeECL turns a blind eye to the issue of providing charging stations for e-vehicles in Shillong. They are well aware that a household connection has a declared Kilowatt. As a matter of fact the MeECL is duty bound to check should the declared bill crosses the limit and accordingly the declaration should be altered and if consumption crosses 3 Kilowatts two phases is a must.

In the past few months we have witnessed e-scooters and e-bikes. These are no different from the new appliances introduced. Scooters have 3 Horse power and one HP is 750 watts. That means the new appliance is 3X750watt or 2.25 Kilowatts. And government is yet to have a public charging station.

Recently the Chief Minister had purchased an e-vehicle which he has put up on social media. Let's assume it's power consumption is 20 HP. This translates to 15 Kilowatts! 15 Kilowatts what 5 big buildings of 3 Kilowatts each with electric motors, washing machines, fridge, room heater, cooking heater and light bulbs say 12 of them consume.

This is unlawful and may invite legal action. It is a surprise that MeECL engineers after having studied electricity in their engineering colleges could not apply their learning on these modern sensitive issues especially since power is being rationed and load shedding implemented in certain areas. The CM will be driving his e-vehicle at the cost of the poor domestic consumers who need to boil their water in order to remain safe. The public are just heavily duped. The rich enjoy and the poor man's needs are ignored.

Yours etc.,
James Carey Wahlang,
Shillong 14

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

Tips for art collectors in the digital era



Collecting artwork has evolved in all respects - it has changed in format, resources, means, accessibility and perspective, but its essence survives through the test of time. Art is now being influenced by the digital era. Art collection earlier was considered a virtue of mature age but recently more and more millennials are taking up art collection very seriously.

Collecting art is as much a passion as a study, it is seen as an investment but it is a more personally rewarding pursuit. The journey from an art enthusiast and appreciator to a collector requires study, patience and perseverance. Especially in

this demographic defying dynamic digital era, one needs to know what exactly one wants from the rich and diverse world of art.

To become an art collector, one needs to deep dive into the subject. The study, analyse, understand and decode the world of art. The various platforms, genres, schools of thought, artists, categories, etc and then identify one's core interest area in this wide spectrum. There are a few golden guiding rules one must follow in order to have a rewarding and gratifying art collection journey, says Kr. Roop Partap Choudhary, internationally acclaimed art collector and Executive Director, Noor Mahal

and Jewel Group of Hotels.

Research and explore

The more one knows about the fascinating depths of art and the artist the more satisfying it will make the journey to acquiring the artwork. Investing time in researching and exploring opens doors to newer possibilities and newer avenues. It updates one with knowledge of the latest means and routes to exciting riches. The Digital era has made gathering information relatively easy but it is also important to know how to get the most trustworthy information and not get misguided. It is easy to explore and connect

digitally and also make purchases online by bypassing geographical boundaries.

Find your fondness

Art is a wide canvas and one needs to know what exactly one wants to pursue. What inspires and what does one aspire for. Some choose heritage-inspired rare art, while some are motivated by contemporary art. Some find their pleasure in paintings while some find their attraction in digital art. There is a lot out there and enabled by digital resources one can find their interest.

Design a strategy

Building an art collection is not about spontaneity, it requires planning and strategizing. Once you know what you desire from your art collection it is important to make sure you steer in the right direction. A strategy helps you plan ahead, ensures progress and helps you stay on the path of building gradually.

Networking is an art

The art world is fascinatingly complicated, finding the right things for your collection can prove to be almost like a treasure hunt. It is both helpful and effective to connect with the right people who can assist you in your journey of building a beautiful and meaningful collection. Especially like-minded people who know the world of art.

Assurance of authenticity

With the boom in the digital world and the increasing role of digitization in the world of art acquisition, there is an increasing threat of frauds trying to dupe young art collectors. Beware of cheaters and make sure that you deal with only authorized and authentic people. One can never be too careful in this respect. (IANSlife)

Worry less, travel more with your fur babies



Previously, when planning a vacation, pet parents had three options: leave their furry friends with family or friends, have someone else come to your house to care for them, or place them in a pet boarding facility.

What if we you can take your furry friends on holiday and have a great time without having to worry about their travel?

So why not use these relocation services to transport your pets to their desired vacation locations? They'll be comfortable and safe, and you won't have to worry about leaving them at home alone. Furthermore, you will be able to spend time with your pets without constantly worrying about their well-being. Doesn't it sound surreal? All you need to do is select a pet-friendly location and a reputable pet relocation company.

Faisal Islam, co-founder, Carry My Pet said: "A common misconception about pet relocation or pet travel companies is that people only use their services when moving abroad, shifting bases, or relocating due to a job change or Covid-19-induced shifting. A pet travel company, on the other hand, is all about transporting your pet from

one location to another, regardless of the reason for travel.

"Before planning a vacation with your furry friend, ensure that you choose a pet-friendly vacation spot. While it might sound difficult, it's much easier than you think. Six out of ten Indians have a pet today, and thanks to the increasing number of pet lovers across the country, several tourist destinations have become pet-friendly. Cities like Kerala, Mussoorie, Goa, Ooty, Manali, and Puducherry, among others, have many hotels/homestays and cafes where pets are welcome. You just need to check the hotel's restriction policies as some of them do not permit all breeds."

Moving a pet can be tough, but good management can help you relax and spend paw-some time with your baby without having to leave them at home or with someone else. Next time you plan a trip, don't hesitate. The pet-friendly hotels and accommodations love your pets as much as you do, and relocating your pets using professional pet relocation services will further remove your apprehensions about taking a trip with your babies. So, are you planning the vacation already? (IANSlife)

David Bowie and the birth of environmentalism

David Bowie released his seminal album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* 50 years ago, on June 16, 1972. It was an artsy and ambitious rock album which captured the time's sense of being on the cusp of new technological and cultural frontiers.

In the early 1970s, the US Apollo programme was, briefly, making men visiting the moon seem like a routine event. The possibilities of computer power were beginning to unfold, and the countercultural youth revolt was challenging prevailing values and norms. Bowie's fictional alter ego encapsulated all these groundbreaking developments: an androgynous rockstar from outer space with, in the words of the album's title song, "a god-given ass". Bowie-Ziggy wore heavy makeup, dyed his hair red, and dressed in clothes inspired by Japanese kabuki theatre.

But coupled with its playful fascination for space technology, the *Ziggy Stardust* album also described a dread of the Pandora's box that might be opened as a result. Its opening track, *Five Years*, warned listeners that "Earth was really dying". Indeed, the day of *Ziggy Stardust*'s release coincided with the final day of a landmark gathering in Sweden to discuss the future of the planet.

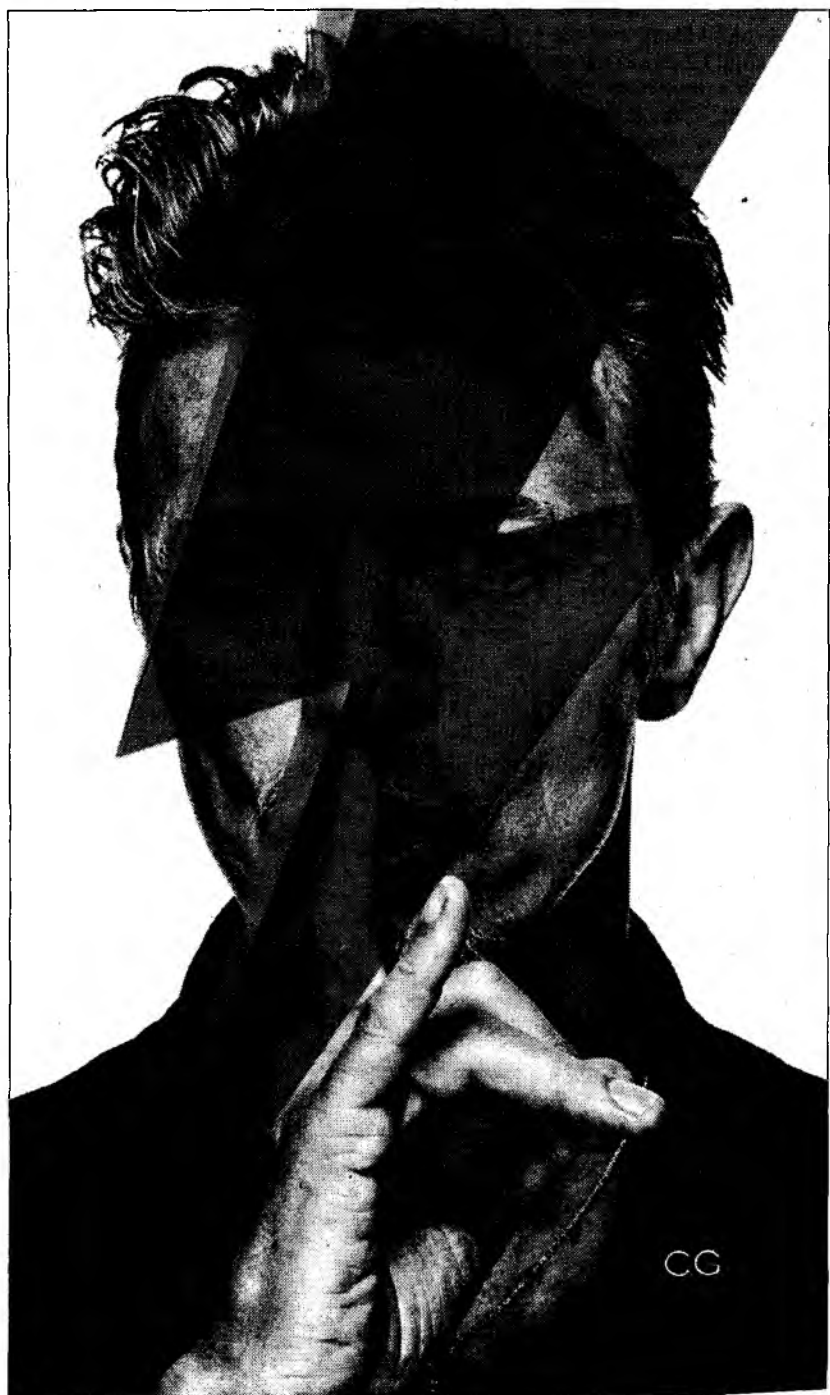
Today's global climate summits, most recently COP 26 in Glasgow last November, are its direct descendants. And like Bowie's album, the Stockholm Conference began amid conflicting emotions: hopes of a new dawn of environmental awareness and technological possibility set against fears of global conflict and planetary collapse.

Moonage daydream

Bowie's obsession with outer space predated the creation of *Ziggy Stardust*. In June 1969, what would become his first major hit single, *Space Oddity*, was released. It told the story of an astronaut losing contact with Ground Control while gazing at the Earth from afar in his "tin can". In July 1969, the BBC used the song in its broadcast of the first moon landing, apparently unaware of the tragic lyrics.

As Bowie clearly grasped, the Apollo space programme was central to the birth and early growth of the global environmental movement.

How Ziggy Stardust and the first UN Climate Summit changed our vision of the future



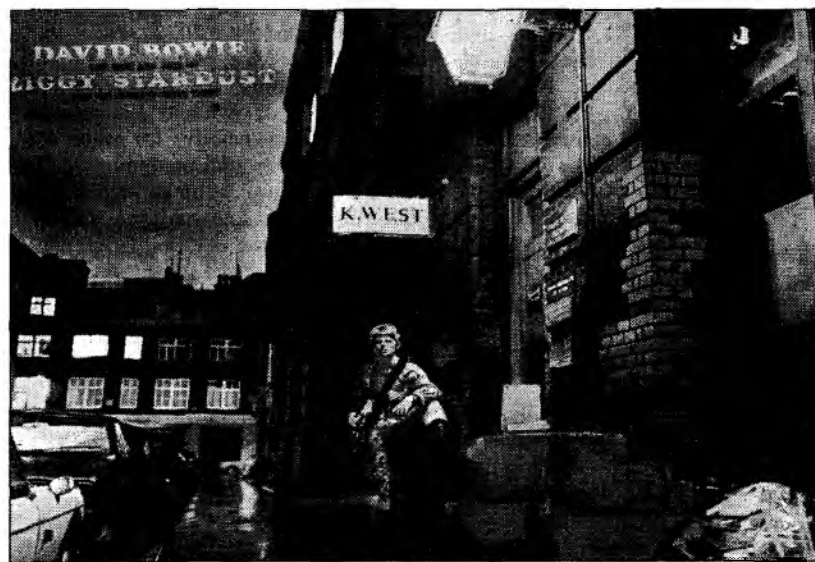
It was during the manned moon expeditions that Earth was first photographed from space. The most iconic image, "Earthrise" shows our planet rising over the lifeless landscape of the moon, like a sun at the horizon. It has become one of the most widely shared and reproduced photographs of all time.

In Swedish history, the pivotal moment for the awakening of environmental consciousness came in the autumn of 1967. At that

time, a choir of prominent Swedish scientists publicly warned of an impending global environmental crisis. Foremost among them was the chemist Hans Palmstierna, whose book *Plundering. Starvation, Poisoning* became an instant bestseller. Palmstierna argued there was an urgent need to act "before the hourglass expires for humanity".

Five years

From an international perspec-



tive, Sweden's breakthrough of environmental concern occurred remarkably early. Intrinsic to this reorientation was the very concept of "the environment" (in Swedish, *miljö*).

The word had not been used in the early 1960s - for example, during the intense debate sparked by Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, which awakened public understanding of the links between industrial pesticides and the die-out of insects and wildlife in the US. At that point, people discussed nature, conservation and the threat modern industrial civilisation posed to wild birds and animals. But the environmental debate which arose in Sweden in the late 1960s put the threat to humankind at the forefront.

Inspired by the debate at home, Swedish diplomats suggested to the United Nations that a large environmental conference should be organised. Their initiative set the

ball rolling towards what would eventually become the 1972 Stockholm Conference, the UN's first global Conference on the Human Environment.

It ain't easy

Half a century ago, in the summer of 1972, the future of humanity was looking increasingly precarious in many other ways, too. In the US, the racial divide and ongoing Vietnam war spurred civil unrest. On a global scale, in addition to the cold war, the process of decolonisation highlighted stark differences between the global north and south. Threats of overpopulation and dwindling natural resources were made real by catastrophic famines in India and Biafra.

Two concrete results of the conference were the Stockholm Declaration, which laid the groundwork for international environmental jurisdiction, and the foundation of

the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP).

Starman

Göran Bäckstrand had not long been working at the Swedish foreign ministry when a telegram from the Swedish delegation to the United Nations landed on his desk. They had just put forward the idea of a UN-led conference focused on the environment. Over the next five years, Bäckstrand was directly involved in the preparation and organisation of the 1972 Stockholm Conference.

Now in his mid-80s, Bäckstrand remains a vigorous and politically engaged figure. Over the last five years, we have discussed environmental history and contemporary concerns both in-person and over the telephone. He is a joyous soul who does not seem to despair - even though the road ahead has proven "far longer and more complicated than we imagined in 1972".

Blackstar

The final day of the Stockholm Conference - June 16, 1972 - was the day that *Ziggy Stardust* and the *Spiders of Mars* was released to the world. Fifty years on, the hopes and fears evoked in this album, like the conference, still feel disturbingly relevant - particularly amid the heightened nuclear tensions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

So what would Bowie have made of the way things have turned out for the planet? He may have left some clues in his final album, *Blackstar*, released two days before his death in January 2016. The music videos for the title song and second single, *Lazarus*, were directed by another Swede, Johan Renck. At the centre of the *Blackstar* video is an empty space suit, blinking back to the Major Tom character in *Space Oddity* and *Ashes to Ashes* - a distinctly gloomy echo of that groundbreaking time when men first walked on the moon.

Bowie's death coincided with a renewed interest in outer space. In our time, however, it is not superpower states that are leading the way to the final frontier, but superwealthy individuals such as Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, who have made their billions through the digital revolution of the 21st century. (The Conversation)

WHERE THE HOME IS...

By Christina Taipodia

Through all the years of Anurag Banerjee's frequent journeys to and from Shillong, he realised how he had become a visitor in his own home, unaware of the fact that his experiences would go on to influence his work.

"Perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition" Baldwin's words introduce the theme of Anurag Banerjee's photo book, *I'm not here*.

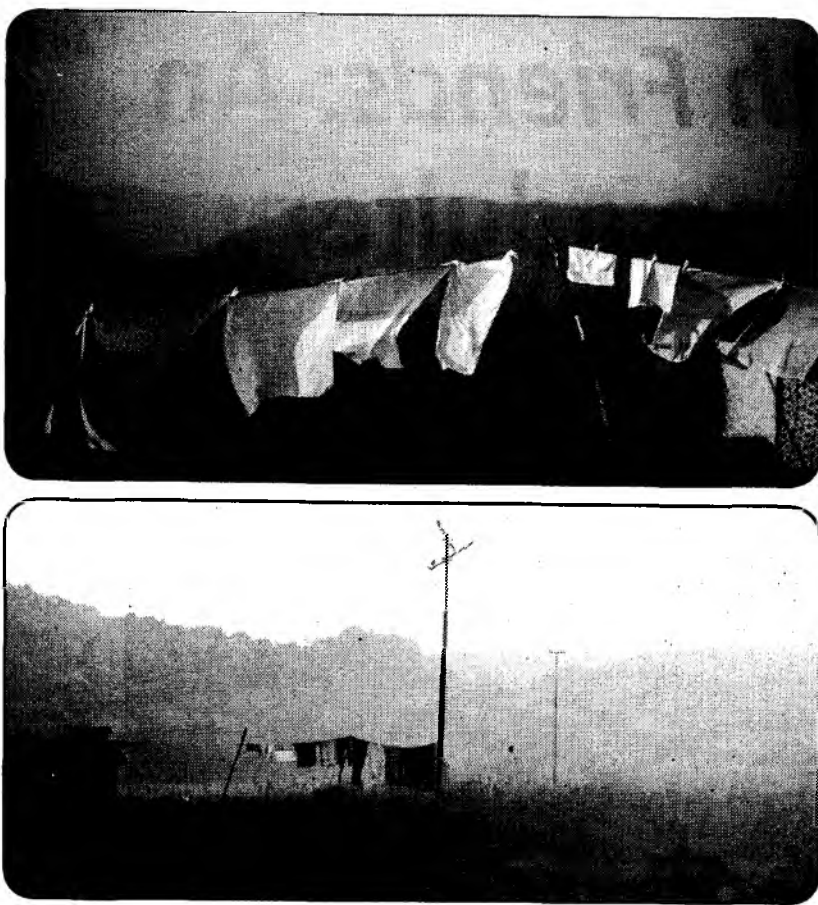
In a unique presentation of images and text, *I'm not here* explores the idea of home and how he asserts his belongingness in the city of Shillong. For Anurag, the interplay of the visual medium with the literary, further evokes a sensory trigger to what the photographs already try to convey; feelings of nostalgia. He says his writings exist along with the photographs because it serves as a passage to hold the story together. As he addresses the concept of home, his art reflects his relationship with his family, his dog Snowy, and memories of Shillong.

"The idea of home is who we are and what shapes us," he says.

Born and raised in Shillong, Anurag's interest in photography began when he moved out of his hometown to pursue a Media Studies course in Pune. After he finished his studies, he started introducing himself as an independent photographer based in Bombay, from Shillong. The mention of his hometown made an impression on how it has an impact on his love for photography and his identity.

At an early stage in his college life, his father bought him his first camera. Coincidentally, it was the same day he picked up a photography magazine and found himself deeply moved by Prabuddha Dasgupta's work. "If this is what you can do with a camera, then this is what I am going to do."

He was also drawn to American photographer Sally Mann, who is known for her personal work. On a usual rainy day at home, he sat in



his bedroom and watched the rain fall from his tin roof. The light from the window shone on the wooden floor while his dog, Snowy slept cozily next to him. The ambience of that particular day brought out the intention to do what he does today as reflected in his photo book. It was in the feeling of closeness and attachment he felt at that moment, as it radiated Sally's words of photographing what is closest to you.

He was convinced, and dedicated towards his goal. "Photography just happened to me," he explained, "I picked up the camera to tell my own story."

Anurag's first acclaimed work, *Love in Bombay*, documents intimacy in public spaces and was born out of his fascination for the city. The images from the series look as though the city was staged just for him to capture. It is, however, a style of work he decided to move away from as it rendered ethical

and moral questions surrounding photography, which he has yet to resolve.

Regardless, this endeavour was what eventually brought him closer to create something that was a reflection of who he is. "Moving away brought me closer to Shillong," he says. "I wanted my first work to talk about who I am," he mentioned.

As he reminisced about his days in Shillong, he said, "In the chaos of Bombay, you tend to lose your mind sometimes. That is the time when I would shut my eyes, and think of the landscape, the light, the cool breeze, and hold on to a feeling which gave me comfort to go on with my life in Bombay."

In 2019, he handmade 50 copies of *I'm not here* and distributed them for free. It is where he figured the core of the work with his photographer and photo book maker friend Gareth Phillips, who observed his project was not just about his

memories of home, but a universal idea of home.

"And that is why I begin the book with Baldwin's words: Perhaps home is not a place, but an irrevocable condition, because it really is." Over the span of eight years that went into producing the work, he believes his book has evolved just as he has, with a new sense of meaning and maturity.

At the end of 2019, when the citizenship movement gained momentum in Shillong and Assam, Anurag questioned his role as a photographer and the movement made him confront his identity like never before. "It was only then that I realised I needed to educate myself and gain a better understanding of the community that I call home," he continued. With that in mind, he arrived in Shillong in August of 2020. "Locals of Shillong were voicing their worries of becoming minorities in their own land, and we

need not be hostile in this situation. I wanted to extend my support by saying, yes, I understand where you are coming from, I am not a native of this place, but this is also where I am from. This is also the home that I know."

Recalling another one of Baldwin's quotes he says, "You cannot stop living your life, but you have to make life liveable for the next generation".

"I would like to think of life on earth as a relay race where the baton is passed from generation to generation, and right now it is with us, so how do we pass it on to the next? This thought keeps me going," he concluded.

How do we assert our belongingness in a place that is not entirely ours, yet it is the only home we know? If home is a feeling, Anurag's work has a way of making you feel homesick.

And if home is a place, Shillong

has a way of making you feel at home, where you keep visiting, and always come back to.

I'm not here extends this feeling, making you experience it all over again. Through a series of timeless images in the photobook, Anurag tries to claim his home, which presents itself as a love letter to Shillong. He has intended the photobook to have a gift-wrap feel, with a book that would wear and tear over time.

Anurag Banerjee has been published in *The Caravan*, *The Indian Quarterly*, *The Hindu*, among others. He is currently working on his second body of work which will reflect his experiences of Bombay, a place where he also considers home.

Anurag will hold his debut launch of the photobook *I'm not here*, in conversation with author Janice Pariat, in Dylans Café Shillong on June 3.

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MAY 29, 2022

Moon conjunct Rahu on your solar return chart. You will get mixed results. You will become lazy. Your work will not finish on time. You will have many doubts in your mind which you will not be able to solve. You will also experience difficulties in your work. You will also plan to change your job for better prospects in future. You will also value family ties and look forward to revive your relations. You will take full advantage of your good times. Destiny will support you. Your time will be spent trying to keep yourself fit and healthy and thus you will concentrate on yoga, exercise etc. You can join a gym. You will earn lot of money too. You will get success in your business tasks. You will also fix marriage of your children. Your meeting with an important person will be fruitful. You will also take active interest in politics and social activities.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)
You will have financial gains. Your enemies and opponents will be unable to overwhelm you. You will be caught in a delicate situation but victory will be yours. You will become more careful in your public dealings. There will be a change in the planetary position. Investments that have been wisely made will benefit you in the future. Your plans will also materialize. Husband and wife will have wonderful bonding. You will be busy in your work and will be unable to give time for yourself. But you must think over it. You will also take some solid and important decisions regarding your business. The results of which will be beneficial the results of interview will be in your favor. Your boss will be pleased with your work. Annoyance could prove to be your biggest enemy.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)
There will be tendency to do creative work. There will be improvement in your health. You will do a lot of problems and diseases. You will also get blessed by your elders in the family. You will be happy about something. You will also have wonderful bonding and understanding with your partner. You will also receive some pleasant news from your friend or known person. Your name, fame and reputation will grow. Take every decision with great care and caution. Some guests will come. You will be busy in their hospitality. You will go on a trip and you will get money on your tour. Your hard work and efforts will pay off. You will get some news that will cheer you up. You will also make some plans regarding the career of your children.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)
Works that were struck up will gather momentum. Some deficiency will be felt in professional capability. You will witness appropriate opportunities for employment/business. You will witness an upward growth in your work. Your name and fame will also rise. You will also get some money by your efforts or other means. You will reach the pinnacle of your career with the help of your mental capabilities and also make some plans regarding your work and progress. You will get better prospects in your job. There are chances of fights and tensions which you need to overcome. You will be interested in reading some knowledge giving literature. The worries regarding your children will get over. You might get to learn some new skill. You will be hesitant to take any major decision. But media, arts, business and creative things will attract you. You will become part of some auspicious function.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)
Jupiter will open the doors of progress for you. The results of competitive exams will be in your favor. You will also explore additional sources of income. You will also plan a major expansion in your business. Your enemies and opponents will extend a hand of friendship towards you, but don't take any decision emotionally. Instead of heart, think with brain. Your children will also make good progress in their studies. The tension that was there with regard to education, etc. of your child will be solved. The time is right for auspicious work. You will get opportunities for employment. You will also make new agreements and contracts. You will not bother with criticisms and move ahead on the path of progress. Some works of your will be completed. Work with a lot of thoughts in matters involving money will be ventured by you. You will do your work generously.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)
It will be a week which will bring mixed results for you. You will get both types of rewards. Disputes will be resolved with mutual understanding. There will be some increase in capability and capacity to do work. Your talent will be openly visible to the people. You will also take some long term work in hand. You will also get the help of your boss. Your efforts at earning money will be successful. You will get success in government related works. Your efforts, hard work and dedication will yield positive results. You will do socially useful work. You will also take major decisions with regard to work, whose results will be long lasting. Matters related to court that were stalled for sometime will be decided in your favor. You will get positive and fruitful results if you use your intelligence and thinking power. You will find yourself attaining the heights of success.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)
You will develop contacts with new people. You will also take some permanent work in hand. You will be busy with your official work. You will not have money gains. Enemies and opponents will try to overwhelm you but not get success. Your work will bring lot of criticism but you will not bother

much about it. You will also take interest in charitable works. The blessings of elders in the family will help you to move ahead. Some new activities will attract you. Your efforts at obtaining money will reap rewards for you. Work will start on a new project. You will get money that was held up somewhere. There is possibility of buying something new at home. Your interest and prestige in politics will improve.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)
It is time to bring changes in your way of thinking. You will pay serious attention to work. You will also receive the guidance of a senior person. Your efforts will bring in lot of money. You will complete your work with great enthusiasm. You will work hard and get the results in due time. You will get success in a competition. Husband and wife will share amazing bonding. Your hands in the financial matter will be a bit tight. These are days for students to work hard. They will get the blessings and love of their parents. You will learn something new and feel like doing something big. You will also pay attention to your needs and wants. The passage of time will assuage your problems.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)
You will be occupied with your work. Your family will fully support you. Family matters will keep you busy. A sudden rise in fortunes is not ruled out. You will also develop a deep bonding with some person. You will also plan to get married. You will also be fortunate in matters of money and finance. There will be need for more efforts in competitive exams and interviews but you will get success. You will also take important decisions in your business. Some property/financial matter will be resolved. You will also perform your family and work responsibilities well. You will be loved and blessed by your parent. You will gain from your hard work and efforts. You will become emotional remembering a very dear one. Romance will bloom for you.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)
You will feel a lot better. Your tension and problems will be decreasing one by one. You will finish your pending official work more rapidly. You will share your happiness and joy with good friends and your parents. You will also get success in legal matters. You must check things very carefully before buying. Health will see an improvement. There is a hope of positive changes coming in your work. Any pending work can be completed with a little effort from your side. You will be supported by good friends, parents and family. Further planning and projects will move swiftly. A liberal point of view and modesty will be profitable for you. You will be in a better and stronger financial position. You will pay attention to your work, communication and relations.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)
It is a fantastic week. You will be far ahead in the contacts and relations. You will buy new items for your house. The matters related to land and housing will speed up. There will be some discussions on husband's marriage proposal. There will be good compatibility between husband and wife. You will give due regards to your parents. You will also have their affection and blessings. You will share wonderful bonding with your mate. Your misunderstanding will get removed. A pleasant event will take place. Some of your work will get lot of praise too. You will be alert in money matters. The friendship with official will be beneficial. Held up official work will be completed with the help of a competent person. You will get more opportunities to grow in your work. There are chances of a promotion for the person in job. You will have financial gains.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)
The time will be perfect to grow in your work/business. You will be happy by getting huge money profits. You will be busy in family affairs but you will not complain. Time will be money earning. You will have to be clever and diplomatic to get back your money that was given to someone else. You will get your work done by meeting with officers gradually. Whatever work you plan to do, you will be doing after making the situations suitable with your wisdom and cleverness. You will also plan to go on a shopping with family. Your mental tensions will get over. You will also save lot of money. There will be profits in business and trading. You will think for the good of everyone.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)
Your relationship with your seniors will be perfect. You will complete your work with cooperation of all. Your financial condition will keep improving. You will also get full benefit of your hard work that you put. Luck will keep favoring you. Your self confidence will be more as you keep facing challenges that are presented to you. You will believe in donations and charity. You will also adopt new methods of income. Good events will keep on happening. You will take full advantage of this. Students will have their results as they wished. The time will be spent in sports. There will be more luxuries at home. By god's grace you will have strong will power to complete the projects. You will face tough competition. Unemployed persons will get job proposals. For you the main matters will be related to property and it will demand your attention. Your planned works will get completed. You can also plan to go on a business, travel all of a sudden.

Influence of Urdu poets on Bollywood songwriters



Several cultures postulate a cyclical construct of time, instead of linear. This may or may not be valid for history but it manifests itself prominently in human culture. Literature, for one, given how motifs, plots, and expressions crop up again and again over time, or are repeated even in its most popular form -- film lyrics. Bollywood is an apt example.

Do you remember the phrase "Awaaz ki duniya ke doston..."? Most film aficionados would instantly place it as the catchphrase of Rajesh Khanna in the superhit musical drama *Anurodh* (1977).

However, it actually dates back to song *Sitam the zulm the aafat the intezar ke din/Hazaar shukr ke dekhenge ab bahar he din*, or more commonly *Man darpan hai jag sara*, sung by KL Saigal in *Dushman* (1939), starring him, Prithviraj Kapoor, and Leela Desai. The lyricist was Arzoo Lakhnavi.

It would be easy to pass this off as imitation, but we must remember literature, like other forms of culture, and in all its spheres, is a human construct, and while it is prone to imitation, the more appropriate term would be inspiration. Or more importantly, its role in rescuing hosts of forgotten poets from obscurity.

In this case, how many beyond the dedicated Urdu poetry connoisseurs/Bollywood historians, would recall the name of Syed Anwar Hussain Arzoo Lakhnavi

(1873-1951)?

Yet, in his time, he was much respected for his poetry, in and outside films, responsible for crafting lyrics for the earliest superstars -- Saigal (*Karun kya aas niras bhayi in Dushman*, 1939); Kanan Devi (*Lachhami murat daras dikhaaye in Street Singer*, 1938); as well as some of the earliest featuring emerging stars such as Madhubala (*Aayi Bhor Suhani in Begasoor*, 1950).

At that time, there was another notable lyricist, by the name of Pandit Sudarshan, among whose oeuvre was the rather doleful *Andhe ki lathi tu hi hai, tu hi jivan ujyaraara hai...* for Saigal's *Dhoop Chhaon* (1935).

As Saigal aficionados may recall, it begins with a spoken couplet: *Dil ke phaphole jal uthe seene ke daag se/Is ghar ko aag lag gayi ghar ke chiraag se*, and while Sudarshan can take credit for the song, these lines were inspired by an 18th-century prodigy.

Pandit Mehtab Rai Taban was 12 when he recited: *Sholaa bhadak utha mere is dil ke daag se/Aakhir ghar ko aag lag gayi ghar ke chiraag se* at a Delhi mushaira, impressing Khwaja Mir Dard, who was in attendance.

And here, it is important to stop and stress that this is not plagiarism or even imitation, but a key constituent of the Urdu poetic tradition, where even one couplet, or even one line, may be used by another poet, as it is or modified appropriately for

another context.

Another major example is from Dilip Kumar-Nargis starrer *Mela* (1948), which saw the genesis of a triad that was behind some of the Hindi film industry's most signal, soulful, stirring songs -- music director Naushad, lyricist Shakeel Badayuni, and singer Mohammed Rafi.

The film's signature classic *Yeh zindagi ke mele...* was however not entirely Shakeel's brainchild.

Yeh zindagi ke mele, yeh zindagi ke mele, duniya mein kam na honge/Afsos ham na honge... derives inspiration from 18th-century Faizabad master poet Mirza Mohammad Taqi Taqi, who had declaimed: *Duniya ke jo maze hain hargiz woh kam na honge/Charche yahin rahenge afsos ham na honge*.

In 1969, Majrooh Sultanpuri, a poet and lyricist of no mean renown, borrowed one telling line from Faiz Ahmed Faiz's immortal *nazm*, *Mujh se pehli se mohabbat mere mehboob na maang* (already used in Pakistani film *Qaidi*) for the opening for Rafi-rendered *Teri aankhon ke siya duniya mein rakha kya hai...* in *Chirag* (1969), starring Sunil Dutt and Asha Parekh.

Majrooh then went to use the opening stanza of Mir Taqi Mir's *Pattaa pattaa buta buta hal hamare jane hai...* to begin a song titled the same in *Ek Nazar* (1972), starring Amitabh Bachchan, and Jaya Bhaduri, though the rest of the lyrics are his own.

Gulzar followed suit in *Mausam* (1975), using Ghalib's couplet *Dil dhoondhta hai phir wahi fursat ke raat din/Baihe rahe tasavvur-e-jaanani kiye hue...* to initiate the song of the name sung soulfully by Bhupinder and Lata Mangeshkar.

In our current age, with the steadily diminishing attention spans of people, abbreviated ways of conversing, and focus on other ways and means of leisure, poetic traditions don't seem destined to gather that much focus. (*IANS*)

*"To dare is to lose one's footing momentarily.
Not to dare is to lose oneself."*
— Soren Kierkegaard

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Meghalaya's rent seeking economy

SEVERAL scams have erupted between 2018 and now. First is the illegal mining and transportation of coal for which revenue has accrued to Assam because of the fake import challan by means of which so-called imported coal (a paper transaction) is transported via Ghasuapara in Garo Hills to Bangladesh. News channels have revealed who the kingpins behind this exercise are but this was stoutly denied by former Home and Power Minister James Sangma who is alleged to be part of this whole process. James Sangma lost the Home Portfolio because the Opposition and also partners in the MDA Government, particularly the UDP, raised a stink on the blatant illegal transportation of coal despite the NGT ban, which was being facilitated by the State Police Department. Then came the MeECL smart meter scam following which James Sangma lost the Power portfolio too. James Sangma has called the news report baseless which is unsurprising. No minister caught with his hand in the till will admit to being corrupt unless he/she is nailed by a court of law. For that to happen some public spirited citizens have to take the matter to court. Failing that what governments usually resort to is to institute an inquiry committee which is a cul-de-sac from which nothing ever comes out. This is exactly what has happened with the MeECL scam, the rice scam and the inquiry into the gunning down of Cheristerfield Thangkhiw, former general secretary of the HNLC.

Normally a public interest litigation involves detailed study of a matter which most citizens have no time for. The media blows the whistle on corruption repeatedly but if the public is apathetic, there will be no outcome. The media cannot be the judge, jury and executioner. Of late the Lok Ayukta has been active and even issued warrants of arrest against wrongdoers. This is a public institution created to safeguard the rights of citizens. It is hoped that this institution will rise to the occasion and carry out its task as outlined by the Act.

Rent-seeking – an economic concept that defines a situation where an individual or entity seeks to increase their private wealth without creating any benefits or wealth for the society is Meghakaya's DNA. In fact, rent-seeking destroys the economy of a state or country. This is what has happened to Meghalaya. Its economy is critically dependent on central doles and loans from national and international organisations. On its own Meghalaya has failed to create the engine of progress simply because politicians have short term goals of five years and the bureaucracy willingly fits into that agenda. All the inquiry reports into the various scams are meant to deceive. Will the public of Meghalaya continue to remain silent spectators?

Letters to the Editor

Church and politicians

Editor,
I fully endorse the views expressed in the editorial published in the ST of May 28, 2022 captioned, Church as Redeemer? If the ideas and suggestions offered by the editor are taken wholeheartedly by the powerful Church leaders, much of the evil of corruption in society in general and in high places and in public life in particular will significantly be reduced, if not rooted out. The real problems arise when Church leaders become abettors and collaborators of corruption perpetrated by politicians or those in authorities like bureaucrats/ministers etc. It is often noticed that Church leaders with or without their members go and hobnob with politicians/ministers/bureaucrats for obtaining favours/grants/schemes for school buildings, school playgrounds, school halls, church halls, church walls, fencing etc and in turn they support the politicians during elections as a quid pro quo. This common practice indulged by them is morally wrong, most detestable and it is a crime and a cardinal sin

for church believers if they are true followers of Christ. It is also widely seen that church leaders are most blatant in supporting candidates from their own churches and do their utmost best to enlist the support of their friends, relatives and faithful to ensure the victory of their favoured politicians.
The Khasi-Jaintia Church Leaders Forum (KJCLF) got fundamentally wrong and off track by convening a meeting of politicians (MLAs) from political parties of Meghalaya asking them to stop the shameful rampant corruption in public places happening in the state. This exercise is bound to yield no results. The Forum has called upon the wrong people for they are only the elected. The real masters and deciders of democratic form of governments like ours are the voters, the electors at the grassroots level - the villages, the towns and those in Shillong city. It is them who need to be made aware, taught, admonished and addressed repeatedly by the church leaders, religious leaders and civil society leaders who wish to root out corruption in all forms especially in high places and in public life. It is indeed painful and appalling

to see that the church authorities and church leaders abdicate their responsibilities to repeatedly, continuously and fiercely fight and campaign against injustices and all forms of corruption, including rampant corruption in public life perpetrated mostly by the politicians and those in authority in government. Jesus Christ would have condemned, chastised and rebuked them just like He did the scribes and Pharisees of His time if He were still physically present here on earth today. But He sees everything that is happening here from where He is and I believe He wonders why His teachings have been so misinterpreted.
Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Sr. Journalist,
Shillong-2

War on drugs a must

Editor,
The drug menace is a serious concern for the state. But what is unfortunate is that the concerned authorities are seemingly unconcerned. Society will have to pay a heavy price for that. What

does one have to say if young people both boys and girls as young as 12/13 years are addicted to the deadly drugs. The news, "Experts flag high drug abuse among minors" (ST 25th May, 2022) calls for a societal awakening. Is it not the fault of the authorities in power? Do the parents of the addicts have the power to crack down on the callous drug dealers and peddlers who destroy the lives of their kids? No, absolutely not! Whose job is this? Why are we so "silent even while the underhand drug business is "thriving" more than ever before, and drug cartels and peddlers are expanding their network with a vengeance? Do we know the new brigand of peddlers are all out to pounce upon the new breed of buyers – that could be your children and my children? Why is the administration so complacent? This laid-back attitude is indeed detrimental. As reported, rampant cases of thefts, robberies, burglaries, and muggings have direct links with the increase in drug abuse.
Frankly speaking, many distraught parents whom I met with, now say with a deep sense of regret that if the neighbouring Assam

can tackle the drug malaise heads-on why can't our state? They are absolutely right. The Chief Minister of Assam himself had made his intention clear of driving the final nail in the coffin of the drug dealers and he has followed that up with action. Given the increasing vices, Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma never held himself back. He gave full powers to the police forces, the intelligence and narcotic agencies to deal with the evil mongers.
What is striking is that the Chief Minister himself drove a bulldozer over the confiscated illegal drugs. At places, he burnt the drugs to ashes. The police departments are on their toes round the clock. Is it not commendable? Lakhs of parents have showered blessings upon Himanta Biswa Sarma for his unprecedented move. In fact, it was well-intended to save the youths and the society from disaster.
I think it is high time that our state as well emulates what Assam has done. The Chief Minister of Manipur has also followed suit and prepared the groundwork to fight the drug menace. Many women organisations have come forward to support him. Meghalaya should not

fall behind. Before setting out the plan, the state must constitute a high-powered committee. Some changes in the narcotic rules and regulations are also imperative. The police force should be given additional powers without allowing for political interference.
What is clear here is that in haste we cannot fight the menace entrenched in society. We need to put concerted efforts as recently rightly pointed out by the Chief Minister Conrad Sangma and Home Minister – "Fighting drug menace in state with all guns blazing: HM" (ST 18 May). All NGOs and the concerned stakeholders must stand together and support the government. It's everyone's duty. The vices have penetrated the deep recess of society. Hope this time the government's promises of the war on drugs will not go up in smoke.
Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Via email

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Church finally steps out of the purdah

By Toki Blah

The leading news caption in the Shillong Times of 27th May 2022 titled "Church leaders meet politicians, call for a corruption-free Govt," accompanied by a picture of the said deliberations and its participants, did come as a pleasant surprise for a Meghalayan citizenry that had for the last couple of days and weeks been thoroughly demoralized and disheartened by unbroken reports of scams, cases of cheating and outright rip-offs happening with in the Governance domain of this state. Buildings and structures ranging from Inter State Bus Terminals, highway bridges, roads and finally the Dome of the building that was supposed to host debates and discourses by our elected Law Makers, literally came crashing about our ears. Preceding these mishaps on capital investments made by this government there were the continuous whispers, that simply refused to die down, of illegal coal mining and transport of the same, ably abetted by powerful ministers within the Cabinet. To add to our list of misfortunes came the national rankings by the Central Government which found Meghalaya at the bottom of every development indicator, and the most dismaying is the downslide in Education, that once was the Flagship of Meghalayan achievements. This too had taken a body blow mainly due to incompetence and paucity of attention, that Education had received from our MLAs. All in all a dismal scenario in mal-governance and therefore the wake-up call by the Church, the most powerful institution in our state, and its demand from the defenders of our future to uphold the Rule of Law, did come as a very pleasant bolt from the blue.

The phrase "Bolt from the Blue" is usually used to express utter unexpected surprise and within the context of this article it came as a massive but pleasurable jaw dropper simply because the Church, until this moment, had preferred to carry on with its illusion of aloofness and distance from the day to day business of governance and administration. The refusal of our clergy and their dogmatic refusal to recognize the umbilical connection between poor delivery of justice, governance and development with the rising social evils that ultimately affects both body and soul of society, had always been a source of bitter disappointment to most believers and followers of the Fisherman. It is now apparent that some

forward thinking elements among church leaders have finally decided that enough is enough and are stepping out of the self-imposed purdah of the Church with regards to its involvement in secular, lay matters of governance. The Church appears ready to come out of its hibernation and indifference to challenge a corrupt political system that has held Meghalaya and its institutions hostage for the last 50 years. It seems that this influential faith institution of Meghalaya (or to be more exact, some of its forward and progressive looking laity and clergy) that holds 75% of the state's population as its members, is now ready, to identify and challenge the corruption and rot that has managed to infiltrate the hallowed portals of our democratic system; ready to speak on behalf of an anxious, leaderless and perplexed people. The Church has identified the political parties as the main carrier and host of the virus that has attacked our electoral system and institutions and this is not an unjust, nor incorrect nor unfair diagnosis. The Khasi Jaintia Church Leaders Forum (KJCLF) had then decided to drive home its point through a meeting with personalities that head our political parties. This development must be welcomed and encouraged by all well-wishers of Meghalaya. We need major stakeholders in the development of our state to call out; awaken and lead on issues that negatively impact on the welfare of Meghalaya and its people.
So, let's see where and how this progressive, budding development led by the KJCLF is likely to play out within the established Church denominations of our state. I have a strong feeling that most established Churches will view this attempt of the KJCLF with a certain amount of distaste and hesitancy. I belong to the Presbyterian Church and have myself, a number of times, raised the issue of Church intervention in improving the political governing system within our state. The usual reply and argument by my own church leaders in rebuffing my plea are quotes from the Bible such as from Romans 13:1-7, where persons are directed to subject themselves to the governing authorities, John 18:36, where Jesus had said that His Kingdom is not of this World and Mark 12:17 with the famous quote "Render to Caesar—" are thrown at my face to shut me up. This however has not stopped my Church leaders from rubbing

shoulders with politicians stained with the reputation of being "dirty"; nor prevented my church from approaching such politicians for help in setting up of lavishly decked up shamianas and pandals for large church gatherings nor from asking contributions from such people for various other church related activities. Where the money comes from for such help has never really been questioned! Politics has instead been closely associated with the denomination a candidate belongs to or the position he holds within the church community. Some Church elders have even been brainwashed by that immoral motto of "Winability" as propagated by some leading lights of our political parties where the win of a political character is projected as a win for the denomination he belongs to. It happens not only with the Presbyterians but with other denominations too, or so I am told. Sad but a reality which thrives and does exist in our midst.
Here I have to clarify another truth and that is, all church leaders or clergy cannot be tarred with the same brush. Some are really worried by the failure of their church in addressing bad governance or corrupt practices within the political system and are as anguished as the next person with the downward slide of governance in our state. These are advocates for greater involvement of the Church in bringing about better governance and in identifying Christianity as a champion of good governance. This other side of Church leadership champion involvement of the Church but limited to (a) creating better public understanding and awareness about election of public representatives (not to be confused with active involvement in party politics) (b) They quote Romans 13- for creating public awareness that the leaders we elect make decisions on our behalf and this underscores the importance of Good Governance and maintenance of social justice (c) Psalm 72:12-14 – election of wise leaders to uphold justice and the common good, especially for those who are poor and needy (d) from Leviticus 19:15 and James 2:2-4 on the call for leaders to govern without partiality. All of this clearly shows that the Holy Scriptures can be subjected to various interpretations. In our case however it simply boils down to the will and desire to make the Church a major stakeholder in the introduction and maintenance of Good Governance through the election of capable, morally and principled leaders (not to be confused with "U brieve Babba", who excels in the art of distributing free money and goodies) and of the need for better public understanding about the process of electing such leaders.
In conclusion, I as a Christian take great pride in identifying the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ as a harbinger of Good News. The message from his birth in a dingy manger of a shabby and stinking stable is "Joy to the World and Peace on Earth". How can there be Joy in the midst of sickness, hunger, unemployment, hopelessness, frustration, anger and ignorance amidst the fear for an uncertain tomorrow. How can there be Peace where poverty reigns, where inequality in society is encouraged and promoted, where corruption prevails and ill gotten wealth dominates a society that professes the administrative Principles of "Kamai ia ka Hok" and "Ka tip brieve, ka Tip Blei", where elected leaders neglect public service and instead rule to enrich themselves and their businesses and where people struggle for existence in a visionless governing dispensation of clueless leaders? Can the Church afford to remain an indifferent soulless spectator in the midst of such chaos and confusion? Is it not the mandate of the Church to enlighten the electorate and the public on the need for accountable, transparent leadership, better governance and how to get it within a Parliamentary Democracy such as ours? Should the Church not step in and from the pulpit provide direction, guidelines and awareness to the laity on the profile and class of leadership we need to elect for ourselves? Not to get involved in the unscrupulous going-ons of Party politics but to be responsible for bringing in accountable, transparent politics in our state. I sincerely believe that besides upholding aspects of "Praise and Worship" that are aimed at sustaining the soul, the Church also has the mandate of teaching its members on how to elect leaders that inspire Hope and Vision while on this Earth. Perhaps this writeup has trodden and hurt many a sensitive toe. Perhaps it goes against the grain of many on whom the light of introspection has been thrown at. If it has, so be it. No apologies, for it is the truth and the truth at times can be bitter but also needs to be said to correct existing flaws.
Author is the President of ICARE

Tobacco and the Church World No Tobacco Day 2022

By Dr. Caleb Harris

It was heartening to know that the church, through the Khasi Jaintia Christian Leaders Forum (KJCLF), engaged with the political leadership of the state, in order to bring about changes in governance. While this has been welcomed by many, others might wonder if this really is the job of the church. This is probably because of the thought that there should be a divide between the 'Secular' and the 'Sacred'. Though there are examples from the bible wherein prophets such as Amos have interacted with the political establishment of the day, that was in the pre-secular era.
The editor of this daily, in her editorial on May 28th, 2022 (Church as Redeemer?) spoke about the 'top-down' approach of this meeting and the need for behavioural change in the society. This is without controversy as the church cannot shirk away its responsibility in guiding its members in the right direction. As a cancer surgeon, I would focus on things pertaining to my field wherein the state can grow by a change in behaviour.
Meghalaya, in its golden jubilee year, has the dubious distinction of topping the country in the proportion of cancers caused by tobacco, with 70.4% of cancers in men and 46.5% of cancers in women of East Khasi Hills District attributable to tobacco. Meghalaya tops the country in the incidence of esophageal cancer (cancer of the food pipe) with ten times the incidence seen in other states. This is also one of the diseases attributed to tobacco. It is sad to note that while tobacco has no beneficial effect to humanity (apart from the profit it brings to those who trade it), yet it is one of the most abused substances.
So what can the church do to ensure the health of the society apart from running hospitals? While the missionaries did well to build mission hospitals, it was in the era when even primary health care was not available in India. People were dying during child birth, of diarrhoea, malaria and other infective diseases. The standard of healthcare has improved much today (though there is scope for much improvement!) and so has our understanding of disease. This is reflected in our National Health Policy (NHP) which was revised in 2017. This NHP 2017 emphasises on 'well-being', and stresses on the preventive and promotive aspects of health services and not just the curative aspects. This is where the church can play its role, without any major investment whatsoever.
Where I grew up, it was considered a 'sin' for a church-going person to smoke. Even the few who used tobacco, did so in private, taking pains to ensure they are not seen in the act. But sadly, it is probably not so in Meghalaya. Few years ago, I was surprised to see the 'No Smoking' board, outside a prominent church, on the wall of the parish hall. I wondered as to why such a board was necessary in a church where none (I thought) would smoke. Later, inside the church, to my shock, I could smell tobacco on the person who was leading the service. This was at a time when face masks weren't mandatory. While some may argue that it is not a 'sin' to smoke, I am sure that none can deny the fact that tobacco harms the body, which is considered the temple of God.
As per the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS 2016-17), 47% of people in Meghalaya use tobacco, as compared to the national average of 28.6%. This means that more people in Meghalaya use tobacco, as compared to the rest of the country. Since this is a state

with a Christian majority, the church can play a major role in changing this. If the pastors in our state can preach (both from the pulpit and off it) on the need to curb tobacco use, it would go a long way. If tobacco use is looked upon as a 'sin', it would surely discourage its use among the faithful.
A major fallout of the high prevalence of tobacco use in the state is the impact on children. The bible lays a lot of emphasis on parents teaching children the right things and it is to be remembered that kids learn a lot by observing. I usually buy fruits from a van parked on the road near my house and the fruit seller is usually accompanied by his son, aged about 7 years. Sadly, oblivious of the fact that the vehicle is parked in a public space and that his young son is watching him, he is invariably seen smoking. Now it is obvious as to what this boy would do once he grows up. Unfortunately, he would probably not even wait to be an adult to take to smoking as data from the Global Youth Tobacco Survey 2019 shows. This is a survey done among children aged 13 to 15 years of age, commissioned by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India (GoI). In Meghalaya, 34% of 13-15-year-olds were found to be using tobacco.
The Government of Meghalaya, through a joint effort by the departments of health and education, has successfully implemented the 'Tobacco Free Educational Institution' (ToFEI) program to curb use of Tobacco by school students. As part of this program, the school is expected to ensure that no tobacco product is sold in and around schools (upto a radius of 100 metres), no teachers (or other staff) use tobacco in the school and activities such as pledge against tobacco are taken up on a regular basis by the students. The students have participated in rallies to spread awareness around the state and have conducted a signature campaign to this effect too. The government of Meghalaya has been commended by the GoI for this program. But such an initiative of the government would be fruitless if the same students go home to see their parents use tobacco.
World No Tobacco Day is observed on the 31st of May every year, since the year 1987. An initiative of the World Health Organisation (WHO), this year, the theme is 'Poisoning our Planet' with the hashtag #TobaccoExposed. The focus is on the impact tobacco has on the environment. The tobacco industry uses a lot of natural resources for preparing the finished product and also leaves behind a lot of waste, apart from the contamination the smoke produces. This again is something which should be of concern to the church.
A few months ago, a patient with esophageal cancer was brought to my outpatient clinic by his brother, who introduced himself as a church leader. After explaining in detail about the patient's condition, I encouraged him to teach his congregation about the ill-effects of cancer-causing substances such as tobacco, betel nut and alcohol. It was heartening to see a video clip sent by one of his congregation members, wherein he was seen preaching from the pulpit on this issue, exhorting his congregants to desist from these substances. How I wish many more church leaders (and lay leaders alike) would be like this person. It would go a long way in ensuring a healthy church, healthy society and a healthy Meghalaya.
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