

“ While natural disasters capture headlines and national attention short-term, the work of recovery and rebuilding is long-term. ”

--- Sylvia Mathews Burwell

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SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, MAY 1, 2019

Workers of the world unite

THE above was a call given by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848. May 1 is a day dedicated to workers who are hardly recognised for the efforts they put in. On this day it would have been fitting for the people of Meghalaya to remember the 15 dead miners trapped in the flooded rat hole coal mine at Ksan, East Jaintia Hills since December 13, 2018. Christmas and then Easter were observed but the faithful forgot to petition their Creator in heaven for the souls of these castaways and the Government on this earth to retrieve their bodies. It is now 137 days since the miners were trapped. It is instructive that whatever attempts have been made by the state government so far have been at the behest of a Delhi-based petitioner, Aditya N Prasad who approached the Supreme Court purely on humanitarian grounds. The apex court has been directing the State Government to get its act together by seeking the help of the Indian Air Force to airlift the water pumps from the Kirloskar Brothers; the Indian Army to constructing temporary structures for mounting the water pumps, while the Indian Navy were brought in to dive into the ill-fated 137 ft deep hole to try and recover the bodies. From day one, the Deputy Commissioner, East Jaintia Hills had written to the Government that the local mine owners had the expertise to carry out the dewatering process since they executed this task regularly after the rainy season. This suggestion was given a go by.

The presence of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was meaningless since they did not have a standard operating procedure (SOP) for managing a mine disaster. They have not carried out such an exercise in the past despite there having been several such mining disasters. This brings us to an important point - that of labour rights and welfare in the State of Meghalaya. The State Government recently observed that much money has been spent in the miners' rescue mission without any results. What the Government has failed to acknowledge is that it has not only messed up in not getting the local mine owners to help out but has also added to the dilemma by delaying the process. The Kirloskar pumps were not lifted quickly enough; the pumping process which should have gone on continuously was erratic with complaints about there not being enough electricity to power the pumps. And while there are powerful advocates in the apex court arguing on behalf of the mine owners, not a word is being said about the safety measures to be adopted for the miners. This is a clear case of violation of human rights by none other than the state.

TO THE EDITOR

A lesson for teachers

Editor,
The recent development in Aeroville school where a child has been seriously assaulted by the Headmistress requires a fresh perspective. I have myself have been in the teaching profession for a good 35 years. Not for a moment do I condone the act. My heart goes out to the child who now is traumatised and needs complete reassurance, and love from all quarters from school authorities, parents, relatives and friends. Yes it is very unfortunate. I understand the pain and torment her parents would be facing now and in the days to come. Inconceivable would describe them best. The angry reactions pouring out on social media or in private conversations are undoubtedly justified. I too would have reacted the same way if it was my child or grandchild.

Having said that, the uneasiness and awkwardness that Madam Sane must be going through in this entire episode is unimaginable. To give credit where it due, she has been a dedicated teacher for countless students in different schools for three decades. Why is it then that we remember and record the

goals that a goalkeeper has missed rather than appreciate the hundreds of goals that he has saved in his career? Yes all goals must be saved but we are human and there is always a slip-up sometimes in minor ways and in this case in a major way.

As a teacher myself I can fully understand how as teachers we expect our wards to be perfect. Being human we sometimes go overboard in our words and actions but only because we strive to teach and get the best out of them without realising the far reaching consequences of our actions. Yes what happened is wrong and I admit it.

Madam Sane herself has brought up four grown up sons, all gentlemen to the core as I know them but she has also had her fair share of troubles and uncertainties in life. Her youngest born had to undergo a heart transplant some years ago. I do not have her permission to write all this; but these are just my musings being a teacher myself. There are those unfortunate days where we carry our problems to our workplace. This is a learning experience and a warn-

ing to all of us in the teaching profession that we should exercise patience and cool and tolerate the shortcomings of our students and also be kind and gracious at all times no matter how difficult and testing our day might be.

Now that the case is out in the open and all concerned authorities are informed and involved and the incident will run its legal and logical course before things come to a closure my sincere request would be that we should stop the gossiping on social media and in the privacy of our homes about this unfortunate incident and trust that God above is at the helm of affairs and something good will always come out of something unpleasant. It is my sincere hope that this isolated incident will not deter or discourage Madam Sane from performing her duties and that she will continue to be the dedicated teacher and administrator that she has always been. Also that she will continue to be treated with love and respect by her students past and present and by her well-wishers.

Yours etc.,
Shirleen AB Sawkme
Tura

Rising inequality

Disasters add to woes

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

support of the UN and the World Bank. Among the 33 countries which have already supported the Indian initiative, Italy, UK, Australia, South Africa, and the European Union have agreed to fund the new organization set to be declared at the UN Climate Summit, scheduled at the UN headquarters this September.

It is understood that the CDRI will work to develop common standards in infrastructure building and invest in research and development that will also determine funding from multilateral banks towards future investments by countries. The coalition's charter provides for facilitating collaborative start-ups between countries to develop knowledge plat-

increased frequency of weather events, atmospheric pollution etc. Scientists from various fields of expertise concurred that an earthquake of the magnitude of 8.5 or more is expected to rock the Himalayan region.

These research groups, including the one in IIT, Roorkee, are in the process of developing earthquake early warning systems which could give people up to a minute of warning before the quake. A section of scientists believe that science can tell where an earthquake may strike and with what magnitude, but predicting the time may not be possible.

Though it is generally regarded that prediction of quakes is a rather impossible task, the efforts of en-

of the country has resulted in floods in many regions, specially the North East. Added to this, cutting down of trees and clearing forests has aggravated the situation. In such circumstances, lack of infrastructure has resulted in massive loss of lives and property.

The whole issue is one of serious concern but planners have not given it enough attention as the sufferers are mostly poor people who reside in villages and in the coastal belts of the country. Very few people in cities and urban areas have been affected and since the focus of our planning strategy is urban centric, flood protection has not received due attention in terms of resource allocation. Thus, floods are witnessed almost every year though, in recent years, evacuating people from flood affected areas has been quite fast than before.

In such a critical situation, there is need to evolve a strategy to counter all types of natural disasters in an effective manner. It needs to be pointed out here that unlike the West, which is economically better equipped to handle climate change and its repercussions, countries like India and China which bear the brunt of disasters caused by rising emissions and a warmer planet. If there are no floods or cyclones in the country, India faces drought in several areas. The rise in temperatures is rather phenomenal causing natural disasters. In fact, temperatures in three Indian cities Chennai, Mumbai and Delhi have seen a steady rise during the last several years.

While infrastructure development and awareness generation have to be taken up in right earnest by India, there is need to involve the grass-root organisations in tackling disasters, specially floods, cyclones and earthquakes. The Human Rights institutions are uniquely placed to play a role in ensuring that rights of those affected by natural disasters are promoted. Those that have expertise in human rights principles and are rooted in locally may have a better view of what is needed and what is possible than national actors. While specific national contexts vary and different kinds of disasters require different responses, the need to uphold human rights in emergency situations seems to be constant. ---INFA

A disaster is an extreme disruption of the functioning of a society that causes widespread human, material, or environmental losses that exceed the ability of the affected society to cope with its own resources. Disasters caused by floods, droughts, tidal waves and earth tremors are generally considered "natural disasters."

forms on disaster and climate risk and resilience for infrastructure.

Meanwhile, a study by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), released October last year, had found that 91 per cent of all disasters in the past two decades (1996-2017) were caused by floods, storms, droughts, heat waves and other extreme weather events. Globally, disaster losses during this period were estimated at \$3 trillion. Low income countries like India suffered greater economic losses with up to 87% of their disasters not reported. India suffered losses of \$80 billion during the 20-year period.

Among natural disasters, many earthquakes have been witnessed in the Himalayan region but India has not learnt from past mistakes to tackle such an eventuality. At an international workshop on 'Climate Change & Extreme Weather Events' held recently, experts discussed the effects of climate change, melting of glaciers,

engineers at Roorkee would go a long way in saving some lives. However, seismologists believe that even such warning to enable people to safely vacate their buildings before an earthquake, though many a home may be destroyed, renders a whole society into refugees. It was pointed out at the conference that publicly funded government buildings in Himalayan States such as Sikkim and Manipur could not survive low intensity earthquakes.

The need for buildings to be quake resilient was stressed at the conference, much like medical instruments are sterilised before use, irrespective of whether a patient is rich or poor. Thus the building of proper infrastructure is very much necessary for which the CDRI may play a significant role in the coming years.

Another natural disaster which is almost a recurring problem for India every year is floods. Melting of glaciers and excessive rainfall in certain parts

Protecting traditional knowledge systems

Editor,
Traditional knowledge has no single definition, however, it may be defined as knowledge that is unique to a given culture or societies which provide the infrastructure for agriculture, health care, food preparation, training, environmental conservation and other life process on the local level. It is part of the identity of indigenous tribes. It has recently been regarded as an important commodity in global health development. World Health Organization (WHO) in its recommendations on Health for All Declaration (1978) highlighted the need to include local people, their traditions and practices in Primary Health Care (PHC).

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines traditional medicine as 'the health practices, approaches, knowledge and beliefs incorporating plant, animal and mineral-based medicines, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises, applied singularly or in combination to

treat, diagnose and prevent illnesses or maintain well-being'

Herbal medicine in traditional medical practice is an important resource which can be mobilized for the attainment of the common goal of health for all. These herbal medicines have contributed significantly to man's struggle against diseases and maintenance of health. In recent years interest in the use of herbal preparations has increased. Herbal medicines are used in most countries within the state health care system or in communities and private practices outside the state system.

Traditional and indigenous knowledge is unique to a given culture or society and the Jaintias who adhere to the traditional belief system are no exception to this knowledge particularly in health care. However, the advent of western cultures has had a great impact on the traditional healing system. Today, the survival of many indigenous/traditional knowledge systems is at stake because of rapidly changing natural environments and fast-paced economic, political, and cultural changes on a global scale.

Traditional knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation, often in oral form or by way of example, whereas written sources may not exist at all or may exist only in local languages. Thus, it is imperative to preserve the knowledge held by our forefathers. It is in this context, that the traditional knowledge should be afforded effective protection. In recognition of the value and preservation and promotion of the traditional knowledge system, Sein Raj Niamtre Shillong proposes to setup the Jaintia Indigenous Knowledge Centre (A Centre of Herbal Health Care & Other Traditional Knowledge and Spiritual Healing) which will be inaugurated on May 5, 2019, to coincide with its 56th anniversary. The Centre has been proposed with the objective of promoting, preserving and documenting the indigenous and traditional knowledge, to meet the primary health care requirements of the communities and to promote other indigenous systems of health knowledge and spiritual healing practices.

Yours etc.,
Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah
Via email

General election 2019

Parachute loyalties rule roost

By Poonam I Kaushish

As India's greatest nautanki enters its last three phases of polling we will have stood witness to 900 million including 15 million new voters in the 18-19 age group deciding the fate of 543 Lok Sabha MPs between the BJP, Congress and the regional satraps. Its a toss between big leaders, small netas and two-timing jan sevaks and with bagful of promises. All in their reckless quest for power, amplified by the silly chair called India's Raj Gaddi!

Amidst the poll cacophony various ticket seekers are hedging their bets in the hope of being declared a candidate. Those who lose are busy shopping in other Parties and shifting loyalties wherein politics today resembles a revolving door. One doesn't know who is in and who is out. Who's jumping into which bed, eloping with whom, tying the nuptial knot and divorcing whom.

Who is entering which door and cutting which deals --- sideways and under. Who is cutting corners or double-crossing whom? Juxtaposed against this ever-changing kaleidoscope is the quest of Parties for miracle men. All means favoured. Age, caste, religion, sex no bar. So long as they can deliver power out of nothing.

Undoubtedly, Parties prefer a smart and useful defector to a dubious loyalist. Topped by a virtual stock exchange for "parachuted winnable and chamcha" politicians based on ground reports. Think. Over 50 leaders across the political spectrum including 9 sitting MPs and 39 MLAs switched loyalties. While three MPs and 10 MLAs parachuted to the BJP, three MPs and two MLA preferred the Congress. The Grand Dame lost two MPs and 21 MLAs and BJP 5 MPs and 12 MLAs to the cycle of defections.

Of 22 MLAs who left Congress 8 joined BJP while one MP each of BSP and Samajwadi in UP joined the Congress and one MP each of BSP-SP and four BSP MLAs shifted to the BJP. All glibly asserting "There is no internal democracy, it is stifling." And all hoping for tickets which their new mai baaps readily obliged.

In UP alone which accounts for 80 Lok Sabha seats, 28 leaders from different Opposition parties including SP, RLD and Congress have joined the BJP over the last two months. Fifteen people who have defected to the BJP are from the BSP, including 11 who have contested on its symbol in state and general elections.

In Bihar, erstwhile BJP leader and now Congress's Shatrughan Sinha is pitted against Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad from Patna. Ditto former cricketer Kirti Azad and two Dalit leaders who walked out of the Safron Sangh on being denied tickets to the Grand Dame on the grounds the Party was anti-Dalit. In Andhra two TDP MPs and one MLA defected to Jagan's YSR and another to Rao's TRS.

Shocking was the exit of Sonia key aide and Congress Secretary Tom Vadikkam to the BJP as also ex NCP Maharashtra Minister Vikhe Patil along-with two MLAs in Gujarat. Mamata's Trinamool lost two MPs and one MLA to the BJP in West Bengal and Patnaik's BJD one MP in Orissa. In Haryana three Congress rebels and one from the INLD have joined the Hindutva Brigade.

In a milieu where elections are won by Parties and its leader rather than individuals, the candidate is judged, defeated or elected on whether he has the right caste, communal, class and criminal credentials. Win-ability not acceptance holds

the key. All want the Taj or to be Kingmaker. Whatever the means: Kaam, Dham, Thand, Bhad.

Bluntly, 'win-ability' is an indirect admission of grass-roots politics whereby Parties don't really win on the basis of their ideals and principles but by putting their brand name on those who they think are likely to win, while keeping their trademark alive with tall talk and big spending.

However, what is worrisome is that burning national issues like poverty, rising unemployment, financial morass and farmers distress have taken a back seat to stitching the right alliance. Sadly, nobody is talking about their vision and plans to propel the country forward. Neither are they worried about selecting the right candidates on the basis of their character, integrity, honesty etc.

The BJP quotes a verse from Vikram Seth's Suitcase Boy --- "Phir Ek Bar Chowkidar Modi Sarkar" and bombards the Net with NaMospeak. The Congress President Rahul Gandhi busily hums "Ab Hoga NYAY!" The nascent 'Mahagadhbhandhan in UP Mayawati's BSP and Akhilesh Samajwadi prefers playing gulli danda with everything and anything it can lay its hand on --- Parties, polity and policy. All practicing individuals' meanness for public good.

True, it is still too early to predict the outcome but incumbent BJP's Modi is riding high on nationalism to emerge victorious in the hope that his rivals will play second fiddle to their State allies. For the BJP it will not be NaMo alone but the performance of the Party in States ruled by it alongside NDA allies JD(U), Akali Dal, Shiv Sena, LJP, AIMDK and other small outfits.

Ditto, the Congress. How it fares in Andhra, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Bihar, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu will be decided by the UPA's States CEOs. As it stands Mamata, Mayawati, TDP's Naidu and NCP's Pawar have made plain their Prime Ministerial ambitions at best or kingmakers at worse. But it all hinges on how well they perform. After all, if Gowda and Gujral could become Prime Ministers with their Janata Dal strength of 44 and 27 MPs respectively (neither enjoying a popular mandate), why can't they? Yet one cannot discount a free-for-all. Sadly with changing fidelity voting has been relegated to only choosing the lesser evil. Not about getting the right man for the right job like in other walks of life, education, employment, scholarship etc. Nothing objectionable. But when it comes to alignments, there is a chasm between ideologies and objectives with everyone busy scrambling for pelf and familial aggrandizement and Parties to increase their political firepower.

What next? Can we merely shrug our shoulders and dismiss it as political kalyug? No. True, numbers will decide who sits on Delhi's gaddi. At the same time, all Parties should quickly rethink their priorities and desist from elastic loyalties and destructive mindlessness electioneering.

In sum, six weeks is a long time in politics and 42 days in election-mode an eternity. The pendulum will swing from one end to the other, evaluating the fluctuating stock of the candidates depending on their stock preferences. Clearly, an unpredictable poll turf lies ahead. If they are real Desh Bhakts as they profess to be, they should remember this adage: Nothing costs a nation more than a cheap politician. Jai Ho! --- INFA

“Religious liberty might be supposed to mean that everybody is free to discuss religion. In practice it means that hardly anybody is allowed to mention it.”

--- G.K. Chesterton

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MAY 2, 2019

Japan- A smooth transition

THE Chrysanthemum Throne of Japan has changed from one royal hand to another - father to son - in a generational shift after three decades. Crown Prince Naruhito has been installed as the new Emperor and his father Akihito, 85, stepped aside voluntarily for rest and relaxation. Akihito has, in his wisdom, acknowledged the need for rejuvenation of his land with new energy and new blood.

The emperor in Japan is a symbolic figurehead in terms of authority. Yet, Akihito has earned the love and affection of his people, and provided the moral authority to elected governments to take the nation on the right lines. Japan, as is famously noted, rose like a phoenix from the ashes of its World War II defeat and nuclear bombing disaster, which had left it limping and its people caught in serious health problems for generations. Yet, its positive attitude to life and sense of resilience helped the new generations of leaders make Japan the top economic power in Asia for decades. Its economy matched the strengths of the West, and rose to the level of the world's third top economic power. Post WWII period also saw a nation that was constantly at war with its neighbourhood and the world at large adopting a pacifist constitution at the prompting of the US. This made it, eminently, a nation without a military and pursuing the path of peace and progress with a single-minded devotion.

Akihito, who stepped down from power Tuesday, was known as a pro-people emperor, who firmly stood for the cause of democracy. He refused to give an ear to conservative sections who still nurtured the nationalistic, 'Japan First' spirit which had turned out to be the undoing for Japan during the period of Akihito's father, the previous emperor. Notably, this is the first time in the past 200 years that an emperor has abdicated and handed over power to his new generation, it having happened last in a similar fashion in 1817. Japan shifted from its Heisei era to the Reiwa era. It is celebrating the occasion with a 10-day holiday, signifying the importance the nation attaches to this solemn moment.

India too shares the joy. The relations between the two countries are improving and Japan's hi-tech presence is strongly evident in fields of infrastructure and bilateral trade. Japan occupies a central slot in India's Look East policy. In diplomacy too, Japan and India are strongly linked vis-a-vis China's attempts to dominate the waves and usurp the rights of others.

TO THE EDITOR

Why violate the girl-child?

Editor,
It is very painful to go through the news item, '7-year-old raped, killed in GH' (ST April 30, 2019). One after another such vicious, remorseless and beastly crimes are being committed, leaving behind innocent girl children and often killing them outright. What can be more heart rending? Isn't this a sign of social anarchy? What is the value of elections and the Constitution etc., when law and order is absent and the law keepers have totally failed to provide minimum safety and security to women? Today, minor girls and even the baby girls are not spared from the cruel clutches of the beastly criminals. Repetition of the same crime indicates that the culprits are not deterred by the criminal justice system. Where can we find solace in these de-

pressing situation? Despite repeated agitations and appeals by reputed women's organisations of Meghalaya, no moral change could be brought about in society. Women still live in the same darkness!

Following the recent heinous incident of South Garo Hills, the GSMC has rightly claimed death penalty for the rape-perpetrator. This should be an exemplary punishment for future offenders. Being a senior citizen and a mother at the same time, I feel outraged yet helpless! Will the fair days ever come back?

Yours etc
Uma Purkayastha
Shillong - 4

India should remain vigilant

Editor,
This refers to media-reports that some terror-elements in India were

Mandate, defined as "an authorisation to act" means in electoral politics "the authority to carry out a policy, regarded as given by the electorate to a party or candidate that wins an election". Winning an election is winning the mandate of the electorate. How far the winner has the mandate of the people to act as he does or how far he fails to act as he has promised become issues in the next election.

The electoral mandate to pursue a particular policy is not a legal contract except in referendums. It is just an understanding, an expectation and hope based on trust. Chances of a winning candidate or party honouring or dishonouring the promises made are equal.

Representative democracy has emerged as functionally the most suitable and hence popular form of democracy although there are differences over the method of representation. Modern democracies believe in principal-agent relationship where a particular person is authorised to act on behalf of others. Since the views of others may not be unanimous, the agent must be authorised to use his judgment without approaching his voters on every issue. The representative having the mandate must act as the trustee of the constituency he represents.

The Congress that ruled the major part of seven decades since Independence got its mandate by winning a majority of seats (either alone or in alliance with others) and not majority of votes. In all general elections when the Congress won a majority of seats and formed the Government, its vote share was 43 to 48% of total votes polled. Such a mandate to form a Government is possible in a multi-party system and is inevitable with scores of parties in the fray. Nonetheless, they are electoral victories and give legitimacy to form the Government, but without a clear and positive mandate of the electorate for any policy or candidate.

In 2014, the BJP which got 52% of seats won 31% of votes only. Next stood the Congress with 19% of votes and 8% of seats, the BSP with 4% of votes did not win any seats whereas some regional parties with a much

Race for mandate Politics of manipulation

By Dr S Saraswathi

less proportion of votes managed to get higher proportion of seats due to concentration in less space. The AIADMK restricted to Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry recorded 3% votes, but bagged 7% seats.

The 2014 was more a mandate for the BJP leader Modi as 1971 was for Indira Gandhi and 1999 for Vajpayee. In the Indian experience, leadership plays a crucial role in winning the electoral mandate more than the name of the party.

Winning an electoral mandate with a minority

few places, the voter turn-out exceeds 60% of registered voters and cases of missing names remain a mystery for no fault of the voters.

Such calculations behind the race for mandate encourage candidates to shift focus from canvassing support for policies and programmes to securing votes by reinforcing social divisions and mobilizing vote banks based on narrower considerations or purchasing votes in return for favours. In either way, it is politics of manipulation of the mandate to construct a major-

issues. Candidates also in many cases of regional parties in a federal system lack a policy on national issues making votes cast to them meaningless in Parliament election. Where principal contenders are State parties, mandate for national policy is irrelevant in the absence of pre-poll alliance with a national party. And mandates are being made weaker by purchase of votes going on a large scale in terms of cash and promises of freebies in the present Parliamentary elections. The one and only goal of parties/candidates is to win the electoral mandate.

Parties are indispensable for political education of the citizens, for articulation of their views and for providing a vehicle for participation in the democratic process. They have a legitimate, definite, and permanent role. The mandate given in an election is to the party/parties getting a majority of seats. The pre-eminence of parties is widely acknowledged that those with an ambition to come to power try to capture the leadership of the party first against their rivals. Securing the mandate within the party is the stepping stone to the climb upwards to the Government.

Such considerations lie at the root of parties growing as family fiefdoms. Exceptions in India are the BJP and Communist parties.

As an alternative to the First-Past-The-Post system under which electoral mandate may be obtained on minority votes, proportional representation (PR) is adopted in some countries. For some time, even in Britain there was clamour for switching over to PR and a campaign called "Make my vote count" was vigorously conducted as a positive means of reconnecting politics to the people.

PR, in the absence of national consensus on major policies and goals is unworkable and will destroy whatever democratic character survives in our system. Parties are now specialising in blocking the work of their opponents and cannot do any team work. We have to educate the voters on electoral mandate --- a task parties have failed to perform. ----

INFA

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

“Modern democracies believe in principal-agent relationship where a particular person is authorised to act on behalf of others. Since the views of others may not be unanimous, the agent must be authorised to use his judgment without approaching his voters on every issue.”

of votes is common and several Governments have successfully worked their full term. The percentage of candidates winning by minority of votes polled was 67.28 in 1952, 58.09 in 1957, 60.03 in 1999, and rose to 75.87 in 2004 and 82.68 in 2009. As more and more parties enter the field, the vote share reduces for almost every candidate. Consequently, the electoral mandate and the actual people's mandate are different. The latter cannot be expected in a representative system of democracy.

The voter turn-out was 66.14% in 2014 and 56.97 in 2009. In the current Lok Sabha election, the voter turn-out was around 69% in the first two phases and 62% in the third and 64% in the fourth phase. The electoral arithmetic shows that winners hardly get the mandate of even 30% of voting age population in their constituencies. The lower the voter turn-out, the less clear the mandate.

Considered alongside voter turn-out, election data suggest that a winning candidate is not at all a true representative of his constituency. In very

ity of seats.

The fair winning of an election to have a legitimate mandate to govern is the principal concept of a representative democracy. It may be argued that an elected Government has the mandate of the electorate only to implement whatever was promised during election campaign and its written manifesto and has no mandate for major shifts in policies/programmes.

However, no legitimate Government can be restricted to such a narrow sphere as no one can predict what the future has in store necessitating policy changes, course corrections, emergency operations, and innovative approaches. That is the reason, that Governments are given a mandate for governance as long as they retain the confidence of Parliament. The majoritarian concept is central to the claim of mandate in representative democracy and for ensuring stability of Governments.

Mandates are for various reasons elusive. Voters in most cases are ignorant of national issues and policies of different parties and are inclined to vote on immediate local

political parties which resist any strong action by government in the name of human rights and religious freedom.

Yours etc.,
Subhash Chandra Agrawal,
(Guinness Record Holder & RTI Consultant)
Delhi - 6

International Workers' Day

Editor,
May Day or International Workers' Day is observed on May 1 to commemorate the eight-hour workday movement in Chicago in 1886. The labour movements against exploitation can also be called the movement for human rights. Such movements took many countries to the highway of welfare economics and human development.

We need labour move-

ments in India more than before as we are heading towards privatisation and the contractual employment raj. Shop assistants in some malls are made to work more than eight hours a day. They are being forced to hand over their mobile phones during working hours. Being totally disconnected, they cannot be with their families in case of family emergencies. Sometimes, they are even denied a visit to the toilet. On other hand, the NGO Safai Karmachari Andolan has estimated that one sanitation worker dies in the gutter every third day in our country.

Since the workers can be fired at the drop of a hat, exploitative methods like withholding of wages, debt bondage, holiday hijacking and even physical and sexual torture have become rampant. Informal workers are highly vulnerable to exploitative practices as no

record of contract has properly been maintained, thereby giving ample opportunity to the employers to adopt, use (and abuse the workers) and throw (the ailing ones) methodology. Moreover, two layered discriminations namely social stigmatization and economic marginalization are still prevalent in our country.

The Government needs to conduct regular labour inspections and force the employers to upload the medical check-up reports of the workers and the data of the contracts of the contractual workers every month.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

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

The Battle for Sabarimala

By TP Sreenivasan

The issues raised in Kerala this election were related not to matters of mortals but those relating to God

The will of the people of Kerala, more inscrutable than before, is safely sealed in rooms with extra security as demanded by the times. The long wait for the Lok Sabha election results will mark an anti-climax, with temples getting a break from the delirium of devotees. Offerings from candidates will quietly pour in, making it comfortable for temples to regenerate and repair the damage done. As activists leave the temples, devotees can return to their prayers in peace. The rhythms, the bells and the music will be heard again,

that young women should not enter and a review of the verdict should be sought. The Congress hesitated for a moment, but in keeping with its soft Hindutva agenda, supported the traditionalists. The government stood firm and turned Sabarimala into a battlefield, openly escorting activists to the sanctum sanctorum.

Gaining political mileage

As political postures developed around the issue, the Left parties pushed for a renaissance movement to reform outdated practices, while the powerful Nair Service Society sought protection of the faith by either reviewing the Supreme Court decision or by legislative action. The BJP supported

“The first signs of the change appeared when some of the communist conclaves featured Christ and Krishna, together with Karl Marx and Fidel Castro. The explanation was that divine teachings may have influenced communism, but that was the beginning of the efforts to end the monopoly of the BJP over Hinduism.”

without being immersed in political cacophony.

Embracing Hinduism

This is the first time that God and temple rituals came to the forefront as election issues in Kerala. Earlier, it was only entreaties and special prayers that marked the election process. The first signs of the change appeared when some of the communist conclaves fea-

the faithful and championed their cause, but stopped short of using its majority in the Lok Sabha to issue an ordinance to counter the decision of the Supreme Court. The Congress eventually came to the side of the believers. As a consequence of these developments, the Kerala government was seen as a renaissance group, while the others became

“The vexatious issue on the day after the polling was the phenomenal rise in the number of voters compared to previous elections. Each side believes that more voters came to vote this time because of its own enhanced popularity.”

tured Christ and Krishna, together with Karl Marx and Fidel Castro. The explanation was that divine teachings may have influenced communism, but that was the beginning of the efforts to end the monopoly of the BJP over Hinduism. Soon enough, every party began to create its own version of Hinduism to prove that the BJP version was extremist. Political parties began to embrace Hinduism of different varieties rather than alienate Hindus, many of whom were inclined towards the BJP.

A Supreme Court judgment on the long-standing issue of whether women between the ages of 10 and 50 should be allowed to enter the Sabarimala shrine caused a tremor in Kerala, though initially there was a general consensus that constitutional rights would eventually let women of all ages enter the temple. There were some issues about women being unable to remain pure in body and soul for the entire 41-day-period of penance because of menstruation. But the surprising insistence of the Kerala government on enforcing the decision without any concern for the safety or the convenience of the women pilgrims led to sharp differences over the Supreme Court verdict. Following the model of the Ram temple, which brought the BJP to power in Delhi, the highly polarised political parties took on the cause of the vast number of devotees, who wanted customs and traditions to be protected. The strongest position was taken by the BJP, which espoused the view

champions of faith and rituals. Since the line between the BJP and the devotee groups was thin, the BJP got more political mileage out of the controversy than the others and, therefore, is expected to open its parliamentary account in Kerala this time. The Congress also believes that it has gained popularity with the devotees. The Left believes that it too has gained on account of its government-sponsored renaissance, demonstrated by protests staged under its auspices by women.

Rise in number of voters

The vexatious issue on the day after the polling was the phenomenal rise in the number of voters compared to previous elections. Each side believes that more voters came to vote this time because of its own enhanced popularity. Obviously, the issues raised this time were not those of mortals, like unemployment and price rise, but those relating to God. Though the Chief Electoral Officer of the State had decreed that Lord Ayyappa's name should not be dragged into the campaign, the Sabarimala issue was on the minds of voters as they went to the polling booths. The description of Kerala as 'God's Own Country' was a mere tourist slogan once, but today political parties are banking on divine intervention to determine Kerala's future.

T.P. Sreenivasan is a former Ambassador of India and currently Director General, Kerala International Centre, Thiruvananthapuram

“There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

--- Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, MAY 3, 2019

World Press Freedom Day

MAY 3 is observed as World Press Freedom Day. For India it is appropriate that the theme for this year's WPF, celebrated in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from May 1-3 should be, “Media for Democracy, Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation.” Press freedom is shrinking by the day in every part of the world. The safety of journalists covering day to day affairs especially in conflict zones is a huge challenge. While media persons have no dearth of enemies especially from amongst the power holders, in India they are now also being booked under oppressive laws such as sedition or the National Security Act (NSA). It leaves us wondering how a journalist could be so dangerous merely for reporting the truth as he/she observes it.

In press freedom ranking India is today at 140th position from among 180 countries. This statistic is compiled by Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF). The report claims that violence against journalists, including police violence, attacks by Maoist fighters and retaliation by corrupt politicians and criminal outfits inhibits press freedom in India. Six Indian journalists were reportedly killed in 2018 owing to their work. RSF further highlights dangers faced by journalists especially those working for regional media outlets in rural areas of the country. RSF has recorded that attacks against journalists by supporters of Prime Minister Narendra Modi increased in the run-up to general elections 2019.

The RSF report also states that female journalists in India are targeted on social media through hate campaigns and even receive threats of rape and murder. Journalists who criticise the authorities are often threatened with criminal prosecution and even gagged with Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code.

However, at the other end of the spectrum is also the fact that several print and television media in India have blatantly capitulated to the government of the day and are behaving like propagandists of a particular political party. This has eroded journalistic ethics. Perhaps such media groups believe that disseminating populist views helps them rake in the moolah. India is in the middle of an election. Can such blatantly partisan media add to the democratic ethos? Journalism is expected to rise above emotions and to filter out fake news especially during an election? Although the Chief Election Commission has warned of social media posts that border on hate speech by one or other political party and their followers, trolling of those holding dissenting views continues. Press freedom when conflated with social media turns into an ugly cocktail.

Why we need societal conversations

By Patricia Mukhim

In Meghalaya some individuals and groups take it upon themselves to rake up an issue; to confront the government and put everyone else on notice. Such groups do not believe in the democratic process of discussion and debate before arriving at a decision. They believe they have all the wisdom. Yet they have arrived at their decisions by simplistic arguments. Take the case of influx. These groups feel that the Inner Line Permit (ILP) is the only solution. Perhaps the problem lies somewhere else; so too the solution! Influx happens because there is an employment vacuum that's filled up by people from another state who have the required skills. Influx in Meghalaya means there are opportunities for work here which the local people either do not have the skills for or are unwilling to engage in. Try getting an electrician or a plumber and you hit a wall. You would have to know some electrical store which has a number of electricians at its beck and call. Getting a good plumber through is not easy. I have never seen a local refrigerator repairer or a mobile phone repairer. I also do not believe that all these people in the trade mentioned above can claim they are domiciles of this state. They have come here because they are needed for certain trades. Without them most firms that require the services of such professionals would have to close shop.

I reiterate what I had said in the past about the ILP. Meghalaya is not a dead end state like Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh or Nagaland. It is a transit state. People from Assam's Barak Valley transit to and from the Brahmaputra valley through Meghalaya. So too the people of Mizoram and Tripura. How on earth do you regulate the movement of transit passengers through Meghalaya and check their ILP? Does Meghalaya have that human resource? Is it a viable proposition? Influx requires better solutions than the ILP but pressure groups want instant solutions. How can a far-reaching policy be decided by one or two groups?

The major stakeholders who need to be consulted about the ILP are tour operators and all those running the hundreds of guest houses and eateries in our villages. In Tourism, the money generated is shared in a horizontal manner; there are many beneficiaries. Some earn more than others but everyone earns something. Contrast this to the coal or limestone mining businesses where only a few gain from the environmentally destructive activity. Coal mining requires maximum labourers from outside the state since few locals would want to venture into a death trap called a rat hole. It's quite surprising that the pressure groups too are very selective about who they target. None of the leading pressure groups in Meghalaya have said a word against illegal mining and transportation of coal. Now they are up in arms wanting to implement a regres-

sive instrument that dates to the colonial period in this era where trade and commerce requires easy transit and no unnecessary check gates. Imagine one of the universities inviting a professor from outside for a lecture and then having to tell him/her that they have to get permission to enter the state. There will be arguments that the same professors wanting to enter Nagaland, Mizoram or Arunachal Pradesh have to take permits. But let's get real and find out how many such visitors actually travel to the above three states and how many national centres of excellence do they have and whether they are thriving. Will it be possible for Nagaland, Mizoram or Arunachal Pradesh to have an IIM or IIT with all the constraints that are put on visitors? And yet despite the ILP, Nagaland complains of IBIs (Illegal Bangladeshi Immigrants).

Be that as it may, let me come back to the point I started with, which is that we should bring all issues of concern before a bigger body. No issue can be exclusively dealt with by one or two or three organisations. No group has proprietary rights over any issue. The purpose of the Dorbar Syiem, Dorbar Raji and Dorbar Shnong was primarily to address all issues that concern the Khasi people - an inclusive term for the Pnar, Bhoi and War people. Citing from Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih's book,

“I have never seen a local refrigerator repairer or a mobile phone repairer. I also do not believe that all these people in the trade mentioned above can claim they are domiciles of this state.”

“Hiraeth and the Poetry of Soso Tham, the author quotes from what the Late RT Rymbai, one of the earlier administrators, says of the Khasi Dorbar. Rymbai says, “This concept of Ki Hynniewtrep of the role of their kings and the fact that power lies in the hands of the people, forms the corner stone of the democratic nature of their political organisations where the will of the people is expressed by consensus. In their case the goodwill prevails throughout the deliberations, for or against, because each participant is guided and governed by

non-tribal people too, many of whose ancestors have lived here for hundreds of years. They too are as worried as we are about the consequences of influx on our fragile economy. Should they be kept out of the consultations and should we just impose our decisions on them as if their voices don't matter? Let's admit some facts. We Khasis are not the centre of the world and our culture is not the linchpin of human history. Nor are our concerns exclusive to us. We have to learn to trust that those who have made Meghalaya their home are not outliers who are out to stab us in the back. They too are as human as we are with the same concerns and problems that beset all of us. True that non-Khasis have more acuity for business but we should have imbibed that from them in all these years of social interface.

We are now entering a very challenging era. As Yuval Noah Harari in his book, “21 Lessons for the 21st Century” says, “Billions of us can hardly afford the luxury of investigating, because we have more pressing things to do; we have to go to work, take care of the kids or look after elderly parents. Unfortunately, history gives no discounts. If the future of humanity is decided in your absence, because you are too busy feeding and clothing your kids - you and they will not be exempt from the consequences. This is very unfair; but who said that history was fair?”

The ILP will have consequences for all of us if it becomes a policy even though we have not been part of the debate on it. The question is whether we were allowed to be part of the debate. If not, why not? Should policy be decided by one or two pressure groups? Has enough research gone into the mechanisms for checking influx? Isn't the ILP just a copycat agenda? Don't we have the capacity for a more intelligently designed mechanism? These are questions that trouble many who may perhaps not want to voice those questions for they fear the consequences. We often have to pay the price when we resist and rebel against mainstream views. At this point, to contest that the ILP is not the best mechanism for checking influx is swimming against the tide of public (read pressure group) opinion. But it has to be done for the simple reason that we value the freedom of expression.

Every Khasi, nay every Meghalayan is concerned at the influx that is visible especially in Shillong city. Let us also not forget that Meghalaya today is domiciled not just by the Khasi people but by non-Khasi,

to the nation, which only time would decipher in the future.

Yours etc.,
A Bhuyan
Nagaon (Assam)

Terrorism has no religion

Editor,
Apropos the letter, “India should remain vigilant” by Subhash Chandra Agrawal (ST May 2, 2019), the writer's views are not only very shocking but also laughable. Terrorism it seems is super-inflated when the elder brother of the descendants of Isaac commit violence on the younger brother of the Ishmael family tree. Of course the Palestinians terrorise the Israelis on the Gaza Strip but this does not give a license to the Israelis to do aerial bombing. Please don't be obsessed with local TV

news. Watch BBC sometimes where you can see meaningful debates by Stephen Zakur and others who are really neutral anchors. The security of the nation depends on the strength of the military and not on a private entity. The writer should have courage to name the pseudo secularists who resist military action and who always stand in the way of security. If we look at terrorism from an angle that suits us as it was done in the Christ Church incident, then terrorism from any religious group is not going to wither away soon.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem
Shillong - 14.

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

Delhi Voter's Conundrum: The Shrinking Space of Electoral Possibilities

By Prannv Dhawan

Noted social scientist and politician, Prof. Yogendra Yadav, along with various political activists and Delhi unit of Swaraj Abhiyan had appealed to Delhi voters to vote NOTA. This comes in the context of larger campaign by democratic activists to coalesce opposition forces against the authoritarian and majoritarian establishment. Pursuant to widespread criticism of this stance, Prof. Yadav and his party clarified that their opposition to the dictatorial politics of the BJP was not inconsistent with their strong appeal to the people to demand answers to the real issues from all political parties and use NOTA as a last resort for expression of disillusionment. This appeal also seems to be relevant in the context of voter disappointment over lack of focus on their real life concerns in these elections. The controversy about this appeal raises fundamental concerns about the governance in Delhi and the political alternative and possibilities (or lack thereof) that this electoral contest offers to the citizenry. It is important to understand that this appeal comes in the context of chaotic governance wherein key administrative decisions as well as day-to-day functioning are affected due to the indecisiveness of the Supreme Court and political self-interest on the part of Union Government. Even as Delhi regularly faces multipronged and complex policy crisis (environment, pollution, transport and health emergencies like malaria epidemic), the various institutions within the state machinery remain embroiled in conflict and blame-game.

The Background of Political Conflict and Policy Paralysis

A lot of issues shaping the pollution/environmental outcome in the national capital, particularly matters related to environmental policies, infrastructure, regulation, finance and coordination among various agencies and other state governments to put up a coherent strategy, rest very much with the Central government. There is a deep sense of uncertainty marred in scuffle between Center and Govt. of NCT, Delhi aggravated by divided political climate which seems to deviate from major issues at hand. Not being a full state is a major obstacle for any government which is not in harmonious terms with the Center due to ideological differences. The AAP government has been arguing that because police, law and order, land and municipalities are not under the direct control of Delhi Government, it is impossible to ensure delivery and maintain democratic accountability over officials. It claims that the full statehood would give the State government a free hand to implement and plan major developmental project without any hindrance. The provision of critical public services such as law and order and low cost housing would happen more smoothly if Delhi were accorded autonomy as a full-fledged State with greater control over these aspects. Coordination is likely to improve and the constant blame game between Union and the state government would stop.

It is in this context, that the conditional nature of the AAP Manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections has become a topic of intense debate. While the promises being based on the attainment of full statehood have been criticized for myopic political imagination and cynical approach, it is an attempt to rally public support for full statehood by AAP which has been lamenting its inability to fulfill its govern-

ance related duties since the time it got elected. The detailed comparative analysis of the full statehood vs. status quo scenario is an attempt to connect their electoral promises with the political movement for full statehood. While this is an exercise of realistic public communication about practical challenges, it tends to state that conditions of people and situation of policy paralysis in key sectors is likely to change only if political consensus to transform its status is reached.

Missed Opportunities

The situation of governance breakdown reflects the cardinal failure of the political class to pragmatically manage center-state relations. This also represents a reckless disregard of Supreme Court's judgment that mandates the institutions of governance to respect the spirit of constitutional trust and morality while holding that the democratic autonomy of the elected government must be respected. The judgment presented a moment for all the constitutional functionaries to not engender conflicts and obstruct governance in order to respect the public trust doctrine and cooperate in public interest. However, the spirit of the judgment was not respected and the conflict ensued to the extent that the elected CM had to sit on a dharna to get LG's approval on an administrative policy amidst intense public demand.

Even as the judgment and its ramifications showed that the constitutional interpretation of federalism in India needs a paradigm shift, it also reflected a rare moment of opposition concurrence about fighting against undemocratic interference of the Central government through the LG. This would have reflected a realistic possibility of democratizing the governance in Delhi through an overarching consensus of multiple parties including the Congress. However, this promise of opposition unity also turned into an illusion after the breakdown of prolonged alliance negotiations between AAP and Congress.

The political actors failed to adequately realize that during national elections under the authoritarian regimes, opposition groups are most effective when they are united. One of the most obvious manifestations of opposition unity are electoral coalitions. These coalitions can take a number of forms, including common policy platforms that call for political liberalization. In legislative elections, this entails coordinated policy narratives among parties across constituencies. This kind of unity is much desired in the context of Delhi where the opposition unity could have created a monumental pressure on the current establishment and could have precipitated into a wise political solution in larger public interest of Delhiites. Remediating the sense of uncertainty in governance of state must have been priority of political parties.

In the scattered nature of opposition resistance to multiple policy blunders of the BJP Government, the real crisis of chaotic governance has lost the emphasis it deserved in this crucial election. While AAP's manifesto and campaign bring the realpolitik of half statehood in electoral discourse, it portends a shrinking space of political promises and commitments.

(The writer is Founding Editor Law School Policy Review, II Year, B.A., LL.B. (Hons.) National Law School of India University, Bengaluru)

TO THE EDITOR

Horrific nature of rat-hole mining

Editor,
It was on Dec 13, 2018 when Meghalaya came into the news for yet another wrong and horrific reason. 16 miners were trapped in the coal mines at Ksan, East Jaintia Hills. Till date the search operation has managed to bring out only two decomposed bodies. Rescue operation teams are finding it difficult, or to be more precise are certain that it is next to impossible to bring out any other bodies even if they manage to locate them. It is really tragic because the loss of precious lives and the vacuum that these dead miners create in the hearts and minds of their families is unimaginable. And no amount of compensation will ever make up for the loss. Sadly, for the material gain of the owners of the

coal mines, precious lives of the miners are sacrificed at the altar of death. In spite of knowing full well that rat hole mining is dangerous yet the owners carry on with this mining method to reap profits while the poor labourers, forced by poverty and lured by the wage, plunge into this sacrificial hole. It may not be wrong to state that coal mining is indeed a matter of great shame for the State, dangerous for the labourers and an irreparable loss for the family members while the only ones reaping wealth are the mine owners and their aides. Isn't this a display of greed and lack of humanity and fellow feeling? The government as well as coal mafia are aware of the criminality of coal mining, yet rampant mining of coal is being carried out as it is a lucrative business. The nexus between the coal mine owners and the authorities concerned is

so robust that in spite of the NGT ban, coal mining is still going on in the state. Many such incidents in the past may have passed by unreported but it's about time that the Government takes this matter seriously and comes up with a Mining Policy that will enable the mining of coal using scientific methods. If this is not feasible then mining activities must be stopped. Period. This will save lives, save our rivers and streams and preserve and conserve the environment as a whole.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

The price for Masood Azhar

Editor
Finally, the UN has declared Masood Azhar a global terrorist, and it is a symbolic win for India. How much of terrorism,

pursued by this man, in India, can now be arrested remains to be seen. However, the behind the scene activities needs to be known, and the public should be aware of this. Till recently, India was having a good rapport with Iran, and Iran was supplying oil to India in Rupee terms. The US administration under the tutelage of its maverick President, Donald Trump, was hell bent on imposing sanctions on Iran, for one reason or the other. At the same time, the US appears to be supportive of Saudi Arabia, and its murderous heir apparent, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman. This Wah-habi regime of Saudi Arabia is one prime exporter of Islamic terrorism all across the world, including killing of hundreds of civilians in Sri Lanka recently. The price of Masood Azhar being declared a global terrorist may be quite high

“Almost everybody thinks that the fight is about ideology. Everybody will tell you, ‘Well, the fighting is all about the Middle East.’ ‘Well, it’s about Muslims starting jihad.’ ‘It’s about terrorism.’ ‘It’s about this or that.’ And no, it’s not. It’s about money.”

--- Roger Waters

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SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MAY 4, 2019

Much ado about Masood Azhar

THERE clearly is more of excitement and less of realism vis-a-vis the UN designation of Masood Azhar as a ‘global terrorist’. He is, no doubt, one; but what would come out of this hard-earned approval for the Indian stand is worth a check. Azhar’s terror outfit, Jaish-e-Mohammad, had been designated in such a manner years ago, and this meant little. It changed its name on paper, and carried on with its heinous acts.

Another anti-India terror outfit operating from the Pakistani soil, the Lashkar e Toiba had been proscribed similarly by the UN, years ago, and nothing happened to it. Its leader Hafiz Saeed is a free man in Pakistan till now, like Masood. Notably, it took 10 years for India to “bring Azhar to book” and that too in a mild manner. It showed how weak the highly respected world body is when it comes to the crunch; and how weak India is.

UN either vacillates or acts in a weak-kneed manner. It generally obliges the US, its base being in New York and the US being its main funding source. UN gives freedom to a small and select group of nations to veto proposals at the Security Council. In the case of India-Pakistan tussles at diplomatic level, China used this power to the hilt, to back Pakistan and hurt India. UN reforms is an idea being floated around for quite some time, but neither the US nor the other key players are interested in this. The present scenario suits them; not others.

India’s own long-drawn diplomatic campaign with the UN to get at Masood Azhar is proof of this nation’s weak leadership profile. It wasted much time to get this much done. Azhar heads a terrorist outfit from Pakistan with ISI support and the huge funds he extracted from Indian government by way of ransom money for freeing of hostages from a Kathmandu-New Delhi flight his brothers had hijacked in 1999. Pakistan harboured him openly and he spearheaded anti-India terror activities from there for many years. India could not lift a finger against this; instead, it ran to the UN.

Two main “actions” that Pakistan took now are of curbing Azhar’s travel abroad, which anyway is not possible, given his global terrorist tag; and of freezing his assets. China saw to it that Pakistan had enough time to help Azhar transfer his key assets and funds to others before this UN action came. The “technical holds” were meant precisely for this purpose; to buy time.

TO THE EDITOR

Terrorism hurting humanity

Editor,

This is indeed a wounded modern civilization. The frequent terror attacks have created more chaos. When the UN Security Council designated Masood Azhar as a global terrorist, I instantly remembered the famous statement made by the father of Atomic bomb – Robert Julius Oppenheimer, “We knew the world would not be the same. A few people laughed, a few people cried, most people were silent. I remembered the line from the Bhagavad-Gita... ‘Now, I become Death, the destroyer of worlds.’” It makes a lot of sense and is more relevant now if we think little deeply. Yes, the nuclear scientist had said this with regret on the decision of making bombs and the consequential destruction of Japan. Again, given the fact that

Masood Azhar and his ilk have been bombing and killing countless innocent lives across the world, our “silence” is more dangerous. It took so long to call a spade and spade. The “cry” against terror is not at all shrill. The Balakot airstrike which followed the bloody Pulwama attack vis-à-vis the present Lok Sabha Election, has clearly exposed what our leaders can think about the country and its security. Many did not even hold back to “laugh” off the government action. So, the above-mentioned quote by the father of the atomic bomb perfectly resonates with the twists and turns of world politics, ego and businesses of the modern times.

Very strangely some people here in the home country show more respect for terrorists than the killed army personnel and innocent civilians. They try hard to ignore the acts of malevolence of Osama bin Laden calling him “ji” and

The house searches and arrests of three suspects in North of Kerala by the National Investigating Agency have revealed a sinister plot to replicate the suicide bombings in Sri Lanka. The explosions at six places in the island nation of Sri Lanka – three each at luxurious four star hotels and Churches – killed over 300 people and wounded several others. The 21 April terrorist attack shook the entire world, once again jolting every world leader and others on the growing menace of religious fanatic terrorism. The tremors of the attack were immediately felt in the neighbourhood, mainly in South of India that has historical cultural links with Sri Lanka.

Understandably, the Indian authorities swung into action to prevent any probable repeat of what happened in Sri Lanka. Remember, India is recovering from the shock of the Pulwama attack on 14 February on a security convoy killing 40 security personnel, and is dealing with its aftermath. As the stakes are so high vis-a-vis terrorism, New Delhi will have to go into an overdrive to react to Sri Lankan pogrom. But sadly that is not the case. Both media and politicians are too engrossed in the on-going elections to pay serious attention and space to Sri Lankan episode.

It received scanty space in the television and print media, and the politicians, having shown sympathy and solidarity, did not spell out what India could do to repair the damage in the neighbourhood and preclude such dastardly acts in future. Election is a good excuse, but not good enough to ensure security to the citizens. Let us examine this.

Admittedly, the police in the metropolis have been put on high alert and the national security agency has unearthed and undone a plot to carry out similar suicide bombing in Kerala, thanks to NIA, which has been surveilling many youths drawn to Islamic radicalism and extremism. The main suspect Riyas Aboobacker, who has been arrested and remanded to judicial custody until 29th May has confessed to preparing for a suicide bomb attack. He has been influenced by the preachings of Zahran Hashmi, founder of National Thowheed Jamat (NTJ) and the radical preacher Zakir Naik. Hashmi blew himself up in a hotel as he detonated

so on, even while Afzal-ji is the darling of many. The majority of us are mute and confused spectators. I think this way we are only slipping from bad to worse. I’m afraid, that our silence against the increasing rise of the terror will soon be driving humanity to the brink of disaster. Shall we still keep ourselves in the delusion of this great civilization? Who knows the whole edifice of advanced modernity may be reduced to ashes if we continue to allow the terrorists to have the last laugh!

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Via email

District Council back in the news

Editor,

The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council is again making news for the

Lanka’s Jehadi killings

Sinister shadow in South India

By Dr. D.K. Giri

the bomb, and Zakir Naik is in hiding to escape India law enforcement agencies. Lots of CDs, video clips and other literature was found in possession of Aboobacker and his other two accomplices.

There has been reportedly massive intelligence failure on the part of Sri Lankan authorities as there was evidence found in India of preparations for these. India agencies had alerted the Sri Lanka counterparts that the Indian

cross-border operation like terrorism.

Another question to ponder over is why ISIS chose Sri Lanka, a small island nation of 21 million people. The attack was supposedly retaliation to the bombing of the mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. The Easter-worshipping Christians were the targets. But looking at the demography of Sri Lanka, 70 per cent of population is Theravada Buddhist, followed by 12

Christchurch. Now on Sri Lanka she said, New Zealand rejects all forms of extremism and stands for freedom of religion and right to worship safely”.

Many leaders including Donald Trump, Israeli Prime Minister, European Commissioner Jean-Claude Juncker, the Australian Prime Minister promised support to Sri Lanka. The message was unanimous, “we all stand ready to support”. The message from Turkey was quite powerful as Recep Tayyip Erdogan, despite criticism of him being authoritarian at home said, “This is an assault on all of humanity. This barbaric act has once again demonstrated the need for decisive fight against all kinds of terrorism.”

As I write this, the State of Maharashtra, India has just been hit by Maoists killing 50 people. It is of course an internal terrorist attack backed by the vested interests from aboard. But the consequences are the same -- loss of innocent lives and property, breach of national security. Therefore, India has a major role to play in wiping out violence, mainly by the terrorists and extremists who do not believe in dialogue or democracy.

India, the land of Mahatma Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence must lead the fight against terrorism, not only from Pakistan, which has become the hotbed for terrorism, but anywhere in the world. New Delhi should already have despatched his intelligence officers to help Sri Lankan agencies to investigate the roots of this latest attack.

As a matter of approach, it is established that a sense and practice of internationalism helps strengthen one’s national resources, and these in turn determine the strength of our global stance. So, both as a votary of non-violence and victim of violence, India needs to take up the gauntlet of fighting terrorism.

Let New Delhi begin in its neighbourhood in helping Sri Lanka snuff out the last vestige of terrorism in its soil. Apparently, there is a back and forth link between Sri Lanka and South India in terms of what has happened in the island nation. That makes India the biggest stake holder in Sri Lankan efforts. Let New Delhi play the role it must.

---INFA

(The author is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

“As the stakes are so high vis-a-vis terrorism, New Delhi will have to go into an overdrive to react to Sri Lankan pogrom. But sadly that is not the case. Both media and politicians are too engrossed in the on-going elections to pay serious attention and space to Sri Lankan episode.”

High Commission in Colombo and other areas were being targeted. But Intelligence Agencies in Sri Lanka did not take this input seriously. The Sri Lankan President has removed the Secretary of Defence and the Inspector General of police for this serious lapse.

Be that as it may, Sri Lanka initially admitted that they could not han-

per cent Hindu, 10 per cent Muslims and 7 per cent of Christians.

The reasons for choosing Sri Lanka are mainly three: it is a soft target, secondly, it is tourist spot, and foreign nationals could be targeted drawing international attention. Look at the causalities from different countries; United Kingdom, Denmark, Portugal,

“Admittedly, the police in the metropolis have been put on high alert and the national security agency has unearthed and undone a plot to carry out similar suicide bombing in Kerala, thanks to NIA, which has been surveilling many youths drawn to Islamic radicalism and extremism.”

dle such a massive counter operation to get to the bottom of this murderous conspiracy. They need international help. In the meantime, they have rounded up several suspects. Yet, they will have to do a lot more to wipe out the threat of terrorism. India has obviously a role to play in it. Zahran Hashmi was in India for quite some time, months before he masterminded and executed the bombing operations. India knew of the plot. Could India have done more to nudge Colombo to act? New Delhi realises it well that countering terrorism has to be a multilateral exercise. One country cannot handle a

India, Turkey, Australia, the Netherlands, Japan, Switzerland, Spain, Bangladesh, United States and China. Incidentally, 3 small children of the Danish billionaire Andres Hoch Povlsen were eliminated.

As a part of their strategy, terrorists want international attention, and they got it here. Sample the reactions of the world leaders. The latest victim of terrorism, New Zealand’s Prime Minister Jacinda Arden said, “New Zealand condemns all acts of terrorism and our resolve has only been strengthened by the attack on our soil.” This was after the attacks in

China, though constructed by the Allied soldiers led by America. If this road is again revived by the Indian government, we could take at least take some preventive measures before the Chinese government takes advantage of it. Though the Indian Government has proposed to reopen this road and making it an International Highway for trade route links to Myanmar, China and other South East Asian countries in the Act East policy, yet no concrete efforts have been made beyond talking about it. If this road reopens, the isolation of North East India would end and we would be better able to engage in trade and commerce with South East Asia. It is time that the Look East Policy which is now called the Act East Policy is actually acted upon.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Whither Stilwell Road

Editor,

I would like to state that the Stilwell road which is more popularly known as The Ledo Road has helped the Indian government during the Second World War. This historic road connects two countries, India and

BJP’s downhill journey to continue

Major setback likely in Uttar Pradesh

By Gyan Pathak

The fifth phase of Lok Sabha Election is marked by no holds barred election campaign. It has reached a new low, and even our Prime Minister is not without blemish, though EC has given him a clean chit. The BJP is doing whatever it could to save its majority, but it is too late by now. Elections to the 374 out of 543 seats are already over in the first four phases. NDA, UPA, and Others could hope to win 140, 130, and 104 seats respectively indicating a strong possibility of emergence of a new fragile political realignment in India this month.

The main contenders are of course the BJP and

two BJP, two PDP, and one NC member in the Lok Sabha.

Four constituencies – Kodarma, Ranchi, Khunti, and Hazaribagh – of Jharkhand will elect their MPs. These are presently held by BJP, but they are running the risk of losing Ranchi and Kodarma seats this time to INC and JVM. The party is also fighting a tough battle in Khunti too with INC. The BJP may be sure to win only one seat – Hazaribagh.

All the seven seats going to poll in Madhya Pradesh are held by BJP. The party seems to be comfortable in Betul, Hoshangabad, Khajuraho,

BJP is fighting its toughest political battle in Uttar Pradesh where it has the highest stake. Fourteen constituencies of the state are going to poll in this phase. Barring Rae Bareilly and Amethi, all the seats are presently held by BJP. INC is most likely to retain Rae Bareilly and Amethi seats, but the BJP is most likely to lose Sitapur, Kaushambi, Bahraich, and Kaiserganj to SP-BSP alliance. BJP is struggling to retain Dhauraha, Mohanlalganj, and Banda where SP-BSP seems to have slight edge.

the INC, and both of them are most likely to end up winning only 111 and 97 seats respectively in the first four phases, which are much less than even half of the magic number 272 required for majority to form the government. Since only 169 constituencies are now left to undergo polls in the last three phases, neither of their alliances can even hope for majority, and hence the regional parties are to play kingmakers. TDP and YSRCP of Andhra Pradesh, BJD of Odisha, and TRS of Telangana have already emerged as major players.

It is in this backdrop, 51 constituencies are going to poll in the fifth phase on May 6 spread over seven states. Most of these seats are presently held by NDA, and therefore, it has the largest stake. BSP, SP, and AITC are likely to emerge as kingmakers in this phase, while INC has great hopes of winning several seats which are presently held by the BJP.

Five seats of Bihar will be polling in this phase. NDA has been eyeing for more seats from this state compared to the last general election. They were claiming to win 35 out of 40 seats. However, the election held for 19 seats in the first four phases indicates that the alliance is likely to win only seven, and 12 seats may go to UPA. RJD and JD(U) candidates are locked in close contest in Sitamarhi which was held by BLSF in 2014. Saran seat was won by a thin margin of 4.85 per cent by BJP last time which the party is struggling to retain. The same is the case in Madhubani which it had won by a margin of only 2.44 per cent. There are only two seats, Muzaffarpur and Hajipur, which are considered to be safe for BJP and LJP respectively.

Election in Jammu and Kashmir will be over with polling in Anantnag and Ladakh. PDP is most likely to retain Anantnag, but BJP may lose Ladakh which it had won by a wafer thin margin of 0.03 per cent in 2014. In final reckoning, the state is most likely to send

and Tikamgarh, but is running the risk of losing Satna which it had won by a very small margin of only 0.96 per cent in 2014. Rewa and Damoh constituencies are witnessing a tough fight between BJP and INC.

With polling in 12 constituencies, the election in Rajasthan will be over in this phase. All the seats in the state are presently held by BJP. The party seems to be losing Karauli, Dholpur, Dausa, and Nagaur seats to INC, but seems to be comfortable in Bikaner, Churu, Jaipur Rural, Jaipur, Alwar, and Bharatpur. Ganganagar, Jhunjhunu, and Sikar are witnessing close contests between INC and the BJP. In final reckoning, INC is set to wrest nine seats from the BJP which had won all the 25 seats. INC can hope to win even a couple of seats more where there are close fights between the two.

BJP is fighting its toughest political battle in Uttar Pradesh where it has the highest stake. Fourteen constituencies of the state are going to poll in this phase. Barring Rae Bareilly and Amethi, all the seats are presently held by BJP. INC is most likely to retain Rae Bareilly and Amethi seats, but the BJP is most likely to lose Sitapur, Kaushambi, Bahraich, and Kaiserganj to SP-BSP alliance. BJP is struggling to retain Dhauraha, Mohanlalganj, and Banda where SP-BSP seems to have slight edge. However, the party is most likely to retain Lucknow, Fatehpur, Barabanki, Faizabad, and Gonda. Uttar Pradesh is thus presenting frustrating moments for the BJP.

Seven seats – Bangoan, Barrackpore, Howrah, Uluberia, Srerampur, Hooghly, and Arambagh – of West Bengal are going to vote in this phase. All seats are presently held by AITC, is likely to win all of them again. The party is, however, contesting tough fights in Bangoan and Srerampur where it is caught in a triangular fight with the Left Front and the BJP. (IPA Service)

Is this the right choice

By Dr Anjana Kannankara

When addressing major depressive disorder, prescribing antidepressants combined with psychotherapy is the most common way of approach. While suffering from deep, disabling depression, the idea that a medicine can give back normal life and sense of hope is incredibly appealing. But unfortunately, antidepressants do not always bring about the desired results in everyone. Studies show that only four out of 10 people treated with antidepressants improve with the first prescribed medication they try. Sometimes the trial and error method becomes a necessity to find which antidepressant would work for a particular person. Researchers warn that since this would take time, it might worsen the condition at least in some cases as the search for the appropriate medicine might delay the actual treatment.

Experts believe that some people are prescribed antidepressants unnecessarily. Significantly, the fact that more people take antidepressants nowadays is a possible indicator that these medications are sometimes frequently prescribed for milder cases, even though there is doubt regarding how well they work in a specific case.

There are several apprehensions surrounding the use of antidepressants which cannot be dismissed lightly. A discussion about a few concerns may be helpful to understand the pros and cons and decide if an antidepressant would be a right choice.

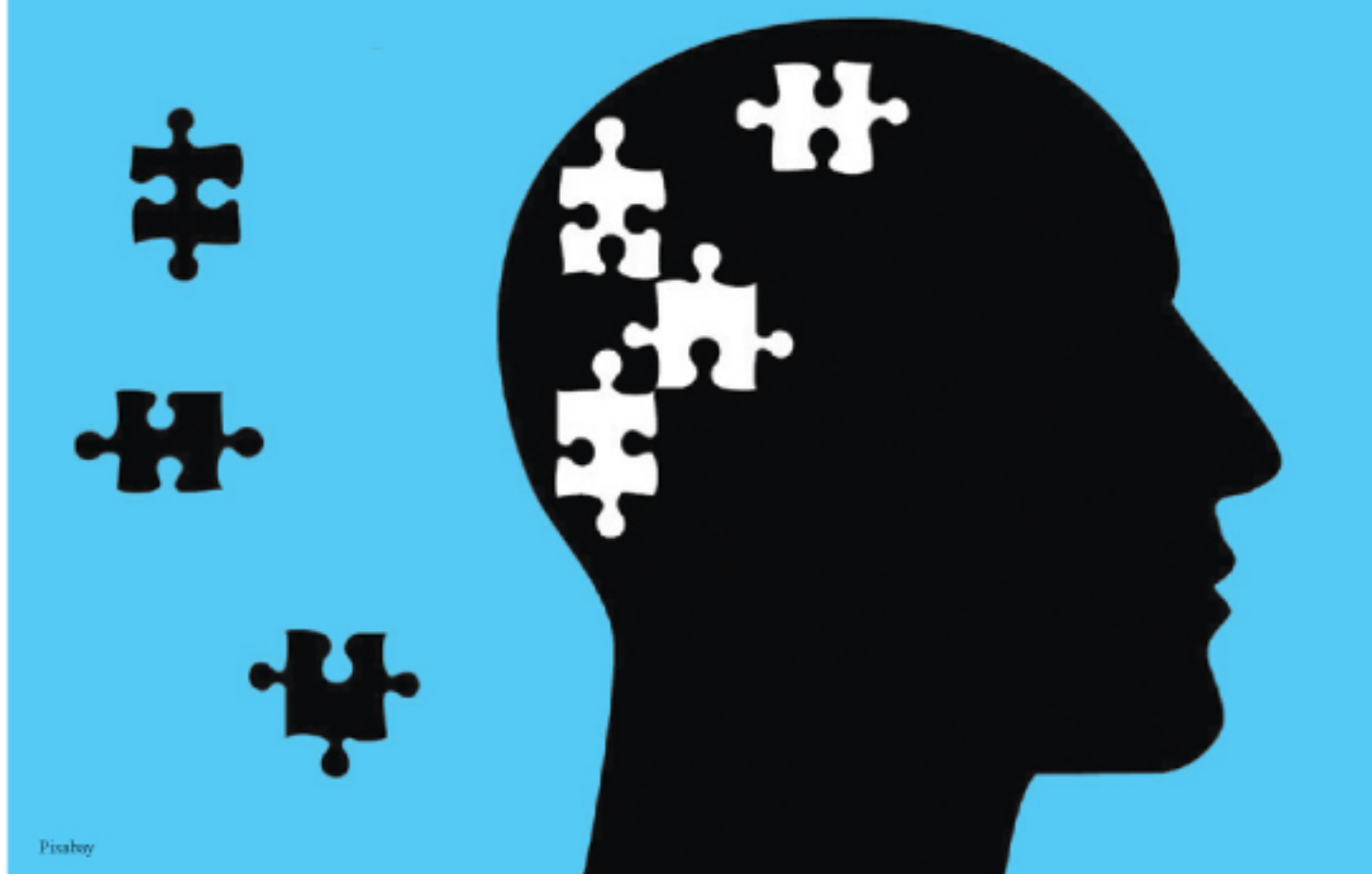
Concern: Antidepressants help to suppress the symptoms only not the actual problem.

The depressed state can distort a person's perception of problems and sap him of the energy to address difficult issues. Medication may relieve some symptoms of depression but can't change the underlying issues and situations in the person's life that are making him depressed. Antidepressants can surely make it easier to deal with the problems. Many therapists report that when their patients take antidepressants, it helps them make more progress in psychotherapy. These medicines are believed to work by increasing the availability of chemicals like serotonin and dopamine in the brain. However, the theory of chemical imbalance in brain being the cause of depression is disputed by many scientists.

Concern: Antidepressants turn a person into a zombie.

When taken under proper medical directions, antidepressants

There are several concerns over use of antidepressants



sants are not supposed to change anyone's real character. They are said to be aimed to help improve mood, control anxious feelings and return the previous level of functioning of a person. What needs to be remembered is that medication has an effect on the brain and is not something to be taken lightly. Those who favour use of drugs claim that if a person who isn't depressed takes antidepressants, the medicine does not seem to improve the person's mood or functioning. Rarely, people do experience apathy or loss of emotions while on certain antidepressants. When this happens, lowering the dose or switching to a different antidepressant may help.

Concern: Antidepressants have severe side effects.

Like all drugs, antidepressants have side effects, and weight gain can be a common one of many of them. Some antidepressants may be more likely than others to cause weight gain; others may actually cause to lose some weight. Side effects of antidepressants vary from one medication to another and from person to person. Bothering side effects, such as dry mouth, nausea, tremors, restlessness, weight gain or sexual side effects, can make it difficult to stick with treatment.

Concern: Antidepressants tag the person with social stigma.

It's high time that people learnt to overcome the stigma attached with seeking help for any kind of mental discomforts unlike in other medical conditions. The fact

Concern: Antidepressants once started have to be taken lifelong.

When antidepressants are prescribed for a primary episode of depression, the goal in the first few weeks and months is to relieve the symptoms and if possible, make the depression go away. Once that goal is attained the patient may need to take the medication continuously for six to nine months for clinical effectiveness and to prevent relapse. Towards the end of the treatment, the dose is gradually reduced over the course of several weeks before stopping the drug completely. Discontinuing them suddenly or abruptly may cause severe withdrawal symptoms which might be difficult to control.

While antidepressants are believed to be quite effective at relieving depression in severe cases, it is possible that some patients, in particular young people, may temporarily feel worse when they first begin taking an antidepressant or when they make changes in their dosage.

Concern: Antidepressants tag the person with social stigma.

It's high time that people learnt to overcome the stigma attached with seeking help for any kind of mental discomforts unlike in other medical conditions. The fact

remains that majority of people these days are stressed out but do not hesitate to get treatment because they understand how treatment can help them lead a normal productive life. When depression interferes with the ability to function normally, seeking treatment is not a sign of weakness. It's a sign of good self-care when a person decides to seek timely help to alleviate stress, anxiety or sadness even in the initial stages so that the condition doesn't worsen or ruin the life altogether.

Concern: Antidepressants increase the risk of suicide.

Studies in recent years have raised concerns that antidepressants may raise the risk of suicidal thoughts or behaviours among children, adolescents, and young adults. For example, a 2009 review in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) looked at 372 studies involving nearly 100,000 people who were taking antidepressants. It was found that, antidepressants were associated with a slightly high risk for suicidal thoughts in some children and young adults, have no effect on suicide risk among those 25 to 64, and reduce the risk in those 65 and older.

A 2006 study published in PLoS Medicine suggests that antidepressants have saved thousands of lives. However, people

who are taking antidepressants should be watched closely to detect any worsening symptoms and alleviate possible danger.

Concern: Antidepressants cause addiction.

Unlike sleeping pills and some anxiety medications, antidepressants are less addictive. Having said this, one should never just stop a course of antidepressants without the supervision of a treating physician. Though body may not crave for the medicine, it will be certainly affected by a sudden stop, particularly at higher doses or might cause the symptoms to return.

Concern: Antidepressants can be quite expensive.

The cost of antidepressants varies widely, depending on the dosage, the drug taken and whether it is available as a generic. Some antidepressants can be expensive, so it's important to enquire if there's a generic version available which would be equally effective. Informing the medical practitioner about the concerns can help devise a treatment plan without burning a hole in the pocket.

(The author is director, TGL Foundation, and senior director, FWO)

Opt for veggie meds

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



New things are happening on the food front that are exciting and potentially earth saving. From clean meat, which is real meat made by multiplying cells instead of using animals which will remove the millions of animals that are grown and tortured for food to milk that is made in the

same way. One company has started making real yolks without chickens.

And now comes gelatine. For the last five years I have been trying to get the government to make a law, asking for all medicine capsules to be vegetarian. Millions of people like me can't eat medicines because the capsule is made of ground animal bone from cows and pigs. The Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) made a number of committees. Presentations were made, issues discussed and finally he agreed that capsules should be vegetarian.

Then the gelatine industry started feeding the press and their lobbyists got into the act. It would make them expensive, vegetarian alternatives were not available, all not true. Then the political order came that this was not to be done as it would have political repercussions close to the elections meaning that some politician's friend was in the gelatine industry. So, we are back to where we started after five years, and I am really sad.

Gelatine is a flavourless, colourless, gelling and thickening agent made by throwing animal skin, bones and connective tissues into an acid or alkaline, bath and dissolving them.

The animal parts, used commercially, are pig skin, cow hide, cattle bones, fish skin.

Gelatine dissolves in hot water and gels when it cools, and creates a texture and bite in confectionary such as sweets, marshmallows, desserts, cakes and jellies. It is used to simulate the mouthfeel of fat in low fat foods and to create volume in foods ranging from ice cream, all Chinese food, soups, cream cheese, gummy bears, wine, beer, apple juice and vinegar, pill capsules, frosted cereals, yogurts, dips and even some frozen vegetables. It's what gives them their chewy, rubbery strength.

Food and beverage is the biggest market for gelatine, followed by nutraceuticals, pharmaceuticals, photography, and cosmetics such as face creams, shampoos, hair sprays, soaps and nail polishes.

There are vegan alternatives to gelatine: agar agar, pectin, starches, gums. But companies using gelatine say that they do not have the same chemical and mechanical properties. They are also slightly more expensive.

But now a company, Gelzen, has been founded in 2015 to produce animal-free gelatine, for use in food, pharmaceutical, and cosmetic products, in a new way. Gelzen co-founders are molecular biologist Nick Ouzounov and Alex Lorestani, who studied medicine at Rutgers, and bacterial pathogenesis. While studying at Princeton they asked themselves the question: Why has the consumer goods industry still not benefited from synthetic biology to the extent that medicine has? We no longer have to slaughter a pig and take its pancreas to get insulin, so why should we do it for gelatine and collagen?

Geltor (previously known as Gelzen) is a California-based company that seeks to disrupt the gelatine market by providing the same gelatine except that it is animal free. It creates designer vegan collagen for the best skincare products, and in 2018 it won the CEW Beauty Innovation Award. CEW is Cosmetic Executive Women - 8,600+ beauty industry professionals who know the best cosmetics in the market.

The San Francisco-based company seeks to supply the overwhelming demand for gelatine. By taking the machinery that builds collagen in animals and moving it into microbes, Gelzen can make a customizable, cost-competitive, safe, animal-free and environmentally friendly product. Gelzen explains the simple logic behind the cruelty-free gelatine on its website: Scavenging essential products from animals presents urgent economic problems, environmental problems, public health problems, and, for many, moral problems. Gelzen has been heavily invested in by food and tech investors.

Most people don't know they are munching on a sweet containing fish or pigskin. But, if they did, I am sure they would not buy the product even if they are meat eaters. It's not just religious (halal/kosher/cow/pig issues) but also about animal diseases. The vegetarian/vegan market is growing and there is a significant demand for a vegan alternative that can precisely replicate the unique qualities of gelatine. The current market for gelatine has been estimated at 3 billion dollars (current price is about \$8 dollars per kg) so there is great potential for a cost effective alternative. People are already paying four to five times this amount for gelatine substitutes.

What Geltor has done is, it has taken microbes and genetically engineered them to produce collagen from which gelatine is derived via a fermentation process, without using or harming animals. Gelzen's scientists program bacteria and yeast with the same genetic information as in animal tissue that produces gelatine. They then use these biological strains to ferment gelatine.

According to Lorestani: We start with a suite of microbes that naturally produce proteins but we give them a set of instructions for making collagen [from which gelatine derives] in the form of genes. We are basically programming them to build collagen for us. The process can also be customized so we can make gelatin with a specific stiffness or beer clarifying agents with a particular property.

Geltor's animal-free collagen was launched in April 2018. Their aim is to have significant commercial quantities available by 2020, but they have already started selling.

The use of animals as edible proteins is now fast becoming archaic. Once all these companies, with alternative production systems, come on the market, people will wonder twenty years from now why they ever ate meat and got all their diseases. Why they let millions of acres of land be devastated for animal grazing, why they let 70 per cent of the water be used for animals, why they allowed greenhouse gases to be emitted by animals.

For the 400 million vegetarians and vegans in the world the suspect presence of gelatine in foods often means going without pudding, or having to read endless number of labels. It also means that many companies lose customers. Now, with Gelzen in the field with safe, sustainable, and no animal cruelty in its real gelatine, the gelatine companies in India have no excuse at all.

(To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org)

Lorni music video next week

Director Wanphrang Diengdoh will release the music video of *Lorni-The Flâneur*, his new film, in the city on May 11.

The video has been directed by Diengdoh and the music is by Hammarsing Kharhar. The director has also written the lyrics for the track. The two form part of the #khasinewwave act Nion.

The track was recorded at Reddur Productions and will be released under Rynsan Records.

We recorded the track at this 100-year-old plus bungalow and the Khasi percussions, the guitars, pipes and the chanting just sounded out of this world primordial and trance inducing. Yet at the same time those instruments sounded so humble and almost aware that the music they resonate should ignite a conscience of who we were, we are and will be, said Diengdoh in an email interview.

"When we finished the recording session and stepped out, it was as if we were transported to some other world. It was an extremely strange yet profound experience. That is what music can do to you defy time and space even, he added.

The five-minute music video has footage from the film and will be released at the Evening Club. The video is being released online but Nion will play at the club on May 11 at 9pm. The performance will start off with the release of the music video, the director informed.

Diengdoh said he was looking for cutting edge local music to accentuate the film and "I had requested Hammar to write some for the film".

He came up with this hypnotic riff that supported the visuals in the film where Adil Hussain (who plays the lead in the film) was running around the streets and alleys in Laitumkrah looking for this suspect who has stolen these objects of great cultural value from the Khasis. Apart from Adil, the other actors who



make an appearance in the film are Merlvin Mukhim, Lumbor Mawsoor, Randell Nongkhlaw, Dawiat Syiem (one of the best artists I have worked with), Elizer Barch (watch out for this one) and my favourite Khasi pop icon, Rana Kharkongor, Diengdoh said.

The director said musically, it really asserts Hammarsing as the sonic architect that he truly is and if you are from Shillong, you will immediately understand both visually, aurally, metaphorically what the track is all about.

Although having said that, we sent the track to a few people in the country and elsewhere for feedback and they said that it sounded so old and haunting yet still

very contemporary and relevant. I like that we are surrounded by our past, he added.

Lorni-The Flâneur is already selected for a few film festivals in the country and elsewhere but the Shillong release is scheduled in October.

"The whole film is like a song. I don't think the film would have shaped the way it is without my constant attempt to further understand Khasi philosophy which I now understand is deeply rooted in our legends, lores and our music. Also, for me, a film is a musical composition. Every crest and trough should correspond to how our emotions respond to what we see on screen. Film is truth every frame

and every second while music or sound multiplies that truth every millisecond. That is how crucial sound and music is with regards to controlling our emotions and our sense of understanding of the world, Diengdoh asserted.

There are other musicians who contributed to the film — including Gareth Bonello who has been working extremely hard these few years to understand the nuances and complexity of Khasi music, Stefan Kaye- keyboard extraordinaire and musical genius who has single-handedly changed the music scene in this country in the past decade and most importantly, a true punk!

(As told to Nabamita Mitra)

A larger slice of life

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



Balarama asked Krishna a question when they had to leave Mathura and were going through all kinds of hardship:

is not true to dissolve let us say a hundred lifetimes of karma, you may take a minimum of a hundred lifetimes. But in the process of these one hundred lifetimes, you may gather enough karma for another thousand lifetimes.

When you are on the spiritual path, you are in a hurry to get to your ultimate destination. You do not want it to take a hundred lifetimes. Entering the spiritual process means being willing to experience life in great measure. Once you come and sit with me, this is my blessing too let everything that is life happen to you.

A spiritual person does not look at events as good and bad you are only concerned about how intensely life is happening to you. Good and bad are social phenomena they have nothing to do with life. Once you have been initiated in a certain way, you are not limited to your prarabdha anymore. If you want to handle the quota of one hundred lifetimes right now, naturally your life will happen with great intensity. If you maintain equanimity, you will see every event that happens in your life will bring you a step forward. If you don't see this, if you get influenced by your social situations, then because of the pace at which life is happening, you may think something is going wrong with your life, which is not so.

If you want to be spiritual, fundamentally, it means you want to end yourself, the way you are right now. Positive terminology can always be misinterpreted in a million different ways because your mind dwells upon it. I consciously use negative terminology because you will not misinterpret it. A positive way of putting it is, you are seeking liberation. You are seeking your ultimate nature; you are seeking God; you want to become unbounded. When you want to be boundless, you want to cease to exist the way you are right now. Once you express this wish and the necessary energy is invested in you, things will happen to end you the way you are right now. This does not mean negative things will happen to you. It is just that life will move on fast-forward, at a tremendous pace.

(Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, visionary and bestselling author. He was conferred the Padma Vibhushan in 2017 for exceptional and distinguished service)

Why are all these things happening to us, and that too with you around? Krishna's answer was, 'Don't you complain when life is happening to you in great measure. It is because you look at certain situations as good and others as bad, or certain situations as desirable and others as undesirable, that you ask yourself why these things are happening to you rather than just seeing life as life.'

The moment you step into the spiritual stream, life is happening to you in great measure, as if everything is on fast-forward. If you do not identify one thing as good and another thing as bad, you will see life is happening in great intensity that is all. There is no such thing as good and bad. Life is happening. Some people enjoy it, some suffer it.

I am talking about life as life is, life as creation is. Right now, most people consider many things as life that actually have nothing to do with life in a deeper sense. People who do not have a car think people who have one are fortunate. It is definitely comfortable and convenient, but it is not a great fortune. If there were no cars at all, no one would desire to have one. The problem is in comparing yourself with others, in the sense of 'Oh, she has it. I don't. This has nothing to do with reality it is a mental condition. All suffering comes from that insanity.'

When you walk the spiritual path, your inner situation is on fast-forward. There are various reasons to this. One fundamental reason is your prarabdha the allotted karma for this lifetime. Creation is very compassionate. If it gave you the whole lot of your karma, which is called sanchita, in this lifetime, you would die. People are unable to shake off memories of this lifetime. If you remind them of a hundred lifetimes in great intensity, most would fall dead, unable to bear the burden. Therefore, nature is allotting an amount of prarabdha that you can handle. If you go by nature's allotment, and we assume that you will not create any new karma which

Women actors in B wood are now driving box office'

Bollywood actress Neha Dhupia, who was recently present in Kolkata for the East Zonal Crowning Ceremony of Femina Miss India, in an exclusive interview with IBNS-TWF correspondent Souvik Ghosh, shares her journey from the beauty pageants to film industry

How does it feel to be the mentor in Femina Miss India being the former winner of the pageant?
It feels fantastic. I am just happy to be the mentor. This is the third year in a row that I am a mentor. It is another feather in my cap. For the first two years, I had Manushi Chhillar and Meenakshi Chaudhary who have gone up and won international pageants and both of them have been from up north. This is the first time they (Femina Miss India) put me on east and west duties.

Do the pageants pave the way for the winner to venture into films?
It is a part of it. It serves the platform for one to do what she wants. With the kind of media glare, they can get much closer to their dreams. Now I only hope the dream that they share with us behind the closed doors is very similar to the dream they actually have. I really want out of girls that they should be themselves which is the most important thing.

You have witnessed a sea-change in Bollywood over the years. Any reason for that change?
I feel the storytelling is defined by society. The storytelling is the kind of subjects people socially talk about. At the same time, the storytelling is also defined by the kind of audience that is ready for it. So I feel it is also the audience which defines the storytelling. The audience has changed resulting in the change in the film industry. Now the filmmakers can't feed the audience, who are way too smart, with anything. The audience won't buy the stuff if the filmmakers mislead them or do not fulfill their promises through films.

Are the scripts now written with bigger space for women characters?
Yes absolutely. Though people say



powerhouse performers have come out, I believe power house scripts have also come out now. I love the sound of Alia Bhatt or Deepika Padukone or Anushka Sharma being the leads in films.

They are driving the box office because they were given good scripts and also performed at that level. Also these actresses demand the kind of payments that they do. I am really happy that I have seen both sides of the film industry in the number of years that I have spent here and the direction that we are headed towards is phenomenal.

What is your take on disparity in remuneration of women actors in Bollywood?
It is changing. I don't know how much anybody gets paid but rumours

say the situation is getting better. The equal payment for men and women actors is a far future for sure but there are women who drive the box office and there are subjects that are made like that.

It is great to see that films are doing so well with women actors in the lead like in the case of *Raazi*, *Queen*, *Manikarnika* or even *Parv*. It is great to see the actresses turning producers. So equal wages is something in which we need to work a little more at every levels. I am in the industry for 17 years and I am not sure about the pay cheque of a male actor who spent the same number of years in Bollywood. Somewhere we need to raise our voices and put our foot down and it will happen.

How do you choose your film? Do

you look for your character or the script?

For me, I feel like it is the script because looking at something as far as one's character is concerned is very small and myopic. I am not in that phase in my career to choose on the basis of character. Even if my character is small and interesting, I will go for the film if I find people will go and watch it because of the script.

You are also hosting the chat shows. How was the experience of venturing into that world?

It has been great. I was the producer myself. I produced the content, worked towards it and worked really hard for three months while doing that. During the last season, I remember I was nine months pregnant. When I was doing my last recording, I remember it was with Kartik Aaryan.

How the life has changed after the birth of Mehr (Neha's daughter)?

Oh my God! It is the best life. It has been the best years of my life. I love the morning hug which I get from her. Ahh! Oh my God! It is worth it. I don't know how to describe the feeling. The feeling of seeing her play all around and coming to sleep on my chest is priceless. She is just five months old and now learnt how to give kisses. She gives the sweetest kisses in the world. We are right now in that phase where she is giving free kisses and hugs (smiles).

Any recent projects you are doing?

I have just finished doing *Roadies*. I did travel with my daughter who was just three months old then. On Apr 27, the brand new season of my chat show *BFFs with Vogue* will start.

How challenging it is to balance both the personal and professional lives?

Tough. I don't know how I am managing the whole thing. But I am so crazy about my work and also my daughter. I don't believe in picking one or the other. I respect every mother who decides to stay at home and look after their kids. But here I am. I believe in the hustle. I am ready to carry my bag on one hand and my daughter on the other. One hundred per cent.

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambi

Sunday, MAY 5, 2019

Moon vertical Sun on your solar return chart ushers in success in career and business. Efforts put in in the past can also be quite handy at this point of time. Businesspersons will find it smooth sailing all around and a new venture can also be initiated. Sources of prosperity open up and a positive attitude can help you make the most of it. Take advantage of this expansive time. Contacts would be useful. It is an appropriate time which provides insight and when you can see your vision unfolding in front of you. Social activities will also keep you busy. Benefits can accrue by selling or buying property and/or assets.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Some associations can be competitive in business as you shine and work well in your field of activity. You initiate a current of forceful energy to achieve success in an important venture. You are likely to protest against domination by people at work. You may have to face egoistic people. This week brings love, romance and excitement in personal relations. Deep personal relations and business partnerships are likely to get stronger. Good luck in finances and new opportunities are encouraging. This is an excellent period for starting new regimen to improve your health and well being, such as regular exercise, more structured and productive use of your time, and so forth.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You have the desire for love, harmony and a peaceful life. It is a gentle, considerate, and sensitive vibration. You are diplomatic, warm and sensitive. This week brings for you socializing, romance and stability at the work place. Love, friendship and relationship are emphasized. There are strong chances of materialization of friendship into a long term relationship during this time. Your social life may be restricted to business and family related obligations. Luxury shopping may make a hole into your pocket but makes your family happy and brings a smile to their face.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Self-confidence and prompt action are highlighted. You are generous with friends, and loving in family situations. You come across as especially smooth, and your good nature is bound to attract some attention. You stand in the middle of a doorway in the middle of the week while making an important decision be it professional or personal. It would be better to listen to your own judgment and do what is good for you. People around you could be judgmental or manipulative. Do not forget to share your feelings with the one who loves and cares for you.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You are loving, stable, and harmonious in personal relations. There is conflict within and discord outside. You may be divided about business and professional matters and finally come to terms with compromise which might be the best thing to do at this time. You may disagree mentally with your partner but the love between you allows peace and acceptance. Emotions and moods can swing to extremes and it is important to achieve equilibrium. You can get stressed and manifest a health problem as you worry about everything.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You are practical, trustworthy, hard working, and helpful. This week influences your finances and material aspects, suggests that you are considerably more goal-oriented related to earnings. Your ability to concentrate and focus helps you to achieve what you set out to do. A new project or goal begun at this time has a good chance of being successful and long lasting. It's an excellent phase to make a lifestyle change. Self-confidence and action are highlighted. You may go in for a change of your image. Personal relationships especially with your loved one are stable and rewarding.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23)

You have intellectual vibration and ability to adapt to most situations. This period brings financial gains for those in banking, investment, hotel industry and those who are in the

teaching profession. There could be alteration in ideas or plans, increase and decrease in finances and fluctuation in business. You can be lead away by undue enthusiasm unless careful inner balance is maintained. Marriage, business partnership and collaboration can be strengthened through understanding and commitment.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

You are introspective and quiet. This week brings some changes in the way you look at professional goals and new interests are developed. You connect with fun loving people, artists and entertainers. Strong existing relationships are likely to grow and transform. Your finances could also improve as long as you employ a tried and tested strategy. Attending an important social occasion or festival may put you in the public eye. Meditation and introspection is therapeutic and revealing as you intuitively get to the bottom of things.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

This phase brings youthful energy and you accept challenges in your life. You are diligent and pedantic at work and specialize further in your field of activity. You are on the threshold of a creative and inventive work that brings you name and exposure. Meditate on the constant changes happening around you and centre within. Good health and energy enables you to participate in sports and related pastimes. A pleasant surprise awaits you at the end of the week.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You would be more accommodating and compassionate in relationships and not take things personally. You would express your adaptability and persistent energy in professional projects. You deal with official and personal matters with calm authority. You possess great power to attract creative and charismatic people around you to make your social life enjoyable. You would be dynamic, forceful and assertive in professional ventures to establish a position of authority. Health and energy need to be conserved through a busy time at work.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

The planetary configuration promotes your luck in work related areas. You would be especially fond of home and family life. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental now. Loyalty and sensitivity in your relationships are more important to you. There would be a bright opportunity to travel, learning or the publishing of a project. Getting your finances on track will be necessary at this time. Do your best to avoid letting emotions rule over good judgment when it comes to expenses and other financial matters. Share your thoughts and feelings with others and you may be surprised at the support you receive from close friends and loved ones.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

This phase brings excellent work opportunities for sportspersons and lawyers and also a favorable time to appear in written exams, handle court matters and attend to legal matters. Self-confidence and tremendous efforts are highlighted to attend professional goals. Financial benefits may come your way through investments. You need to be careful in your interpersonal dealings and you must avoid confrontations with your family. Your financial situation looks promising if you manage it well personally rather than look to others. Make sure that you do not get caught up in arguments as a simple and straightforward approach is all that's called for.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You may see the light in a friendship, realizing its importance in general, as well as the importance of acceptance and camaraderie. Circumstances may be such that you bring a new spirit of friendship into a romance or another connection in the next months. This can be invigorating. Surprises coming from children may be part of the picture. Your creativity, romance, pleasure, and children are involved. This could manifest, for example, as a romantic proclamation from a lover, a creative project bearing fruit, a child revealing something significant to you, and other such possibilities during this time.

Start career planning now

By Ranjan K Baruah

In our last edition, we published information related to career options after senior secondary. This time, we will talk about few more options. Aspirants and guardians must follow the updates from institutes and government departments as there might be changes in syllabus or patterns of entrances or eligibility. Whenever there are changes information is passed through advertisements or other means.

Medical Entrance: Admission in medical colleges in India is done through national level entrance like National Entrance and Eligibility Test (NEET). Students may appear for NEET after Class XII. Science students with Physics, Chemistry and Biology or other may appear for this entrance. AIIMS and JIPMER also conduct entrances at national level. One should be careful before taking admission in private medical colleges or colleges outside India. Interested students may visit the official websites of Medical Council of India. Like MBBS, there are other courses like BDS, Ayurveda, etc.

Nursing: In nursing, one can do courses like B Sc, GNM, ANM, etc. After passing Class XII students can take admission in nursing courses. For BSc, students must be from science background and for GNM it is preferable to be from science stream. However, students from arts stream may also take admission in GNM and ANM courses. For guidelines and to look at the status of affiliation of various nursing schools or colleges interested may visit the official website of Nursing Council of India.

Paramedics: There are courses related to paramedics like lab technician or ICU technician. One may also choose courses related to physiotherapy and allied health courses. Students may also explore courses related to Yoga or Naturopathy.

Hospitality Courses: Interested students can opt for some courses in hospitality sector like courses in travel and tourism, air hostage, beauty and wellness. Students should be good in communication skill apart from other required soft skills. There



are government affiliated institutes and many are privately managed institutes which offer courses related to hospitality.

Social Work: One can join bachelor level courses on social work. The course is known as BA in Social Work or Bachelor of Social Work (BSW). Many universities conduct BSW courses in the country. BSW is graduate level courses; similarly there is course like MSW which can be joined after graduation.

Five-year integrated course: Traditionally students join college as part of their graduation, which is mostly for three years and after finishing graduation, one does post graduation as part of the higher studies. Integrated courses help students as they remain focused on particular subjects. Some of the popular five-

year integrated courses are in Law, Development Studies, Commerce, Mathematics, Social Work, etc.

BA/B Sc/B Com: Bachelor level courses are available in most of the colleges the country. After passing senior secondary many take admission in three-year courses under various universities. Popular subjects are Economics, Political Science, History, Accountancy, Zoology, Botany, etc. Admissions are on the basis of marks obtained in Class XII final exam. Some colleges might conduct admission test for admission.

Updates:

HDFC Bank Educational Crisis Scholarship Support 2019: HDFC Bank Educational Crisis Scholarship Support 2019 invites applications from students who are unable to bear the cost of education and are at a risk of dropping out due to a personal or family crisis. The key objective of the scholarship is to provide assistance to these students, to tide over a difficult situation without adverse impact on their education. Aspirants may apply before June 15.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjank@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

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

-- Robert H. Schuller

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SHILLONG, MONDAY, MAY 6, 2019

Maya Jaal in UP

THE non-BJP opposition, a split force now, might as well stand united after the Lok Sabha poll results are out. Proof comes also from the gesture of BSP chief and former chief minister Mayawati on Monday to announce the formidable BSP-SP alliance's support to the Congress in the key battleground constituencies of Amethi and Rae Bareilly – where Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi are contesting.

Juxtapose this with a statement from Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi on Sunday that her party would back the SP-BJP alliance in constituencies in UP where the Congress does not have a winning chance. Even amid a tough fight, the two sides are clearly giving top priority to defeating the principal enemy, the BJP. This could be interpreted as a pointer to the post-poll ministry formation exercise in the national capital- Delhi.

The general impression is that it will be a tough task for PM Modi to manufacture a majority after the Lok Sabha polls. The Modi Magic is no longer visible, though there palpably is no anti-incumbency mood, either. The results could throw up a hung parliament, and chances are that a combination of political entities would come together to form government if Modi and the BJP are found wanting in the numbers game. In such a scenario, a possibility of some political parties breaking ranks – from the alliances they are now part of – and siding with a rival group cannot be ruled out. Uncertainties are there for all to see at this juncture.

Mayawati, on her part, has also threatened to teach the Congress a lesson in Madhya Pradesh where her party is keeping aloft the Kamal Nath-led Congress ministry in a scenario wherein the tricolour party does not have a majority on its own. Yet, it could be that Mayawati is keeping her fingers crossed.

In any post-poll scenario, the BJP would not help her meet the proclaimed ambition on her part to become the Prime Minister. There is an air of hope on the other side. If the Congress does not get a large number of seats, it would be open to being part of a wider alliance of opposition parties; not just of the UPA. In the event, the scope for bargaining exists for the likes of Mayawati and Mamata Banerjee. This is not to ignore similar ambitions of several other regional satraps who are waiting in the wings.

Under the circumstances, putting a few coins in the Congress basket at this juncture suits Mayawati as also her alliance partners Akhilesh Yadav and Mulayam Singh.

TO THE EDITOR

Embarrassing situation

Editor,
A footprint can be checked and matched to an existing footprint on record. The Indian Army's claim of "Mysterious Footprints of mythical beast 'yeti' near mount Makalu" sounds confusing as there exists no footprint of yeti on record as yet. Then how can it be identified as that of a yeti's? It would have been better had the Army described the footprints as that of an unknown animal. Previously, all 'yeti' sightings happened to be bear sightings. However, unknown species have been discovered, named and catalogued over the years and it is an ongoing process. It may so happen that the team of the Army has actually discovered a new species of bear other than the Himalayan brown bear, the Tibetan brown bear and the Himalayan black bear. First of all, the photographed footprints need to be matched with the footprints of those bears. If they don't match then there is a possibility of a new species being found.

Be that as it may, Sangh ideologue Tarun Vijay's advice to the Indian Army creates new problems. He said, "Congratulations, we are always proud of you. Salutes to the #IndianArmy Mountaineering Expedition Team. But please, you are Indian, dont call Yeti as beast. Show respect for them. If you say he is a 'snowman'."

A problem will arise if the Snowman, as Tarun Vijay says, is not a beast. There is every possibility that he might have come either from Nepal or China. In that case, he has to establish his religion to pass the NRC test to stay in our country. BJP President Amit Shah said, "We will ensure implementation of NRC in the entire country. We will remove every single infiltrator from the country, except Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs." This is going to create a huge problem for the Snowman to stay with us if he does not believe in any of these religions. What will happen if he is an atheist? Can India's well known atheistic school of thought called Charvaka or Lokayata then be used in his defence?

KHADC: Pre-shock warning of a tremor in MDA

By H H Mohrmen

The imbroglion in the United Democratic Alliance of the Khasi Hills District Council in which six MDCs withdrew support to the Executive Committee led by Teinwell Dkhar is nothing new; in fact this is expected from a coalition where the regional parties are present. What was not expected was the time factor. Politicians belonging to the regional parties cannot even work together for three months. But this conflict is more than what meets the eye; it could also be a bad omen for the National Peoples' Party led Meghalaya Democratic Alliance in the state.

What is it with the regional parties that they are always at each other's throats? Look at the brief history of the budding regional party People's Democratic Front (PDF). In less than two years after it was established, its own founder leader left the party. The story is similar with Khun u Hynñiewtrep National Wakening Movement (KHNAM). It has folded its flag and its own founder President joined another regional party. In the case of KHNAM some of the founder members are trying to keep the party's flag flying, but new leaders too are fighting each other and the matter has even reached the High Court. The future of the HSPDP with its former president looks promising but we all know what has happened now. He has done the vanishing act.

The UDP does not have smooth sailing either. It may be reminded that UDP is the third incarnation of what was earlier known as the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHL) and later morphed into the Hill Peoples Union (HPU). Regional parties like the PDIC, the MDP and in Jaintia hills the JNU have become history but it will not be surprising or the time will not be far off when some of the existing regional parties in the state follow the same path of history.

Now it is clear that two months is the maximum time that the politicians who belong to the regional parties can work together in the district council. One may ask why? Regional parties on their own cannot co-exist. It is like having too many male lions in a pride; every leader is an alpha male and a pride cannot have two or more alpha male. This is happening even before the results

of the general elections are declared. The result of the Lok Sabha election in which the alliance support a common candidate is yet to be declared but the cracks in the alliance have already appeared.

Once the outcome of the election are known, in Garo hills win or lose the NPP will have no one to

Now everybody has admitted that illegal transport of coal is a reality and even the SP of Ri Bhoi District did not deny it when he told the press that it is difficult to check every truck plying on the highway. If the Meghalaya police cannot do it, perhaps the government should ask the Assam Police to do the checking

"It has folded its flag and its own founder President joined another regional party. In the case of KHNAM some of the founder members are trying to keep the party's flag flying, but new leaders too are fighting each other and the matter has even reached the High Court."

give credit to or blame for, but in the Khasi and Jaintia hills, if the common candidate wins then that will further cement the alliance. But if unfortunately the MDA common candidate loses then the crack will further widen. The counting day will be the judgement day which will prove to the world

like they do on the Jowai-Silchar road just across the Malidor Bridge. On this section of the highway, the Assam Police checkpoint at Malidor does not allow coal trucks to pass through the bridge before dark and of course not before some palms are greased. Only coal trucks are stopped before Malidor bridge while

"The point is that this is only an excuse. The police do not have to open the trucks to check the consignment they carry which of course will take time. The police should only check if they even have necessary papers to carry the consignment on the trucks."

whether all the coalition partners of the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance really worked hard to ensure that their common candidate wins the Shillong parliamentary seat.

There are already complaints that the common candidate did not have enough funds to even serve tea during the campaign in spite of being the coalition candidate. If a candidate of a coalition which is in the government does not have enough money even for organising campaign meetings, then the question is why is this happening? Did the candidates contesting from other parties face similar financial constraints? In fact money should not be a problem for the coalition which is now running the government.

trucks carrying other essential commodities are allowed to pass throughout the day. The Assam Police easily distinguish coal laden trucks from the others.

But it was reported in the press that the Khliehriat Police were compelled to file a suo moto FIR against the attack on police who manned the NGT check point at Tuber Chohchrieh on the May 1 last. After this incident coal laden trucks were not allowed to pass through to Guwahati and now from May 4 and 5 coal trucks were seen returning to the place from where they loaded the coal.

The point is that this is only an excuse. The police do not have to open the trucks to check the consignment they carry which of course will take time. The police should only check if

they even have necessary papers to carry the consignment on the trucks. The state is losing crores of rupees due to the illegal transportation of coal, but money does change hands in the process and the question that the public are asking is where does the money go? Who gains from this illegal transportation of coal? The government is grumbling about the financial crisis and says that it cannot even pay teachers' salary, but everyday crores of rupees which should have come as royalty from coal is being siphoned off by the ghosts of the highway.

Obviously this cannot happen without the knowledge of the government in power. Neither can they feign ignorance about it because it has been reported in the media almost every alternate day, but the way the NPP-led government is handling the issue will further widen the cracks in the MDA. The other question is whether other coalition partners are aware of what is happening and how much is collected by the police? And if they are aware, then are the coalition partners given equal share of the spoils? Or is this a case of the regional parties being taken for a ride by the leader of the coalition Government?

We blame the police every time we see them collecting money from the trucks on the highway, but now that we know the truth behind it, can the blame be squarely put on the police only? Can the people who look the other way when it is happening be let off the hook and not be held accountable for all the mess? The police were emboldened in their act by the Government which does not respect the rule of law. Now this is the situation that we find ourselves in, in Meghalaya.

After the KHADC mess the only thing that acts as the glue that holds the MDA together is the support of the NDA. Without the support of the alliance in Delhi, it would have split and the alliance would have collapsed. But time will tell if the NDA will retain power in Delhi. If there is a change of guard in the national capital and another coalition partner takes charge then MDA will meet its doomsday.

Can we make Rabindra Jayanti culturally inclusive?

By Jyotirmoy Prodhani

Rabindranath Tagore - the great poet, philosopher, Nobel laureate and arguably one of the finest thinkers of modern India - used to write primarily in Bengali and also in English, but his writings have been essentially a celebration of universal humanism, which have remained abidingly relevant not only within the regional confines of India alone but transcended the boundaries of nations, for he firmly believed that human civilization and intellectual refinements have been the foundational legacies of humanity in general. For Tagore the idea of humanity itself is a manifestation of deeper understanding and harmony despite contradictions and incongruities which essentially define the history of civilisations as a chronicle of innate values and beauty. And culture is part of that harmony. In his famous essay on Nationalism he has elaborated on his idea of inclusive identity as a civilizational reality. Even the idea of India, according to him, is a composite manifestation of ethical diversities when he had mentioned that the basis of Indian unity had come through the saints, the spiritual voices like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others. The cultural vision of Tagore was essentially universalist. In his essay, "Religion of the Forest" he writes, "Humanity for ages has been with one great creation of spiritual life. Its best wisdom, its discipline, literature and art, all the teachings and self-sacrifice of its noblest teachers, have been for this."

Tagore had underlined the fact that despite the mutual differences of races and diversities, India has achieved a sense of unity. This, he argues, might well be the most significant contribution of India to the world. On the idea of history, he writes, "There is only one history - the history of man. All national histories are merely chapters in the larger one." ("Nationalism") He even reiterates that the most important fact of the present age is the fact that all the different races of men have come closer to each other.

Tagore's philosophy has been inclusive, corporate and communitarian. But unfortunately he has been reduced into a formidable symbol of deeply exclusionary cultural disposition, the process that has provincialized Tagore. This is largely the reason that Tagore has been progressively alienated and distanced from the mental cartography of the communities who are not part of, what can be called as, 'the Bengali cultural discourse' or of the cultural pedagogy known as 'Rabindra charcha'. With the growing awareness among the micro entities, even within Bengal, the communities are increasingly beginning to assert difference rather than engaging in voluntary retreat for 'assimilation'. This has led to the anxieties as well as a sense of resistance among them when it comes to celebrating Rabindra Jayanti which essentially follows a module that zealously curates a mono cultural patronisation with aggressive exclusion of all other forms of cultural manifestations by effectively reducing them, even in the spaces of their own, as veritable pariahs, the culturally orientated 'other' as well as the perpetual fence sitters, as if being on the fringe is an act of atonement of their 'interpellated' cultural inferiority. This very act of exclusionary celebration of one of the greatest icons of modern India is a severe desecration of the very ideas that Tagore stood for than an achievement of the purportedly supremacist cultural stance that such acts actually aim at. Tagore

would be the staunchest critic of any form of hegemony, be it cultural or political, but ironically the celebration of his own anniversary has, in effect, become an annual ritual of asserting that very scourge.

In the context of the North East, Tagore has a different significance. His association with Tripura was rather deep. He was close to the Kings of Tripura, including Radha Kishore Manikya and Bir Bikram Manikya. He had also given the name, 'Ujjayanta', to the Agartala Royal Palace and during his several visits to Agartala he came across Manipuri Dance and took some of the most eminent Manipuri Dance Gurus to Shantiniketan like Guru Budhimanta Singha and others. It was Tagore who was instrumental in making Manipuri Classical Dance as one of the first dance forms to become an institutional discipline in Indian academia. In fact, the dance form known as 'Rabindra Nritya' is primarily inspired by and based on the Manipuri Classical Dance. Tagore also had received generous financial support from the Kings of Tripura for Visva Bharati. Similarly, his association with Assam and Shillong have also been significant. He had visited Assam thrice. Despite having a different opinion initially, his support to the Assamese language has been particularly noteworthy.

In fact, Tagore was always critical of any form of oversentimental hegemonic assertion. He has been categorical in not accepting his own region, Bengal or his city, Calcutta, as the sole centre of cultural or historical supremacy. As a matter of fact, it is not Calcutta but rather the cities like Pragjyotishpura (Guwahati) or Imphal in the North East or even Coochbehar, presently in Bengal, have been rather few hundred years older than Calcutta in terms of antiquity, history and cultural enlightenment. In his essay, "The Modern Age", about Calcutta Tagore writes, "Calcutta is an upstart town with no depth of sentiment in her face and in her manners. It may be truly said about her genesis- in the beginning there was the spirit of the Shop, which uttered through its megaphone. 'Let there be Office!' and there was Calcutta." Tagore continued, "She (Calcutta) brought with her no dower of distinction, no majesty of noble or romantic origin; she never gathered around her any great historical associations, any annals of brave sufferings, or memory of mighty deeds. The only thing that gave her the sacred baptism of beauty was the river. (Tagore Selected Essays, 35-26). Tagore has been starkly objective with the stately elegance of a great thinker. He had famously said, "Nationalism is a great menace. It is the particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India's troubles". (ibid 246) The same is relevant even in the context of what can be termed as 'sub nationalism'. It is, therefore, an imperative on the part of the organisers to celebrate Tagore with the spirit of the bard himself, which is pluralistic, inclusive, multicultural and polyphonic, so that Rabindra Jayanti on 25th of Baishak becomes a collective celebration of cultures and not a mere esoteric rite that alienates.

The most ideal way of celebrating Tagore in the North East is not through the monochrome of cultural singularities but through the polymorph of multiplicities which is unifying. Rabindra Jayanti would carry much more significance and relevance if the event transforms into an occasion for uninhibited cultural freedom rather than an event of sanctioning the native tongues. (Jyotirmoy Prodhani teaches at NEHU, Shillong. Email- rajaprodhani@gmail.com)

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

Coal: to mine or not to mine

Editor,
Coal mining has somehow come to a standstill and brought some temporary relief to individuals and groups involved in the tourism industry. There are pros and cons in coal mining. The activity cannot continue with all the lawlessness that has happened and continues to happen in different parts of the state especially in East Jaintia Hills. No tourist would like to venture out to a place where his or her security is not guaranteed. If the state cannot protect its own police personnel from attacks how do we expect ourselves or tourists for that matter to be protected? There has to be some checks and balances before allowing coal mining to resume. The state authorities must awake from their slumber and only allow coal mining after putting in place strong environmental protection mechanisms.

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

Points to ponder

Editor,
Apropos the letter, "Terrorism hurting humanity" by Salil Gewali, (ST May 4, 2019), I agree with the writer to an extent. It is surprising that not many leaders had express sense of relief when finally Masood Azhar was listed as a global terrorist. One of the factors why this action did not resonate with these leaders is because of the condition put by China to omit Pulwana in his list of terror activities. Another more important factor was the inaction of the Pakistan government in the past with respect to Hafiz Saeed who still roams around freely. About Balakot, I fully agree with the writer though the word 'laugh' is, I believe a bit too harsh. The opposition had exposed their ignorance by relying too much on Reuters and other international media which raised serious doubts about the number of tar-

gets hits. Even the Modi Government erred by throwing up different numbers at different times. In a war propaganda is crucial. In the absence of satellite imagery which was never made public, these doubting men from the Opposition behaved so badly that they had to pay a heavy price in the election campaign. One mistake by our Prime Minister was that he took the entire credit for the Balakot strike to himself. During the all-party meeting of parliamentarians there was a consensus that the military should be allowed to do its duty. To then claim that the Balakot success was a personal victory of Pm Modi and the BJP does not auger well. It was also inappropriate to have used this to get votes for the BJP during the election campaign. In 1940, when the RAF finally silenced the Germans in the air battle over London, the Prime Minister and military commander, Winston Churchill said in a radio broadcast worldwide, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few." In 1945, it would have been, "Never in world history were the RAF, USAF, Australians,

New Zealanders and the Commonwealth, owed by the whole world". What a credit to the fighting men, most of whom could never come home.

About the use of the world 'Ji' for terrorists, the leaders who said so should be condemned. However, sometimes the word 'Ji' is so frequently used that in the heat of the moment it could have been a slip of the tongue. Just as we also commit a mistake by saying, 'Modi ki sena,' etc.

Finally, let us all unite to curb terrorism. We should condemn the terrorists and also console the family of the victims no matter what their religion. If we could do this there is hope that one day terrorism may be defeated.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Shillong 14.

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

"The Pessimist Sees Difficulty In Every Opportunity. The Optimist Sees Opportunity In Every Difficulty."

— Winston Churchill

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SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MAY 7, 2019

Itinerant Chief Minister

GOVERNANCE in Meghalaya is on the back-foot. Nothing of consequence is happening. We are witnessing a blame game that has gone on for over a year. The present NPP-led MDA Government blames the Congress-led MUA government for every ill that besets the state. But isn't that the reason why people voted for change in 2018? So where is the change? Do we see any change in terms of how governance is executed? Right now the alibi is that important decisions cannot be taken until the election results are declared on May 23. But that's not the point. The point is that many decisions that can legitimately be taken and are not necessarily tied to the Lok Sabha elections are kept in abeyance. Meghalaya's capital, Shillong is bursting at the seams with traffic snarls leading to loss of precious man hours particularly during school timings. People voted for change even here. They wanted the new Government to grow a spine and push the elite schools to procure school buses so that all the vehicles that come out on the road in the morning and afternoon (which include government vehicles ferrying the privileged children of government and police officials) are put to rest and don't congest the public roads. But even this decision is kept pending for reasons best known to the CM Conrad Sangma.

Speaking about the CM, he seems to be straddling two worlds - that of leading the state and that of leading his party the NPP. Between the two he is undecided on which is the more important duty. Add to that the duty of chaperoning the PM during his Varanasi rally followed by his accompanying Union Home Minister Raj Nath Singh to solicit votes from Uttar Pradesh. The same CM had no time to visit the Ksan mine where 15 miners were trapped since December 13 last year, if only to get a firsthand account of the incident; the relief and rescue measures being undertaken and the gaping loopholes in the operation before passing comments that too much money has been spent in the rescue mission. Clearly, leading a Government is no easy task and the strain is showing. Besides, putting up candidates in several states to contest the Lok Sabha elections just so that the NPP becomes a national party and therefore enjoys more clout is no cakewalk. It is not without reason that the Bible says no man can serve two masters. At present Conrad Sangma the CM is devoting more time and attention to his role as Conrad Sangma the NPP President. And Meghalaya suffers!

Is Meghalaya CM a saffron pracharak?

By Albert Thyrniang

The Meghalaya Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma first attended Prime Minister, Narendra Modi's nomination rally in Varanasi on April 27. Then he accompanied Home Minister, Rajnath Singh to Bishop's House in Lucknow on May 3. It seems the CM cannot but follow the instructions of the saffron party, the BJP. It looks as if he has to comply to the directions of the current bosses of the ruling party at the centre. It is quite obvious now that he is a BJP admirer.

His decision to be by the side of the PM along with other NDA leaders from the North East has reinforced and reaffirmed his close links with the RSS backed party. Of course, he and his party are free to be associated with any political party, including the BJP. But he should state it clearly. So far there has been ambiguity about the relationship between the NPP and the BJP. As an MP, the NPP supremo stated that his support to the NDA was issue based. During the Meghalaya Assembly election last year he, more than once, categorically stated that his party had nothing to do with the BJP - a Party that minorities look at with apprehension. However, soon after the results were out he was more than willing to embrace the BJP. You have to notice a subtle insincerity here.

Then came the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB)! The Chief Minister was inconsistent. He opposed the communal ridden bill. His cabinet was the first to take a resolution against the 'un-constitutional and illegal bill'. Intentionally ignoring strong opposition, protests and sentiments from Meghalaya and the North East, the BJP which was already in poll mode, bulldozed the bill and passed it in the Lok Sabha. Refusing to act, the CM threatened to pull out of the NDA if the controversial Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha. In the run up to the last parliamentary session it was more than clear that the BJP was determined to enact the Bill if it comes to power. In our very region the PM and the BJP president, Amit Shah reiterated their intention to pass the dubious bill. Though the bill was never introduced in the Upper House, the BJP tried every trick in the book, to do so. Our CM could have easily cut off ties with NDA but

strangely he did not. Conrad Sangma seems to be attached to the BJP's string.

Now, was it necessary for the CM to go the temple city, Varanasi and the India's most populous state capital, Lucknow? Meghalaya had already voted on April 11. So, to drive home the facts let me ask a hypothetical but a very relevant question. If the polls in his home state were to be after Varanasi and Lucknow would the CM have gone to the twin cities in UP? I think the answer would be a resounding 'No'. So, again we see an element of dishonesty in the CM.

The younger son of PA Sangma has been defending his relationship with the BJP on the basis of development. He justified his solidarity visit to Varanasi from this view point. He claimed that in the last five years, the centre has taken up a lot of developmental works in the state. Informing that Central sponsored schemes have increased 4-5 times, he said that funds under PMGSY have multiplied tenfold, amounting to Rs 1400 crore in last one year alone. So, for him and his supporters, funds are the primary reason for the friendship and cordiality with the likes of Modi and Shah.

Now, we know that India is a federal structure. The Central government has a constitutional duty to assist the states in their developmental effort irrespective of who rules at the centre and who is in power in the states. That assistance is not conditional and certainly not based on friendship between the CMs and the PM. That assistance is not based on ideology and political differences. Concretely, the Union Government has to provide assistance to the Trinimool Government in West Bengal, the TDP Government in Andhra Pradesh, to TRS Government in Telangana, the AAP Government in Delhi, the Left Government in Kerala, the AIADMK Government in Tamil Nadu, the Congress Governments in Punjab, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh etc. Even though Mamata Banerjee, Chandrababu Naidu, HD Kumaraswamy, Pinarayi Vijayan, Chandrashekhar Rao,

Arvind Kejriwal and Pinarayi Vijayan are bitter political rivals the Centre cannot deny development of their state.

Part XI of the Indian constitution deals with the federal structure of the Indian Republic. Defining the country as the "Union of States", the distribution of legislative, administrative and executive powers between the Union/Federal/Central government and the States of India (state governments) are specified in this section. Besides the distribution of powers, article 275(1) provides grants-in-aid for needy states from the Consolidated Fund of India.

The Constitution specifically says that by law funds are to be allotted for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes in different states including all the states in the North East. Therefore, the central government is duty bound to provide funds for the development of states. If the Union government implicitly or explicitly says that it will fund projects for development only for states whose leaders are cordial with the Centre then that is nothing short of black-mailing and as such it must be condemned, opposed and exposed. Moreover, the Centre itself breaks the constitutional law of federalism. That party that rules at the Centre is anti-constitutional and anti-federalism.

It appears that our CM and other CMs in the North East are hooked by the Centre. The Centre seems to have played a trick on them. The Centre is using its muscles on them. A threat of 'unless you support us you will not get funds for your state' seems to be in place. Or a pact might have been made somewhere to this effect. Perhaps, the North East leaders need to be educated on federalism. They have easily compromised on their ideology on the promise of funds for their states.

It is suspected that leaders from the North East have gained individually and for their parties for allying with the BJP. The funds for the state must only be a mask for massive personal benefits. With a declared income of 1,034 crore, BJP is the richest political party in the country and one of the wealthiest in the world. The Congress is a distant second, with only Rs. 225.36 crore. Is this the reason for which non-Congress leaders in the region are at-

tracted to the BJP, not so long ago disliked by North Easterners? Secretly people estimate scandalous amounts which might have changed hands with politicians from the seven sister states.

The NPP chief has been accused of benefiting from the illegal coal mining. The black money derived thereof might have been used to fund elections in the state and outside the state. It is a fitting case of curiosity. The NPP has put up candidates in 11 of the 25 Lok Sabha seats in the Northeast. It is not just the number of seats but the 'Meghalaya party' is gaining clout across the region. Who is funding the party? Besides the black diamond, could the BJP be the other bigger source? Therefore, the chief has to submit himself to the wishes of the top brass of the BJP.

Why do you have a problem with the BJP? It is only a political party, commented one seemingly NPP supporter on social media. Well, the party in question might be a political party but it is backed by a proto-fascist organisation, the RSS. The BJP cannot exist without the Sangh. The so called social organisation is the ideological base of the BJP. The BJP just carries out the agenda of the RSS. And the RSS's agenda is Hindu Rashtra where other religious minorities would supposedly be subservient citizens. RSS ideology is Hindutva, which is defined as 'Hindu cultural ethos'. It foresees one religion, one culture and one language in India. Our CM might contribute to the 'acceptability' of the BJP and RSS in the state.

Another allegation against the CM is that he is not in control of his government. Is he being remote controlled from Delhi? Are there rich and powerful men in the national capital who issue directions? Is our CM trapped? Is he being influenced ideologically? Is he changing his political colour? What are the compelling reasons for his increasingly cosy relationship with the communal party? Is he ready for the title, 'saffron pracharak'?

Right to health New govt must reflect

By Dr. Oishee Mukherjee

Health care comes into sharp focus this General election. While the BJP already has its ambitious Ayushman Bharat scheme in place, the Congress has sought to counter it by promising 'Right to health care' in its 2019 manifesto. This is in continuation of the rights-based laws enacted under the Manmohan Singh government, such as Right to Education and Right to Information, which were milestones in the history of public welfare in India.

Three things we are considering for our manifesto', had said Party Rahul Gandhi while interacting with health care professionals in Chhattisgarh, before the polls were announced. 'Right to health care' which will guarantee a certain minimum health care to all Indians, increasing the expenditure on health to 3 per cent of the GDP and training doctors and health care professionals', he added was the party's 'top priority'.

Recall, Modi government had launched the Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana, last September. However, health experts including those in public hospitals pointed out that this does not cover the cost of outpatient services (OPD), diagnostics and medicines -- the biggest source of patient expenditures. And so, the Congress seeks to improve on it and commits that health care professionals would work out an effective model for the right to health care.

Its justification being in its belief that be it any government, it has to do three things -- "one, fix the problem, two, provide low cost, high quality education and three, ensure that people are protected as far as health care is concerned".

And while time will tell whether Congress will get an opportunity to fulfil its commitment, the Centre and some States are trying to improve the present health facilities. A decision has been taken to allow dentists to practice general medicine, in view of the acute shortage of doctors in the country. It is said that the first two years of MBBS and BDS courses are more or less the same, and the decision may to some extent help tackle doctors' shortage, in rural and semi-urban areas.

Then there is Maharashtra government which has recently drafted a bill to create special reservation quota up to 10 per cent in undergraduate (MBBS) and 20 per cent in post graduate (MD) medical seats for those who give a commitment to work in tribal and rural areas. Candidates must serve for a period of 7 years immediately after completion of MBBS and for 5 years after completion of MD.

The health care situation in rural Maharashtra is dire need of over haul. Though there is a huge network of 1816 primary health centres, 400 rural hospitals, 70 sub-divisional hospitals and 26 civic hospitals, these are largely rendered useless because of lack of manpower. A similar situation prevails in some North Indian States.

In Odisha, the situation in the tribal belt is worse. A new scheme of incentive policy has been introduced since mid-April in the 1750 government hospitals, wherein doctors posted in vulnerable and backward areas are being given maximum incentives.

In Jharkhand, where 65 per cent of women are anaemic and cases of vector borne diseases like malaria, kala azar and Japanese encephalitis are above the national average, the shortage of doctors in rural areas remains. Though three new medical colleges have come up during 2017-end at Palamau, Dumka and Hazaribagh, of the sanctioned strength of nearly 11,000 doctors in State health service, 6000 are said

to be vacant. Obviously, this is because doctors do not want to work in CHCs and even in district hospitals. Similarly, in Uttarakhand, medical students do not honour terms of the bond signed to work in rural areas. Recently, the State's medical education department issued legal notices for recovery of money to 383 doctors for not keeping their commitment.

It is a well-known fact that resources allotted to health are quite meagre. While 10.6 per cent of the total amount in the Interim Budget is allocated to defence, only 2.2 per cent was given to healthcare. Funding need not be redirected from current allocations to preventive care, but surely India can make health spending a priority, much like defence? Despite several innovations in the healthcare sector in recent times, the Government remains woefully short of its ambition to increase public health spending to 2.5 per cent of GDP. At present, health spending is even below 1.5 per cent of GDP.

Last year, it was announced that nearly 1.5 lakh health and wellness centres would be set up under Ayushman Bharat, with the mandate of preventive health and community-based management of basic health problems. But this should have included health education and holistic wellness integrating modern medicine with traditional Indian medicine, which is not the case. Both communicable disease containment as well as non-communicable disease programmes should be included. An estimated ₹250 crore has been allocated for setting up health and wellness centres under the National Urban Health Mission while the National Rural Health Mission received ₹1,350 crore. The amount is undoubtedly meagre considering the increase in both population and diseases in recent years.

Malnutrition and under nutrition has added to the problem as directly or indirectly these relate to health problems. On the other hand, in urban India the over dependence on fast food has aggravated diseases like obesity, diabetes and even cancer. In 2017, dietary risks were the second biggest factor behind deaths and disabilities in 2017 in the country, close on the heels of malnutrition. Dietary risks also increased by 35 per cent in a decade since 2007 when it ranked fourth after malnutrition, air pollution and the risk of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

In spite of all this, the allocation for the non-communicable diseases programme of the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke has been allocated just ₹175 crore, which is much less, or as estimated by experts, to be even 50 per cent of the actual need. While the rich and the middle income sections have the financial means for treatment, the poor and even the low income sections cannot carry on with such treatment after a period of time, or some can't even start it.

It is distressing indeed, to note that the policy makers of the country have yet to understand the importance of health in social and economic development of the country. The big question to ask them is whether they are even aware of the living conditions of the poor, the backward sections and do they have genuine concern for their welfare? Whichever government comes to power, must make a note that as the nation celebrates the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, it is critical to make health a fundamental right and thus ensure that in the next two years each subdivision should have a well-equipped hospital. It must realise that only a healthy people can ensure a healthy nation. ---INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Low political speak

Editor,
The Lok Sabha elections touched a new nadir. Debates filled with hate speeches aimed at rekindling communal tensions, where a lesser luminary has issued an open threat that if his party returns to power, the party will bring machines from China to shave 10-12 thousands of Muslims and later force them to convert, to sexist khaki underwear remark by Azam Khan to projections like "Modiji ki Sena" by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath who has never been famous for nuance or civility of expression. Any attempt at political ownership of the military is not just alarming; it is treacherous. The soldier owes allegiance to the Indian state and to his regiment, unit and uniform not to any government or political party and such projections will only hasten the loss of respect which the armed forces still enjoy in India. Indian army is neither a private army nor a mercenary force whose services can be bought and sold. It is a professional army meant to protect the constitutionally established order. The armed forces need to be kept at a distance to maintain their apolitical stance. Governments may come and go, but the armed forces would remain.

Alas gone are the days of politicians enunciating their ideologies and policies in measured tone and tenor of how they plan to take the country forward on a growth trajectory. Today political speak has been reduced to a slugfest of personal insinuations, speeches spewing communal hatred and character assassinations against opponents which brings out the worst in everyone thereby vitiating the very idea of democracy.

Yours etc
Advocate M.Haque,
Via email

Global Terrorist Masood Azhar

Editor,
That Masood Azhar the chief of the terror group JeM based in Pakistan was on May 1, 2019 black-listed and designated as a global terrorist by the UN Security Council is a big diplomatic win of the decade for India. The Congress Party, realizing that they are losing ground very fast, does not have a single word of appreciation for the achievements of the ruling dispensation at the Centre. The erudite Jawahar Lal Nehru made a blunder in foregoing permanent membership in the UN Security Council in favour of China, twice in 1952

- once backed up by Russia and once by the United States. Panchasheel of Bandung Conference of 1955 flopped because of imperialistic attitude of China. Controversial alignment of McMahoon line mentioned in the Discovery of India disturbed China and big brother Chou-En-Lai backstabbed Nehru. Hence the Chinese War of 1962. Indian soldiers had to fight barefoot in the front line with antiquated rifles used in First World War. Jawahar Lal's concept of peaceful co-existence betrayed him because he took for granted neighbouring power-mongering enemy countries as friendly ones. Nehru did not think at all about strengthening the defence of the country. The posting of his inept friend scandal tainted V K Krishna Menon as Defence Minister was another grave mistake Nehru made. In fact all the three chiefs of the army resented Krishna Menon's dictatorial attitude and inept handling of defence matters.

In a hurriedly convened recent press conference, Rahul's advice of, 'Terrorism has to be dealt with sternly' is ridiculous. His further claim of, 'We (Congress?) deal with it more sternly than Narendra Modi' is again making himself a laughing stock. Rahul's comments before the press flanked by Congress leaders P

Chidambaram and Randeep Singh Surjewala once again re-affirms that the toddler politician always needs two crutches on two sides to back up his falsehoods or to make political gimmicks before the press. Earlier he used to be sandwiched between mother & sister on his sides as props to stand up and irrelevantly fumble before the press.

The fact of the matter is that during the Congress rule for decades the trinity of home ministers Shivraj Patil, P Chidambaram and Sushil Kumar Shinde pursued an extra-soft policy against terrorists and terrorism; against the separatist leaders of J & K and against Pakistan at the behest and dictates of Sonia Gandhi. So much so that the accused perpetrators of Mumbai Serial blasts of 1993, Patna terrorist attacks and others almost in every nook and corner of the country went unpunished. The policy adopted by the Congress and the UPA dispensation resulted in the present situation of unrest and turmoil in today's Jammu & Kashmir with sponsorship of the then ruling dispensation and aided and abetted by terrorist funding to separatists by Pakistan.

In 2008 the proxy war of Pakistan in Mumbai was at a time when Congress party

ruled the state of Maharashtra. It needs a thorough investigation to identify the senior Mumbai-based Congress leader who conducted the combative operation and ordered three senior-most IPS officers including Mr Hemant Karkare to move in one vehicle/jeep only to meet their doom. Who is that leader who acted in a treason-like manner at the dictates of Dawood Ibrahim? Has the Congress party and the president of the party had the courage to name him? Example is better than precept. Congress has not taken any initiative or stern action ever to stop the growth of terrorism in the country as a whole and terrorists activities of the separatists of J & K. Congress party has only preached and practised the one and only philosophy of 'divide & rule' and played nasty and divisive politics as inherited from their British masters by making innumerable reservations based on religion, caste and creed with multiple amendments of the Constitution thereby destroying its sanctity.

Without the knowledge of the politics of the sub-continent and the history and ethos of the country Rahul Gandhi unwittingly dragged the issue of release of Masood Azhar and two other terrorists by India in 1999 in exchange for pas-

sengers held hostage on board IC-814 flight hijacked to Kandahar in Afghanistan. In fact by raising the issue Rahul has showered grave insult on one of the greatest statesman-politician of the country, late, Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The Congress is responsible for the partition of India in 1947 at the cost of Punjab, Bengal and Sind. Their divisive policy of seven decades have brought the country and the nation on the brink of multiple partitions and attrition based on hatred, language, caste, creed and religion by their sustained publicity and propaganda of falsehoods in a sycophantic manner so as to ensure that the power to rule the country remains in the hands of a tainted dynasty and by deriving favours from the hybrid family descendants from here to eternity.

But the people of India are clever and conscious enough and well aware of the hidden agenda of the Congress Party and is not likely to allow the Congress Party to succeed in its sinister design.

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay
Advocate Kolkata High Court

"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

— Thomas Jefferson

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ILP enforcement mechanisms

IN a democracy, there are many contestations and demands from different interest groups. As the name suggests, each group seeks to protect its own interests. The Inner Line Permit (ILP) is seen by some pressure groups in Meghalaya as the only mechanism to contain influx in the state. Influx is perceived as dangerous because it could upset the fragile demographic balance of the tribals of Meghalaya. However, the other aspect is that while Meghalaya is home to the tribes it also has within its fold permanent non-tribal residents who have made this land their home much before Meghalaya was carved out Assam. So what is the mechanism to be adopted for identifying those non-tribals domiciled here whenever they travel out and return home? Should they be subjected to the same checks at the respective check gates? What we witness today is that those manning the check gates take a cursory look inside the vehicles carrying passengers and allow those with tribal looks to pass through. But a non-tribal, irrespective of him/her being a permanent resident of Meghalaya has to produce some form of document to prove his/her identity. This is not only violative of the Indian Constitution which guarantees freedom of movement of all Indian citizens within the country but also reduces the status of genuine non-tribal residents of Meghalaya to that of temporary visitors. Does a permanent resident of a state not have rights and privileges under the Indian Constitution?

Those who clamour for the ILP have obviously not thought through the process and the possibility that someone who feels aggrieved by the ILP might approach a court of law since his rights are violated. The non-tribals of Meghalaya have acceded to several demands for withdrawing from the political processes in the state. As far as the KHADC is concerned the non-tribals gave up their right to fight elections to the Council just to keep the peace. Later they were also not allowed to vote for the Council elections. Now their number in the Assembly is reduced to nil. So who actually represents their interests? Clearly the non-tribal is a non-citizen in Meghalaya.

TO THE EDITOR

Uncouth behaviour

Editor,
The SSLC 2019 result has not yet been declared by the MBOSE. But the esteemed Pine Mount School, Shillong, as notified in the School's Official Notice Board, has already commenced Classes for Class XI since April 17 2019. Hence out of a grave concern I modestly approached the Principal of the School in question, in her Office on May 6, 2019 to seek clarification on the above dilemma. To my utter shock and dismay the said Principal behaved very arrogantly and rudely with me. I did not even have the opportunity to inquire about the matter at hand because as soon as she allowed me into her office, I was confronted with impudent questions such as, "Who the hell are you?" And when I placed my queries before her, I was again rudely asked, "Who the hell are you to inquire on such matters? We have our own rules and regulations." When I requested for a copy of the rules and regulations that request was turned down and I had to leave her office.

I therefore am deeply concerned about the uncivil

behaviour of officials holding such responsible positions in our society, especially in matters relating to the Education Department as these are matters that have a direct bearing on the youth who are the future of our State. Moreover, I earnestly hope that by taking this constitutional step of expressing my concerns through your esteemed daily that the officials of our State encourage such reasonable inquiries with openness in the best interests of us citizens and to maintain the reputation of their respective Institutions and Departments.

Yours etc,
Banshai Marbaniang
Shillong -1

When non-historians dabble in history

Editor,
Apropos the letter "Global Terrorist Masood Azhar" by Samares Bandyopadhyay (ST May 6, 2019) the writer has really worked hard to project the achievements of the BJP and the failures of the Congress which is appreciable. Talking of

We the Khasis

By Toki Blah

Myth no longer dictated history. The written documented word now held sway and handed down to us the heroic patriotic sagas of U Tirot Sing Syiem and U Woh Kiang Nangbah. From the written word flowed the cogent eloquent verses of the Khasi poet laureate U Soso Tham. As a society from the mid 1800s till late 1900s we continued to produce historians, administrators, educationists, men and women of letters and persons of substance. It can be claimed as the golden age of Khasi history, an era of expectancy and hope. It was the most productive period in recorded Khasi history. Sadly the flow now seems to have ended. Hope started drying up ever since we attained statehood. Why, wherefore and what went wrong is definitely worth a PhD or two!

With hindsight, it can now be claimed that with the attainment of full statehood in 1972, two significant developments took place simultaneously within Khasi society, each influencing the outcome of the other. On the one hand the realisation gradually dawned that we were different. Within the settings of the Indian political setup we were defined as a Scheduled Tribe, a minority community. We were Indians but with different looks, outlook, culture and habits. We occupied a different landscape with a language of our own. In short as Khasis we had a distinct identity of our own that we were proud of and that there was need to preserve it. This realisation had a profound impact on the psyche of post statehood Khasis. To protect and defend identity gained precedence over everything else. The influence that this realisation has had on the politics of Meghalaya and its political elite is something that we as a community have yet to understand and far less admit. Opportunistic politics however was quick to grasp the fact that projection of fear over loss of identity offered better electoral returns than any manifesto based on hope and optimism. It is the one single factor that helped saviours of the community (Nongpynim ka jaitynriew) gain precedence over promoters of the community (Ki nongialam ka jaitynriew). Time and again fear over

loss of identity was used to create chaos, mayhem and confusion in the minds of the electorate. Talent, capacity, education and merit singularly gave way to fear mongering. Today Khasis yearn for credible leaders who can lead. Our obsession over fear of loss of identity prevents us from electing them. Should we be surprised?

The time has perhaps come for the Khasis to ask themselves what is the need of the hour and as to what sort of leaders have they foisted upon themselves to fulfil this need. If truth be said we have to accept the fact that our future needs are many and varied but foremost is the need and ability to adapt to the rapid changes taking place around us. These range from climate (the environment); economic (changing livelihood scenario); geo political (the Look East Policy) and cultural (the growing demand for gender equality). Times are changing and we have to accept that change comes along with time. No one can prevent change. Change however can be managed and what we need are leaders who can manage change not fear-mongers who are scared of change. For this to happen we need leaders who can at least peer into the future; people with imagination, vision and insight as to the requirements of tomorrow. Sadly the humbugs we have elected for ourselves today seem totally incapable and unqualified for such expectations. We need leaders who can inspire Hope for tomorrow. We need leaders with a roadmap for the future together with the milestones we need to cross. The trouble with the people we have elected to lead is that they have no vision for the future. They seem to be more comfortable speaking about the myths and legends of an imagined glorious past and with simply maintaining their own economic status quo. Question is don't our elected leaders have anything else to talk about except lifting the NGT ban on coal? Is that the only important issue for the state and its people? For a change why can't we have discussions and debates on how Govt and civil society can engage with one another instead of confronting each other. How the Govt and the ADCs should co-operate with each other instead of accusing each other? How can our traditional grassroots systems of governance be empowered to give better

service to the people? I believe these are issues that can bring about better governance in our state. Aspects that are urgently needed! Are there leaders prepared to take up such issues?

Aside from the above I sincerely believe that as a society we need to sit and discuss about the future of Shillong. Shillong is not only the capital of Meghalaya it also represents the soul of the Jaitynriew and what happens to this city will willy-nilly affect all Khasis. It is our city yet we have allowed this scenic hill station to wither and die before our very eyes. Shillong is turning into a slum and tragically everyone is actively contributing to this eventuality. Slums are characterised by the absence or total breakdown of urban amenities. The water supply system of our city is collapsing. We have no drainage or waste management system worth the name. Our roads are getting choked up and commuting within the city is a daily nightmare. MeECL, the energy provider is expected to give up the ghost anyday yet nobody is prepared to challenge its lackadaisical management. Everyone speaks about the "Big One" that might hit us any day, yet none seem bothered about the safety of structures that continue to mushroom sans technical supervision and approval. If Meghalaya has no leaders, Shillong, the heart of Meghalaya has no champions! Our urban durbars continue to act as ostriches with their heads buried in the sand. They seem more at ease dabbling in the ridiculous political nonsense emerging from KHADC than in discussing the deterioration of Shillong and in the process their own localities. Again another case of misplaced priorities! Again the Nongpynim vs the Nongialam syndrome. What we need is a body of elected members ready to look not only into the woes and problems but also the future issues of Shillong and greater Shillong city. The Govt seems helpless; MUDA dead and inert; the urban durbars blind; KHADC incapable of understanding the problem. Working together, for the common good, seems impossible. Where is the voice of the people?

The unsubtle political games of the RSS Blowing hot and cold about India's future

By Amulya Ganguli

Why has the RSS fallen silent? The last one heard from it was an advice to the BJP to focus on local issues instead of harping all the time on national security. After that brief intervention, the Nagpur patriarchy has chosen to keep their own counsel, ignoring the hurly-burly of the electoral scene.

However, before the RSS lapsed into its present maunvrat (vow of silence), it had been blowing hot and cold by playing a prominent role in public life as rarely before. For a start, it invited stalwarts like former president Pranab Mukherjee and Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi to address the RSS cadres, suggesting that it was willing to listen to what Arun Jaitley would call "compulsive contrarians".

The putative votary of a Hindu Rashtra also

that since it has been "proved" that a temple was there in ancient times, the apex court should deliver its verdict quickly since "justice delayed is justice denied". This is palpably the speech of a politician and not of the head of a "cultural" organization (which is the BJP's usual description of the RSS), who does not care what the Muslims may say about the matter.

This hardline phase was obviously aimed at boosting the BJP's electoral prospects since at the time the party was not seen as faring too well in the aftermath of the electoral setbacks in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

In the wake of the Pulwama massacre and the subsequent surgical strikes, however, the RSS no longer raised the temple issue because the BJP apparently did not need its

"The BJP must be grateful that it has a fraternal organization with an extensive network which keeps a tab on popular sentiments and regularly transmits its feedback. Almost no other party has such a friend in the field, neither Indira Gandhi who hadn't a clue how the people had turned against her in 1977 or the communists who thought that they could outwit the Manmohan Singh government on the nuclear deal in 2008."

wanted to show that the RSS was not a closed shop of upper caste Hindus, oblivious of what was happening in the outside world.

But, if the observations of an important RSS functionary like Indresh Kumar are taken into account, it does not appear that the paeans in praise of pluralism and inclusivity by the two guest speakers had any effect on the organization.

Indresh Kumar, for instance, has called upon Indian Muslims to forsake beef and adopt cows, presumably in preparation for 2025 when he expects Pakistan to become a part of India.

The distinction made by U.P. chief minister Yogi Adityanath between Bajrang Balis and Alis also suggests that inclusivity is not uppermost in the minds of followers of the SanghParivar. The same view was expressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he said that Rahul Gandhi has chosen a constituency in south India where the Alis, and not the Bajrang Balis, are in a majority.

However, the RSS chief, Mohan Bhagwat, did echo Mukherjee and Satyarthi when he told a conclave, "Bhavishya ka Bharat - an RSS perspective" in New Delhi last year that "Hindu Rashtra doesn't mean that there is no place for Muslims. If we don't accept Muslims, it's not Hindutva". Hindutva, according to him, is "Indianness and inclusivity".

But, not long after this mellow declaration, came the phase of blowing hot when Bhagwat wanted that work should start immediately on the construction of the Ram temple, even via an ordinance, to circumvent the judiciary which is hearing the case.

The RSS chief also told a Jan Hunkar (voice of the people) rally in Nagpur

help since the party's electoral position was seen to have improved because of its display of muscular nationalism.

After a while, however, the RSS made its views known again when it felt that the BJP was overplaying the jingoistic card at the expense of local issues.

The BJP must be grateful that it has a fraternal organization with an extensive network which keeps a tab on popular sentiments and regularly transmits its feedback. Almost no other party has such a friend in the field, neither Indira Gandhi who hadn't a clue how the people had turned against her in 1977 or the communists who thought that they could outwit the Manmohan Singh government on the nuclear deal in 2008.

It is possible that the latest feedback which the RSS has given to the BJP about the neglect of local issues is based on the belief articulated by the BJP M.P., Subramanian Swamy, that the BJP may not get more than 220/230 seats in which case Modi may not be the prime minister again since some of the party's new, non-NDA partners in a "hung" Parliament - Swamy mentioned Naveen Patnaik - may not approve of the "strong" man.

What will be the next move of the RSS? By backing the likes of Yogi Adityanath and Sadhvi Pragma, it has shown what kind of a "bhavishya" (future) it has in mind for the country. Evidently, the advice it received from the two outsiders has been forgotten. The RSS has no use for them.

Lenin would have called the two "useful idiots", as the Bolshevik leader described those Russian liberals who supported the communists without knowing that their autocratic preferences were no different from those of the Czar. Will the RSS return to the temple plank? (IPA Service)

Jawaharlal Nehru foregoing permanent membership in favour of China in 1952, let the writer know that Nehru was not gifted with prophecy which many of his friends had. Who would know the behavior of Mr Xi Jinping in 2019 looking at Nehru's friend Chou-en-Lai? Coming back to Chinese aggression of 1962, it was a sheer fault of Nehru when one contemporary historian named Hussain, mentioned to Nehru the worry of Sir Winston Churchill (who was not the Prime Minister then), warned of invasion from the North. Peace loving as he was and busy with industries and rise of economy, Nehru was betrayed by his Chinese counterpart.

Let us also be careful with dates in history. The weapons used as claimed by the writer are the World War I weapon, when muzzie loading guns requiring three minutes to load were deployed. Chinese War was in 1962, when the Indian army could get the gift of weapons and vehicles used by the allies, left behind after they had fought against Hitler and the Japanese. One should know that these vehicles continued to serve the army and the public till 1964 when Willys Jeeps with Mahindra collaboration

were produced in large numbers. Tata Mercedes Benz trucks followed likewise. About Masood Azhar, it was the BJP that released him after the Kandahar hijacking episode and India did have to pay a very heavy price. We should never forget the rescue operations of the Israeli military of the passengers at Entebbe Airport. Golda Meir the then Prime Minister along with the military performed the rescue operation under the most difficult circumstances. Of course a price had to be paid. One Captain who happened to be the brother of would be Prime Minister, Netanyahu was killed. Another lady was shot by Idi Amin's men in the hospital at Entebbe. We should also know that Idi Amin was most hostile against the Israelis.

About the sad days of Partition, let us know that even if the blame apportioned is correct, the present Congress was looked upon by the BJP as not at all having links with the INC of 1947. In that case why associate Rahul Gandhi for the so called fault of his great-great grandfather? I am reminded of Aesop's fable about the old weak lion before he could be given

a reason to devour the sheep, standing upstream and blaming the sheep for polluting the stream. When rhyme and reason did not work, he said "Oh! Your great-great grandfather in 1857 polluted the stream".

Thus, if we blame our "grandfathers" for whatever mess we are in today, and if history is used by non-historians to plays trick with the dead then let us hope that history students are not misled. History repeats itself and it is history that teaches us to correct our mistakes. Finally, if Dr Ambedkar had the gift of prophecy, the book volume would have increased ten-fold and it would have been very difficult to put it on both palms. In that case there would be no more unnecessary amendments as frequently seen today like the CAB.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Shillong -14

Odisha an excellent example

Editor,
The efforts made by the Government and the administration of Odisha in mitigating the loss to human

lives caused by cyclone "Fani", is laudable, to say the least. Naveen Pattanaik, the Chief Minister of Odisha, and his entire team has done a fantastic job, with support from the public in general. Other States would do well to take a leaf out, and work towards developing institution(s) that could minimize losses due to disasters, natural or man-made.

This is even more important for States like Assam, Bihar, etc, where many lives are lost, especially due to floods, electrocution, etc. Every year, many parts of Assam, for that matter, even the capital city of Guwahati, are brought to a standstill because of floods and water-logging.

A great example and benchmark in disaster management, is set by Odisha, for other states to emulate.

Yours etc.,
A Bhuyan
Nagaon
(Assam)

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

“As long as man continues to be the ruthless destroyer of lower living beings he will never know health or peace. For as long as men massacre animals, they will kill each other.”

—Pythagoras

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MAY 9, 2019

Hope in the air

THE nation is set on a new government-making agenda. The Lok Sabha poll campaign and voting are mostly over. Of the seven-phase voting, five are over. The move on the part of the some 21 non-BJP political parties to approach President Ram Nath Kovind to forestall a likely effort by the BJP and PM Modi to return to power is significant. This comes amid a realisation that no party will get a majority of 272 seats in a house of 543. The Modi government has not enthused the voters enough to affirmatively give it another term.

The Congress party is still in a revival mode, and failed to energise the masses to a level where they would blindly give it a majority.

For the trained eye, there is neither a pro-incumbency nor anti-incumbency mood. After the five-state polls which saw the Congress recapturing power in the Hindi-heartland, the BJP and the PM were on the run for cover. The Congress seized the moment with a major pro-farmer step in the form of waiving of farmer loans. The demonetisation failure of the NDA to rev up the industrial and farm sectors, and the lack of job opportunities to youths in the formal sector all had added to the disappointment of the masses. Then came Pulwama, followed by Balakot. It is still a moot point as to how successful the IAF operation was, but overall it likely gave those in the Hindi belt a new mood to give some marks to Modi. Yet, notably, this positive mood towards the PM fell short of a wave. Herein lies hope for the Opposition parties that they could, somehow, grab power through a hastily arranged and broad-based coalition.

A worry for them is that even in the emerging scenario, the BJP might steal the thunder by emerging as the single largest party. As per convention, in the event of no party or pre-poll alliance of parties getting a majority, the option before the President - or Governors in states - is to give the party with the largest share of elected members the first chance. The advantage for such a party is that once a government is formed, horse-trading is easy and more MPs can be more easily "purchased" to win a vote of confidence. This, thus, is a fait accompli.

A long-established practice might not be easily changed unless a new situation so warrants. It is for the Opposition to prove that there arose such a situation.

CHRI initiative helping to defuse tensions in Assam State Govt at last adopting a human approach to 'foreigners'

By Ashis Biswas

At last, the recent appeal made to the Supreme Court by the distinguished organisation Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), urging a more humane and legal approach to the complex issue of illegal foreigners in Assam, comes as a sorely missed voice of reason. If anything, such a rudimentary message to ensure even the minimal requirements of justice for some of the worst persecuted prisoners of the world has been long overdue.

Whether the CHRI's call helps to reduce long simmering social tensions and mass passions on the sensitive matter of identifying and eventually deporting illegal Bangladeshis from Assam, remains to be seen. The organisation has done well to remind the highest Court as well as concerned authorities that they must ensure due legality and the observance well defined HR norms for the people currently held in detention, many of them well beyond their prescribed terms!

For the record, in six detention centres in Assam, altogether 938 people including men, women and children have been held (herded, more accurately) for some years now. These special 'centres' are located within the existing jails of Assam. These are all people identified as illegal Bangladeshis who must be deported after their detection, arrest and serving their prescribed jail terms, according to existing laws. The fate of another 823 people, also declared foreigners following recent raids, hangs in the balance. The number of people pushed back to Bangladesh so far is 27,000 — a far cry from hyped-up estimates claiming the presence of 'millions of illegals' in the NE!

The law says that anyone entering India without valid identity/citizenship papers after March 24, 1971 is a foreigner who must be deported. There have been feeble protests over immigrants being herded in common jails along with various types of criminals. There has been no response from the authorities, nor any directives issued by special courts, the Assam police or other concerned authorities.

A team of fact finders led by prominent HR activist Mr. Harsh Mander, who has

filed a PIL on the subject seeking details regarding living conditions in Assam jails, recently reported that for years, the arrested 'non citizens' enjoyed no human rights apart from the provision of food and shelter! To a man, they were too poor and ill educated to press for their minimum rights, to respond as a pressure group or afford any kind of legal help! The majority are Bengali-speaking Muslims.

According to reports, for years they have not been allowed to do even the regular physical exercises allowed to other prisoners,

they had served out their prescribed jail time.

In many ways their condition has been worse than the persecuted Rohingyas of the Rakhine province of Myanmar. They at least have had help from international HR groups, local NGOs, West Asian relief agencies, the media and other quarters. Nothing of the sort has been available to the apparently stateless prisoners languishing in these so-called centres in Assam, as their unrelieved agony drags on and on for years. No civil rights campaigner in the Northeast seems to have heard of them. Certainly no major political

for such people, at a cost of Rs 47 crore which will be ready for occupation by end August this year.

The CHRI in its appeal expressed its disappointment with the apparently hard line taken by the Supreme Court's incumbent Chief Justice, in his dealings with Assam Government officials. The latter had suggested a way to end the present impasse regarding the citizenship for such people by making them secure a security bond of Rs 5 lakh. But the CJI seemed to press for their eventual deportation instead, according to some observers.

Thereby lies another tale. Bangladesh authorities have made it clear that since their country came into existence in 1971, they will not assume any responsibility for people who might have entered into India illegally earlier, as 'East Pakistanis'. As for the other cases referred to it, Dhaka will accept and take back only such people whom Assam/Indian authorities can satisfactorily prove to be of Bangladeshi origin.

In other words the burden of proving that someone is/was an illegal Bangladeshi who made his/her way into India remained, as before, very much with Indian authorities! Given this background, there seems to be little likelihood of Dhaka being overly influenced by the dictates of the Delhi-based apex Indian court, no matter how urgent.

In such a context, the CHRI's appeal to the SC not to overrule Article 21, which enshrines the right to life or to due process, for any 'person in India' (not necessarily a citizen), makes much good sense. Also, it would be just as well for all concerned authorities not to hurry unduly with the examination of appeals for inclusion in the National Register of Citizens submitted by 38 out of 40 lakhs of people whose names were left out of the final list in Assam, says the CHRI. Due diligence was a must in such matters. Far too much was at stake here, involving long term security implications for the troubled NE region and bilateral relations. (IPA Service)

“For the record, in six detention centres in Assam, altogether 938 people including men, women and children have been held (herded, more accurately) for some years now.”

nor permitted to undertake any kind of work or earn a single penny by exercising their labour — facilities enjoyed by hardened criminals with whom they may or may not share normal space, being subjected to strict segregation at times. Married men are not allowed to live with their wives or families. There are no facilities for educating their children either. Only in cases of serious ailments, a doctor may visit his patients, prescribing mostly simple medication.

As expected, diet and living conditions are in a word, wretched. For reasons of safety, prisoners must be back in their dank and dark cells by 6 p.m. or so, in time for their last meal for the day! Jail authorities do not provide newspapers or TV sets for this category of detenus, pleading as an excuse the absence of 'specific rules.'

No wonder, inmates of the so-called 'Special Detention centres' urged upon the fact finding team to persuade the jail authorities and officials to carry out 'immediate mass executions' to deliver them from the ordeal of living in these conditions. Many had not been released although

party in Assam or the Northeast has uttered a single word about these forgotten, most wretched victims of the troubled political cauldron of India's Northeast.

Fortunately for the prisoners, the CHRI is guided by a senior, much respected journalist of Assam, who has taken a keen interest to see minimal justice done. Observers find the handling of this category of illegal Bangladeshis shocking. As a Kolkata-based HR organisation spokesman put it, 'There are well defined procedures in all countries under the UN charter to deal with illegal immigrants, stragglers, refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants and so on. There are special laws to deal with them, ways to secure international help and intervention. It is amazing that successive elected governments in Assam, headed by educated, enlightened leaders over the years, have not found time to pressure the Central Government into talking to Bangladesh or contacting concerned International agencies that deal with such issues.'

Only now has the Assam government announced steps to set up a new special facility (or a new high security jail?) 'Detention centre'

Samares Bandyopadhyay, Via email

Revisiting Tagore's thoughts

Editor, Rabindranath Tagore was born on May 7, 1861 as per the Gregorian calendar. However, it was the 25th day in the month of Boishakh according to the Bengali calendar. His birthday is celebrated as per the Bengali calendar in West Bengal and Bangladesh and the 25th day of Boishakh has fallen on May 9 in this year's Gregorian calendar.

I had spent an entire day in Tagore's Jorasanko home some months ago. It was the house where Rabindranath was born, lived and passed away. I visited both of the rooms where he was born and where he breathed his last. Jorasanko means twin bridges. The name of the place - Jorasanko - must have been derived from the material existence of the twin bridges over the canal in that area. But it has now got a new spiritual connotation! As Tagore said in one of his songs ~ "This is only coming and going.."

But he believed that our existence has a meaning. It is for going forward for a better tomorrow. In his Nobel prize acceptance

speech, he said, "We are not like fighting beasts. It is the life of self which is predominant in our life; the self which is creating the seclusion, giving rise to sufferings, to jealousy and hatred, to political and commercial competition. All these illusions will vanish, if we go down to the heart of the shrine, to the love and unity of all races."

Tagore had tremendous faith in the spirit of India. He said, "I do not think that it is the spirit of India to reject anything, reject any race, reject any culture. The spirit of India has always proclaimed the ideal of unity. This ideal of unity never rejects anything, any race, or any culture. It comprehends... all things with sympathy and love. This is the spirit of India."

The British used, as it were, the twin bridges ~ Jorasanko ~ when they came to rule India. They used the bridge of birth and creation to bring the ideals of liberty. But at the same time, they also used the other bridge ~ the bridge of death ~ to import the poison of racial hatred - to destroy the religious fraternity and the spirit of India so that they could divide and rule India.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

Causes & remedies

Voter apathy

By Dr. S. Saraswathi

Voter turnout in the four phases, where 2019 Lok Sabha elections were completed last week, is reported to be better than in 2014 when the highest turn out since independence (66.38%) was recorded. According to the Election Commission, voters comprised a little over 21.5 crore men and over 20.31 crore women.

More interesting is the information that women voters outnumbered men voters in nine States and UTs in the four phases. Meghalaya in the North-East recorded the highest percentage of women voters (52.13) followed by Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh.

Several deficiencies in the electoral system and functioning in India noticed over a period of seven decades already discussed several times are coming up once again perhaps because the present election is going through the most bitter fight since Independence. One of these is the low rate of voter turnout in many places due to various reasons. Voter apathy is a cause to worry if it is true as believed by many.

Apathy is often due to voter fatigue caused by frequent elections. In India political elections are held for Parliament, Assemblies, Corporations, Municipalities, and three tiers of Panchayati raj and any number of by-elections to fill up vacancies. Only Lok Sabha election is a nationwide event. Somewhere some election is going on throughout the year making the election management bodies, once placed at second level in administrative importance, the busiest Constitutional body today.

Voting being a civic right and not a duty, voter apathy has to be tolerated. Treatment for it is to build contacts and conversations between members of elected bodies and voters. Just as freedom to speak includes freedom not to speak, freedom to vote includes freedom not to vote.

Simultaneous election to Parliament and Assemblies - seriously debated as an important electoral reform - is also considered as a remedy to address this sickening voter fatigue though not a panacea for electoral illness. But, there are many practical problems in adopting it.

Voter apathy is different from political alienation, which is caused by a feeling of estrangement from the system. It arises from dejection due to a feeling of being left out in the political process. Generally, small minority groups cherishing strong feelings of separateness from the majority coupled with oneness within themselves, feel alienated. Such minorities are not necessarily social and cultural; they may even be political groups. Occasional reports of particular villages, areas or social groups advocating boycott of elections are coming, which are signs of political alienation which is different from normal voter apathy.

In most democracies, voting is a right and in some a civic responsibility. There are also democracies where voting is compulsory and regulated by national constitutions and electoral laws. Sanctions, penalties, or punishments are provided for non-voting as a civic offence. But, available reports point to lack of enforcement of compulsion in most places suggesting that compulsion is symbolic to enhance political participation.

The First-Past-The-Post system, which permits winning people's mandate on minority vote, further loses credibility as a democratic method by low voter turnout going even below 50 per cent. Compulsory voting is suggested as a remedy, but it is a rather drastic form of thrusting a right as a duty.

The oldest form of compulsory voting introduced in 1893 in Belgium National Assembly was extended to

provincial elections in 1921, to communal elections in 1932, and to European Parliament in 1989. Introduced initially for men, it was extended to women in 1948 and the system is still in vogue. Those who fail to vote without proper justification may face prosecution and may be fined. Argentina introduced compulsory voting in 1914.

By 2013, provision for compulsory voting existed in 22 countries. Most of them are small countries except Australia where compulsory enrolment was introduced for federal election in 1912 and compulsory voting in 1924 for British subjects. Voting right was granted to indigenous population in 1949, but enrolment was not compulsory until 1984.

The Netherlands and Venezuela, which introduced compulsory voting reverted to voluntary voting. The last compulsory voting took place in The Netherlands in 1967 and in Venezuela in 1993. Voting rate drastically declined in subsequent elections conducted on voluntary voting basis. Chile enforced compulsory voting for some years, but abandoned it in 2012. In Brazil, except for illiterate, youth between 16 and 18 years, and the elderly above 75 years of age, voting is compulsory and failure carries fines.

In Singapore non-voters are removed from the voter register and are disqualified from contesting elections. They can be readmitted only on fresh application. In the US, voter turnout has been much less than in many developing countries, but there is no support for compulsory voting system. According to PEW research data, 56 per cent of voting age population voted in 2016 presidential election in USA which placed it in rank 31 among 35 countries covered in the study. The Census Bureau recorded that that there were about 245.5 million Americans aged 18 and above, but only 157.6 million were registered voters. Voter turnout in 2016 was slightly higher than in 2012, but lower than 2008 record.

Compulsory voting is not a foolproof solution to low voting. Its intended effects may be nullified by high proportion of spoiled ballots or "donkey votes" as they are called in places where preference vote is permitted with compulsory voting system. In preference voting, a system of ranking candidates on the ballot paper is allowed. High proportion of "donkey votes" is an indicator of voter apathy, protest or ignorance. Such systems, which apparently look like providing more scope for choice of voters, only complicate voting procedure and encourage frivolous ranking, and blank or invalid votes.

In India, voting machines, after listing names of candidates, include NOTA (none of the above) for the benefit of voters not in favour of any candidate in the contest. NOTA votes may increase if compulsory voting is enforced.

NOTA vote has gained popularity in India and is used by conscious voters who do not want to support anybody in the list, but want to prevent bogus voting. Even if NOTA votes constitute the majority of votes polled, the candidate securing highest number, however small, is declared elected.

Besides India, NOTA vote is permitted in Greece, Ukraine, Spain, North Korea, Columbia, and US State of Nevada. Russia had the system for some time, but abolished it in 2006. Bangladesh introduced it in 2008.

Given the size of the country and plurality of problems, it is impossible to enforce compulsion in voting in India. It may be argued that there is practically no incentive for average voters to vote whereas voting involves expenditure in travel and loss of income for the self-employed. --INFA

(The author is former Director ICSSR, New Delhi)

TO THE EDITOR

Life beyond academics

Editor,

Academics has always been an essential part of human development. It prepares us to survive in the outside world and establish an identity of our own. But, is an individual's development restricted to merely academics?

In India, from an early age we have been taught that education is limited to the boundaries of academics only. The idea of getting out into the field, for gaining practical experience is not considered important. This has hindered the overall development of students. The truth is that education represent a considerably broader field than we know of it. Our teaching, from the basics has been focused on getting good grades and job offers, rather than being creative and unique.

In the 21 century, the pure academic type of education is slowly paving way to a whole new pattern. The paradigm shift in the whole education system is evident. People have now come to understand that education is a 360 degree activity that should focus on students' overall development rather than restricting him/her to the classroom. Classroom teaching provides the foundation, and co-curricular or extra-curricular activities provide

practical exposure and opportunities to implement what students learn in the classrooms. This helps in developing the overall personality of students, including various soft-skills in them, which otherwise are difficult to teach. Clearly, life beyond academics creates creative and empowered professionals.

Yours etc.,
Badonkumar Mairom,
Law Department,
NEHU

Crying need for poll reforms

Editor,

Almost all major political parties have nominated sitting members of state legislatures as candidates for the Lok Sabha and even if only a quarter of them win, it would entail yet another round of elections - this time to state assemblies across the country. This process eats into government time and dries up the exchequer. Hence the crying need for poll reforms.

While candidates are free to contest from any place in the country, what needs to be considered is the additional costs that it puts on the exchequer - in other words the money actually goes from the tax

payers' pockets. This raises the question about whether the government should bring in a rule that bars sitting MLAs from contesting Lok Sabha polls and also stops candidates from contesting two Lok Sabha seats simultaneously. A writ petition was recently filed in the Kerala High Court seeking directives to the Election Commission to make the nine MLAs contesting Lok Sabha polls to bear the additional cost of the by-elections from their seats in case they win the elections. The petitioners argued that frequent by-elections were not only a drain on the exchequer but also cause tangible loss to productivity and human resource utilization. However, the learned judges held a dim view of the petition stating that the Constitution permits sitting MLAs to contest for the Lok Sabha and the law only prohibits holding two positions in the government simultaneously.

The Court warned the petitioners to refrain from filing such "frivolous cases" claiming that there was nothing wrong with sitting MLAs contesting Parliamentary polls. The Court sought to know whether a by-election resulting from the demise of a sitting MLA should be paid for by the legal heirs of the family? However, the Court also suggested that political parties should refrain from such activity and were free to persuade voters to not elect sit-

ting MLAs. Perhaps this ruling could come in handy for political parties in defining future campaign strategies.

On another note, the Supreme Court is hearing a petition based on a Law Commission report that proposes to restrict candidates from seeking election from more than one Lok Sabha seat. The Election Commission reiterated its stand from 2004 that favoured an amendment to Section 33 (7) of the Representation of Peoples Act, 1951 to ensure the one-candidate-one seat rule. It also stated that candidates contesting from two seats should bear the cost of the by-election if they decided to forgo one seat.

And, what has caused a spurt in such incidents? Political parties select a sitting MLA due to their inability to find a winning candidate and to use the goodwill that the state legislator has possibly built by nurturing the assembly segment. The case of Congress leader Krishna Byre Gowda from Bangalore North is a case in point.

Is there a solution to the menace? The Commission could simply declare the runner-up as the winner of the MLA seat if the sitting member relinquishes it for a Lok Sabha seat.

It is time for political parties to build a consensus around this issue.

Yours etc.,

“You don’t have to live your life so that your life is suitable for small talk. Life can be lived in ways that circumnavigate a myriad of colors and landscapes.”

--- Cherie Ve Ard, Technomadia

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, MAY 10, 2019

NEIGRIHMS standoff

THE tug of war between the Director NEIGRIHMS and the Department of Cardiology has now subsided. But it is unfortunate that matters had come to a flashpoint, requiring the intervention of the Meghalaya High Court since many patients requiring surgery were kept waiting for no fault of theirs. NEIGRIHMS is a premier health institute modeled along the lines of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and the first of its kind in the North Eastern region. It serves the people of all seven North Eastern states. The Department of Cardiology has been its flagship Department. Since April 30 NEIGRIHMS was in the middle of a storm. For days the Cardiology Department could not operate on patients because the Director of the Institute seized all equipments on allegations that the Head of Department (Cardiology) was not procuring the required materials such as stents, pacemakers etc., from the Amrit Pharmacy at discounted rates. This allegation has been shot down during the court hearing where it was explained by the HOD Cardiology that those materials were of inferior quality and insufficient to meet the needs of the Department. The Meghalaya High Court has directed the Cardiology Department to start functioning immediately even as matters are to be sorted out in the presence of a senior personnel of the Union Health Ministry.

NEIGRIHMS has been left orphaned by the state governments of the seven states and also by the North Eastern Council. They should have intervened when they saw the Institute being dragged into the news for the wrong reasons. The Institute has a Governing Council which has not met even once in the last four years. Yet none of the members are raising a stink over this. Actually members are appointed to governing boards so that they can track the performance of the institution. What's the point of appointing inactive members? It's as good as not having a governing board. This is the first lapse. Secondly, several doctors have resigned in frustration since the incumbent Director joined. There is at present acute shortage of doctors; so much so that even the undergraduate MBBS courses do not have sufficient teachers. This does not bode well for NEIGRIHMS. In every institute of repute, employees who resign are normally asked to give an exit interview in writing, stating their reasons for leaving. This helps the Institute to improve its workplace situation. It will be interesting to know if NEIGRIHMS has such a policy and if so what the doctors who have left have to say. That should give us a fair idea of the situation.

Education: Gap between what's taught and what students need to learn

By Patricia Mukhim

This article is meant to shake the conscience of those running educational institutions and producing an assembly line of students that pass out without imbibing the real meaning of education. Yes, the results are just out ...ICSE, CBSE, etc. Next in line is the MBOSE Class XII and X results. And what after that? Parents will rush for admissions to the best schools and colleges? And how are those best schools and colleges rated? On the basis of their results; not on the quality of the students they churn out. It's a rat race and there's so much of catching up in this race. Parents push the accelerator hard without ever questioning what their kids actually want. Conversations between parents and kids mostly end up in blame games and the kids just clamp up for the sake of peace. At my age I am an onlooker to this extremely competitive game of thrones where each parent wants their child to occupy that pride of place in the economic ladder. That's what all the grunt work and the pushing and shouting and quarrelling are all about.

Those who run institutions know what parents aspire for their kids. They will cater to that angst and will not engage parents in a conversation which could help them see their children and what their deepest yearnings are through a set of realistic lenses. If the owners of institutions start doing that they would lose out on the number of admissions. It's a rat race. The problem with a rat race, as someone said, is that even if you win the race you are still a rat.

Why do parents send their children to school? The primary reasons are because they want their kids to learn basic social skills such as sharing, making friends, developing language through conversations, asking permission to borrow something, toilet training; learning to negotiate and above all learning to wait for one's turn. I recall visiting a kindergarten school in the US where kids don't sit on chairs but on mats on the floor and play with toys. After the playtime is over the teacher tells sing a song, "Clean up, clean up everybody, everywhere, clean up, clean up everybody do your share." At this age kids are already taught to understand rules and follow directions. In the classroom there is a story

corner, a puzzle table and games table where there is no winning or losing, no right or wrong. Parents are invited to observe how their child interacts with other kids or if he/she is an introvert. They also see how the child is learning. Is she receptive when presented with new tasks or is she slow, shy? This enables both parents and teachers to work together to help the child with no blame whatsoever.

I sit with young parents regularly and listen to their tales of woe about their children's schooling; their non-performance or lackluster performance. They despair. But that's not all. These days teachers call parents and complain rudely on a regular basis about their children not having completed their assignments. Sure parents have a role to play and most parents do their bit but not every parent has gone through B Ed classes where child psychology is taught. But, every teacher today is expected to have gone through the grill; to understand how each child is to be handled; motivated, disciplined, encouraged, prodded on etc. When we were growing up we had reading classes so each student read a few paragraphs loudly. That was how we learnt pronunciation and diction. When we read fables, myths and history we were asked what important values we have learnt from the lesson. Learning then was fun because no teacher ever raised their hand against anyone.

Coming to the point of physical punishment, I was appalled to learn that in an elite Christian school corporal punishment was regularly meted out to students. And I was told this is a not a new phenomenon but that it was a normal thing in that school. Parents are paranoid about complaining lest they be told, "Take your boy somewhere else." I asked some parents why they did not broach this subject at the PTA meeting. After all this is violation of the rights of the child but they had nothing to say. The desire to proclaim to the world, "My son passed out from St... so and so school or even the not so saintly public schools is so overwhelming that they would rather see the child suffer in agony than tackle the school authorities.

What an ego trap this is. A child that experiences violence in school or at home will soon become a violent teenager and a violent adult seeking out revenge for all he has lumped up and suffered in his younger days. And the fact that his parents can do nothing, despite knowing what he goes through, will make him see them as accomplices in the crime.

There are many who trot out the lame argument that it's not easy to teach boys especially in this day and age. Well I have been a teacher for a quarter century and half of that was spent teaching boys of Class VII - X. Perhaps the only difference was that the school I taught in was not an elite school; the majority of boys came from distressed families. Hence they valued the education they got at great cost. Most of them found it hard to pay a school fee of Rs 120 a month then. Poverty is perhaps a great teacher but affluent parents often destroy a child's moral fibre. Most parents believe in instant gratification. A child asks for a mobile phone and hey pronto he gets it! How can a child of Class VI or VII be expected to be disciplined in using a mobile phone when we grown-ups are so addicted to it. Now with games like PUBG which even adult males are hooked to, a mobile phone means destroying the child's concentration. It was heartening to hear from the recent toppers of the ICSE and CBSE exams that the reason for their success is that they were not on social media. Social media far from being social tends to lure people into an illusory existence where their emotions are allowed full play whereas those same emotions are bottled up in real life.

There is as yet no known antidote to the mobile phone craze and its twins Facebook, Twitter and some of the sinister games now on the phone. As parents and elders we ourselves need counseling on how to stay away from the mobile phone; forget about telling our kids the same. After all children learn by seeing, not by hearing! Like they say example is better than precept.

And coming to the real meaning of education, today its more about quantity (marks) than quality (values and principles of good living). Children today have no empathy because

education itself is competitive. Collaborative learning as practised in Japan and elsewhere, where students share what they learn with one another and therefore learn from each other is unheard of in India. Research has found that learning outcomes are much better through collaboration than when learning alone. In fact, by combining all the different thoughts, learning is hugely enriched.

Another disturbing trend one sees in India is that students pass out of school and college without any skills other than computer application skills. Skills are much prized in western education and work experience helps them gain entry into good universities. There isn't any rush to go on from school to college to university. Vocational education has been just a talking point in our country. We have not given it the required attention. It's high time we gave credit to skills education.

Recently a friend from Finland said most parents in that country are now doing homeschooling. She said in homeschooling the learning is child-led not teacher-led and the child is nurtured and allowed to excel in what he/she is good at.

In India too homeschooling is catching on. Although there are no studies yet on the results of homeschooling in India, studies from countries like Finland, Sweden etc., have found that such children perform substantially better than their conventionally educated counterparts, in areas such as verbal fluency, independence, and life skills. Talking about homeschooling in India, the youngest person to ever clear the highly competitive Indian Institute of Technology, Joint Entrance Examination, in 2010, Sahal Kaushik with a rank of 33 in the country, and standing first in Delhi at the young age of 14, was homeschooled.

It's time for parents to get out of the rut of schooling their children in elite institutions where the competition is about which brand of car a child comes to school in and which is the more expensive brand. If this is what schooling teaches a child and not how to live life and to struggle to get what they want in life, then education surely is wasted. Marks do not a person make, but the values imbibed along the way are what will stand every student in good stead through life.

Masood Azhar Episode Triumph of Indian Diplomacy

By Dr. D.K. Giri

After 10 years of diplomatic endeavours by India, lately backed by France, UK and USA, Masood Azhar, the Jaise-e-Mohammad Chief was declared on 1st May by UNSC as a global terrorist. After JeM claimed they masterminded the 26 February Pulwama attack on our security personnel killing 50 of them, the three powerful permanent members of Security Council pressed for declaring him a global terrorist under 1267 Sanctions Committee. They diplomatically clobbered China to lift the technical hold on the proposal to the Committee. Remember, Beijing had vetoed the proposal to list Azhar as international terrorist and had put a technical hold on 1267 Committee proposal.

Notably, US threatened to move a resolution in UNSC, should the technical hold not be lifted by China. If a resolution was moved in UNSC, and if China were to veto it again, it would have been seen as supporting terrorism. This would have been detrimental to China's insatiable ambition of being a global power. Besides, China is in throes of trade war with USA, and the vibes are, it is losing out to the latter. China took on the US too soon to secure global dominance. Apparently, Xi Jinping did not realise that China was not yet ready for a trade war with America. He overshot. Anyway, this is topic for another discussion.

What does this declaration mean for the terrorist, Pakistan, India, and China, the main stakeholders in South Asian Security? For Masood Azhar, the terrorist, it would mean three things: his assets would be frozen immediately. He would be divested of all the bank accounts where he was perhaps receiving terror attacks. Second, there will be a travel ban imposed on him. His movements will be restricted, and monitored; he would be kept under house arrest. Third, there will be an arms embargo, which means he cannot acquire or supply arms to any terrorist outfits or groups. These conditions reflect the resolution that designated Azhar as global terrorist-- "Azhar is participating in the financing, planning, facilitating, preparing or perpetrating acts or activities of terrorism, or supplying, selling or transferring arms or related material for the same."

What does it mean for India? It is certainly a diplomatic victory of sorts. Some would say that it is symbolic as Azhar has reached the expiry date for Pakistan. He is ill and ineffective. But, as Syed Akbaruddin, India's permanent representative to the UN said, "This is for us a significant outcome as we have been at it for years." France, which is a go-to country for India in UN, replacing Russia, said, "It is a successful realisation of its (France's) efforts for several years." It should also be noted that France is advocating for permanent membership in the UNSC of India, Brazil and Japan.

India could claim the victory as it successfully mobilised three big powers and had the support of 10 non-permanent members of the Security Council. It also got support of UNSC's current Chair, Indonesia, represented by Transyan Djani, who was supported for the post by India in 2018. He pushed for a decision by 1st May, as others had given Beijing a deadline of 23rd April to lift the hold or US would move a separate resolution by bypassing 1267 committee. China capitulated under pressure, although supposedly it managed some face-saving by dropping reference to Pulwama attack and so on.

The 1267 Committee decision would cast a shadow on Pakistan, which will come under increased scrutiny by the world as a haven for terrorists. Pakistan, expectedly, sought to play down the 1267 Committee decision as it claimed to have

taken several actions against Azhar. This is a hoax. At any rate, the spotlight will now turn towards 138-odd UN listed terrorist sheltered in Pakistan. Further, the Financial Action Task Force, which monitors terrorist funding, will blacklist Pakistan, having been put in the grey list before. Pakistan will suffer heavily despite China's calculated benevolence, as international funding will stop.

The third player in Azhar episode, China's international credibility has nose-dived. It was seen supporting a wrong cause, even if it wanted to play Pakistan against India. Beijing has been plotting to hold India back, so that the latter does not ever question China's hegemony in Asia or elsewhere.

The US played a significant role too. It wants to have India on its side, keep China on its toes. It wants India to help counter Chinese ambition to emerge as a super-power and challenge American supremacy. It took the initiative in moving a resolution after the Pulwama attack, which read: "The Security Council condemns the Pulwama attack and asks all States to cooperate with India and counter threats to international peace." The US was adamant in putting 23rd April deadline. The 1st May episode has also confirmed that it is still the reigning super-power, and China has a long way to go.

In March this year, at the behest of the US, P-3 of UNSC had moved the proposal in 1267 Sanctions Committee, which was created in 1999 to impose sanctions on Al Qaeda. The Committee comprises 15 members including P-5 of the Security Council, and takes decisions on the basis of a consensus. Any member can put a hold for seeking more time or greater clarification, information etc. Invoking this procedure, Beijing has been blocking the decision. The hold can last up to six months.

What next for India's diplomacy vis-a-vis China-Pak axis in South Asia? New Delhi has so far been targeting Pakistan. Even in the current Lok Sabha elections, anti-Pakistan rhetoric is the staple diet in the campaign of the ruling BJP. It is easier to build a nationalism narrative by declaring Pakistan as enemy number one. But, is that really the case? As I have argued in this column, it is China, not Pakistan that New Delhi should make the reference point in its foreign policy.

New Delhi must realise in its bones that by blocking our move for 10 long years to nail Masood Azhar in UNSC, China has demonstrated its unholy alignment with Pakistan, and that India is not its friend. Second, China has all kinds of fantastic claims on India's territories, like it has with several other countries. The Azhar episode also has demonstrated that New Delhi will have the support of many other countries that are wary of China's model of politics -- authoritarian, ambitious and aggrandising.

The move to clinch it in the Sanctions Committee was also hastened by the gruesome terror attacks in Sri Lanka. I have argued that New Delhi should have actively engaged with Sri Lanka in handling the aftermath of the attack. If India is leading in advocacy against terrorism in the world, it must fight against it in its neighbourhood. On the other hand, China seen on the side of terrorists would alienate countries including India, which it is wooing. As some observes apprehend, if here is any quid pro quo between India and China, we will know after 23rd May when a new government will be in place.

Leaving those conjectures aside, the world wants India to replace China in Asia as the major power. It gave India the chance in 1950s which India scuppered. Will India be able to grab this opportunity now?--INFA
(The author is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

TO THE EDITOR

Plight of taxi drivers

Editor,
I am a local taxi driver who has been driving for more than a decade. I am also sure that I was the first driver in the city who started wearing a seat belt while driving. I am a law abiding citizen and concerned about traffic rules and the growing road congestion. I had once met our ministers in the previous government with my innovative idea about how to minimise congestion but there was no response from the government's side. So I approached The Shillong Times with the idea and it was published on October 16, 2016, in the Sunday edition. But still there was no response from any agency concerned, both government and private. I also attended a brainstorming session on traffic problems at IIM Shillong. There I found that everyone has a problem with taxis and taxi drivers. Though I would disagree with what the eminent personalities there were saying but before

I put forward my views I would like to apologise on behalf of all those drivers who are arrogant and who misbehave and violate traffic rules.

Traffic police and taxi drivers are the worst victims of road congestion that is worsening by the day. Drivers have to waste around 3 to 4 hours every day because of congestion. But the taxi fare has not been revised since 2011, as per my information. During this period fuel prices have increased by Rs 10-12. It is our biggest problem and we find it difficult to survive. However, government employees get 3 per cent increment every year. Even the staff of private firms get salary hikes. The price of everything has gone up. A cup of tea costs Rs 10, haircut is Rs 50-100. Even my children's school fees are hiked by 10 % every year. Even tourist taxis have revised their fares then why not us?

Don't taxi drivers have the right to ask when we can revise our fares? Today, passengers and taxi drivers

share a bitter relationship and every now and then they go to police stations or write to newspapers complaining against us for violating the MV Act of 1988. I sincerely request our government and authorities concerned to kindly look into the matter and consider our request for fare revision as soon as possible. We are ordinary drivers from poor families with little education but we need to speak out and hence the letter. Nobody feels for us or writes in favour of us. Why?

Yours etc.,
Gautam Gurung
Local cab driver

Pine Mount principal's alleged misdemeanour

Editor,
Apropos the letter to the editor captioned "Uncouth behaviour" (ST May 8, 2019) I admit that at the time of writing this letter I have come to know only one side of the story from the social activist, B. Marbaniang. I

don't know the Principal's side of the story. In the absence of the other side of the story I have to believe only what was believed by Mr Marbaniang. I am really astonished to learn of the rude and uncivilized behaviour of the Principal of Pine Mount School. As per his letter in your daily and other news reports published in the vernacular dailies, Mr Marbaniang had approached the Principal for certain information but he rudely rebuked by the Principal. It was also learnt from the activist that the staff in the school are also scared of the Principal 'like rats in front of a cat.' If so then the Principal must be very arrogant and dictatorial and does not deserve to be the head of a premier educational institution like the Pine Mount which is also a Government Institution. Principals and teachers must be role models of good and civilized behaviour. We cannot afford to have rude and uncouth heads to run

institutions. The Principal is actually a public servant and is holding the post to serve a public cause; not to throw tantrums around. Perhaps, it is high time for the Government to seriously consider appointing someone else in her place. We cannot afford to have Principals who misbehave with parents and visitors. Even during the recent ISC examination there was a goof-up of the answer scripts. Hence the behaviour of the Principal is found wanting in every way. However, I hope that the Principal also comes out with her side of the story so that the public comes to know the truth.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Meghalaya Assembly Building at last?

Editor,
I read with interest the news item, "Govt wants to complete Assembly building project before deadline" (ST

May 7, 2019). If the present Govt is committed enough to complete the construction of the Assembly Building well within the stipulated time it would indeed be a feather in its cap. After all the State has too many failed and incomplete projects. To hear that the MDA Govt is all set to complete the building during its tenure is great news. For the past 18 years, Meghalaya witnessed several discussions, disagreements and loss of time and public money only to decide on a suitable site for the building since every new government in the past had it's own site in mind.

This time around let us hope and keep our fingers crossed that the Assembly Building would stand tall for the State and it's people to take pride in.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

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Not a shred of evidence exists in favor of the idea that life is serious.

--- Brendan Gill

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Turning the tables

POLITICS, after all, is where strategies make all the difference – more so, in turning adversity to advantage. See how a clever Prime Minister Narendra Modi has turned the tables on the Congress, and with relative ease. The main weapon used by the Congress and its principal campaigner Rahul Gandhi was Rafale, to puncture Modi's claim of running a clean government after the disastrous scams of the UPA periods. It seemed to take a toll on the PM and the ruling BJP as they fought the Lok Sabha polls inch by inch through the past few weeks. By a sleight of hand, the PM then changed the adverse campaign scenario to his advantage. Note the fact that today, the talk is no more about Rafale. Rafale is past, and Bofors has come back from relative obscurity to occupy centre-stage in the campaign arena. Aggressor Rahul Gandhi is scurrying around to defend himself. This, after the PM fired a lethal shot from a campaign platform, by invoking the Bofors scam of the 1980s. He went one more step ahead, with some planning, and brought in Rahul's father Rajiv Gandhi calling him Bhrashtachari Number One – or, the most corrupt. All hell was let loose, and everyone was scrambling their weapons to attack Modi, not for the Rafale deal, but for bringing in a martyr of such a high stature to gross "disrepute."

With one stroke, the PM seems to have punctured the Congress offensive. Instead of defending himself in what palpably was an embarrassing situation, the PM dramatically turned around and took on the shape of an aggressor. Long-forgotten memories of Bofors naturally reach up to the interiors of Italy. The embarrassment for the Congress is all the more because, as the principal opposition headed into the battleground, it talked only about Rafale, and did not bother to highlight the many weak points of Modi's five-year rule. There was hardly any mention about the disastrous demonetisation, the failure on the part of the government to rev up the industrial and manufacturing sectors in ways as to generate jobs, and the overall downturn in economy. Instead, the Congress put all its eggs into the Rafale basket. Now, midway through the sail, the Congress campaign boat seems to have lost steam. Modi scored a point, but he and the BJP may still not have the last laugh. One has to wait till May 23 to know how the nation judged the PM's performance in the past five years. However, one thing that will remain about this election is the low life language used by all political parties which makes the phrase "hitting below the belt" sound blasé.

A Common Education System

By Ananya Guha

Elections are dominating everything in the news today. Elections are round the corner almost every time. If there are no central elections, there are state elections, or better still bye elections. Even elections in University campuses make headlines of sorts. We get to see everything about elections even before it has begun. Never has an election been so smeared with words that malign an opponent or an opponent's party. Electing an individual or a political party is the law of the land. This will continue to take place as per political and constitutional processes. But this dominating every minute of the news is a testimony to politics taking possession of our lives. It has come in a way that we can view nothing but a political context. That is why this context is everywhere, in education and social contexts. It is high time we evolve methods for peace, development, health and education. My point is that politicization of everything not only weakens the body politic of a nation, but its sustainability and overlooks the happenings in our surroundings. Poverty for example, the plight of the poor, the struggles for a daily living in a country like India.

Then where do we go to? Yes a new ruling government will come. Let it come and let the work for development and for the common man, employment and above all living in peace come. There is a diversity in the country which is unique. Such diversity must be the strength even while the disparity in terms of social and economic conditions must be alleviated. Then only can the strength of diversity be brought to a common platform. Otherwise the proclivity of driving wedges on the basis of caste, community and religion will remain.

And how do we play up to all this? The mainstream media does by constantly introducing acrimonious debates or discussions, where you have politicians dominating the scene, or journos and academics that have political leanings. This will hamper education and

the right to think in our country. In short we are being brainwashed, and the vicious hand of hatred takes over our psyches. Are we looking for change? No. We are only anticipating change in a political firmament. Do we want to see more education for those who cannot access it? Very doubtful. What happened to the Right to Education? How do we address the needs for a holistic education for the drop outs and the disadvantaged? Without education there can be no access to a better living. This is simple: because education provides sustenance for combating the outside world; it arms an individual to question and also makes a person more discerning. Skills can be developed concomitantly. How much of focus is there on education in the media?

Coming back to university campuses, political groups dominate there as well. What do these student leaders do for education in their respective regions?

If we are remembering Gandhi today, what are we doing to understand the art of persuasion, dialogue or mediation? It is here that education is the fount. We can resolve conflict through mediation, and meeting something or someone half way. We do not. We simply aggrandize and thrust our views on others. We play politics and groups in our ethos, workplace or even homes. Then where is non-violence, satyagraha, being civilly disobedient? We remember the patriarch but not what he stood for. We mouth these terms but do not put precept to practice. Gandhian ideals are mouthed, not practiced. We need more introspection. Education and the manner of bringing resolution to crises can help us achieve these. It is a feeling versus reason dichotomy that we must constantly resolve, not the politics of bickering, shaming and attacking.

Then only can the cultural heritage of India be understood and realized

in a seamless context. That can be done when we veer round to the common man and his innate penchant to learn and harness applications of knowledge. It is simply that the opportunities for education are missing. The man who owns a small grocery shop gives the best education he can to his children. Those who have practical skills say in plumbing, electrical wiring or plumbing have an intelligence that is not measured. The common man uses technology with aplomb but does not possess formal qualification. When we think of votes we think of the common man but not when we think of education. Technology and say the internet is best suited for education because we have free and open sources on the internet, open source libraries, open access to journals etc. Literacy and numeracy must be amenable to open access so that people can read, write and learn. What we call literacy today is only signing of names. Literacy is the base and springboard for education. And, open and accessible education vis a vis the internet of things (www) is the solution. Once the common man is educated or has access to it then only we can have a free thinking society when people are not galvanised or exploited as a vote base. It is here also that learning ontologies can focus on open and distance learning which is accessible and affordable.

Distance Education is for the masses; the antinomy are the classes who are privileged to have an elitist education. When demonetisation took place I was pleasantly surprised to see here in Shillong how shop keepers used the Pay TM mode to transact their small businesses in the absence of notes. These very people are 'uneducated' but they know very well the utilitarian value of technology and its application processes. And such processes must be used for education both formal and non formal. The cynosure must be the common man and the weapon: technology for education, to learn, gather information and hone

cognitive skills. Earn and learn is truly a catchword, but it can be practised through distance and open learning. Alternating between work and study is what distance and open learning provides to the common man or the professional, who is also a 'common' man.

My point is that technology is not being used enough for education. The common man grasps instinctively its entertainment value but not its educational value. That is because the position of the radio, the television, the internet and the mobile phone are undermined as educational value. When it comes to education these are almost strictures and fall under a 'prohibited' order.

Let us posit in this manner. Education can be mass oriented when the focal point is the man on the street or the common man who must be taught not only to vote but to learn. Then only does he exercise true franchise and is a liberated soul. True education is a liberating force and doubly egalitarian. When we speak of equal opportunities or the right to education we must think of the poor and the unequal.

It is sad that the import of distance and open learning has not been understood in a nuanced manner. They encompass radically the following: cost effectiveness, continuity in education, non formal and formal learning and both Young and Adult learning. Where else would you find such educational holism? And here the benefits can be reaped by the common man, the unlettered, the hitherto untutored and the less fortunate in terms of educational advancement. Linking degrees with jobs or employment is not the only criterion for a sound educational system but also the development of thinking skills and application oriented knowledge.

I started my article with a note on the tenor of politics, but have drifted mid stream to education with a focus on education for the common man. If we can think of a common school system we can also think of a common education system.

Corrupt to the core Babudom of India

By Arun Bajpai

It is common knowledge that in any type of Government but especially in a democracy, the public (aam aadmi) has to deal only with the babudom of that country. It is to the babudom of India that the democratically elected Government conveys its policy decisions which this babudom has to implement. Unfortunately in India, with no educational qualifications laid down for an Indian neta to become a parliamentarian under the Indian Constitution, and the manner in which these educational degrees are being obtained by fictitious means by our netas and in some cases netas themselves honestly depicting their educational qualifications as 'matric' or 'below matric' no neta dares to annoy the babus who actually run the Government. The Chief Vigilance Commissioner of India N Vitthal had rightly stated some time back that in India a babu is more

British Colonial era and now in Independent India it should have been changed to make police people friendly. However, no Government either in Centre or states have implemented these reforms in true spirit. They all have done lip service to the issue and closed the matter because it is not suited to neta's and babus of India and the vast powers they enjoy.

Similarly, the Civil Service Code 1947, which governs the rules of functioning of IAS, were framed during the British era of 1919 and this 1947 code is a true copy of 1919 Civil Services Code. This shows the bankruptcy of ideas of those who framed these rules. At least they should have modified this code to the conditions prevailing in independent India. This was not done. So, these babus enjoy unlimited powers which they misuse for personal purposes every now and again. How do you justify the fact that even if a Babu is caught red handed

In India babudom comprises the central services of IAS, IPS, IFS and IRS and the state services of PCS and PPS. If we just look at the web site of Training and Implementation Department, Government of India on how their IAS service is performing on corruption, it tells you that 10 IAS serving officers are in jail for corruption, Indian Government has sent home 129 IAS officers for being dead wood and inefficient, 66 Ex IAS officers are in jail for corruption and other offences and Government has been informed that 100 of their IAS officers have property worth 800 corers.

corrupt than a neta because the janta every five years can throw out a neta by not electing him but is powerless against a babu who can continue to be corrupt for 30-32 years of his service period.

In India babudom comprises the central services of IAS, IPS, IFS and IRS and the state services of PCS and PPS. If we just look at the web site of Training and Implementation Department, Government of India on how their IAS service is performing on corruption, it tells you that 10 IAS serving officers are in jail for corruption, Indian Government has sent home 129 IAS officers for being dead wood and inefficient, 66 Ex IAS officers are in jail for corruption and other offences and Government has been informed that 100 of their IAS officers have property worth 800 corers. World Bank in their recent survey found that in India in the trucking business, senior IPS officers and their subordinate police officers are earning more than 222 cores yearly through corruption along the New Delhi-Mumbai route. Two days extra are being taken on transportation because of this corruption. Truth is that in Indian babudom, corruption has become organised and institutionalised.

Today Indian babudom is seen in the world as the most corrupt and ever ready to put obstructions in the path of anything happening smoothly. Nearly 12 years ago the Supreme Court had directed all governments of centre and states to implement reforms suggested by it in the police force. It needs to be remembered that Indian Police Act is the true copy of 1861 Police Act of the

doing something wrong including corruption, he cannot be proceeded against without an 'OK' by the Government? Why?

Currently the elections for electing the 17th Lok Sabha are going on. If you read the election manifesto of any political party, none is saying that they will improve functioning of 1.70 crore babudom of India which are just Central Government services. The second Administrative report on reforms of the bureaucracy in India is lying in cold storage. In the neta-babu nexus in the country the slogan is khao aur khaane do (eat and let others eat) If Indian politicians really care for the people who vote for them then they must make the Services Selection Board as applicable to Armed Forces, compulsory for civil services also with necessary modifications. It is necessary to know the psychological mindset of the new entrants. Every babu must be forced to give yearly update of his property, if he does not, then his services should be terminated. Babus must have separate rules of employment and should have separate fast track courts to decide their cases within six months' time. No lingering on for ages.

This babudom which is so corrupt today must be made accountable and clean if future Governments in India want administration to be good and responsive. SAB CHALTA HAI WILL NOT DO ANYMORE BECAUSE PUBLIC HAS BECOME VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE.

(The writer is a retired Brigadier and can be reached at brigarunbajpai@yahoo.co.in)

TO THE EDITOR

Statements unbecoming of a PM

Editor,
The recent statements of Prime Minister Narendra Modi which tantamount to profanity and were directed at late Rajiv Gandhi have created quite a negative image of the country's leader. Mr Modi had at an election rally, called the late former PM as the number one corrupt person. This is totally uncalled for and c o n d e m n a b l e . Notwithstanding the fact that during the election season candidates like the Prime Minister who have had gruelling schedules tend to become tired and frustrated and let fly baseless accusations right and left but stooping to the lowest standards of public debate is really not acceptable especially for a person holding a high constitutional office.

In fact, the BJP should know that when the Kargil War happened it was the very Swiss made Bofors artillery guns that threw off the invading Pakistani elements, and every time soldiers would shout in unison praising the Bofors which were procured during the time of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Mr Modi

should learn political decorum and say what he has to say about his own party and his achievements without wasting too much time speaking about his opponents. That is a sure sign of insecurity and it is not what democracy is all about.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S. Wankhar
Shillong:

Is Modi dividing India?

Editor,
The election rhetoric across the country reeks of a divisive agenda. The Times Magazine which is widely read has in its May 20 issue termed Prime Minister, Modi as, "India's Divider in Chief." India is today deeply divided along ideology (Right Wing) and religion (Hindus versus the rest). Every conversation on social media revolves around the issue of whether Modi and the BJP would return to power on May 23. And if not Modi then who? The average Indian with a desire for a diversity and tolerance is wary about Modi's second term. They feel that most institutions are today run by people hand-picked by the RSS and are now in the hands of illiberal right wingers. But

apart from ideology, the 5-year Modi Government has not been able to do much in terms of creating jobs. Why, many people have even lost jobs after demonetization. The GST is still facing teething problems. While Modi speaks of digitisation and online financial transactions, a recent study has shown that the number of people filling income tax forms online has reduced substantially. The employment statistics in the country has been changed or manipulated in order to hide the truth.

Religious minorities live in fear of the growing intolerance expressed by BJP leaders from time to time in their election speeches and at other platforms. What is worse is that a terror accused Sathvi is being put up as a candidate from Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh even before she has been acquitted by the court of law. India chose to be a secular country; not a theocratic one. This was decided at the time when the Constitution was written after years of debate by the great minds of the country. So why is the BJP making it sound as if India made a mistake by choosing to remain secular? In fact religion should have nothing to do with governance and

development.

Most Indians today find themselves at the crossroads because they are forced to vote against one political party by choosing to vote for another simply because they have lost faith in the former. However, the mahagathbandhan of non-BJP parties too does not inspire confidence. We are left with the choice of Mamata Banerjee or Mayawati as Prime Minister and both are, according to me highly unpredictable. I am saying this with responsibility and not because both are women. So India has reached a very critical point in its political journey and this will be an election that is difficult to predict. The political players are unsure of their victory hence they are indulging in the worst form of mudslinging, unheard of before and raking up issues that are no longer relevant except to tarnish a person who is dead and gone. Is this why we are having an election? Isn't it a waste of resources that we focus on non-issues while ignoring those issues that matter to us such as better health care, education and yes employment creation and addressing the farm crisis but not by giving out doles?

We will finally get the government we deserve so I guess our choice will reflect our own mindsets.

Yours etc.,
Khrawborlang
Marbaniang
Via email

Self-correction a prerequisite for leaders

Editor,
If you want to get the worst out of a person just provoke him. Even a child might get a good slap from the mother if it provokes her continuously. I believe it was such provocation by Rahul Gandhi that finally drove PM Modi round the bend and because of which he uttered the deadly slur against his father, the former PM Rajiv Gandhi. Naturally, PM Modi's corruption charges against Rajiv Gandhi has literally upset many. Yes, hundreds of lies were overlooked but one truth (or untruth) by PM Modi has jolted many people. Now they are on the job! This itself shows something is amiss in the nation.

In the first place, why does Rahul have to indulge in such mudslinging ceaselessly? Is this a desirable characteristic of an aspiring Prime Minister who

continuously harps on things that are seemingly cooked up? Why does he have to take the path of deceptions and lies to achieve the top goal? Are all citizens foolish that they can consider one as their PM whose propriety is questionable? Just the other day Rahul Gandhi clearly told a news magazine that his only one and only mission is to malign and knock down PM Modi. One wonders how his party people and others can agree with the outrageously bitter attitude of their leader. The Supreme Court has also pulled him up and he has no option but to unconditionally apologize. I believe all leaders should first put sincere efforts to build a pleasant persona before stepping out for a mission. The ambition to become great must be fortified by the four wheels of virtues such as truthfulness, dedication, patience, and humility. Let the crown of Prime Minister-ship (or leadership) be claimed by a person who really has a vision for the nation, respect for its values and stands upright for its integrity and sovereignty.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwalji,
Via email

River, interrupted!



Dams are opening up floodgates of ecological imbalance, says river cyclist Samrat Moulik

By Madhumita Mookerji

Water is fast becoming as precious as gold in many regions of the world today due to shortage. Environmentalists warn that unless water is used more sagaciously when there is still time, the world may suffer from a water-crisis as never seen before.

There are few people to tell us to turn that tap off when our thirst is satiated. One such is Samrat Moulik, freshly returned from a 5,200 km expedition from Ladakh to Kanyakumari.

He calls himself a river cyclist, the only in the world he claims, riding solo with the motto: 'Save River, Conserve Water'. In his mission, he mapped his route along the country's major river courses.

Moulik pedalled from Gangotri to Padma in Bangladesh, driven by the same mission. He reminds us that around 97.5 per cent of the world's water is non-drinkable seawater, leaving just 2.5 per cent as freshwater. Out of this 2.5 per cent, 0.67 per cent is potable, the rest being locked up in the two poles and mountain glaciers. Of this 0.67 per cent, India's share is 4 per cent. Thus the entire world's population, flora and fauna are dependent only on this 0.67 per cent global freshwater for survival.

Having seen the country's rivers up, close and personal cycling 8,200 km, Moulik says one of

the most ill-planned infrastructure projects conceived since Independence are the river dams, which, while generating hydro-electricity, are also making man fish in troubled waters.

A river is a living entity, Moulik stresses, whether glacial or rain-fed, and in this journey, it performs its own geological role. All great civilisations have evolved around rivers. But human beings have tried to bind them with dams and barrages to restrict their free flow.

India has travelled a long way since Independence, when the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had referred to the dams as the temples of modern India. But in recent years, from the Sardar Vallabhai Patel Dam on the Narmada, Tehri Dam on the Bhagirathi, and now Bursar Dam on the Chenab in Kashmir, have seen innumerable protests by environmental activists. Why?

"India wanted to copy-paste the US model but overlooked the fact that it may not work here. Rivers here are in spate during the three months of the monsoon, unlike in the West where rainfall occurs throughout the year. In scorching summer, most of our rivers dry up. Thus, water is a precious resource and we need to conserve it," Moulik stresses.

A river, by nature, flows down carrying with it earth and broken rocks; when nearing the sea it disgorges its load on the flood plains which helps to facilitate a good crop. But, as Moulik explains, whenever a dam is constructed across

a river, it creates reservoirs which hinder the uninterrupted flow of water. Consequently, silting becomes rampant.

It has been seen globally that dredging has not been able to rid the river of its problems born of the dam. Moreover, when the glacier-fed river hurls down, it meets the dam. Once the dam is unable to bind the waters, it is released into the lower catchment area, resulting in floods and devastation. "Thus, through our faulty planning, we ensure flood and devastation and loss of the precious water," insists Moulik.

Dams have other highly negative impacts. One, obstruction of the natural movement of river fish. As the river flows through cities, it meets industrial effluents replete with harmful chemicals, municipality wastes and untreated water. The flora and fauna that feed on this water start undergoing genetic mutations, posing health hazards. Moulik laments the loss of rich fish haul of River Teesta. Because of the high velocity of the water, the surrounding areas are subsiding too.

Some of the largest rivers in India flow through Uttarakhand located in the extremely environmentally fragile seismic zones IV and V. The Himalaya is the youngest fold mountains in the world and, still rising. Yet, there are over 70 dams constructed in the upper Ganga region. The moment a reservoir is formed, the river starts putting pressure on the surround-

ing mountain folds, which has led to catastrophes in past.

"I don't think we have learnt any lesson from the Uttarakhand disaster," Moulik observes.

As for the downward journey of rivers, take for example, the Sundarban delta. "The delta was created out of the river's ebb and flow which led to massive silt deposition that actually impeded the salty seawater's entry. But today, the hydel power projects have disrupted this rhythm, leading to rapid coastal erosion and seawater is entering ('I am talking of the Indian portion'). This is posing a danger to the tiger population which cannot survive on saline water. Secondly, the world's largest mangrove forest is also at peril from an assault of salt water," Moulik cautions.

Also, Moulik reminds, any kind of large infrastructure project like a river dam generates a huge amount of debris and dumping leads to rise in river beds resulting in floods.

Dams offer tourism potential too. The Hoover dam in the US is one such. To promote tourism, road widening is a must which again leads to ecological imbalance through dynamite blasting of rocks, which, in any case, are sitting on a fragile zone. The debris from the blasting also adds to rising river levels. As a result, a minor flash flood, cloud burst or glacial melting is today leading to dire natural consequences.

There is a social angle too in the form of displacement of locals. "They lose agricultural land but rehabilitation initiatives are poor in India, as we all know," says Moulik.

Another aspect is climate change. "Average global temperature, in a few years, is likely to increase two degrees. Storms and floods are frequent. At such a juncture, man, instead of preserving precious water, is disrupting the natural flow of rivers in the name of hydro electricity generation," Moulik rues.

Way forward

Moulik feels that instead of building huge structures, governments should give approvals for small check dams.

"The administration needs to study data to see the habitation along a course-changing river, the amount of agricultural land in its catchment area and arrive at an estimate of the water required and distribution. Unfortunately, in India the river is a state subject and there is often a Centre-state conflict and projects get delayed."

Rainwater harvesting should get more attention, the 'river-activist' says.

A proper canal system, groundwater recharging and rainwater harvesting should be the way forward. A 200 sqm school terrace in an area with 500 mm of rainfall can harvest almost 1 lakh litre of rainwater in one year.

The solutions are there waiting to be explored. Sadly, it is mainly due to mismanagement of ground and surface water and lack of long-term vision that make us stare at an arid future, Moulik feels. (TWF)



Dozing your way to happiness

By Dr Anjana Kannankara

Living in a world that is highly demanding, we often sacrifice sleep in an effort to fit everything perfectly into our daily routine. A good night's sleep is essential for helping the body function at its best. Healthy sleep can help the body better regulate blood sugar levels, keep the immune system functioning properly and even improve the heart health by decreasing stress.

How the body sleeps

Many factors help in preparing the body to fall asleep and wake up. There exists an internal "body clock" that controls when a person is awake and when the body is ready for sleep.

The body clock typically has a 24-hour repeating rhythm called the circadian rhythm. Two processes interact to control this rhythm. The first is a pressure to sleep that builds with every hour from the time the person is awake. This drive for sleep reaches a peak around night, when most people fall asleep.

A compound called adenosine is described to be an important factor linked to this drive for sleep. While awake, the level of adenosine in the brain continues to rise. The increasing level of this compound signals a shift toward sleep. While sleeping, the body breaks down adenosine.

The second process involves the syncing in of the internal body clock with certain cues in the environment. Light, darkness and other cues help determine when to be naturally awake and when to feel sleepy.

The light rays received through eyes signal a special area in the brain that it is daytime. This area of brain helps align the body clock with periods of the day and night. When it gets dark, the body releases a hormone called melatonin. The amount of melatonin in the bloodstream peaks towards evening time. Researchers believe this peak plays a vital role in preparing the body for sleep. Exposure to bright artificial light like that from TV, computers or LED clocks in the late night can disrupt this process, making it hard to fall asleep. As the sun rises, owing to the cues and signals received, the body releases cortisol, a hormone that naturally prepares the body to wake up.

Variations in the rhythm

The rhythm and timing of the body clock change with age. Teens fall asleep later at night than younger children and adults. One reason for this is because melatonin



World Sleep Day tomorrow

is released and peaks later in the 24-hour cycle for teens. As a result, it's natural for many teens to prefer late bedtimes and sleep late into the morning than adults.

People also need more sleep early in life, when they're growing and developing hence newborns may sleep more than 16 hours a day, and preschool-aged children need to take naps. Young children tend to sleep more in the early evening. Teens tend to sleep more in the morning. Also, older adults tend to go to bed earlier and wake up earlier.

The patterns and types of sleep also change as people mature. For example, newborn infants spend more time in REM sleep. The amount of slow-wave sleep which is a stage of non-REM sleep, peaks in early childhood and then drops sharply after puberty. It continues to decline as people age.

Factors causing sleep issues

Sleep problems can be caused by various physical, medical, psychiatric, or environmental factors. Although causes might differ, the end result of all sleep disorders is that the body's natural cycle of slumber and daytime wakefulness is disrupted.

Short-term or acute insomnia can be caused by life stresses such as job loss or change, death of a loved one, or moving, an illness, or environmental factors such as light, noise, or extreme temperatures.

Long-term or chronic insomnia, which occurs at least three nights a week for a month or longer, can be caused by factors such as depression, chronic stress, and pain or discomfort at night.

A common cause of chronic insomnia is a conditioned emotional response. Persistent thoughts about the sleep problem and behaviours that develop around the sleep problem like sleeping in or napping, ruminating in bed tends to maintain insomnia symptoms.

Other factors that can interfere with sleep may be genetics, varied work hours, medicines that interfere with sleep and also the natural ageing of an individual.

How much sleep is good sleep

The amount of sleep required each day changes over the course of life and varies from person to person. The chart below reflects recent American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) recommendations that the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has endorsed — 4-12 months: 12-16 hours/day (including naps); 1-2 years: 11-14 hours/day (including naps); 3-5 years: 10-13 hours/day (including naps); 6-12 years: 9-12 hours/day; 13-18 years: 8-10 hours/day; 18 years or older: 7-8 hours/day.

Sleep debt

If a person routinely loses sleep or chooses to sleep less than needed, the

sleep loss adds up. The total sleep lost is called his sleep debt.

Some consider quick nap as a way to deal with sleepiness. Naps may provide a short-term boost in alertness and performance but doesn't provide all of the other benefits of night-time sleep.

Some people try to make up for their sleep debt by sleeping more on their days off than on work days. This can be taken as a sign that they aren't getting enough sleep. Although extra sleep on days off might help the person feel better, it can upset your body's sleep-wake rhythm.

Are you in danger?

Bad sleep habits and long-term sleep loss will affect health drastically. Sleeping when the body is ready to sleep is very important.

Sleep deficiency can affect people even when they sleep the total number of hours recommended for their age group. People whose sleep is out of sync with their body clocks such as shift workers or routinely interrupted such as caregivers or emergency responders might need to pay special attention to their sleep needs.

If your job or daily routine limits your ability to get enough sleep or sleep at the right times, talk with your doctor. You also should talk with your doctor if you sleep more than 8 hours a night, but don't feel well rested. You may have a sleep disorder or other health problem.

Sleep aids

Over-the-counter sleep aids might help temporarily but lifestyle changes are usually the best approach for chronic insomnia. Tolerance to the sedative effects of sleep aids can develop quickly which eventually means the longer they are taken, the less likely they are to make one sleepy. In addition, some over-the-counter sleep aids can cause hangover effect, leaving the person feeling weak and unwell the next day.

Medication interactions and side effects are possible as well, and much remains unknown about the safety and effectiveness of sleep aids, hence any medication should be taken strictly under medical supervision. Various non medical therapies like meditation, yoga, hypnosis or relaxation techniques are also preferred to reduce the stress and anxiety thus enhancing healthy sleep.

(The author is director, TGL Foundation, and senior director, FWO)

Missing love on Mother's Day

By Uma Purkayastha

Mother's Day is a very popular celebration nowadays in India though its origin was in the UK. In Indian culture, the status of a mother is compared to goddess 'Janani Janmabhummischa Swargathopi Gori-see' — which means Mother and Motherland are superior to heaven. Not only mother, to a child parents are equally respectable and lovable. But mothers are more attached to their children because a child has the closest bonding with the mother.

There is a proverb, "Father is the head of a family but mother is the heart." Children are more attracted to the affection and attachment of a mother. The first food of a child is its mother's milk; the first pronunciation of a child is 'Mm.' It is observed by researchers that the first sound that a child makes is 'Mm', which occurs due to the constant abrasion of two lips. It is very interesting to observe that almost in all the languages of the world, the synonym of 'Mother' is based on M (English-Mother, Mom; Bengali-Maa; Khasi-Mei; Sanskrit-Mata; Assamese-Matri; Hindi-Mai; Urdu-Amma;

Portugse-Mae; Dutch-Moder, German-Mutter; French-Maman or Mere; Italian-Mamma; Danish-Mor; Bosnian-Mojka; Arabic-Mahm etc). A mother's affection and attachment to her child is universal. It is also seen among animals. A dreadful tigress is also an affectionate mother to her child.

In India, though there is no particular day as 'Mother's Day' or 'Father's Day' to observe, Indian culture is based on love, obedience and respect towards parents. Many exemplary stories and myths are there regarding obedience and respect to parents. But we the Indians are particular about following the culture of western countries forgetting our valuable culture. Nowadays, the old, disabled and ailing parents are considered to be a burden. Old Age Homes are open to the helpless parents at the verge of death when they ardently need the company of their dear and near ones. This is the moral degradation of Indian culture whereas Mother's Day or Parent's Day are being observed with full glamour and gaiety.

(The author is an educationist)



Pixabay

A home for growth

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



When I stay in the ashram, my spiritual practices happen so effortlessly. But when I go home,

after a while, it becomes very mechanical. How to grow spiritually and maintain this effortlessness even at home?

Sadhguru: Essentially, a home is an arrangement to live. People make arrangements according to their means and according to their needs – or sometimes according to their neighbors' needs! I hope your home is according to your needs, and not according to someone else's idea as to how you should live. You must make your home the way it works for you.

A home is not just the building. It also includes all your other arrangements – your wife or husband, your children, maybe your parents, your neighbors, and the neighborhood. The idea of living in a town or city instead of living in the forest is to make our lives easier, to have infrastructure and a community. It may not be working for you right now, but you choose to live in the city so that life would be a little more effortless. You choose an arrangement that is convenient for whatever purpose you live for.

What Makes an Ashram an Ashram?

What makes an ashram an ashram is that everyone is here because they want to be here – they are not trapped here. You need to create such a situation in your home too. Just see if anyone is feeling trapped in your home. There may be people who feel that way, and you don't even know. They may be speaking to the neighbors, not to you. They may not feel entirely trapped, but maybe suffocated in some way. If they are feeling suffocated, open larger windows for them, or put them on the rooftop – whatever is needed to make sure everyone is there because they want to be there.

Once you create this atmosphere, suddenly, home is a nice

place to be. But if there is even one person who does not want to be there, he will create a certain atmosphere and a vibe that is difficult to live with. First of all, check yourself – is this the place you want to be? If it is not, see why. If it is, see why. Engineer your home in such a way that it feels like a wonderful place for you to do your sadhana (spiritual practices), to live well, to be peaceful, and to be joyful. Let this not become a hellhole for you – it is your home. It is an arrangement that you made – no one shoved you into it. It must work the way you want it to.

Above all, clean yourself from all the stupid competition and opinions that you have about how you should live in the city. You do not have to be in a particular way to achieve certain things. You can be completely different, do completely different things, and still get there. In many ways, I am a living example of this, regarding the spiritual process. People think you are not spiritual if you turn your head briskly. They think you must turn it slowly, and you must speak gently. People have certain ideas how someone who is spiritual is supposed to be. Set patterns are destroying your life.

Set Up A Conducive Atmosphere

If you are a spiritual seeker, why can't your home be set up like an ashram? It would be great if everyone was a volunteer at home. Do not volunteer only in the ashram – be a volunteer at home too. Many people have shared with me, "Never in my life, I ever thought cutting vegetables could be such a fantastic experience." I said, "Why? You never ate vegetables in your life?" "Yes, but..." When they are at home, they expect someone else to do it.

The fundamental thing is to make sure everyone is there because they want to be there. Set an atmosphere where your home is not a place to be stuck in but a place to grow in. Your home should be an arrangement for your growth.

(Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, visionary and bestselling author. He was conferred the Padma Vibhushan in 2017 for exceptional and distinguished service)

Tagore & his beloved Shillong

By Malabika Bisharad

The houses of Shillong that Rabindranath Tagore graced in the first half of the 20th century are Brookside, Jitbhoomi and Solomon Villa. Asia's first Nobel laureate, Tagore came to Brookside, Riblong, for the first time on October 11, 1919. He was accompanied by his eldest son Rathindranath, daughter-in-law Protima Devi, nephew Dinendranath and his wife Kamola Devi, and the bard's personal assistant Sadhu Charan.

The poet stayed at Brookside for three weeks and left Shillong on October 31, 1919, for Guwahati. According to his biographer Pravat Kumar Mukhopadhyay, the poet rented the bungalow from Kiranchandra Dey, who was the then assistant commissioner of Chitragong Division.

The rich heritage of Brookside dates back above 100 years. It might be made after the devastating earthquake of 1897 by the Britishers. Onlookers marvelled at the pristine location of the bungalow at the end of the long Zigzag road. On the right side of the road meandered the Umshyri brook. On the left, a few bungalows were settled on the hillocks and in the midst of pine groves. The area was called European B ward. Riblong settlement was yet to be made by the British government. The military hospital was to the northeast of the bungalow.

Shillong was very much a known place to Tagore's family. Rabindranath's father Mahharshi Debendranath Tagore used to extend financial help of Rs 10 every month to Brahmo Samaj of Shillong.

Tagore's eldest son Rathindranath and his wife Protima Devi stayed in Shillong during the summer of 1919. Tagore came to know about Shillong's natural beauty from them.

After his denouncement of Knighthood on May 30, 1919, Tagore was much disturbed. During July 1919, he received



invitation from Australian universities to do translation works of his Bengali speeches into English. Tagore wanted a peaceful place and decided to come to Shillong.

Tagore and his family started for Shillong from Kolkata on October 9, 1919, and reached Shillong on October 11. He had a tough journey as there were no bridges on the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. He came to Shillong by motor car at a cost of Rs 125 from Guwahati.

During his stay at Brookside, Tagore was extremely busy with his translation works. He once visited Brahmo Samaj Mandir at Police Bazar. He wrote only two 'Golpanu' (very short stories) – 'Ekti Din' and 'Ekti Chawni' – during his stay at Brookside which are included in 'Lipika'.

Local Bengalis used to visit Tagore at Brookside. Writer Lila Majumdar and poet Hem Chattopadhyay visited Tagore and penned their experience of meeting the great laureate.

Shillong was then capital of Assam province under strict British administration. British government didn't give any felicitation to the Nobel laureate for his denouncement of Knighthood. It was because of that Bengalis here also could not felicitate their dear poet. But that did not deter him from establishing an immediate

bond of love for this wonderful city.

He wrote a few letters to Ranu Adhikari, Hitendra Nandi and Kalidas Nag describing his experience of the tough journey from Santiniketan to Shillong, his wonderful moments at Brookside, the beautiful environment here and his busy schedule.

After visiting Brookside and Jitbhoomi, Tagore visited Europe. In 1926, he sketched the story of 'Sesher Kobita' (Farewell My Friend). Geographically and historically the backdrop of Sesher Kobita matches the Brookside locality written far away from Shillong in South India in 1928.

It is not known whether Tagore had met Khasi people directly during his first visit to Shillong but he loved Khasi cloth and bought a piece of cloth as gift for his most lovable little Ranu before leaving Shillong on October 31, 1919.

From Guwahati, he went to Sylhet and Tripura and then came back to Santiniketan in November 1919. Tagore received a fitting welcome in all those places.

After Tagore's visit to Brookside, the owner kept Brookside as it was. He kept all the materials used by Tagore intact.

In 1961, during Tagore's birth centenary, the then Assam Government installed a plaque at the entrance of Brookside. All Bengalis, Khasis, Assamese and people from other communities celebrated

the occasion together.

During that period, the government set up Rabindra Bhawan in many states of India. It is very unfortunate that Guwahati scored over Shillong despite then being the capital of Assam.

Culturally highly developed Shillong people always wanted a Rabindra Bhawan in Shillong. Helimon Khongphai wrote in 1987, "It (Shillong) definitely needs a Rabindra Bhawan". In 1987, Bangio Sahitya Parishad Shillong celebrated Tagore's birthday at Brookside.

During the last part of 1980s, Brookside property was almost to be sold to private persons. It was saved by AK Samanta of SIB, the then chief minister of Meghalaya then Purno Sangma and other noble persons.

Though an art gallery was made but no birthday celebration used to happen at Brookside at the state level or by local people.

Due to negligence, Brookside lost its glory, rich history and heritage. Very few Tagore lovers used to visit Brookside. They used to visit Jitbhoomi.

In the last part of 1990s, a huge auditorium was made at Brookside just beside the heritage bungalow. A board reading 'No Entry for Outsiders' was fixed at the main entrance. People felt scared to enter Brookside. The auditorium is being used as temporary Assembly for the last 16-17 years.

In May 2007, Kavi Pronam

was organised by Doordarshan Kendra Kolkata and State Government of Meghalaya at Brookside. In his inaugural speech, the then chief minister DD Lapang suggested, "The entire building could be used for art exhibitions and workshops." Even after that, Brookside bungalow was not looked after. It needed regular maintenance.

This author took personal initiative and wrote articles on Tagore's visits to Shillong. In June-July 2007, she requested Bangio Sahitya Parishad to save Brookside, set up Rabindra Bhawan and a statue at Brookside with the help of the government.

The then chief secretary assured in his letter dated October 22, 2007, "Shri Rabindranath Tagore is highly respected in the State of Meghalaya and it would be a matter of pride and honour to the State of Meghalaya to have a Bhawan, library and monument named after the great personality of our motherland..."

On the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Tagore, the Ministry of Culture accepted requests for Rabindra Bhawan, library and Tagore Research Institute at Brookside and asked the state to send a detail project report.

The state government installed Tagore's statue at Brookside in May 2011. An art gallery was also opened after completing renovation work.

In April 2014, the state government also accepted requests for celebrating Tagore's birthday at the state level with all Tagore lovers. ICCR, Shillong also collaborating with them.

Since 2015, Tagore lovers are observing his death anniversary, Basonti Utsav and first visit day on October 11 in a graceful manner. The Arts and Culture Department is supporting them.

October 11, 2019, was Tagore's first visit centenary year. It will be our duty and responsibility to join hands to celebrate this occasion in a grand way. The hills and dales of Shillong are already enriched with culture, education and philosophy. Tagore's universal brotherhood, philosophy and culture will definitely help in promoting the culture of this region.

(The author is writer, researcher & Tagore admirer)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, MAY 12, 2019

Moon trine Jupiter on your solar return chart ensures an excellent year ahead. This will likely be the year of sociability. It will be a great time to enjoy life and other people. You must focus on personal freedom, reaching out to others, making new friends, and exploration. You will be more enthusiastic and ready for adventure. It is likely to be a rather lighthearted year when opportunities for "play" time are greater than usual. It's also a good year for expressing your creativity. Advice - reach out, but avoid scattering your energies.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You are likely to swing to extremes in this period, sometimes happy, celebratory and at other times heavy, serious and even low. Professional situations and personal relations are sensitive and tend to go through ups and downs. Finances and material effects need to be evaluated: do not make investments or speculate heavily. This would be the right time to concentrate on your career prospects and professional skills. A healthy body holds a healthy and positive mind - work towards this.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

The planetary configuration brings to the fore activities related to communications, competition and examinations. You feel touchy and sensitive but would be more accommodating and compassionate in relationships. You would create a work of art in your field of activity. This brings success and good fortune at work and opens new horizons for expansion. This is the right time to participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you. Sports and physical activities keep you fit and energetic.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

This week highlights friendship, love, romance, spirituality and children in your life. There would be positive results from written and oral communication. Short trips, shopping, and journey are on your agenda. This is a good time to promote harmony and good relations with people around you. You are also dealing with issues that force you to rid yourself of guilt about under-performing, and to develop faith and trust in a larger more spiritual plan. It's time to let go of some of your fears that you are not doing enough; to develop more compassion and understanding of others, and to be humble, feeling content in the knowledge that you are putting in your best.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

This week brings mixed results for you. After dealing with tough people and complicated issues you feel much stronger and clearer about your priorities. You are compassionate and generous with family, friends and relatives, drawing respect from them. It's also important to let go of some of your obsessions with rules, details, and fears of not doing things perfectly. The movement is towards a more balanced approach to dealing with practical, worldly matters and your own spiritual growth. Health needs extra care and old habits detrimental to your health need to be discarded.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Mixed results are indicated this week. If you feel especially angry, frustrated or restless, it would be great to find a little more work and things to do so that you can channel excess energy constructively. Your heart and head pull you in different directions when domestic and family related decisions are to be addressed. Communications and business associates from overseas bring good news and offer lucrative opportunities. A marriage proposal is worth considering. Children may be a stronger focus as well. Sponsoring or supporting other people would be rewarding. New or changed responsibilities around the home or towards family also figure at this time.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

This phase indicates income and gain from investments and speculations. This is a time of increased psychological understanding, intimacy, and perhaps accumulation of wealth

if you manage your resources well. You are more capable of helping friends and loved ones who are dealing with a crisis you can be leaned upon. Any type of in-depth study or research is likely to go well. Be careful when expressing feelings and emotions as others can misunderstand you. You might spend a lot of time in short frequent trips, communicating with people.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

An intimate relationship develops or figures strongly in this period. Learning to share on a personal level brings you some measure of joy. Money matters make big headlines. A bigger drive for security is with you and re-organizing your home and domestic life comes into play. Other people's money may come your way or you might secure some real estate. You adopt new styles and invest in clothes, jewelry, perfumes and this brings color and glamour in your life. Your thoughts turn to children, pleasure and romance. You maintain a fitness routine and a healthy diet program.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

The planetary configuration brings mixed results for you. A partner's resources could have a significant impact on your home life. Finding joy in developing intimacy is featured, and this is a time where you develop and enhance your love on a deeper level. Work could be moving towards more research and development. The work you do could be supported by your spouse or other people's money in general, such as work in finance. You achieve success as you are brilliant and there is good fortune attending professional, personal and material aspects.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

This phase brings new associations and beginnings in work areas as new opportunities and changes may come about. You are likely to see benefits in the areas of finances, shared resources, personal transformation, research, investigation and emotional matters. An insurance settlement, tax rebate, could come your way, and this is an excellent time to work on financial planning and strategy. Financial gains may come through a partnership or there may be an increase in income. Benefit can come through jointly held resources, loans, or taxes.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You would enjoy making things that are beautiful and you succeed in areas that require an aesthetic sense as well as technical ability. You would compromise and adjust and take a softer approach while dealing with people at work and home. It's a passionate time, although you are unlikely to be displaying a whole lot of self-discipline. This is a time when you could get a mortgage or other property - and home-related financial backing. You would get serious about home, family, and domestic concerns. Health food, yoga and meditation would help to overcome from health problems.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

The ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on the cards. Sharing your interests and communication with your loved one may be especially appealing to you. Family obligations may get in the way of your experience of pleasure and of the achievement of your personal goals. Your current living conditions may feel restrictive, limiting, too small or cramped (physically and/or emotionally). Delays and slowdowns may be experienced in the areas of health, mobility, and career.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

This period brings wisdom, knowledge and creativity in your behavior and cooperation and harmony in personal relationships. Your drive for personal freedom and insistence on your rights is pressing, and a confrontation in which you have to stand up for yourself is likely. You certainly don't like to follow orders. Do your best to avoid impulsive decision-making that is built upon your desire to be a free spirit. You may recognize talents that you never knew you had, and this can be a sudden, exciting discovery. A health program finds favour with you.

Job to save Mother Nature

By Ranjan K Baruah

The entire world is concerned about changes in weather pattern. The natural environment has degraded and new challenges have arisen for the living world. We must think about a solution and take action if we want to preserve and conserve our planet. One of the areas of study that can help us find a solution is environmental science.

Environmental science is an interdisciplinary academic field that integrates physical, biological and information sciences (including ecology, biology, physics, chemistry, plant science, zoology, oceanography, soil science, geology and physical geography, atmospheric science) to the study of the environment and the solution of environmental problems. Environmental science emerged from the fields of natural history and medicine during the enlightenment. Today, it provides an integrated, quantitative, and interdisciplinary approach to the study of environmental systems.

Students can become environmental scientist after completing courses related to environmental science. Environmental scientists conduct research to identify, control or eliminate sources of pollutants or hazards affecting the environment or public health. Many colleges and universities in India and abroad offer courses related to environmental sciences or related subjects. Several institutes and colleges in India these days offer both undergraduate and oost-graduate programmes in Environmental Science. One can go for BSc or a BE degree in Environmental Science. The minimum qualification required for this is 12th standard with Science subjects. The course duration is three years. After graduation one may go for masters degree and later PhD.

Some Environmental Science Institutes in India are Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), School of Environmental Sciences, New



Delhi; University of Delhi, New Delhi; GB Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar,



Uttar Pradesh; University of Mysore, Mysore; University of Pune, Pune, Gauhati University. There are deemed universities and research institutes in India and abroad which offer diplomas and advance diploma and certificate programme. Those interested to become environmental educator may join short-term courses.

Jobs vary from place to place. Aspirants may join government sectors like different research institutes, policy-making organisa-

tions etc. Many become teachers and professors. Some join the media as there are focuses on environmental journalism. One of the best career options is joining different non-governmental organisations focussing on environment issues.

Apart from working in own places of areas one may also explore international organisations for jobs. Few international organisations which take people from environmental science are Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Students may also participate in youth activities organised by international organisations like UNEP every year or every alternate year.

Apart from mere qualification one must have skills to be employed globally or in own places. Strong communication skills apart from writing skills and other skills are always important for getting placement. As global community is concerned about climate change and its impact so it brings more opportunity for the students studying environmental sciences.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, skill trainer and motivational speaker and can be reached at bkrnanjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

"If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything."

--- Mark Twain

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Season of lies

In election campaigns, truth is often a casualty, and lies walk on four legs. Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed two to three public rallies a day for the past 40 days and raised the ruling BJP's campaign frenzy. So did Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. Less than a week more is left for the campaign to close, and three days thereafter for the results to stream out. With all claims and counter-claims, allegations and counter-allegations, the wisdom of the voter is what the nation can fairly bank on. This season has seen leaders on the rival side displaying all the tricks of the trade even to funny levels. PM Modi's latest, by this week-end, was to fight back Mayawati's barbs at him. She had said the PM was unfairly seeking to project himself as a 'Backward,' whereas his community happened to have been 'Forward' but included in the BC list in Gujarat only around year 2000. Caught on the wrong foot, the PM quickly made an attempt to recover lost ground. He is now claiming that his caste is none other than the "caste of poverty." The logic behind this claim is all too clear... he wants to project himself as being part and parcel of India's single largest segment of the population – the poor – who form more than 50 per cent of the population.

A question arises as to what Modi as PM has done in the past five years to change the lot of the poor. It was his government's last budget which, after years of vacillation, turned to the poor, to offer pensions to the small-time farmers and the unorganised labour. Those budget proposals were introduced just weeks before the Lok Sabha polls with an eye on votes. No element of sincerity underpinned it. A new government would decide whether these are implementable or not. So much for Modi's claim to appropriate the electoral base of the poor! On the other hand, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi now promises to eradicate poverty through the NYAY scheme and expresses his moral indignation over the sweep of poverty in India – and not mindful of the fact his family ruled India for 60 of the 70 years after India won right to Self-Rule. Note, also, PM Modi's promise that he would, if elected back to power, put Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law Robert Vadra in jail for the "crimes" he committed in the real estate sector. His jailing was what Modi had promised in the past too, but could not do in all the five years. Vadra, for sure, is smarter than Modi.

Odisha's Disaster Management: Lessons for Meghalaya

By H H Mohrmen

The manner in which the Government of Odisha handles the recent cyclone Fani which hit the state was appreciated even by the international body like the UN. Although the other coastal states were also hit by the cyclone, it was Odisha which was most devastated and if not for the disaster preparedness of the state machinery, the loss of life or human casualty would have been more than the 41 that is now a statistic. The credit goes to the Naveen Patnaik government which has diligently handled what would have been a major catastrophe for the State in recent times. It is now obvious that it pays to have a professional disaster response team. The SDRF or the Odisha Disaster Relief Force, the NDRF and the volunteers have done a commendable job in evacuation and rescue and relief operation.

The availability of modern technology which enables the meteorological department to accurately predict the time of landing of the cyclone and when it will hit the shores of the state is one reason that has helped mitigate the damage and particularly the loss of human lives. Such advanced technology enables the relief forces to evacuate people living in low-lying areas beforehand and help save precious lives. Apart from the disaster preparedness of the state which not only has trained professionals and volunteers to tackle the problems what was more important is that the state had ready shelters to accommodate the people evacuated from low-lying areas. There are 3000 such relief centres which are specially designed structures to protect and keep the affected population in safety till the cyclone is over. And this has helped the state machinery immensely in the rescue operations and to keep the evacuees safe. The relief operation has been meticulously planned and which lakhs of ready food packets were available to distribute to the affected population.

When the Tsunami hit the Indian Ocean on December 26, in 2004, it is believed that the indigenous people in some island that keep themselves isolated from the outside world, were able to save

themselves only by using their instincts. Even though they lived without any modern technology to warn them of the imminent tragedy, they were able to escape being swept by the high waves by using indigenous knowledge that they had inherited from their ancestors. It is believed that the islanders noticed the peculiar movement of the birds and animals to higher ground and understood that something was wrong. They too moved along with the birds and animals to higher ground and that was how they saved themselves from killer Tsunami. Now what does this have teach us in Meghalaya? We definitely no longer have the indigenous knowledge of our ancestors, so the question is: do we have a foolproof plan to protect the citizens of the state and their properties in case of any natural disaster?

If we are to list the kind of natural disasters common to the state then we can say heavy rains which lead to flash floods on the villages downstream is a major natural disaster that the state encounters every year. Heavy rainfall also leads to landslides and damage to property and even to loss of precious lives. This sort of disaster visits the state quite frequently. In Meghalaya the state also experiences regular hailstorm and although there is no history of human casualty due to it but it surely damages farmers' crops and property of the people. The state now also experiences frequent cyclones which lash out different areas of the state and not only uproots trees but in many cases damages houses and kills people too. In all the above natural disasters there are no pre-emptive systems to help the citizens prepare for the eventuality beforehand. The only thing the government does and continues to do is to provide relief to the affected person which in many cases is just a pittance.

So isn't it time for the government to come up with some mechanisms to protect the citizens from these annual natural disasters that hit the state on a regular basis? Right

now the effects of these calamities like floods, landslides, cyclones and hailstones is insignificant, perhaps this is why the government takes the job of mitigating the effects of the disaster so lightly. But one never knows. One day it could be different. It is therefore better if the state is better prepared for the eventuality.

It is also true that these are minor natural disasters which the state and its people have been experiencing for quite some time now and on a regular basis, but Meghalaya is also located in an earthquake prone zone. What if (God forbid) a huge earthquake hits the state one day? Everybody is saying that a big one is due in the sub-Himalayan region. Now is the state prepared for that? Does the state of Meghalaya have well designed disaster preparedness in the eventuality of a big earthquake? Do we have shelters readily available like in the case of cyclones in the coastal state of Odisha?

Unlike cyclones, earthquakes are unpredictable. We cannot see them coming or cannot estimate the time and date hence there is no chance of giving prior warning or of evacuating the people beforehand. This makes disaster management more difficult. In case an earthquake strikes do we have any idea what are the areas that are prone to damage and would suffer maximum casualty and areas where the impact would not be so severe? Have we identified such locations and worked on how to mitigate the damage that can happen? The threat to lives could be in the buildings that people live in, so perhaps the government should start by looking at the kind of buildings we have. Do we have buildings with weak structures and are therefore vulnerable in case of an earthquake? Has the state identifies buildings particularly educational institutions and assessed the strength of the structures and if the same can withstand a major earthquake?

The government should start identifying the kind of buildings that are vulnerable and might have large numbers of casualty in

the eventuality of an earthquake and plan how to tackle evacuation out of these buildings in case of an earthquake. Thank goodness we don't have high rise buildings but the government should check the kind of structures of the four or five-storied buildings. Are they strong enough? In case of multi-storied buildings, the government should have the names and numbers of people occupying the building. In Meghalaya we are in a peculiar situation in which the state and its institutions are quarrelling about building bylaws; leaders are fighting for the right to supervise construction of building in the state. But the most pertinent question is not who is supervising what, but rather to ensure that all buildings constructed in the state should be earthquake proof. The state is in an earthquake prone area, so we need government institutions to ensure that the rules for construction of buildings should be strictly adhered to.

The saying goes, 'Hope for the best but prepare for the worst.' One earnestly hopes that the people of Meghalaya do not have to go through the problems of natural calamities like earthquakes, but in spite of that we have to prepare ourselves for any eventuality. In recent times MeECL is one government run agency which is not in the good books of the public. People complain about the erratic supply of electricity and particularly the load shedding which has affected the lives of the consumers. Now the question is if the MeECL fails the public in ordinary times, is it prepared for extra-ordinary times such as a natural calamity hitting the state? Can the public trust it do the needful in case of natural disaster?

The job of managing a disaster is not that of the district administration, the home guard and civil defence or the SDRF and volunteers alone. Other government departments too need to do their part in protecting lives and property. The role of the other departments could be in the aftermath of the disaster. The government therefore has a lot to learn from the state of Odisha especially in disaster management.

Insult Now Asset More rancid the better!

By Poonam I Kaushish

Rajnetik virodhi ya jaani dushman? A question that niggles as the narrative hits a new low with highly vitriolic and acerbic mud-slinging down to gutter-sniping slugfest between the BJP, Congress and regional Parties over the last few weeks. Which underscores that slander, sleaze, sensation, smear, sully and smirch are the new political dialogues. Serenaded by frenzied audiences' *seeetes* galore. More vulgar the better, *dil maange more!*

Certainly, the audacious bare-all below-the-belt attack by Modi on former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi might not seem behoving of him as one does not speak ill of the dead. Said he: "Rajiv Gandhi may have been declared Mr Clean by his courtiers but he died as "Bhrashtachari No.1. I challenge Congress to fight the polls in his name." Adding, "Rajiv used the Indian Navy's premier warship INS Virat as his personal taxi for a family holiday along with his Italian in-laws and friends and did it with great swag."

Needless to say, it had the Congress frothing and led Rajiv's progenies to lash out. *Beti Priyanka*, compared Modi with Mahabharata character *ahankari* Duryodhana and said, ego and arrogance are two things that are common to both...I have not seen a more coward and weaker Prime Minister", while *Beta* Rahul dubbed him a rioter and grandiosely responded with a hug. Even as NaMo justified it by asserting "For over a month you have been giving me, my mother and family *galis*, we have the ability to pay back in the same coin".

True, one can fault Modi for his harsh language, innuendoes, call it too blunt for the political palate and even dismiss it as being brash. Some might shrug it off as part and parcel of political discourse. But the fact is that he alone is not to blame as his intemperate language is no different from what other *netas* have perfected down the years.

Look at Trinamool's Mamata who averred, "When Modi comes to Bengal and says that I am a top extortionist, I wish to give him one tight slap of democracy." If this was not bad enough she went a step further, "he is a liar....A person drenched in blood....I will ask him to do 100 sit-ups if corruption charges against my Party are proven wrong." Countered NaMo, "I advise Didi give a tight slap to some of your Party leaders who stole people's money in the chit fund scam."

The barbs got uglier when Modi talked about 'Trinamool's Tolabaazi (organized extortion racket) Tax' enforced by *Bhua Mamata* and *her bhatiya*. Shot back Didi, "*Woh ek badtameez nalayak beta hai* who does not care for his mother and wife." Worse, was RJD's Rabri Devi who called Modi "A jallad (executioner) with a *khoonkhar maansikta*" (vicious mindset). Sic.

It got more rancid as days went by. A Congress Minister called Modi a "*Gandi naali ka keeda aur Ganguteli*," another leader, "*Woh ek paagal kutta hai aur Bhasmasur hai.... rabies bimari se peedit bandar hai, rajnitik Dawood Ibrahim hai*." From Hitler, *chooha, lahu purush, asatya ka saudagar, Raavan, saanp, bicho, ganda aadmi zehar bone vaala*. The BJP got a shot at countering this when Rahul's Guru Sam Pitroda flippantly dismissed the 1984 Sikh genocide as "*hua toh hua*," by accusing the Party as *khooni*.

More. Titillating voters has become common whereby anything and everything is game. For the BJP, "Muslims can be identified by removing their clothes (reference to circumcision) to Samajwadi's "Jaya Prada wears a *khaki* (RSS colour) underwear" and insinuation linking Modi and Mayawati's single status to a post-poll alliance between the BJP and BSP. "*Woh teen baar Modi ki godh mein*

bathe chukeyi hai" while NCP's Pawar dubs Modi as "deranged who needs treatment in a mental hospital".

Alas, none want to address critical questions: Why are politicians' discourses becoming more and more venomous and toxic? Can such language and conduct be condoned? In Delhi the BJP stands accused of calling AAP's Kejriwal "a dog" and its woman candidate "a prostitute" alongside casteist slurs. Frankly, I am neither surprised as our *netagan* are only showing their *girgit* true colours throwing all public decency and decorum to the winds! Gone are the days when jibes and trolls were funny or sarcastic and *netas* took them in their strides.

Today, the lines between an opponent and an enemy have got blurred wherein trash talk and brazen innuendoes seem to be the flavour of the season. Dumping basic courtesies and decencies all take venomous delight in reveling in their baser characteristics swaying to the heady tinkle of cheap thrills and seeetes. Wherein gutter-sniping, sordid and spiteful tu-tu-mein-mein between opponents and Parties is the order of the day. Of dirty linen being washed in public, more vulgar the better.

Thereby, underscoring the bankruptcy that is manifest in our system wherein *netas* have perfected the art of cultivating low morality and high greed according to their whims and fancies made more malignant by our fragmented politics. Resulting in immorality becoming a way of life, what damn difference does one more slanderous attack make? Sadly, through this entire diatribe one thing emerges crystal clear: the political skulduggery indulged in mirrors the harsh and horrendous reality of our polity. Where there is no dividing line between statecraft and witchcraft, what is correct and incorrect. Never before has politics denigrated to the sewer level as it has today.

In this slugfest of personal insults and character assassinations against rivals along-with a euphemism "I am right," the BJP vs rest *tu-tu-mein-mein* is a harsh reflection on the depth of political depravation we have come to. A nouvelle vote-catching mantra in the hope that this cesspit sniping would bring them *tripti*--- and power. None cares a damn for decency and decorum except for scoring brownie points against each other. Ends matter not the means and winning is the name of the game. Consequently, thanks to our polity's wind-bagging the very idea of democracy has been vitiated. Add to it the peoples' distaste for vulgarity, gender insensitivity, sexist thinking and speeches spewing hatred. What next? Clearly, it is time that our politicians realize that they are putting a premium on insult. How long will they allow profligacy be the bedrock of India's democracy? Undeniably, our leaders need to tone down divisive and personal attacks, engage each other on issues affecting the people and nation and not personalities, put electioneering back on the rails of dignified debate and adopt a zero-tolerance stand on offensive language.

The aim should be to raise the bar on public discourse, not lower it any more than has been done. And those who reduce the level of discourse to such depths only do so at the cost of exposing their lack of civility to the electorate and the nation at large. Our leaders should remember one age-old truth: If you point one slanderous finger at another, four other slanderous fingers will point back at you! How long do we suffer the stampele for sensation and slur? Can a nation be bare and bereft of all sense of shame and morality? --- INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Overdue paradigm shift in education

Editor,

Patricia Mukhim's article, "Education : Gap between what's taught and what students need to learn" (ST, May 10, 2019) has aptly zeroed in on some of the problems of our education system like its failure to impart social and even basic skills at the primary school and vocational skills at the higher level, its reluctance to understand the dangers of corporal punishment and its giving all priority on marks rather than on values.

We have largely been using "stand and deliver" teaching model which has become obsolete. The learning process of this model follows the mechanical one-way street from an, "I - know - all teacher" to "they - know - nothing students." Here, a teacher enters a classroom and delivers the lecture and departs. There is no effort to involve students in the dialogue. It is, so to speak, a monotonous monologue.

The hollowness of this kind of education has been reflected in Pink Floyd's famous song ~ "Another Brick in the wall". It was written by Roger Waters. It

has sent a loud and clear message against this model of education. It says, ~ "We don't need no education/ We don't need no thought control/ No dark sarcasm in the classroom/ Teacher leave them kids alone/ Hey, teachers, leave them kids alone."

There is every possibility of the existence of dark sarcasm in the classroom in the traditional model of teaching which is based on vertical relationship between a teacher and the students. The classroom in a society which has all kinds of inequalities - caste, class, language and gender can turn out to be a warehouse of sarcasm.

There is an example of such a sarcasm in Bengali saying ~ *gadha pitiye ghoda kara jayena* (You cannot make a horse by beating a donkey). Such an acidic comment can be a death knell to the self-confidence of a student.

In this model of teaching, the onus is on the students to understand what the teacher is saying. But the onus must be on the teacher to clear the doubts of the students through dialogue. The teacher needs to engage with the students and share practical experiences with

them rather than leaving them after bombarding them with a top-down lecture.

Thus, we need to have a paradigm shift from the traditional "stand and deliver" teaching model to the "guide on the side" teaching model. Teachers must orient themselves as co-learners. Learning needs to be treated as creative workshops.

Most importantly, teaching is all about encouraging and guiding the students so that they can do it on their own. The Mother (spiritual collaborator of Sri Aurobindo) said, "When a child is full of enthusiasm, never throw cold water on him, never tell him, 'You know, life is not like that!' You should always encourage him." If the teacher discourages a student from thinking outside the box, then the student is bound to become in the words of the Pink Floyd's song ~ "just another brick in the wall."

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

Real purpose of education

Editor,
Apropos Ananya Guha's article, "A Common

Education System" (ST May 11, 2019) I would say that education in the true sense is unavailable in the whole world now. What we call education is some sort of ancillary unit only and human beings are just fuel to it. True education is meant for enhancing human perception. For immediate needs of course we require lawyers, doctors and accountants in society and education is there to help achieve our goals. This is fine but the larger issue is the impact that education has on the lives of individuals and the nature of life counts. Even the grasshoppers, earthworms and a blade of grass needs to grow to their full potential like human beings. The education that we have does not cater to the very process of life in this creation. We need doctors for the sick, accountants for commerce but what is important is education that will serve the purpose of every living being on earth. If that happens then true education has definitely happened.

Yours etc;
Pradip Kumar Dutta
Shillong-3

Excessive rhetoric

Editor,

Apropos Salil Gewali's letter, "Self correction a pre requisite for leaders" (ST May 11, 2019), I, for the first time ever tend to agree with his views. "Chowkidar Chor hai" with slogans for four long month with a resonating voice of the crowd had reached a decibel that PM Modi, an honest and upright man could, as an ordinary human no longer bear. It is good according to medical science that any built up anger in one's heart should rupture, and when it does, there follows a sense of great relief. Unless Rahul Gandhi could prove that Rs 30,000 crore has gone to Anil Ambani he is better cautioned not to repeat the slogan again, failing which defamation case could be made by Mr Modi. I am delighted with Salil Gewali's mother son analogy. The only mistake was Modi did slap the wrong face. Now election is almost complete let us do some poems writing to calm down the heat as in Delhi the mercury is at 45 degree Celsius.

For the U.P.A. in INC era: The woods are lovely dark and deep/But I have promise to keep/ And miles

to go before I sleep.

For the ruling dispensation with exemplary performance in five years compared to U.P.A's 60 yrs.

Thus the little minutes (2014-2019)/Humble though they be/ Make the mighty ages/ Of much talked democracy.

Acronyms like SP for SO, RLD for RO, BSP for BO, SARAB are not acceptable acronyms. It is also not good to play with AD and BC. They are time divisions of millennium. When Oliver Hardy overheard the flamboyant officer say, "Hey you divine, bring me the wine", Oliver not to be downplayed repeated to the caterer, "Hey you beggar bring me my butter". Rhymes are fine but what does butter have to do with wine and who allowed Hardy to call someone a beggar. Luckily the fight was avoided when Laurel smartly said, "Beggar is bay kar Baker". Thus everything was solved amicably to the delight of all.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Via email

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

"The doctor sees all the weakness of mankind; the lawyer all the wickedness, the theologian all the stupidity."

—Arthur Schopenhauer

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Reconfiguring the Act East Policy

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi made a huge splash when he visited the North Eastern states after he took over the reins of governance in 2014. As usual, people of this region of lost hopes saw their faith rekindled in the Indian political system when Modi spoke endearing words about them and of the need to rev up development in the seven states. They believed Modi meant business when he said his Government would change the catchphrase, 'Look East Policy' to 'Act East Policy,' because merely 'Looking East' without any concrete plans for progressive action in that direction is a futile aspiration. By way of exports, the North Eastern states can only sell niche products such as silks, cane products and rare edibles which can be marketed in the processed form. Then there's religious, medical and educational tourism. People from Myanmar are keen to come to the North Eastern states for medical treatment and also for learning English and to admit themselves in higher educational institutions. In fact all these initiatives are happening even now but the scale is too small to make dent in our economy. What is needed is to identify the export potentials other than those already on the list and see which of the seven states can export what. Each of the states have their own strengths. At the moment the natural resources are being exploited to the point of denuding our forests and killing our rivers and with huge environmental consequences. The region is a repository of myriads of medicinal herbs but these are disappearing along with the forests. Does anyone care to do a survey of the herbs and edibles from the forests that our ancestors benefitted from? The North East Slow Food and Agro-biodiversity Society (NESFAS) is trying its best to document these rare herbs, seeds, fruits, roots, leaves and vegetables but even they need institutional and financial support from key stakeholders. There are other organisations in the region doing similar work but there is no convergence; hence each one is working in an isolated space and perhaps not making impact.

An important component of the Act East Policy should be to bring these institutions under a single roof and enhance their capacities for doing what they are good at which is their grassroots connection. When these institutions get together they can learn and teach each other. This cross-learning is what's missing in the region and that's because institution like the North Eastern Council (NEC) have either lost their moorings or have not readjusted their lenses according to the demands of the times. They are stuck in a rut like all government departments. The Act East Policy needs a reconfiguration of how to make it work.

TO THE EDITOR

Purpose & role of educational institutions

Editor,

Institutions serve people in various ways. We are proud to say that in Shillong people from different North Eastern states have come to educate themselves to be equipped for better living and to render better services to their own community and to the country at large. The recent Class XI results were appreciable. This is something that each student has to learn from. Parents, friends and others who know and even those who don't know the toppers should appreciate good news like this. How much more would teachers who were guiding them for the past two years rejoice at the success of their students! I hope the coming results for the Class X MBOSE students will be as good as that of the Class XII. In addition, the expectations of all are that it becomes better than that of the Class XII exam.

But there is another about the institutions in the North Eastern region particularly those in Shillong. From the part of the students, it is very clear that they have done the best they can. But our educational system does not in-

clude extra curriculum activities and subjects apart from classroom learning. Is education only about imparting bookish knowledge in the classroom? Why do our students find it difficult to find a successful career after completing their studies? What is the reason behind the failure of our students to get through the public services exams? Also why do our students find it very difficult to compete with students from other states? The reasons may vary, but there is a clear sign that students from the very first stage itself were not given liberal education to help them study independently; how to engage with the world outside the classroom; to foresee the challenges they would face in the future, and how to face those challenges!

Identifying the potential of students is very important and that is an important task of teachers but unfortunately, it has not taken place in most of our Institutions. If the students are asked to identify what they are good at, most of them will find it difficult to identify their talents. This goes against the very spirit of education which is meant to be the holistic development of the individual.

Another issue is why

The divider in chief and his subordinates

By Albert Thyrianiang

'India's Divider in Chief' is TIME magazine's cover story on the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi in its May 20, 2019 issue. Assuming significance due to current national elections, the story has provided ammunition to the opposition parties to attack the man at the helm who has polarised the nation like never before. In the meantime, the BJP termed the report 'malicious', and branded the writer, Aatish Taseer as a Pakistani and even defaced his page on Wikipedia. The American weekly International edition's damning caption has also received a lot of attention from TV channels, print media, online platforms and social media.

That Modi is a polarising and communal figure was never in doubt. He earned the tag from 2002. As Chief Minister of Gujarat, he faced severe allegations of his Government's acts of commission and omission that allowed the Gujarat riots, a three-day inter-communal violence that officially resulted in 1,044 deaths, including 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus. Critics even see him as initiating and condoning the rioting, pogrom (religious riot), arson, mass rape, kidnapping and mass murder.

The massive interest in the magazine's catchy title is, perhaps, due to clear indications that the seven phases general election will negatively decide Modi's fate. On the eve of voting in Delhi and in the thick of the marathon elections, the international media is being critical of the muscular nationalist. The Guardian on April 10 writes that Narendra Modi isn't the strongman the world assumes him to be. On May 2, The Economist emphatically stated that Modi poses a threat to democracy. The New York Times on May 8 predicted that young voters might desert Modi this time around. The same newspaper followed it up with the April 20 story observing that farmers have been hurt in the last five years.

The subject matter of the article critically analyses Modi's tenure highlighted by mob lynching on minorities, women's issues, demonetisation, growing intolerance, insecurity and alienation of minorities together with disturbing assertions of majoritarianism artificially enacted by the ruling party.

Prominently taking note of the economic failure, the

writer terms the prevailing social situation under Modi as "stress" because "an atmosphere of poisonous religious nationalism" has been created totally negating Jawaharlal Nehru's idea of secularism. Far from his promise of development for all, he has a state in which Indians are increasingly obsessed with their differences, writes the author of a Pakistani father and Indian mother.

The Indian PM is not a divider because The Times says so. Rather the world's largest weekly (26 million readership) has given the title to the RSS pracharak to reflect a reality. The assessment is true as a matter of fact. The former three time Gujarat CM's tone, rhetoric, optics, symbolism, demeanour and his very persona is divisive. The controversial figure, with the permanent stigma over post-Godhra violence, divides on religious lines. He divides the North and the South. And of late he has divided even the armed forces.

On April 2 after Rahul Gandhi's candidature from Wayanad, Kerala was announced, the PM, in a rally, with communal intent, blatantly alleged that the Gandhi scion was scared of 'peace-loving Hindus' in Amethi and decided to flee to a safe seat where 'Minorities are majority' there. Later after Pragya Singh Thakur, a terror accused, was declared as candidate from Bhopal, he accused the Congress of inventing the term 'Hindu terror' and, with high pitched rhetoric, proclaimed that Hindus can never be terrorists.

During Modi's five year regime communal tensions rose sharply, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and communal activities by Hindu nationalist organisations grew alarmingly. 'Ghar Wapsi' programmes were openly organised and campaigns against alleged "Love Jihad" were carried out disdainfully. Elements in the right wing outfits declared their 'Hindu Rashtra' and Hindutva agenda contemptuously. On the policy front the BJP vouches for building of Ram Temple in the disputed area of Ayodhya, implementation of the controversial Uniform Civil Code and abolition of sensitive Article 370 for political mileage. The latest communal trick of the BJP is to enact the Citizen-

ship (Amendment) Bill 2016 (CAB) which promises Indian citizenship to illegal migrants belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian religious communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

According to the C-Voter survey, Modi's popularity is least in South India with Tamil Nadu giving him the lowest at 2.2 percent. His election visits to South India were met with black flags and "Modi Go Back" slogans. His unpopularity in the south reflects a much broader and deeper reality. The more developed, more prosperous, more tolerant, more educated and more varied South sees Modi as someone hostile. Modi represents the North's attitude of bias against them that had earlier attempted to impose Hindi on them. Despite its dominant force the South sees Modi's BJP as a party of the north and the west. Though it subsidises the North the South plays second fiddle politically. The South-North divide has a history but under Modi the divide has only widened.

Ever since the Pulwama terror attack Modi has even succeeded to divide the armed forces. The Army, the Air force and the Navy have been adversely politicised. Starting with the PM himself, the BJP has shamelessly tried to appropriate the country's apolitical defence forces. Retired personnel are forced to take political sides. Without even a cooling period many have joined politics and are fighting elections. Modi's recent accusation that former PM, Rajiv Gandhi used INS Viraat as 'personal taxi' for his Lakshadweep holiday has split the Navy right in the middle. A former navy chief has denied the charge while at least two veterans have backed the claim. Modi has achieved in involving even the national defence forces in public, political mudslinging. Hence 'India's Divider in Chief' is the most apt title for the 68 year old Modi!

The presence of 'The Divider in Chief' implies that there other 'subordinate dividers'. Three 'lower ranked dividers' readily come to mind. Topping the list is Yogi Adityanath. The UP CM is considered the heir to Modi. Since March 19, 2017 in office, his state has been the Sangh's Hindutva hate laboratory. The monk cum politician founded the Hindu Yuva Vahini, an organisation that

has been involved in communal violence. The Hindutva firebrand leader was reportedly involved in conversion of 1,800 Christians to Hinduism in 2005 in his home state. He has at least 18 criminal cases against him ranging from murder attempts to defiling places of worship to rioting and criminal intimidation. His hate speeches and anti-Muslim statements are too well known.

Next is Pragya Singh Thakur. Better known as Sadhvi Pragya, Thakur is an accused in the 2008 Maligaon blasts and was arrested and jailed under the MCOCA and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. While on bail she joined the BJP and was declared the Bhopal candidate. Soon after she indignantly asserted that the former Mumbai ATS chief, Hemant Karkare was killed because she cursed him as she was tortured in jail as per his directions. Adding to her communal and obnoxious remarks, she also proudly declared her active participation in the demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in 1992. The Chief Election Commission banned her for 72 hours from campaigning for violating the Model Code of Conduct.

Amit Shah is last in this short list. The BJP President, accused in the extrajudicial killing of Sohrawuddin Sheikh and his wife Kausar Bi is another polarising figure. As Home Minister in Gujarat he played a vital role in getting an anti-conversion bill passed. His current political speeches include vowing to implement the National Register of Citizens (NRC) across the country to ensure removal of all infiltrators except Hindus and Buddhists, if Modi returns to power. In communally fragile Assam he vowed the return of CAB.

It is unfortunate that Time magazine has to negatively label the Prime Minister of this religiously diverse country, the land of the Buddha, Mahavira and Guru Nanak, Mahatma and the freedom fighters of all religions. The citizens of this multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, multi-racial society who have evolved for over 75,000 years of civilization, are certainly not proud of the dubious distinction.

An ego tussle claims a life

Editor,

The tussle amongst the hospital authorities and the management of NEIGRIHMS cost the life of a precious soul - a lady from Mawphlang who was suffering from heart ailments. Despite knowing the medical causes and the urgency to take critical decisions the management was busy playing to the gallery and fighting out their battles at the cost of the suffering public. It is evident that NEIGRIHMS has become an area for a battle of egos with complete disregard for human life, thereby violating the patient's right to life - a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution of India. It is also a medico-legal and negligence case for which necessary action must be taken by the state and central government. The hospital has lost its name, fame and dignity and all the good work of the past has now been cancelled out. It will take a long time before people's confidence can be restored in NEIGRIHMS.

Yours etc.,

Dominic S. Wankhar Shillong

have told NDTV that the presence of low clouds prevented the launch of the Crystal Maze missiles meant to accompany the SPICE 2000 glide bomb. The Crystal Maze was not launched as the missile works on the pilot flying the missile to the target. The weather conditions of under cloud precluded this. Once launched, the Crystal Maze requires acquisition of the target visually by the pilot in the last phase of the attack. In other words, the weapon flies to its target based on pre-fed Global Positioning System (GPS) co-ordinates but requires the pilot of the launching platform to manually steer it to its precise point of impact through an electronic data link between the launch aircraft with the weapon.

Thus the above report appearing on April last on NDTV throws important light on the Balakot final stage of attack. The terms used in the report are highly scientific on which some Physics post graduate or for GPS the ones from Geography could help the layman. To sum up clouds played a vital role in the Balakot air strike though not the ones our Prime Minister is currently raving about.

Yours etc.,

M. Khyriem, Shillong-14

Clouds & Balakot air strike

Editor,

Several comments some perceptive; some humorous and some very serious and well thought-out regarding Prime Minister, Narendra Modi's concept on RADAR and Cloud. The one serious comment was how political leadership could advise the experts on the field. That aside, here are excerpts that may throw vital information.

Sources familiar with IAF attack on the Jaish-e-Mohammed terror camp

2019 alarming Trends Are elections a farce?

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Elections are almost nearing completion in the world's largest democracy. But the developments leading to these elections point to the fact that muscle power, violence and abuse not of party policies but also of individuals have been manifest in most parts of the country. Special mention may be made of West Bengal, where violence has been manifest in each of the 42 Lok Sabha seats and musclemen of the party in power in the State has largely been blamed for the terror unleashed wantonly.

The other significant factor that marked the elections has been the abusive language used by the leaders of the major political parties. In no previous elections has such attacks and counter attacks been evident. It is indeed shocking that leaders could stoop so low as to criticise their opponents in such manner in a country like India, where leaders have claimed that its civilisation and culture has been among the best in the world.

Their clamour for such remarks has been so sickening that educated people are steadily losing faith in their capability to take responsi-

The trends obviously reveal that our leaders have little idea about the problems plaguing the country due to wrong policies pursued by subsequent governments. At the very outset while morality has been lacking in governance matters, the lack of effective decentralisation and giving power to the people are basic reasons for such pitiable conditions prevailing across the country. Also the neglect of minorities and tribals has also been a major cause for concern, resulting in lop-sided development.

The moot point is that the role of the Election Commission needs to be questioned viz the conduct of free and fair elections. Though a section, like the Opposition, may openly accuse it of favouring the party in power, which is debatable, it is a fact that Nirvachan Sadan has failed to regulate the political leaders as far as their utterances and conduct are concerned and strictly upholding the Model Code of Conduct. An opinion gaining ground is that it could have played a more effective role in ensuring that candidates, of whichever party, don't cross limits.

"In a diverse country with people from different castes, creeds, religious affinities live and work, the political parties have been trying to create a wedge in social relations."

bility for governing a state in a judicious manner. Issues where leaders cannot claim credit or which are beyond their purview are being aired time and again. The credit for the military or the ISRO performance rests largely with their capability and acumen and political leaders really have no hand in this.

In a diverse country with people from different castes, creeds, religious affinities live and work, the political parties have been trying to create a wedge in social relations. Reports suggest that minorities are attacked by one party, while the other criticises other parties by taking credit for giving special preference to them. In fact, religious issues have been frequently used by leaders to defame one another.

On the financial front, parties do not have any limit on how much they can receive in total; or from any single donor. Though candidates have a stipulated limit on how much they can spend, in reality the expenditure is much more. Now with the introduction of electoral bonds, even foreign governments can and are making donations to political parties. It is indeed a tragedy that money power is the essence in fighting elections and this is well known to the Election Commission.

It is no secret that politicians need financial support from corporate houses which turns out to be a quid pro quo. Obviously, businesses require politicians to get the legitimacy of the policies they prefer, most of which serve their own interests and are anti-poor and therefore are willingly ready to oblige at the time of elections with support in cash or kind. All this has been happening when the nation is celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, who had all his life talked of communal harmony and unity of different religions. For him, God represented a supreme being manifested in truth and morality. It can very well be said that these values have been eroded in recent times with religious fundamentalism holding sway which political leaders are merrily cashing for petty electoral gains. Indeed, a sorry state of affairs.

The values that we cherish and we want the young generation to follow have been missing during the campaigns. Moreover, some utterances are also said to go against the rules and regulations outlined by the Commission. But it has failed to take stern action and let off candidates by barring them for two to three days from canvassing, which many see as ineffective action, wherein some end up repeating their utterances.

Political analysts are of the firm opinion, and quite rightly, that political parties do not really want an improvement to take place. The quest for power and money, very much against Gandhian ideals, is provoking many a politician to win the election by hook or by crook. It appears there is actually no desire by most political leaders to adhere to democratic ideals, whereby giving the people a choice to vote for the right candidate based on his integrity, policies and morality.

If the present trend continues, it is feared the social structure could face a serious challenge. Similarly, inequality would further widen with the rich becoming richer and the poor stagnant in their incomes. Though corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been introduced, this happens to be a far cry from Gandhi's theory of trusteeship. Way back in 1947, one may recall his momentous observation: "Today there is gross inequality. The basis of socialism is economic equality. There is no Ram Raja in the present state of iniquitous inequalities in which a few toll in riches and the masses do not get enough to eat".

The future looks quite bleak as the political parties are desperate to retain or gain power. And to achieve this objective, all values will be sacrificed and money power would hold sway. The Commission has failed in its onerous task and, with the passing of times, things would deteriorate further and society's intrinsic structure would crumble. The question that arises before us obviously is whether we can expect most of those elected to ensure proper governance and welfare for the masses, given the means they adopt to come to power? --- INFA

George Washington, as a boy, was ignorant of the commonest accomplishments of youth. He could not even lie.

--- Mark Twain

The Shillong Times

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The NEIGRIHMS imbroglio

THINGS have been going wrong in this premier institute over a long period. The question that arises is why those wrongs are not being set right and on whom does the onus of course correction lie? Every public and private institution has a governing council (GC) whose responsibility is to draw broad policy guidelines which the institute should follow. The GC is also to keep an eye on the functioning of the Institute to see that there are no administrative lapses which would affect patient care. Now when did the GC of NEIGRIHMS last meet? Records show that the GC last met in June 2015. Is that not a violation of the rules of governance of public institutions? It certainly violates rule of corporate governance. A director comes into an institute and is expected to understand its organizational culture and to strengthen elements that would make it more robust. It is an established fact that the best leaders positively impact long-term organizational culture and values through their own behaviours. The Director NEIGRIHMS on the contrary has presided over an organisation whose attrition rate has gone up ever since he joined. In a health institution the director is just the first among equals. He is to treat all doctors, irrespective of seniority with equal respect. This has not been the case with the present Director who it is alleged has never called for a meeting where the doctors' concerns can be aired. On the contrary doctors wishing to meet the Director have been kept waiting outside his office and sometimes without meeting them at all. Naturally this has created a climate of resentment and what has happened in recent times is a culmination of all the above factors.

Another important leadership trait is the ability to communicate clearly and concisely. The NEIGRIHMS Director has failed to make communicate a two-way process but is adept at sending out memos to doctors instead of inviting them for talks. For junior doctors and even for senior ones, being heard is important even if final decisions are not what were initially requested. Leaders lacking in emotional intelligence cannot effectively head any organisation, least of all a medical organisation where empathy is the key word. The Director evidently has no team building skills and the result today is a premier health institution that keeps its patients on endless wait even for surgery. Clearly the Modi Government has been amiss in addressing the goings-on in NEIGRIHMS despite several complaints being lodged against the Director by members of the GC. The critical question to ask is whether the Modi Government indeed cares for institutions in the North East.

“Culture of preparedness - A paramount thought”

By Maitphang Syiem

Natural disasters and natural calamities are inevitable phenomena which we cannot escape and which we are bound to meet and face the consequences of. We have seen in the recent aftermath of the super cyclonic storm "Fani" how it ravaged human lives and settlements disrupting normal life and processes. However in this context we should indeed applaud the IMD team for giving early information on the movement of the super cyclonic storm "Fani" and the necessary steps taken by the Odisha Govt to evacuate the population before the landfall of the super cyclone in Odisha. This requires a coordinated management on the part of the concerned authorities and the communities at risk.

In the present age of information and technology much information on tropical cycloneic movements are available on the websites and particularly with the IMD websites such as RAPID which stands for Real-time Analysis of Product and Information Dissemination whereby we get real-time satellite imageries of cyclones from the space-borne INSAT 3DR satellite belonging to ISRO. Such information to the public has been very helpful in early preparation and evacuation thereby avoiding the adverse effects of the storm.

In the context of disaster management we have always been following the conventional stereotypical style where much of the subject matter is emphasised only during and post disaster activities which involves response, relief, recovery and rehabilitation. This has been the normal process which many of the controlling authorities follow. With the passage of time the effects of natural disasters have also changed with changes in the human developmental activities and have become more devastating. One of the major factors for instance in the context of cyclones is the "Climate Change and Global Warming effect." We may not realise how ravaging the cyclones in recent times will be with the increasing rate of Global Warming. Therefore taking into consideration all natural disasters, how prepared are we and how prepared are our controlling authorities to facilitate timely measures?

As mentioned earlier we have been following the

conventional measures only during the cyclones and post disasters episodes but in the recent time-scale there is a huge paradigm-shift which focuses more on disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness. World organisations such as the UNDRR (United Nation Disaster Risk Reduction office) focus on disaster risk reduction activities and disaster preparedness. It has clearly stated that its aim is substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses would ensure a sustainable future. Disaster Risk Reduction aims at preventing new and reducing the existing risks that disasters can affect and building the resilience of the population and also strengthening of systems and approaches. Therefore a legitimate question arises in this regard and indeed practical one. We need to ask ourselves if we are aware of the nature of the disasters and the impacts they have on us and are we equipped with the knowledge to counter the risks? Do we have a preparedness plan? Do our controlling authorities emphasize on disaster reduction and disaster preparedness? If so how effective have these plans been when put into action? Have the public been made aware of such plans?

As seen from many cases, in many of the approaches there has always been a gap between the controlling authorities and the public. A stereotypical top to down approach is followed where we only execute what has been put across without integrating the essential indigenous knowledge of the people in the approaches. In this very context towards disaster management approaches it is imperative that we should now focus on community based disaster preparedness. As we clearly know the elements that are at risks and that could be severely impacted are the populations in various communities whether rural or urban and the buildings and several infrastructures. Communities as institutions are emerging as a very important entity in many aspects of development. It is recommended that the controlling authorities should focus on strengthening them, giving them the knowledge and awareness and de-

centralizing the planning processes, thereby allowing the communities to participate in the process of planning with respect to disaster preparedness and disaster reduction. The higher the participation from the communities the better will be the countering measures against the impending risks from a disaster.

In this regard we would like to ask ourselves what is a "Community based disaster preparedness plan?" The keyword to understanding is "Community", therefore preparedness plan made at the community and with the participation of the community is a comprehensive document which includes measures to be taken up by the community before, during and after the disaster. It is a participatory approach to planning. Therefore through such participatory approaches the controlling authorities will have a better management and also a lesser load to take at the time of the disaster and also during the post disaster period.

It is practical to allow communities as they have major roles to play such as offering mutual support and solidarity, strengthening peoples' ability to face crisis, generate awareness and consciousness, organizing the collective, acquisition of skills and knowledge in varied spheres.

The communities whether rural or urban can participate at several levels while preparing the plans namely at the pre-disaster level, during disaster level and post disaster level. Activities such as orienting the community towards the nature and the effects of disasters, taking stock of the resources at the community level, formulation of task team and specifying their roles, search and rescue operations and monitoring activities are critical to the plan. Our controlling authorities should take note that such approaches will help in minimizing the costs of relief and recovery measures and target only the affected area. Also it will empower the communities to participate in the monitoring process which will help in avoiding discrepancies in the relief and recovery measures.

Awareness and knowledge on disasters by the public is not such a difficult task to acquire since much information about it is readily available on the

internet and in the smart-phones. However, that's only from an information perspective which only remains as information and which may not be taken seriously one way or the other. What is really needed now is to cultivate a culture of preparedness. Let us ask ourselves if we have a culture of preparedness and whether the controlling authorities are helping us to cultivate that culture of preparedness? It is high time that communities should start thinking on the lines of disaster preparedness and also on the part of the controlling authorities to initiate programmes targeting the grassroots and rural and urban communities to help cultivate a culture of disaster preparedness and resilience.

To shed more light on Community Disaster Preparedness Plan, the communities can participate and take the lead in activities such as hazard mapping and zoning, formulating community preparedness and contingency plans, forming of disaster task force, arranging of mock drills and also creating a network with the concerned NGOs and government agencies.

There have been many case studies on how communities in different parts of the world have taken a lead in countering the effects of the impending disasters and subsequently saving many lives. Perhaps we can learn from such case studies in cultivating a sense of preparedness and creating disaster resilience. Communities should take responsibility and display a sense of ownership and stewardship.

Quoting from Petra Nemcova, "We cannot stop natural disasters but we can arm ourselves with knowledge so that many lives wouldn't have to be lost if there was enough disaster preparedness." It is pragmatic to go by these lines since cultivating a culture of preparedness and starting with community preparedness through a participatory approach will eventually help us in minimizing the risks of an impending disaster and subsequently preventing the ill effects of disasters and ultimately saving lives that are most at risk.

(The author is Geospatial Expert and Disaster Management enthusiast)

Mission air strikes compromised by leaking details

By Lalit Sethi

Is it too late in the day to invoke the election code of conduct when the final round of elections is almost done? Is it possible to bring up issues of defence when the Prime Minister decides to speak up? Has the Election Commission already had enough of it when the talk gets to cloud cover and air force bombers being able to bypass it, but concentrate on the secrecy of the mission Balakot.

Apparently Mr. Narendra Modi was engaged in discussions with the defence and security experts in the last week of February prior to the early hours of February 26 to decide that the plan to bomb the Balakot terror camp in

"I had two issues in mind. One was secrecy... and the second, I said I am not someone who knows the science. I said there is so much cloud and rain. There is a benefit. I have raw wisdom to guide me, the clouds can benefit us. We can escape the radar. Everyone was confused. Ultimately I said there are clouds... yet, let's proceed". That tweet is no longer on the BJP site, but the party had also placed a one-minute video on Twitter about the story of the air strike in the PM Modi's words. It remains, undeleted, it is claimed.

Air Marshal Vinod Bhatia (retired), who has commanded three Air

The BJP might have deleted its "handle" on the net when it felt that perhaps the election code of conduct might have been exceeded, but it could afford to let a one-minute video remain on line. But has the issue created a buzz about Mr. Modi's handling of critical issues like defence of the nation? He is entitled to ask rhetorically whether any other leader of the nation could match him in defending India.

Pakistan could not be deferred, but go ahead with it to retain the element of surprise and secrecy of the mission.

Did Mr. Modi decide to make a last-minute salvo and show what a strategist he is? Rather than bother about doubts, does he seem to pat himself on the back? Did his experts keep him in the loop about the Balakot air strikes on February 25- 26 and claim what a good job he had done in trying to curb terrorism from across the border.

According to an unnamed source, quoted by

Commands, comments: "Scientifically, radars are not affected by cloud cover, but it is the weapon aiming at the target that could be a problem if the target was not clearly visible

The Indian Air Force knew radars are not affected by clouds or rain and Pakistan radar did pick Indian planes. It is speculated that the cloud piercing spy satellite might or might not have been functional. Indian missiles were expected to beam back footage as they hit their target, using Spice munitions, but did the video

The Indian Air Force knew radars are not affected by clouds or rain and Pakistan radar did pick Indian planes. It is speculated that the cloud piercing spy satellite might or might not have been functional. Indian missiles were expected to beam back footage as they hit their target, using Spice munitions, but did the video feed of the Crystal Maze strike, meant to show destruction of the Balakot terror camp, materialise because of clouds that day?

Mail Today, there were certain points about the mission being "compromised by the weather in terms of efficiency but maintaining secrecy was crucial. We had no option but to go for it", the source added. The most important factor that emerged was the element of surprise and secrecy being ensured. It emerged as the most important point.

Certain experts said that bad weather might have prevented Indian Air Force jets from clear imagery of the attack they were carrying out.

The BJP might have deleted its "handle" on the net when it felt that perhaps the election code of conduct might have been exceeded, but it could afford to let a one-minute video remain on line. But has the issue created a buzz about Mr. Modi's handling of critical issues like defence of the nation? He is entitled to ask rhetorically whether any other leader of the nation could match him in defending India.

Did the Prime Minister imply that a laser-based system cannot penetrate clouds because it uses visible light? What sort of light was expected when the mission was carried out much before dawn. But Mr. Modi clearly talks about radar, which can detect objects with precision even in adverse weather conditions. PM Modi trying to do experts job at best has made experts wonder if he compromised the mission to achieve his political goals by leaking details of the mission.

(Lalit Sethi is a Journalist of long standing and a commentator on Political and Social Issues).

TO THE EDITOR

Has India lost the purpose of education?

Editor,
Rivaldo Kurbah has aptly concluded his letter, "Purpose & role of educational institutions" (ST, May 14, 2019), by saying that educational centres have unfortunately become profit making business which is the main problem of our educational system in India. The expert in development economics, Jean Drèze has underscored the need for a big movement in India to improve the quality of education and to halt the privatisation of education. He said, "When I grew up (in Belgium), there were many private schools but they were mainly non-profit schools run by NGOs, churches, civic organisations. They had government subsidy and they performed extremely well. But in India, the private sector in education is mostly the commercial sector, and I don't think this is appropriate for elementary education." On being asked why market competition is bad for

the schooling system, he said that for competition to work, consumers must have a fair idea of the product they are getting. For example, if you are buying an umbrella, you can see what it is made of, open it, close it and you get an idea of what you are paying for. "But illiterate parents sending their children to school - what would they know about the quality of education their children are getting?" he clarified.

Indeed, a good schooling system is supposed to provide children with a level playing field. But commercial education with the sole motive to maximize profits, fails this objective. It is more so in a country like India which has a heavy historical baggage of all kinds of inequality - caste, class, language and gender. Universal Quality Education is therefore a crying need for India - a country that suffers from extreme social inequality. The Indian government should not be mesmerised by economic growth sans human development. Jean Drèze has clearly

explained why development must have wide ranging public actions like education, health, nutrition, social security, environmental protection, public transport etc. Indian government should fulfill its responsibility for which it has been elected to power. It must not hand over its major responsibilities to the corporate sector.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

Rynjah where no traffic laws operate

Editor,
Is Rynjah locality without any Headman/Rangbah Shnong? The locality which was previously a housing society is now a thoroughfare for people travelling to New Shillong and NEIGRIHMS. The road is already very small but vehicles are allowed to be parked on both sides of the road especially near the Community Hall which seems to have some

function or the other going on for 365 days. People who attend the functions believe it is their birthright to park their vehicles right next to the Hall without a care about the large number of traffic traversing that way.

What is surprising is that the Shillong Traffic Police seem to consider that busy locality to be beyond their jurisdiction hence people are emboldened to break all traffic rules. Interestingly, a Minister of this MDA Government, AL Hek also resides there and I am sure he sees all the chaos but has not raised a finger to ensure that there is no unnecessary disruption of traffic in the area. Is that not one of the tasks of a public representative irrespective of whether he represents the constituency or not? And what about the MLA, Charles Pyngrupe? Has he ever visited this area in the day time to see the complete traffic chaos created by vehicles including taxis parked on both sides of the narrow road?

As a concerned citizen, I request the SP Traffic (Shillong) to visit this area and put a system in place which if violated must entail a heavy fine. Let us see how many vehicles are clamped on this thoroughfare.

Yours etc.,
A Kharkongor,
Via email

Who is the real thief?

Editor,
Chandra Babu Naidu's three year old granddaughter has a net-worth of Rs 19 crore. But he says, 'Modi chor hai.' Mayawati owns Rs 5000 crore worth of declared assets earned out of her agricultural income. She is one of the most successful farmers. But she also thinks, 'Modi chor hai...' Akhilesh Yadav has increased his assets by Rs 1300 crore just in one term as chief minister. But even Akhilesh says, 'Modi chor hai.' Sonia Gandhi is the 4th richest politician in the world without even occupying any position. She was not even deployed anywhere. She

and her son Rahul also think, 'Modi chor hai'

A Swiss magazine displays 15 most corrupt leaders in the world including Rajiv Gandhi of India in a recent publication with photographs. Bofors is still shadowing Rajiv Gandhi & dynasty. Sharad Pawar the king of wealth also thinks, 'Modi chor hai.' A failed politician like Abhishek Manu Singhvi form Congress also owns Rs 1000 crore assets- "thanks to Gandhi loyalty". But he says on TV, 'Modi chor hai.' Modi owns one apartment in Ahmedabad and Rs 3 lakh fixed deposit in spite of having being Chief Minister of a rich industrial state of Gujarat for 13 years and Prime Minister of the country for five years. Modi's entire family is still working and living as middle class citizens.

Let the people of India now decide who the real chors and who is not!

Yours etc.,
Samares
Bandyopadhyay
Via email

"There's been so much corruption and so much cronyism in the taxi industry and so much regulatory capture, that if you ask for permission upfront for something that's already legal, you'll never get it."

— Travis Kalanick

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MAY 16, 2019

Battle for Bengal

WEST Bengal breathes politics. This has been so for many decades after the Communists won power and remained in the saddle for 34 years. The ouster of the Reds from power only signaled a more aggressive kind of politics, this time at the hands of street-smart Mamata Banerjee. Having won power in 2011, her effort thereafter has not only been to retain power but also seek a "promotion" and seize power in Delhi. It meant a direct fight with the BJP which, on its part, is seeking to outwit the chief minister in her own turf. The eruption of violence in Kolkata on Tuesday in the course of a road show held by BJP chief Amit Shah is a pointer to the viciousness of the battle that lies ahead.

Mamata Banerjee is raising the hopes of Bengalis by projecting a possibility that she could head the new government at the Centre after the LS polls. A Gujarat chief minister becoming the Prime Minister set a precedent, though he was a nominee of two strong entities at the national level - the BJP and the RSS. Mamata Banerjee or her Trinamool Congress has little support outside West Bengal. Yet, the fighter that she is, Banerjee is leaving no stone unturned to reach her goals. She had managed to decimate the once-powerful Communists and drag to her side sizeable support bases of the Congress, including the Muslims who form about 30 per cent of the state's population.

At the same time, it is a debatable point as to how much her style of politics and constant fights with the Centre are of help to West Bengal. The long years of Left rule had hurt the state badly. The Communist policy was to fight the Congress ruling the Centre, without being mindful of its consequences. What was once the capital of the British Raj, West Bengal has, through progressive Communist misadventures, become one of the poorest states in India. Congress governments in the past had looked the other way, and the Modi government too was not of much help to West Bengal due to the aggressive postures of Banerjee. Modi's soothing words about "Didi" are likely an attempt at camouflaging his hidden anger over her abrasive postures towards him.

There is less chance of Mamata becoming PM even in this round. Her hopes were high at a time when the Congress was down and out, and Rahul Gandhi was still shaping up. That's old story now. Yet, she can still fish in troubled waters.

TO THE EDITOR

Plight of taxi drivers

Editor,
That Gautam Gurung had to make a plea for readers to know the plight of taxi drivers, shows the gravity of the matter. Apologies at the outset for this delayed rejoinder for I was too absorbed with the Radar-Cloud row. The performance of a Maruti 800 (the most efficient car) is 22 km/litre. This is the highway data. With the present traffic snarl in the city the data would drop to 8 km/litre. I did ask about the fare from Nongthymmai to Motphran and after analysis, the maximum profit for one way trip is Rs.30 without taking into account the maintenance cost. If ten trips per day are made it means Rs.300. With lunch, tea and breakfast it comes to Rs.220.

Now even domestic workers are at present paid Rs 400 per day with free food and tea. Taking this

into account I do wonder how taxis are earning presently. To cushion the pain of joblessness parents buy taxis for their graduate sons. Traffic jams are not going to leave us for a number of years. The only solution, in my humble suggestion is to have a substantial increase in Shillong fares of radius 5 km (with General Post office as centre) and have some minor increase for long-distance trips. Let us also remember that D.A. increases and arrears from time to time are also meant for travelling expenses.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Shillong 14

Shocking crimes

Editor,
What had happened in national capital a few days back is dangerously shocking. A small

Polling for 2019 Lok Sabha election, in seven phases stretching to 39 days from April 11-May 19 has completed six phases. It is a period of expectations for some parties and contestants and anxiety for all without exception. While voters and non-voters patiently wait for the counting day and political analysts and observers are busy calculating the chances of the candidates, parties are preparing for post-poll alliances.

Seven weeks is a long period for polling and it is certainly a tedious job policing the conduct of political parties and candidates. The vigour of mutual attacks is growing from phase to phase. Several agencies are conducting exit polls but cannot release the findings until all phases of polling are completed.

Parties are making their own assessments of polling trends and change their canvassing strategies and post-poll politics. In the meantime, leaders have a common tendency of visualising their own victory to draw voters in the last phase and prepare for post-counting operations.

2019 is witnessing by far the most bitter election battle, which instead of subsiding after polling started intensified further. Issues and promises are changing from place to place and along with them the strategies of attacking one another.

The Election Commission is presently the most sought after constitutional body to resolve the grievances of parties and candidates. The Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) is the principal target of attack of the current Opposition parties suspecting and voicing possibilities of manipulation. It is partly preparatory to seeking refuge under the cover of faulty machines in case of failure.

Nirvachan Sadan is flooded with complaints of violations of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) never seen before. Derogatory and provocative remarks and lies and distortions in campaign speeches have become common.

The EC in this election is cornered for both action and inaction. Recall, on April 15, a Supreme Court bench headed by the CJI had pulled it up for not acting against "hate speeches and statements on religious lines." After this, the EC took some ac-

businessman Druv Raj Tyagi, a resident of Moti Nagar, West Delhi, was stabbed brutally last Sunday and died the next day. The reason was that the businessman's daughter was regularly taunted and eve-teased by a group of boys in the locality. This has become a cause of serious concern for the girl and her family members. On that fateful night, the father was returning from the clinic with his daughter who was quite sick. When a gang of youths passed lewd remarks on the daughter, the father felt very hurt. He decided to approach the parents of one of the boys. The father of the boy, Jahangir Khan, instead of pacifying Mr Tyagi and taking his son to task started hurling abuses at him. Immediately many other neighbours joined him and started thrashing Tyagi. In the meantime, Jahangir took out a knife and stabbed Tyagi multiple times in his abdomen. Hearing the loud cries of

Amid polling & counting

Suspense period politics

By Dr S. Saraswathi

tion against top leaders of the Congress, the BJP and even scrutinised PM's speeches for violation of MCC. It also blocked the release of the film "PM Narendra Modi" during the election period.

Post-poll alliance is the hot topic among many parties looking forward to a hung Parliament and a coalition government. TDP leader Chandrababu Naidu, presently sticking to the theme of post-poll alliance to keep the BJP out of power, forecasts only three possibilities --

the end of its term and winning again with massive mandate, defeating both the Congress and BJP, he is optimistic of a major role for regional parties in forming the government at the Centre. In the hope of pushing both national parties - the BJP and Congress - to be at the mercy of regional parties to build majority, he has taken initiative to convert other regional parties to his line of thinking.

KCR has already met Kerala Chief Minister Vijayan, had a telephonic conversation with

"Seven weeks is a long period for polling and it is certainly a tedious job policing the conduct of political parties and candidates. The vigour of mutual attacks is growing from phase to phase. Several agencies are conducting exit polls but cannot release the findings until all phases of polling are completed."

grouping under Congress leadership; forming a non-Congress, non-BJP grouping with "outside support of Congress" called Third Front; or forming non-BJP alliance inclusive of the Congress. A meeting of Opposition parties on completion of polling to exchange ideas on government formation, including choice of PM is now postponed to take place after announcement of results.

To the TDP, the period between polling and counting is a time for bringing together as many non-BJP parties as possible to form and/or help to form a non-BJP government. For some parties, it will mean reconciliation with a rival after a bitter election fight -- a move justified as a "democratic and secular compulsion". A front of non-Congress and non-BJP parties, i.e. the Third Front of TRS does not appeal to TDP. Replacing Prime Minister Modi is the principal objective of TDP leader.

TRS chief KCR, who was keen on a federal front from the beginning of alliance talks in March last year and is hopeful of winning all the 17 Lok Sabha seats in Telangana, has resumed the dialogue after four phases of polling. Having opted for State Assembly election before

Karnataka Chief Minister Kumaraswamy, and has met DMK chief Stalin, also who does not support Third Front idea.

However, the desirability of re-enacting 1996 experiment in 2019 needs to be carefully examined by the potential allies. Politics must be played for national interest and not for party or private benefits. Parties are also readying excuses for bad performance and have picked on the EVM, which is already at the centre of controversy with the Congress leading the Opposition attack on lack of tamper-proof machines.

Recall, in February, the Opposition sought 50 per cent random verification of EVMs with Voter Verification Paper Audit Trial (VVPAT) slips. The EC objected as this would extend the counting process and delay the results.

In an unprecedented move, 21 non-NDA leaders led by AP Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu moved the Supreme Court nearly a month before the commencement of polling seeking a direction to the EC to count VVPAT slips of at least 50% of EVMs in the General election, i.e. 125 polling booths in every constituency. The signatories to the petition included leaders from NCP, Congress, TMC, LJD, SP, BSP, DMK,

Shillong

Violence in Bengal

Editor,
Mamata Banerjee has become very restless! The reason is obvious. People tend to become worked up suddenly because of two reasons: one, success is coming; two, bad days are ahead. Judging by the body language and her indiscriminate throwing up of filthy and unconstitutional languages against a man who is holding the constitutional post of Prime Minister shows that something is seriously wrong with her. Lok Sabha elections are being held in the entire country but cases of large-scale violence are reported from Bengal only. What are the reasons? Actually, in my opinion, Mamata Banerjee herself could not imagine such a huge turn-out in Bengal for the Lok Sabha election. As far as Bengal is concerned, some 60-

CPM, CPI, RJD, AAP, NC, JDS, RLD, AIUDF, HAM, JVM, IUML, NPF, and TJS. Though they have many differences amongst them preventing pre-poll alliances, they are one in blaming the EVMs for their losses in any place.

They challenged the EC's guidelines which make it mandatory for counting of VVPATs from only one random polling station per Assembly constituency, which meant less than 0.44 per cent of EVMs in the country. So on April 22, the Opposition parties filed a review petition seeking at least "33% or 25%" VVPAT verification, if not 50%. The review plea contended that "Indian democracy could not be left to the mercy of EVM programmers". It also complained of "large-scale tampering and elective malfunctioning of EVMs in the Lok Sabha polls so far".

The apex Court dismissed the plea to review its judgement rejecting 50 per cent physical verification of EVMs using VVPATs. The court directed the EC to increase physical counting of VVPAT slips to five random EVMs in each Assembly segment/constituency.

Following the dismissal of the review petition, a delegation of Opposition parties met the EC seeking "transparency" in its functioning in order to ensure 'free and fair' election. It was also explained that the review petition was filed "to underline a grave and serious threat to democracy". Affirming that they would abide by the Supreme Court's decision, the delegation expressed its intention of carrying on an all-India campaign "to make the electorate and the citizens aware of the perils and pitfalls of the current electoral process" thus choosing to lead the nation towards a backward progress in the election system. Several complaints of malfunctioning of the EVM-VVPAT machines are also being reported. As the suspense period politics between polling and counting is getting more and more murky, we have to shorten the period since politics cannot be cleansed. ---INFA

(The author is former Director ICSSR, New Delhi)

65% of voting could be handled out but how could one control the tide to go in her favour when voting crosses 80% in every phase of the election? It seems that the people of Bengal are voting in large numbers out of anger. I am not sure, but perhaps anti-majority policies and all pervasive Syndicate-Raj in Bengal have something to do with it. But anyway, it cannot be denied that Mamata Didi has become very tense and, perhaps, fears that she might lose power in the near future. This fear has gripped her psyche completely.

Yours etc.,
PS Gupta,
Via email

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

The incoming government must take forward the national strategy agenda

Securing our borders

By Shyam Saran

National security has become a major issue in the ongoing elections. This could be a positive development, provided the current focus is sustained beyond the din of elections with a new political dispensation inheriting the reins of government later this month. One key aspect involves securing India's long and contested borders as well as its vast maritime frontiers. This is no easy task and demands careful assessment of the challenges they pose due to the complexities of terrain, demographic particularities, political, social and economic characteristics of border and coastal states and the state of relations with adjacent foreign states. Effective border management cannot be separated from a sound neighbourhood policy. A comprehensive consideration of border management must wait but it may be worthwhile to flag some urgent issues which the incoming government should address. I am drawing upon three border infrastructure surveys I was tasked to carry out over 2004-2015.

Our armed forces are required to serve at remote, high-altitude posts in extremely inclement weather conditions. Siachen is only one such theatre. The fibre glass dwelling units were not properly insulated from the cold and the use of kerosene heaters exposed soldiers to noxious fumes. Often the toilets and kitchens did not have proper shelter

We need more roads up to the LAC itself or as near as possible.

Considerable progress has been made in the construction of border roads, including a trans-Arunachal highway along the northern bank of the Brahmaputra. Several feeder roads now connect this highway to locations at or near the LAC. However, there are major problems in our border road building programme. Most alignments in the mountainous zone tend to follow valleys of streams and rivers, where construction may be easier and the distance between points A and B the shortest. However, these roads, which are critical in supplying border posts, often get washed away due to floods and storm surges. Communications are interrupted, repairs take time and the story is repeated every few years. It would be far better to construct roads away from banks and along adjacent ridges, which may mean longer distance but make up in terms of reliability and durability. There would also be considerable saving in the long run through avoidance of frequent repairs. The use of satellite imagery and geo-spatial applications can help plot the most suitable alignment.

In J&K we have the Valley enclosed by high mountains, beyond which lies a sliver of territory, for example Poonch and Rajouri, where most of our border posts on the LOC with Pakistan are located. There are

"These conditions had persisted despite high-altitude dwellings with proper heating being routine even in tourist locations in mountainous countries like Switzerland and Nordic countries. As a result of the survey, some improvements have been made."

or heating. These conditions had persisted despite high-altitude dwellings with proper heating being routine even in tourist locations in mountainous countries like Switzerland and Nordic countries. As a result of the survey, some improvements have been made. For example, installing units using water radiators but apparently the scheme has not gone beyond the pilot stage. It is recommended that modern, properly heated dwellings be provided at all our posts located in high altitude. We must not subject our young officers and soldiers to more hardship than is necessary.

The quality of our border posts is poor in comparison to what China has put in place over the past three decades. A large proportion of their posts are at the LAC or only a few kilometres behind. They are connected by all-weather metal roads linking up with the trans-Tibet highway and the Tibet-Xinjiang highway. In several posts 24X7 electricity is provided through transmission lines stretched right up to the LAC. The living quarters are modern and comfortable and can accommodate a much larger number of soldiers than actually deployed. That is because additional troops can be brought in speedily thanks to excellent connectivity. On our side, border posts are typically several kilometres south of the LAC. We have to deploy the numbers who may have to fight at these locations themselves, because in a crisis situation it would take too much time to deploy additional personnel from the interior. This asymmetry has to be acknowledged and efforts must be made to minimise its impact.

five passes through which the Valley is connected to the border zone and these are free of snow six-seven months during the year. This means that supplies have to be taken across during summer but must be stocked to last through winter. The long-term solution is to build tunnels where the passes are to permit all-weather access. In the meantime, snow clearing equipment should be deployed to extend traffic by at least two-three months. This is also the case on the highways built to provide alternative access to the Valley from Himachal. Recommendations regarding the building of tunnels along the existing road alignments must be given urgent consideration because they are the only long-term solution to a persistent border security challenge.

Regular patrols are indispensable. However, patrol routes specified by our defence establishment must not end up defining the alignment of our borders. It is important that in addition to regular patrols along authorised routes, armed forces personnel regularly visit and assert their presence in areas beyond the patrol lines. In fact, there is a good case for doing away with these lines altogether and ensure our presence right up to where we claim our borders lie.

There are other issues related to border management but those listed above must be high on the agenda of the incoming government. If they could be considered as part of an overall security strategy, so much the better. *(The author is former foreign secretary and senior fellow, centre for policy research) (By arrangement with The Tribune, Chandigarh)*

“For every challenge we face - unemployment, poverty, crime, income growth, income inequality, productivity, competitiveness - a great education is a major component of the solution.”

— Bruce Rauner

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Bofors and CBI

IT is a pity that India keeps investigating the Bofors case for decades, even as no lead has yet been established into one of the most sensational defence scams. The CBI was told by the trial court on Thursday that it needed no permission to continue investigating the case – and this, after the CBI sought its nod on the ground that some “fresh evidence” has cropped up. Question is, how long can this go on?

The Bofors case surfaced in 1987 after the Swedish media broke the story saying the artillery manufacturer there had paid kickbacks to several individuals in India and Sweden to secure the Rs 1,500 crore guns contract for the India's defence. Another media report in Sweden had said bribes of Rs 60 crore had been paid by the Swedish company to Indian politicians, including Congress leaders and bureaucrats. The role of an Italian businessman, Ottavio Quattrocchi, as an agent in the deal, further spiced up the case. Several governments have come and gone since the mid-1980s, and there were several twists and turns to the Bofors case. Either the investigating agencies could not do a proper job, or hurdles were put in their way, or there was no evidence to prove the allegations. Considering the nature of the case and the personalities involved, nothing is likely to surface even now. The long years saw governments of the Congress, the BJP and others too at the helm of affairs here, and yet the case did not progress except to be used as a political weapon every now and again. The fresh initiative on the part of the CBI is based on what it stated before court as “revelations” made by one Michael Hershman.

The Bofors case had been prominently raised in this Lok Sabha poll campaign by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, by way of retaliation to Congress president Rahul Gandhi who called the PM a “chor” in relation to the Rafale fighter jet deal with France. But, the CBI reworking on the case at this juncture would in no way help the BJP push its campaign. Rather, other reasons might be suspected.

The CBI, the caged parrot, is capable of such moves on its own too, even for the heck of it. Hundreds of crores might already have been spent in the investigations. More crores could go the way of the CBI and its officials if a fresh probe is done. The inference could be that CBI is keen on playing with money and wasting its precious resources including manpower for longer terms.

TO THE EDITOR

Evils of iconoclasm

Editor,
The act of some goons of smashing the bust of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar to pieces in a street of Kolkata was an attempt to vandalise our evolutionary progress. Just after Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the name of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar comes to our mind as a pillar of the Bengal Renaissance. And College Street where the incident happened was the heart of the Renaissance that showed the light to India.

Unfortunately, those who have a vested interest, brainwash us into believing that the past was very good ~ Satyayug and the present is very bad ~ Kaliyug ~ so, we need to march backwards. There is nothing to worry about as evolutionary progress keeps on giving us great reformers like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar who fought against the prejudices surrounding girl's and Dalit's education and widow remarriage.

I had learnt Bengali alphabet through Ishwar Chandra's book 'Borno Parichoy' (Introduction to the letter) and Sanskrit through his books 'Upakramonika' and 'Byakaran Koumudi'. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was a philosopher, academic, writer, social reformer, translator, printer, publisher and had oceans of knowledge (Vidyasagar) and in the words of Michael Madhusudan 'ocean of kindness' (Dayar Sagar) within him.

He opened the gate of Sanskrit College for the non-Brahmin students and did

everything for women's education from establishing schools for girls to door to door campaign requesting parents to send their daughters to school. It was his efforts that got the Hindu Widow's Remarriage Act, 1856 decreed. He even married his son Narayan Chandra to an adolescent widow to set an example.

No one can destroy Vidyasagar who was a man of exceptional character ~ who never bowed his head to high ranking British officials, to colonial mindsets or to inhuman rituals in our society.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

Ill-mannered driver

Editor,
There is an exponential rise in the number of two wheelers in Shillong. Through your esteemed daily, I would like to point out an incident that occurred on the 17th of this month. As I was walking in Dhankheti near Bawri Mansion a scooter bearing registration number ML 05 L 4868 came from the wrong side of the road and started honking from behind. I gave way and told the rider that he is driving on the wrong side of the road. After I took a few steps the rider stopped and started arguing with me and abusing me. I would have loved to use the footpath but as usual it was occupied by hawkers, but it was not right on the part of the rider; he should not have used strong language. Pedestrians have to walk between the footpath

Surprisingly, the Lok Sabha elections are discussing the nation's problems on a low key. The socio-economic situation is difficult despite 431 programmes of the NDA government. The Opposition is either too dazed or lukewarm to the realities, much to the delight of the ruling combine.

The voters are wondering whether the political parties need a reorientation or not. Or does the nation need a new set of political parties? This election is more about accusations about the past non-issues. The 2014 polls had vibrant discussion on the UPA performance, triggering motivation among the voters. That's the right process and shows the vibrancy of political parties.

One assumption may be the nation is devoid of issues. The other may be that those supposed to run the country are oblivious, ignorant or plain simple negligent. There are issues both good and not so good. But where is the debate?

The Union Finance Ministry report suggests economy is going through a slow patch to touch the lowest GDP growth of 7 per cent in five years. Reports of National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) tell us about problems of new series of GDP calculations. The banks are still to come out of the NPA and deposit crisis. Even savings are hit.

Jobs are eluding people since the 1991 liberalisation and pro-corporate policies. None even raise the issue that the process of economic liberalisation itself is not that liberal. It is a portent time to discuss the shape of a new economy, agriculture and education, which is not being seen or heard.

Recall, the Left parties used to raise portent issues -- be it on telecom, coal, power or poverty. However, the weakening of their political base has eroded that. The BJP used to be vociferous and rake up vibrant issues and the then ruling Congress, forgetting its 1960s vibrancy, was left putting up a weak defence.

'Inflation' & slow growth Reform political parties

By Shivaji Sarkar

The nation finds it difficult to fathom why a party in government has to defend the weaknesses, many of which are the creation of a bureaucratic process. A party in Opposition suddenly changes its colours once in the saddle. These defend what they have been demolishing till a day back, which undoubtedly calls for a debate on the role of political parties. India has to be different and so also the party with a difference

sations as their meagre collections are being taxed and has raised their cost.

Rightfully, former Chief statistician Pronob Sen has commented that post demonetisation and the GST roll-out, the non-corporate sector has been hit, which is clearly showing. All these have hit liquidity, adding to the cost of banks and the RBI, which has to continuously monitor. The Bimal Jalan or UK Sinha committees have not suggested exact solutions.

“Pronob Sen noted the decline in the share of household savings and officially savings have become a bad word.”

has to rethink.

Demonetisation has been a critical, if not harsh decision. Keeping in tune with the character of a ruling party, officially its impact was not discussed. The wonder is that the Opposition failed to put forth the problems before the people, which they instead privately discuss. It has raised a moot question: whether the Opposition is in cahoots or is so ignorant that it cannot be handed over responsibility of governance.

The pros and cons have yet to be documented. The note-ban, however, is known to have jerked the economy, added to problems of bank functioning, bank charges have become atrocious and many sectors were badly hit. It even did not answer how the Government itself could renege on its promise of paying for each of the currency note. None raised it.

The GST – one nation tax – notionally is fine. The reality is that many States have different taxes, petrol continues with a complex tax and GST on small trades, accounting process is affecting, possibly eliminating the entrepreneurs and small business operators. It has jolted the voluntary organi-

Further, the new inflation indices are being accused of camouflaging inflation. The low indices figures are stated to conceal more, which may suit propaganda but it diverts the process of debate and discussion. Besides, it has added to the problem of savings, which are not being rewarded. Pronob Sen noted the decline in the share of household savings and officially savings have become a bad word. Actually household savings fund the borrowing needs of government and the corporate, which don't savings.

With artificial inflation figures, rewarding the corporate through interest rate cut has become the norm, forgetting that the huge NPA and bank crisis is a creation of the wilful corporate default. As of December 2018, wilful defaults have soared to Rs 161,213 crore from Rs 39,504 crore in March 2014 -- a rise of Rs 121,700 crore, according to Transunion Cibil, a credit information company. The SBI alone has Rs 39,471 crore of defaults. These are 11,000 borrowers, who have financial wherewithal to repay the debt.

The NPAs have hit the poor and geriatric savers. They are paying high bank charges and are forced to accept low interest rates. Ironi-

cally, low interest rates reduce the liabilities of the defaulters and they are even rewarded with waivers. Remember, if household saving go down, it would either pull down investments or raise the current account deficit.

The Opposition has never raised the issue, which is critical for nation building. That is called patriotism! The nation has encouraged this habit of savings through intense propagation through 1950s to 1970s. If one forgets the history, one has to pay for it.

Add to this, the recent scam of road building-toll-IL&FS, which should have become a hot political issue. It's a minimum of Rs 90,000-crore loss with wide ramifications extending to different corporate. Monetary policy itself to reward the corporate despite Rs 15 lakh crore, if not more, bank scams is questionable. Nobody has answered why interest rates have to be cut when the prices in reality are rising.

The Supreme Court has come down heavily on corporate and real estate companies such as Jaypee and Amarapali. In fact, its recent apprehension on penetration of the corporate into the court system has rattled the nation.

Then there is agriculture, forestry and fishing which is giving less returns, at 2.7 per cent growth against projected 4.6 per cent, as per CSO. Likewise private consumption has declined though government expenses have soared. Tax collections too are falling. The real exchange rate rise, exports crisis, US sanctions and actions on tariff, European Union cutting its growth rate are other potential problems.

Sadly, the dormant political system has not cared about the many challenges afflicting the country. The nation must wake up to reform the parties thriving on rhetoric and instead take the country out of a difficult situation. ---INFA

Potholes and manholes in Laitumkhras

Editor,
Laitumkhras locality which is considered as the seat of learning in Shillong is, today, fast becoming one of the most neglected localities of Shillong, particularly in respect of garbage management, street hawking, suffocation and the presence of pot-holed roads. As one who frequently visit this locality I am dismayed to find that the internal and arterial roads of this famous locality are in a state of complete disrepair and are worsening day by day. There are several potholes and at times I also noticed manholes at regular intervals. I am aware that the MLA of North Shillong, Ampareen Lyngdoh, resides in this locality and is famous for taking up public issues and addressing local problems but I fail to understand why she is blind to the lack of these basic amenities like good roads, an efficient garbage system and a well managed street hawking system. Even the footpaths are in a pitiable condition and in most places there are no footpaths at all. I wonder how the people of this locality can tolerate all these lapses. I hope the MLA will act immediately on these issues and that the problems faced by the people of this locality will be addressed by the authorities concerned at the earliest.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Progressive Kerala

Be progressive, is a firm message from Kerala to Muslim organisation across the country. The Muslim Educational Society (MES) has said a big no to IUML's demand to withdraw its circular banning hijab (face-covering veils) on its campuses. The Muslim league claims hijab to be 'part of religion' and it's the 'religious scholars duty to take a decision on it'. But MES disagrees. It's "not a religious custom. Some elements are planning to impose certain customs, which aren't part of religion", it says and further argues there is a "growing 'Arabisation' in the community," which must be checked. "Arabs wear dress according to their climate. Nobody can impose such a dress code here," insists MES, which runs 150 institutions and educates over 100,000 students. Additionally, the Kerala High Court recently too stated it had nothing to do with religion or belief and left it to school management's discretion to decide the uniform. Apparently, not just the fact that MES found only six cover their faces of 40,000 Muslim students, but the LDF, of which IUML is a constituent, has noted "women never cover their face when performing Haj pilgrimage."

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via email

like Sohra, Mawlynnong, etc. for they have to traverse this stretch of road.
Yours etc.,
Rishan Kupar Rangslang
3 & 1/2 Mile, Upper Shillong

Yours etc.,
Manisha M Pala,
Shillong.

West Bengal & EC Offsetting the bully

By Insaif

Round the States

2019 elections must be the biggest challenge Nirvachan Sadan has had to face, what with West Bengal unrelenting. The polls in Mamata land have been marred by violence between the TMC and BJP supporters, from the very beginning. However, Tuesday turned out to be the last straw with BJP President Amit Shah's roadside show in the State's capital Kolkata, vandalised. Enough was enough. And thus, in an unprecedented move, it cut short the campaigning by one day for the last round of voting for nine seats in the State, inviting Mamata's wrath. She accused the EC of being "unfair, unethical and politically biased." Worse, the decision gave the Opposition a stick to beat the EC yet again and accusing it of 'submitting to the ruling party.' The question raised, not just by Mamata but her Opposition comrades, is why the poll panel waited 24 hours to impose the campaign restrictions, because it gave PM Modi time to finish his two rallies before the campaign ban kicked in?

Be that as it may, there is no denying the fact that the past six rounds of voting have seen violence and intimidation, more by the TMC cadres than rivals BJP. The EC's decision on Wednesday last came after marathon meetings, wherein senior poll officers and observers are said to have indicted Didi's handling of the democratic process. "There is distinct resistance and non-cooperation from district administration and district police when it comes to providing level playing field to all candidates for campaigning and in providing a fearless threat-free environment to the voters," noted the EC. So not only did it cut short the campaign till Thursday instead of Friday, but also removed two top Bengal officers--additional DGP in-charge of CID and Principal Home Secretary. Good enough reason. But Mamata and team are not convinced. In one voice, they question the "neutrality, impartiality, and fairness of the EC". More so, as they claim the EC hasn't even bothered to issue a notice to Shah for the violence that erupted during his roadshow, which the TMC claims of having video evidence. The blame game is never ending. It is bound to go beyond May 23 and outlive this poll season.

Rajasthan & History
Governments change and so do history books. The Congress government in Rajasthan follows suit. It has revised school textbooks and removed references on demonetisation among others from the current academic session. This shouldn't come as a surprise to BJP though, for when Ashok Gehlot took over, two review committees of educationists were set up to peruse changes made by previous BJP regime. Recall, in 2017, Vasundhara Raje had introduced portion on demonetisation in Class 12 political science book, terming Modi's decision as "historic" and an "operation to clean black money." None of this, says the Education Minister now, as not only was demonetisation a "most unsuccessful experiment", but Modi's three objectives -- it would end terrorism, corruption and bring back black money weren't achieved. Instead the public was forced to stand in queues and it put a burden of over Rs 10,000 crore on the country." There is no full stop though. The Ministry shall review portions in textbooks which "glorify" Veer Savarkar, much to the chagrin of BJP which feels Congress is ignoring "patriots who have been associated with Hindutva". The big question is: whether new generations will learn history per se or a distorted version by those holding a particular political ideology? The answer is not difficult to guess.

Punjabi Passing Buck

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Time to take the community ahead, not backward indeed!

Odisha Helps Central Help

Odisha has put the burden on the Centre to help it overcome the Fani devastation. On Wednesday last, it gave its assessment to Union Home Ministry saying it suffered damages to its properties worth Rs 11,942 crore. However, this was 'just preliminary assessment' and a final memorandum would be given by May end after it undertakes a village-to-village survey. So far the damages accounted for are: Rs 1,159.8 crore by Energy department with over 1.56 lakh electric poles blown away or bent by high winds and over 2 lakh-km-long electric lines damaged plus Rs 537 crore by the forest department. But there is more to come, as losses to private properties like hotels, business establishments and lakhs of houses are yet to be ascertained. For one, the Hotel and Restaurant Association of Odisha claims the industry in Puri and Bhubaneswar suffered a loss of Rs 500 crore as scores of sea-side hotels had massive damages--glass-pannelled doors, windows were shattered and rooms were filled with sand. Worse, some 6,500 schools have been completely or partially damaged by the cyclone. The entire exercise will therefore be completed only after the new government is in place. Whoever it may turn out to be, will Naveen Patnaik be able to extract his pound of flesh?

Rajasthan & History

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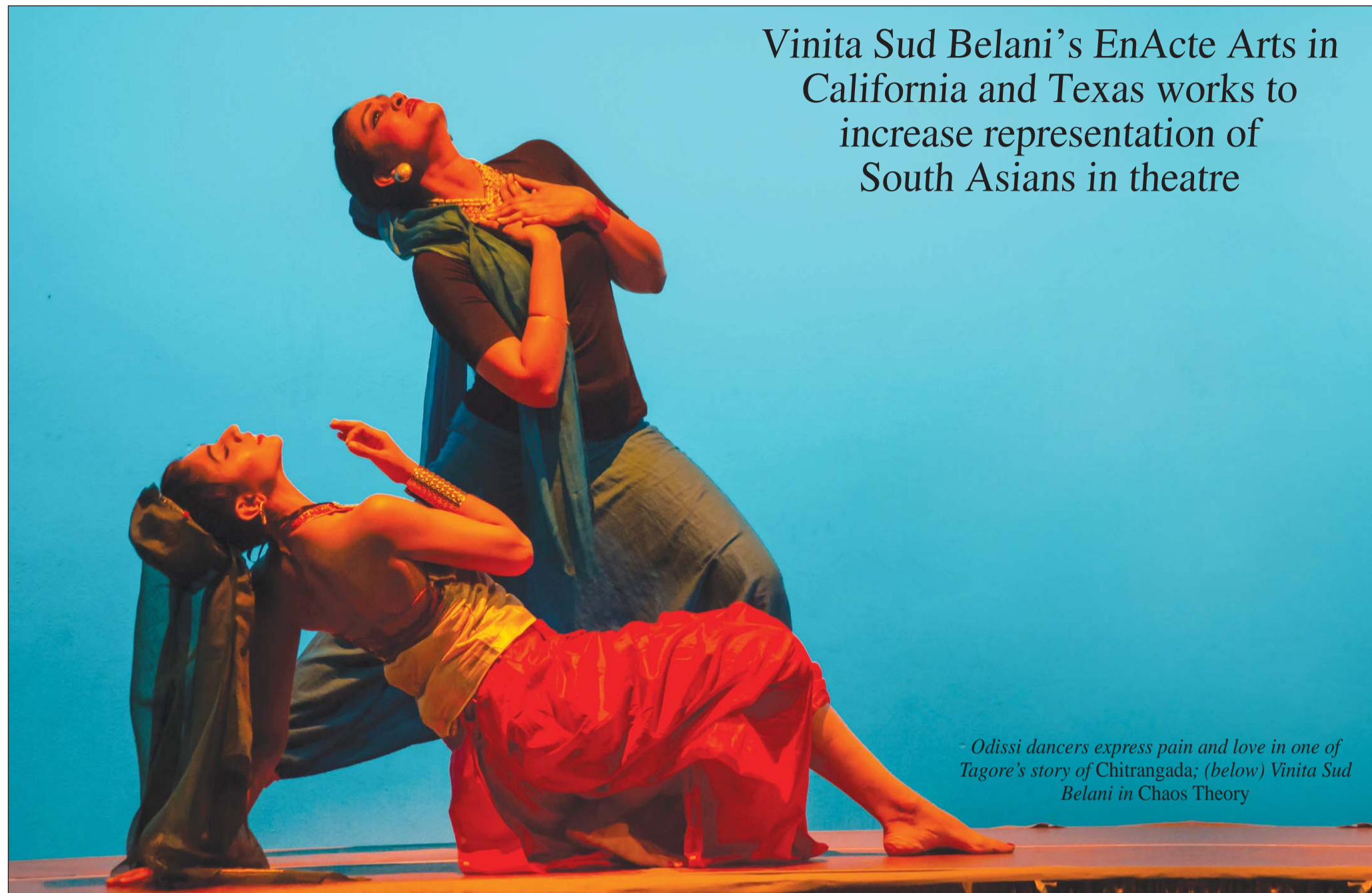
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Theatre tells stories of diaspora



Vinita Sud Belani's EnActe Arts in California and Texas works to increase representation of South Asians in theatre

Odissi dancers express pain and love in one of Tagore's story of Chitrangada; (below) Vinita Sud Belani in Chaos Theory

By Candice Yacono

EnActe Arts, co-located in the Silicon Valley and Houston, showcases and serves the South Asian diaspora through theatre. With its roots in the greater Indian subcontinent, EnActe seeks to inspire conversations that lead to greater tolerance.

"We are a theatre company with a three-fold mission," says Vinita Sud Belani, founder and artistic director of the international theatre company. "This includes telling stories that put South Asian stories and culture into a global context and breaking ethnic barriers between communities that live and work together; creating opportunities that help correct the under-representation of South Asians in theatre; and developing talent in all aspects of theatre, including playwrights."

EnActe predominantly selects plays

by young or upcoming South Asian playwrights who write with, in Belani's words, a 'diaspora voice'.

"We choose subjects that are of relevance to South Asians taking their place in a global society today. These plays have strong South Asian roles, especially female ones," she says. "It could be, for example, an Indian-origin playwright born in Kenya now living in Los Angeles, like Shishir Kurup, whose play *Merchant on Venice* is a brilliant satire on how Hindu-Muslim relations are carried by Indian immigrants into their US lives." It has 10 Indian roles and two Latino roles.

Or it could be a young Silicon Valley-born playwright like Madhuri Shekar, who went back to India to live for a few years. Two plays of hers have been produced by EnActe: *Nice Indian Boy*, which is a humorous exposé of what it is like to be Indian, gay and in love with a white guy in Silicon Valley, and *Queen*, which explores the relationship between a female Indian

mathematician and a female Caucasian biologist at University of California, Santa Cruz, as they rush to find the scientific cause behind why bees are dying.

"All of them have strong roles for South Asian actors," she says.

EnActe also commissions works on subjects of interest to South Asian audiences.

Lifetime Oscar winner Jean-Claude Carrière wrote and performed a 90-minute storytelling piece for EnActe. In this personal retelling of *The Mahabharata*, Carrière traces the story's roots in ancient civilisation and discusses its relevance to our times.

Indian playwright Feisal Alkazi wrote *Noor: Empress of the Mughals* on the life of Empress Noor Jahan, as seen through the eyes of a eunuch at the Mughal court.

First-time playwrights Salil Singh and Anurag Wadehra of the Bay Area wrote *The Parting* based on true-life accounts of people who crossed the

line dividing India and Pakistan in 1947.

"It was a unique, political view of the Partition," says Belani. "The entire South Asian community came together for this project—donating funds, sharing stories, hosting fundraisers and filling the seats at all our shows."

EnActe receives funding from ticket sales, arts grants, individual and corporate sponsorships and foundation grants. Its affiliated EnActe Academy teaches acting and theatre stagecraft through classes, workshops and hands-on experiences, including a programme for young actors.

"Aspire is our amateur production, Hybrid our training ground for actors more serious about their craft, and Pro takes actors to the point where they are ready for a professional career in acting," says Belani.

"Many of them then become Equity actors and feed into the mainstream talent pool in Los Angeles, New York

and other regional theatres," the thespian adds.

EnActe has partnered with 14 dance companies to date, as well as with a wide range of venues, arts organisations and community centers.

"Collaboration is built into our DNA," she says.

Belani was born in Kolkata to an engineer father and a musician mother. She worked with Mother Teresa on her charitable efforts, and developed a love for theatre and debate, as well as mathematics and physics. She also earned an MBA degree from HEC Paris, an international business school in France.

Belani graduated from Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, with a degree in computer science, and worked around the world for multinational tech companies, including a couple of Silicon Valley start-ups, she says.

Despite her exciting career in tech and all of the travel she enjoyed, something was missing.

"Twenty-plus years of moving across countries and continents, while trying to hold down a job and raise a family of three children, meant that there was not a lot of time for theatre in my thirties and forties," Belani says.

But then, a fateful moment arrived for Belani. At a friend's dinner party in Paris in 2011, she met Carrière. "In conversation, I mentioned to him that I had children now who were the same age as I was when Peter Brook and [Carrière] first produced *The Mahabharata*," says Belani. "The production was such a huge watershed moment in Western theatre, making a deeply Eastern story, steeped in four millennia of cultural context, comprehensible to all."

She suggested to Carrière that perhaps it was time to stage *The Mahabharata* again.

"Well," he joked, "why don't you start a theatre company and then we could!" The rest, as they say, is history. Belani gave up her job, moved back to the US, and founded EnActe, with Brook and Carrière.

Looking ahead, Belani describes how the group is now producing a play called *A Widow of No Importance* by Shane Sakhrani, on the subject of Indian widows' right to make their own choices on how to live life.

"This will be followed by *The Case of the Vanishing Firefish*, written by me and Ajay Chowdhury, based on his Ayesha and the Firefish, which showcases an 11-year-old British Indian detective, Ayesha, who saves the world from an environmental disaster," she says.

"We are also presenting a piece called *Snake and Ladder* by Los Angeles-based Navarasa Dance Theater, which showcases a revival of India's ancient martial arts form, Kalari-payattu," she adds.

(SPAN-TWF)

Army technology proves fatal for Amchang elephants

By Michael Shylla

Many of us know that elephants have been part of the Indian culture and mythology from time immemorial. Elephants are worshiped and respected all over India. They are possibly the most important animal in the animal kingdom. Their size, strength, anatomical peculiarities, intelligence, irresistible appeal and usefulness have made them lovable and at the same time terrific. They evoke strong emotions and opinions, but all this is irrelevant to the authorities of Narangi Military Station in Guwahati.

The army-elephant tussle in the Narangi Military Station is causing a serious concern for the authorities of Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary, NGOs and animal lovers. The military station is sharing a common border with the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary. The sanctuary has an estimated hundreds of wild elephants and most of them enter the military station which falls on the path of the pachyderms in search of food and water. In view of this, the army station has set up permanent cemented barriers with sharp iron spikes (6 inches tall) to secure its supply depot, which elephants use to enter frequently in search of food.

Gargaraj Nath, a senior forest guard on duty at the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary, Bonda narrated a sad incident that took place in December 2018 when one of its female elephants was seriously hurt and injured in the foot while crossing a sharp iron-spike barrier put up by the army.

By the time the nine-year-old otherwise healthy elephant was found with her injuries, the wound was in a bad shape and the animal could no longer move or walk. She was treated by the veterinary doctors in the military



area. It was a terrible condition. The elephant became emaciated due to severe illness of septicemia and fractured bones in the leg and foot and died in March 2019.

The forest guard also told during the past one year, two more elephants died under similar circumstances and

another injured animal could be treated effectively. It is also learnt from the villagers working in the military campus that elephants are regularly bited with traumatic injuries on their body and are roaming around the military station.

According to records with Guwahati

Wildlife Division, the carcass of a 9-10 year old, 1500 kg male elephant was found near a stream in the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary in Guwahati on March 4, 2019. The post-mortem report noted externally there are various punctured wounds on the right fore and hind legs. The report said the wild

elephants died due to septicemia. A month before the female elephant died at the Narangi Military Station, the Forest Department had warned against the "cruel measures that would defeat the very point of wildlife protection".

The Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary also wrote to the Indian Army and

requested it to "do away with (such) detrimental measures against innocent animals" as the sharp iron spikes have seriously injured many animals in the past and also killed five elephants of the sanctuary. This kind of cruel efforts to keep elephants at bay is definitely going to defeat the very point of Wildlife Protection and Preservation that the Forest Department had written.

The initial reports state that the cause of deaths of many elephants is due to "septicemia" and fractures (of legs) while noting injuries to the elephants' legs. However, it is the nature of the injuries which had led the Forest Department to conclude that the deaths were caused by a bed of 6-inch long iron spikes laid down by the Army inside the cantonment adjacent to the sanctuary.

The spiralling cases of man-elephant conflict had been a raging issue in Assam and adjacent areas of North Bengal. Since 2010, 214 elephants and 761 people have died in the state with the rates of both human and elephant casualties increasing every year.

The World Wildlife Day is observed every year on March 3 to celebrate and create awareness on the World's Wild Flora and Fauna. It is celebrated to mark the signing of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in this day in 1973 in Washington DC.

The Assam government should take immediate and proper steps to tackle and stop the unlawful, brutal and uncivilised act of the army which is against the law passed and constituted by Parliament on forest and wildlife laws, implemented by the states of the country.

(The author is former director of the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Photo division)

Take admission decision carefully

By Ranjan K Baruah

Everyone has a dream to study in a reputed college. Institutes of repute are in demand as many students apply for admission but not all can make to those institutes. Now it's time to take admission for higher studies as results are out. As government institutes are limited, so students have to get admitted in different private colleges or similar institutes. Admission may be for senior secondary, graduation, post graduation or special professional courses. All aspirants must be aware of certain things and they must look at the institutes, especially the private ones, carefully before taking admission.

Look at the proper affiliation of the institute.

Look at the campus placement and records of the previous placements.

Try to connect to alumni of the institutes. This is not easy but can be done with the help of internet and other social media platforms.

Search in the website properly about the institution. You can read about the review in different magazines or websites.

Take proper counselling from career counsellors. A career counsellor is different and admission agents/representatives from a particular institute are different.

Some colleges might advertise that they are offering free education to students belonging to Scheduled Tribe or Scheduled Caste. In this regard, I would like to appeal to students and guardians to be vigilant. There are scholarships for students of northeastern region but that does not mean that everyone will get scholarships. We must check the proper documentation of the colleges whether they have proper papers in connection with scholarships or not. Apart from students and guardians, I would appeal civil society to be alert and aware so that no institute can cheat students from the region.

Success does not mean only getting good marks in board exams. It depends on your skill too to be successful. Students not getting good marks should not be upset but they should plan and move ahead in life. Proper planning with authentic information will take us nearer to success academically or from other perspectives. Students may try for some technical lines like taking admission in ITI after passing secondary or senior secondary examina-



tion. There are many skills training programmes in the state and one may choose and select the trade and get training accordingly.

Our career is in our hands and we can make it bright and vibrant or we can spoil it. Students must remember that no one else can change their life or make good careers. Others may advise or provide information but it is up to students how they take it in life and move ahead. Let us congratulate all those who have done well in board exams and we wish best wishes in life. At the same time we would like to appeal to those who could not do well or did not get good marks to make proper planning now and move ahead in life to be successful in life.

Update:

HDFC Bank Educational Crisis Scholarship Support 2019: HDFC Bank Educational Crisis Scholarship Support 2019 invites applications from students who are unable to bear the cost of education and are at a risk of dropping out due to a personal or family crisis. The key objective of the scholarship is to provide assistance to these students, to tide over a difficult situation without adverse impact on their education. Aspirants may apply before June 15.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

CAMPUS CALL

Manual scavenging & why it's still an option

By Brinda Das

Imagine yourself driving past an open sewage drain in your luxury car. Most certainly, you will be forced to shut the windows due to the unbearable stench and turn on your AC. Now if you multiply this smell by a magnitude of 1,000, you're still likely to fall short of what it actually is. This is something which is not ideally suitable for humans to be exposed to.

However, even in the 21st century where people use machines and gadgets to carry out the most trivial tasks in their daily life, jobs like manual scavenging still continues to exist in society. By definition, manual scavenging refers to the practice of handling, managing and treating human excreta and other waste products using bare hands or with most common tools such as brooms and buckets. It is undoubtedly the most disgraceful job to be involved in and very little has been done by the government and authorities concerned in our country to ease the process of doing it. Although laws have been passed in 1993 and 2013 to ban manual scavenging, the practice still continues and no strict action has been taken to curb it.

Normally, workers involved in these jobs get inside sewage or septic tanks and take out all the filth in bulk with their bare hands, bearing the foul smell and coming in contact with several types of germs, toxic gases and other lethal contaminated substances. This makes them prone to various water and air-borne diseases such as cholera, typhoid, malaria, hepatitis and cardio-vascular diseases which cause death at a young age. Every year hundreds of manual scavengers die of such health complications.

Manual scavenging is mostly carried out by Dalits and it is not just associated with caste but also a gender-based issue — 80-90 per cent of manual scavengers are women who work for a bare minimal wage which is humiliating. Although manual scavenging is



Google Images

not a choice considering the utter lack of hygiene and health hazards associated with it, it cannot be eliminated completely either. So what are the potential alternatives that we can look for?

New mechanised machines and equipment should be designed and introduced which can clean filth from sewages, septic tanks, manholes, railway tracks and so on. If huge investments could be made on other infrastructural developments such as multiple lane highways, bridges, etc there could be no reason for which we cannot come up with innovative solutions to overcome this problem. All we require is the will and attention it deserves.

Development of infrastructure to set up sewage pipes and septic tanks of good quality is also very important so that there is no leakage and to ensure that machines and equipment could be easily used for cleaning them.

Sanitation workers should be made to use proper equipment and oxygen masks while working so that minimal manual intervention is required while cleaning and also making sure that they are unaffected by the lack of hygiene in such places. Also, awareness should be promoted among them about the ill-effects of such jobs.

People should be freed from discrimination based on caste and

gender and alternative livelihoods should be provided to them irrespective of their social strata.

To conclude, manual scavenging certainly is not a choice and concrete steps should be taken in the right direction to adopt more effective ways to manage wastes so that people involved in it can take up better and respectable ways to make a living.

The country needs to rid itself of inherent casteism. As a progressive youth, I believe giving up my surname would take away my privilege and lessen the persistent caste discrimination in the nation.

One of the most astonishing legacies of Hinduism which began centuries ago since the advent of our society and continues till date impacting every aspect of our living is casteism.

Caste-based discrimination is primarily a practice based on which people in our society are broadly categorised into four groups, namely Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras and a number of other sub-castes. This division was made based on people's occupation but it continues to affect several areas of our life and deprives us of future prospects in terms of career and job opportunities irrespective of our talents and skills.

The Brahmins, being at the top of the hierarchy are generally considered to hold the topmost positions

whereas the Sudras and the Dalits are meant to do the most menial of occupations such as manual scavenging, daily wage labourers and so on.

Since independence, the Government of India has taken several measures for uplift of the lower caste people such as introducing quotas during admission in premier educational institutions, reservations in jobs applications and many other forms of subsidies. However, little has been done to eradicate this system completely and this is indeed the need of the hour now. Due to the caste based preferences, many students and job seekers do not get the opportunities that they truly deserve even if they outperform the candidates falling under the categories who can avail of the reservation system.

As a prospective youth, I firmly believe that giving up my surname and using only my first name in any form of application will go a long way to overcome this problem. Instead of giving preferences based on caste, the privileges should be given based on family incomes as a lot of people are unable to afford the fees to study in premier institutions.

The youths have every right to get the opportunities they deserve. So using only the first name and ignoring the surname will help in minimizing the favouritism involved in the preferences that some people get and many others don't merely based on the caste or the sect they belong to.

Caste-based discrimination promotes inequality and people belonging to the lower caste have to face a lot of humiliation. It's one of the stunning examples of human rights violation. Hence a system needs to be introduced according to which the caste of the people cannot be determined easily. Perhaps, giving up the surnames and using only the first name for any enrolment can help in doing away with this age old system.

(The author is senior copy editor, The New Indian Express)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MAY 19, 2019

Full Moon on your solar return chart will enhance and optimize your creativity and imagination. This will give a potent surge to your career. Also as imagination would be an asset this year remember to stay within the realms of pragmatism. Your abilities come in for recognition and your status will also improve. Moreover relationships will be a big theme this year. There could be the end of one and start to another relationship or a romance. Emotions and feelings would come to the fore so be aware of this. Take care of your health as there could be some emotional stress at times.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You are individualistic brilliant and daring in professional aspects as new projects get under way. This is an exceptionally exciting time as professional and business opportunities are offered to you during this time. You could be impatient in love and relationships as you are overflowing with energy this week. Relationships take on a lighthearted aspect as children play an important role. You are more stimulated by all that is unconventional during this cycle, and your ideas are original and progressive now.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You win debates, competitions and sports with your dynamic energy and power. Emotional attachments and relationships are rewarded with reciprocity. Some interesting people are drawn to you and invite you to work with them. This is a good time to attend to matters that require attention since you are received well by others. Think about the attachments you have-to things, people, and routines— and consider which ones are dragging you down. This is a time when competitive energies and the ego are on a bit of a break.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You would be able to face truths, deal with emotional choices or difficult situations. Your position of power and authority is maintained despite many changes all around. You can draw correct conclusions from previous knowledge of people you meet again personally when making important decisions. Business projects and associations are opening up and widening your horizons so you need to think expansively from now onwards. A new cycle begins with the old order finishing as inner and outer changes are on the cards. Health problems are resolved and your energy is restored.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Personal relations are packed with emotions and feelings and you enjoy the company of loved ones. Practical details are to be dealt with clarity and efficiently. You may be involved in meetings with business associates, as financial and business dealings would bring good results and gains. You can count on your professional and personal partners, as they stand by you. You will work in a free and unrestricted space. Physical energy and good health allow you to tackle busy schedules.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Your actions and emotions are balanced as you bring more accuracy in your work area. You connect with new people and discuss important business matters. Your professional skills wisdom and craft is appreciated and fresh opportunities for expansion are made available to you. Personal relations are satisfying and you have plenty of goodwill and friendships around you. Your partner is especially supportive. You could be attracted to new people and ideas as you are open and receptive. But you must conserve your financial resources for priorities that have to be met at the end of the week.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 24)

The unpredictable is likely to happen and that too when you least expect it. Surprises are in store for you in professional and personal matters. It would be best to be open and receptive in personal relations and family situations. A flexible approach in the work area is recommended. New people may come into your life and influence your decisions and

direction. Don't be thrown by new developments. Balance in all areas and field of activities is recommended this week. You could be depleted of resources and forces if you don't manage them properly. Meditation and spiritual pursuits can be rewarding and worth pursuing.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This week opens up a world of romance and love in personal relations. You are gracious with family and children. You are likely to be involved in creative pastimes. You would express yourself in a gracious and exalted manner and influence people in authority this week. You may handle more than one project at the same time with expertise and success. Commercial transactions and business deals could be conducted effectively this week. Money matters take priority, as some unexpected expenditures have to be met. End of the week brings fresh energy, love and romance in important relationships.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You are likely to spend time in different places and work closely in new associations as you combine good luck and good management. You share some memorable moments with a loved one. You are in touch with an innocence that comes from a life lived fully, which also has a quality of wisdom and the acceptance of the ever changing wonders of life. It would be good to say what you feel as you would be appreciated for your honesty. Good luck in finances and opportunities is encouraging. You are restless and move from one task to the other and pay impromptu visits to friends.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You are bold, courageous and frank while dealing with controversial, professional and family matters. You are likely to meet well known authoritative people and share ideas and spend a fruitful time in their association. A stimulating project should be taken as a challenge that would further and promote your business prospects. Good planning and management lead to progressive and productive ventures. You may take a short break before starting on a new project to renew your energy. You are able to achieve a lot at home and at work with youthful energy.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

Your social life is expansive and a variety of people connect with you. You are stronger and wiser after having gone through trouble and difficulty. It would be wiser to face difficult people and situations rather than escape as there would be victory and success in professional ventures. Don't take the one you love for granted but show your love and appreciation. Communications from overseas are hopeful and exciting as business opportunities are extended to you. Meditation is needed for gaining deeper insight into personal relations and complex situations.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You have the ability to stand alone and have strong positive energy. You are independent, creative, original, ambitious, determined and self-assured. Adopting a realistic, practical and disciplined approach towards life would bring harmony at home. You would have good support from family members. While you work on one project another suddenly gains more importance and demands more attention. A financial windfall is possible as some backlog is handed to you after a period of time. Sports and physical activities keep you fit and energetic.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You are fortunate as things turn out well in difficult situations at work and home during this period. Your financial situation looks promising if you manage it well personally rather than trust upon others. Personal relationships are warm and comfortable as you spend beautiful moments with your loved one. A relaxed and light attitude would help to overcome negative thoughts. Examining the past in order to improve the future is certainly worthwhile, as long as you don't expend all your energy. Creative opportunities should not be ignored as it is likely to bring substantial professional material gain.

Brutality for luxury

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



Many years ago, I asked a stylish, older, film actress from Mumbai whether she would be the ambassador of my animal welfare organisation People for Animals. I had been to her house twice for dinner, and she had made the most amazing vegetarian food, and kept grumbling about how awful meat was.

She refused, and her explanation was that while she did not eat meat generally, she could not do without pate foie gras. Everyday.

Pate Foie Gras is French for fat liver paste. It is a luxury item because few countries allow it to be made, due to the extreme cruelty involved. It is the cancerous liver of a duck or goose fattened by force in a process known as gavage. Birds spend their lives in semi-darkness. Till eight weeks old they are confined to cages to prevent exercise, and fed a diet designed to promote rapid growth. Force-feeding begins when the birds are between 8 and 10 weeks old. For 12 to 21 days, ducks and geese are subjected to gavage. Every day, between 2 and 4 pounds of grain and fat are forced down the birds' throats through a feeding tube. The tube "is pushed 5 inches down their throats, and more food than they want is gunned into their stomachs three times a day".

The birds' livers, which become engorged from a carbohydrate-rich diet, grow to be more than 10 times their normal size (a disease called "hepatic steatosis"). Most of the ducks/geese are lame and unable to walk without using their wings for support. Some ducks move by pushing their bodies along the floor. All of them are severely stressed and ill. Most throats develop skin lesions and neck wounds, and get maggots in them. The carcasses show wing fractures and severe tissue damage to the throat muscles.

When the bird's liver weighs 1-1.5 kg, (these livers are felt every day by farm workers, causing even more pain to the bird), its throat is slit and the liver taken out. The rest of the bird is thrown away. French chef Jean-Joseph Clause created and popularised pate de foie gras in 1779, and was awarded a gift of twenty pistols by King Louis

XVI (probably to kill more animals). He obtained a patent for the dish in 1784 and began a business supplying pate to the rich. By 1827, Strasberg (and now Toulouse) was known as the goose-liver capital of the world.

Pate is made by removing the veins, gristle and membrane. The liver is chopped and made into a paste combined with wine, salt, herbs, mushrooms and sometimes veal (which is the meat of a baby calf starved to death so that its meat turns white). This paste is pressed down to form a cake. The product is exported to all parts of the world in several forms — the paste in tins, the plain cooked livers, sausages and puree.

France produces more than 20,000 tonnes of foie gras each year. Only five countries still produce foie gras: Belgium, Romania, Spain, France and Hungary.



In July 2014, India banned the import of foie gras. Its production is banned in 35 countries. However, foie gras can still be imported into, and purchased in, these countries. The European Union is working to phase out the force-feeding of birds entirely by 2020.

Foie gras is unhealthy for humans. It derives 85 per cent of its calories from fat: a 2-ounce serving contains 25 gm of fat and 85 mg of cholesterol.

Companies all over the world are now working furiously on creating meat from animal cells. The end product already has a name: clean meat. The science for cultured meat is an outgrowth of the field of biotechnology known as tissue engineering.

The initial stage of growing cultured meat is to collect cells that proliferate rapidly — embryonic stem cells, adult stem cells, myosatellite cells or myo-

blasts. It has been claimed that, conditions being ideal, two months of cultured meat production could deliver up to 50,000 tonnes of meat from 10 pork muscle cells. Once the scale and cost are dealt with, the price of cultured, or clean meat, will come down to the same level as animal meat.

A company called Hampton Creek Foods, founded in 2011 in California by Josh Tetrick and Josh Balk, has chosen to make Pate Foie Gras in this way. With its team of food scientists, biochemists, and engineers, Hampton Creek is a technology rather than a food company. As of 2014, it has secured \$30 million in funding, and is backed by six billionaires, including Bill Gates, Jerry Yang (Founder of Yahoo), and Li Ka-Shing, the wealthiest person in Asia.

They are now spending millions of dollars making the world's first clean foie gras, while developing cell lines for various other meats. Like most of the clean food companies in America, many of their scientists are Indian.

One of those scientists is a stem cell biologist called Aparna Subramanian who grows the farm animal cell lines. Why Pate? The company feels that it is a high end luxury product which is technically easier to make by multiplying cells, and which chefs and foodies want as it is a status symbol. Liver is easier and cheaper to grow than muscle. If you feed liver cells a lot of sugar, they get fatter and fatter, to the point where they mimic the hepatic lipidosis.

Trials are on to get the cultured fatty liver to the exact taste of the current foie gras in the market.

The current sales of foie gras are \$3 billion globally. If Hampton Creek became the first company to be allowed to sell Foie Gras in California, it would headline the progress that clean meats are making.

Tasters of the Hampton Creek pate say the pate is meaty, rich, buttery, savoury and very decadent.

The plan right now is to commercialise Pate Foie Gras, the first cultured meat of an animal product made without using animal. Once it is on the market I will send masses of it to the actress, and then perhaps she will agree to be our brand ambassador.

(To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org)

“We must accept that this creative pulse within us is God's creative pulse itself.”

--- Joseph Chilton Pearce

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, MONDAY, MAY 20, 2019

‘Advantage’ BJP

CURIOSLY, exit polls on Sunday predicted a clear win for the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls. When several agencies came up with similar conclusions, and since some opinion polls in the past had made correct projections, the claims this time cannot altogether be wished away. Notable however is the fact that such a mood was not evident in the campaign, when the voters generally were silent, except for some violent activism in West Bengal. One will have to wait till May 23 to get a final picture. The hints from the exit polls this time are that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will have the last laugh, and the principal Opposition the Congress party failed to win the trust of the people. Even the Hindi belt states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, as also Delhi, are projected by the exit polls as turning pro-BJP in this round of polls. Too much of optimism or pessimism on either side at this juncture is unwarranted, as official results are yet to come.

If this is going to be true, the Opposition has clearly messed up with their prospects – by not standing united and fighting the polls separately, with a suggestion that a post-poll coalition can be cobbled a la Karnataka. This plea was advanced mainly by West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, for fear that a pre-poll alliance will have to have the Congress in the forefront. Her prime ministerial ambitions did not allow her to proceed in that direction. The Opposition, as a whole, would now seem to have paid a heavy price. It would appear that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP chief Amit Shah, as also Rahul Gandhi, had some advance hints about the way the exit poll results were shaping up. Their assertions and body language proved that. Rahul Gandhi, who spoke to the media at the end of the campaign, was clearly downbeat. By contrast, Modi who shared space with Amit Shah at a party press conference in Delhi stated emphatically that he would return to power. Shah went to the extent of claiming, “We would get some 300 seats this time.” The exit poll results seem to veer round to such a figure. It is not time for either side to have the last laugh. Exit poll results could go wrong as well. It will still be advisable to wait for three more days. If a fractured verdict is avoided, as also a hung parliament, that would be the real victory for the nation.

General Election 2019: Which side will the scale tilt?

By H H Mohrmen

Predicting the outcome of the recently held general election is not going to be as difficult as rocket science and it does not need a prophet to predict the outcome of the 2019 election either, because everybody knows that it is going to be a hung parliament. Even the leaders of the two major national parties and contenders for government formation know it very well, that no party or not even the alliances that they have will be able to come up with a comfortable majority to form the government. If the two alliances led by the BJP and the Congress would ever be able to form the government, they will need the support of one or more regional parties from across the country. It is therefore as clear as daylight that the next government is a going to be a coalition government.

Of course the two alliances led by the BJP and the Congress have no doubt claimed that they will form the next government with the support of their alliance partners. The NDA is confident that along with partners it will be able to form the next government and Modi will be the Prime Minister of the country yet again. Similarly the Congress and its UPA alliance partners are also claiming that they will have the numbers to form the government and replace Narendra Modi. Both the alliances are confident that the people will give them the mandate to form the next government in the country.

Then there is another contender to the top honour and that is the coalition in the offing, an alliance of the regional parties or the mahagatbandhan. The idea of having a third front in which the regional parties will rule the roost and form the next government was floated even before the general election 2019 was declared, but the idea did not take off. Now can this idea be revived after the election was declared? Is the third front a viable alternative? Is it even a workable idea which is worth considering? These are few questions that can be answered even as the trend of the results start

appearing on May 23. But there is one question the answer to which is already there for everybody to see and that is the fact that the regional parties are going to be the deciding factors post May 23. One thing that is sure is that post the 2019 general election results will see the rise of the regional parties in different regions of the country. Whether this is going to be good or bad for the country is what we will have to wait and see, but again another major outcome of the 2019 election is that the regional parties are here to stay at least for a few more general elections.

In the situation where none of the alliance

of its leaders during the campaign will have an adverse affect on the party performance in the election. Prime Minister Modi and the party president have constantly attacked the regional party leaders during the campaign. They targeted people like Arvind Kejriwal, Mayawati and Mamata - leaders who are going to play a very important role post May 23. Of course one may say that during elections anybody can say anything against anybody and that will be forgotten because that is part of the election process, but does this apply to the relationship of the leaders of the BJP and the aforementioned leaders of the regional parties? Of

Then the tall claims of using digital camera and transmitting a photograph to Advani only proves wrong what he has been saying all along and throughout his campaign trail that the Congress has done nothing in the last seven decades.

But the Himalayan blunder that the BJP has committed during the election was to allot Pragya Singh Thakur the party ticket to contest against Digvijay Singh from Bhopal. She is an accused no doubt and can of course contest the election, but the first blunder she committed was when she said she cursed Hemant Karkare to death. And the final nail in the coffin was when during election campaign she praised Nathuram Godse as a true patriot. That epitomises the kind of person she is and whether this will have its affect on the election results we will only know after the judgement day.

The Congress on the other hand, except for Rahul having to apologise to the top court for some of his remarks on the Rafael deal, by and large the campaign was free from controversy. But the most important point to note is although the Congress and other parties were fighting against each other during the election, yet, they were able to maintain decorum and leave an avenue open for them to work with each other if and when it is necessary.

Even as polling has ended the other question that the people need to ask is whether it was necessary to have an election which extended to more than a month? Was it really necessary to have a 7 phase election or is it safe to conclude that the reason that the campaign became toxic and that the vitriolic exchange was at its all time high was because of the pressure built from the prolonged electioneering? Whether the protracted election helped in tilting the election in favour of the ruling party, or the opposition only time will tell. The answer to this question will be known only after the final results are declared.

It is not only anti-incumbency which is going to have its impact on the performance of the alliance and particularly the BJP which is the major party in the alliance, but the attitude of its leaders during the campaign will have an adverse affect on the party performance in the election.

partners could muster the required strength to form a government, the next option is for the two alliances to try and rope in the regional parties which are not in alliance with either the NDA or the UPA. The onus is therefore on the leader of the parties which leads the alliance if they are able to convince the parties which are not their alliance partners to support them to form the government. The question is, which of the two alliances are more attractive to the other parties?

The leader of the NDA by virtue of being in the government in the last five years, would have to be on defensive and the anti-incumbency factor is already taking its toll on the alliance. It is not only anti-incumbency which is going to have its impact on the performance of the alliance and particularly the BJP which is the major party in the alliance, but the attitude

course the saying goes - In politics there are no permanent friends or enemies, but like in a football match there are just opponents which are very temporary. But the campaign in the last election has reached an all time low and there are several instances of leaders hitting below the belt from both sides of the divide. Therefore one wonders if they can reconcile, or if this is possible in the near future. Surely there is always a possibility of reconciliation, but that will take time and not as immediate as just after the results are declared.

It is also true that Prime Minister Modi is his own worst enemy; everything he has done and said returns like a boomerang and hits him back in a double whammy. Calling the leader of the major opposition party a ‘Papu’ has backfired and now people know who does not have a basic understanding of a simple theory of how a radar works.

\$7 Billion Election Money does talk!

By Shivaji Sarkar

Elections are becoming trickier, opaque and a game of money power. Rigging polls is no more a hush-hush matter. In the run up to the 17th parliamentary election, muscle power and not so confidence-building EVMs are overtaking voters. The cost is increasing manifold and some estimates suggest that Indian elections are as expensive as those of the US presidency.

It is known, no electronic device is foolproof. The introduction of VVPAT print trail has been a welcome move, but the Election Commission's reluctance to count all printed slips foxes the voter. Its reasoning that it takes longer time in declaring results is a flimsy argument but somewhere, though clumsily, it wants to say it would be an additional expense.

Nirvachan Sadan forgets that an election, which used to be over and done with, in about a month has now been extended to three months. Is there any rationale? It appears that earlier the Commission was more efficient and did a mammoth job in a shorter period even with ballot papers. Can it therefore take the trouble to explain why it held polling in two constituencies 15 days apart in the tiny State of Tripura?

A matching count of VVPAT slips it is estimated would not add more than a day and therefore the EC's reluctance is not easy to comprehend. It must not forget that VVPAT slips are necessary for sheer credibility of poll process, else it all adds up to nagging suspicion.

Poll expenses in 2014 were Rs 3870 crore, as per the Election Commission data. In 2019, it is anticipated the exercise may cost at least 50 per cent more. But let us not forget that the first election, through ballot papers, in 1952 cost Rs 10.5 crore.

However, these expenses are only of the Central government and do not include cost of State law and order machinery among others, work loss in offices, banks and schools, etc. Thus, actual expenses are rising and so is the blatant, scientific, artistic rigging and buying of votes. It is not surprising when Open Secrets.org, which tracks money trail in US politics, says about \$6.5 billion was spent in US presidential race.

There are myriad expenses. Earlier it used to be just advertisements and some event managements. Now it has expanded to media management, social media, paid and fabricated news, continuous bombarding on the voter with news or non-news or mud-slinging or unreal videos, et al. These are not easy to calculate. In the Indian context, New Delhi-based Centre for Media Studies estimated the total expenses in 2019 would be around Rs 50,000 crore or \$7 billion, which is 2 billion more than in 2014, stated to be \$5 billion.

Even modest calculations would put another approximate Rs 3000 to 5000 crore increase in EC's official spending. Besides, it's no secret that cash, even up to Rs 5000 a vote, was doled out by some candidates in the 2018 Assembly elections. Add to this other costs involved in use of choppers, special flights, buses and other transportation modes by political parties and their candidates.

While the election process in West Bengal and Tripura have hit headlines due to blatant violations, it would be similar in many other States, but with more finesse. These polls also confirm that Modi's note-ban has had little impact on entire process and it remains as tricky as it was during the days of ‘vote chhapa’ in Bihar or Haryana. Even the

first election was not free of it. There are narrations how musclemen were engaged by influential people, then zamindars and petty royalties, who were afraid of losing their clout in 1952.

This culture exists today too. There are brazen claims by some party workers of pressing the EVM button 150 times each in different booths. The truth is not easy to verify but the claim itself is not unbelievable. Apparently political parties seem to master it well if we look at West Bengal, Kerala or hinterlands of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh or the North-East. These have monetary cost too.

Particularly in West Bengal it is an art practiced since the days of Left Front regime. Then it was called scientific rigging and soft to harsh methods were utilised. Now days State party cadres are more subtle—they visit individual homes across the State, including Kolkata, greet voters, have tea with them and ‘politely’ leave saying, “Dada for five years we have taken care of you. Please do not go to the polling booth”.

Other times, it is not always that polite. In villages particularly, party cadres visit homes and put indelible ink on the voters' finger, saying “Your vote is cast. Don't take the trouble any more to go to the polling booth”. Other subterfuges include driving the voters on polling day to a picnic spot instead.

The violence as witnessed in Bankura, Ghaatal and Midnapore is the result of rivalry between cadres for dominating an area. The winner controls local businesses, real estate, security agencies and tolabazi – extortion and contributes to the party fund. And this is vital for a post-election scenario.

Recall, West Bengal perfected the art in 2018 panchayat polls. Not only did these elections cost 112 lives but one-third of the panchayat seats were won by TMC candidates uncontested. The rivals were simply forced to withdraw nomination by sheer force or threats. Further, the modus operandi goes beyond polling day. Transportation and storage of EVMs as always with ballot boxes has been tricky and suspect. Then there is the problem of secrecy and credibility of electronic voting. Fiddling with an electronic device, without even physically touching it, is possible.

There is no denying that elections are becoming far more expensive as political parties are receiving funds through election bonds, and yet declared contributions have seen a reduction, increasing the anonymity. The Association for Democratic Rights has thus argued in the Supreme Court against such funding, alleging black money donations through shell companies.

In a statement in the Lok Sabha, the government said that in 2017-2018, 520 electoral bonds worth Rs 222 crore were issued, of which 511 worth Rs 221 crore were redeemed. Of these, the BJP received Rs 210 crore, the Congress Rs 5 crore and other parties Rs 6 crore. Obviously, this suggests that smaller parties such as TMC, BSP, SP, BJD, TDP, TRS, AIADMK, DMK or even those in J&K, Kerala and elsewhere are not cash-strapped. Whoever may be winner of 2019 elections, the sanctity of the process has been undermined. Post-poll, the Election Commission, political parties and civil society organisations need to ponder whether India's democracy was held hostage by those who vow to cherish it? ---INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Towards Uniform Building Bye-laws for Meghalaya

Editor,
Hamlet Dohling, the Meghalayan Urban Affairs Minister had in an interview with local TV channel aired the view that a single Uniform Building Byelaw, applicable throughout the length and breadth of the state, is the need of the hour. Frankly speaking, this is a long awaited level-headed truth, sans any political colouring and it is hoped that it finds the support of all sensible thinking people of Meghalaya. It speaks of an approach towards holistic governance where the interest, convenience and safety of the common man finds central place in the planning and execution of administration.

If (God forbid but if it does) a big earthquake strikes the state, the first casualties will be the insecure, unsafe, rickety structures constructed without any technical supervision and regulation. An earthquake will not discriminate, as foolish power hungry politicians do, between a municipal area and a 6th

Schedule area. All unsafe structures anywhere will be flattened out contributing greatly to the heavy casualties that will occur. Construction of quake proof buildings therefore is the first priority for the safety of the common man. MUDA, State Govt and ADCs working separately and at tangent to each other will not help. The common citizens' interests which all have sworn to uphold therefore calls for unity and uniformity of action on this sensitive and dangerous issue.

State Govt and MUDA have the technical manpower and expertise for the job. Why can't this be shared with the District Councils in 6th Schedule areas? The fees too can be shared on a percentage basis. This will greatly reduce unnecessary expenses and also ensure maximum utilisation of scarce technical resources. Of course since we speak here of the convenience of the people and since almost all structures are now in the RCC mode, State Govt will have to provide these supervisory and regulatory services at least in every Block HQ. Online time bound applications, help of IT enabled services and e-governance should be made full use of to reduce time lag.

Accountability and non harassment of applicants should be ensured. Actually this calls for more power to the people and less red-tapism! The time has come to start thinking out of the box and out of suffocating petty politics dominated by small people with small minds.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

The Unprecedented

Editor,
Sunday May 19, was the last day of polls. This has been the most unprecedented of all elections. That the Supreme Court had to say to the Election Commission these words, “You are toothless”, then “You woke up now”, “You can now watch the biopic”, then “S.C. seeks response on EVM's, V.V.P.A.T's complaint”, all show that the golden era of the EC is now over. What TN Seshan and JM Lyngdoh strove for is all undone. The last is a very serious case. The three complaints among which, “Delhi man claims that there is a mismatch between vote cast by him and the VVPAT slip” is a matter to be studied. For the retired DGP

of Assam who also claimed that the VVPAT slip did not have the name of the person he voted for but that he was scared of having to pay a fine of Rs 10,000 and face six months imprisonment if an enquiry should find the claim to be false, I find this highly illogical. How could a high ranking retired police officer take such a thing lying down? How can such votes creep in? Who will judge the deviant behaviour of the EVM/VVPAT machine? And what happens if this erring EVM functions normally again during tests in front of the Presiding Officer, the polling agents and the elector? Challenge votes should never be confused with identity challenge when a polling agent has to pay Rs 2 to challenge the identity of the voter. How can we imagine an elector approaching the Presiding Officer and saying, “Look sir, I stamped on the lantern but unfortunately the seal landed on the bicycle!” This would have looked ridiculous in the ballot paper era. Every phase is not without glitches. People have returned home on account of EVM malfunction since no one knows how long it would take to undo the malfunction. Also paper

jamming and EVM replacements are the talk of the day. The American Telephone and Telegraph Bell USA had fabricated IC chips so beautifully that our GPS had served us for nearly thirty years. The common one the Electronic Control Unit (ECU) that drives the engine for adhering to pollution safety norms, enables us to drive cars for lakhs of kilometres. Then we have smart phones never to be replaced unless you compete with your neighbours. All these are IC chip inventions. Let us accept one fact that while the EVM errs in recording a vote it is the electors that suffer. In 2024 let us accept our limitations in resorting to the use of modern gadgets and revert to ballot papers which most advanced countries are still using.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Shillong 14

Meghalaya's tourism potential

Editor,
It's interesting to learn that very few know what efforts are being made to uplift and improve the tourism sector at various levels both from the

government and private entrepreneurs. I was presented with vast details and information about Meghalaya tourism, courtesy the Tourism Department and it this very same information in printed form can be of use to many tourists coming into our state and visiting various places. There is more scope to augment employment in the tourism industry. For example if the government wants it can open a 24 x 7 call centre to man the Tourism Department to cater to the requirements of potential guests and clients. It can create more avenues in marketing rather than having just stand alone offices. Tourism is very lucrative if manned by professionals like Mr Cyril Diengdoh who is a young dynamic officer along with his team. Those in authority need to take a deeper look in at opening a tourism back office under the public-private-partnership (PPP) mode and employ strong lobbies for marketing the tourism products available.

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

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

"The tourism industry has considerable potential to be a sustainability role model in its role as a buyer of goods and other services, from building materials and green construction standards to farm produce."

—Arancha Gonzalez

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Exit polls and their reliability

THE exit polls carried out on Sunday after the last vote was cast has predicted a win for the BJP-NDA alliance. Exits polls are the sum total of public opinion and what a voter informs the surveyor after he/she leaves the polling booth. Hence a lot depends on whether the voter actually gave accurate information. Exit polls somehow trample on the idea of the secret ballot. It presumes that the voter is speaking the truth. Exit polls involve several variables that need to be factored in to arrive at a reasonable rationale. Several exit polls in recent years have gone awry. Hence to rely on exit polls is risky business.

It is instructive to note however, that the Sensex jumped up over 1400 points after the exit polls predicted a win for the NDA. Since Sunday, critics belonging to the combined opposition, particularly the Congress party and the TMC leader, Mamata Banerjee have termed the exit polls as being overstated and "gossip." The most striking example of an exit poll going horrible wrong was the one following the 2004 elections where the NDA was predicted to win between 230 and 275 seats, and the UPA roughly 176 and 190 seats. In the final result the NDA won 187 seats and UPA 219. On its own the BJP won 138 seats and the Congress 145 seats. In the 2009 elections the exit polls managed to get closer to reality. In 2014 the exit polls gave the NDA between 183 and 289 seats, while the UPA tally was projected to be between 92 and 120. When the results were declared on May 16, 2014, the NDA managed 336 seats while the UPA was reduced to just 60 seats. The BJP alone got 282 seats and the Congress plunged to 44 seats.

Exit polls rely heavily on vocal voters but miss out on the silent ones. In a country like India many voters give false responses because of fear of reprisals. However, exit polls have sometimes got it right as in the case of the elections in Assam, West Bengal and Kerala.

The margin of error in an exit poll also called confidence interval, tells us how much we can expect the survey results to reflect the views from the overall population. For instance a 60% "yes" response with a margin of error of 5% means that between 55% and 65% of the general population think that the answer is "yes." Hence there is some amount of extrapolation which again relies on whether the informant is telling the surveyor the truth. Be that as it may, the NDA and its faithful are in a celebratory mood.

Tourism attractiveness of Meghalaya

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

Tourism is primarily a travel for leisure. Although other facets are also associated with it, the 'leisure' component trumps over all others. At the heart of this leisure-orientation, the attractiveness of a particular destination from the perspective of aesthetics and ambience plays an important role. As such, tourism marketing campaigns, promotion and advertisement factor attractiveness as its unique selling proposition (USP), thereby conforming to the age old adage, 'seeing is believing'. Hence, tourism attractiveness can be simply and plainly viewed only from the perspective of beauty and aesthetics. It can be viewed from the prism of pictures, videos, commentaries and so forth. However, in the true sense of the term 'tourism attractiveness' is not a qualitative concept; rather, it is a quantitative representation of the tourism elements thereby assessing the status and shortcomings of tourism development percolating into derivation of growth (and development) strategies. Subsequently, one may wonder as to the tourism attractiveness of Meghalaya (in its true sense). Accordingly, I place the following pointers -

Firstly, what is this construct called 'tourism attractiveness?' To start with, it is a key factor in destination marketing and it generally refers to 'the feelings, beliefs and opinions that an individual has about a destination's perceived ability to provide satisfaction in relation to his/her special vacation needs'. It predominantly assesses 'what a destination can offer to a tourist?' Accordingly, tourism attractiveness is aptly defined as 'the interaction between tourism supply and tourism demand, which in turn depends on the relationship between the availability of existing attractions and the perceived importance of such attractions'. Here, tourism supply includes 'what a destination has to offer' (covering natural resources, culture and events, recreation and entertainment, infrastructure, security and safety, hospitality, etc) and tourism services as an existent component of the supply. On the other hand, tourism demand includes tourist arrivals (domestic and foreign), number of overnights, average stay

duration, tourist spending and so forth. This interaction (between tourism supply and tourism demand) acts as an important indicator of tourism attractiveness and the growth of the tourism sector. Moreover, it can be used as a decision-making tool in planning, marketing and developing appropriate resource allocation strategies.

Secondly, let us look at Meghalaya as a tourism destination. Let us do this in simple language without involving any strategic construct whatsoever. In general, we will find that our hills and valleys are endowed with breathtaking

development in the entire state (and not just focus too much on East Khasi Hills District alone). To add to this, if we can scale and improve upon our services, then the tourism demand is bound to be more robust with vast possibilities of further impacting upon livelihoods.

Thirdly, as stated above, tourism attractiveness is all about the 'interaction' between 'tourism supply' and 'tourism demand'. The point to be noted here is that this interaction works both ways. Tourism supply influences tourism demand and vice versa and the cycle continues to perpetuity. However, the million dollar ques-

development model'. In failing to do so, we will be in continued deprivation of the real socio-economic benefits from tourism and the sector will continue to grow in an unsustainable manner.

Fourthly, a talk on tourism is incomplete without factoring in the 'sustainable/unsustainable' issues. It is important that we view tourism as 'a source of bread and livelihood' and not some source of stop-gap, short-term windfall gain(s). Unless we have this perception, our initiative of tourism development will be bereft of encompassing practices and processes which evoke a degree of sustainability (or even responsibility). As a case in point, look at Shillong in the weekends (and extended holidays). Gradually, our city is turning into a Chandigarh of the Northeast; whereby hoards of people from the nearby states come in to party and pop a merry time with no inclination of being responsible tourists. Alas, this is not the form of tourism development we need. Disturbingly, this trend is emerging in other parts of the state as well. Of course, inebriation is a personal choice; however, this choice must not be exercised to the limit that it starts to define the tourism of a particular place. This trend is to be nipped in the bud before it starts to excessively impact upon the general face of Meghalaya tourism. Clearly, the construct of 'tourism attractiveness of Meghalaya' is faced with challenging times.

Lastly, although tourism has progressed commendably over the years, it must also be noted that tourism is not a panacea. Moreover, the tourism sector is closely related (if you like, dependent) on other developmental departments of the state machinery (the most important being infrastructure). Therefore, any effort towards tourism attractiveness shall require a coordination and synergy across the stakeholders. Well, one might be as blunt in saying: 'either we ship together or we sink together!'

(The Author teaches at NEHU) Benjamin Lyngdoh NEHU Campus Shillong - 793022

Firstly, what is this construct called 'tourism attractiveness?' To start with, it is a key factor in destination marketing and it generally refers to 'the feelings, beliefs and opinions that an individual has about a destination's perceived ability to provide satisfaction in relation to his/her special vacation needs'.

ing beauty which resonates of a vibrant tourism potential and fantastic business opportunities. In addition, we must realize that there is latent tourism potential as well; these are the ones that will drive our competitive advantage. There are pictures/videos on Meghalaya which present an enticing prospect for travel by the leisure seekers. All of these represent the inherent 'tourism supply' of Meghalaya. However, tourism supply also includes services (like accommodation, food, transportation, infrastructure, etc). It is when we add these services that our tourism takes a hit. This is more so in the context of infrastructure (roads, road-side basic sanitary and health services, overall IT connectivity, etc). The end result is that all these issues impact upon 'tourism demand' primarily seen in the context of tourist arrivals. Ideally speaking, our 'tourism carrying capacity' can be a lot more today if we take care of the supply related issues by ensuring a holistic tourism

tion is: where is the starting point? Does supply influence demand first or is it the other way round? Globally, experiences have shown that at the start-up point, supply influences the demand. This is in keeping with the conceptualization of tourism; that we deal with tourism 'products' and market them to the prospective clients (albeit tourism is a service sector). Subsequently, as the process goes on the demand will influence the supply; whereby there will be a demand for certain services by the tourist which will have to be provided for by the host community. Bed and Breakfast and home-stay services of Sohra are a good example of this. This is the crux of how tourism grows and develops in any setting. It is indeed a very simple construct. Hence, the earlier we factor this, the better.

In our context, it is time to revisit our tourism supply related issues. Although, tourism has been operational for years, from the context of a strategic pull, we need to go back to the drawing board and devise a 'sustainable tourism

Post-2019 Elections Will new govt focus on poor?

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

The campaigning and polling for 2019 General elections are over. Those who cast their vote would have done so in the hope for a better future, but those who didn't may have a reason i.e. it hardly matters which coalition occupies the seat of power as their interest gets over shadowed by that of the rich and powerful. Unfortunately, India's State machinery is influenced by the business houses, which have over the years managed to get their interests being taken care of. To put it a little bluntly, money power has and does play a critical role in manipulating politicians and bureaucrats by the corporate.

The pessimism about the future role of political parties stems from the deep political-business nexus that is well known in the country. This perhaps could be a major reason for a good section of the educated class dissociating itself from any political activity due to wrong policies or deep-rooted corruption or lack of moral values of our political parties. Over the years policies have by and large been seen as being framed to make life better for the rich and the upper middle class through increased investment in metros while neglecting rural areas.

And, it is not just the political parties alone but the top judiciary too may have lately become a victim. A bench led by Justice Arun Mishra recently expressed shock at how an order was altered against builder Amrapali, saying it indicated that some influential corporate houses had managed to penetrate the judiciary to manipulate the court staff. However, it is reassuring that the bench ordered a probe into the allegations that "fixers and middlemen" tried to manipulate judicial proceedings.

This apart, an earlier order passed by a bench in Anil Ambani contempt case was reportedly changed after which two court staffers were sacked and a criminal case was lodged. Another example was a CJI bench expressing surprise as the Rafale judgment review not being listed as per schedule.

Clear pointers to the extent the rich and powerful are willing to go to? Worse, it's the governments which fail to prioritise their goals, neglecting the aam janta (public). Take the case of the health sector, which subsequent governments have failed to heal. Though the meagre allocation for health has been highlighted by the undersigned as well as other commentators, a recent report reveals the warped priorities that authorities have.

A study published in International Journal of Drug Policy, reveals that current alcohol consumption patterns cost the national economy more than what the government spends on health every year. It found that after adjusting tax receipts from alcohol sale, the economic loss from adverse effects of alcohol consumption would touch 1.45 per cent of the GDP. For comparison, the government's annual expenditure on health is around 1.1 per cent of the GDP, which may have increased a little presently.

Thus, it comes out that the government has an eye on revenue generated from taxes of alcohol sale without bothering about its effects on health, particularly of the poorer sections. And the study estimated that the economic burden of alcohol-related health conditions by 2050 would be a staggering \$3228 billion, more than India's health budget in 2018.

Then again, let us take the case of manual scavengers, most of which belong to SC or ST groups. According to the 2011 census, there are over 26 lakhs dry latrines in India as opposed to toi-

lets with flush, though these may have changed marginally with the 'toilet revolution' through Swachh Bharat. However, a recent manifesto of the Safai Karmachari Andolon, an organisation working for the rights of manual scavengers, demanded a Right to Life (RL-21) card to ensure free access to education, health care, dignified employment and livelihood and other benefits as per Fundamental Rights given to all citizens under Article 21 of the Constitution. It also demanded pension of Rs 6000 per month. But none of the major political parties considered it worthwhile to even speak of their demands in the course of their campaigning.

The two examples cited suggest that whoever comes to power would follow the same set of policies, with little concern for the under privileged. So if the government doesn't deliver, do we start looking towards an increased private investment in the economy? Perhaps not, as the private sector, as is known, will increase investments only when it is assured of huge profits, directly or indirectly. The health sector for that matter has seen a growth in private hospitals, but these go beyond the reach of the common man.

It is feared that due to ongoing farm and rural distress the trend in Indian planning is bound to witness jobless growth and migration of rural populace to urban areas in search of better livelihood. A reorientation in planning strategy geared towards the rural sector and a sharp focus on the needs and demands of the masses is what should be the aim of the new political dispensation.

It must address the question of how interests of the poor and economically weaker sections can be taken care of. Unless there is an understanding of ground realities and a political will, the much-needed shift in planning and development will elude the nation. Unless the leadership starts thinking in the true Gandhian spirit of working for the community with sincerity, dedication and honesty!

The communists, who demonstrate the maximum community feeling, are nowhere in the new government that may be formed. While the NDA with BJP as the main partner has been perceived to be pro-business by many, the Congress is rethinking strategy of how to woo the masses with its ideas of minimum income guarantee, right to health and other basic amenities, which it should have done long ago.

However, the Congress' suggestion for setting up a separate permanent National Commission on Agricultural Development & Planning is worth a look. It seeks to advise the government on how to make agriculture viable, competitive and remunerative while repealing the Agricultural Produce Market Committee Act which regulates markets in States, and may have a favourable effect on the rural sector.

With a new government set to assume office within the next few days, the political parties are bound to make an analysis of went wrong or right for them. And while there is no dearth of analysts within the parties, the policies need a re-look to meet the economic and social challenges. Perhaps, a study of manifestoes of all put together could offer an outline of how to fill the developmental gap. More importantly, the violence and hatred that was manifest during the election campaign must be overcome and sincere efforts made to integrate the society to serve the interests of each and every community. Is it asking for too much? ---INFA)

TO THE EDITOR

NEIGRIHMS needs stents

Editor,

The call for change of guards in NEIGRIHMS is no doubt most welcome but that is not going to remove the malaise and stents of this important health institute. What is important now is to have a high level independent thorough probe into the goings on in this hospital. The probe has to be incisive and should cover all aspects of the Institute's functioning beginning at the top and going right to the bottom. Indeed the Institute requires thorough revamping in all aspects which of course includes effective administration and proper functioning of all the Departments. The problem plaguing the Institute comes mainly from the people who run it, namely the Director and the heads of departments. It is here that the truth should be uncovered. The malaise is deep and that is the Institute itself that is in immediate need of stents. The earlier the probe (diagnoses) the better.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via-Email

Exit polls: winner and losers

Editor,

The exit polls conducted by leading agencies on Sunday projected that the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is all set to retain power at the Centre, riding yet another 'Narendra Modi wave.' What could be the main deciding factor that has tilted the balance in favour of Modi? It was none other than the retaliatory attack undertaken by our army in Pakistan's territory days after the Pulwama terror attack. Modi and his party BJP had given wide coverage and the credit for it was always claimed by Modi. During his election speeches, he spoke volumes on his brave acts of attacking Pakistan, and it won him millions of people's support. After all, he always exhibited much

optimism and high dose of confidence in dealing with problems especially international affairs, which also made him dearer to people.

For Rahul Gandhi, however, all is not lost. There is still hope as the exit polls may sometimes prove to be wrong. But even if Rahul loses this time, there is still chance for him the next time, and he can prepare and learn a lot in between before taking on the mantle of Prime Minister. For the last one month we waited patiently and two more days will pass soon enough. Let us all wait for the day with bated breath.

Yours etc.,
T K Nandanam
Kochi - 15

Tragedy of consuming mushroom

Editor,

It is profoundly heart-rending to know that on May 6 last in the remote village of Nongsynrang, West Khasi Hills district two siblings of a family died, their mother and grandfather

were hospitalized and the other three relatives were taken ill with less seriousness for consuming wild mushrooms which turned out to be of poisonous strains. Undoubtedly, it is next to impossible to imagine the magnitude of the anguish suffered by the said family to have lost two young souls aged two and four respectively.

A point to be noted is that during the spells of pre-monsoon showers the hills and dales of Meghalaya run riot with the sprouting of wild mushrooms of varied hues and colours prompting the village folks to come out in hordes to collect mushrooms either for self-consumption or for sale in local markets. More often than not it is a challenging task to pick identify edible mushrooms from poisonous ones. Here lurks the dangers of human casualty. Now, while revisiting identical events way back in April 2016 this paper had published my letter in these very columns captioned, 'The bell also tolls for me' (ST April, 27,2016),

wherein I had highlighted the then twin fatal incidents occurring in two villages of East Khasi Hills district at Mawsawa near Mawsynram and the other at Nongpriang not far off from Sohra respectively following consumption of wild mushrooms locally known as 'Tit kur miau' where the six lives were lost due to mushroom poisoning. It was lamentable that in one of the unfortunate families, a household had lost both the parents.

I can say with a fair sense of certitude that fatalities of such extent can recur from time to time and for that matter, the village elders of Nongsynrang couldn't have been more right in advising people to be more cautious in going for wild fruits, vegetables besides mushroom. Furthermore, the latter have also urged the Government to ensure that such calamities do not recur by way of creating mass awareness. Now, our State Govt. has an office at Upper Shillong called: Mushroom Development Centre which vigorously carries out regular awareness programmes

throughout the State on the economic benefits of mushroom plantation. I can't see why this Centre couldn't have coordinated with officers of its own department like the Assistant Directors of Agriculture/Horticulture posted at every district/block in conducting awareness sessions on the dos and don'ts of having wild mushrooms?

Additionally, I may reiterate that the assistance of ICAR, NEHU, Botanical Survey of India; NEIGRIHMS etc. could also come in handy in coordinating outreach efforts to all concerned against the life-threatening consequences on selective wild mushrooms. I hope these may be viable options to avert further loss of human lives.

Yours etc
Jerome K. Diengdoh
Shillong 2

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"Terrorism is a significant threat to peace and security, prosperity and people."

— Ban Ki-moon

The Shillong Times

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HNLC threat and state response

IT is in the nature of things that when a state government is perceived as weak and bedevilled by short term objectives then subversive forces tend to raise their ugly heads. In the past seven years of the MUA government the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC), a self proclaimed insurgent outfit had lost steam. Now it is back in the news. Why? The HNLC has put people of this state through a period of bloodshed and unrest from the mid 1990s up to early 2000's, after which was the matter was handled deftly when Dr F Khonglam was CM and RGLyngdoh the Home Minister. Recently the HNLC publicity secretary, Sainkupar Nongtraw who regularly communicates to the media from the email address of H Winner Mark (hwinnermark@gmail.com) has threatened to attack and kill non-tribals in Meghalaya in quick succession as retaliation against the police action against it members and sympathizers.

As usual the HNLC has no dearth of cheerleaders. Social media is rife with support for the outfit. A state with a burgeoning youth population with no job prospects and the luxury of using smart-phones cannot call that population a 'demographic dividend.' On the contrary this section of youth has become a demographic liability. Whether the present state government is in a position to take stock of the HNLC threat and to tackle it effectively is debatable. The Chief Minister has responded with a weak, generic statement that all lives would be protected in Meghalaya. The Home Minister who is at the helm of the law and order apparatus has chosen to remain silent. All he did was to offer the olive branch to the outfit, asking it to come for talks. But talks on what and about what? Who does the HNLC represent? Certainly not the entire Khasi-Pnar population because the outfit has never spelt out its objectives! Since its inception the HNLC has been extorting big and small business people. It used to dole out ambulances and construct sporadic bus shelter until the Khonglam government decided to put a stop to that. FIRs were filed against prospective patrons (although they really had no choice but to pay up or be killed). These patrons had to run for cover and take anticipatory bail. That was when the outfit's backbone was broken.

The question before the people of Meghalaya is whether the government has the mandate to talk to criminal outfits with obscure objectives and known only for extortion and killing? The people of this state cannot forget the violent past they have been through.

Phew! The last ballot has been sealed and on May 23 we shall know who will sit on India's Raj gaddi in this hard-fought theekadhuandhar elections. Encapsulated brilliantly in an adage: Poll is a right whore. She often gives but also takes away all in one fell swoop. So will it be Modi's BJP and cohorts or the 'mahamilawati tukde-tukde' gang comprising Congress, TMC, SP, BSP, TDP, TRS etc. Either which way in politics it's not over till it's over and jo jeeta wohi sikander!

In this arduous six weeks Election 2019 the first thing that stood out was the metamorphosis of 'vikas purush' Modi who sold a dream of 'achhe din' in 2014 to the NaMo persona of a macho numero uno who has no challenger. Whether he comes up trumps and gets a second term is not the issue and neither is it a quibble over whether the BJP gets a majority with how many seats. He is the central figure for the BJP campaign with Congress and other Opposition Parties pulling out all stops to bring him down.

This is the first election where the aam aadmi is asking, "if not Modi, who? Call it the TINA (there is no alternative) factor as there is no real and credible challenge and choice to him. Alongside the Opposition tukde tukde satraps are influential only in their respective regions. Indeed a feather in BJP and NaMo's cap as they have successfully been able to sensitize people about their narrative vs squabbling regional netas.

Two, it is for the first time that the BJP which prided itself on being a Party driven by a broad-based collective leadership wedded to the RSS's ideology, is today Modi-centric, dictated totally by his personality cult. Aply assisted by counter ego Amit Shah nobody dare challenge him else he will be banished forever.

At another level, it has exposed the hypocrisy of the system. Love him, hate him or ignore him, the hard reality is that this in-your-face chai-wallah turned Prime Minister couldn't care a damn. He believes in an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Truly, living up to the synonym of rule by law, jiski laathi uski bhains. His reaction: catch me if you can.

Moreover, even as the entire BJP campaign has been built to show that

Jo jeeta wohi sikander!

By Poonam I Kaushish

Congress's Rahul is not mature enough to lead the nation and the Prime Ministerial cap will not fit the likes of Mamata, Mayawati, Naidu, Rao etc., UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi is seeking to bind together a cohesive alternative. But this would depend on the Congress and regional satraps' total tally. It is to Rahul's credit

air. In fact it is the regional Parties with strong leaders, committed cadres and carefully crafted caste equations which are giving stiff resistance and putting up a much better fight against the BJP in UP, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, West Bengal and Odisha. They are set to win large majorities here, effectively con-

"In this arduous six weeks Election 2019 the first thing that stood out was the metamorphosis of 'vikas purush' Modi who sold a dream of 'achhe din' in 2014 to the NaMo persona of a macho numero uno who has no challenger. Whether he comes up trumps and gets a second term is not the issue and neither is it a quibble over whether the BJP gets a majority with how many seats."

that he has matured as a leader who relishes the thrust and parry of real politik and is a stark contrast to Modi whose persona is all pervasive larger than life. True, he has not been able to manage alliances, was snubbed by Mayawati and Akhilesh and failed to ignite voters' imagination as an alternative to NaMo yet made his Party into a potent force.

Surprisingly, the Congress, post its victory in the recent States Assembly polls and showing signs of revival plus desperate to stop Modi from returning to power continues to be confused about its support base and has fallen back to its tried and tested formula --- abuse and corruption as poll plank as NYAY has hardly created an impact. Whether Rahul's "love and hug" to counter rancid politics can increase the Party tally is a moot point.

On the face of it, the Congress has been unable to really challenge the BJP in States where it is in a direct one-to-one fight. Except Punjab, in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh the Hindutva Brigade is busy fighting a rear guard comeback after a humiliating drubbing in the Assembly elections while Gujarat is up in the

fining Modi's pickings to States in which he is up against the Congress. The Grand Dame is only playing spoiler or Party popper specially in UP.

Also, more than likely allies it is easier to pinpoint those who will definitely not go with the BJP. Besides, the Congress, Left, Mamata's Trinamool, RJD, DMK and perhaps Akhilesh's Samajwadi could be the bulwark of UPA 3. While TRS Rao, YSR Congress's Jagan and BJD's Patnaik could go along-with Modi and BSP's Mayawati, NCP's Pawar, TDP's Naidu and JD(S) Gowda could be ready to jump ship to the Saffron Sangh if the right offer is made.

Despite all the hype, another takeaway is the stark north-south divide vis-a-vis Modi vs rest. Clearly, the Southern regional satraps come up trumps as their electorate does not seem to have been taken in by the Modi personality as people in the North. Other than Karnataka, the BJP has not made much of an impact in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra and Telangana. So despite the hype, the BJP would be lucky to get a few seats in these States.

Further, it is the first election in years when the secular-communal words are non-

existent. While the Hindutva Brigade has centered its poll theme on Jai Sri Ram, Congress leaders starting with bhai-bahen are falling over themselves to prove their Hindu roots. Rahul calls himself a devout jenu dhari while Priyanka performs pujas at various temples.

In a milieu of an over confident BJP, the only debatable point for the Saffron Sangh is how much ground Modi's BJP will concede to NDA allies and others likely to join his bandwagon if the Party's tally remains around 200-220.

Undeniably, 2019 election is easily the most polarising one in recent electoral history. Forget mutual antipathy and mistrust, it is an election which spews hatred built on those supporting Modi and his opponents with barely any meeting ground between the two. The political discourse has never been more neech, gross and pungent sans any debate on vital issues debilitating the nation. Be it unemployment, farmers distress and rising food inflation.

Leaving voters wondering whether our Parties need a complete makeover and a new set of rules which fight for policies and problems that bother their electorate. Additionally, is it right for a poor country to spend nearly Rs 50,000 crores on elections? Time we think of overhauling the election apparatus.

In sum, have we run out of good politicians? Who uphold the ideals of democracy? The dignity of the electoral process? And draws a lakshman rekha on vulgarity and vow not to cross it? Time our leaders understand that Prime Ministers will come and go but their words will stay and which will influence young minds and teach them to show dignity and respect for others. It will be a mistake to even think that this narrative will return to normal and business as usual once polls are over. Primarily, they could leave our polity and society divided and scarred, whereby a lot of time, effort and statesmanship will be required to undo the damage. The lead will have to be taken by none other than the next Prime Minister. --- INFA

few days from now we will see how parents and their children rush from one institution to the other to collect as many forms and prospectus (very costly) as possible. The list would be put up in the next few days. Some smile and some don't to make a quick rush to another institution to try their luck. After being admitted, another problem is to get better private tuitions. At no other time in the history of education in our state has it become so expensive. I know that soon India would have a person on the moon. If we could have Neil Armstrong's sentence changed, to "One small step for an Indian, a giant leap for government schools and colleges," then every student on this earth (India) would have reasons to be happy.

Yours etc.,
M Khyriem
Shillong 14

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

Politics of labelling A dangerous game!

By Dr. S. Saraswathi

A primary lesson for all political speakers is to avoid controversial terms particularly to malign somebody or something. Labels, names, and terms carry political significance and have played a significant role in the just-concluded General election. In fact because of our ignorance of historical events and background of organisations, and lack of ability to conduct sensible and orderly political discourses and decent election campaigns, several irrelevant issues came up during electioneering this year with the sole aim of denigrating rival candidates and parties.

Labelling and name calling candidates and parties took the place of issues and policies leading to unnecessary exchange of abuses. People were practically asked to choose between labels and names and not between policies and programmes. Voters were treated like ignorant illiterates.

A case in point is of the new face in the electoral theatre, Kamal Haasan, who ignited a fierce debate in the country over what is reported as his "Hindu terror" remark with reference to the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathuram Godse. He was speaking in an election meeting in an Assembly constituency in Tamil Nadu on behalf of his party candidate.

The highlight of his speech as reported in the media is his depiction of Godse - independent India's first terrorist - as a Hindu. The connection between the assassin and his religion was not clarified. He has also responded to critics with further assertion that, "If a historical fact I point out hurts you, then this wound will never heal".

Haasan was booked under Sections 153 A (promoting enmity on grounds of religion) and 295 A (deliberate and malicious act intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion and religious beliefs) of the IPC.

Kamal insists he has used the Tamil word "theeviravadhi" meaning "extremist" and not "bayankaravadhi", Tamil equivalent of "terrorist". He applied for and obtained anticipatory bail to avoid arrest. This is not the first time he spoke of Hindu extremism as he himself admitted, but his earlier speeches did not receive this much attention. For some political personalities, proper usage of terms in their mother-tongue or another language is a problem. Still, they are very vocal.

Another leader defending Haasan, is reported to have welcomed his statement adding, "Godse was not only an extremist but also a terrorist..." This episode opens the need for understanding the use of labelling in politics as much as the meaning of terrorism or the character of Godse.

2019 election has no connection with Mahatma Gandhi or Godse or the tragic assassination of the Father of the Nation to be remembered in an election campaign for a by-election to State Assembly in Tamil Nadu. The reference is nothing but an attempt to denigrate the opponent by attributing to him a dangerous link in the past.

Labelling is describing someone or something in a word or short phrase. Its use for communication is unquestionable. It is mostly intended to highlight the fact that the label is a description coming from outside rather than from some intrinsic character of the labelled thing. Thus, label is earned by creating perceptions consciously and unconsciously, or deliberately and incidentally. And label is used to perpetuate usually a negative image of a per-

son or group. As such, it is a strong rhetorical tool.

The speciality of this election is that labels are coined by experts and poll advisors more than being earned by the labelled. A big industry has grown all over the world to collect raw data, separate positive and negative characteristics contained in the data, construct an edifice suitable to one's purpose with the data, and run a machinery to propagate the image created. Its greatest use is in election period. Labelling and name calling form an important part of this industry. It is going on in full swing in India whereas in the West, it is on decline after its rapid rise.

Labelling in politics is intended to influence our perception, judgement, and behaviour and determines interaction between individuals and groups. Labels confirmed by endless repetitions block individual judgements and affect interaction with the labelled. They promote preconceived notions and presumptive assumptions. In the politics of labels, there is no use for knowledge and experience. It promotes divisive politics.

Name calling is explained as a form of ad hominem, meaning attacking opponents personally as opposed to attacking their policies. In this election, it is also done ad nauseum, i.e. repeatedly any number of times. Name calling is a form of verbal abuse, and in politics, it is used as a substitute for rational, fact-based arguments against opponents or ideas.

Political parties conduct election campaigns like marketing and advertising companies, which aggressively push their products. They pick catchy labels and coin rhyming slogans and indulge in repetitions day in and day out. Crowd collection seems to be the object of campaigns conducted on filmy style and supported by audio-visual media.

Labels originated in politics several centuries ago. Perhaps, we never realised that Whig and Tory were terms of abuse introduced in 17th century applied respectively to opponents and supporters of hereditary right of King James; that "rightist" and "leftist" are terms for conservative and liberal groups respectively. Nazi labels, Hitler title, and fascist name have been commonly used in the West in political contests and have entered into India also. These are used as negative symbols.

Between the two World Wars, an organisation called The Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA) took up a systematic study of "propaganda" - a political strategy adopted by Hitler. The analysis included "name calling" in its list of common rhetorical techniques. It was found that bad names have played a powerful role in the history of the world and in our own individual development.

Bad names have ruined reputations, and incite people to violence. These have been applied to "other" people, groups, tribes, political parties, institutions, neighbourhoods, States, sections of a country, nations, race and so on.

On the other hand, labels are necessary to introduce some order in the chaotic world. It helps categorisation and easy identification of what one wants from a heap of things. The function of putting identification mark of a product on its package is called "labelling".

Labelling in sociology is the theory how the self-identity and behaviour of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them. It was developed in the 1960s. In these days, terrorist and insurgent are labels that carry worst negative connotation. ---INFA (The writer is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

TO THE EDITOR

An appeal to the Chief Minister

Editor,
It is an urgent appeal from every non tribal citizen residing in the state of Meghalaya that a strong and reassuring response to the recent threat to end our lives by the extremist organisation HNLC needs to be given. No section of society should be singled out as lesser citizens under the eyes of the very people we have elected to work for our welfare and progress. The Constitution of our country enshrines equality of our rights, to work and live as equals within the law and borders of our country.

The silence of the Chief Minister on this issue till now will only embolden such disruptive elements to go further with their unlawful agenda; needless to say it adds to the climate of perpetual fear in the minds of the people who are being targeted. We have seen an agenda at work since 1979. Bengali residents of the state were systematically driven out of their homes. It was the Nepali community in 1987. An attempt was made to rouse communal tension in

2018, when an instance of assault on a tribal boy snowballed into an attempt to evict an entire community.

This is 2019 and yet this sword of fear hangs on the head of the non tribal residents of the state. Nothing has changed, the polarization seems to only get further exploited to suit vested interests with their nefarious agendas.

My appeal to the Chief Minister is to issue a strong statement of strength against this audacious threat of death by an unlawful organisation. An affirmation of your faith in our welfare so we as non tribal citizens can see you stand shoulder to shoulder with us.

We need our human rights safely protected along with each and every citizen of the state.

Yours etc.,
The Zephrian

The HNLC warning

Editor,
This letter is in response to a story published in your paper (ST May 18, 2019) on the open threat to kill non

tribals of Meghalaya by the banned outfit - HNLC. It is surprising to see that the State Government, so called 'pressure groups', holy church leaders become mute spectators to such a call without any condemnation. On the contrary, a thankful or should I say a hapless state government, has extended an olive branch to the ultra outfit for peace talks once again a day later.

For far too long appeasement politics has taken centre stage leading to radical groups emboldening themselves and issuing open threats that have led to an atmosphere of unrest and tension among different communities. An outfit with not even 20 active members trying to dictate to an elected government and outline its ideology by issuing hateful statements is ridiculous. This can have serious implications in the long run as far as development and growth of the state is concerned. (By development I do not mean having a house and a car but growth of intellectual wisdom). Such calls have the potential to usher in resentment and backlash from other ultras and communities in adjoining states.

Non tribals play a constructive role in the economy of the state especially in trade and commerce and in adding to the intellectual capital of the state and the also adding to the vibrancy of a pluralistic society. Given further opportunity they will continue to do more and beyond. The state enjoys significant powers to pacify voices of unjustified dissent and sedition yet it fails to act when needed. The media must play a constructive role and not allow open threats to dominate its headlines. It's time we citizens denounce violence and strive towards building a cohesive society which is free from fear and intimidation. Remember the world is watching us.

Yours etc.,
Bhaskar D,
Via email

Has India lost the purpose of education?

Editor,
Apropos Sujit De's letter "Has India lost the purpose of education", (ST May 15, 2019) my response

is 'Yes, we have.' Actually as far as Meghalaya is concerned, we had lost it nearly twenty years ago. I fully share the concern of Rivaldo Kurbah for the genuine students of our State in the face of a huge rush of students from adjoining states. Basking in the glory and past performance of missionary run institutions, we have failed miserably in dealing with the huge increase of student population. These government institutions, very small in number, do not have space for expansion; thus leaving the students who passed out especially Class X students to the mercy of private institutions of which fees are exorbitant. Gone are those days when our missionaries built institutions with the motto of imparting the best education at a very minimal cost. This had really helped the poor (children of farmers and daily wage labourers) to get education from which they could face the future. Government attitude towards teachers especially the government aided ones too is not pleasant at all. As can be gauged from the daily newspapers we hear of arrears salaries that date back to five, six months. Come result time and in a

“Our greatest happiness does not depend on the condition of life in which chance has placed us, but is always the result of a good conscience, good health, occupation, and freedom in all just pursuits.”

— Thomas Jefferson

The Shillong Times

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Destiny in the making

INDIA wakes up Thursday to the chimes of a new leadership in the making. The contours of it are as yet unclear, but there is a general sense of comfort that no exit poll has predicted a hung parliament or fractured verdict. The anxiety to hear the final word from the two-month-long election exercise has built up to a crescendo. This could yet be a day of mixed feelings — the victors in the height of glory and the vanquished left in deep disappointment. The first lot would be bracing for good times ahead while the others can sit back and draw comfort from the adage, “Every failure is a stepping stone to victory.”

The Election Commission did a job, and despite complaints of EVM tampering, much of it unproven, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has acquitted itself well. For a voting exercise of such a massive scale complaints and allegations from various quarters are not unexpected. Even when such a well-planned schedule was unveiled, incidents in West Bengal and stray cases elsewhere marred the exhaustive exercise set in seven phases through two months. Complaints need to be addressed with all seriousness, and the Opposition’s right to question actions of a suspicious nature at even booth levels should be respected and encouraged. Their strength is the strength of democracy. Hope is also that no side seeks to harm the good image of the ECI on flimsy grounds.

From the looks of it, it would now appear that Prime Minister Modi and the BJP gained substantially from the division of Opposition votes. A united Opposition is not an acceptable format, though. They represent clashing interests and these would come out in the open sooner than later. The previous hotch-potch experiments at the national level failed to sustain and collapsed in a jiffy. Egos of regional party leaders knew no bounds and proved to be the undoing for them all, from the Janata Party days onwards. There is little to hope they would turn a new leaf this time. Their vaulting ambitions to grab the PM’s chair dissuaded them from aligning behind a reasonably well-knit national party like the Congress. The results Thursday would make clear how much harm this did or did not do.

Despite the massive mandate that the BJP and its NDA allies got in 2014, the Modi government could not act in an appreciable manner. It, though, passed muster in some areas of governance. Hopefully, the new government in the making would change India for the better, and in more forceful and meaningful ways.

Beyond borders

New govt’s priorities

By Dr D.K. Giri

seen in their dealing with China, a muddled up strategy weighed down by Nehruvian legacy of collaboration as well as confrontation.

Second is the neo-liberal perspective, i.e. making economy the measure of strength of the country, and the key determinant of foreign policy. Indian missions across the world were mandated to focus on building businesses for India, a clear shift from defence and security agenda to trade and commerce.

The third is the hyper-realist approach, which emphasises the military preparedness. This perspec-

tioned, we should not mix security issues with a progressive approach. Security issues are temporary, emerging from time to time, die down once they are resolved, but progressivism is based on timeless values.

The second priority is to make foreign policy part of national planning and discourse. Although one can normatively delink foreign policy from domestic issues, a strong economy, stable politics, and sound society help a bolder foreign policy. As India is perceived to be emerging as a major power in the world, and it aspires to become a big power, Indian citizens will have to dare that

“The military actions, including surgical strikes, constitute security operations which do not define nationalism. Somehow, nationalism became the whole basis of India’s pride and policy in foreign affairs. A debate on nationalism is, however, beyond my brief here.”

tive privileges military strength over other determinants. That is how, for the last 10 years or so, as Indian economy grew, New Delhi went on a purchase spree of defence equipments at a heavy cost to India’s development process.

There is a fourth approach, New Delhi is not adopting or is unaware of, is a progressive foreign policy, i.e. inclusive, and based on principles, mainly solidarity. The other principles enunciated by Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore, include pluralism, diversity, democracy and multiculturalism etc. These principles lend any country the power and scope for resilience not fragility. India leads the world in the concept of solidarity. The concept of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ meaning the ‘world is one family’ is uniquely Indian.

Further, way back in 1893, in the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Swami Vivekananda addressed the gathering “sisters and brothers of America”, and surprised the world with such an intimate address and endeared himself to one and all. He

dream and behave as a big power. While fighting the nefarious aggression of Pakistan, we need not behave like Pakistani leadership, duplicitous and double-crossing. The ‘urge to be great’ attitude will help build a better democracy at home.

The third priority is to take global responsibility, if India wishes to become a world power. India is fairly active in trans-national issues such as climate change, refugee crises, international terrorism, poverty alleviation etc. New Delhi has become the convener of international solar alliance, leading the charge against terrorism in international fora, dealing with its own heavy influx of refugees. But New Delhi does not take positions on violation of human rights, fights against authoritarian dictatorial regimes.

On the other hand, New Delhi has been on the wrong side, like in Myanmar, doing business with the military junta etc. New Delhi could justify it by invoking its national interest, which is the key driver for any country’s foreign policy. But when the values and national interests converge, that is the measure of a great power.

The fourth priority is to define its approach to China.

Given the complicated, unending US-China trade war, and rivalry for supremacy, there is a great scope for India to sprint forward to replace China as a manufacturing hub of the world. Reportedly 150 CEOs of MNCs have expressed interest in moving their bases from China to India. Donald Trump is determined to isolate China economically, and build alternative sources to Chinese supply.

But sadly, New Delhi has been prevaricating on China. It is caught in conflicting dualism. Both Japan and India are wary of Beijing’s policy in Asia. Both countries’ economic stakes in China are high. But they have divergent approaches. Japan is economically withdrawing from China, expanding its links with ASEAN countries, and attempting to check China militarily with the help of Americans.

India is anxious about China’s territorial claims on India, its incursion into South Asia, but it wants to maintain stable relations with it. Such strategy is determined by two factors, India’s huge power asymmetry with China, and second, New Delhi’s misreading and miscalculation of Beijing’s designs.

The fifth priority will be to play to its real strength, i.e. the soft power, and alliance building. Joseph Nye, an international political theoretician suggests that culture-rich countries like India need to switch from hard power to soft power. Many countries in the world do not have military or economic power, but are influenced by soft power, health, education, social-capital and so on.

India is a bigger soft-power than China, and New Delhi must use it to counter China and build alliances in the world. New Delhi’s attitude to Israel and Islamic terrorism converge with America’s. There are many other areas of convergence with other big powers, which New Delhi should build on.

Finally, India should not try to overtake China in economic and military terms, at least in near future, although it should treat Beijing as number one adversary. It must build strategic and military alliances to counter China, which will reduce its own spending on military hardware, which can be used for deepening development.---INFA

(The author is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

Can the Anti-BJP secular front become a reality?

Despite exit polls, opposition pins hopes on may 23

By Kalyani Shankar

Most exit polls have predicted a clear majority for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party but that hasn’t stopped the opposition from going ahead with their plans of forming a non-BJP coalition to stake claim for power. Opposition leaders, including West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, have pooh-poohed the exit poll predictions claiming that they were wrong. Congress leaders in private have rubbished them pointing out that the pollsters have gone wrong in 2004 and 2014. It is this hope which is keeping the unity move go forward.

The Opposition parties are preparing for a 1996 (United Front) or 2004 (UPA) post-poll scenario expecting a hung Parliament.

The Opposition unity movement has gained in

Let us assume for a moment that there is a possibility like the 1996 or 2004 situation. In 1996, Congress supported the United Front government. The constituents chose Deve Gowda as prime minister though he was the fourth choice after V.P. Singh, Jyoti Basu and G.K. Moopanar. Even at that time it was not easy for the ragtag coalition to decide as there were many aspirants like Mulayam Singh and Lalu Prasad Yadav. In 2004, the UPA won the race.

Naidu wants to cobble together a coalition of regional parties and take the help of the Congress to form government at the Centre. Though the Congress may be the single largest Opposition party, Naidu expects the Congress to play the second fiddle and reserve the PM post for a regional leader. There are too many aspirants for

Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekhara Rao believes that with his 16 seats he can become the prime minister. Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik too has joined the race. Sharad Pawar is the senior-most leader, who has good relations with all players and he had been nursing prime ministerial ambition for decades. All these for a position, which is not vacant yet!

the past week and is continuing to gather momentum even after the exit polls.

Can the anti-BJP front become a reality? Most major opposition parties are coming together as they don’t want to be caught napping if the BJP fails to get a majority. Former Congress chief Sonia Gandhi has convened a meeting of 21 opposition parties on May 23, the day the results are to be announced. Sonia, who has taken a back seat since she handed over the baton to her son Rahul Gandhi last March, has come to the forefront again because the Congress feels that senior Opposition leaders like Deve Gowda, Sharad Pawar, Mamata Banerjee, Sharad Yadav and others will have no hesitation to work under her. Sonia herself during the campaign reminded about the 2004 surprise victory for the UPA in spite of the India Shining campaign of the BJP.

The main anchor for the unity move is the Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu. Fearing a total rout in his state, Naidu has been busy looking for a national role. He has been visiting Rahul Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee, Akhilesh Yadav, Sharad Yadav, Sharad Pawar, Mayawati and others and holding intensive talks with them about staking claim with the president, in case the BJP did not get the majority. Insiders say that they want to try the Karnataka model where the Congress prevented the BJP from forming the government by supporting the junior party JD(S) though the BJP had emerged as a single largest party. It is this ‘Keep BJP out’ move, which is binding the opposition parties. But for all these, the results have to show a hung Parliament with the BJP getting less than 200 seats. Only then there is a chance for the Opposition.

the post among the regional satraps. The Congress is the only party other than the BJP likely to cross 100 and the party would demand the top post for Rahul Gandhi. Pre-poll allies like DMK chief M.K. Stalin, JD(S) supremo Deve Gowda, RJD leader Tejaswi Prasad Yadav have supported the claim of Rahul Gandhi. However, Mamata Banerjee too is a front-runner for the post. Moreover, BSP chief Mayawati has not hidden her ambitions for becoming the prime minister for many years. Telangana chief minister K Chandrashekhara Rao believes that with his 16 seats he can become the prime minister. Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik too has joined the race. Sharad Pawar is the senior-most leader, who has good relations with all players and he had been nursing prime ministerial ambition for decades. All these for a position, which is not vacant yet!

It is not going to be easy for the non-BJP parties to stake claim. They have to cross many hurdles including choosing their prime ministerial face, a Common Minimum Programme, dealing with the inherent contradictions in such a coalition etc. The past record shows that there had been five non-Congress, non-BJP governments so far and none of them lasted a full term. Four of them had the support of the Congress while the BJP supported the fifth one.

After May 23, if the NDA forms the government, the opposition should function as a constructive opposition if they don’t achieve their dream. It was mainly this division in the Opposition ranks, which might have helped Prime Minister Modi to get a second term and the Opposition should learn the lessons. Had they been united before the elections, they might have defeated the BJP. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

BJP’s overconfidence is naive

Editor,
Birds of an NDA feather flock together. Yes, the allies met in New Delhi specifically at Delhi’s Ashoka Hotel hosted by Amit Shah, having been buoyed and backed by exit polls predictions in favour of the NDA. But doubts are creeping in the minds of people whether Modi and company are exuding too much confidence by depending on the exit polls predictions. Too much of anything is bad. Likewise, too much confidence of winning the elections are unwarranted as the relevance and importance of counting votes is belittled. Celebration of victory without the results being declared is tantamount to being improper on the part of political parties.

Truly, for Modi and company, it is a bash of celebrations, of having been voted back to power for the second term. When such celebrations and confidence are overflowing, history is there to warn them of con-

sequences. Even in the past, exit polls had gone wrong much to the chagrin of the psephologists and the enthusiasm of the political parties. So, while celebrating the premature victory, the BJP and its allies should not forget the fact that the victory is not yet awarded to the NDA. There is a process called vote-counting based on which the winner is declared and the nation is inching towards it on May 23.

For those who are keen about revelling in premature results, let them wait till final results come out because there is many a slip between the cup and the lip.

Yours etc.,
T K Nandanam,
Kochi - 15

Of exit polls

Editor,
Much has been said about the Sunday exit polls. Till February 13, 2019, the day when Prime Minister Modi was in Corbett National Park after a tedious journey of four years and nine months, he was facing the

2019 polls against all odds. These odds are too many to name in this limited space. Then Pulwama happened followed by Balakot happened. If The Reuters and World View 2 are to be rubbished and if some huge variations in the number of casualties are ignored then Balakot was a success. With the World View 2 statement that satellite imagery shows Jaish-e-Mohammed camps intact, Balakot becomes more mysterious than ever, especially when satellite imagery promised by the government was never released. Be that as it may but nationalism and jingoism have trampled over all the odds of Feb-12-2019. With that Faridabad polling booth incident, which till now we are clueless as to how many such booths exist among the 900 million voters, and with opposition complaints of MCC violations taken up after thirty days, only a miracle will prove the exit polls wrong. Who knows the NDA numbers may well be above 340 on 23 May 2019.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Via email

Anarchy in Bengal

Editor,

It’s condemnable that some goons in Kolkata have also destroyed the statue of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the pride of Bengal a few days back He was a great scholar and a social reformer who worked for the overall welfare of society and always upheld human values. The vandals, who harbour evil thoughts, cannot tolerate, nor can they respect the virtues of a person. All right-thinking citizens should stand up to condemn such acts of hooliganism.

But it is worrisome to note how one political party is blaming the other. If there is smoke from the fire it is certainly due to “damp” wood. Of course, it was a premeditated act considering there were a good number of youths inside the campus in the evening when the college was on vacation. However, in Mamata’s Bengal such destructive elements have increased by leaps

and bounds and are thriving but there is no noise of intolerance by any prominent forces from any quarter. The party rivalry and vindictiveness has turned into brutal enmity and bloodshed in this state. The hands of the state police are literally tied. They cannot arrest Didi’s non-dressed infantries. How many innocent people have been shot dead or injured by TMC cadre and others is hard to account -- the latest being Joydeb Barman, a BJP leader from Cooch Behar who was shot dead with an AK-47 rifle two days back. The news has been just suppressed.

There is another bombshell relating to Mamata’s special people. They have used the mike to warn people from a particular community to leave the place or bite the bullet. As per the number of WhatsApp footages that are going around the situation is ominous. Crying, and weeping crowds of people from Diamond Harbour is exceedingly heart-wrenching to see. It’s almost like a Kashmir type (1989) situation in

certain pockets in West Bengal. People have been seen leaving their homes in frenzied panic to look for safety elsewhere as their residential units have been burnt and destroyed.

What is shocking is that no media has raised the alarm bells; no one said that democracy is in danger. Is cancer in one square millimetre of skin-area not enough to kill a man in due course of time? One strike of a match-stick is enough to reduce several buildings to ashes. Let’s learn to be human first then indulge in intellectual hypocrisy. Humanity should not be slaughtered at the altar of discrimination and insane politics.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Via email

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

I tore myself away from the safe comfort of certainties through my love for the truth; and truth rewarded me.

--- Simone de Beauvoir

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NDA returns and how

THE BJP is riding back to power in a decisive victory and on a pro-incumbency wave in its favour. The election this time took on the Presidential character with Prime Minister Modi at the centre of it all. Modi has special reasons to cheer as he single-handedly led his party and the NDA to resounding victory. His principal opponents, mainly the Congress and its leader Rahul Gandhi, have conceded defeat while Andhra Pradesh's Chandrababu Naidu who set his eyes on New Delhi has lost both his base and balance. He is driven out of power in the state, lock stock and barrel. Another anti-Modi crusader, West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee, has been hit hard by the saffron push, but not fully outmaneuvered. Her Trinamool Congress bagged a few more seats than the BJP which made a big entry into the TMC bastion. Here starts the tide of misfortune for her. Notably, the Hindi belt again turned its back on the Congress. Three chief ministers who emerged unassailable are Punjab's Captain Amarinder Singh, Odisha's Naveen Patnaik who won power in the assembly polls yet again, and K Chandrasekhar Rao of Telangana whose TRS did reasonably well. The results were a total disaster for Delhi's Arvind Kejriwal.

Needless to say, the Congress as the chief rival of the BJP and with a national spread has to do serious stock-taking. Rahul Gandhi has done his job on the campaign front, but he lost track midway by clinging on to the absurd anti-Modi slogan of "Chowkidar chor hai." This slogan not only did not resonate with the hoi-polloi but also backfired. His apologies before the Supreme Court and the hit-back he got from PM Modi vis-a-vis the Bofors scam did him in. Worse, the Congress hoped to return to power on a perceived anti-incumbency vote, and not by strengthening its organisational structure in states. In the absence of a mood against Modi overall, the Congress failed to improve its fortunes. Clearly, the lack of formation of an anti-BJP opposition front at the national level helped Modi outwit his detractors. The ambitions of regional satraps proved to be the undoing to the anti-BJP Opposition. Had there been a united challenge against Modi and the BJP, the scenario might have been different. The disaster for the Congress extended spectacularly to the Nehru family. The parachuting of Priyanka Gandhi to strengthen the image of the Congress and provide able support to Rahul Gandhi was of little help. Even Eastern UP did not warm up to the Congress and to her despite concentrated efforts. The Maya-Akhilesh combine made moderate gains. PM Modi, taller than ever and the resurgent BJP have reasons to feel enthused and energised. The agencies involved in the exit polls process deserve a pat for their predictions which majorly proved correct. Last but not the least, the fears of a hung parliament have evaporated, to the nation's great relief.

The election to the 17th Lok Sabha had no wave until the Pulwama attack that killed over 40 CRPF personnel followed by the Balakot air strike of February 26, right inside Pakistani territory. But for most Indians the fact that Wing Commander Abhinandan was handed back to India within 60 hours of his being taken captive by Pakistanis when his MIG 21 aircraft which was in a dog fight with a Pakistani F16 was brought down, was the one big score for Modi and India. The above actions reinforced India's status as a country that's capable of fighting back and is not weak-kneed and indecisive. And who would know this better than those in the armed forces who very often become casualties because they are cannot fight back and are sent to the frontiers with their hands tied.

While as civilians we have a lot to say about the armed forces going rogue and committing violence against their own people - the perspective from the other side is also instructive. Fighting insurgents is not the brief of the army but they are pushed into it because state and central police forces are not adequately trained for it. Tackling insurgency is a tricky business. Insurgents are usually part and parcel of the local population and they have their sympathizers amongst the locals. Naturally the army raids those homes to get information. And because the military is trained to fight an external enemy, they cannot suddenly be expected to undo years of training and to wear a humane face. In the battlefield where they come face to face with the enemy, they either kill or are killed. Considering that India is beset with internal insurgencies the country should, in all these decades, have trained a counter-insurgency force to deal with the insurgents in the North East and the Maoists in Central and Western India. As a pragmatist with no empathy whatsoever for gun-toting groups that have sprung up on different pretexts and live off the fat of the land by extorting from the public and from development funds (vis a vis Nagaland and Manipur), I believe

The Die Is Cast: Whither Meghalaya

By Patricia Mukhim

that those who live by the gun will die by the gun. There can be no soft peddling with groups like the ULFA, NSCN(IM), NSCN (K), NSCN (R), and the plethora of outfits in Manipur and in our own backyard.

The recent gunning down of Tirong Aboh, the MLA of Khonsa, his 20-year old son and nine others by the NSCN(IM) reeks of utmost cruelty. Hence, I find it distasteful when people hold a benign, almost patronising view of insurgency. How can an outfit that is holding peace talks with Government of India also carry out such gruesome, cold-blooded killings which are possibly contract killings. The comments and outpourings on Mr Kiren Rijiju's Facebook timeline are a commentary of how people feel about these ghastly killings. Rijiju has been challenged to get out of his comfort zone and to

The recent gunning down of Tirong Aboh, the MLA of Khonsa, his 20-year old son and nine others by the NSCN(IM) reeks of utmost cruelty. Hence, I find it distasteful when people hold a benign, almost patronising view of insurgency.

urge the Union Home Minister to flush the militants out of Tirap-Changlang-Longding districts of the State. The three districts are bordered by Nagaland, Assam and Myanmar and the people of all three districts have asked Rijiju to fence off the Myanmar border as it allows free movement of insurgents.

There is much anger and disgust from the people of Arunachal Pradesh at this incident and it might have well affected the election prospects of Rijiju and the BJP had it happened before voting. They all wonder why not enough security bandobast was given to the MLA while travelling through this exposed area. Ironically a defence spokesperson said it was not possible for the armed forces to be present in all places in a mountainous territory despite "area domination by the Army and the Assam Rifles." Consequently, perhaps the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) which

was partially withdrawn on April 2 this year would have to be re-imposed in view of the onslaught by the NSCN(IM). This is not the first time that the outfit has been used by one or other political aspirant in the three districts. And Aboh and his entourage are not the first to be gunned down by them.

Facebook comments responding to Rijiju's post where he expressed grief at the death of Mr Aboh and his family members and security personnel were sharp and critical. They asked why Government of India which could enter inside Pakistan and bomb Balakot, not do the same in sanitising the three districts by flushing out the NSCN of all three acronyms from Tirap, Changlang and Longding. These are questions that Mr Rijiju must answer and also his seniors in the Party, particularly the Prime Minister and the next Home Minister. Can the NSCN(IM)

and its other offshoots be given free rein merely because they are in talks with Government of India? Is the army given strict instructions to treat them like interlopers when they venture out of Camp Hebron?

Coming closer home we have seen that the verdict in Meghalaya is split between the Congress and the NPP. Clearly, out of the 11 districts, six have voted for the Congress for reasons best known to the electorate but mainly because of the shadow of the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), while five have voted the NPP. Is there a divide then between the people of Khasi-Jaintia Hills and the people of Garo Hills about the CAB? The BJP has been very upfront in its objective of implementing the CAB should it come to power. Now that it has, it will be a matter of time before the Party pushes its agenda. Let's also not forget that the BJP has retained seats in Assam and added more to its kitty because

most Hindus believe that CAB would help offset the Muslim population there. Those who don't believe in this ideology are a minority in that state.

So what would be the position of the NPP-led Government should the Citizenship Amendment Bill be introduced in Parliament? There are people with a short-sighted, somewhat benevolent view of CAB. They believe that only those Hindus who have lived in India without papers, before December 2014, because they were persecuted on account of their religion in Bangladesh, Pakistan or Afghanistan would be given full citizenship. The Bill, however does say that it will not have a prospective effect. At any point of time the 1.13 crore Hindus from Bangladesh who decide that they would prefer to live in India, (read North East India) and claim that they are persecuted, might be allowed to settle here for reasons of vote bank. No wonder Sheikh Hasina the premier of Bangladesh said recently that the CAB is a vote-winning propaganda of Mr Modi and the BJP because Hindus are not persecuted in Bangladesh.

There are also many others who have expressed anxieties about the return of the BJP and fear its anti-minority stance. Perhaps it is time for civil societies of Meghalaya to engage better with Prime Minister Modi and his team rather than leaving all that in the hands of obsequious politicians who do not dare to make claims on behalf of their people. Indeed the only engagement by the Government of Meghalaya so far with the Centre has been to reopen the coal trade. This is such a shortsighted agenda. This is precisely the fear when you leave everything to politicians just because you have voted them in. Our duties as citizens begin after we have voted. It does not end with voting. The reason why we are where we are today is because we rely on unreliable people who are in politics not to serve their constituents but to serve their private interests. Not every politician in this state or region has the commitment of a Modi; not even those in the BJP. They are all businessmen first. That is the travesty of politics in Meghalaya.

Even negatives do not seem to affect Narendra Modi

BJP is now way ahead of Congress

By Amulya Ganguli

What is remarkable about Narendra Modi's triumph is that none of the factors which were expected to undermine his position has had any effect on the popular support for him.

Neither the hugely disruptive measures like demonetization and GST, nor the continuing unemployment and agrarian distress has limited his appeal. Instead, it appears to have grown and placed him in a virtually invincible position.

It isn't only the economic factors which Modi has been able to brush aside as something of little consequence, even the concern expressed by the intelligentsia about the erosion of institutional autonomy as in the Reserve Bank, the CBI and even the Election Commission does not seem to have bothered the general public.

Moreover, if the latter had faced any inconvenience, they convinced themselves that only Modi could solve them. The belief apparently was that he deserved another five years.

A possible reason for this conviction is the government's success in ensuring what has been called by a supporter as "delivery" on the ground in the matter of providing cooking gas cylinders or houses with latrines and

but also because it had a wide network of fraternal outfits affiliated to the RSS to come to its aid.

The BJP's tactics, too, were far superior to those of the opposition with Modi being a past master in turning a narrative in his favour.

This was achieved not only by suppressing inconvenient statistics about unemployment and the economic scene, but also by a no-holds-barred attack on the credibility of his opponents, whether dead like the "bhrashtachari (corrupt) No 1" Rajiv Gandhi, or alive like the naamdar (dynast) Rahul Gandhi who was associated with a mahamilaayati (adulterated) opposition alliance, which, the BJP proclaimed, would be unable to save India from enemies like Pakistan.

It was such an onslaught which derailed the gains which the opposition had made by its 2018 victories in the Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh assemblies and in the earlier by-elections in U.P., Bihar and elsewhere.

It was those successes which made the opposition believe that it had hit a winning streak. But if it was unable to capitalize on them, the reason was, first, a failure to understand the kind of challenge which the formidable Modi-Amit Shah

The whining was also accompanied by their inability to get together in durable alliances.

Except in Tamil Nadu, where the DMK-Congress tie-up appeared stable, the other such combines - as in Bihar and Maharashtra between the Congress on one hand and the RJD and the NCP on the other - seemed wobbly.

electricity or the opening of bank accounts or the provision of loans to entrepreneurs.

There is little doubt that these microeconomic programmes have enabled the government to divert attention from its failures on the larger macroeconomic front such as on the creation of jobs which the opposition had tended to emphasize.

The opposition's main disadvantage, of course, was the absence of an inspiring leader. Modi fitted the bill in every aspect in this respect with his rousing oratory and commanding presence.

In contrast, Rahul Gandhi and others came through as minor figures who could not be taken seriously. Some of them like Mamata Banerjee and Mayawati were seen as no more than state-level leaders who no one could conceive of leading the nation. In addition, the constant whining of the opposition parties about the reliability of the electronic voting machines showed them up as petulant losers resembling bad workmen who blamed the tools.

The whining was also accompanied by their inability to get together in durable alliances. Except in Tamil Nadu, where the DMK-Congress tie-up appeared stable, the other such combines - as in Bihar and Maharashtra between the Congress on one hand and the RJD and the NCP on the other - seemed wobbly.

It is also undeniable that at the ground level, the BJP could deploy far more foot soldiers than any of the opposition parties not only because it had greater resources at its command,

duo posed with their indefatigable energy and never-say-die attitude.

And, secondly, by a lethargic attitude (compounded by internal bickering) which made the victors rest on their laurels, as in Rajasthan, and not conserving and building on the gains that had been made.

Nothing underlined this contrast between the Congress's relaxed attitude and the concerted effort made by the BJP president, Amit Shah, in what to most observers would have appeared to be a lost cause, viz., the storming of Mamata Banerjee's seemingly impregnable bastion of West Bengal.

Considering that the BJP did not have a sizeable ground level presence in West Bengal where the local leadership or the rank and file were concerned, most would have thought that the kind of effort which Amit Shah was putting in would be fruitless.

But the BJP apparently saw the chinks in Mamata Banerjee's armour in the matter of her overtly pro-minority policies and her failure to bring about the state's industrial revival. The BJP also saw that the fading out of the Left and the Congress was creating a vacuum which it could fill.

It was the same in Odisha where the weakening of the Congress was seen by the BJP as the thin end of the wedge which it could exploit. Therefore, whether it is charismatic leadership or a keenness to explore the possibilities of political expansion, the BJP does not seem to have a rival at the moment. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Bengal violence: A one-sided view

Editor,
Apropos Salil Gewali's "Anarchy in Bengal" (ST May 23, 2019), I must say that I am not too concerned about the events in West Bengal. And as far as his lengthy second paragraph is concerned the writer should know that the rally that evening, conducted by Amit Shah and which ended in Vidyasagar College was watched by all across the country on neutral TV Channels. The four videos aired by TMC MP, Derrick O'Brien which I believe are not doctored, are enough to give us the true picture. Of course the dark side, according to the writer might be there but to club the sad incident at Vidyasagar College with some shortcomings is to miss the full view of what was going around.

Mr Gewali may snub other writers and label those who were mute spectators as hypocrites. We should remember that 'hypocrite'

stated a hundred times can well be defeated by 'just ignoring them'. The fact is if we rake up a rotten mango which is odourless, the peel will emit an unpleasantly pungent smell. From different write-ups we learn to size up the writers and to understand which party they are affiliated to and where their loyalties lie.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Nongkrem 15.

Modi magic

Editor,
As the nation waits with bated breath for the counting to be over, the NDA has come out victorious and staking claim to form the new government as the exit polls had predicted. Full credit must go to Narendra Modi and Amit Shah the strategist. Perhaps it is the will of the God that Modi should come for the second term to take up the reins of the country. And what was the incident that turned the tide in favour of Modi? Undoubtedly, it was the Pulwama terror attack and its subsequent

retaliatory action against Pakistan that made the people rally behind Modi. All the gimmicks and poll promises made by Congress and its allies fell flat and some of the allies received a fatal blow.

The greatest casualty in Indian politics is the Waterloo of the Communist party. Its presence in Kerala, West Bengal, Tripura and elsewhere seemed to have disappeared and dejected its leaders culminating in an unprecedented drubbing. And in West Bengal too, Mamata's TMC could not put up a good show as per her pep talk as her strong bastions fell one by one silencing her for the time being. In Andhra Pradesh, Chandrababu Naidu a national figure bit the dust and his party TDP is completely wiped out from Andhra. Some of the regional parties also received a drubbing.

Coming back to the impressive win, the BJP has fairly captured a good number of seats to rule the country, and it performed well in the north except in Punjab. Elsewhere in the country too BJP has been

able to garner as many seats as it could. The notable win posted by the BJP was in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Assam and Delhi.

Anyway, Kudos to Modi and Shah whose tireless work round the clock to come back to power is praiseworthy. Now, people have given the mandate, and it is up to them to rule the country well to wipe the tears of the farmers and other workers. Modi should not forget the trust people reposed in him and he has to rise to their aspirations. Modi's first priority should be to wipe out the scourge of poverty from this land and take the country economically forward. Let us all look forward to a more prosperous India during his tenure as the Prime Minister of India.

Yours etc.,
T K Nandanam,
Via email

Erratic power supply in Tura

Editor,
Power comes and

power goes in Tura. This disruption in power supply has been going on for quite some time now and it happens not less than 5-6 times a day. Rain or no rain, wind or no wind, sunshine or cloudy weather, there is power cut for reasons best known to the MeECL. This disruption in power supply is in addition to the regular load shedding hours from 3 pm to 6 pm every day. We need power not only to cool ourselves from this heat but also for running industries and businesses. Even banking operations are affected due to power cuts. Lots of people are unemployed and looking for jobs. How will the unemployed people get employment if the industries do not run/operate or business establishments close down because of erratic power supply?. Agriculture alone cannot absorb all the unemployed people. We need industries and the service sector to develop side by side and gainfully employ the unemployed youth. It is high time the Govt.

seriously think of completing and commissioning the Ganol Hydel project which will definitely augment the power supply to Tura and its adjoining areas.

The Govt. should also find out ways and means to clear the outstanding dues to NEEPCO so that allotted power supply is restored. Till such time that the regular power supply is restored, the people of Tura will have to silently suffer for no fault of theirs. Or is it a blessing in disguise as power cuts are the only time that the whole family assemble together and speak to one another as wife, TV remains off?. Perhaps this is the new idea of connecting people by disconnecting power.

Yours etc.,
Fergertson R Marak
Tura-11

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

"The art of leadership is saying no, not yes. It is very easy to say yes."

--- Tony Blair

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MAY 25, 2019

More of Modi

As the will of India asserted itself in Lok Sabha Polls 2019, it turned out to be a defining moment for democracy. A strong leader in the form of Narendra Modi swept the polls and is set to run the nation for a second term, meaning a total of 10 years. When Modi assumed the prime-ministership of India in 2014, he had famously said he wanted one more term to make India great. He has been granted the wish. The past five years did not see any spectacular change for India; it carried on in a normal manner. The hope today is that the day when Modi completes 10 years in Delhi, India would be a shining example of all-round, fast-paced growth. Time waits for none - neither for individuals, nor for nations. It's easy to sit in judgment as to what helped Modi perform this miracle. Till a week ago, the media was awash with reports of rural distress, joblessness, and an overall mood of despondence. For the naked eye, no wave was in evidence. Still, as we see now, a Modi wave was building up through the seven phases of the Lok Sabha polls. It was a total washout for Modi's rivals across India, except for the deep South and a part of the south-eastern side. A saffron surge was in full force, decimating its rivals with rare dynamics. It's for the first time after 1957 that such luck is beckoning a political establishment and its leader.

Symbolism matters. Modi presented himself as the "chaiwala" in 2014; this time he was the nation's "chowkidar." And, once the results were out, Modi swiftly disbanded the chowkidar tag from his twitter handle. Modi managed to identify himself with the common masses. It means much in a democracy. The minorities were not comfortable with Modi or the BJP. They have the right to dissent, but wider India saw merit in Modi. Modi now says he will bring unity among all Indians. Magnanimity is both a virtue and a calling of the times. The grand mosaic of cultures, races, religions, regions, castes and communities that India is made of, demands that the nation stand as one. Leadership makes all the difference - it crafts good times or bad times. Notably, what helped Modi and the BJP reach this stage was also the lack of a viable alternative. By liberally granting space to the likes of Chandrababu Naidu and Mamata Banerjee, and for their vaulting ambitions, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi failed to lead from the front.

LOOKING BACK

June 19, 1989

China: End of the road for Dengism

Deng Xiaoping, till recently described as China's supreme leader, has reached the end of the tether. The tragic events in China during the last fortnight imply above all the end of the road for Dengism a Chinese variety of pragmatism which sought to marry socialism and capitalism to give China the benefits of both.

Two of Deng's most outspoken saying are characteristic of Dengism. "It doesn't matter if the cat is black or white as long as it catches mice" this way typical of Deng Xiaoping's approach to the problems of China's economy, in veritable shambles after the Maoist Cultural Revolution. Deng's approach produced instant results insofar as it resurrected the economy both industrial and agricultural from its downward drift. It not only halted the economic decline but set the pace for acceleration of production all round by assimilation of the fruits of modern technology.

Deng's answer to the urgent need of China's economy, defence and administrative bureaucratism.

And there is no denying that the four modernization did go part of the way in giving China the benefits of modern technology. The economic reforms which Deng helped to usher in represented a bold experiment with foreign collaboration ventures in a part of the economy, while retaining firm grip of the state over the bulk of China's industrial production. This brought good economic results as well as generated big new problems the principal ones being inflation and corruption.

The other outspoken Deng saying one country two systems represented an aspects of Chinese reforms, and an area, on which Deng Xiaoping rested on far more slippery ground. Devised primarily to bring back Taiwan (also Hong Kong) under Chinese sovereignty even while retaining its full fledged capitalist system, economic and political, this outspoken opportunism or pragmatism brought in its train political forces which Deng Xiaoping did not bargain for.

Modi faces tough challenges in his second term

By TN Ashok

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, hoisted the BJP led NDA to a landslide victory winning over 300 plus seats (nearly 20 more than 2014) for his party alone and with allies is set to have a brute majority of 350 seats plus thus creating amass hysteria among the crushed opposition of Congress and Mahagatbhandan of regional parties fearing that the country could slip into a state of autocracy. Only Rajiv Gandhi holds the record of about 400 seats riding on a sympathy wave of his mother Indira Gandhi's assassination, notwithstanding the anti-sikh riots that killed hundreds and hundreds.

There were no major issues in the elections in 2019 as in 2014 where Modi rode the crest of an anti-corruption drive hijacked from AAP. Congress under a new aggressive President Rahul Gandhi tried its best to reverse the kickbacks in Bofors gun deal with alleged stupendous payouts in Rafale deal to Anil Ambani, but it did not cut much ice with the people. Mahagatbhandan of SP, BSP and other regional parties focused on caste politics of swaying the Dalits and lower caste. That too did not cut much ice with the people.

2019 elections were won on clever strategies where the opposition lost out to weak strategy. BJP President Amit Shah and PM Modi very well knew the odds were stacked against them, the Rafale deal where nearly Rs 30k crore was allegedly doled out to an inexperienced so called defence expert, Anil Ambani's twin cos Reliance Aerospace and Defence, growth rate was chugging, Current Account Deficit was rising as exports slid, unemployment was rising, Make in India made little headway to create jobs, inflation was so-so, Demonetisation and GST had crushed the cash strapped economy and yet the duo cleverly crafted a strategy that would sway the vote banks.

One was Modi took advantage of his personal charisma and twittrati serving as a direct connect with the people, put National Security on the front bench with the surgical strikes and Balakote bombings creating a fear of war among the people with Pakistan and

that he had crushed it in the bud, and made people think that they were Indians first and their caste came second - the Hindu card was played well to polarise the votes again against the Thakurs, Brahmins, Yadavs, Dalits and lower caste factors that led to the SP+BSP alliance bombing. West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee's roughshod way of running the state, stealing the once allegedly corrupt CPI(M) musclemen from the communist cadres, went against her and she gifted 14 seats to the BJP, which held massive rallies in the state.

Amit Shah ensured that the assembly reverses suffered in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh were reversed. Reverse he did by overriding state leadership in all the states including the so called arrogant former Rajasthan CM Ms Vijay Raje Scindia by rejecting their list of candidates and fielding at least 50 new faces in each of the state and thus recovered lost ground. Rajasthan was a clean sweep for BJP.

BJP still remains a North Indian party, unlike the Congress, which ruled the country for 60 odd years in the 70 years of independent India's history, which enjoyed a vote bank in south Indian states too until the language issue and neglect of their demands pulled the rug from under their feet by the rise of regional aspirations leading to growth of regional parties - DMK and AIDMK in south, congress has to ride piggy back on either of them, TDP in undivided Andhra and now TRS in Telengana, JDS in Karnataka, UDF in Kerala, BJD in Odisha.

While BJP supporters and their outfits may be gloating over their victories in the 2019 polls where allies have no role at all, a disintegrated opposition, there is a clear and present danger of the Hindutva brigade pushing its agenda of saffronisation, the Ram Mandir, Kashi issue, conversions, that could now let the promoters come to the streets fearlessly. An internal threat looms large and PM

needs to appoint a strong Home Minister, most likely Amit Shah shifting Raj Nath Singh to the party presidentship, but RSS cadres want Shah to continue.

The strong 18 to 40 demographic dividend in that age group, which is enamoured by Modi's Hindutva, his charisma and strong leadership but thinks gives secondary thoughts to the economic ills is the main reason for the 2nd landslide win of the BJP. From their perspective they may be right. India is a Hindu majority state after all with little say and Muslims and Hindus have personally cohabited peacefully, albeit some external interventions by different political parties that need not be named for narrow electoral gains.

In the five year rule of Modi there was no major attack by terrorists of civilian targets, but only military targets, no major corruption barring the alleged Rafale deal, highways were literally speeding under Gadhkari with 10kms of road construction every day against UPAs tortoise one km a day, terrorist funding was cut with demonetisation, and GST made taxation uniform throughout the country making movement of goods faster and easier, even though initially they got the slabs all wrong.

And this has largely gone down well with the people, healthcare programme such as Ayushman Bharat and Ujjwal Yojana of free gas connections to the poorer strata became massive vote winners. The biggest worry for the BJP should be that the south still remains cut off from the north, a looming danger of an unnamed balkanisation of North India vs South India. Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and add to it Odisha, West Bengal and a troubled Jammu and Kashmir is cold comfort for Modi. He has made inroads into the bastion of Didi's Bengal. He lost TamilNadu, but apparently rides on an uncertain Jagan Reddy in Andhra and Chandrasekhar's TRS in Telangana.

The North South divide

is clear. BJP is strongest in UP, MP, HP, Delhi, in the north and in the west Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra - that makes it the 7 Hindi heartland states stacked against 7 non BJP states, a tie. In T20parlance, we need a super over in 2024 to decide this issue.

Modi has many challenges. Putting the economy back on the rails kick starting the manufacturing process, keeping inflation and CAD under control, putting money in the hands of businessmen and traders in a cash strapped economy, the digital economy has not succeeded but only largely among the urban elite, and on top of this the brute majority poses the danger of rise of an alleged saffronisation and Hindutva brigade bringing issues to the streets that could create law and order problems.

Modi is aggressive, has charisma, strong man image, energy to travel to make India known to far corners of the world, has a tight grip on administration but woefully lacks a strong team of ministers. If Amit Shah can lead the party well, Modi today needs a strong team especially an astute Finance Minister (not a yes man), a robust Defence and Home Minister, and an aggressive External affairs Minister. If he gets them, the game is up for the opposition. But for Modi this is like searching for needles in a haystack. He is still struggling to find them.

To conclude, former US President Barack Obama asked Modi how many hours of sleep he got in ruling a divergent India and the reply was four hours. Obama said, "I also slept for four hours in my first term but in my 2nd term I sleep for five hours now." But Modi does not have that luxury; he has to sleep for one hour less, only three hours if he has to come to grips with the dangers of external aggression (which he has done successfully), internal aggression and a devastated economy. 2nd term is a rough ride for Modi, but he is capable of riding it well with his oratory skills and swaying the masses, even if he achieves 50% of the targets with a very strong publicity machinery

TO THE EDITOR

Grave challenges of ECI

Editor,

Post the jubilant poll results announcement of the 17th General Elections for Lok Sabha in 2019, the Election Commission of India which was at the forefront spearheading the gigantic show needs to be applauded. ECI ensured that it was up and running to meet the increasing challenges to ensure a free and fair election.

The logistical and security arrangements made to ensure smooth and free and fair elections has met up with the voters expectations this time especially at the ground level. This comes at a time when ECI witnessed high level differences amongst the members, including speculations related to the appointment and tenure of CEC, dissent owing to Model Code of Conduct breaches, VVPAT challenges posed by the opposition parties, Supreme Court related judgments urging ECI to fall in line, effective EVM management till the end of polling process etc.

Several firsts were witnessed, amongst them being the formation of media monitoring committees, extensive voter

grievance redress mechanism, consistent voter awareness drives including the launch of CVIGIL app and running of special Voter Express trains, launch of PwD friendly initiatives for special voters etc to name a few.

ECI's move to conduct smooth elections was otherwise overshadowed by controversial speeches and actions by political stakeholders, owing to which the Commission remained a mute spectator leading to voters' apathy. The desperation reached such a level that it led to dissent amongst the three election commissioners. Instead of meeting the voter's expectations and voicing out a unanimous decision, the ECI was divided. However, ECI and its team at the ground level need to be appreciated for having conducted such a mammoth democratic exercise in the world.

Yours etc.,
Varun SD
Bangalore -72

Modi's spectacular return

Editor,

The din and dust kicked up by the general

election, 2019 has settled down, and the winners and losers have also retired to their places to resume their daily chores. And in the post election scenario, sadness and sobbing came to grip the minds of the losers. But Rahul Gandhi, a prime ministerial candidate for the election has had a mixed response from the people. In Amethi and in Wayanad where Rahul sought the people's mandate too there was a mixed response. While Amethi gave him bricks, Wayanad gave him bouquets. He won with a record lead of 431,770 votes over his nearest rival, CPI's PP Suneer.

Rahul Gandhi was not the only Congress heavyweight who faced defeat on Thursday. Stunning political pundits, Pragya Singh Thakur, who is out on bail and facing trial in the Samjhauta train blast case, trounced Congress' Digvijay Singh from Bhopal and KP Yadav beat the other top Congress leader Jyotiraditya Scindia from Guna Lok Sabha constituency.

Licking the wounds inflicted by the poll debacle, Rahul has even readied to step down from the Congress president's position owning up responsibility for the Congress debacle. As a

motivating man, he said that the Congress would continue to serve people without compromising on its ideological stand. Rahul is very apprehensive of the BJP's Hindutva policy as this policy has oriented the majority of the Hindus and consolidated them as a strong platform to give strength to the BJP party. The think-tank and the mastermind behind the landslide victory of the BJP, Amit Shah has done a tremendous job for the Party.

But in the South the BJP's plan and the play fell-flat except in Karnataka and so the buoyant mood and enthusiasm of the party leaders fizzled out. And in Kerala too, it has not yet been able to open an account, which is an eye-opener for the BJP. For the BJP in Kerala, this was the most favorable situation but even then the Party could not translate this into winning a single seat for the Lok Sabha. As Kerala is the most literate and politically conscious state, the BJP leadership has to study why this state has refused to swallow the bait of the Party although all other states at least gave some seats to it.

Yours etc.,
T K Nandanam
Kochi - 15.

New conservatism sweeping India right now Modi got full advantage of the mood in 2019 Poll

By Anjan Roy

Demonetisation had hurt the interests of lowest and the weakest, GST had disrupted all business and industry, more particularly the small and tiny sectors, farmers had been distressed to led them to suicides, Raffale aircraft purchase had been a massive scam, Balacote air strike was a false claim.

A formidable list of shortcomings and a wide section of analysts and intellectuals felt fall of the BJP was imminent. They contended 2019 was different from 2014.

What then did the trick that the wipe out of BJP turned out to be a formidable tsunami. It was a result overwhelming the 2014 results. Whatever the Elf Liberals and intellectuals claimed, the people at the gross roots level chose the BJP to lead the country for the next five years.

Whatever it was, the 2019 elections had been a denouement of the intellectuals and liberals.

What is noticeable is that the tsunami swept from the extreme west and rippled through the entire north Indian planes to the northeastern hills. It was as if mimicking the wave of Aryan migration serial thousand years back. Even Bengali Left's latent claims

basis of issues.

What are the outlines of this new conservatism in the wide swaths of north of the Vindhias.

Obviously, the fulcrum of this new conservatism is nationalism or "rashtaband" which was presented in large dollpops by the BJP supremo in the wake of the Pakistan attack. People remembered the Mumbai attack and the spineless response of the government of the day. They had expected India to teach a lesson to Pakistan for the outrageous attack in Mumbai.

For a far less incident, though as much regrettable India's response to the Pulwama killing had been seen as a fitting reply. It was not much realised at the ground level that the gambit was a high risky venture and could have placed a huge burden on the country. However, these are hardly any considerations which count in the highly emotional issue of nationalism and patriotism.

Secondly, this appears to be a demonstration of a robust self-assertion. The people refused to be swayed much by promises of doles from the government. Rahul Gandhi had promised a scheme for a monthly assured dole of Rs 6,000 per

The results showed a surprise consolidation from divisions in society. Take for example Uttar Pradesh. The SP-BSP combination was thought to be catalyst for capturing the caste divisions of the state. The various castes and sub-castes were the pawns in this political chess game.

of exceptional-ism of last five decades had been mere straw in the face of the rising waves.

If you are looking at these developments trying to extricate from here and now, it would appear that he wave is not the "Modi factor" or Amit Shah's clever poll calculations. It is the rising spirit of a new conservatism in the country.

This conservative-rightist psychology would be the defining element of Indian politics. It marks a clear departure from the pseudo socialistic strangle hold over the politics of the nation since the days of Nehru. It is the emergence of India on its own, away from that iron-clad frame of imported ideas.

The hiatus between this new India and the old hackneyed ideas of earlier age became clear from the way the country took the poll campaign and their voting. While like pet parrots Lutyen's Delhi had been talking of Modi splitting up the country, the voting actually demonstrated a curious unanimity. Picking up the cues from the resident intellectuals of New Delhi, leading international media organisations carried cover stories of Modi as divider of the nation.

The results showed a surprise consolidation from divisions in society. Take for example Uttar Pradesh. The SP-BSP combination was thought to be catalyst for capturing the caste divisions of the state. The various castes and sub-castes were the pawns in this political chess game.

However, it appeared that the voting was for a party or a person across caste fault-lines. In the end, BJP bagged no less than fifty-eight seats in the state. This might be the precursor to the collapse of the caste based politics and voting on the

month for every poor family having an income less than a threshold level. The Trinamool Congress government in Bengal had believed in giving only dollpops of free money to locality clubs of young men to cycles -which of course needed immediate repairs before riding- to girls. They have turned down the freebies and instead expect free opportunities.

Thirdly, the new conservatism also harks back to the nation's past. It is conjuring up -rightly or wrongly- a distant past which looks golden and almost a fairy-tale story of a fair and plentiful society. That country of long lost memory is interwoven with the myths legends. A clean Ganga or a re-built Benares are mere components of that mythical world. But they could be an integral part of that story.

Lastly and on a far less elevated level, the new conservatism of the majority had always complained about appeasement of the minority under the earlier Nehruvian framework. This grumble about appeasement was the crucial around which pro-BJP voting across castes and classes in Uttar Prdesh made possible a consolidation of votes. A similar development explains the clear swing away from TMC towards the BJP in Bengal. Of course, the situation had been compounded by the sheer misrule, inefficiency and nepotism of the TMC structure.

Whatever happens, the onward march of India's new conservatism is unstoppable as of this moment. Societies and politics develop aggregate mentality which represent the zeitgeist of a time. We appear to be passing through such tremendous times of transformation. (IPA Service)

What is values education? To develop values in an individual from a young age so that he or she can become a responsible, conscious and honest member of society. The best place to develop the qualities, apart from home, is the school. So the Moral Science class, mostly integrated into the curriculum, can take care of it. Right? Think again. Whether you like it or not, the very mention of the MS class brings a big yawn from schoolchildren.

"Oh, it lectures us to be good... you know," says Ayan Sen, a Class VI student of a reputed English medium school in Kolkata. His tone makes it clear that he is bored with the topic though he is polite enough to leave unsaid, "Can we change the subject please?"

But what if the values necessary for making of a good human being are imbibed in a casual, playful manner with stories, examples, illustrations?

"Living in Harmony: A Course on Values Education and Life Skills" (Oxford University Press) attempts to offer an alternative to the staid moral science lessons we often come across. The series that starts with Class 1 to end in Class 10 is replete with interesting anecdotes, stories, illustrations, comic strips, etc. but keeps at its core the important lesson of 'living in harmony'.

For example, the book for Class I starts with the chapter 'Let's be friends' with an illustrated story from the Jatakas about a little conflict arising between 'Two Silly Friends', a lion cub and a tiger cub, which is solved by the intervention of a wise old elephant who shows how they can remain friends if both can see each other's view. The tagline reminds 'We all need friends'.

Other lessons are titled, among others, 'Let's Work Together', 'Learning to share' and how 'My family keeps me safe'.

This style of values education is maintained throughout as the lessons progress into higher classes with instances appropriate for the age groups. The Class 2 book, for instance, contains chapters like 'Respecting others', 'Being different' with a comic strip based on Tom Thumb, the folk-tale figure. He is short and tiny, i.e. different, but he also has his strong points and can contribute to society.

The lesson on 'Simple Living' for the Class III book draws on a real-life story of Vidyasagar, the educationist and reformist. He was once blocked from entering a banquet, though invited, as he was dressed in a simple dhoti and kurta. He went back, dressed in smart European clothes and was allowed in. At the dinner table he did not eat, he offered the food to his dress. He told the astonished host, "When I came dressed in grand clothes, I was let in. I thought it was the clothes that you had invited." The host got the point and apologised.

"I felt there was a great need to teach a course on values seriously and not as a token. What if we taught values

the way Physics or Biology is taught, the same topic spiralling upwards," says Mini Krishnan, series editor, on the concept behind.

Besides, as she explains the concept behind the series, "It is widely acknowledged that children are growing up in an environment which is much more violent and coarse than it was before. How do we prepare children to face the challenges that we did not have when we were their age? What we do, think, and say as teachers and parents will strongly influence what our children will think, do and say as adults."

As to the designing the content, Krishnan says, "It moves children from the space of an imaginary story-based contemplation to a more familiar and fundamental reflection based on their lives and familiar situations, that is, from a comfort zone gently into a more uncomfortable zone of facing themselves."

Thus the stories set as examples to talk about the values are drawn from fables, the Jatakas, folk tales etc. Is it a conscious decision to 'Indianise' the context as against the usual nursery rhymes and stories from across the seas popular in average 'English-medium' schools, you ask. "Indeed, yes. There is also plenty of material from China, from African countries (the ritual Alex Hailey described in his book Roots), from American Indian community behaviour (the Talking Stick) and from Korea," she says.

As the volumes progress gradually for students of higher classes they tackle more complex questions and situations. On the chapter on Sexuality, for example, meant for Class X, the message is 'Wait' illustrated by a story about a mother advising her son to wait till he becomes an adult before driving a car. But he does not listen and tries to drive at 13 and slams the car at the gatepost.

"You have all the new sexual energy through your veins, making you impatient. Remember what happened to the car. Be patient. WAIT," the gentle reminder ends the chapter.

Science subjects, explained the same way, dominate volumes meant for higher classes. The chapter 'Water is life' tackles the environ question of saving water, and saving the planet.

Moreover, Krishnan points out, "Some topics like 'Ahimsa', 'India Home to All Religions', 'Understanding Social Justice and Equity', 'Cast out Caste', were ideas that had never really been tackled in textbooks from a moral angle. Heritage for instance is not taught from what it is to belong to a post-Colonial nation whose identity and pride in itself nearly withered away."

Says Falguni Gosalia, teacher, what she likes about the Living Harmony series is that, "Without being judgmental it teaches the right values and in a fun way."

Sadhana Biswas, who privately teaches students from Class I to senior level, agrees. "It's easier to impart lessons on value education this way, and my students enjoy going through them." (TWF)

Valuing harmony

Values education seems dull but it can be imparted in a much more fun way, finds out Ranjita Biswas

Major Trends

Over the past 15 years, as the Living Harmony series has evolved to focus on contemporary concerns, the major trends relevant to values education for children, the designers contend, would be:

Social trends:

- The increasing importance of maintaining religious (communal) harmony and countering intolerance

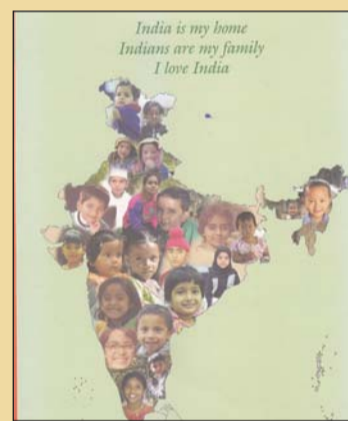
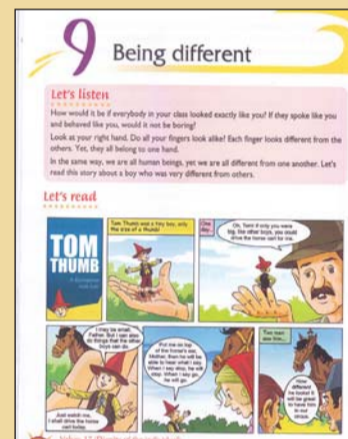
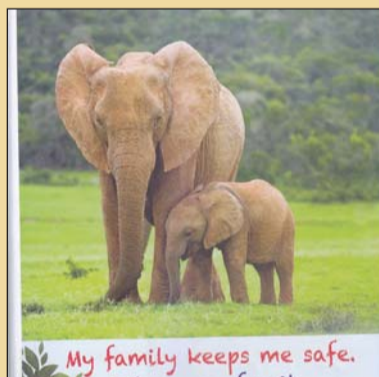
- Increasing awareness of the need to be inclusive (socially, culturally, etc.) and also with the disabled (differently abled) persons

Scientific and green concerns

- Increasing concerns about the health of the environment, climate change, etc.

- The spread of technology into every facet of our lives

- The need to attend to personal health and lifestyle



(Anti-clockwise from below left) Illustration from Class I book; talking about harmony among all; book on preservation from a volume for Class V; and the Tom Thumb example in Volume 2

'Easiest way to target women is by aiming at sexuality'

Journalist-author Seema Goswami, who had an opportunity to interview former Prime Minister late Atal Bihari Vajpayee during her career; was the chief guest at An Author's Afternoon presented by Shree Cement Ltd and organised by the Prabha Khaitan Foundation in association in Kolkata recently. In an interactive session with her husband, celebrity journalist Vir Sanghvi, Goswami spoke at length about her book Race Course Road and also women's position in politics. IBNS correspondent Souvik Ghosh brings excerpts:

There is a mention of a defence deal scandal

Also there are references to women politicians in the book. Were you aware of the alleged Rafale scam while writing?

No. Actually I didn't know. I wrote this book two years ago while the alleged Rafale scam broke out slightly over a year ago now. There was certainly no Rafale controversy when I was writing the book. But I decided to put in a bit of spice in the book and I found arms deal as an obvious thing to write about. But the alleged scam broke out after the book got published and it seemed that I had prior information about the controversy (smiles).



tioners in the book corresponding to the election season where leaders like Mamata Banerjee or Mayawati may be the deciding factor if no party gets a clear majority.

As far as the women politicians go, it was very obvious to me that Mamata and Mayawati would play very important role when it comes to the general elections. Mamata's hold in Bengal is more or less complete and no matter how hard the BJP tries, she is always going to have a very significant presence and the same for Mayawati. Obviously there was no mahagathbandhan (grand alliance) when I wrote the book. But more than that, I think it is obviously interesting to write about women in politics because they need to be a bit extraordinary. If one is a woman, she will have to be mad to get into politics because she is aware of the kind of treatment (she would receive).

Why all women are good in the book while men are not?

While writing, I was not conscious of it that the moral centre of my book were the women characters who mostly make the right choices. On the other hand, men in the book are more edged in shades of grey. It is not that I consciously wrote a book where all women characters are saint but I tried to sketch them as fully fleshed out and people in their own rights.

Also, the book is a bit insider to how politics works out in Delhi. Tell us a bit about it.

Being a journalist in Delhi, one gets to pick up a little bit of political gossips and almost like an osmosis the way government works. And there is a lot of stuff we can't write about because a journalist cannot prove everything he knows. So I wanted to write all those stuff in a book as a fiction. The book is a culmination of my 20-year experience and the stuffs which I knew. So it seems to be an insider's book not because I was an insider but I was observing everything as a fringe person.



Tell us about the media which doesn't come off well in your book.

I am a kind of an old-fashioned journalist. I began my career in 1980s and in those days, newspapers were very different and there wasn't much television except Doordarshan. In recent years, we don't really have news anymore. We just have an opinion that is masqueraded as news, be it newspapers or television channels. This kind of journalism disturbs me. I was sure that I had to express my disillusionment about media if I had to speak about it in my book. There is not really reporting anymore but biased individuals across the spectrum. I thought it would be interesting to pit two channels against each other in the book. And the only way to do it is by pitting anchors against each other.

In the book, the heroine is involved in a sex scandal or at least her sexuality or personal life is getting used. You think women in politics face such things?

We have recently seen the instance of Atishi Marlena (AAP candidate from East Delhi). I am certainly not sure that it was Gautam Gambhir who circulated the pamphlets against Atishi but from the kind of things written in the pamphlet, it is clear that people think the best way to target women is by targeting her sexuality. We have seen with Mayawati when she was younger and also with Mamata. Targeting sexuality is the easiest way to target a woman. This is why so few women are in politics.

Do you intend to write a sequel?

Yeah. The ending of the book is a bit open-ended and the idea was always to complete the story in the next book. But writing the sequel is a little bit more difficult because I will have to find a balance between the two. The narrative in the first book will have to be explained for those people who didn't read the first one. And also I have been overtaken by events very fast so I will have to keep going back and changing things around because I didn't want my book to seem so close to reality.

Need support, says Kashmiri trick shot star

Huzaib Shah, the first football trick shot star from Kashmir, became a sensation on social media after his performance at the global CR7 contest in 2017. He became an inspiration for many young football enthusiasts in the country, including one from his own state.

Shah Huzaib started playing football in 2016. "It was a difficult time in Kashmir and youths were all home-bound. We could not step out of our houses. A few of my cousins were staying in our house in Budgam. They are good footballers and playing with them was enjoyable. I got drawn to the sport during that time," said Huzaib in an email interview to **The Shillong Times**.

After two years of rigorous practice in the game, Huzaib started doing trick shots. "To do trick shots you need to know the game very well. So I learnt football first. My family always appreciates my endeavours and it is a constant support system for me," says the 15-year-old student of Class X.

In Kashmir, it is difficult for a youth of Huzaib's age to remain insulated from the ongoing violence. People are more interested in stone pelting than trick shots amid the unrest and that is doing harm to them, especially the youths, feels Huzaib.

"So to keep my mind away from all these I dedicate time to practising football trick shots and want to reach the advance level. Also, I want to help people learn these tricks one day and for this I need people's support," says the teenager.



He adds that support is elusive but he has not given up hope.

"Some people are jealous... But I want to continue my game and prove that there may be a great future in football trick shots. There are people in Kashmir who are good comedians and are getting more recognition than us (trick shot stars). I'm confused. Isn't what we are doing important," Huzaib wonders.

When asked about Huzaib, he says they do not know each other personally and "we are not doing these tricks together".

Huzaib wants to be a star footballer. His favourites on the field are Cristiano Ronaldo, David Beckham and Isco Alarcon. On his list of top trick shot stars are "Jed Hockin, Liam Coyte and Matanos, all from Europe".

Talking about competitiveness in Kashmir, Huzaib says he wants more trick shot stars to emerge from the state "so that this game gets recognition here".

"People enjoy trick shots. But the situation in Kashmir is not conducive for budding talent. Climatic condition is also a factor. We just need a platform where we can perform," he adds.

Shah Huzaib is from Budgam district in Jammu & Kashmir



Fighting with loved ones

By Dr Anjana Kannankara

We all have that one person in our lives with whom we argue and fight but still can't resist speaking to them".

Emotions are indeed strong so we ought to display them wisely and in the right manner to strengthen the bonds and also to engage our near and dear ones in the same experience we find ourselves in. Despite the strong affection and gratitude in our minds, we sometimes lack the ability to express how we feel, how we care about our family or loved ones simply because we do not realise the importance of conveying.

Has this thought ever crossed your mind that why do we fight with the people we love the most?

It's an interesting concept, the whole of which is hard to explain. The fact remains that we act in a more volatile manner with the people we'd feel most devastated to lose.

Well, shouldn't it be the opposite? Shouldn't we be fighting the least with the people who are willing to overlook even our most compromising flaws? But science says that half the time we tap into our belligerent selves, we are not even trying to be malicious; we unconsciously act aggressively because that's just part of being human; that's just the way we are made! However, human psychology lays down a few simple reasons.

Expression of true emotions
We feel safe in pouring out the honest emotions around the people we love and trust the most because we believe we don't need to filter or sugarcoat anything. The urge to show our sincerity, to just be ourselves, brings forth a necessity to not hide anything in front of our beloved ones. We take it for granted that our aggression can be understood by them. But if the other person does not take it the same way, the result would be damaging.

High expectations
With our dear ones, we expect them to put our needs at high priority as their own. They are the people whose needs we would keep above our own and quite naturally

we would expect that they'll do the same for us! So when we find that we are not getting back what we think we bestow on them unconditionally, the situation explodes!

Familiarity breeds contempt

We might be aware of all the secrets and past stories about the people who are close to us. The sad part is that many a time we can't resist using their past mistakes as weapons simply to win the argument. This would create a sense of distrust and resentment in the mind of the other person. One should be very careful not to play with the

through the daily fights than live away from them! We know we need them just like the air we breathe and can't ever think of walking away. While fights are disruptive, more often than not they result in solutions that make for a better relationship. But sometimes the hurt caused might evolve into deep wounds that can never be healed.

Wearing no masks

We tend to be brutally honest with them — in a way that we can't be with the rest of the world is another reason for a fight to erupt. We often blurt out harsh truths that may upset

mistakes that they make!

For some extra attention

At times it would be just craving for a little extra attention. While picking up a fight with mom or sister or brother just because of what a horrible day it was at work or school, what we really mean to say is "please give me some extra attention". A little love and pampering — who wouldn't want that?

Possessiveness

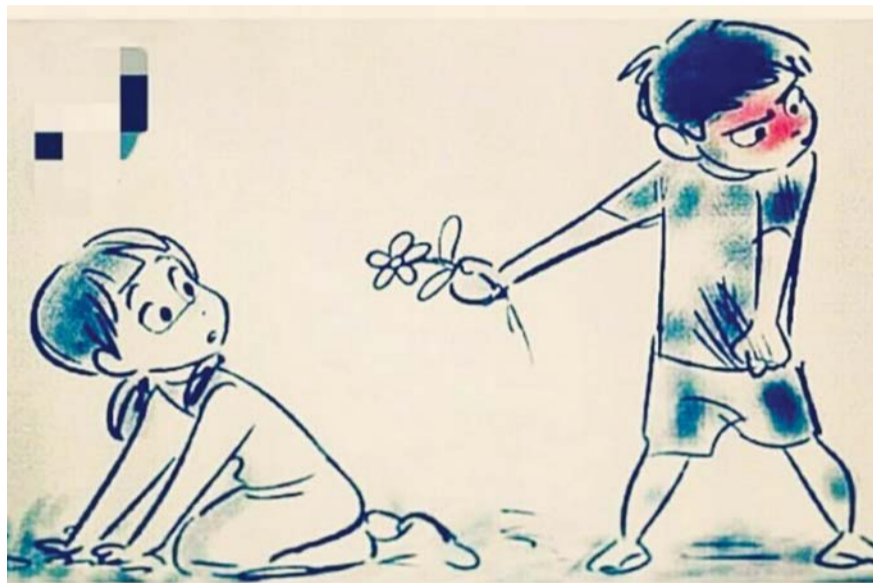
It is commonly found that there exists a healthy possessiveness in relationships but usually does not become a cause for worry. If it crosses a reasonable limit, stress and pressure mounts upon the people concerned. Usually, we consider our dear ones as our 'own', where controlling, domineering, intruding on other's boundaries and disrespect other's inherent independence might occur unintentionally. Needless to say, fights are only byproducts in such circumstances.

Insecurity

All fights arise from insecurities. As a matter of fact, there are experts who opine that fights are demands placed indirectly. The idea of making demands often arises with the thought of rejections. Each fight with a dear one is an effort to place our views upon theirs; a desperate struggle to make ourselves heard! But of course, when both hands come together to clap, there is no escape from a distressing fight.

As the bottom line, fights often occur when emotions combined with unhappiness take a toll on the parties concerned. Let us all learn to value the feelings of each other, understand the moods of the other person, provide some comfort from our side and bring ourselves out of insecurities. The pain caused by those who matter is the same for all hearts. Be it mom, brother, kid or friend — let's try treating them exactly the way we wish to be treated by them; enjoy loving them unconditionally and believe me, it would work wonders in the relationship. Sure, we all wish to be heard, but do remember — we can make ourselves heard calmly too!

(The author is director, TGL Foundation, and senior director, FWO)



emotions of someone because we may win the argument but will lose the person forever.

Highest value for relation

Deep inside our minds, we give highest prominence to the relationship with our family or friends, hence we wish to explore all means, clear the misunderstandings and resolve all differences, to carry on smoothly but unfortunately end up being persistent causing discomfort to others in due course, leading to fights or arguments. If not for the value given for the relationship, why else would we waste all that energy and emotion in trying to work each one of the conflicts out? In any case, no healthy relationship can be built on silent treatments!

Caring too much

For our dear ones and their feelings matter too much. We would rather bear the pain of going

them, about a particular look, attire or a trait but all we really intend is to lay out the reality exactly as it is, without any sweet talking. After all, we feel it's our duty to try saving the person we love from getting hurt before anyone else pointing fingers at them. They might think we're their worst critics, but actually our efforts to save them from embarrassing moments might not be grasped well by the other person.

Lower tolerance level

When it comes to the rest of the world, we believe we have to double check what the outcome of each action will be! May be we have a mentality to not interfere or create a scene with strangers or acquaintances even when they commit grave mistakes, as it doesn't matter to us! But with family or dear ones, we are part of them and would never able to tolerate even the smallest

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MAY 26, 2019

Sun semi-sextile Uranus on your solar return chart ensures an excellent year ahead. This year you should try to focus your energy into professional endeavors. It would be a period of success and happiness, as you would make major gains. You would easily outsmart your competitors because of your better skills and aptitude. Investments during this period would also yield handsome gains. New proposals for joint venture would be alluring. You would make new friends through old ones.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

The planetary configuration indicates that you would be ambitious, realistic, practical and disciplined towards work and commitments. This is a time when you can be bold and enjoy new experiences. You tend to talk more readily, particularly about your own personal likes and dislikes or your past. This is an excellent time to work on intellectual tasks with more vigour and passion. You are likely to draw emotional and sensitive individuals into your social circle. At the root of this is likely to be a quest for a sense of personal freedom.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

This is a period that brings desire for love, harmony and peace in your life. Personal and professional relations are loving, stable, and harmonious. This week brings social meetings and events, and for situations that call for treating others with equality and respect. This would be a good week for financial undertakings involving electronics, technology, arts as well as group activities. Learning new things is your passion this week. You are more sensitive and your artistic imagination is stirred, and you have an increased appreciation for subtleties.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Financial benefits accrue and this week proves good in terms of investments and finances. This is the time when gifts and rewards come to you, as well as opportunities to expand your horizon through travel, a broadening of your "audience" if you have one, or higher studies. Career moves in the form of new offers could also arrive now, is a particularly auspicious period for such matters. You come across as especially articulate, and your good nature is bound to attract some attention. You are blessed with good mood and health to indulge in outdoor activities.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

You would be generous, pleasantly emotional and creative. Striking a balance between your attention to career and to your family life is necessary. Taking steps to improve your family and home life as well as your career and public life will be in order. You will also thoroughly enjoy artistic, musical, or cultural events and activities, especially in the company of a loved one. This is a good time to build your skills, get organized, and attend to your health and well being. You are able to stand your ground and assert yourself more than usual.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You achieve success as you are brilliant and there is good fortune attending professional, personal and material aspects. You interact with people in position of power and authority gracefully and diplomatically. Your finances could also improve through continuous efforts and follow-ups. In love and romance your personal relationship takes on a special quality as you communicate beautifully. You have energy at your disposal to move your plans forward and you are more enterprising. Health needs care and old habits of excesses need to be discarded; this would benefit both you and your family.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

Self-confidence and quick action are highlighted in this phase. This is a good time to promote harmony and goodwill as you have to garner a good team spirit right now and be more tactful with your co-workers. You need the energies, companionship, and support of other people. It can also be

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

The planetary configuration indicates that your domestic and career needs are likely to be fulfilled. New ideas and concepts floated by you at your work place will be appreciated. You find an intoxicating romance and express your feelings to your loved one. At work, you may take up new assignments and projects that would bring creativity and development of new ideas. Your inner hopes and desires come to the fore even as you tackle your job with a realistic and practical purpose of mind. You extend your hospitality to family and expenses occur this week on purchasing of luxurious household items.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You are unusual, introspective and reserved this week. It is good time to organize your workplace and make it more effective and equipped with good infrastructure. This is an exceptionally exciting time as professional and business opportunities are offered to you. You are just fair and generous in family and professional situations. Health needs to be looked at; also be careful in your interpersonal dealings and avoid confrontations. Your mind is focused on private matters and past issues during this cycle. This is a time when you are least likely to speak out of turn or to express yourself freely.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You may take up assignments and projects and this would end on a winning note for you. Your mind is bright, alert, and active during this cycle, and you have the ability to come up with unusual and inventive ideas. Sharing your thoughts with others is a prime interest. Others tend to particularly enjoy your conversations during this transit—you are willing to listen as well as add your own thoughts. Your ability to grasp unusual subject matters and to intuitively understand what others are trying to say win you some brownie points. You could also do a lot of thinking and muse about your own happiness and long-term goals.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You succeed in areas that require a creative bent of mind as well as technical ability. Some of you may find that your career is moving towards a more service-oriented direction. You have more faith in general regarding your career and the direction in which you are headed. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for this placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits. You are able to stand your ground and assert yourself more than usual during this transit.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

The focus would be on responsibilities and workload. You want to leave your mark on the world in some way—however big or small—and you are able to make an impression more than usual. If circumstances are such, you are able to easily fight back. In fact, you may be somewhat combative under this influence, and you may have a short temper. If you've been off track, be kind to yourself, but make sure you re-commit to your personal goals. Take charge of your life, but don't bulldoze others in the process. This is an excellent transit for assertiveness and physical vitality.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

This week brings for you socializing, romance and stability at the work place. Connections can be made now and networking pays off. Being part of a community or circle of friends and building your social network is important to you at this time. This is a period when practical vision may be at a high, during which you can see what needs to be done and just how to go about doing it. Career and vocational issues may benefit from the increased clarity you possess. Much of your energy will be applied to vocational achievement, professional success, and leadership.

Cruelty in wool industry

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



Many people think that the wool industry is made of sheep gambling in pastures, that no animal is abused or killed, that placid sheep stand in line quietly and men with large electric scissors shear their hair off. Not true.

Before you buy wool see the PETA video, released in 2017, of the treatment of sheep in the shearing sheds of the main wool farms across Australia. The undercover video showed workers violently punching frightened sheep in the face, stomping and standing on their heads and necks, slamming their heads on the floor, beating and jabbing them in the head with electric clippers. The violent shearing process left large, bloody cuts on their bodies and workers stitched up gaping wounds with a needle and thread without any anaesthesia. Says one photographer, "The shearing shed must be one of the worst places in the world for cruelty to animals... I have seen shearers punch sheep with their shears or their fists until the sheep's nose bled. I have seen sheep with half their faces shorn off..."

Three years before this, in 2014, PETA exposed similar abuse in the top wool exporting farms. The secretary of the Shearing Contractors' Association of Australia said that the 2014 footage had been a "wake-up call" to the industry and vowed to implement a zero-tolerance policy on cruelty to animals. After a few weeks it was business as usual and the cruelty was resumed.

Shearers are the bottom of human evolution — illiterate, impatient, insensitive farm labour, who are paid per sheep. It doesn't matter whether they cause the frightened animals distress and injury, they simply want the numbers done and their wages.

Is this the only country where such terrible things are done by shearers? Similar exposés have been done in Argentina, Chile and the United States, and they show the same brutality.

If the wool farms are not going to stop this, it is up to us, the consumers, to do it. Go wool free (God, thank you for acrylic!). You could write to wool retailers across the world to demand better conditions. You could start a shaming process through social media.

Twenty years ago carpet importers from Europe and America were under pressure to stop doing business with India because we had been accused of using little children to make them. I was not in government. We made a group called Rugmark, moved into Varanasi and Bhadohi, and visited carpet makers and removed the children. We sent some back to their parents in Bihar where they had been kidnapped from, we put others in orphanages and schools which we established. By the time the exercise was over, children were out of the production system. Carpet exporters signed a pledge, which holds good till today, that they would never use them again.

We need to solve this problem with a similar label. Australia and New Zealand are the largest exporters of wool. Australia alone accounts for one fifth of global wool production. In 2018 Australia exported 152 million dollars worth (41.47 million kg) to India. We import carpet wool, greasy wool,

India should refuse to buy wool from farms that have cruel shearing practices. There is another hideous practice called mulesing

scoured wool, clipped wool, tannery wool, lamb's wool, merino wool and wool waste.

We use this wool to make carpets, handloom fabrics, yarn, hosiery and knitwear — cardigans, pullovers, socks, gloves, mufflers and suit material. Carpet manufacturers blend domestic with New Zealand wool. We export the finished products.

We are big enough to influence the way sheep are kept, and treated, all over the world. India's wool industrialists need to develop a label that says Ethical Wool. Consumers now object to buying things which are not made by paying ethical fair wages, millions have gone vegan or organic, most designers have given up fur. Why not apply this new morality, and distaste for wickedness, to wool?

Companies like Patagonia have al-

ready stopped using wool from the general market, and source it from wool farms that have ethical practices.

Our companies should refuse to buy wool from farms that have cruel shearing practices. There is a hideous practice called mulesing. Sheep are grown to get more and more wool on their bodies — some cannot even walk any more. Because sheep hair is oily, and the area round the anus is warm, and full of faeces and urine, sometimes blowfly lay their eggs on the skin, and the larvae feed on the sheep's tissue. This, of course, makes the sheep sick and the quality of hair goes down. So, what the industry does is even worse. They cut the skin from the buttocks without anaesthesia. What would you do if some sick individual tried to cut large chunks of skin and flesh from around your anus?

When the world threatened to boycott mulesed wool, Australia vowed in 2004 that they would ban it by 2010. It is 2019 and they have still not done it. Many clothing companies have pledged not to use wool from sheep that have undergone this procedure.

There are many other horrible things that happen to sheep. For instance, Sharlea sheep have been mutated to produce a certain kind of wool. However, the same genetic mutation has also made them blind and unable to walk. Millions of sheep perish every year on large wool farms due to disease and individual neglect that occurs when animals, meant to roam freely, are squeezed together. Adequate health, and veterinary care for ailments, is non-existent. And, at the end of their "productive" lives, they're shipped to slaughter to the Middle East in overcrowded ships.

If we confined our label to anti-mulesing and anti-bad shearing, castration, tail-docking, and ear-punching, we would go a long way. If our Indian wool industry would hire one animal welfare organisation in Australia to check randomly, and then give ethical wool labels, it could change the world. When India banned Pate foie gras in 2014, so did dozens of countries in Europe. When we started Rugmark and cleaned up child labour, it had an impact on so many industries which used child labour. It is time for Ethical Wool to become a reality.

(To join the animal welfare movement contact gandhim@nic.in, www.peopleforanimalsindia.org)

The Past is to be respected and acknowledged, but not to be worshiped. It is our future in which we will find our greatness.

--- Pierre Trudeau

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'Secular' Modi

Secularism in India is a creed and an article of faith. The Constitution guarantees freedom and rights to all citizens in equal measure. The societies in India have an eminent desire to co-exist. Riots happened, but they were aberrations and not a norm. Hinduism, which is both a religion and a way of life, is tolerant about other faiths and saw the world as one, as is also evident from the message it held aloft -- Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam, World is one Family. The thought arises in the context of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call on Saturday to reach out to minorities, in an acceptance speech he made in Delhi after being elected for a second time as leader of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). When Modi took over as PM for the first time in 2014, he made an attempt to keep aside the past -- read the Gujarat riots of February, 2002 which happened under his chief ministerial watch -- and declare to the world that the Indian Constitution would guide him in his actions in as much that it would be his Holy Gita in governmental performance. To be fair to Modi, he did not act in a different manner. In fact, no PM can.

Yet, the fact also remains that streams in the Sangh Parivar of which Modi is a part had repeatedly gone hammer and tongs at Muslims as also hapless Dalits. Modi as PM did not do enough to rein them in. His silence as leader of the nation in such situations meant he failed to outgrow his RSS moorings. This is due to the fact that his political base was built on that controversial edifice. RSS is changing for the better in many ways. Both RSS and Modi are now keeping hate-mongers like Pravin Togadia under "some" control. Modi's call to MPs of BJP/NDA to reach out to the minorities and help open a new chapter is appreciable. True, there are those who create an atmosphere of scare among them so as to fish in troubled waters. They need to be stopped in their tracks. Minorities everywhere face problems, but less in India thanks to the great Indian traditions; and no thanks to our politicians, many of whom turned secularism into nothing more than a slogan for vote-fetching. Modi, as PM again, would do well to translate his words into deeds. It will be a good start.

BJP's Winning Combinations

By HH Mohrmen

As soon as the trends of the Lok Sabha election results began to appear, election observers, political pundits and what have you, started to debate what works for the BJP and its NDA alliance that helped it win a massive victory and what has not worked for the Congress and its allies that it failed miserably to win the support of the people. The factors that led to the winning and losing are as numerous as stars in the sky, but one thing is definite. It was not magic that helped the BJP win a major victory in the recent general elections, and it was not anybody's curse either that made the opposition lose so badly.

There are several factors which influence the victory or the defeat of political parties and here are some which are in the forefront. It is the Modi wave some opine; others believe it is his charisma or rather the Modi brand that was successfully marketed. Every move he made and every dress he wore counted and it emitted a certain kind of message which resonated with the waiting receivers. He was projected as a pious man, who had humble beginnings and remained humble even when he was the Prime Minister of the country. Modi's image is that of a man who by dint of his hard work has reached the top office in the country. A man who is a devout Hindu and a Prime Minister who is proud to wear his religion on his sleeves and to appeal to constituents which constitute the largest chunk of the population in the country.

This Modi image was further bolstered by the media sympathetic to Modi and the BJP. This was obvious from the way they interviewed him and the content of the interview which was comical in some cases. Modi on the other hand was selective in his choice of interviewees (and chose a movie star instead of a journalist) while also handpicking the media houses that he chose to be interviewed. This was all an attempt to sell brand Modi to the people and a section

of the media were willing partners.

Still some are of the opinion that the massive victory is due to the Hindutva wave, and the hard work of the RSS in nurturing its support base all of which succeeded and brought the much needed numbers for the BJP. The RSS is like an engine and the BJP the different compartments of the train. The credit for the superb performance of the BJP goes to the RSS which is the engine that pulls the train. The Party's decision to allot the Bhopal ticket to an accused in a terrorist attack is one case which shows that the party is pushing its Hindutva agenda further. Although the Ram Mandir issue was not on the agenda because it is sub-judice, yet majority appeasement was very much evident when the party chief, Amit Shah announced that they

The factors that led one party to win and another to lose are many and depends on local situations too. In one place it could be brand Modi, in others it could be the Hindutva propaganda while in the other it could be the Balakot air strike which helped the BJP to win.

would implement the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) if the party returns to power.

This election like any other election before it was very much influenced by India Inc. The different corporate houses supplied the different parties with the much needed resource. This they have in abundance and this has contributed to the BJP's win by a huge margin. As reported in the media the lion's share or the major contribution made by the different corporate houses in the BJP. Hence this is another factor that helped the party win the election.

Some argue that what helped the Party win is because of its ability to make the best use of social media. The BJP has indeed

graduated from 2014 and it's messaging, courtesy the internet penetration even to the far corners of the country has definitely helped the Organisation reach even the far flung areas. Organisation wise the BJP is in a better position and because the party is power in the Centre and even in some state, its cadres are very active. It is also because of strong grass roots presence of the RSS that the BJP won a thumping majority.

Some say that Balakot air strike 'is the factor' or rather it was like the last straw which ignited the fire for the BJP and the NDA and it worked in favour of the party in power. National security became an important issue and the incident helped project Modi and the NDA as the only party which can protect the nation from the enemy. The opposition and those who questioned the strike

were branded as anti-national, traitors and enemies of the nation. This has given the Hindutva brigade the impetus to work harder and has also had a huge impact on the majority population of the country.

It was rightly pointed out that it looked like the agenda which appealed to the Hindutva brigade and now even the majority population, is not music to the ears of people in the other parts of the country. The BJP did not make a dent in the non-Hindi speaking states either in the south or the north east of India. In the NE the BJP was only represented by its alliance partners in the tribal states. The non-Hindi speaking population of the country still feel alienated and feel excluded from Modi's grand plan.

The opposition parties

particularly the Congress got it all wrong. It began when the party and its alliance failed to cobble a united opposition front to fight the BJP and the NDA. On the organisational front the Congress units are no match to the RSS which works like a well oiled machine. In cases like in Meghalaya, even the party units were not functioning. This was apparent in Meghalaya where Congress candidate, Vincent H. Pala won not because of the party but because time favours him. As someone said, "in spite of his non-performance, he just happened to be on the right side of the divide."

The Congress does not even have a strong grassroots presence. Their cadres are complacent. Hence they failed miserably even in the states where they had just won the Assembly elections. The party should be ashamed for doing so poorly even in the states they are ruling. This has also compelled people like this writer to eat humble pie because the party had failed even in the states that it was expected to do well.

The factors that led one party to win and another to lose are many and depends on local situations too. In one place it could be brand Modi, in others it could be the Hindutva propaganda while in the other it could be the Balakot air strike which helped the BJP to win. It cannot therefore be said that any single factor was responsible for the BJP's win and the Congress and others losing this elections. It is not that the Party decided on one single winnable factor that clicked and which helped the party to win. It was a combination of several factors which led to the BJP winning handsomely in the just concluded election. The Party and its alliance partners just happened to have a winning combination which worked well and helped them retain power in Delhi.

For the Congress Party, soul-searching is important at this juncture. It needs to analyse the reasons for its shoddy performance.

It is a hot burning and the LDF government in the state of Kerala has never been able to come out of the catch-22 situation so far. Sabarimala has always been a thorn in the flesh of the Kerala government. But the onus is now on the state unit of the NDA to follow up on its repeated assurances to press the Centre to bring an ordinance to override the Supreme Court's verdict permitting young women's entry at Sabarimala. During Modi's campaign in Tamil Nadu, where he alleged that the Communists were using brute force to strike at the roots of faith and expression, Modi offered and assured the faithful saying, "As long as the BJP is there, nobody will be able to destroy our faith and culture."

It may be recalled that BJP state president Mr Sreedharan Pillai also had promised to press the Centre, once the BJP was back in power, to take recourse to the ordinance route to restore the status quo at Sabarimala. So, the mountainous issue can be solved by the Centre issuing an ordinance overriding the Supreme Court verdict which allowed women of the menstruating age at Sabarimala. The LDF Government had no other option since it is compelled to implement the court verdict, irrespective of whether it was for or against the entry of young women inside the temple.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Kochi

Votes of Aspiration Redraft economic vision

By Shivaji Sarkar

The BJP, rather Narendra Modi, has stunned the world. Resounding victory touching 352 plus is a rare feat in an election. The spread is all the more spectacular as the fortress West Bengal has collapsed. In fact, the surprise is not his victory. It is sheer poll m a n a g e m e n t notwithstanding not so bright an economy in real terms.

Yes, Modi stressed on the populist measures that touched the poor -- Pradhan Matri housing, Ayushman health care, toilets in every house, job ruses of MUDRA or Skill India and about 431 other programmes. In the post-election scenario, these programmes look to have touched the hearts of millions. May be, as part of their gratitude, they voted Modi back to power with a thumping majority.

That may possibly explain a uniform phenomenon of the rout of caste-based parties such as of Mayawati's BSP, with the support base among dalits; Ajit Singh's RLD based on Jat support; Mulayam-Akhilesh's SP a hardcore Yadav-OBC party; Chandrababu Naidu's TDP, a party of OBC and fringe castes but with a slightly wider base; Sharad Pawar's NCP, strong Maratha sugar-lobby party or Laloo Yadav's RLD, a Yadav party.

The economic packages lured the voters to vote for Modi, who sells dreams to the fringe classes, rather than the combine put together. This is possibly Modi's new political economy. It does not serve the elite voters, who certainly no political party can trust for loyalty. A best instance is that of Modi's one time Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramaniam. Modi could trust him but Subramaniam could not understand Modi and chose a different path.

Modi's macro economy functioned different from his targeted-vote economy. Dole-based economy succeeded politically to break the caste arithmetic, a shrewd move indeed. But so far his macro economy has been a continuation of the hardcore Manmohan Singh's principles called Manmohanomics. So Modi had to bear the brunt of criticism that had seen the ouster of Manmohan Singh.

This no doubt had put a spanner in the progress of the nation, and which led to joblessness, industrial slowdown, lack of demand, high bank NPAs, crisis in public sector like giants BSNL/MTNL, ONGC, petro companies and Maha Navaratnas.

But that was before the elections. What next? Would he now have a new policy? Modi did not promise much in concrete terms. But if he and his government continue the same policy, the nation would continue to go downhill, which would neither suit him nor the country.

It is not the public sector alone that faced the brunt. Hindustan Lever, the largest consumer goods producer, had the poorest show in 18 months in March 2019 of 7 per cent. And what was unnerving was its CEO Sanjiv Mehta's statement: "Consumer essentials are recession resistant but not recession-proof".

From car makers to toothpaste sellers and in fact every sector has had a lousy start this year. All eyes are now fixed on Modi's new policies. Would he be breaking away from Manmohanomics to pave a super highway of growth or would his team continue to struggle in search for a policy.

India has to come out of this recession else the aspirational voters might behave in the most frustrated manner. During

the past two years farmers' distress has increased and they have had to march several times either to the country's capital Delhi or the financial capital Mumbai. Mostly peaceful, but with extreme angst!

The new government is literally walking on the razor's edge. The BJP's popular Hindutva promises wonderful life as did the Marxism in Soviet Union. An aspirational voter believes in it because he feels he would have more than what he can actually see.

However, the BJP faces its toughest challenge now. Mere booth management does not win polls, and this it realised in the three State polls held last December. A correction today has paid seat dividends no doubt, but now the young voters want better industrial show, action and result that would ameliorate their lot.

Modi and team must accept that 2019 is an aspirational vote, a process of social synthesis. And the caste divide in Indian social system has been obliterated by a strong Modi. Poorer people, having got the basics of food, cash support, house and toilet, would be demanding more.

India is entering the middle income category of countries around \$2,000 per capita income. Newly-emerging consuming classes are driven by aspiration rather than feudal style dole outs. Even less-demanding rural youth vie with the urban youth.

Economy needs a boost. The last five years have seen a benign environment where food prices recorded a modest increase. Now a global economic slowdown is visible. There are incipient signs of stress on the price front while global trade wars, may be even real wars, are breaking out. Brexit may change European economy and those dependent on it.

Modi has also to work in education, its funding and linking it to industry and manufacturing. He also has to work on a new short-duration syllabus that saves nation's money and churns out skilled people faster. Public universities are in crisis and private ones in a morass. The youth is unhappy. The system needs cash and policy lubrication.

The tax system needs reform as the one-nation GST has hit many sectors such as education, NGOs, small traders and entrepreneurs. Income tax reduction is awaited. It is a tough task as people's purchasing power has to be increased as also the government's revenue. The stock market is in a thaw. Occasional boom is stated to be self-managed.

The economic vision has to be redrafted. The NITI Aayog has to be invigorated. It has to find out solutions to inflation, slowdown and joblessness. The Aayog has to function as a think tank but is unable to even suggest ways to come out of flip-flop policies on taxing fuel or high tolls or cost on working out tax component. Over 5 per cent of corporate expenses are on working out the taxes and satisfying tax raiders.

The nation and its people have reposed trust. They want to be paid back and cannot wait for another term to deliver. Till today, Indira Gandhi is ridiculed for the failure of her garibi hatao slogan. A lion of a Modi cannot repeat that. It would devastate the people. He has to function to invigorate the faith in leadership.

The aspirations today are more than what these were 2014. Indians believe Modi has the magic wand to solve the problems and make India the leading economy. And hope next five years would finally see 'India shining'. —INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Bengal's politics of violence

Editor,
Apropos the letter -- "Bengal violence, a one-sided view" by M. Khyriem, (ST May 23, 2019), I would like to further clarify my points. If a village is affected by malaria, a doctor will certainly be pointedly focused on hovering "mosquitoes" than "ants" on their way to their holes. Will I say that the doctor is one-sided and biased here? Normally ants do not bite if you do not "provoke" them. Ants normally just follow their path and head towards their colonies. Their road shows are beautiful. Please allow me to compare the TMC cadre with mosquitoes which have stung and killed many people. The deeper we go the more it reeks of targeted violence.

What all has not been done by TMC brigands in Bengal to win the election, or to remain in power? They have become "manav to danav" -- from human to beast --- most of their evil deeds were under-reported from day one. They not only imported people from outside and intimidated the natives but also tortured and shot them with guns with impunity. For the last four years, I have personally heard many painful stories from the people who have suffered. Their sufferings are u n s p e a k a b l e , unconstitutional and inhumane. A TMC worker did not hesitate to urinate on a

woman's mouth when she was found supporting the rival party.

One scholar - Prof Nirmal Maity of Kolkata quips, "About 42 people have been killed by TMC workers, countless other fatally injured in last eight months but they never became newsworthy; and therefore no one heard the scream that "India is under threat" or "democracy is in danger".

If we analyze the series of violent incidents at different points of time and events in West Bengal in past few years, we can understand that Mamata's administration has practically put the very "security" and sovereignty of the NATION at risk. This could have harmed and hurt other neighboring states too -- even our Meghalaya in due course of time. I could foresee this happening!

Further, in my letters I have not said that the statue of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was destroyed by TMC. There are many "enablers" to accomplish the evil plans for narrow political ends. One believes that in one shot Didi's anger could have brought the management of the college to submission. If not more watchmen and gate keepers of the institution could have spilled the beans. But that did not happen. Several "clues" were just pushed under the carpet. I don't want to trust TMC MPs/MLAs who indulge in unholy tricks and

betrayed their own people. It is in the know that many violent crimes were committed by TMC cadres by wearing particular kind of dresses to malign their rivals.

Nevertheless, to save myself, in my article - "Anarchy in Bengal" I had coined a phrase - damp wood. Even in non-TMC parties, a few could act like damp wood that can at times tarnish the image of the party they belong to. This is possible everywhere at any point of time.

However, my regular writings on Mamata's misrule and her open discrimination was not at all for the purpose of showing who had destroyed that particular bust of an iconic figure. It is, in fact, to bring out other suppressed truths, which are detrimental to the state and country, and "endless sufferings" of the natives. My humble intention is to hold forth how the whole edifice of Bengal's ethos and rich values are being systematically knocked down by chisels and hammers of bigotry and terror which are expanding their base and dominance.

People are worried about the bust, but I am worried for much more. Of course, it is good to acknowledge the views of caution that the rude tremors in West Bengal can shake Assam and then immediately Meghalaya. I'm very glad that Mr. Khyriem's letter has made me more informed, particularly about the

ground realities.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong 2

NDA Govt must hit the ground running

Editor,
As the nation has now given a clear mandate to BJP ruled NDA alliance, it is high time now that this majority party in power puts the country's focus quickly back on track. The governance and development issues which had taken a back seat for over two months, owing to enforcement of Model Code of Conduct, now needs immediate attention. The pomp and glory of election victory should immediately subside by giving due importance to further necessary steps to quickly form the new incumbent government.

The steps related to form the new government i.e. mammoth cabinet formation, ministries berth allocation, appointment of key officers to various ministries to spearhead the functioning of various departments and also to fast track various on-going development programmes/welfare schemes should be accorded priority. The nation now has no time to patiently wait for victory speeches, ceremonies and celebrations to get over. A delay in formation of the new government, if it is still under jubilation, may

further jeopardize a common voter's morale on the ground who otherwise expects a speedy day-to-day functioning of the government machinery (i.e. post elections).

The incumbent government should now set an example of moving to business as usual quickly, which is now an easy task for NDA upon its second successive win. Many core issues now need immediate attention including working out a strategy on oil import with Iran and sanctions imposed by US, clarifying the stand on distorted unemployment data, impeding agrarian crisis and much more. The much expected quicker government formation move may perhaps result in getting all the newly elected political representatives of Lok Sabha up and running without much delay and ensure that the nation leaps back to normalcy in quick succession.

Yours etc.,
Varun SD
Bangalore - 72

NDA and the Sabarimala issue

Editor,
Now that the BJP government has come to power at the Centre, Sabarimala issue is surely going to be solved taking into account of the assurances given by the Prime Minister during his electioneering for the just concluded Lok Sabha Polls.

"Tired minds don't plan well.
Sleep first, plan later."

— Walter Reisch

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MAY 28, 2019

PUBG takes a toll on young minds

PUBG or the PlayerUnknowns Battlegrounds is an online multiplayer war game that is played on smart phones by teenagers and young adults. Today the addiction to the game has reached such proportions that parents don't know how to deal with their children. Perhaps one of the reasons why the SSLC results announced by MBOSE on Monday saw the schools of Shillong not performing well while schools from the other districts of the state captured some of the best twenty positions, is also because students in rural Meghalaya are either digitally badly connected or their parents cannot afford mobile phones. A good number of high school and college students as well as adults with time on their hands are seen with earphones on and their fingers typing away on their mobile phones. The game is inspired by the 2000 Japanese film Battle Royale, and expanded into a stand-alone game under Brendan Greene's creative direction. In the game, up to one hundred players parachute onto an island and scavenge for weapons and equipment to kill others while avoiding getting killed themselves. The available safe area of the game's map decreases in size over time, directing surviving players into tighter areas to force encounters. The last player or team standing wins the round.

Battlegrounds was first released for Microsoft Windows in March 2017, with a full release on December 20, 2017. The game was officially launched in September 2018. The same year, a free-to-play mobile version for Android and iOS was released, in addition to a port for the PlayStation 4. Battlegrounds is one of the best-selling and most-played video games of all time, selling over fifty million copies worldwide by June 2018, with over 400 million players worldwide including the mobile version. This game is nothing short of an extreme sport and people prioritizing the game over other studies or other duties is commonplace now.

Statistics as of December 2018 show that PubG Mobile has 200 million monthly players and 30 million daily players (excluding China). 8% of the total players are from India and 33% are from China (October 2018 numbers)

The average amount spent per day on PubG is a whopping 1.1 million dollars. A beginner plays with other beginners and a person's chances of winning goes up drastically as he starts playing with experts. This ensures that a player's win-percentage stays high, and he keeps getting the adrenaline rush that the game feeds the players with. The algorithm of the game is such that if a person loses 5 games in a row, he has a chance of winning the next two rounds and his hope of winning continues. How this mobile game negatively affects India's youth is an urgent subject of research.

This was a moment in history whereby India stood 'Modi'fied 2.024. A triumph of Hindutva majoritarianism as he ably convinced voters of the rise of a new India. The BJP made good its promise abke baar 300 paar by winning 303 seats and with allies totaled 353 in a 543 Lok Sabha. A turning point which cements the dominance of Modi and BJP. Today, NaMo stands numero uno unchallenged thanks to voters reposing unquestioned faith in him.

He has created history by becoming the first non-Congress Prime Minister to be re-elected after completing a full five-year term in office. And the only one after Nehru and Indira Gandhi to be re-elected to office with full majority after completing a full term, 48 years after 1971. Today this political phenomenon has created a deep sense of identification with the aam aadmi resulting in the lotus blooming pan India.

Not only did he get rid of old Mandal caste loyalties but also fashioned an intense script of muscular nationalism with strong Hindutva mooring of a new India which over 41% voters lapped up. He stirred a combination of hope and fear, mixed a desire for national greatness with perceived threats from internal and external enemies, vaulted over faultlines of caste and class thereby creating a pan India identity enveloping Brahmins, Banias, rich and the aspirational poor. Class trounced caste with Modi as the unifier.

More. NaMo was unapologetic about his appetite for pure Caesarism power and constantly scripted his message and successfully used the medium as his massage adding layers to his appeal which resonated with the poor, rural-urban, upwardly mobile aspirational youth and flattened his opponents. A leader who claimed his place on the high table of world leaders holding a beacon for diligence, national pride, growth and opportunity! Modi also benefited from considerable popularity among voters, many of whom view him as a hard-working, corruption-free politician.

The Opposition has only itself to blame for the mess it finds itself in. It created an enabling environment for the BJP to squash regional disparities and sweep aside State specifics. Alongside the leaders were unable to put egos and ambitions aside and come together leading to Modi's gambit of "kaamdars vs

Chowkidar ka chamatkar

'Modi'fied new India 2.024

By Poonam I Kaushish

naamdars" paying off.

From the Congress to Samajwadi, BSP and RJD all were desecrated by his 'corrupt dynastic' brush. Given young voters are not enthralled by dynasts who have nothing to show but lineage which has no mystic for them. Also, they abhor the neo-inheritors condescending politics.

Undoubtedly, Verdict 2019 is a watershed poll wherein the aam aadmi has shown his profound wisdom and maturity by serenading the end of vote-bank politics of the Hindu heartland regional satraps, their mohalla mentality of parochialism and naked personal ambition of aggrandisement to usher in

taste but boomeranged with Modi usurping the Chowkidar title and using it to his advantage leaving voters with a sense of chor machaye shor. Worse, his Nyaya scheme found no takers, instead exposed how sycophancy triumphed over strategy.

Predictably, Rahul offered to resign but the Hubris afflicted Congress wants to continue in his dynastic tentacles. A classic case of the blind leading the blind as none knows the way forward. For starters, the Party needs to urgently do some honest soul-searching and drastically overhaul its jo hukam culture of groveling before the "family" as this does not translate into votes. Two, get

caste-based politics.

Certainly, it would be a misnomer to believe that caste will evaporate from Indian politics but as of now Modi has changed the narrative from class and caste. Said he: "There are only two jaatis, those who are poor and those who want to free them from poverty.... There is no other caste.... I may make mistakes but will work non-stop to ensure country moves forward." Opportunities, growth and national pride are emotive drivers for this class.

True, Modi's 2014 promise of vikas and ache din came a cropper but he won despite his economic failures by setting in motion the juggernaut of building toilets, pucca homes, providing gas cylinders, opening Jan Dhan accounts ensuring Government money reached recipients without being lost to bribes and dispersing Rs 2000 to distressed kisans he showcased his swachh, responsive and honest intentions.

But the coming months pose a stiff challenge with unemployment at 45%, rising oil prices, farm distress, consumers buying less and a slowing economy. Undoubtedly, bread-and-butter issues will be back on the economic delivery table once the victory sheen wears off. In 2014 Modi had asked for 10 years to put India on track, let's see.

As NaMo moves forward he needs to remember the Indian polity is dynamic and the voter can never be taken for granted. He has the mandate and must boldly take a transformational leap to put the economy back on track, knowing that a powerhouse economy can yield a political bonanza in the years to come. Will he bite the bullet?

In sum even as the 2019 election underscored the Modi persona and his deification it is time he starts a new conversation with a scarred and divided polity, including the 'Lutyens-Khan Market Gang.' The electorate has presented him a historic opportunity. He would be wise to recall with great power comes greater responsibility wherein he would need to put in a lot of time, effort and statesmanship to erase the poll bitterness, reach out to a shrunk Opposition and prove that his concentration of power has the ability to take everyone along. Will this 'faqir' rise to the occasion? --- INFA

He has created history by becoming the first non-Congress Prime Minister to be re-elected after completing a full five-year term in office. And the only one after Nehru and Indira Gandhi to be re-elected to office with full majority after completing a full term, 48 years after 1971. Today this political phenomenon has created a deep sense of identification with the aam aadmi resulting in the lotus blooming pan India.

a new dawn of constructive politics of change and rising aspirations. Underscoring as never before that jo jeeta wohi sikandar!

Modi, it seems is inching towards his dream of a Congress-mukt Bharat with its decimation in 19 States and Union Territories winning only 52 seats, less than what the BJP won in UP alone. Rubbing salt is Rahul's humiliating defeat in Amethi, the family bastion since 1980. Once an unbeatable force which ruled for over 55 years, the Congress stands eviscerated. It failed to capitalize victories in Rajasthan, MP and Chhattisgarh last year and consolidate its position as a challenger to be feared. Consequently, its moment of reckoning has come.

Adding insult to injury Rahul a lightweight compared to NaMo was unable to build a strategy to counter Modi's appeal despite Priyanka's boisterous but failed blitzkrieg. Bereft of a political narrative and eye-catching ideas its rant about Chowkidar Chor Hai on Rafale not only left a bad

its act together, induct fresh talent, reinvent itself to regain credibility and behave as a responsible and effective Opposition Party.

As for the regional satraps, barring DMK, YSR and BJD, the writing is on the wall. They neither had a programme nor a narrative or a leader. Their algorithm of caste arithmetic, rainbow social engineering, anti-Modi sloganeering and distorted secularism which alienated the majority without benefitting the minority came a cropper. Today Bhua-Bhatija Maya wati - Akhilesh's Mahagadbandhan has been binned, Mamata is busy licking her wounds, Naidu is history while Pawar finds himself in a squeeze.

Further, the voter has given thumbs down for khichdi sarkas as coalitions seem to be out of favour. The electorate feels it causes social turmoil vis-a-vis various castes, hurts governance and the economy. This has resulted in the shrinking role of the regional parties at the national level while continuing to stay relevant in State politics, but after reworking their

concessions through senior citizens and Divyang categories and to travel by Anubhuti Coach comfortably.

Yours etc.,
Mr Varun SD
Bangalore

Minorities under Indian Constitution

Editor,
After analyzing the minds of Nehru-Gandhi Congress combine and their attitude towards Mohamed Ali Jinnah the British rulers applied the "divide & rule" policy and made the Partition of India in 1947 forever generate hatred between these two principal communities. Present-day political leaders of Congress party and their allies posing and preaching as advocates of secularism during the 17th Lok Sabha election campaign are in reality pseudo-secularists. They are only appeasing the Muslim minority community and are creating a

Congress must work on revival strategy Uncertainty over president should end fast

By Amulya Ganguli

Rahul Gandhi is right about the Congress opting for a non-Gandhi president. But that is not the only criterion. For the party to break the shackles of dynastism, it has to choose someone who will not be a puppet of the party's first family.

The chosen person's independence of mind should be evident to all. Any hint of the presence in the shadows of a backseat driver will be disastrous for the new president's political standing and his future.

Since the Congress's future will be linked to the chief's, it is only when he or she stands tall (amidst the ruins of the party at present) and is seen as capable of giving it a new direction in the realm of ideas and of breathing life into the currently moribund organization, will there be any chance of the 134-year-old party recovering its lost glory. It is no secret that the glory was lost because the Congress lost its way. And since the Nehru-Gandhis have always been at the helm (except for brief periods when Kamaraj or Narasimha Rao and a few others were at the top), there is no way that the blame for the party's blunders can be placed on someone else.

Among these were the Emergency of 1975-77, the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 and the overturning of the Supreme Court's Shah Bano judgment in the mid-1980s. For the present, it is the last blooper which is relevant because it paved the way for the BJP's rise by confirming its charge of minority appeasement by the Congress. To counter this phase of Indian politics which tends to darken the country's "soul", as The Guardian of London has said, a new Congress president has to return to the party's old secularism and not take recourse, as some of the other chiefs have done, in "soft" Hindutva in a futile attempt to appear to be more Hindu than the BJP or at least as much of a Hindu as the saffron outfit.

But there was no need to play such silly games, for few are deceived. Most people see it as an insincere ploy. Yet, the fact that they were indulged in showed a numbing of the party's intellect. And that is an inevitable consequence of the absence of internal democracy, when the party begins to resemble a zamindari household with the family being surrounded by sycophantic courtiers who are forever kowtowing to their masters - young and old - and echoing their views.

The deadening of the intellect not only robs an or-

ganization of the mental capacity to evolve novel means of taking on an opponent - and not via imitation - but it also makes the followers develop a pathetic dependence on the masters so much so that they fear that the organization will fall apart if the prop of the first family is removed. This crutch of dependency is not unlike what is fostered by the system of reservations in the social sector.

Since the two successive drubbings of the Congress have rung the alarm bells about the party's future, the need to chart a new course cannot be delayed any further.

The bells had tolled earlier, too, but the Congress's response was a bureaucratic one of setting up a committee under a pliant chairman to analyze the causes and then shelve the report.

The committee route was preceded by the routine offers of resignation by the party president, which was predictably rejected by the docile party members.

The Congress has avoided the charade this time although there were tearful members who protested against Rahul Gandhi's offer to step down. But he seems determined to leave the post after making the correct diagnosis about the party's malady. The Congress needs a new zamindar from outside to move into the decaying, crumbling palace and begin the repair work. But who will it be? Amrinder Singh would have been the ideal choice. But who will take his place in Punjab?

As if the feudal bug wasn't enough of a hindrance to healthy growth, the Congress has also unfortunately suffered a series of untimely deaths - Madhavrao Scindia, Y.S. Rajashekhara Reddy, Rajesh Pilot - while its leaders in the south like Siddaramaiah appear too immersed in state-level politics (apart from having a non-Congress background) to make the transition to the national level, and A.K. Antony seems too subservient to the first family. Apart from the untimely deaths, what has also deprived the Congress of having a strong bench strength - as they say about cricket teams - is the stifling of local talent by nervous "strong" leaders like Indira Gandhi, who did not like challengers to emerge from the boondocks. As is known, even Amrinder Singh was not a favourite of Rahul Gandhi because of his outspoken nature. So, the country waits for a new saviour to rescue the Congress from its dire straits. (IPA Service)

remain at daggers drawn so that they can retain power in their hands through their direct or hybrid family descendants for all time to come. After the poll debacle some of the Chief Ministers and leaders of pseudo-secular groups have already taken vows to stand by and support the Muslim Community and not all minority communities. Raising such slogans by politicians/leaders, who are deliberately trying to make the society bipolar (Hindu & Muslim sans other communities) for their vested interests and end-gains is extremely dangerous. It goes against the tenets of the Constitution and will vitiate the atmosphere thereby to communal unrest.

People of Kolkata or West-Bengal, Punjab or for that matter anywhere or of any other state of India would not like to revisit the organized and sponsored Calcutta Killings of August 1946 by the ruling dispensation.

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay
Kolkata-91

TO THE EDITOR

Not good at all my leader

Editor,
The Shillong Times of May 24 carried a report captioned, "UDP attributed defeat to fear factor." According to me, the paper should not have given prominence to this report and consigned it to an insignificant space on page 10. Also the caption should have been in small letters as this is an absolutely irresponsible and highly controversial statement by the President of the UDP. He had unnecessarily made the Christian community of this region vulnerable. Election rules, though not followed universally in our country, clearly state that no religion should be ever used to win votes during elections. The recent defeat of the UDP candidate, Jemino Mawthoh might have been a great disappointment for the Party, but for them to ride on the excuse of religion and point out the religion of the electorate is shameful. Meghalaya's past leaders who had served our state with dedication had never dragged religion or re-

ligious denominations into an election campaign and thereby demonstrated to the coming generation how to maintain decorum and abide by the secular ideals of the Constitution. If this is the attitude, not of a common man but a leader, then Meghalaya is treading a dangerous path that may result in unpleasant consequences for our state and for our brothers and sisters residing in different states of India.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Nongkrem-15.

Priorities before Modi

Editor,
Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke at a rally in Ahmedabad on Sunday and said that the next five years would be very important in the history of the country as was the period between 1942 to 1947. He said, "This period will be the time to regain the rightful position of India in the world. In the past our country had that place. I am sure

India will regain its importance in the world order."

It is indeed heartwarming to learn that our Prime Minister has something up his sleeves to implement for the glorification of India. There is the stigma attached to our country about impecunious people living in garrets. Our country's basic problems are that people have no good habitable houses, potable water and jobs. So, Modi's first priority must be to rehabilitate homeless people by providing them good houses, provide at least one member of a poor family with a government job, and equally important to provide people with clean drinking water. Further, the government has to deploy more officials from the health departments to create awareness on public hygiene. On a casual visit to villages, one can see how people live in unhygienic and squalid conditions. Once they become educated and are aware of the value of cleanliness they will start living hygienically, and all kinds of epidemics can be contained.

Also as people's standard

of living goes up they can rub shoulders with the rest of the world.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Via email

Concession for senior citizens

Editor,
The Hon'ble Ministry of Railways had recently augmented one Anubhuti Class Air Conditioned Chair Car Coach in some of the popular Shatabdi Express trains across India including Chennai-Mysuru Shatabdi Express, Mumbai-Ahmedabad Shatabdi Express, Pune-Secunderabad Express, New Delhi-Armistar Shatabdi Express etc. The Anubhuti Coaches offer aircraft-like features including 2x2 seating with wide leg-room, window screens with collapsible blinds, LCD infotainment TV screens, attendant call buttons, reading lights, arm rest affordable food trays and seats with comfortable foot rest.

The ticket fare offered for Anubhuti Class travel

though online reservation system is charged on full fare basis with a choice to opt-out of catering services. However the fare component does not offer travel concessions to senior citizens and 'Divyang' passenger categories who are otherwise forced to pay full fare for the journey. Such a move causes great inconvenience and prevents the elderly from travelling comfortably since they cannot avail concessions in Anubhuti Class. Interestingly, the concessions benefiting both senior citizens and 'Divyang' passengers is otherwise offered on First Class Executive AC Chair Car also attached to these trains.

Hence the concerned Ministry of Railways and the Railway Board are requested to urgently consider offering ticket fare subsidies through the facility of senior citizen concessions and 'Divyang' passenger concessions in Anubhuti Class Air Conditioned Chair Car Coach attached to all the Shatabdi Express trains. The move will greatly benefit many passengers intending to avail

"Anyone who is capable of getting themselves made President should on no account be allowed to do the job."

--- Douglas Adams

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, MAY 29, 2019

Congress in existential crisis

Congress President, Rahul Gandhi seems determined to step aside after taking responsibility for the Party's poor performance in the just concluded elections. He has blamed senior leaders like Ashok Gehlot, P Chidambaram and Kamal Nath of nepotism and alleged that they were busy campaigning for their respective sons instead of thinking of the larger interests of the Party. But the Congress has no dearth of sycophants who feel safer being led by the Nehru-Gandhi scion than by anyone outside the family. The India of the 21st century is no longer enamoured by dynasty and the election results have clearly proved this. The irony is that while Chidambaram's son Karti Chidambaram and Kamal Nath's son Nakul Nath were elected from constituencies in Tamil Nadu and Bhopal, Ashok Gehlot's son Vaibhav Gehlot lost the polls. The Congress ended up winning just 52 seats nationwide, a mere eight seats more than its tally in 2014. Rahul Gandhi himself had to migrate to a safe seat in Wayanad because he was unsure of his win in Amethi. This should have pushed the Congress to reflect and ponder on its future course of action, rather than just going through the rigmarole of resigning as the AICC chief and then backtracking because the Congress Working Committee (CWC) refuses to accept his resignation.

The most telling example of the Congress's dismal performance was that it could not establish its hold over Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh - states where it presently ruling. The Party drew a blank in the former and got just one seat in the latter. If this does not call for some drastic action then the Congress might as well fold up its flag. Leading political analyst and psephologist, Prof Yogendra Yadav recently passed a stinging remark on the Congress. He said that the Party should die so that a new party emerges that can take on the BJP on its own turf. He feels that the Left and Congress have lost that mandate and if India is to be a resilient democracy then it requires that the BJP and its allies in the NDA be held to account for its acts of omission and commission which the Congress and its allies failed to do this time around. Now the Congress is also facing internal revolts in Karnataka where it is in a coalition with the JD(S). The Congress campaign chiefs of Karnataka and Amethi and the party presidents in Odisha and Uttar Pradesh have also resigned following the heavy election defeat. This attrition is set to get worse. But will the Congress Party adopt pragmatic steps or will this season of reflection also end in a whimper as always with things remaining the same?

TO THE EDITOR

Ifs and buts of history

Editor,
Apropos Samares Bandhopadhyay's letter "Minorities under Indian Constitution", (ST, May 28, 2019), I fully agree with the writer's historical views. The blame for the Partition of India and Pakistan lies at the feet of Nehru and Jinnah. The Salt March by Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, the burning of a huge mountain of English clothes, the horror of Kalapani whose existence the family members of those who spent their days there are trying to forget; the case of Govind Ballabh Pant being beaten by a six foot long stick (as depicted in radio newsreel of the 1940s. When he fell down a white Congress cap lay beside his head. Then came the long imprisonment of Jawaharlal Nehru, from which cell he wrote many letters and poems; all these ended in smoke. Greed for power had simply divided Bharat during that

tumultuous period of the Partition. Even after 1950's, Nehru still made a grave mistake in inducting China, which was already a super power, into the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and had it not been for the UK, USA and France (though I have doubts about the Rafale commitment), Masood Azhar would never have been black listed. No Pakistan means no Pulwama which leads to no Balakot which finally results in absence of jingoism and nationalism that had swept the whole nation recently - a nation filled with vengeance. There was even a huge protest about Indian cricketers taking part in the tournament in England if the Pakistan cricket team is not expelled by the ICC.

If we delve deeper into history, the final man responsible for our mess is Mussolini, the Italian Fascist. Hitler had to rescue him after his misadventure into Greece. Thirty three long days were wasted and

The results of recent Australian federal elections surprised observers and analysts across the world. The Liberal-National Coalition. Whereas Indian Parliamentary elections were predicted by one and all to re-elect the incumbent Narendra Modi-led NDA government, although the victory margin was higher than expected. Arguably, the single factor that sprang the surprise in Australia was one business tycoon from Gujarat, Gautam Adani.

A soft parallel may be drawn between Australian and American elections. In the latter Vladimir Putin was alleged to have manipulated the elections in favour of Donald Trump, Adani conglomerate tilted the results towards the liberal coalition, even if, according to some observers, it lent a symbolic edge. The coalition got the majority from one State, Queensland, where Adani is setting up a coal mine called Carmichael, supposed to be by far the biggest in the world.

Clearly, the Labour Party made the last Australian elections for their 46th Parliament about climate change. Reeling under extended drought, damaging floods, more and more bushfires, unusually hot summers, Australians were perhaps looking for relief and respite. The Labour Party promised them sound climate change policies, by cutting carbon emission, by 45 per cent by 2030, and increase the use of renewable energy up to 50 per cent by 2030; whereas the coalition did not have any climate policy or target beyond 2020.

However, Scot Morrison, the incumbent Prime Minister backed by an anti-immigration party, called one nation, led by a Queenslander, and United Australian Party, led by mining billionaire Clive Palmer, and largely by coal-supporters and climate sceptics, negated the narrative crafted by the Labour. Morrison clearly resorted to populism and nationalism. He charged his Labour contender Bill Shorten with latter's greater interest in 'green issues' than jobs. His populist platform for Queensland comprised narratives likes 'Queensland is the economic powerhouse of

the icy cold winter with deadly snipers halted the Stalingrad thrust. This made Hitler lament at the imminent defeat, "I have but few miserable years, where others had eternity at their disposal (talking of Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt)". If Mussolini had not distracted Hitler it would have meant that the Fuehrer with his Third Reich might also have ruled India. We would then be driving BMW's and also be champions of World Cup Football.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Nongkrem 15

Modi's winning formula

Editor,
Prime Minister Narendra Modi was back in Varanasi on Monday to thank voters, party workers and offer prayers at the Kashi Viswanath temple. Modi said, "Despite facing political unreachability and political violence, the BJP

the country.

Coal is the biggest revenue earner and job provider. It raises USD 12 billion in royalties, and USD 18.6 billion in company taxes (2017-18) which funds the teachers, nurses, police, and infrastructure projects. Further, the coalition claimed that cutting the carbon by 45% will cost 167000 jobs, and cause a loss of USD 246 billion.

On the other hand, Adani Mines Carmichael would generate 240,000 skilled works. The Coalition despaired at the Queensland labour government's continued efforts to stall the Adani project, which was plainly unjust and put people's livelihood's at risk. It was said that labour government in Queensland

The accruals from ecological services could not be monetised concretely and placed neatly before the public. In electoral politics, people often go by perception not particularities. The perception produced by the Coalition hinted at national pride through preservation of mines and national interest through creation of jobs.

was attempting to "tarnish and delay the work of Adani mines which has been held to the highest level of scrutiny over the past 8 years of planning and demonstrated its capability to operate as one of Australia's leading mining companies". It is time to get the Adani mines started, asserted the Coalition. There were posters and feasts, like 'start Adani Mines' seen during the campaign.

One can call these claims populist as there are tangible arguments that: Australian coal mines are not as profit-generating as before, their main clients, Japan, South Korea, China, Taiwan and India are switching to renewables, heavily reducing their imports from Australia. Secondly, the transportation costs to far-away places are offsetting the profit margins of the companies.

Be those as they may, the Labour party lost the climate change debate in the federal elections. There are two facets of the

Australian Polls

The Adani Factor

By Dr D.K. Giri

debate the Labour party seems to have missed. Anthony Giddens, the former 'Guru' of UK former Prime Minister Tony Blair, has nicely explained them in his book, The Politics of Climate Change (2009). He has argued that people are not excited about climate change issues as these do not affect them directly and immediately as, let us say, a road accident or a house on fire. They are more concerned about their immediate needs, jobs and incomes etc.

That is how the people in the state of Queensland reacted to the climate change campaign. They wanted jobs, and they thought they were being robbed off their jobs on some 'imaginary' threats of climate disasters. It was so acrimonious that,

reportedly, both groups quite often faced off in the streets. Once a man on a horse opposing the pro-climate change group, rode into them, and knocked off a woman. Coal mine supporters equated setting up of Adani mines with creation of number of jobs and vote for the Coalition.

Second facet is of climate change debate is that it is too sophisticated to be conducted public. The accruals from ecological services could not be monetised concretely and placed neatly before the public. In electoral politics, people often go by perception not particularities. The perception produced by the Coalition hinted at national pride through preservation of mines and national interest through creation of jobs. No wonder, Clive Palmer of United Australian Party, spent 10 million USD on a populist campaign called 'Make Australia Great'.

There is a revival of nationalism across the world, challenging the

supra-nationalism of the European Union, or conventional internationalism in the rest of the world. In India, the right-wing BJP won a bigger mandate defying predictions or a reinvigorated platform of nationalism. In the elections to the EU Parliament, nationalism played out prominently, and the Liberals and Progressives barely held their ground. So how could Australia escape the wild wind of nationalism blowing across the world?

Another strategy the Progressives including the Australian Labour Party adopt, may have led to the defeat of the Labour party. The strategy is to deride and dismiss their right-wing opponents, instead of understanding and engaging them.

There are a good many voters across democracies, that are undecided or fence-sitters. If they are intellectually engaged and emotionally embraced they can be made to change their minds. The Progressives somehow fail to reach out to them. Their ideological and policy Puritanism ironically makes them less inclusive.

Remember, what Hillary Clinton called Trump's supporters in 2016 US Presidential elections. She said: "You could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the basket of deplorable". She added, they are racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic-Islam-phobic, you name it. This is not a great approach to wean away people from the other tent, and win them over; Australia Labour Party needs to introspect, if they had a similar attitude.

At any rate, the results in Australian elections have been really surprising, and depressing for Progressives beyond Australia as the Labour Party was expected to win. In addition to the generalities, the specific reason for their last-minute defeat is the controversial claims made by and on behalf of the Adani Group. I would wear neither my progressive nor my nationalist hat and pass any judgment on the role of Adani in Australian elections. He may have been an agent provocateur, or a beneficiary of the elections, as the Indian press suggests. It is for the Australians to deal with. I wish them well.---INFA

(The writer is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

interests of the Hindus at large.

Apart from the voter chemistry theory that Modi has been able to attribute to his landslide victory in the election, his personal charisma too played a vital role. By nature Modi is a down to earth man finding solutions to myriads problems in his own way. In the international spheres too, he is a more welcome figure than any other leader from India, and he has a good rapport with so many world leaders as well. In short, the charismatic Modi seems to have the Midas touch when it comes to winning elections.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Kochi -15

Irresponsible action

Editor,
This evening as I was walking from Ribong towards Laban last stop, I saw labourers carrying out some concrete work on the

roadside just a block or two after Ribong Police Station. I was surprised to see them place glass splinters around the concrete work and assumed that it was meant to prevent people from sitting and loitering around the place. However, I would like to question the wisdom of those who gave the instructions to place the glass splinters, since this is being done in a public place (road side) where school and college students pass through during the day. As this is not a busy road, it is routine to see students run and play while passing by. Now, if something happen to the students or to anybody for that matter, will those who gave the instruction to place the glass splinters take the blame?

Yours etc.,
BJ Syiemlieh
Shillong -5

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Agenda for opposition parties after electoral defeat

By Dr Satish Misra

The BJP's unprecedented rather miraculous victory at the 2019 general elections has undoubtedly stumped majority of political analysts and commentators who were of the view that the ruling party would cede some space to the opposition but contrary to their assessment triumph is bigger than in 2014.

The BJP has won 303 Lok Sabha seats while its alliance partners have taken the NDA tally to 353. The Congress led UPA could only muster 91 seats while the country's oldest political outfit reduced itself to mere 52 seats three short to get the status of the leader of the opposition. Fact that the BJP's overall vote share jumped from 31 percent in 2014 to 41 percent in five years is a clear indication of the danger that opposition is facing now.

A clear message from the its worst ever defeat in the Lok Sabha polls for the entire opposition including the Congress is that unless they draw appropriate lessons from their massive defeat is not very far from their respective extinction. Lack of an effective opposition is already a tragedy for the parliamentary democracy but complete extinction would be its death.

Though the battle for

should be formed to prepare the blue print of unity. NCP chief Sharad Pawar should head the committee.

Parallely, the left parties or the parties that formed the Left Front in West Bengal and Kerala should take the similar step towards unity. In this direction, the CPM should take the lead and form a committee. In the same manner, former socialist leaders should also take the initiative.

After the unity of these broader ideological forces that were part of the freedom movement and dominated the post-independence politics of the country before the rise of the BJP on the scene should form a federal alliance that should work towards evolving a common vision of the country that is inclusive and implementable.

Common vision should be shorn of rhetoric and high-sounding ideological verbosity and should contain ideas that have the potential of changing the lives of the ordinary citizen and common persons. This is all the more important because the RSS-BJP under the leadership of Narendra Modi has successfully created an environment of anti-intellectualism in the country.

High university degrees and education in premium

The call for unity should go from Congress chief Rahul Gandhi making it clear that all top posts including that of the party chief of the new Congress would be open for contest. should head the committee.

ballots is ideological yet it, at the same time, requires not only a convincing narrative but also an emotional connect with the large sections of the voting society. There is no doubt that Hindutva driven nationalism threatened by internal as well as external enemies is on march. While Pakistan symbolizes the external enemy, forces within are Muslims. Massive propaganda machinery of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) successfully drilled in gullible minds that Prime Minister Narendra Modi alone can defend the Indian nation.

Victory at any cost whether through fair or foul means is the motto of the ruling party. The BJP, being in the government, had multifold advantages and would continue to have it even in subsequent Lok Sabha and assembly elections. The Election Commission, Enforcement Directorate (ED), Departments of Central Bureau of Investigations (CBI) and Income Tax (IT) have been converted into the handmaidens of the ruling party with which obstacles and hindrances were removed to ensure the ruling party's return to power in 2019 and the scenario is not going to be changed in 2024 either.

In the given conditions, the opposition indeed not only requires a serious introspection to be able to come up to the challenges that exist today. While the Congress has relatively more responsibility to take a sincere initiative to unite the opposition. First step should be to invite all those political parties like leaders of the Trinamool Congress (TMC), YSR Congress, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) for serious deliberations for forging a unity.

The call for unity should go from Congress chief Rahul Gandhi making it clear that all top posts including that of the party chief of the new Congress would be open for contest. To begin with, a committee of senior leaders of those parties that emerged from the Congress

academic institutions and institutes of higher learning have become suspect in the eyes of those living in small towns, villages and deprived pockets of the urban conglomerates. Not only suspect, they have come to be identified as anti-nationals.

Therefore, systemic work is required to reestablish the credibility of academics. For this, common vision would need to focus on primary and high secondary level education system where corrective steps are urgently required. Biggest challenge today is to prepare a counter narrative to counter the Hindutva and for that the secular forces need not take an anti-religion stand. Sanatan Dharm is one broad concept through which Hindutva could be effectively challenged. Each political party that emerge after the unification process would have to work at the grassroots level to extract the venom that is being injected in society by Sangh and the BJP. One of the most important rather crucial prerequisites of such a federal front should be a brutally honest introspection on the part of the two units of the proposed federal front-namely the Left and Socialist- of their anti-Congressism that has dominated their frame of mind and also an inspiration.

At the same time, federal front should also work towards electoral understanding identifying constituencies of respective strengths of the three parties so that people of the country get enough time to accept such a front. Candidates for these identified constituencies could be decided at the time of the election.

Work for the unification of ideological force has to begin rather must start immediately if the opposition really cares for the country, people and idea of India that is enunciated in the Constitution.

(Dr. Satish Misra is a Veteran Journalist & Research Associate with Observer Research Foundation).

“ Let’s forget the baggages of the past and make a new beginning. ”

– Shehbaz Sharif

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MAY 30, 2019

Team Modi - blend of old and new

A new Modi ministry is taking charge of the nation on Thursday. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP chief Amit Shah were engaged in selection of ministers, the nation eagerly awaited the character and complexion of the new team in the making. The first Modi ministry of 2014-19 was no great shakes, if expertise and talent to run various ministries were any indication. It just passed muster, and Modi won a new term more by his lung power, possibly, and less by any exemplary performance. Hope now rests on possibilities of more expertise coming in to make a stronger Modi show for another five years.

The outgoing ministry was faced with several serious problems. Health of ministers was one. Manohar Parrikar was already ailing when he left the Defence Ministry midway through the five-year term and returned to Goa to be chief minister. He was tasked to handle the Defence Ministry five months after Modi started his innings. Till then, Arun Jaitley held dual charge of Finance and Defence.- an unusual scenario of one minister holding two top ministries. Later, Nirmala Sitharaman was brought in as Defence Minister. Finance minister Arun Jaitley himself was ailing and another minister, Piyush Goyal remained as stand-by for months. External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj had serious health problems and remained away for some time. All these, even as Modi kept the old guard, meaning those over age 75 out of the reckoning as a matter of policy. It is safe to assume that the ministries' functioning was affected by these 'health' issues. The shuffling of portfolios, as was evident also in the case of HRD, midway through the term did no good.

Perceptions are that Rajnath Singh as Home Minister did a good job. He carried with him both strength and experience. Nitin Gadhikar as Highways minister too acquitted himself well in execution of projects, but other problems with him persisted. External affairs minister Sushma Swaraj did a good job. Railways ministry faced odds as first minister Sadananda Gowda was shifted out and Suresh Prabhu brought in. Who handled what in both Railways and Civil Aviation ministries were confusing at times. Railways showed signs of modernization, but too little was done, considering the huge requirements. Things did not move fast in the defence sector, and handling of finance ministry left much to be desired.

What makes a difference to governance is deploying the right people to the right posts and a copious flow of expertise. Hope is that Modi's new team will inspire the nation and provide good governance as promised.

Tasks before new govt

By Dr S. Saraswathi

After winning a huge mandate on the plank of "sab ka sath, sab ka vikas" (along with all, development of all), PM Modi is now emphasising the need to promote "sab ka vishwas" (trust of all). He said: "those who vote for us are ours and even our most trenchant opponents are ours".

One of the first tasks mentioned is to win the trust of all sections of the population. He said that minorities had long been made to live in fear by those who believed in vote-bank politics and that this deception must end. The priority was thus set on promoting faith and harmony among majority and minorities.

Elections are over, but no actors on the stage not excluding the Election Commission can afford to take rest. The post-election period is the time for stock-taking -- identifying factors behind success and failure for parties and candidates. The party coming to power has the responsibility of fulfilling its promises. The bigger the mandate, the greater the responsibility as not only the entire nation, but the entire world will be watching closely the performance of the new government that will enjoy near two-thirds majority in Lok Sabha.

The country witnessed the most bitter electoral contest and intense and extensive campaigns in this election. Noticeable is the fact that electioneering by speeches and contacts was dominated by a few leaders in various parties though assisted by thousands of party workers at various levels, which makes fixing responsibility for gain or loss easier.

Professional campaign managers were said to have been employed, which is believable, because of certain persistent propaganda, pattern of communication and contacts, virulent attacks, and tireless persecution that were carried on unmindful of insulting opponents or hurting sentiments and indifferent to people's reaction. The less said about the language and tone used in campaigning, the better. The first task of the winners and losers is to get over their election tension and settle down to peaceful governance.

Both parties - the winner BJP and the main loser the Congress - today shoulder a heavy responsibility. The former has to fulfil its promises and the latter, free of any obligations to honour any poll promise, has to rebuild the shattered party. Massive defeat also carries a massive responsibility of

rescuing the sinking ship particularly in the case of the Congress party which is more than 100 years old.

Indian voters, on the whole, have exhibited no permanent addiction to any party. They shift their support for even small reason. Pro-incumbency and anti-incumbency are not independent forces, but come into operation depending

Despite massive mandate, the leader of the winning party admitted that the politics of alliances is a reality and important to fulfil regional aspirations. In a way, the hectic parleys, 24-hour discussions, several visits of some regional leaders from State to State to bring them together for an agreed purpose have served to bring to light the

victor and the vanquished is to the Constitution and the values enshrined in it. Both the winner and the loser have to share the responsibility of cleansing the political environment, whoever spearheaded the movement for degeneration of party politics and practised it vigorously. Heat of election campaigning cannot be legally accepted as a defence for fake news and false propaganda extensively used to confuse the voters.

The PM believes that "people voted for democracy" and a huge responsibility rests on him. To him, coming years would be about people's participation in governance ("jan bhagidari") and people's awareness ("jan chetna"). These relate to social welfare programmes of the government. The big mandate is to be used for solving common citizens' issues who form bulk of the electorate. This will mean addressing problems of farmers and others in the unorganised sector, increasing avenues for employment and self-employment, and providing social security for all.

By winning this election, BJP has reason to believe that its economic policy has popular endorsement. Despite its weakness in convincing people of the economic reforms, the support obtained is incredible. Still, it is not possible to retain people's support without building their trust in the government by building a clean image and engaging in purposive action.

The mandate of 2019 is for both domestic and foreign policies. The security of the nation should continue to be our priority. The image of India globally, which has always been high, is expected to grow higher in the coming years. India has to take lead in fighting terrorism, which is necessary for national and regional peace and development. Massive electoral mandate enhances the status of India in international relations, and cannot be ignored in the Asian region. The status has to be maintained by adhering to its own independent foreign policy.

No mandate is permanent. The winner must keep improving his performance to retain people's confidence which is so fickle and will take no time to shift.--INFA

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

Elections are over, but no actors on the stage not excluding the Election Commission can afford to take rest. The post-election period is the time for stock-taking -- identifying factors behind success and failure for parties and candidates.

on the performance sheets of the main actors.

The defeat of the Mahagathbandhan conclusively proves that electoral result is not pure arithmetic, but a matter of people-party/candidate relationship. Leaders of two or more parties may join hands, but cannot assume that their followers and supporters will follow them. In some cases, alliance itself may be the cause of defeat.

importance of accommodating regional ideas and aspirations in national politics. It cannot be erased whatever be the size of victory of the winner. The mandate for the BJP comes with the proviso that regional requirements and aspirations - political, social, economic, and cultural - have to be national priorities also.

The same is true of sectional interests in this plural society and the new govern-

The less said about the language and tone used in campaigning, the better. The first task of the winners and losers is to get over their election tension and settle down to peaceful governance.

Hence, the victor and the vanquished have to bestow their attention more towards winning the support of the electorate than concentrating on arithmetical calculations and personalised attacks.

"NARA - National Ambition, Regional Aspiration" - a slogan raised by the PM post-election conveys the quintessence of the party politics displayed in this election, when regional players appeared in their full strength and displayed their power, capabilities, and ambitions. He says that a balance between the two will be the key to the nation's progress, and it cannot be achieved without the support of regional parties. The new government must work in national interest at the same time protecting State/regional interests.

ment has to promote education and health for all. NDA in its second term must eradicate any impression - genuine or false - of partisan interests, and continue its journey without any discrimination on the basis of caste or religion. Equality and equity must not only underlie schemes and programmes, but must be visible and felt by all. It is the spirit of inclusiveness and service that should be the driving force of the mandate winner. The illusion of fear gripping the minds of minorities sown and fanned in election campaigns by parties indulging in divisive and vote-bank politics needs to be shattered.

Big win does not put a party or its top leaders above our Constitution. Nor big loss gives licence to suspect, discredit, and blame the functioning of any office or authority. The first loyalty of the

Any attempt to confine people to a monochromatic frame is bound to fail

An alternative vision of India

By Shyam Saran

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi has won a second term with a resounding majority. This is a victory for Modi as a leader embodying an idea of India different from that of the founding fathers of the Constitution, even though he claims that for him the Constitution remains supreme. The notion of secularism has been buried and this has implications for a multi-religious society. The Constitution recognises citizenship as the basis of nationality. The new political dispensation may set norms of nationalism that go beyond citizenship and this could limit other constitutional rights and privileges of citizenship such as freedom of expression and the right to free speech.

In his victory speech, Modi said there were only two castes now in India - the poor and those who are able to use resources to help them escape poverty. He would presumably count in the second caste his own party, the BJP, and its allies and supporters. What happens to the different categories of the middle class, professionals and entrepreneurs all of whom contribute to India's growth story? Will they remain relevant only to the extent that they align with the political orientation of the elected leadership? Are they being consigned to the 'Lutyens' elite' or the 'Khan Market gang' the PM so sharply criticised in the interviews he gave during the election campaign? A political binary may take hold with place for only black and white and no greys in between. It is the greys that sustain democracy.

One may argue that Modi's victory has peeled off the veneer of Western-style liberalism and values associated with it which an English-speaking elite foisted on a deeply conservative society with its own entrenched value system. Anti-elite sentiment is not peculiar to India. We have seen its powerful energy in many countries, including mature Western democracies. Donald Trump's election is one example. Brexit is another. There are deeper and more structural forces at work across nations and societies and it is important for us to understand them.

The end of the Cold War demolished the legitimacy of the socialist idea and entrenched the notion of market fundamentalism. Free markets and liberal democracy were linked together as inseparable ingredients of economic advancement. Free markets were expected to lead inevitably towards liberal democracy and it is this belief which led the West to support the economic reform and liberalisation process in China, a belief which now lies completely belied. The transition economies of Russia and Eastern Europe were similarly prescribed the twin remedies of political democracy and open markets as the gateway to the future. The role of the State in providing public goods to citizens in the form of education, health and welfare support was progressively dismantled across a large swathe of the global landscape. India was not immune to these changes, particularly after it adopted its own reform and liberalisation process. As in other countries, India's elite became more self-entitled, began to see itself as part of the emerging global elite, symbolised by the Davos man. It is no accident that the Indian contingent to Davos has been one of the most numerous year after year. Just as Wall Street in

the US lost touch with the Main Street, so did the distance between a small but wealthy elite and the ordinary citizen in India grow apace.

The Indian State followed suit by diminishing even its basic responsibilities of providing education, health and public security to its citizens. The fastest growing sectors of the Indian economy are private education, health and security services. It is not English-speaking which is at issue. If you consider the rush for English-medium schools in India, there is a clear awareness that for success in India and in a globalised world, English is an asset. No, anti-elitism has deeper and global origins.

The notion of the 'magic of the marketplace' took a devastating hit in the global financial and economic crisis of 2007-08. However, what may have remained an economic setback became a crisis of democracy because of the equation of free markets with liberal democracy. Since one failed, the other became suspect too. And this explains why in most countries the support for democracy has significantly declined. There should have been no such equation between a certain kind of economic arrangement and the pursuit of democracy. There have been several models of market-based economic growth associated with a variety of political dispensations and China itself is a very good example. The idea of democracy has to be rescued from the tyranny of the market.

What about the argument that liberal democracy and the idea of a multi-cultural society of equal citizens is alien to the Indian way of thinking? Is faith in a powerful leader more aligned to Indian political culture? The immense diversity of India is a fact and any attempt to confine its people to a monochromatic frame of whatever shape or colour is bound to fail. If there are deep fractures on the basis of caste, creed and ethnicity, there are also more inclusive strains of thinking, of belonging to a larger humanity, of accepting that there may be several equally valid paths to redemption. While there may be communal or sectarian passions which lurk dangerously below the surface, the celebration of syncretic impulses in music, art and spiritual seeking is also real. Liberal values that embody the ideas of equality, liberty and fraternity have always been part of India's cultural ethos but articulated in a different idiom. You may have a leader like Mahatma Gandhi who stimulated the more noble strains in our thinking. You may also have leaders who seek power through appeal to the darker recesses of our mind. The lure of a powerful leader has less to do with Indian values and is more related to the current global preference for authoritarian leaders. We, too, suffer from 'dictator envy'.

Political democracy and liberal values associated with it are the most valuable assets India has. We should understand the context in which these are being questioned not only in India but the world over. We must reject the idea that a more authentic India is emerging for which these are alien concepts. There is an alternative vision of India which lies enshrined in our Constitution and must remain our guidepost for the future.

(By arrangement with The Tribune)

(The writer is Former foreign secretary and senior fellow, centre for policy research)

TO THE EDITOR

Environmental disaster awaits Shillong

Editor,
As a concerned citizen of Shillong, I am shocked to learn that the State Government is planning to cut down trees and to deforest the Shillong Peak for the purpose of constructing a link road from Laitkor to Malki and for construction of the approach road to the Shillong View Point. It may kindly be noted that the water sources located at Shillong Peak are generating more than 18 million litres of water per day and localities like Lawsohtun, Laban, Lumparing, Kenches Trace, Rilbong, Bishnupur are heavily dependent on the water generated from the Shillong Peak. The water from Shillong Peak is also supplied up to Jaiaw area and the quality of the water is far better than that supplied by the PHE from Mawphlang. I'm sure that if the road construction project is implemented the Shillong Peak (U Lum Shillong) will become barren and we will not be able to find beautiful greens in the peak area. The scenic beauty of Shillong will be a past glory; all water sources will dry up and citizens of Shillong will

face tremendous water shortage. Besides this, many other ill effects will take place which will be disastrous to the environment.

Therefore, I would request the citizens of Shillong and those organizations that care for Shillong and those who work for saving the environment to oppose the idea tooth and nail, not to allow such foolish and disastrous initiatives of the Government to take place.

Yours etc.,
Havenly Lyngdoh
Shillong-2

NEHU's marking system lacks transparency

Editor,
Everyone understands that an educational institution exists because of the students who are enrolled in it. Without them, the institution would merely be a useless concrete structure. Any university, therefore, and NEHU in particular must make students' interest paramount if it wants to maintain its credibility. My particular issue is with the evaluation system of

NEHU.

Of late, there has been a lot of resentment among the students of different departments of NEHU regarding the marks they have obtained in their semester exams and the complete lack of transparency of the University insofar as the standard and accuracy of evaluation is concerned. The majority of the students in NEHU across departments are from the MBOSE system and many of these students have taken advantage of the provision of MBOSE to provide photocopies of evaluated answer scripts on demand, for a fee. This provision by MBOSE speaks volumes about the confidence the Board has in its evaluation system and thereby has won the confidence of the students who go through the system as well. Why can't NEHU be as transparent and be able to provide photocopies of evaluated answer scripts? Logistics cannot be an excuse. Moreover, in today's world of increased accountability, this is the right of the students.

I humble request NEHU authorities to be more transparent and keep the interest of students above all else. Marks affect a person's future and cannot be taken

lightly.

Yours etc.,
S. Marbaniang
Shillong-4

Suspension bridge over Kyrshar river

Editor,
I am greatly perturbed and dismayed to learn from media reports that the beautiful suspension bridge over river Kyrshar in West Khasi Hills is in a decrepit condition and is waiting to snap any time soon. This 400 meter suspension bridge is made of iron cables and connects Ukiam village with Kyrshar village in Meghalaya. This is a beautiful picnic spot and thousands of people from Assam and Meghalaya flock to this spot for outings and picnics every day, especially in the winter months. This bridge is the main connecting link in the area between Kamrup district, Assam and West Khasi Hills District and the nearby villages which commute daily through this bridge are Kyrshar, Ukiam, Nongspung, Umbah, Dariphang, Kalimara, Mawdangngop, Umthli,

Umkhamdol, Warigrow, Doledongnga etc. If this bridge snaps then there is no way to connect the two major areas because the river is wide and deep. It is learnt that this bridge was constructed during the early days when (Late) Hopingstone Lyngdoh was the MLA of Nongstoin constituency. If this bridge is snapped there will be a huge loss to the people of the area in terms of connectivity. I appeal to the MLA and MDC of Rambrai - Jyrgam constituency to ensure that the suspension bridge is immediately repaired so that it continues to be the lifeline and communication link in the area.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via-Email.

Mamata's TMC rattled

Editor,
The recent victory of the BJP in West Bengal has created immense political leverage for the Party. The resultant impact is that two TMC MLAs, one CPM MLA and as many as fifty councillors are ready to join the BJP. It may be recalled that Modi had stated that if his party

came to power, then more MLAs from the TMC would join the BJP and TMC would be reduced to nothing. This is beginning to take shape in Bengal much to Mamata's chagrin. If things have started positively for the BJP immediately after the elections results were declared then how many MLAs would desert Mamata and the TMC in the future is a big question that should give the lady sleepless nights.

We have seen and heard enough about the animosity of Mamata towards Modi. She ridiculed him and mocked him many times in the past and each jibe at him became a bouquet. The final Modi-Mamata fall out is causing much embarrassment in the TMC camp as more MLAs are just biding their time to cross over. How Mamata is going to tackle this situation is being watched curiously by all.

Yours etc.,
T K Nandanam,
Kochi -15

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"Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd."

--- Voltaire

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Modi 2.0 – a shock and awe treatment

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi's list of 58 ministers, 25 of whom are of cabinet rank, 9 Ministers of State with independent charge, and 24 Ministers of State, reflect his innate sense of who to repose his faith on. It is what some call the shock and awe strategy. While a number of performing old timers from the first Modi Government have been retained others have been dropped. Jayant Sinha who was MoS Finance and later also held the Civil Aviation portfolio in the outgoing government has been left out. So too Suresh Prabhu, a dependable hand right from the Vajpayee era when he made his mark as the Environment Minister. Unfortunately, several rail accidents marred Prabhu's tenure in the Railways Ministry. Sushma Swaraj, former external affairs minister has opted out on account of her health. So too, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley. Other old hands that have been left out are Maneka Gandhi and Rajyavardhan Rathore. Interestingly Modi 2.0 includes two foreign service officers, S Jayashankar former Foreign Secretary and Hardeep Singh Puri who was Minister of State with independent charge in the previous government. Puri had lost the elections this time. Another MP who many thought would be inducted is the articulate, progressive Rajiv Pratap Rudy who also was minister in the Vajpayee Government and a 3rd term MP.

The Modi 2.0 Ministry includes 16 first timers and 38 repeats. While some political analysts and BJP spokespersons have claimed that those from the previous government who were re-inducted into the ministry are performing ministers, but Prakash Javadekar who first held the Environment Ministry and later handled the HRD Ministry, many feel had failed to steer the HRD ship. Javadekar could not come up with the much touted new education policy – a much needed initiative. Ironically, Nitish Kumar who enjoys a close bond with Prime Minister Modi has conveyed that his party the Janata Dal (United) would not join the ministry. Nitish Kumar is miffed at not being given adequate representation in Modi 2.0. However, Modi still has scope to expand his ministry and take it up to a strength of 80. Perhaps he prefers to wait awhile and assess the impact of the first swearing-in which has left no one in doubt about who the boss is. Meanwhile, North East India has only two representatives in the Modi Ministry – Kiren Rijiju who was MoS Home in the outgoing ministry and Rameshwar Teli the sitting MP from Dibrugarh who represents the tea community. Speculations that the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), President, Himanta Biswa Sarma would find a berth in the ministry have proven wrong. It was quite a starry show with a number of Bollywood stars in attendance. Prominent industrialists included Ratan Tata and Mukesh Ambani.

LOOKING BACK

June 19, 1989

Raga transfer had public support: Apang

The Chief Minister Mr Gegong Apang has refuted the allegation made by the ANSU that local people were not taken into confidence in the transfer of Raga circle to the Upper Subansiri District. The Chief Minister, while meeting a delegation of the All Nising Students Union on June 9 at his office asserted that the merger decision was taken at the instance of the local leaders and the State government agreed to it only when the proposal was endorsed by the members of the Assembly irrespective of party affiliations.

The Chief Minister told the ANSU delegation that the public representatives who approved the merger idea included the Deputy Speaker and an Opposition MLA besides Ministers.

The Chief Minister's talk with the ANSU delegation lasted for 90 minutes. It was often marked with heated exchanges. The Chief Minister appealed to the ANSU not to escalate tension and to keep utmost restraint

in voicing their grievances. He regretted the ANSU call to the public leaders to disassociate from the government and political parties and opined that such call could only create misunderstanding.

The Chief Minister advised the ANSU to go to the people in the area, initiate dialogues with the elders and the students belonging to different ethnic groups and try to find out whether there was any genuine reason for apprehension.

The Chief Minister felt that the issue had been blown out of all proportion. Explaining the government stand the Chief Minister said the government had an open mind even now regarding the whole issue. The government has responded to the public demand for transfer of Raga circle, but if the people now wanted to reverse the decision, a democratic government would not stand in the way, he assured.

MDA Government : An appraisal one year down the line

By Patricia Mukhim

Like everyone else in the country we are all exuberant about the Modi 2.0 Government which took oath of office yesterday. Our state leaders headed by the Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma have naturally flown to Delhi to be part of the grand celebrations. Our CM has in fact either been campaigning this whole year or attending swearing-in ceremonies. One is not aware of any other state chief minister who is also heading a political party that claims to be 'national' in character. This is simply not viable. Look at Amit Shah, the BJP President. He remained the Party's chief organizer and vote catching machine throughout the entire period of the first Modi Government. Not so the National Peoples' Party (NPP)! And while we can be upbeat about the new government at the Centre, the reality is that back home things are just not working. We seem to be short both on policy and delivery. Post May 30, the hype and hoopla will die down and we will all be looking at our state government with greater scrutiny and wondering if the change we voted for is visible in any of the development fronts.

But first things first! The Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) Government formed in March last year is a coalition of the NPP, UDP, HSPDP and PDF. At the national level the NPP is an alliance partner of the BJP and Conrad Sangma has never been diffident about stating that upfront. The problem is with the regional parties who are still trying to proclaim to the world that they have no truck with the BJP which they see as anti-minority. Indeed the BJP's gau rakshak policy violates the tribal way of life, starting with tribal cuisine. Beef is and has been part of our diets from the time we were conscious of our existence. Khasi indigenous faith (NiamTre or Ka Niam Tynrai) are not the equivalent of Hinduism, so trying to force that affinity is incongruous. Tribals have no caste system which Hinduism continues to promote despite Dr Ambedkar's unstinted fight for its abolition. Dalits continue to be at the lowest rung of the poverty pyramid. So the mainstream Indian way of life is still rife with exclusions. It is ironic today that the Hindus should feel estranged from the political system and that their vote

for the BJP and Narendra Modi is to rekindle Hindu nationalism, if that is a fitting term. But what else do you name a political movement which is quintessentially religious in its approach?

So back to the regional parties! Prior to the 2018 Assembly elections, the regional parties had floated what they have always done – an ethnocentric political message that promises to safeguard the distinct cultures and way of life of the tribes. In that context we the people expected that the regional parties would have insisted on a Common Minimum Programme (CMP) where the aspirations of the coalition partners and their pre-poll promises could be accommodated. Over a year has passed and the CMP seems to have been forgotten. It is business as usual in the Government and every party seems to have forgotten their promises to the people. They will probably go back after five years with the same undelivered promises. The tragedy is that people continue to be misled by the same set of politicians again and again.

Recently the UDP held a press conference to thank the voting public, but more than that, the aim of the prescon was to blame the Congress party for the defeat of the UDP candidate. That was totally unnecessary. Only insecure people blame others for their defeat. Most people spoken to had expressed their apprehension about voting for an ally of the BJP (let's not pull the wool over peoples' eyes and say the UDP is not with the BJP, because the MDA is, and, the umbilical cord is all joined up) because of the apprehension that if the BJP wins then the much touted Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) would become a reality. Perhaps the only guy with bravado is the BJP candidate Sanbor Shullai who publicly announced that he would 'commit' suicide if the CAB were to be imposed. The UDP did not tell the electorate how it was going to tackle the CAB whenever it is sought to be implemented. People vote their MP so that policies that affect us on the national scale are taken

up in Parliament. Congress MP Vincent Pala was given that opportunity twice but he never really stood out for speaking in Parliament. Compare that to Kiren Rijiju when he was BJP MP during the Congress regime. He would hold forth in Parliament on various issues of the region. The only reason why Pala won this time is (a) because he continues to bat for the coal lobby which believes that he has their interests at heart (b) because people thought it better to vote Congress which might put up a fight, however weak, against the CAB. For now, we will have to wait and watch if Sanbor Shullai will keep his promise!

Now coming back to the MDA Government and its one year in office, there is really nothing to write home about. The HNLC has returned and is threatening to eliminate the non-tribals. That's a daring threat from an outfit that police claim barely has 20 active cadres. Go to any shop in the city and the groan about extortion having gone up and the number of pressure groups added to the list of existing ones also has increased. I wonder if the Police are even aware of this and if they are then whether they are even bothered about curbing this menace because these are signs of lawlessness. In the past we have had Home Ministers who were vocal about issues that were brought to their notice. Now we have a silent Home Minister. Perhaps he is busy doing something else not related to his brief as Home Minister. He is also the Power Minister and the power scenario today is in shambles. Earlier we mumbled about the load shedding during winter months. Now it appears that we will have to bear with the load shedding throughout the year and for what? Because of the incompetence of the MeECL which will not trim its flab and is run like a Government Department? Consumers regularly pay their electricity bills and it's not even a subsidized bill so where is the money going? Can this issue be taken up in the Assembly? Or will the consumers have to organise themselves into a mass movement and start by boycotting to pay their bills? Is this what the MDA Government wants? A

revolution by peace loving citizens? Because the MDA Government will not stir otherwise? There has been no action that citizens can claim is geared towards making their lives a little better. If anyone has seen anything that's worth mentioning they can correct me.

The only thing that this Government has done is to appoint a whole lot of advisors who are either not tasked to give advice or have no clear terms of reference about the kind of advice sought from them. They, of course have been added to the list of VIPs enjoying their perks from the public exchequer. And yes, the list of VIPs grows longer by the day. They throw their weight around using their sirens even when the road is chock-a-bloc with traffic.

So at the end of the day even the tribal MLAs/ministers whose origins were humble and who come from a culture that knows no class or caste have today become the new royalty. Indeed India after Independence is replaced by another set of royalty after having done away with the real royals who at least knew their place in society. This new set of royalty is crude and rapacious for power and pelf. Look at the ostentatious manner in which Andhra CM, Jaganmohan Reddy rode for his swearing in ceremony! Of us it is true to say that we have indeed landed from the frying pan into the fire.

The MDA Government will, however, be remembered for one thing and that is the worst ever mining disaster where 16 or 18 people (the exact numbers are still not known) were buried alive in a rat hole mine in Ksan, East Jaintia Hills in December last year followed by the most incompetent rescue operation. The rescue operation got traction only after a Delhi-based lawyer approached the Supreme Court on humanitarian grounds. By then it was too late to even retrieve the bodies. This is a Government of, by and for the coal lobby only. Up until now the only intervention made by the MDA Government is to put pressure on the Centre to lift the ban on coal mining. We have indeed gifted ourselves a classic government.

Alas! Now the problems have increased manifold. Her only concern is to build her vote bank through the policy of appeasement. Bengali people cannot freely celebrate their festivals like Durga Puja and Kali Puja in some of the districts, whereas Mamata Banerjee never stopped other communities from celebrating their festivals by causing problems to indigenous Hindus. Many kidnappings and rapes are committed and no action is taken against the convicts. The conviction rate against the rapists is very low. Why is there such discrimination? In the villages and suburban areas where the population of infiltrators is very high the villagers live in constant fear. Indigenous Bengalis feel orphaned in their own state. Though media always tries to hide the atrocities experienced by the majority but now everyone has understood. What I feel personally is that NRC in Bengal is a must otherwise the Bengali people have no future.

Yours etc.,
Rupesh R. Nath,
Shillong -2

Does early detection of Cancer really save lives?

By Dr. Caleb Harris M.Ch.(Surgical Oncology)

The answer to the above could be Yes, No, or Maybe.

It sounds a great idea, right? This is what the medical community thought when it embarked on what is called 'Screening'- running tests in healthy individuals to detect a disease before its symptoms manifest. It was thought that catching the disease early, even before it starts troubling the individual(making him/her a 'patient') would enable the person to live a long, trouble-free life.

One of the earliest screening was done for detecting psychiatric disorders in recruits to the US Army. This was performed using a questionnaire which was later termed as the NSA(Neuropsychiatric Screening Adjunct) Test. Tests for early detection of diseases like Syphilis(a sexually transmitted disease)

instead of the entire population.

A large study was conducted in Kerala, wherein trained healthcare workers examined the mouths of patients in some parts of the state, which was compared with other localities where this was not done. It was found that while such screening was not found effective in the overall population, in people who used tobacco, there was a reduction in the deaths due to oral(mouth) cancer.

The National Lung Screening Trail was done in the US to find out if performing annual CT scans would detect early lung cancers more than chest X-rays. And yes, it proved that those who underwent CT scans had a 20% reduced risk of dying due to lung cancer due to early

The National Lung Screening Trail was done in the US to find out if performing annual CT scans would detect early lung cancers more than chest X-rays. And yes, it proved that those who underwent CT scans had a 20% reduced risk of dying due to lung cancer due to early detection of their cancer. But it is important to note that people were eligible to participate in this study only if they had smoked at least 30 'pack-years'. If a gentleman smokes one packet of cigarette a day for one whole year, he has clocked a pack year. In effect, this study was effective only in patients who smoked cigarettes.

and diabetes followed. Screening for cancer started with the Pap smear for uterine cervical cancer in the 1940s and 1950s, followed by Mammography for breast cancer. However, screening for breast cancer using Mammography was not found to be very effective.

To understand this, I want to cite an example used by Siddhartha Mukherjee in 'The Emperor of all Maladies'. Hope and Prudence are identical twins who live together. In 1990, breast cancer cells develop in both of them and keeps growing slowly. While Hope opts for a screening program and undergoes a mammogram in 1995, Prudence-true to her name, refuses the mammogram. Hope goes through a mastectomy(surgery) and chemotherapy. Being the positive person that she always is, she is a successful 'fighter' till she is found to have a recurrence in 2000 and dies after brief treatment.

Prudence noticed a breast lump in the year 1999 and underwent mastectomy and chemotherapy, but she also succumbed to the disease in 2000, around the same time as her sister.

At the joint memorial service held in the honour of the twins, the question on everyone's mind was, who was the more prudent of the twins? Though both had similar length of life, Prudence probably had a better quality of life. Screening the entire population has resulted in several women who may never have been troubled by the cancer during their lifetime being branded as a 'cancer survivor', after being subjected to treatment which is not pleasant. While the number of patients with breast cancer increased because of the women with small tumours being detected, there wasn't a significant decline in the number of women dying due to breast cancer. Hence the focus shifted onto screening a smaller target group,

detection of their cancer. But it is important to note that people were eligible to participate in this study only if they had smoked at least 30 'pack-years'. If a gentleman smokes one packet of cigarette a day for one whole year, he has clocked a pack year. In effect, this study was effective only in patients who smoked cigarettes. Or, in other words, people are allowed to use carcinogens (tobacco) and these tests are being done to 'minimise the damage caused'.

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 focus is on "tobacco and lung health." The campaign will increase awareness on:

" the negative impact that tobacco has on people's lung health, from cancer to chronic respiratory disease, " the fundamental role lungs play for the health and well-being of all people.

The campaign also serves as a call to action, advocating for effective policies to reduce tobacco consumption and engaging stakeholders across multiple sectors in the fight for tobacco control.

So, Does early detection of cancer really save lives? Yes, if the cancer manifests itself through symptoms(like breast lump, difficulty in swallowing, etc.) Does early detection of cancer through screening save lives?

Maybe, for cancer of the uterine cervix, screened using vinegar (VIA test).

Does abstaining from tobacco save lives?

Certainly YES, as about two-thirds of all cancers in Meghalaya are caused by tobacco.

(The writer is Associate Professor and Head, Department of Surgical Oncology, NEIGRIHMS, Shillong surgonco@outlook.com)

TO THE EDITOR

NDA swearing in ceremony

Editor,

The incoming NDA Government's oath-taking ceremony on Thursday which had as many as 8,000 guests makes the event great and unique. But while the nation is agog at this swearing in ceremony, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is sulking and has decided to stay away, thereby taking the sheen off the event. Mamata has her own reasons for not attending the function. The TMC Chief said that the BJP had spread lies about political murders in West Bengal. She accused the BJP of using the swearing-in ceremony to score political points.

In another unexpected development, TMC MLA Monirul Islam joined the saffron fold, making him the third legislator to desert the ruling party in West Bengal after the BJP gained significantly in the Lok Sabha polls in the state. Sadly, the BJP and TMC are engaged in a bitter war of words throughout the

seven-phase campaigning in the state. Mamata said, "In the last one hour, I am seeing media reports that the BJP claims 54 people have been murdered in political violence in Bengal. This is completely untrue. There have been no political murders in Bengal. There is no record with us. Sorry, this has compelled me not to attend the ceremony."

In the ultimate analysis, it can be inferred that Mamata could not make it to the event as her party's relationship with the BJP has worsened beyond redemption. It seems that BJP and TMC enmity has reached a crescendo with Mamata's decision to stay away from the swearing in ceremony. If the two parties do not bury the hatchet, further spilling of blood in West Bengal cannot be ruled out. In the interest of the people of West Bengal, both the parties should stop fighting. Let peace prevail so that the state and its people can march forward in the path of development.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Kochi -15

Plight of Bengalis in Bengal

Editor,

Apropos the letter "Bengal's Politics of violence" by Salil Gwali, I have no words to praise him. His letters have opened my eyes and made me realise the weakness of our own communities. As a Bengali I thank Mr Gwali from the bottom of my heart. Bengal has been facing problem after problem long before independence. The man-made famine of 1945 was very disturbing. About 3 million people died when they were forced to starve to death. This happened due to the uncaring policies of the British Raj towards the people of Bengal. All food supplies were stopped. Again many massacres happened during CPM rule which were due to ideological and cultural differences. Bengal people were happy when Mamata Banerjee entered politics. She was determined to end the misrule of CPM. She promised to help the underprivileged and to mitigate their sufferings.