

The good doctor in H-1B limbo

Visa review under the Trump regime in USA puts rural America at risk of losing Indian doctors amid a shortage of physicians. Sharon Mai in USA and Sudipto Maity in India report

Five months ago, Bhopinder and Jasmine held their beautiful, healthy newborn Simar in their arms. She was born at University Hospital in Columbia, Missouri, where the two physicians are practicing and completing their training.

Simar is a U.S. citizen. Her parents are not. On a recent afternoon, Simar was calm and quiet until her parents started talking about their uncertain future in the United States. When their voices broke, the infant made a single crying sound—almost as if she felt her parents’ pain.

Bhopinder, 32, and Jasmine, 30, (who didn’t want their last name used due to sensitivity of the subject matter) are from India and hold U.S. visas with a maximum of three years. Jasmine has a student visa, while Bhopinder has an H-1B work visa that has been the subject of recent scrutiny under U.S. President Donald Trump.

Last April, Trump signed a “Buy American, Hire American” executive order, saying he wanted to prevent fraud and abuse of work visas that allow foreigners to replace American workers. In particular, Trump seeks to review and change the H-1B program. This could affect not only physicians in the U.S. and India, but also the patients they serve amid America’s growing doctor shortage.

This April, the Trump administration announced that the spousal visa of H-1B visa holders will be eradicated, effectively making the H-4 dependent spouses not able to seek employment or run businesses.

“The American Dream is failing the people who want to come here and contribute to society just because of

the visa.” Physicians will stop coming, Bhopinder said.

“With this new visa issue, there’s going to be a further shortage of physicians.”

Filling a need

The H-1B program provides visas for highly-skilled foreigners in specialty occupations to work in underemployed sectors such as rural medicine for up to three years. Indians comprise 70 percent of employed H-1B visa holders.

Interest in the program far outstrips the availability of visas. For visas to be issued in 2019, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, or USCIS, got 95,885 applications for just 85,000 slots, including 20,000 slots physicians and others with at least a master’s degree. The agency uses an annual lottery to randomly select which applications to grant, and physicians like Bhopinder and Jasmine are included in the numbers game. If they’re not lucky, they could be deported.

The H-1B program grew out of a need for doctors and other highly-skilled professionals in the U.S. Foreign-born physicians used to be prohibited from obtaining temporary working status to perform direct patient care. But in 1991, Congress amended federal immigration laws to allow them to qualify for temporary visas to complete medical residencies and fellowships and care for patients.

Back then, and today, the number of medical practitioners has not kept up with the growing U.S. population. A study last year by Association of American Medical Colleges found that the U.S. will face a shortage of anywhere be-



tween 40,800 and 104,900 physicians by 2030.

According to the American Immigration Council, foreign workers are critical, particularly in science, technology, engineering and math fields. “Many opponents of the H-1B visa seek to pit native-born workers against their foreign-born colleagues. In reality, workers do not necessarily compete against each other for a fixed number of jobs.”

At his 2018 State of the Union address, Trump pushed for a merit-based immigration system that admits skilled people, rather than the per-country limits he considers unfair to more populated nations.

To many, the future of H-1B is up in the air.

The same can be said about the futures of foreign physicians and their families.

Patients could suffer

Without foreign doctors, proponents of the H-1B program worry patient care, research and medical education could suffer—especially in rural states like Missouri.)

but a federal report said there were about 8,700 H-1B applications by people in all professions approved between 2014 and 2016 in Missouri.)

Dr. Darrell G. Kirch, president and CEO of the Association of American Medical Colleges, issued a statement about President Trump’s executive order last February. Kirch said nearly one of every five practicing physicians in the U.S. identifies as foreign-born, and a majority work in rural and underserved communities.

“While the executive order may be intended as a short-term pause for national security, the implications for medical education and health care delivery—the foundations of our nation’s health security—could be significant and long-term,” Kirch said.

Khorzad Mehta, an attorney who works with physicians at the immigration law firm Murthy Law in Maryland, agreed: “We have a significant shortage of doctors in this country and that shortage is most acute in primary care.”

Changes in the H-1B program could also affect hospital staffing.

“Very few programs across the country give H-1B visas these days because nobody wants to deal with the problems of the visas,” said Tushar Tarun, chief resident of internal medicine at University Hospital, the main teaching lab of the University of Missouri School of Medicine.

He said many physicians completing residencies or fellowships there are foreign.

Tarun estimates that roughly 50-60 percent of foreign physicians end up spe-

cializing in internal medicine. Tarun’s wife is one, completing her residency on a J-1 student visa. In the upcoming year, he will start a three-year cardiology fellowship. But afterwards, he is unsure of their future.

Since Tarun, 32, will be a cardiology fellow, he has to re-apply for an extension of his H-1B. But with a backlog of applications, the process may take anywhere from three to six months. And if he leaves the country in the meantime, he said, the chance of being allowed to return is low.

What’s next?

While a growing number of aspiring Indian doctors are launching careers in their own country, many still view America as the land of opportunity.

Dr. VR Ramanan, Deputy Director-Medical at the Tata Medical Center in Kolkata, said there’s more freedom to practice and excel in America, while factors such as caste, religion and political affiliation can make it difficult to become a doctor in India among so many competitors.

But Trump’s new executive order changes the landscape for those considering whether to work in the United States.

Debaghya Chatterjee, a student at the R. G. Kar Medical College and Hospital, said he has no firm plans to go to America but doesn’t rule it out, especially given its world-renowned universities. So he’s keeping a close eye on what’s happening with U.S. visas.

Chatterjee said medical students still want to travel abroad for research and education, partly because of the allure of interacting and learning with an international crowd.

If it becomes harder for medical students to travel to the U.S., he said, America will lose out because they will look to other places like the United Kingdom.

Meanwhile, those already in the U.S. wonder what will become of their American Dream.

“We study medicine by reading American books and it’s a dream to come to a place like the United States where this medicine is actually being practiced,” Jasmine said.

Foreign physicians dream of a resolution with this visa issue and finally receiving a green card so they can practice in peace.

Mehta said the United States must alleviate green card backlogs as an incentive to keep physicians in medically underserved areas for the long haul.

Mehta said Indian physicians now get lumped in the same category as IT and finance professionals, increasing the time it takes for them to get green cards up to five, ten or even fifteen years. But Mehta remains hopeful that America will look closely at its health care needs and do more to help foreign physicians.

Experts said foreign-born doctors are helping the neediest Americans and making the nation a better place. “Oftentimes, they end up being cornerstones of their communities,” Mehta said.

“You’re not taking away somebody’s job by coming on H-1B as a physician,” Bhopinder added. “You’re not hurting the country, You’re taking care of people.”

(Additional reporting by Ranojoy Saha, Images by Avishek Mitra and Sharon Mai) (India Blooms News Service (IBNS) in collaboration with University of Missouri, USA)

Illusory truth effect: Fake information tends to circulate much faster than real information

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi

Research has revealed that there is a colony of cockroaches on the moon, the descendants of the cockroach that went in Apollo 11. You don’t believe me? Didn’t you read it in the papers? A magazine article? On WhatsApp? It is probably true, otherwise why would so many people write about it.

That is how the human mind works. When a person hears the same information several times, no matter how absurd it is, the mind starts convincing us of its truthfulness. WhatsApp forwards are a classic example of this, where, if misinformation is circulated a number of times, it takes on the status of truth. This is called the illusory truth effect.

Researchers, led by Liza Fazio at Vanderbilt University, have shown that when one hears something for the second or third time, the brain responds faster to it. This faster response is wrongly considered by the person to be a signal for the information being true. Gord Pennycook, a psychologist at Yale University, studies the spread of misinformation, and has shown through experiments that when participants were told something and then told the same thing the next day their familiarity with the news led them to rate it as being true. The frustrating truth about the illusory truth effect is that it happens to us unthinkingly. Even people who are knowledgeable about topics can fall prey to it, specially if it is reinforced by an equally lazy “mentor” type like a teacher/doctor/parent. In 2015, Fazio and co-authors published a paper that found that prior knowledge about a topic doesn’t inoculate you to the effect.

The illusory truth effect has been studied for decades. Typically, experimenters in these studies ask participants to rate a series of trivia statements as true or false. Hours, weeks, or even months later, the experimenters bring the participants back again for a quiz. On that second visit, some of the statements are new and some are repeats. And it’s here that the effect shows itself: Participants are reliably more likely to rate statements they’ve seen before as being true — regardless of whether they are. When you’re hearing something for the second or third time, your brain becomes faster to respond to it. “And your brain misattributes that fluency as a signal for it being true,” says Fazio “The more you hear something, the more you’ll have this gut-level feeling that maybe it’s true.”

People often pass on information without validating its source. The internet is full of amazing seeds that make you lose weight immediately, miracle hair oils and, of course, cancer cures. Studies have shown that fake information tends to circulate much faster than real information, and is remembered and believed by people for a longer period of time. This is especially true when the information encountered is in line with our beliefs or desires. E.g. immigrants are the cause of all social and economic issues, women are bad drivers, the British are responsible for all of India’s problems, drugs must be tested on animals before being ready for human consumption and so on.

Does that last one sound familiar? Many of you might be thinking “But of course drugs have to be tested on animals. Scientists have been doing so for 100 years, so it

must be necessary.”

While we expect politicians to tell lies, no one exaggerates and twists truth as much as the so called scientist. 100 years later we are no closer to even discovering what causes cancer – much less what cures it. But tests on over 50 million animals go on annually and, in order to justify this, things are periodically put into the papers that a cure is just round the corner. We have not even been able to deal with teenage acne, rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes, obesity, Alzheimer’s – all of which are on the rise – but scientific misinformation goes on to keep us from questioning the huge amounts of money given by governments and charities to pay salaries.

Animals are completely different from humans –anatomically, genetically and metabolically – even their basic cellular structures. So, even if a particular medicine or procedure is effective or safe on an animal, it may have adverse effects on humans. Even more importantly, human diseases occur naturally, while experiments on animals involve an artificial re-creation of the disease in animal, which is inevitably inaccurate. Giving a diabetes, by destroying its pancreas and then injecting it with drugs to see its effect on the disease, has no bearing at all on the human condition. Rats have been genetically modified to be cancer ridden. Not one experiment on them has shown the way forward to curing the disease in humans.

Data derived from testing on animals cannot be accurately extrapolated to humans. The American Federal Agency for Food and Drug Administration has confirmed that nine out of ten drugs, shown to be successful in animal tests, have failed in human trials. E.g. a drug named Cylert was passed through animal tests and proposed to treat Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. However, when administered to children it had disastrous effects, causing liver failure in 13 children, 11 of whom either died or had to undergo liver transplants. Vaccines tested on animals pass the tests. The same vaccines given to children in India have caused so many recent deaths.

Clearly, animal testing is not just a waste of time and money, it also has the potential of huge damage to humans.

The flipside is equally dangerous – there are drugs that fail animal testing but could potentially be very useful for humans. E.g. the path-breaking drug penicillin was found

to be ineffective on rats and rabbits and had a deadly effect on guinea pigs and hamsters. Scientists were discarding it.

However, since passing animal testing was not considered mandatory at that time, it was tested directly on humans and opened up the entire field of antibiotics for human welfare. Because the scientists are so stubborn about animal testing, there may be a number of potential cures that have never reached us.

Despite common sense telling us that a rat is not a monkey is not a human, animal testing has been mandatory for decades and is allowed, even encouraged, by non-scientific people who falsely believe it to be useful. This is a real life example of the illusory truth effect.

New technologies have now been developed, which are more effective ways of predicting effects on humans. We have mass spectrometry, genome mapping, innovative imaging techniques and highly developed computer models capable of simulating parts of the human body, to name just a few. In-vitro experiments, using human blood and tissue to determine toxicity. Have 2-3 times more accurate results than animal testing. Research on humans, such as clinical studies by analyzing a patient’s condition and responses to treatments, provide vital information, and have given us treatments for childhood leukaemia, thyroid disease, current HIV and AIDS therapies and many more. Similarly, autopsies have given critical information about human bodies and their interaction with a variety of drugs and procedures.

Even though we encounter new and valid information, we continue supporting the pointless practice of animal testing, under the false belief that it is useful to medical research. Scientists, universities and big pharmaceutical companies have been perpetuating this belief systematically for years, as it helps them accumulate huge research funding and cover up their inaction and inefficiency. Companies that earn millions selling harmful products like cigarettes, sugar, colas, genetically modified foods, polluting cars etc., benefit by influencing research and hiding the real effects of their products on people by saying that their products are safe based on ‘successful’ animal tests.

This age, more than any other, is, on one hand, victim to an overload of information, giving us little time to go into details. On the other, it is easy to expose fraud which has been posing as science. I would encourage you to read up on the failure and potential disasters of animal testing, because it is not about the animal’s life: it is about yours.

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

How to make your children follow in your footsteps

By Nury Vittachi

They have to do something worthwhile with their lives, since none of them want to be writers like their dad.

“We want proper job,” said one. “With money,” said another. One of them fancied being a rich businessman like Rupert Murdoch or Donald Trump until I told him that you had to have your heart removed and learn to drink blood. My mind was on the topic of job inheritance after I received a letter from a reader about a real-life saga in India.

In 1925, a man named Chaturvedi became an accountant. Today, five generations of Chaturvedi family members are accountants, and there are about 500 accountants in their caste where they live, Mathura in north India. Imagine a whole region of people in dark suits holding calculators and auditing each other.

Terrifying.

The reader did not want her name printed in case her children think she is pushing them to follow her footsteps (she is an accountant), but asked: “Do children usually do what their parents did?” A colleague and I embarked on a comprehensive research project (typed the question into Google). Up popped studies which said three factors determine whether your kids follow your profession or not.

***The Dining Table Chatter Effect.** As parents chat to each other about their working lives, children become intrigued and inspired by the phrases they overhear. (“I hate my life”; “Kill me now”, etc.)

***The Arcane Skills Effect.**

The higher the number of mysterious specialist skills a profession has, the more likely it is that children will do the same job. (“Big day at the office tomorrow, remind me to take my Ancient Book of Spells”.)

***The Infectious Jobs Effect.** Boys with soldier dads very often become soldiers and girls with teacher mums very often become teachers. Three other inter-generational jobs are business management, construction and entertainment.

“One of the strange things is that the job of ‘king’ is inherited in many societies, including ones with no monarch,” my colleague said. “The president’s family members become the next leader.”

And if you really want your children to follow your footsteps?

Make your title sound grander. If you are a Road Sweeper, call yourself a Highway Environmental Hygienist. The hot trend is to add the word “architect” to any activity. So a baker becomes a Cake Architect, a barber is a Hair Architect, a bank robber is a Financial Extraction Architect, etc.

Most importantly, experts say you should be sure to talk about your profession over the dinner table in ways that sound enigmatic, esoteric and intriguing. “I’m seeing a new client tomorrow: Remind me to bring my amulet, pentagram and magical Lamp of Thoth.”

But here’s a warning. Kids these days are pretty smart, and some won’t be fooled. They will just sneer and roll their eyes.

If they want lessons, my children can supply them at attractive prices. (IANS)

IN SEARCH OF SPAIN IN LATIN AMERICA

By Parag Ranjan Dutta

Latin America, spanning across the continents of North and South America for 10,000 km, from the Rio Grande river of Mexico to Tierra del Fuego, an island separated from the mainland by the Strait of Magellan of Argentina.

Latin America is known for the mighty Amazon, luxuriant equatorial forests of Brazil with exotic flora and fauna, the high Andes, deadly piranha, drierist of all the deserts, the Atacama, and the mythical El Dorado. It was Ferdinand Magellan, the Portuguese explorer, while circumnavigating the world discovered the island of Tierra del Fuego in 1520. The sighting of a large number fires burning along the coastline, which may have been made by the aboriginal inhabitants prompted him to name this island 'Tierra del Fuego' or 'the land of fire' (fuego- fire in Spanish). Magellan called the Pacific Ocean 'Mar Pacifico' which in Spanish means 'peaceful sea'.

Today more than two thirds of the speakers of Spanish and Portuguese live outside Europe, mainly in Central and South America, though it varies somewhat from Spanish spoken in mainland Europe.

As many as eighteen countries of Latin America have Spanish as their official language, brought to their motherland by the invaders.

Spanish have evolved from a major branch of Indo-European language family, Romance, which was developed from Latin spoken by ancient Romans and the Roman armies, and hence the name Latin America. Latin America was the home of many early civilizations like the Maya and the Aztec of Mexico and the Inca civilization of Peru.

The 16th century Spanish explorers and settlers had left an indelible imprint on the life and culture of Latin American population. The late 15th century and the first half of the 16th century were the periods of discoveries and explorations.

The honour of pioneering these voyages to distant lands undoubtedly belonged to Portugal. Under King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella I, this was also seen as an era of great Spanish discoveries and colonization of the Americas and Spain was destined to play a major role in Latin America for about three hundred years.

They forcibly invaded the society and culture of the Mestizos (a mixture of the original Maya Indian inhabitants and Spanish settlers) and American Indians. All the countries of Central America accept Belize were once governed by Spain.

Only Brazil, named after its first export 'brasil', a red dye made from wood remained purely Portuguese. Gradually the whole of South America came within the folds the Spanish rule. The Spanish conquering of Latin America was not at random. In a phased manner they invaded the countries of South America until they reached their final destination in Argentina.

The ruthless plundering of the local inhabitants was culminated in the forceful occupation of the social, cultural and economic life of the people.

Local languages of the original inhabitants collapsed and gradually Spanish was diffused into their languages.

Mexico, the largest country of Central America is a country with rich mixture of traditions and cultures. The ancient civilization of the Aztecs which once flourished in Mexico was destroyed by the Spanish invaders in the 16th century.

Latin America today has a varied ethnic population which is associated with the settlement history of the region. Although Spanish rule ended by early part of nineteenth century, their language and culture continued to develop in these countries



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The Aztec Empire that will later become Mexico was destroyed by Hernan Corte's when he led an expedition in the 16th century. He was part of the generations of Spanish colonizers who began the first phase of colonization of the Americas. Spain ruled this country until its independence in 1836. Today the country has the world's largest and fastest growing Spanish speaking population.

The invasion of Latin America by the Spaniards

and early colonization of North Eastern part of North America by the English had far reaching effect on the rich ethnic culture of the local inhabitants.

Besides mainland Latin America, Spanish is also the official language of a number of island nations in the Caribbean Sea. Cuba, an island in the Caribbean Sea was one of the earliest Spanish settlements.

Christopher Columbus, an Italian, under the auspices of the Catholic Monarchs sailed in search of new lands landed on Cuba in

1492 and various other Caribbean islands.

And soon after there were swarms of Spanish conquerors and invaders who simply plundered the new lands. The heart of the Maya civilization, Guatemala was overrun by the Spanish conqueror Pedro de Alvarado.

The word Caribbean though, comes from 'Carib', which owe its origin to a warlike people who were widespread in the West Indian group of islands.

The word 'Carib' means brave man in their language.

A number of countries of the West Indian group of islands derived their names from original Spanish e.g., Jamaica from Spanish 'Xamaica' which means the land of wood and water.

Hispaniola (present Haiti and Dominican Republic) too had a Spanish origin. It refers to Hispanic, relating to Spain or a Spanish speaking person of Latin American descent.

A number of Latin American country names will be a testimony to Spanish influence, e.g. Puerto Rico is a Spanish equivalent of 'Rich Port' or El Salvador, literally from Spanish 'Republica de El Salvador' or Republic of the Savior.

The largest of the Central American Republics, Nicaragua, derived its name from Nicara, the chief of one of the most powerful indigenous tribes, who fought against the Spaniards, who ultimately conquered Nicaragua in the early 16th century.

The lure of huge treasures attracted Spaniards further south towards the Isthmus of Central America, who took control of Costa Rica, meaning 'rich coast' in Spanish.

A number of Spanish expeditions explored and mapped the eastern coast of South America. Vasco Nunez de Balboa, a Spanish explorer, governor and conqueror or best known for having crossed the isthmus (a narrow strip of land connecting two larger landmasses separating two water bodies) of Panama for the first time. He had a glimpse of the Pacific Ocean in 1513 and became the first European to lead an expedition to reach the Pacific from the new world.

Francisco Pizarro Gonzalez joined Vasco Nunez de Balboa as his captain in his march to the south sea when Balboa discovered the Pacific Ocean.

Since then this crossroad became one of the world's main trade route which culminated in the construction of the Panama Canal in 1914.

Pizarro was made the mayor and magistrate of the newly founded Panama in Central America. He was also a part of an expedition to Colombia. Pizarro travelled through much of the Pacific coast of Peru.

Sixteenth Century explorers claimed the existence of a fictitious country or city of El Dorado with fabulous riches somewhere deep in the Orinoco and the Amazon basins of South America.

El Dorado comes from a Spanish word meaning 'the gilded one'. Several Spanish conquerors made valiant and risky attempts to discover this mythical city. Pizarro was a very ambitious man who had the desire to discover and make own fortunes travelled to Peru lured by the mythical 'El Dorado'.

Pizarro along with his brothers Juan and Gonzalo discovered the Incan Empire of Peru in 1532 which, the seat of Inca civilization within the folds of the high Andes Mountain. Incas came from the south to the Andean Region and founded the city of Cuzco.

Once the capital of the Inca Empire, Cuzco is known for its archaeological remains and Spanish colonial architecture.

Pizarro captured and killed the last Incan king Atahualpa and claimed the territory for Spain. He founded the capital city Lima after three years in 1535. Pizarro not only plundered the Incan Empire but made good with troves of gold and silver.

Spanish settlers mainly from the neighbouring Peru and Chile began to colonize Argentina (Land of Silver).

The mention and conquest of Argentina dates back to the first voyages made by the Spanish conquerors to Rio de la Plata, which means river of silver.

Argentina is a Spanish adjective (silvery) traditionally called Argentine in English ultimately derived the country name from Latin 'argentum', which means silver.

In quest of the new lands Spaniards had to cross the equator a number of times and one such territory later became known as Ecuador, a Spanish term for the equator.

During the three centuries after Columbus's discovery a number of native Latin American words entered the English language via Mexican Spanish, particularly those words that named physical and cultural objects encountered by the Europeans in the New World.

A number of English equivalents for certain crops and fruits actually came from Nahuatl. A number of common fruits and crops like chili, guava, cacao etc are classic examples.

When Aztec Empire was destroyed by the Spaniards in 1519, the chief language of the local people who lived in Central Mexico was Nahuatl, which is still spoken by millions today.

Latin America today has a varied ethnic population which is associated with the settlement history of the region.

Although Spanish rule ended by early part of nineteenth century, their language and culture continued to develop in these countries.

(The author is former Head of the Department of Environmental Science, St Edmund's College)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, July 1, 2018

On your solar return chart Moon conjunct Mars indicates good results. This is a time when you may need to acclimatize to situations and circumstances to make the best of what is accessible. Financially this remains to be a stable period. However overgenerous tendencies need to be cramped. In general you would fare well on the professional or academic front. Nevertheless some projects may not yield anticipated outcomes. Family will aid you emotionally in tough times. You need to keep pace with a tight timetable so consolidate your priorities beforehand. If you are in the midst of any clash over ancestral property then try to settle it cordially.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Your wits and luck will give you a fine combination which will prove to be excellent in your profession. You will have a very good scope for progress in your career and business. You would be caught up in a lot of activity on the professional front. Many things take shape and your image will enhance. Pending tasks will be completed and you will get a new spurt of energy and enthusiasm to get on to more projects and jobs. Your efforts are recognized as you bask in the glory. Those who are in a relationship will have a setback in their love affair. Sudden expenditure cannot be ruled out. Health must be looked after.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Position of stars will give you some mixed results. You are hard working and sincere towards your profession but certain setbacks will force you to put some projects and issues on the back burner. You may invest money in some long term investments. You will have four programs at your disposal but take care of your luggage and self. You will try to be affectionate, caring and loving among your family members and loved ones. It will be advisable to rein your extra expenditure. Your health has been indifferent of late however you will feel energized and there will be an upswing in your energy levels. You will be eager to get back to your exercise routine.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Many new contacts have been made over the last few months and these new contacts will pay off. Changes are manifesting faster than you may realize. All this will certainly be exciting but you may feel a bit apprehensive however you cannot move ahead without taking some risks. On the personal front friends will cooperate immensely in fact some of this goodwill spills over to your professional field too and you reap benefits. Family ties will be stronger and you will find that you express your thought and feelings to your spouse further strengthening your relationship. Your health needs some care. You may join some gym or a fitness routine.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Your work, career and money related problems will require you to be more responsible and you may get some feeling of unrest at your work place. But it will be a temporary phase and you will have ability to come out of it. Presenting your ideas after taking into account all considerations and points of view will help you maintain good relations with your colleagues. Expenses slow down and you are in a position to consolidate and make investments. Your family and loved ones will have warmth, affection and respect for you. Health and vitality will remain to be good as you plan some outdoor activity with friends and family.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You may find yourself surrounded by sudden opportunities be it money, intimacy or relationship. Make hay when the sun shines, and utilize this favorable time and maximize gains. Travel plans take shape and materialize. For some of you overseas travel is not ruled out. Your family relations and contacts with loved ones will get reenergized. Socially, you are going to be very popular. There will be many social gatherings to attend and friends will constantly surround you. During the course of this you may meet a new and interesting person and you will form a special bond, which energizes you. Be ready for a joyous affair. You need to remain relaxed. You will feel listless and seem to lack energy.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

It is a time when you get mixed results in matters related to your career finance or profession. Postpone a sudden trip for some time. Get rid of your negative thinking and approach and develop self confidence. Health related problems may influence your working so take care of health. You may find yourself to be in a phase of uncertainty and you will not have clear ideas so concern

trate upon the issue. You need to remain relaxed. You will feel listless and seem to lack energy. Travel will bring good luck and this travel could open up a few possibilities and to an extent some new avenues too, which will help you diversify

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

You will find yourself in an environment that is conducive to a much more creative mood and also provide you with requisite stability. Dynamic energy possesses you and you seek to channelize it in business ventures and interactions with peers and young at heart. You are judicious in matters related to personal affairs. Your focus is on getting to the heart of the matter and homing in on the truth. Financially this is a strong period where you will get good gains. Unexpected financial benefit could come your way. Emotions are on an even keel, as you feel loved in family relationships and share joy with your family members - a period of happy family life.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

A lot of new things will happen. There is bound to be success in undertakings so go ahead and put into action your well thought out plans. Those in the creative field will excel. Your image will enhance, as you are ready to reassess your goals and dreams. Something can upset you emotionally but you will overcome it very fast also. This is likely to be visible in both your professional and your personal life. You show love and care in personal relationships and get support and love in return as you infuse energy in your interactions with loved ones. Finances are stable and there are some gains. Your spouse or partner will provide you extra support and good advice. You find that you get cooperation from your friends

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You flower as an individual and share your vibrancy with people at work and in your personal life. Your potential is realized both by yourself and seniors as you manage professional matters with ease to get desired results. Peers stand by you as you make progress in your career. A previously unused talent in the field of art, entertainment or media could come to light and you look to ways to train in this field. Family support is tremendous realize this and give back the love that you receive. You need to keep your emotional outbursts under control as you may be hurting some relationships. Timely medical advice is recommended.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You will experience some mixed results even as luck will favour you and tremendously boost your career. You will get an opportunity for overseas travel. You will prove your mettle and you will be recognized for your worth. This too will widen your horizons and put your career on the fast track. If you use all your senses to manifest the state of abundance you want to attain, and keep doing this regularly, you will eventually get what you want. Personal finances will stabilize and grow. However health needs due attention and cannot be ignored. Be tactful in your dealings with family members else some angry and hurtful words can be exchanged.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

The planetary configuration gives you strength to achieve something new in your professional life. Energy and strength along with your remarkable personality will draw the attention of people. Money and financial gains are ahead even as expenses could rise. Courage is needed to look at all the points of view and get a balanced picture before you take decisions and arrive at conclusions. An overseas trip is on the cards of some of you this will benefit you both professionally as well as personally. You will spend quality time with your family and strengthen your bonds with your spouse and children. Your health needs care and you need to look at your diet plan.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

There will be good chances for progress in your field of work or profession. You will insist upon innovation and these innovative ideas will catch the eye and imagination of others too. You bring forth your organizational skills to maximize your gains. There may occur some inevitable expenditure in your professional life but it will boost your gains therein. You may have some personal expenditure also. Travel is also indicated during this week and this will also help give a boost to your career. Exhibit patience in family relationships and avoid arguments. Your bonds with your children become stronger and they do you proud. You spend some romantic moments with your beloved. Health of life partner needs care.

Understanding SOWA – RIGPA – Part

Ranjan K Baruah

In our last edition we have published about Sowa Rigpa as career option. Many students and guardians have communicated as they were not aware of this field. Interested students may also visit the website of Ministry of Ayush for getting information related to courses in Sowa Rigpa.

This Tibetan medicine draws on centuries-old techniques such as blood-letting, cupping, and moxibustion — burning herbs on energy points of the body — to try to heal ailments.

The practise draws on aspects of traditional Chinese medicine and India's Ayurvedic system as well as its own unique theories and treatments.

It also features spiritual practises including meditation and Buddhist prayer and it attracts devotees from all over the globe, hoping for help with conditions from back pain to degenerative diseases.

Given the modern social and educational system, some institutions are imparting the education at par with the modern system in terms of time with packages to be completed within a limited duration.

Presently, after 10+2 grate the students are selected on entrance test merit basis. The nomenclature of this six years course is sMempa kachupa which is equivalent to Bachelor of Sowa Rigpa (Tibetan Medicine) .

This course is presently conducted in following four Institutions in India: Central Institute of Buddhist Studies, Leh (under Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India), Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute, Dharamsala HP of his Holiness Dalai Lama, Central University for Tibetan Studies, Saranath UP (under Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India), Chagpori Medical Institute Darjeeling (W.B).

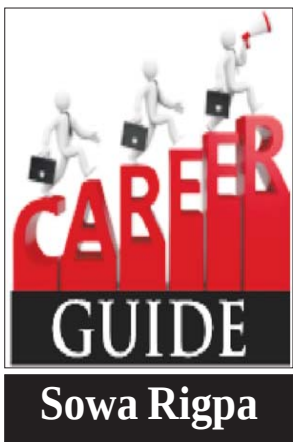


In most of Himalayan regions Sowa-Rigpa is practiced in traditional way with community support with an sMempa in every village.

But since the last two decades this scenario has been changing, adopting some of the administrative elements of modern hospital system in educational Institutions, dispensaries, hospitals and pharmacies etc.

Nevertheless, still there are all together around 1000 practitioners of Sowa-Rigpa in India catering health care in harsh Himalayan regions and other places. Dharamshala in Himanchal Pradesh and Ladakh region of J&K are the main Centers for Sowa-Rigpa Institutions in India.

National Research Institute for Sowa-Rigpa, Leh: The National Research Institute for Sowa-Rigpa, Leh is a peripheral Unit of Central Council for Research in



Ayurvedic Sciences, Ministry of AYUSH, Govt. of India. It was established in 1976 in Leh-Ladakh for Research and Development of Himalayan art of healing "Sowa-Rigpa", popularly known as Tibetan or Amchi medicine. Since its inception this Research Institute has been doing considerable work for preservation and promotion of Sowa-Rigpa in India.

Updates:

NDA Examination: An Examination will be conducted by the Union Public Service Commission on 9th September, 2018 for admission to the Army, Navy and Air Force wings of the NDA for the 142nd Course, and for the 104th Indian Naval Academy Course (INAC) commencing from 2nd July, 2019.

The approximate number of vacancies to be filled on the results of this examination will be as under: — National Defence Academy: 339 (208 for Army, 39 for Navy and 92 for Air Force) Naval Academy: 44 (10+2 Cadet Entry Scheme) Total: 383.

Last date for submitting online application is 2nd July. (Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

"A miracle is an event which creates faith. That is the purpose and nature of miracles. Frauds deceive. An event which creates faith does not deceive: therefore it is not a fraud, but a miracle."

--- George Bernard Shaw

The Shillong Times

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Higher Education Commission

THE University Grants Commission (UGC) had by all accounts failed to fulfil expectations. Indian Universities had performed very badly in global ranking. It is good that the Government had drafted a new law, the Higher Education Commission of Education Bill to revamp the universities. But the snag is that the proposed new law is also inclined to over-regulation which clashes with academic autonomy. The new legislation is intended to improve academic standards. But the Union HRD Ministry is to do the funding. The academic institutions in the country have never been altogether free from Government interference. But, with the HRD ministry directly controlling the financing of universities, the danger of political interference increases. The objective of the Bill is to make groves of academe self-regulatory. The funding aspect defeats the purpose. Repetition of the scandal at Nalanda University is not ruled out. The question is: where will the money come from? The private sector may provide a fair amount of finance. But it is only interested in job-oriented courses. What will happen to pure sciences and humanities? Besides, private sector funding also has strings attached.

The new Bill proposes to arrest the fall in educational standards. But that warrants the appointment of the best available teaching talent. With the HRD Ministry holding the purse-strings, will there be any improvement over the UGC? The bill also empowers the Centre to remove the Chairman of the Commission for ineptitude, whatever that implies. The HRD ministry should have the qualitative competence to exercise such powers. Every institution in this country has suffered due to excessive bureaucratic controls and the inability to attract talent and excellence. Age is equated with wisdom and people continue to remain in certain positions long after they have failed to produce results. Security of tenure and lack of assessment of performance of those holding positions of responsibility in the educational sector have succeeded in killing merit, enthusiasm, motivation and new ideas. Those who have held noteworthy positions in the UGC were insecure about allowing fresh blood into the institution. Moreover, unnecessary control over universities that wish to expand their campuses to the rural outback where higher education is not accessible to the youth has been a huge setback. While universities need to be strictly regulated their growth cannot be stymied by those regulations.

Behdienkhlam: A prayer for bountiful harvest and to ward off evil

By HH Mohrmen

Behdienkhlam is the most important festival of the Pnars in both the East and West Jaintia hills District of Meghalaya. The term Behdienkhlam is made up of three words. In the Pnar parlance, ‘Beh’ literally means to chase or to rid off, ‘dieñ’ means wood or log and ‘khlam’ means plague, epidemic or pestilence. Therefore Behdienkhlam literally means the festival to rid away plague. To define Behdienkhlam by merely using the literary meaning of the festival is like describing the book by simply looking at its cover because that is not what Behdienkhlam is all about; in fact it is more than chasing away plague.

There are altogether 6 annual Behdienkhlam festivals celebrated by the Pnars of different communities called Raids. The first Behdienkhlam was celebrated by the raid Chymang, followed by the raid Jowai, Tuber, Ialong, Mukhla and raid Muthlong.

The main part of the festival is the Council of the 4 high priest of the four raids, the raid Jowai, raid Tuber, raid Chymang and Ialong. K C Rymbai former Daloi of the elaka Jowai confirmed that the festival indeed has a fine connection with the agricultural activities of the people. Every part of the rituals performed throughout the year in preparation of Behdienkhlam are intricately linked to agriculture. It is after the ritual ‘Thoh Langdoh’ is performed that people can start planting cucumber, pumpkins, beans and various types vegetables and it is only after another ceremony ka ‘Chat thoh’ that farmers can start tilling their paddy fields.

The various Behdienkhlam festivals celebrated by the different raid also indicate the many important events of rice cultivation. The first Behdienkhlam is that of raid Chymang and it symbolises the onset of the season for tilling the paddy fields. Jowai Behdienkhlam signifies the season after the seeds are placed on the lap of mother nature and the raid Tuber’s Behdienkhlam coincides with the time that farmers are done with weeding, the raid Ialong celebrates its Behdienkhlam when the rice plant starts to flowers while the celebration of the raid Mukhla’s festival indicates the advent of the harvest season.

Behdienkhlam therefore is not merely about ridding off the plague but it testifies to the fact that the Pnars of

Jaintia were the first tribe in the region to adapt to more developed farming practices.

The immediate rituals and sacrifices that precede the designated four days of the festival are the ‘kñia khang’ performed on Muchai; the first day after the market day of the week and ‘kñia pyrthad’ sacrifice to the thunder god on the Mulong the seventh day of the same week. But the festival officially begins on the sixth day (Pynsiñ) of the eight days a week traditional calendar of the Jaintias.

Though the main features of the festival celebrated by the different raids are the same yet there are some variations in the rituals performed. In Jowai; the three days and four nights annual Behdienkhlam festival always starts with the tradition of offering food to the ancestors in a tradition called, “Ka Siang ka Pha” or “Ka Siang ka Phur.”

The feast of offering food to the dead is a mark of veneration and gratitude to the ancestors the forebears of the clan and the tradition. In the Khasi Pnar concept of the afterlife, departed souls reside with the Creator and eat betel nut in the courtyards or corridors of God’s abode. The spirit of the dead (ki syngngia ki sarei) every year, descend down to the Earth to partake in the feast provided by the descendants to propitiate the departed souls.

Ka Siang ka pha is celebrated by every clan except when there is sickness in the family or if death has just occurred in the family. The family which had just met with bereavement, does not perform the offerings because ‘ka siang ka pha’ has already been offered to the departed souls as part of the last rites of a person. But not all clans perform their offerings to the dead on Pynsiñ. There are also clans which perform ‘ka siang ka pha’ on Muchai the last day of the festival.

All kind of foods are placed in brass plates and they must always be in odd numbers 5, 7 or 9. Care is also being taken that the favourite food of the deceased is placed as part of the offering which could be anything from fruits and cigarettes to rice and curry etc. The next part of the

rites lies on the maternal uncle to invoke the spirits to partake of the offering. After the Maternal uncle’s invocation the whole family gathered for the rites remains silent for sometimes in a symbolic moment to allow the ancestors’ spirits to consume the offerings. Then the offering is shared among the family members. Only a clean female member of the family is allowed to prepare the offerings, women who are in their menstrual cycle are not allowed to do the preparation.

In the traditional calendar “Mulong,” is the day before “Musiang the market day,” the market day in Jowai is also the third day of the fest. By the end of the day all the ‘dieñkhlam’ 9 round neatly carved logs are kept at their allotted place at different locations in the Iawmusiang market area. The Dieñkhlams are prepared by the 7 localities namely Tpep-pale, Dulong, Panaliar, Lumiongkjiam, Loompyrdi Iongpiah, Loomkyrwiang and Chilliang Raji being the khon Raji was by tradition given the responsibility to prepare and bring two round logs called ‘Khongblai’ and ‘Symbod khong’.

On this day all male members of the Niamtre march in a procession and dance to the traditional drums and flutes to bring the dieñkhlam from the forest to Iawmusiang. Early in the morning families are busy preparing ja-sngi (lunch) for every male member of the society and they in turn get ready to join the community to bring the dieñkhlam.

The third day of the holy week is “Musiang” and on this particular day all the dieñkhlam and the Khong are carried from the heart of Jowai town to the respective localities. Apart from the 7 dieñkhlam and two khongs, hundreds of 15 to 19 feet trees called ‘ki Dieñkhlam khian (small Dieñkhlam) are used by the followers of the Niamtre. Two or three of these tiny Dieñkhlam are kept in the frontage or veranda of every house of the followers of the Niamtre. The tiny Dieñkhlam are used to beat the rooftops of the house symbolizing the act of chasing away the plague and evil spirits from the house and pray to the almighty God to bless the family.

Muchai is the last day of the Behdienkhlam festival of Raid Jowai. The day starts in the wee hours of morning

with the tradition of ‘kyntiñ khong’ at the Priestess’s official residence. The programme is followed by the Ka Bam tyngkong led by the Daloi at the clan-house of the first four settlers of Jowai town. But the main part of the festival is the coming together of all the khon (children) ka Niamtre at the sacred Aitnar, a pond in which the last significant part of the festival is performed.

The dance at Aitnar is that of the people who find joy on the arrival of U Tre Kirod (God) with the celebration of Behdienkhlam. It also symbolizes the oneness of the people and everyone joyfully participates without any distinction. The ‘ia knieh khong’ traditions at the sacred pool is whence men compete to set foot on the ‘khnong’ which symbolizes cleansing of the souls and blessing for good health

The climax of the day is the arrival of the colourful Rots/rong brought by the many donges of Jowai town to be displayed at the Aitnar, and all the beautiful rongs are then discard as part of the offering.

Dat Lawakor is the last public event of every Behdienkhlam; it is to ask God to indicate which of the two valleys around Jowai, ‘the Pynthor neñi or the Pynthor wah’ upper or lower valley will yield a good harvest this year. It is similar to football but using a wooden ball with no goal post. The only rule of the game is that the team which can carry the ball to the designated end wins and the particular direction will reap better harvest that year.

The last ritual to be performed by the Daloi, the Lyngdoh and the other religious dignitaries at the Lyngdoh’s residence is called ‘pynleit sarang’. To maintain the sanctity of the religious festival, self-purification by way of abstinence from sleeping with their partners is observed by religious head conducting the various rites during the entire festival. After the ‘pynleit sarang’ ritual; the Daloi and the other religious heads can now return to the homes of their respective wives.

Behdienkhlam is therefore a festival which has many profound spiritual significances for the people.

New York victory a turning point for Left Democrats

Sanders group readies to storm mid-term poll

By Michael Arney

On Tuesday’s Democratic primary election for New York’s 14th Congressional District, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez accomplished a nearly impossible task: She defeated her heavily overfunded incumbent opponent. With practically all votes counted, the bartender-turned-socialist-candidate trounced high ranking, ten-term incumbent and Queens Democratic Party Chair Rep. Joseph Crowley 58 percent to 42 percent, even though he outspent her more than 10 to 1.

“This race is about people versus money,” she boldly proclaimed. “We’ve got people, they’ve got money.” Bronx-born and the daughter of Puerto Rican parents—her mother was born on the island, her father in the South Bronx—28-year-old Ocasio-Cortez began her campaign with the statement, “Women like me aren’t supposed to run for office.” Throughout the primary, she artfully mixed democratic demands for national and working class representation with a constant trumpeting of her democratic socialist platform.

One slogan on her campaign literature was “Es la hora de uno de nosotros” (“It’s time for one of us”), a clear appeal to the district’s majority Latino population. Furthermore, she repeatedly upheld her humble working class origins. Ocasio-Cortez is also an unabashed member of the Democratic Socialists of America and was an organizer for Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaign, both of which helped inform her platform.

Ocasio-Cortez’s victory was buoyed by a perfect storm of Crowley’s lack of primary challengers, the district’s demographics, her platform, and an incredible ground game. Since it was his first primary challenge since 2004, some analysts likened this election to a boxing match of a fighter who had not entered the ring for a very long time.

At this point, the 14th District—which spans from the southeastern and eastern portion of the Bronx to part of north-central Queens—is half Latino, 16 percent Asian, and 12 percent Black, but only 18 percent white, making it thoroughly ripe for nationally oppressed representation.

Her platform—including Medicare for All, housing as a human right, federal jobs guarantees for the unemployed, gun control and criminal rights reform, free college tuition, campaign finance reform, and the abolition of ICE—was well-received by primary day voters. She presented voters with a visionary program for change rather than another defensive campaign aimed at holding the line. Indeed, her campaign ads and literature did not mention Trump.

As for her brand of socialism, Ocasio-Cortez says it is all about “democratic participation” and “economic, social, and racial dignity.” “To me,” she explained in a recent interview, socialism “is about direct representation and people actually having power and stake over their economic and social wellness...it means guarantee[ing] a basic level of dignity.”

Her strong messaging was matched by an overwhelming ground game. Virtually every cell phone and house phone in the district was called, thousands of doors were knocked on, and multitudes

of subway riders were greeted by campaign workers and the candidate herself. In the last weeks and days of the race, endorsements and hundreds of volunteers poured in. Crowley was a virtual no-show in the Bronx, and an actual no-show at debates.

The district is ranked by the Cook Political Report as D+29, meaning it votes 29 percent more Democratic than the country as a whole. Thus, Ocasio-Cortez is practically guaranteed victory in November, which will make her the youngest woman and the youngest Latina to ever be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Unseating Crowley also has made her an instant national media star, with interviews on CBS, CNN, several MSNBC programs, and coverage in The New York Times, Washington Post, Time, and the like. Insurgent candidates will learn from her incredible ability to succinctly answer interview questions in only 15 to 20 seconds, a fact duly noted by Mika Brzezinski on MSNBC’s “Morning Joe” the day following the election.

Ocasio-Cortez was endorsed by a range of progressive organizations, including Black Lives Matter, Brand New Congress, Democracy for America, MoveOn, Our Revolution, and Justice Democrats. She credits the latter organization with a convincing push for her to become a candidate soon after she returned from protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota.

Her victory earned applause from Bernie Sanders, who said: “She took on the entire local Democratic establishment in her district and won a very strong victory. She demonstrated once again what progressive grassroots politics can do.”

To his credit, Crowley was endorsed by a slew of elected officials and trade unions as well as liberal and progressive organizations such as Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, NARAL, Planned Parenthood, the Sierra Club, and the Working Families Party of New York. However, as the years have worn on, his increase in funding from Wall Street sources has coincided with a decidedly centrist voting record, and the district has become more advanced than he.

He also had the backing of the New York State AFL-CIO, whose president Mario Ciento had praised what he called Crowley’s “proven record of standing up for the middle class.” Ocasio-Cortez, however, claimed she was the real “labor candidate” in the race.

Ocasio-Cortez’s win is being seen by many as a milestone in terms of the progressive left’s advance in the Democratic Party and a success of inside-outside organizing. Speaking to supporters after the poll results were announced, she said, “This is the beginning, because the message that we sent the world tonight is that it’s not OK to put donors before your community.”

She continued: “You have given this country hope, you have given this country proof that when you knock on your neighbor’s door, when you come to them with love, when you let them know that no matter your stance, you are there for them—we can make change.” (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

A satire on reservation

Editor,
Hans Christian Anderson told a very instructive tale of how a weaver had taken everyone including the emperor and his advisors for a ride by dressing the emperor with "invisible" clothes. Only a little child could discover the naked truth that the emperor had no clothes when everyone had been admiring their emperor's new invisible clothes!
The same thing happened when I told a little girl a somewhat similar story of peculiar prudence of another king. Here the king was a lion in his jungledom somewhere in Africa. In that jungle, zebras had constantly been hunted by packs of hyenas. So, the lion king declared that a big field near his den would be made a sanctuary for the zebras. A big billboard was erected there. It contained the king's order that one would be punished if one dared hunt a zebra in the sanctuary. Zebras became very happy. At last, they could peacefully eat grass and trot without any fear. But just after a few days, hyenas again started hunting zebras in that very sanctuary even under the very billboard. Naturally,

zebras went to the lion king and complained to him about their humiliation and death even in the sanctuary.
Hearing this, the lion became very angry and promptly summoned an all animal meeting. The king ordered one hundred guards to be immediately recruited. Those guards would be provided with weapons. They will protect zebras in the sanctuary. Then the lion king declared, "Every adult animal can now apply for the job but only those who have well fed body and cunning and sharp mind will be selected."
Having seen that hyenas started licking their lips while listening to the king, an old zebra said, "Your Majesty, please reserve at least some posts for zebras for our safety and security. We have been tortured for thousands of years by animals like hyenas. As a result, right now, we cannot compete with them. Your Highness, I am afraid, they may not protect us..."
"No reservation of jobs," said the king, "will be allowed in my territory of absolute equality! I believe only in meritocracy."
Hearing the story the little girl said, "Ha! Ha! The lion king was as stupid as that emperor who had walked stark naked!"

National Doctors Day- 2018

Editor,
National Doctors day 2018 will be celebrated by the people all over the India on 1st of July like every year. This day is celebrated in memory of Bharat Ratna Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy in order to honour the entire medical fraternity. . Physicians/ doctors- are professionals who practices medicine, which is concerned with promoting, maintaining, or restoring health through the study, diagnosis, and treatment of disease, injury, and other physical and mental impairments.
Doctors are life savers and are integral for any society. In our routine life, we often encounter health issues that are beyond our comprehension. We require help from a doctor to understand the problem and also to cure them. The condition may get worse without medical intervention. Doctors are thus considered to be life savers. Symbol of Doctor's Day is the red carnation and is chosen because the color

of the flower is in character with the medical profession. It represents adoration, charity, sacrifice, bravery and audacity. This day is dedicated to all the doctors to remind them of their vital role in our lives.
Important duties of a medical practitioner:
Emergency Medical Service – The physician has to immediately render emergency medical care and protect life. He cannot refuse this emergency life care service to anyone. The guidelines as laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court are:
a) A patient who needs emergency medical care should be admitted.
b) In case there are no vacant beds, the patient has to be given all due care.
c) The doctor/ medical officer shall make necessary arrangements to get the patient transferred to another hospital in an ambulance –
· He will first ascertain whether the recipient hospital has beds.
· Patient will be accompanied by an RMO during the transfer
· In no case will the patient be left unattended at any time for want of beds
· Attending doctor will document all details – condition of the patient,

treatment given, etc. and will write his name in a clear, legible hand and put his complete signature with date and time. The Hon'ble Supreme Court gave the following directions in cases of RSA
The medical aid should be instantaneous. It is the duty of the RMP to attend to the injured and render medical aid/treatment without waiting for procedural formalities unless the injured/guardian (in case of unconscious/minor) desires otherwise. Efforts to save the person and preserve life should be top priority, not only for the doctor but also for the police office/any citizen who happens to notice such an accident. The professional obligation of protecting life extends to every doctor, whether at Govt. Hospital or otherwise. The obligation being total, absolute and paramount, no statutory or procedural formalities can interfere in discharging these duties. Whenever better or specific assistance is required, it is the duty of the attendant doctor to see that the patient reaches the proper doctor as early as possible. Non-compliance of these directives may invite prosecution under the provisions of the Motor Vehicle Act or IPC.
Role of Doctors in GVK

EMRI
GVK EMRI is an exclusive example of synergy of several disciplines like- Medical, Information Technology, Research & Information Systems, Management, Fleet, etc. Doctors in GVK EMRI contribute as Emergency Response Centre Physician, as Instructors for the Global Certification Programs, as Senior Managers as directors for the Emergency Medicine Learning, as Emergency Medicine Education Counsellors and also diversified in the Operations and Research wings. On the occasion of Doctors' Day (July 1) 2018, on behalf of GVK EMRI, we take opportunity to salute each Doctor who is contributing to achieving the mission of organization in saving precious lives with their skills and commitment.
When there are tears, you are a shoulder, when there is pain, you are a medicine. When there is a tragedy, you are a hope.
Yours etc.,
Deepankar Choudhury
State Head (COO)
GVK EMRI
108 – EMS,
MEGHALAYA

“ *The most significant civil rights problem is voting. Each citizen's right to vote is fundamental to all the other rights of citizenship and the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960 make it the responsibility of the Department of Justice to protect that right. ”*

-- Robert Kennedy

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.322 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 3, 2018

Rising graph of stash

WITH a 50% rise in deposits by Indian in the Swiss National Bank the claims of the Narendra Modi government that it is fighting the black money menace is exposed. While all money deposited by Indians in Swiss banks, or the other tax havens abroad, need not necessarily be black money but clearly, the evil of black money is growing phenomenally, and governmental steps are of little help so far.

The Congress has lambasted the Modi Government and asking what has happened to PM Modi’s promise during the 2014 general election campaign that he would, if elected to power, bring back black money deposited in banks abroad. He had also stated famously that he would put Rs 15 lakh each from the money thus brought back, into the accounts of poor Indians. But while the Modi government has created bank accounts for poor Indians, most of these accounts are poorly transacted other than credits of subsidy reimbursements.

Granted that the then PM-hopeful had made claims to win votes in his and the BJP’s favour. But, the rise in the deposits by Indians in Swiss banks has come about when deposits by individuals from other nations increased by no more than three per cent. Also, the last year’s rise has come about after a fall in such deposits for a couple of years. This major upward spiral happened after

Demonetisation

What this goes to show is the Modi government’s attempts to tame the black money menace have not seen positive results. Rather, Demonetisation -- which proved to be a disaster on the one side -- appears to have encouraged more Indians to deposit money in banks abroad. After Demonetisation, more checks and balances are in place in relation to money transactions via Indian banks. But the result is, that the Indian economy that ran on the strength of the black money faced a major hit. Sectors like real estate are now down in the dumps even while those who have black money are managing to funnel it to tax havens abroad now in more energetic ways.

While PM Modi is not corrupt, some allegations against BJP chief Amit Shah are of a serious nature. It’s high time the Centre devised new ways to tackle the evil of black money and corruption as both supplement and complement each other.

A flummoxed urban citizen

By Toki Blah

Most of us and probably many of the readers of this write-up are Shillong bred and born. Each one familiar with and thankful to belong to one of the most habitable places on God’s Earth. This statement is made with no intention of being mawkishly parochial or provincial about Shillong my birth place but instead it is simply stating an established fact. Of late however this pride and excitement over the Scotland of the East has begun to jade and is replaced with an anxiety that perhaps all is not well with this pearl of the NE. We look around us and this fear is not groundless. We ask questions; we ponder; we introspect and the uncomfortable truth sinks in that perhaps it is we the inhabitants of the place that have to do more with the deterioration of the city than anybody else. We can’t, however much some may want to, blame this one on a ‘villainous outsider’. It’s amply clear the rapid relapse of Shillong into a filthy, garbage infested city is an insider job! Scratch the surface and the truth is revealed -- we the people of Shillong have no clue; no idea; no seriousness about civic management of a growing metropolis! Question is, why in Heaven’s name is this happening?

Any attempt to answer the above will simply push forward another question. Can’t help wondering how older, larger and more populous urban centres, say London, Mumbai, Beijing, Tokyo, New York for instance, cope with their gigantic civic problems, waste and garbage included, which definitely are a million times more complicated than ours? The answer is very simple -- Civic governance of large populated centres is run and managed by an urban civic institution known as a Municipality. We gasp in indignant surprise and sputter “But- but --but- but Shillong too has a Municipality. So why is it not working here for us?” It’s not working because all of us have connived, conspired together and collectively plotted in not allowing the Shillong Municipality to function! Every one of us, politicians, Government, traditional institutions, rangbah shnongs, pressure groups and even educated people who should know better, are totally against the idea of an elected functioning Mu-

nicipality. A Municipality is a specifically designed institution for civic governance; it is composed of elected representatives of an urban constituency; a time tested and proven paradigm on how to run and administer towns and cities; a critical need for any growing urban entity. It has universal acceptability. In Meghalaya we have, patriots (men ieit ri) who think otherwise. They continue to believe (proof notwithstanding) that the rest of the world is practising civic nonsense. A functioning Shillong Municipality is a threat to our identity; a danger to the Jaitybnriew. Of course no one has cared to explain how and why, nor offer an alternative. Everyone has simply been asked to accept an unfounded falsehood. Talk about fake news! It’s as simple as that.

There is the argument that an elected Municipal Board is an alien concept and that it will be overwhelmed by outsiders. Taking this argument to its logical conclusion one can say that the State Legislative Assembly too is an alien concept but surprisingly even after 40 years of elections it still remains steadfast under the control of elected indigenous members. This is because of the policy of reserved seats. The same applies for the Municipal Board of Shillong. Out of the total 27 seats to the SMB, 22 seats are reserved for the locals. Point is that all of us have been misled for the last 40 years by sheer speculative nonsense and unfounded fear. The fear is also propagated that the Ward Commissioner will supersede and overtake all the powers and functions of the Rangbah Shnong and that Ward Commissioner elections, fought on party lines will bring in unnecessary rift and discord within the shnongs. We definitely can’t let that happen but the fact remains that both these fears can easily be avoided and eliminated by amending the existing Municipal Act. The Act can be amended so that Dorbar Shnongs take control of the SMB and elections to the Board need not be on party lines. It can be done and simply needs some imaginative thinking on the part of Urban Affairs. Shillong needs a strong and functioning

Municipal Board controlled and managed by popularly elected members to take care of civic governance. The current “one man CEO to take care of everything” concept of civic governance is absurd. It is simply not working. The rest of the world has an answer to our problems. Time to adapt to that answer!

The reluctance to allow a functioning civic management institution for Shillong city is just one of the confusions faced by the average Meghalayan. Add to this is the ongoing confusion and bewilderment over the role, function and jurisdiction of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) vis a vis the Meghalaya Government. One is bewildered by the KHADC hunger to take over the jurisdiction of the State. Is this healthy? The KHADC is not a traditional institution cloaked in mythical history whose role and functions can liberally be interpreted as the will and fancies of God the maker and creator (da ka mon U Blei nongbuh nong thaw). The KHADC is a creation of the Constitution of India and its role, functions and area of jurisdiction clearly spelled out and demarcated within the provisions of the 6th Schedule. The repugnancy provisions of para 12A of the 6th Schedule have amply demarcated the overriding powers of the State Govt over that of the KHADC. For the latter to now claim that Govt Acts and departments (MUDA for instance) have no jurisdiction in 6th Schedule areas is a dangerous precedence that can lead to a major constitutional crisis within all 6th Schedule areas. Should all development activities within 6th Schedule areas of the Khasi Hills be now handed over to the mercies of the KHADC, simply for someone to gain political mileage out of such a stance? Are all of us that gullible? A few unethical political personalities will gain out of this chaos. For the rest of us, we as Khasis have been led to the edge of a precipice and are standing on some very slippery ground. The anomaly has to be cleared and the sooner the better.

The State Govt is therefore sincerely urged to take up the KHADC challenge on MUDA to the courts (either High Court or Supreme Court) to the clear the air. Let the court decide what is right

and what is wrong. Can’t allow unethical KHADC ambitions to keep nibbling away at crucial issues of governance! No two systems of governance can administer over the same subject and the citizens of the Khasi Hills must never be subjected to such administrative muddles.

Lastly, it has to be mentioned that the latest conflagration at Them Iewmawlong has once again pushed to the fore the mystifying role of the Syiem of Myllem in today’s setup. He is supposed to be the controller and manager of Iewduh, the food basket for the entire city of Shillong. Visit the market and it will not be far-fetched to say that the Syiem has forced his subjects to eat from a garbage dump for that is the status of Iewduh, as far as cleanliness and sanitation is concerned. What happens to the huge revenue the Hima earns from Iewduh remains till date an unsolved mystery. One thing is certain it has never been ploughed back for the development of the market. The Syiem is also the guardian; the issuing authority for pattas or land documents. There is no law, rule, regulation or system of evaluation and monitoring on how the Syiem carries out this critical life or death function. Our identity is intertwined with our land tenure system. Sadly this identity can be sold to the highest bidder and no questions asked! How much of Hima Myllem (at Mawpat forest, Them Iewmawlong, Iewduh and Jorabat) has been sold off and to whom, no one knows. Our eyes have been blinded by our reluctance to question tradition. The total lack of transparency and accountability of Hima Myllem towards community assets has much to do with the incompetence and ineptitude of the KHADC, the institution that is supposed to uphold and promote tribal culture and welfare. To tell the truth there is great confusion in our society. Confusion often leading to social turmoil and unrest! Why do we continue to cling on to institutions and personalities that are so good at selling us down the drain? Why Indeed!

Women Most Unsafe In India Exaggerated, yet an issue

By Dr. Oishee Mukherjee

The recent survey by Thompson Reuters Foundation showing India as the ‘most dangerous country for women’ in the world has raised a hornets’ nest in the country. There is justification in the all-round furore regarding the survey trying to malign and belittle India’s position in the global world. Despite various shortcomings as regards the attitude of the State towards women and girls and related crimes on the opposite sex, it is difficult to believe that the country is more unsafe compared to war-torn Afghanistan and Syria.

The survey revealed that women are more unsafe than war-torn Afghanistan or strife-hit Syria and even Iraq, where violence against women is endemic. As is well known these countries are highly conservative and follow Islamic traditions where liberty and rights of women are at low ebb. The government is quite right in stating that the survey followed “a flawed methodology to present an erroneous picture.”

In a detailed statement, the Union Women and Child Development Ministry questioned the reliability of the poll, since the Foundation has not revealed any information on the 548 respondents consulted who are said to be “experts on women’s issues”. There is no denying the fact that there has been a drastic reduction in child marriage over the years in the country with reports of marriage in the age group 0-9 now being ‘nil’. Further, the percentage of women in the age group of 15-19 who were normally pregnant has dropped from 16 per cent in 2005-06 to 7.9 per cent in 2015-16, states the Government.

The report pointed out that while rape cases increased to 40,000 reported in 2016, only 19 per cent led to conviction due to lack of serious efforts to curb harassment of women and girls and the Government taking any sincere steps. The conviction rate may be poor but available statistics reveal that the number of rape cases is more in the Western world. Data available with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) states 38,947 cases of rape were registered in 2016, slightly higher than 2014 and 2015.

Statistics on rape cases in the country are 0.03 per thousand people, whereas the US reported a much higher figure of 1.2 rape cases. Another figure of 2010 found that figures for rape in India were 1.8 (per 100,000 population) while for Germany it was 9.4, the UK 17, the US 27.4 and Sweden as high as 63.5. The Indian media has rightly pointed out that while rapes in India are highlighted in the Western media a big way, why is it not the same regarding rapes in Europe and America. Questions have thus been raised about what the survey has been talking about, even if we assume that reporting in the above countries is stricter and the conviction rates are much higher.

The survey, no doubt is erroneous but it cannot be denied that sexual violence has been on the rise. There is no reason to deny that harassment and violence against women needs to be curbed and more attention is needed both by the Government and civil society organisations to ensure the opposite sex gets fair play in society.

At the same time, it is also a fact that women are becoming more educated and a significant section completes its graduation and even post graduation and gets employed, both in

the government and private sector. In fact, women, who presently make about 30 per cent of the labour force, are preferred in matters of employment due to their sincerity and efficiency in various types of office work. Statistics also reveal that around 12 per cent of women are behind the wheel as compared to say Saudi Arabia, where ban on female drivers has recently been lifted. The scenario is expected to further improve in the coming two-three years.

The country is also witnessing some States providing more opportunities to girls to complete higher education through various incentives. The southern States particularly have shown remarkable progress in providing all-round opportunities to women and girls, whereas West Bengal and Odisha are trying to come up steadily. The importance of education in ensuring the rights of the opposite sex as also curbing sexual harassment has been realised in most families and a steady change has been taking place.

This has resulted in increased awareness to come out of the four walls of the home. Just like their counterparts, women are more socially inclined and are involved in academic pursuits, religious activities, recreational needs etc. apart from looking into their health and education. In fact, the modern woman in urban India particularly is showing keen interest to enter into a work career because of the pressing needs of the family.

Regarding social violence, it needs to be understood that activities such as girl trafficking and sexual violence etc in rural areas are an offshoot of abject poverty and illiteracy. Thus there is need for awareness generation, putting more emphasis on girls’ education and making the police machinery pro-active in these matters.

The picture in metros and cosmopolitan cities is somewhat different, where girls mostly belong to well-off sections of society and indulge in a different lifestyle such as wearing westernised outfits, find nothing wrong in free sex, enjoy night life etc, which is not in tune with the traditional male chauvinist attitude in our culture and unfortunately fall prey to sexual innuendos, molestation and even rape. Sociologists and psychologists have thus opined that ‘provocation’ by the opposite sex in various forms may lead to an increase in such cases. This despite the fact that India’s religious tenor be it Hinduism or Christianity or Sikhism etc. bestows high regard and respect for women.

Be that as it may, the report should give the added courage to fight sexual harassment in all forms. While spread of higher education amongst the opposite sex has to be widened in the coming years, there has to be a big change in mind set too. The tradition and culture of our country, highlighting ethics, discipline and civility should be manifest in our attitude and behaviour to make us responsible citizens.

The report needs to be resented on all fronts, not just by the Government but sections of civil society organisations and women activists. Every effort must be made both by the Centre as well as State governments that conviction rate of crimes against women no longer remain abysmal. This perhaps will help the country not only improve its global image but counter the dreadful picture painted. -- INFA

TO THE EDITOR

SBI - the peoples' bank

Editor,
On July 1, 1955 the Imperial Bank of India was reconstituted by an Act of Parliament to create State Bank of India to perform the functions of a commercial bank. This marked a new era of banking in India. SBI has emerged among the top 50 banks in the world and outshines all others in serving the economically weaker sections of society and providing equal opportunity with its vast branch network and latest technology platform. It has 42 crore customers with a balance sheet over Rs 30 lakh crore across 36 countries. SBI has served the interest of the common man by opening over 24,000 branches and 59,000 ATMs. The most trusted bank in India SBI owes corporate social responsibility towards the society. Its designed products and various services cater to all customers’ needs.
Banks have played a significant role in the financial system of our country. Good customer service is the heart of banking service delivery. The effective strategy of delivering quality service has now shifted to technology

(app based) driven orientation for superior services. The emergence of private / foreign banks enhanced the expectations of customers. Data revolution is crucial today as customers want swift / high speed transactions due to time constraints. Newly launched lifestyle and banking app YONO has everything in one app “food at your doorstep and entertainment at your fingertips”. SbiINTOUCH is a commendable feat for digital India. Also BHIM, Buddy, SBI Pay, SBI Anywhere, Online SBI are successful applications. After SBI merger in April 2017, Government now considers merging of leftover 20 PSUs into five big lenders (PNB, Canara, Union, BOB and BOI) to overcome the pressure of globalization of regulation and improve ranking.

Banking crisis soared in the aftermath of mounting NPAs which has had a catastrophic affect resulting in less credit flow. At the same time capital adequacy for piling bad loans must be conserved and utilized efficiently. Our country needs sound banking system for the healthy growth of the economy. The big corporate defaulters es-

caped easily from regulator’s scanner despite clarion call by lenders. They have diverted loans taken for specific purposes by using regulatory backlash. And the plight of small farmers due to massive crop failure and farmers’ suicide afflict the low rainfall region. India’s agriculture sector contributes a lot to GDP but its products are sold below MSP. Rural distress often prompts states to offer relief to waiver of loans. The subsidy culture is not sustainable in the long term.

Wilful default by large corporates has nearly wrecked the banking system. There are 12 companies that constitute 25% of total NPAs amounting to more than 1 lakh crore. They are from Bhushan steel/power, Lanco, Essar Steel, Alok Ind, Amtek Auto, Monnet Ispat, Electrosteel, Era Infra, Jaypee, ABG Shipment and Jyoti. Vijay Mallya owes Rs 9,000 crore to 17 banks. Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi did the same by cheating banks of \$2 billion vide the Punjab National Bank. Now extradition has been sought by Enforcement Directorate from the UK, Belgium etc. India’s stress assets have risen to \$146 billion. To cover up, the government plans to infuse Rs 2.11 lakh crore

recapitalisation for PSU banks. To crack down on loan defaulters, new ordinance to speed up the NPA resolution process for time bound winding up of companies and recovery of secured loans is required. All scheduled commercial banks have written off 2.4 lakh crore. Banks have argued that write off is a regular exercise to clean up the balance sheet and continue to retain the right to recovery. But it could recover only a tiny fraction due to long protracted process. SBI reported a whopping loss of Rs 7,718 crore in Q4 as NPA provisions doubled to Rs 22,096 crore from Rs 11,740 crore.

The banking industry is locked in the bad loan battle. The traditional tools of recovery such as Debt Recovery Tribunals and SARFAESI Act, 2002, have become blunt in the face of huge corporate accounts. Newer mechanisms are needed today. India cannot afford a soft approach as at the end of the day banks are dealing with public money. 14.5 crore accounts opened under PMJDY scheme is another success story of financial mainstream of Indian Banking industry. Priority sector lending to the most needy

and the most alienated of the borrowers is another area of concern. Bank has a dual role of earning a profit and expanding banking services to the population throughout India. After demonetization, there has been significant outflow of CASA (Current Account Savings Account) deposits. Revision in saving bank rates would enable the bank to maintain MCLR (marginal cost of fund based lending rate) at the existing rates, benefitting a large segment of retail borrowers, agriculture and affordable housing segments.

To honour the driving force of our economy, SBI gives importance to Micro-Small and Medium enterprises (MSMEs) for giving wings to entrepreneurial ambitions and profound impact on banks’ financing. The success of MUDRA Yojana stories goes to SBI only which places faith on the skills and strength of Indian citizens.

The SBI is owned by the people of India. The Bank is a corporate citizen, where resources and benefits derive from operating in a society and therefore owe a solemn duty to the less fortunate and under-privileged members of the same society. SBI Foundation is a non-profit subsidiary of SBI launched to

undertake CSR activities of SBI. It is spending 100 crore every year on CSR. Besides this, banks have to nurture a healthier balance sheet to carry out the responsibility of supporting economic growth of India. SBI Foundation day, three flagship programs are launched namely Centre for Excellence for Persons with Disabilities, SBI Gram Seva and SBI Youth for India. SBI has been conferred the National Award for their valuable child welfare services thrice by the Govt of India under SBI CSR Activity. It launched Senior Citizen Facilitation Centre for CDM, GCC, Swayam passbook printing machine. As long as the SBI is on the digital platform, customers can transact safe digital banking experience through app based revolution such as BHIM, Buddy, YONO, SBI Pay, SBI Anywhere, Online SBI at 24x7.

Yours etc.,
Kamal Baruah
Guwahati

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

“A gentleman is one who puts more into the world than he takes out.”

--- George Bernard Shaw

The Shillong Times

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Farmers first

Farm sector across the nation has been craving for better attention from the central and state governments. Piecemeal efforts at giving farmers support price for their produce; the implementation of such schemes in a haphazard manner, and lack of effective mechanisms to establish direct links between the production centres and markets remain huge problems. Large numbers of farmers commit suicide due to distress situations like crop failure and lack of proper insurance mechanisms. Large numbers thus fall in a debt trap. Hence the assurance by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to a group of farmers that his government would fix Minimum Support Price (MSP) for farm produces at 150 per cent of the input costs for Kharif crops is a small way of saving the farm sector from the deep crisis it is in today.

The Modi government has just entered its pre-election phase, after completing four years of the NDA rule since 2014. The government has, no doubt, taken several steps to rev up the farm sector, but the scenario is such that the more efforts governments put in the more the burgeoning problems of farmers. The official figures relating to farmer suicides, the latest one being of 2015, showed that over 8,000 farmers committed suicide, against the 2014 figure of 5,600. Failure to repay debts taken for farming operations led to nearly 40 per cent of these deaths, officials reckoned. The recent protests by farmers from western Maharashtra in Mumbai, led by a red outfit, was noted for the extent of discontent prevailing in the farm sector.

The perception is that the Modi government didn’t do enough to save the farm sector from a crisis situation. This is evident also in the delay in announcement of remunerative prices for sugar cane, that should have been done at the start of June when monsoon arrives in India. While there are arrears of over Rs 20,000 crore from sugar mills to farmers who supplied the cane, the PM’s admitted this week that one-fifth of this has been paid in the past one week itself as part of a governmental push. Such small steps cannot extricate farmers from falling into debt traps. There should have been well-organised mechanisms to ensure fair price to farmers for their produce. Farm sector needs a visionary approach and should not be aimed at election success only since 70 per cent of Indians live on income from this sector.

LOOKING BACK

May 29, 1989

Entrepreneurship development programme at Dawki

The Meghalaya Law Minister, Mr J D Pohrmen has lauded the entrepreneurship development programmes of the Meghalaya Industries Department while addressing a group of twenty trainees of an entrepreneurship development course at Dawki on Wednesday.

Exhorting upon the officials of the Industries department to identify industries suitable to the local conditions for the benefit of the local entrepreneurs. Mr Pohrmen stated that the state govt’s industrial policy should be taken advantage of by the tribal population of the State.

TO THE EDITOR

Identify & punish abusive social media trolls

Editor,

Although belated, it is good to learn that the cyber crime wing of the Meghalaya police is using new software to monitor fake news and inflammatory comments on social media round-the-clock. But monitoring alone is not enough. It is important to identify and give stringent punishment to individuals making abusive trolls, sharing fake news and inflammatory speeches on social media. The fundamental right to freedom of speech as enshrined in the Constitution of India does not allow any citizen of the country to exceed the limits of decency and misuse the right so guaranteed. The Constitution of India does not allow a citizen to encroach upon or invade into the privacy of another citizen.

Ms Sushma Swaraj,

foreign minister of India, was abroad on official assignment from June 17- to 21. Despite her kidney transplantation, not so long ago rather in the recent past, she is devoting herself to giving prompt aid and relief to Indians in distress at any point of time in any part of the globe. In fact the present Foreign Minister has become a sort of Florence Nightingale for Indians stranded overseas, responding to their SOS pleas at all hours. She might have taken to heart and accepted seriously the maxim of ‘Charity begins at home’ & Service to mankind is service to God’ during her growing years embellished with the true ideals of our rich Indian culture and heritage. And she is now rendering great humanitarian and unparalleled philanthropic service in today’s restive and selfish world.

In 1993 when Sushma Swaraj was an MP and a former education minister, she had lived in a hospital for a year for nursing her

The Lingering Ghosts of Colonialism

By Fabian Lyngdoh

The British had conquered the indigenous peoples of the North East along with the rest of India and created a unified ‘British Raj’ under the British Empire. There is none to blame because it is vicissitudes of history that had made us subjects of British colonial rule. It is an undeniable fact that as indigenous communities we had also benefitted in many ways through association with British civilisation. But, a cost to our own traditions and cultures has also come along with the benefits of Western civilisation.

The British had left India more than seventy years ago, but we are still under the spell of the ghost of colonialism. We have come under the grip of Western cultural values and ideals, manifesting in our dress, behaviour, manners, attitudes and opinions. Speaking particularly of my own Khasi society, most of us have become uprooted from our own culture and traditions and alienated from our own land, from our own people and society. Sometimes we behave like foreign tourists when we go to the rural areas of our own land, wondering with extreme strangeness at every piece of stone, every landscape, and at every aspect of rural life which are but common phenomena to our tribesmen living there. Sometimes we also behave with strange detachment in our dealings with our less fortunate fellow tribesmen as if we are in a caste or class-stratified society, while we enter into intimate social relationships with people in the higher-ups with ease and grace, even with those not belonging to our own communities, because Western culture and etiquette are the marks of class distinction.

The colonists and Western missionaries had perceived us as primitive, backward, wretched, nasty and brutish in contrast to their own civilization and culture. Likewise, many of us who have earned some status in modern living have also imbibed that same Western attitude towards our own culture and society. Hence, we are apt to hold the same derogatory attitude and opinion towards our less fortunate tribesmen. We see them as backward, nasty and wretched beings, and think that they are poor and wretched because they are mentally backward; they refuse to grow and learn the modern art of living, they procreate too many children, and so on. The reality is that our fellow tribesmen are not backward, nasty or wretched; they seem so only to the

perception of our own Westernised mind-set. They are free from diseases of the market society and are much happier than we are. ‘That aging grandmother over there, surrounded by her thirty grandchildren is extremely happy beyond the reach of our comprehension!’

In specially staged programmes we heartily applaud and express agreement with the taste and nourishment of indigenous food prepared by the rural folks; but do we really eat such food sold at the small ‘jadoh’ stalls in the markets and highways to support the livelihood of the small indigenous entrepreneurs? Of course many of us who think that we are higher up in the social scale would not. We would probably enter into a high-class restaurant where branded food, like Kentucky Fried Chicken is served, even though a piece of it would cost a day’s wage of the poor, and even our own economy cannot comfortably cope with the class identity we are trying to emulate.

We display these attitudes and behaviours because consciously or unconsciously, we feel inferior with our own cultural identity. The British colonial administrators as well as the missionaries from the West had come to our midst with an assured sense of racial and cultural superiority. This Western superiority had been indoctrinated into our collective consciousness through various processes. We have internalized the superiority of Western culture, and hence, we feel inferior with our own. This influence can be observed even in the general attitude and mannerisms of Church leaders such as priests and pastors, not because they are spiritually or ecclesiastically superior, but because by virtue of their office they were to some extent considered equal with the Western missionaries even during colonial period. So, our Church leaders even today exhibit these behaviourisms because they might have directly inherited this sense of superiority from Western missionaries. A small example: in Church services the leaders would raise their heels and stretch their necks to hold their heads higher and deepen their voice while singing hymns. Probably this behaviour was displayed by the Western missionaries during colonial time, either

in a religious sentiment to raise their souls up to God, or to emphasize their superior height and patriarchal commanding voice among the diminutive men and women of indigenous tribes.

This influence is observable also among some senior elders in the villages. A certain elder who had some education during the British period and lived comfortably on some sort of pension, always wore a Western hat which he called ‘ka plahat’. One of his less fortunate contemporary asked him whether he would go fishing the next day. “Yes!” he replied in commanding voice, and standing erect to his full height, he continued, “Kaba mut ‘hoodi!’ ha ka ktien phareng” to the admiration of his companion. The admiration of the Western people as superior beings had entered even into some of the tribes’ mythologies. According to an Idu Mishmi myth, the god Nuyu-Anjaru took a third wife, Uini Arru who bore him three sons. Aja, the third son, a tall figure with full cheeks, was majestic in his personality and behaviour, and it was from him the Sahib (Europeans, Americans) originated.

We fondly romanticise our cultural traditions and are apprehensive of losing our collective identity, while at the individual level we all try to build our personal identities on the residue of Western colonialism away from our own cultural roots that are planted on our land. But, we cannot shake off our basic traditional identity without becoming aliens in our own land and culture; and, the world would not really accept us wearing the mask of borrowed identity. This mask of borrowed identity that we are so keen to wear could be one of the reasons why our fellow citizens from other parts of India failed to appreciate and recognise who we truly are.

At the time when we needed most to free ourselves from the colonial mindset, the era of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation came to strengthen the superiority of Western culture and Western influence in every sphere, and at the same time to validate our imitative behaviour. It is Western values, ideals and lifestyle, Western superiority and Western influence that are globalised through trade and commerce. Whatever belongs to the West is international! Publications done in Europe and America are considered international publications, while publications done in India

are not! Even our scholars and academics are being fooled by this idea. Now we are in a serious identity crisis because we want to fly away to Western civilisation, while our feet are merged deeply with our natural and cultural identity. It is this identity crisis that brews psychological and social unrest among the masses, leading even to deadly conflicts and violence when ethnic identity and autonomy are perceived to be at stake.

The British colonial rule in India had come to an end, and there are no European settlers to rule the nation as in the Americas. Hence, Indian Independence is the independence of all the indigenous peoples of India separately and collectively from British Imperial Rule. On the basis of the erstwhile British Raj, all the independent indigenous peoples came together to form the modern Indian Republic we have today. Unlike the American native tribes, indigenous peoples of North East India were not pushed into “Reservation Areas” or allotted lands by the mercy and kindness of some superior race, but they live in their own homelands which they do not consider as the gifts of the Indian Constitution, but as rightful inheritance from their ancestors.

But, indigenous peoples of the North East feel that they are in danger of another ghost of colonialism which seeks to assimilate them into the caste-ridden social structure, falsely called ‘Indian mainstream.’ This apprehension is not without grounds, as history tells us that all the tribes of the plains were absorbed into the stratified caste structure, including the powerful Ahoms, who not only lost their coherent identity, but also lost their own language forever. This amounts to cultural invasion. Genuine post-colonial democratic Indian mainstream would materialise only when the insignia of the caste system is stricken off from all pillars and posts of public institutions, and its ideals, stricken off from the mind-set of all Indians. I hope all sensible Indians would endeavour to work towards that “heaven of freedom where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit” (Tagore), and only then, we can all say that we live in a post-colonial era.

Social media abusers

Editor,

The Meghalaya Police has done well by booking those responsible for spreading hate messages and instigating violence in the name of protecting the jaidbynriew. Most of those who spread such messages are hardly able to understand the consequences of their actions. Just because someone can afford a smart phone and knows to key in a few abusive words does not mean that a person enjoys the right to troll those whose views are different from one’s own. And the less said about those who share WhatsApp messages the better. We are yet to find out who the person is who spread the fake news on May 31 that one of the three boys who were assaulted by some miscreants had died. That was what started the agitation and stone pelting, resulting in curfew that lasts

till date and which caused immense loss to the people of lewduh and its precincts in those crucial days. In the hands of people with evil intentions, social media can be a very dangerous instrument. We have already seen several deaths by lynching which were a result of wrong use of social media. It is important that police keep a tight leash on all social media users. What is a boon and can be used for crowd sourcing and crowd funding for a good cause can also result in dangerous public outbursts. It is time that schools and college teach their wards the positive and negative uses of social media.

Yours etc.,
John R Blah,
Shillong – 3

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.

India unsafe for women

By Jenniefer Dkhar

It is a matter of shame and embarrassment but most importantly great pain for our country to be recognised as the most dangerous country in the world for women as per the survey carried out by The Thompson Reuters Foundation, London. The safety and security of women has been a matter of grave concern in all parts of the world. Whether it be the most developed countries or the developing and under-developed ones, women and girls have always been subjected to a lot of discrimination, violence, abuse, molestation, rape and murder. As an Indian and also as a woman, I feel the pain, anxiety and fear of what has become of this country in particular and the world at large.

Worldwide, women are some form of prejudices in their daily lives. To be seen as the weaker sex has been the norm, yet even in the 21st century we are still facing subjugation and suppression. We are a country of diverse ethnicity, culture, tradition, religion and faith yet if there is one aspect where we seem to have unity of thought, belief and practice it is in our projection and behaviour

one comes to for rest. There is no other place today where a girl/woman cannot be raped and abused. In our very own state a father-son duo raped a daughter/sister; what more can be said?

Even today, in the court of law when a rape case is taken up the blame has always been on the character of the girl and the way she dresses and the time of night she is out. How pathetically lame that excuse is! For, no matter how a girl dresses or what she wears, the fact remains that no man has the right to judge her and rob her of her honour, pride, dignity and life. To say that because a girl dresses provocatively therefore she sets herself up for rape is a ridiculous argument since even a nine month old baby girl or a five year old girl are raped. So no female is spared these days. It’s time now to go deeper into the reasons as to why our country is so unsafe for women. Should girls and women be held responsible for being devoured and ruined? The root cause must be determined. Such heinous crimes are committed and are so rampant because of a sick and unhealthy mentality,

Even today every Indian girl is being told by her parents and guardians that she must reach home well before dark and that she must not loiter about too late in the night. The streets, the town, the city, the neighbourhood was never seen as a safe and secure space for girls since time immemorial. Girls are to abide by this age-old rule of staying indoors especially once it gets dark. After all, there is no place safer than home! So it appeared as if the confines of the home are a girl’s safe haven. And sure why not! After all, home is where the heart is! Home is where an individual can be and should be herself/himself.

towards girls and women. Women have always been perceived as the inferior ones in position and status and therefore weak and dependent beings. To be ranked as a country that is the most unsafe for women is not only disquieting but alarming. Every single day, news channels, newspapers, radio and all sources of information do not fail to carry news of sexual abuse, rape and murder of women and even girls as young as nine months old. Every citizen of the country is bombarded with such painful news every morning they read the newspapers or watch the news on TV. What is even more horrifying is that these crimes are not limited only to culprits who are strangers but some of the perpetrators of these crimes are people known to the girl/woman and the family. At times it could be a family friend, an uncle, a cousin, a brother and even a father who have joined the band wagon.

Even today every Indian girl is being told by her parents and guardians that she must reach home well before dark and that she must not loiter about too late in the night. The streets, the town, the city, the neighbourhood was never seen as a safe and secure space for girls since time immemorial. Girls are to abide by this age-old rule of staying indoors especially once it gets dark. After all, there is no place safer than home! So it appeared as if the confines of the home are a girl’s safe haven. And sure why not! After all, home is where the heart is! Home is where an individual can be and should be herself/himself. But alas! Today even the home is unsafe and is no longer the sanctuary

perverted minds and corrupted souls of the opposite sex and secondly the low conviction rates. Our court of law is invariably lenient towards criminals that it does not act as a deterrent for others. A person who commits a rape and then murders is awarded only a few years jail term. The judicial process is so long and protracted that it takes the victim years to get justice. This lends credence to the saying, “Justice delayed is justice denied.” Is this fair? Isn’t this an important matter and a concern that the Indian government and the judicial system must work towards with greater urgency than anything else?

The sad truth is that we are really not protecting and saving our girls from discrimination and atrocities as heinous as sexual abuse, rape and murder. On that front we are a failure as we are really not doing much. It is disappointing that our girls/women are living a life of discrimination and insecurity outside and even at home.

Today as a country, we must be ashamed of the alarming threat to the honour and lives of our girls and women. Our government should reflect wisely and work diligently towards chalking out laws and decrees to safeguard our girls and women. As citizens of this country we must work together to ensure that every girl and every woman is safe and lives a life free from fear. As individuals, both men and women, it is imperative to nurture young minds into becoming human beings that are conscientious and sensitive towards the needs and existence of both men and women in this world.

“ *This epidemic of student demands for 'safe places' to protect against threatening words and ideas would make a great science fiction film, but unbelievably, events seem to be outpacing the political imagination.* ”

-- Tom Tancredo

The Shillong Times

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PM and Social media

AT last the central government has expressed disapproval to WhatsApp the instant messaging service company over "irresponsible and explosive messages." WhatsApp has been warned to prevent the spread of rumours that have incited several instance of violence in the country in the last two months. The Government has also pointed out that such a platform cannot evade accountability and responsibility, especially when good technological inventions are abused by some miscreants who resort to provocative messages which lead to spread of violence.

The baneful effect of social media is under discussion the world over. While social media is meant to connect and communicate, it can also incite violence. PM Narendra Modi is an avid social media user but its time he recognizes his Twitter followers many of whom are vicious trolls. The evil spread by WhatsApp in different parts of India and in our own state of Meghalaya are glaring examples. In Assam two persons were lynched based on rumours that they were child lifters. It is reported that in the last 25 days, there were 14 cases of strangers being attacked of who nine have died in three geographical clusters. Why should a mob kill strangers on mere suspicion? It shows the worst side of mob psychology inflamed by one form of social media or another. It is good that the Supreme Court has cracked down on this and will now hold the states responsible. Social media are known to surpass the use of the other media apart from being addictive with harmful effect on the Gen -X. The inventors of social media in Silicon Valley are themselves getting apprehensive about its pervasive impact starting with the Arab Springs. The PM should not be blind to the cons outweighing the pros in achieving easy informality in communicating with the people straight from the shoulder on a wide range of subjects. Emphasis should be on responsibility.

True, fighting the abuse of social media alone will not altogether prevent mob frenzy which results in public lynching. Civil society and school and community groups should educate the public and strengthen the hands of the police force. The PM needs to speak of the evils or the tendency of the people to take the law in their own hands through use of social media. Crime committed by using social media calls for strict punishment.

The latest report of the World Health Organisation on the status of mental health across the globe is alarming. Over 30 crore people are suffering from depression or other mental disorders globally. More alarming is its corresponding effect on the world economy, as it is losing over 67 lakh crore rupees annually on this count. The world's so called super power, the US, says the report, is the highest 'depressed' country, where one person out of every five have admitted to facing depression and mental disorders at least once during their lifetime. And, in Europe, over 8 crore people are facing severe mental disorders.

If the report is to be believed, the cases of mental infirmities rose at a staggering rate of 18% per annum in the decade of 2005 to 2015 across the globe. Moreover, the number of persons suffering from anxiety and restlessness is no less, since over 26 crore people suffer from these initial symptoms of depression.

As far as India is concerned, over 8% population suffers from major or minor mental disorders that require expert intervention. The WHO states that depressive disorders are characterised by sadness, loss of interest, feelings of guilt or low self-growth, disturbed sleep or appetite, feelings of tiredness and poor concentration. Anxiety disorders refer to a group of mental disorders characterised by a feeling of anxiety and fear, including generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), panic disorder phobias, social anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

According to available reports, over 42% corporate employees suffer from depression in India primarily due to intense work pressure and sleeping less than six hours a day thereby leading to diseases like depression, hypertension and sugar etc. Sadly, 36% of Indians are likely to suffer from major depression at some point of their lives because of sedentary life styles, socio-economic concerns and anxieties and other day-to-day stresses.

It means that India is highly prone to growth of mental disorders and psychological disabilities in future due to several factors. Ironically, nearly half of those with severe mental diseases are not treated the way they need to, to fully

Mental disorders
Face up to the “epidemic”

By Harsh Sharma

recover from the ailment.

Unfortunately, suicide has become the second leading cause of death in the age group of 18-29 years. In other words, youth are ending their lives on trivial matters like break-up in love, economic and social insecurity, lack of patience, failing to meet high expectations in education and employment, lack of attention from loved ones, poverty and various social stigma etc.

Socially speaking, depression or mental illness is still a stigma in India because we give more importance to our community and not to an individual. We are more concerned about

this illness will be able to feel the pain and traumatising effects it takes on a person who has to live with depression every moment of the day.

Interestingly, mental disability-which may be hereditary or environmental-has, in the recent past, belied the myth of afflicting persons of lower or middle strata of society. The latest examples of comedian Kapil Sharma, actress Deepika Padukone, singer Honey Singh, newcomer actress of Dangal fame Zaira Wasim and several other celebrities amply prove that the disease has transcended all social and economic barriers. It seems to be all about one's temperament,

Further it provides that photograph or any other information pertaining to the person cannot be released to the media without the consent of the person with mental illness.

"what people will think", which tends to aggravate the problem. Though depression is a very common ailment these days, people fail to realise its intensity. According to Sanya Sehgal, President, Social Club in India, "it is not just a state of being sad, depression is so painful that it prevents the person from being able to express the simplest of thoughts, which often leads to withdrawal from reality and loss of words to express their feelings".

Truly, depression is much stigmatised in society today. While it's getting better about being less judgmental, there will always be people who reject the reality and struggle of depression. The general public needs to be better informed on psychological complications and not to view these as a sign of weakness and not to push the patients around. This makes them more frustrated especially if they are blamed by mentioning past behaviour and making them feel guilty-which, in fact, makes an already bad situation worse.

According to psychologists, depressed or mentally ill people need the same kind of attention as an addict needs in a rehabilitation centre. However, one who doesn't suffer from

mental capacity and toughness, inbuilt positivity, emotional balance, family support and an attitude like, "life does not end here", that prepares a person to rebut the disease at the outset-unless it is chronically a hereditary and incurable one.

Lately, I happened to spend many sleepless nights at a hospital to attend to a close relative- a hosteller youth studying a graduation course in a private university-who, all of a sudden, developed grave symptoms of psychological disorder, later diagnosed as "manic depression". His behaviour was perfectly alright even a couple of days before the disorder caught up with him suddenly without any such medical history. There I came across several young off springs of top bureaucrats and police officers, successful businessmen and well-to-do families-who did not have any such family history but who were diagnosed with deep depression or bipolar disorder.

Interestingly, such depressed youths treat their own family members or the prevailing system as their worst enemies during illness, possibly holding them responsible for their failures, if any, leading them to land at a bed in the Psychiatric Ward.

Undoubtedly, the society in general and family in particular needs to adopt a more humane and sympathetic ap-

proach towards mentally-ill or depressed persons. They must not be looked down upon and humiliated because of the psychological disorders. In fact, such people need constant love, support and encouragement to help them get out of the trauma.

To help the persons afflicted by such a mental state, the Government has enacted 'The Mental Healthcare Bill 2017', which aims to provide for mental healthcare services for persons with mental illness and ensure they have the right to live a life of dignity by not being discriminated or harassed by the family or the society. Moreover, the Act provides that a person with mental illness shall have the right to confidentiality in respect of his/her mental health, mental healthcare, treatment and physical healthcare.

Further it provides that photograph or any other information pertaining to the person cannot be released to the media without the consent of the person with mental illness. Hence, there must not be any case of the society castigating a person with mental illness.

Nevertheless, there is an urgent need to upgrade mental healthcare facilities in the country keeping in view the ever-increasing number of such patients. President Ramnath Kovind too has admitted that the nation is facing a possible "mental health epidemic." He stressed the need to take up access to treatment facilities by 2022 as a national mission, given the meager presence of around 5,000 psychiatrists and less than 2,000 clinical psychologists in the country to cater to the mental health needs of a large number of suffering population.

To sum up, India needs to evolve an effective and adequate mental healthcare mechanism to deal with the challenge of diagnosing and treating mental disabilities so as to contribute to the growth of the economy as well as healthy human resource. Needless to say, a congenial atmosphere at home and in society, positive change in people's mindset and constant family support will greatly help in minimising the number of mentally ill persons which will save the country from the threat of this "epidemic" in future.

Culture and religion: A tribal perspective

By Barnes Mawrie

We all know that the RSS' slogan today is all about Hindu Rashtra or "India is a Hindu country." One of the components of their Hindu Rashtra is the idea of one "Hindu culture" for the whole country. One problem with this ideology is a manipulated understanding of both culture and religion. Although these two are closely linked to each other, yet we cannot say that religion is to be identified with culture. Religion is a part of culture but not the whole of it. In fact, anthropologists will agree that culture has a very broad spectrum and

does not cease to be Khasi by virtue of its ethnicity and culture. It would be sheer stupidity to say that an Oraon who has become a Christian has ceased to be an Oraon and has become a European,that his culture has simple banished into thin air. Culture is not something like a gown that we put on and can be taken off easily. It is therefore highly misleading and a gross fallacy to have a law that would simply take away the ST status just because a tribal person has become a Christian by faith.

Another argument that a tribal Christian has to return

They all believe in one Supreme Being called by different names: U Blei for the Khasis, Dharmes for the Oraons, Pathian for the Mizos, Sing Bonga for the Mundas etc. In fact, tribals who become Hindus are damaging their basic theological principle of monotheism because Hinduism is a polytheistic religion.

religion is just one of that. Another question that comes up to our mind right at the start of this discussion is: Is there such a thing as "Indian or Hindu culture?" India is a land of multiculturalism and various cultures have been co-existing here for centuries in the past. Those who propagate the idea of one "Hindu culture" are actually viciously trying to promote a religion and not a culture. All such attempts like ghar wapsi are synonymous to proselytization or forced conversion (which the Christians are selectively accused of). In a highly heterogeneous society like India, where hundreds of ethnic groups are found, it is ridiculous to even think of a single culture without hurting the cultural sentiments of each group. Gone are the days of "cultural imposition" of the era of colonization, today our constitution respects every culture and upholds its integrity. Therefore any attempt at creating a monoculture society is a crime against humanity which no civilized nation should tolerate.

I am speaking on this issue in the context of the recent dangerous development in Jharkhand where the BJP Government is trying to pass a law depriving the tribal Christians of their ST status. According to this law, any tribal person who becomes a Christian has to surrender his ST status with all its privileges. This is a real discrimination against a group of citizens. If they succeed in imposing this law, there is every likeability that the BJP government will impose it on the whole country as well. As I have indicated above, this is the result of a misinterpretation of culture, namely, that culture is religion. Let us not forget that culture is linked with one's ethnic identity and not with one's religion. To use a paradox, a dog does not cease to be a dog even if it starts eating grass. Culture is the DNA of our identity as a member of a particular ethnic group. That is why, a Bengalee or a Bihari who acculturates himself into let's say, a Khasi society who may have learned the language perfectly and acts like any Khasi, does not become a Khasi per se. He will still be considered a Bengalee or a Bihari by everyone. This example is to demonstrate how culture is broader than religion and its implication in the life of a person is deeper than his or her religious creed. So a Khasi person may adopt Hinduism, Islam or Christianity as his or her religion, but he or she

to the indigenous religion if he or she wants to retain the ST status, is another ridiculous idea equivalent to identifying culture and ethnicity with religious faith. In my comparative study between Christianity and tribal religions, I have discovered that there is no contradiction in the most fundamental theological belief of both Christianity and tribal indigenous religions in India. Monotheism is the common theological basis for these religions. Tribals who have been erroneously branded as animists or pantheists etc, by non-tribal scholars, are fundamentally monotheistic. They all believe in one Supreme Being called by different names: U Blei for the Khasis, Dharmes for the Oraons, Pathian for the Mizos, Sing Bonga for the Mundas etc. In fact, tribals who become Hindus are damaging their basic theological principle of monotheism because Hinduism is a polytheistic religion. Christianity in fact, corresponds more to tribal religions in many aspects both theologically and ritually. Perhaps this is the reason why tribal communities are more inclined towards Christianity than towards other religions.

Secondly Christianity like tribal society does not permit caste division and so it favours an egalitarian social system. Instead Hinduism is structured on caste system which is absolutely alien to tribal communities. All these prove that being a Christian a tribal person does not lose his traditional religious principles at all. So the argument that Christian tribals should go back to their indigenous religions to retain their ST status does not arise at absolutely. Perhaps this law should apply to tribals who have become Hindus because by adopting Hinduism they have damaged their fundamental theological principles. The introduction of such a Bill would cause tremendous damage to tribal communities. It is going to divide communities within themselves, confuse the tribals themselves about their very own identity. It would actually bring in a sort of caste division into a tribal community because there would be ST and Non ST within the same ethnic community. Tribal communities in India should stand up against such a discriminatory law that would endanger the integrity of our communities and even threaten our survival.

(The author is an anthropologist and is editor of Anthropology Today: An International Peer Reviewed NEIRA Journal)

NEIGRIHMS recruitment anomaly

Editor, I am very concerned with the news, 'HC For Time Bound Recruitment To Fill Up Vacancies In NEIGRIHMS' (ST June 27, 2018). I am also shocked to learn that such malpractices are going on in the recruitment process of NEIGRIHMS. On reading the news I checked the NEIGRIHMS website to authenticate the news, as I found it hard to believe that a central government institute can go wrong in its recruitment policies. I found two advertisements for faculty recruitment on regular basis in May, 2017(ADVERTISEMENT NO.NEIGR-E.II119/2004/Pt.XVI) and June 2017 (ADVERTISEMENT NO.NEIGR-E.II129/2009/Pt. dated 06/07/2017).The Hon'ble High Court didn't mention or might have missed the point of the experience allowed for the May notification was up to Dec, 2017(seven months

from the date of advertisement) and for the July advertisement experience allowed till August, 2017.

There is clear discrepancy in allowing the experience, since being a prime central institute they are bound to follow TRANSPARENT rules and regulations for recruitment to give fair chances to all candidates of Northeast and all over India. Another incident during the interview process was that the Institute did not adhere to DOPT guidelines (available in the website) which says advertisement to interview should be completed within 6 months. In this case they took one year. The order was sent to NEIGRIHMS in March 2017 but they did not incorporate this order in the May 2017 advertisement, but did so in the July 2017 advertisement - this is a clear case of corruption and calls for enquiry.

The point is that many more candidates would have been eligible in the last 6 months. If there was some delay due to technical reasons then an

amendment could have been issued to ask for extra candidates who can be eligible in the intervening period. But because of vested interest of those in authority it was not done. One of the non-eligible candidates appealed to the Hon'ble High Court and got permission to attend the interview. Likewise few more candidates who had the same problem were not allowed to appear in the interview by the Institute, because they did not go to court. This discrepancy shows that there are some vested interests at work to make only some candidates eligible in the first notification (May,2017) I request the Union Health Minister to set up an enquiry committee to investigate the matter as such malpractices will destroy the Institute and demoralize the eligible candidates who have been thwarted from appearing for the interview.

I also request the media to investigate the matter and hold the NEIGRIHMS authorities answerable All information is available in the NEIGRIHMS website for perusal.

Yours etc., B Syiemlieh, Shillong-9

‘Give and take policy’

Editor, The State of Meghalaya, as is well known was carved out of the erstwhile State of Assam first in 1970 as an autonomous state. It was in 1972 that Meghalaya became a full-fledged State with the three districts of Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills carved out of Assam. At the time when the State was provisionally classed as an 'autonomous' state it should have established clear boundaries between the Government of Assam and the Government of a new Autonomous State of Meghalaya. In this period people of the adjoining areas predominantly inhabited by Garo, Khasi and Jaintia communities did not know for sure where their villages finally belonged to since there are many villages which partly fall in the new State of Meghalaya while the remaining half re-

mained with Assam. This confusion is created due to absence of formal survey and mapping during the process of granting statehood which was not according to the original claims of Meghalaya's leaders but understandably according to the wishes and policies of the central government and the State of Assam.

The new State of Meghalaya was too busy establishing administrative set-ups to suit the needs and to fulfill the aspirations of the indigenous people of Meghalaya. Ultimately many tribal dominated villages were left out and forced to remain with Assam despite their contributions in various ways to support the separate state demands Years have passed by without any solution to this boundary dispute between the two states thereby giving more scope to intensify the claims and counter-claims by the respective Governments even while the people settling in these contested areas are left without administration by either state. In such a situation, a suggestion thrown open by a seasoned political leader from the ruling party, Mr Prestone Tynsong,

Deputy Chief Minister of Meghalaya about a policy of give and take, is a thought provoking idea which is perhaps aimed at solving the real issue with pragmatism, if the same idea is reciprocated by their counterpart in Assam. This idea of conflict resolution, if sincerely pursued will stop further misunderstandings and unnecessary quarrels between the two states leading sometimes even to violence and killing of citizens of both states who are separated by the legacy of divide and rule policy of the political parties be it regional or national. Every time elections come the border issue crops up but is forgotten soon after.

The boundary dispute needs to be resolved once and for all by the present government.

Yours etc., T. S. Sangma Shillong-1

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

"As long as I have a want, I have a reason for living. Satisfaction is death."
--- George Bernard Shaw

Tenuous nature of coalition governments

THE MDA is just about four months old but the supporting partners are already creating a situation which exposes the unstable nature of coalition politics in Meghalaya. PN Syiem who joined the Peoples’ Democratic Front (PDF) of which he was the architect, after resigning from the Congress Party in December 2017 to contest the Assembly elections, now seems to be calling the shots in that Party. The rumblings in the Khasi Hills District Council are tied to non-transparent use and distribution of development funds by the Chief Executive Member (CEM), PN Syiem who had earlier lost the Assembly elections to his Congress rival HM Shangpliang. Now the four MDCs who had joined the NPP want to disassociate themselves from the ruling dispensation in the Council formed by an alliance between the PDF, UDP, NPP, BJP and Independent. There have been allegations that PN Syiem as the CEM has not been transparent in the use of development funds amounting to Rs 33 crore released by the Centre to the Council. It is alleged that Rs 28 crore was diverted towards maintenance of the Council’s assets. In May this year, James Sylliang, PDF and member of the Executive Council was unceremoniously dropped after he demanded a special session to discuss why the Rs 33 crore which should have been distributed to the MDCs for development of their respective constituencies was instead used for, “Council assets” a term that is vague and reeks of non-transparent use of public funds.

James Sylliang had publicly alleged that a ceiling in the KHADC was dismantled even though it was still in good condition just to make way for renovation. Other MDCs too are feeling the heat since the District Council elections are scheduled for early next year and they have to show some proof of development if they are to be reelected. This is what is causing concern for the sitting MDCs. But PN Syiem has other ideas on the use of Council funds and he is unwilling to subject himself to an open discussion in a special session of the House. A CEM is not a law unto himself. He is accountable to the Council but this is something alien to Syiem who has run the Council like a fiefdom; hence the tremors now. It is unfortunate that Syiem is now trying to hold the MDA Government to ransom.

LOOKING BACK
May 29, 1989

3 LP Schools open in Myllem Block

The Meghalaya Community & Rural Development Minister, Dr R.C. Laloo inaugurated three LP Schools at Mawlai Umthlong, Mawlai Umjajew and Mawtaraw in the Myllem Block. In his inaugural address, Dr Laloo underscored the importance

of imparting "quality education to the students" so as to enable them to "face their future life with confidence."
Dr Laloo also called upon the parents and teachers to put in their best efforts to ensure proper education for the youth.

TO THE EDITOR

Pathetic services of Reliance Jio

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily, I would like to draw the attention of the competent authorities of Reliance Jio Network to the pathetic internet connectivity of their mobile network in the Mawlai area, particularly over Iewrynghep-Nongkwar. Previously, when the Jio network was just launched, the services were undeniably satisfactory and the internet speed was up to the mark. However, over the past few months (and if I recall correctly, immediately after Aircel shut down its services, though I cannot genuinely correlate the two), the Jio internet services have become absolutely terrible. It gets worst during the night when the net speed can actually be compared to a snail's pace. Reliance Jio promised all of its customers good and reliable service but if the existing situation is anything to go by then it seems its promises are

shallow and weak just like their existing network. If Reliance Jio does not address this problem soon, many of its customers will surely port over to some other service provider. I request the management to take up this matter seriously and speedily.
Yours etc.,
Keith Nongsteng,
Via email

Hawkers overstepping their limits

Editor,
A brisk profession fort someone could be a source of worry for others. The traders who first encourage the hawkers at their doorsteps are now feeling the pinch as hawkers have literally taken over most commercial spaces. The stalls particularly in the outer portion of the MUDA complex, Police Bazar, can tell you their sad stories better than others. The fact is simply mind-boggling. In front of each stall are 2 to 3

NPP on a quest for majority: Let’s have Civil Sub-divisions galore

By Patricia Mukhim

resigned as MLA of Ranikor, ostensibly because the previous Government of which he was a part of never upgraded his constituency into a civil sub-division. Incidentally the distance between Mawkyrwat the district headquarters and Ranikor is roughly about 44.9 Kms and takes nearly two hours to commute. Ranikor is a C&RD Block until now. If it takes the public to commute a total of four hours to and from the district headquarter at Mawkyrwat which means losing half a day until they get their work done, then a civil sub-division is called for; not just for Ranikor but for all Blocks with similar distances from the District Headquarters. The sanctioning of civil sub-divisions on a piece-meal basis and on the basis of politics is neither correct nor ethical.

But the question uppermost in our minds should be whether the creation of these administrative units with the hugely misleading hyperbole, "Taking the administration closer to the people," is even possible and I will cite reasons why. Most of those selected to the state civil service are urbanites with no idea of what life in the outback of rural Meghalaya is really like. It is the elected representatives that draw the attention of the Government to the poor road communication between the district headquarters and the far-flung villages. Many of these villages are still very poorly connected and we are about to observe the half century as a state. This is enough indication that governance will continue to be served only to those that are able to physically come to the Block Headquarters. I know from speaking to villagers that this is a wretched experience, more so when they are up against officers that are arrogant and lack the attitude of service. The Meghalaya Basin Development Authority and its manifold wings were created mainly to bridge this governance gap. Young professionals are picked up and appointed on contract basis but are they from these villages? Are they not again the English speaking, urban bred elite with no understanding of rural development? This is why the yardsticks for measuring aptitude of field operatives need to be more

nuanced. You don't want to appoint people who just wait for the day when they will return to the comfort of Shillong. As it is, quite a number of state civil service officers have succeeded to pull strings to remain out of rural postings. Those without clout, mostly the male officers tend to do rural postings. But even they are reluctant to serve in some of the remote outposts of Garo Hills, for instance.

Meghalaya's progress to date is mainly because some of the IAS officers have served their tenures sincerely. I can name quite a few who reach out to the people and try and comprehend what ails their daily existence. Recently pictures of the Deputy Commissioner of West Garo Hills eating a midday meal with school children and also wading over rice fields to see what farmers actually go through are what real administration is about. I can't imagine English speaking, stylishly decked officers with no experience of village life ever succeeding in public administration. Hence the idea of creating civil sub-divisions can also be self-defeating because while the staff will be recruited and paid salaries, their ability to meet the aspirations of the people of that administrative unit will continue to remain unsuccessful unless new modes of governance are tried out. The purpose of every Government is to innovate better ways of reaching out to the unreached.

Coming back to Martin Danggo, he was until the other day a Congressman who like his other colleagues is uncomfortable about being in the Opposition. The Congress is a spent force in Ranikor after Danggo's exit. In Meghalaya people don't understand ideology; they follow individual politicians for different reasons (I would not like to term politicians as leaders because leadership is a different ball game). The UDP candidate, Pius Marwein who came a close second in the February 2108 election lost by 455 votes only. It is natural that he would not cede any ground to Danggo even if the UDP is an alliance partner of the MDA. And here lies the rub! The UDP unit of Ranikor now wants to garner all the anti-Danggo forces including the Congress to defeat Danggo; the parent party thinks differently.

What happens after the

Ranikor election will be interesting. If Danggo loses, the NPP would have lost its opportunity to shore up its numbers. If he wins, the UDP, I suspect would continue to be part of the MDA coalition. But what we cannot fathom is why PN Syiem who lost the Mawsynram seat would want to jump into the Ranikor fray, unless it is an egotistic game of political one-upmanship. People who jump constituencies do so for selfish reasons. There is no public concern in such political moves.

Martin Danggo is very sure of winning back his seat but even if he doesn't he has looked after his personal welfare. Being Co-Chairman of the State Planning Board comes with pay and perks and perhaps cabinet minister status too. This sort of political chicanery is what has put Meghalaya in a very unfavourable position as far as the Human Development Indices (HDI) is concerned. What is unfortunate is that the NPP-led MDA Government is allowing such a game to be played purely for political reasons. Don't they know that the state is above party politics? Are we all to be turned into political pawns?

Since March this year when the MDA Government took over the reins of governance, barring the Education policy not much has been heard on policy formulation in other areas like Health, Tourism, Agriculture, Horticulture et al. Those in Government perhaps have no time to think of these fundamental issues since their time is used up in the aligning and realigning of political forces. And speaking about creating civil sub divisions which is Danggo's raison de etre for quitting the Assembly let it be made clear that this should not be an end in itself. It is a means to an end and requires several areas of convergence of varying departments before people can benefit from a civil sub-division. Period!

Also the MDA Government needs to recognize that repeated elections cost money which flows out of the public exchequer; not the political party's coffers. There is also a huge cost in terms of human resource deployment. The Ranikor example defies the norms of democracy.

careful while walking with their children because every moment is a nightmare.

Here the growing concern is how the public continue to put up with the inconvenience while the government remains a mute spectator. Such rampant encroachment of the public pathways/roads should be stopped forthwith. The authorities concerned must be vigilant before the roads are completely gobbled up. Of course, we sympathize with the poor hawkers but not at the cost of senseless encroachment. Or else, Shillong as a Scotland of the East is only an exaggerated false pride!

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Via email

Candies in lieu of coins

Editor,
It is a common practice in Meghalaya to be given candies in lieu of one rupee coins. No amount of heated exchange will yield results. This is not acceptable and should be made an illegal

transaction by the Reserve Bank of India and also by the Government of Meghalaya. It is not fair especially for pharmacies to be pushing all kinds of candies to their customers in lieu of coins because the customers can never eat those candies since some of them are diabetics. In any case a customer purchasing goods should not be pushed in a 'take it or leave it' corner and accept what the dealer deals out. Actually the Consumer Courts should take suo-moto notice of this and haul up any dealer who takes recourse to such practices and I can assure the Courts that there are many shops which continue to practice this without any attempt to get their quota of change from the banks.

Yours etc.,
Albert J Mawlein,
Via email

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In need of a robust education policy

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

For the first time perhaps in the history of education in the state, the long awaited Draft Policy on Education is now available on the public domain. Since it is at the drafting stage, I believe that all those who are concerned with the system of education in the state should share some insights and put forward their views and opinions in this regard. It is a remarkable effort by the Education Department that in just a span of few weeks after the new Government assumed office the Policy has been promptly uploaded to the internet for public observation. In short, the Policy is expected to address various key issues that are critical in building a dynamic education system for the state. But unfortunately as it appears, the Draft Policy is just another coat of paint on the wall loaded with statements which are subjective in nature. I cannot say how people feel about the Policy, but I doubt that such Policy will be a satisfactory one, or that it will make any difference to the present situation. The contents and term of reference of the Policy itself reflects a mixture of copy-paste concepts and statements. The indigenous approach and contextual factor is missing from the entire document. Since it is the Government's prerogative to review policies now and then, those who are responsible to do the job have hastily painted another new look without a thoughtful investigation on how and what should be educated to the children of the society.

The much expected Education Policy, should, in fact define the holistic goals of education and to answer questions pertaining to the purpose of education. It is a vision document that should also serve as a source of direction and guidelines on the nature and type of curriculum that should be designed for the school children. Education is not just a process of transferring knowledge and learning, but the system of education is like a vehicle that drives civilization and society to improve their way of life and to maintain their own development. It can also be called the engine of holistic growth for the nation, a growth that transcends every area of life be it health, agriculture, etc. For instance, if we look at the health sector of our state and the overcrowded hospitals, we cannot deny the fact that the overall health performance is not satisfactory. The national health ranking for different states in the country as released by NITI Aayog on February 9 this year has figured Meghalaya among the list of poor performance states. It is far behind other small states such as Mizoram, Manipur and Goa. Should this trend continue or should the status improve when all children in the state have become doctors or nurses?

When it comes to health problems and sicknesses that affect mostly the rural population, the primary reasons are simply ignorance and poverty. It is a cycle that entraps poor people intensively and education is the only key to unlock this cycle. Failure to maintain a healthy lifestyle such as eating habits and types of foods always leads to various complications. This is an outcome of a lifelong practice of unhealthy living which is common in the rural lifestyle. Sometimes it is pathetic to learn that people who are graduates and matriculates are still lagging behind in this particular area of preventing occurrences of sickness and diseases. So can we call that system of

education holistic? Even after certain period of schooling people still remain illiterate on how to maintain their health or livelihood. As far as prevention of diseases and sicknesses is concerned, school teachers have a tremendous role to play in assisting this mission for long term achievement. But does the present system of teaching and content have the scope to do so? If this is possible, I believe the health scenario in the state after few years from now will drastically change to a better picture. It is here that we can say that the purpose of education has also served the needs of the society or nation.

It is understood that the objectives of education vary from person to person and for that matter should the Policy attempt to make it uniform as in the present system. The Draft Policy as it appears has nothing new and strategic which can revolutionize the mentality of the learners. And for those who have advocated for a robust education policy will indeed be disappointed by such outcome. The reason is simply because the approach has not developed to any logical precision. For instance, the policy has mentioned several times about quality education but in reality the policy did not define clearly what should constitutes quality education. The parameters to indicate the level and type of quality education should be clearly stated to bring uniformity and to reduce the possibility of deviation from basic truths. Simply by mentioning quality in the policy document will not serve any purpose. At least some models of quality schools and education systems must be exemplified.

But what exactly does quality education imply? For those who are acquainted with the term quality service, the essence of quality is not only about infrastructures and facilities, but more on the nature and style of delivery of teaching services to the learners. Another aspect that needs to be inculcated in the people's mind is that quality is not free and there is a price for it. In general, people are rushing for admission into private institutes because they have the impression that somehow there is quality education in these institutions. Therefore, the pertinent question in everyone's mind is the type and quality of teachers. In the state where there are nearly 15,000 untrained teachers at the primary level, the concept of 'quality' is totally meaningless. Hence the present content of the system too and the curriculum in particular are not designed for any trained teacher to improvise the various training skills and strategies acquired during training in order to provide clarity to the learners on the subject matter.

Another aspect worth examining is whether private institutes should also fall within the purview of the Policy. When it comes to this, one should not look at private schools from the parochial view of profit making. In reality, there are many good things that private schools have contributed towards the welfare of students and society as a whole such as character building, self esteem, co-curricular activities, etc. A robust education policy is one where no matter at what stage or standard a child graduates from he/she always have some skills in life to sustain himself/ herself. The Policy should also pave the way for the identification of talented children in various fields right from childhood.

“Every individual acts and suffers in accordance with his peculiar teleology, which has all the inevitability of fate, so long as he does not understand it.”
--- Alfred Adler

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Mexico’s New Age
MEXICO has come into global limelight because of US President Donald Trump’s tough immigration policy and the building of a wall against the southern neighbour. There was also a national and international outcry against the separation of Mexican children from their immigrant parents at the US border. The Presidential election in Mexico consequently assumed special importance. Mexico had been ruled by the principal political parties alternately. But this time there was a sea change. A wave of populist anger fuelled by rampant corruption and violence led to the landslide victory of leftist leader Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador who is now the President. Mexico is Latin America’s second largest economy but is saddled with pervasive poverty. Drug cartels poison society. That causes the dominance of the local Mafiosi. Law and order is severely mauled. Obrador’s victory has inspired millions of common people with new hope while the nation’s elites are down with trepidation. He also creates a vision of bringing an end to globalisation in Mexico which he says has apparently been detrimental to the nation’s interest. Obrador will of course have to meet the challenge of the two established parties.

Obrador has promised to improve relations with Trump. Trump’s immigration policy is fuelled by his gut anti – Mexican feeling though that should not cause concern in Mexico. But his tariff on Mexican steel and aluminum will weaken Mexican economy as will the US President’s hostile stand against the present free trade concept. Obrador’s leftist stance may hamper foreign investment as well. It would be well for Obrador to study the situation before taking radical steps with the economy since a sudden shift might affect Mexico more than it would the US and its other trading partners. Change is what all newly elected leaders promise their constituents. It was the promise of change that made people elect Narendra Modi in 2014. But four years down the line there is more disappointment than hope in the Modi Government. All this goes to prove that change in governance structures requires several things to come in place, most of all the country’s bureaucracy, for they decide whether or not to deliver the public goods. Obrador might like to look around at the examples of some of the world’s functioning democracies and which see what they are doing right although there are not many in that league.

LOOKING BACK
May 29, 1989

Move to centralize security arrangements

A move is afoot to centralize the entire police machinery used in all State during the forthcoming elections. In previous elections also the Centre has been deploying police and CRPF units in various States during the elections, but their brief was to assist and aid the State police machinery to ensure that elections were held in a free and fair manner. For the coming elections however, the Union Home Minister is reported to be working on a plan which will reverse the roles of the Central and State police forces. The plan envisages

that the entire police machinery should be under the overall charge of the Central police force and that the State police outfits, in their respective States, should be subsidiary to the Central police force for the duration of the elections. According to informed sources, this idea was first initiated about a month ago when the Home Ministry in a letter to the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) asked for the Election Commission’s response to the suggestion that Central forces be sent to all States 72 hours before the elections.

and believe that their alliance can only be successful if they sacrifice their individual goals and aim for the greater goal of leading the country to prosperity and above casteist and sectarian politics.

Yours etc.,
Sadiq Hussain Laskar,
Guwahati

Tribal culture and Christianity

Editor,
Barnes Mawrie’s article, “Culture and Religion: A Tribal Perspective,” (ST July 6, 2018) is a very one-sided view and based purely on

Apropos to the article penned by Barnes Mawrie on the topic ‘Culture and Religion: A tribal perspective’, I couldn’t agree more with him that religion is just a part of the bigger entity called CULTURE. Culture encompasses multiple elements of the society collectively giving a definite shape and identity for a particular community. Language, tradition, attire, food habits, settlements, the types of familial bondage etc all contribute towards cultural formation. But on one point I cannot harmonise with him and that is to say that Christianity is devoid of caste segmentation in India. It might be true for North Eastern region because of our aboriginal tribal character, but for pan India the caste is definitely part and parcel of Christianity. I can understand that he being a priest in the Catholic Church is bound to defend his backyard. But I believe the single sided story of the picture is detrimental and this is the time where media justifies its fourth pillar role in allowing the transmission of ideas, facts and other multi-dimensional viewpoints providing scope for a much better conclusion. I have tremendous respect for Mawrie and for his spiritual and intellectual contribution and I wish the counter view I’m putting down be endured in good spirit.

Coming back to the debate whether Christianity is devoid of caste prejudices, South India is the best example indeed. There are Bamonn Christian (Roman Catholic Brahmins of Goa), Shudri (Christian converted Shudra), Dalit Christian, besides there are community based Christianity like Kuruba Christian, Madiga Christian, Akkasali Christian, Lambini Christian, Nadar Christian, Nekara Christian etc in Kerela and Tamil Nadu. Somebody regular with matrimonial ads may witness how a Christian bride or groom demands certain caste and Gotra background besides religious preference, not to mention the resistance for mixed marriages between the various sub-sects within Christianity itself. Thus, caste segmentation and preference still continues even after ones get converted to Christianity because the society is already structured according to caste if not class since ages and Christianity is no holy grail to cure this age-old disease. The Syro Malabar Church (Kerala), the second largest eastern Catholic Church in the world which claims St. Thomas as its founder, faces numerous

his inability to see beyond the Hindutva ideology of the BJP-RSS which he as a Christian is bound to react to adversely. As someone who belongs to the indigenous faith (Niam Tynrai) I feel that Mawrie does not have the legitimacy to castigate the proponents of Hindutva because the Christian missionaries used the same yardstick while dealing with the tribals here when they came in after the British conquest of India. They labelled those who refused to convert and stuck to their own indigenous faith as “pagans.” This is a derogatory term and those who converted to Christianity had to give up their indigenous dance and other cultural symbols. Is this not what the RSS-BJP

By Sonie Kharduit

complaints of caste prejudice. Few senior priests with the right conscience came forward highlighting the plight only to be silenced by influential sections. Instances like separate graveyards, separate sitting arrangements in church, denial of job opportunities, priests and nuns from lower castes denied from holding higher position etc are common. Conversion to Christianity doesn’t propel a Dalit to the higher echelon of caste order. A manual scavenger continues to be one, rotting at the bottom of social hierarchy with least societal respect. The Church doesn’t bother much to act on this because it may not augur well with the influential Brahmin converts who don’t want to share the same bench in Church with the lower caste converts. The situation doesn’t change much for them, in fact caste and class stratification exhibit an interchangeable role complementing each other. Even if caste is absent but class division is indeed omnipresent. That’s why a poor man’s funeral attracts less attendance than a rich man’s. Hence to say caste prejudice is absent in Christianity is not only wrong but shows the double standards in the assessment process while condemning other faiths and overlooking the loopholes within.

Another intriguing point mentioned by the writer is that Christianity is better suited for the tribals. It’s indeed hard to comprehend the statement. Deciphering the underlying criteria how an individual opts for a particular religion and rejects the other is highly subjective. Faith is the last thing or a mere outcome in the process. How the faith is built is the most important determining factor regulating one’s choice. It’s not the term ‘Jesus’ that makes him famous rather it’s the message, the teaching and the actions propagated by him that gave fame and name to this term Jesus thereby creating a fan base of his own around the world because people somehow could align and fulfill their spiritual needs through the journey of Christ; hence they accept him. Another dimension in this faith building process is the aspects of personal empiricism. A family that had been receiving benefits and favours from one religion will be more obliged to follow it. Tribal belts in our region have received maximum benefits from earlier missionaries hence Christianity became

the dominant figure. Likewise many regions close to central India around Nagpur where RSS has a stronghold have attracted the tribals because of charitable works. Sometimes denial of service may even result in conversion, for example, a family baptized in Presbyterian church may convert to Catholic because the former denied a burial ground to the deceased family while the later provides one and vice versa although both faiths follow the same origin. This is the small example highlighting how personal interest and experiences determine our choice of religion. This phenomenon prevails in all other faiths as well. Therefore, to conclude that Christianity suits the tribal the most and not others is a statement we cannot buy. Any religion can suit the tribal population only if we practice it with humanism. There is no right religion for right people but a right people make a right religion.

The spread of religion is more related with the message it propagates, whether it be Jesus, Muhammad, Buddha or Guru Nanak. These people are mere symbolic figures. Finally it is the connection and conviction in how individually we relate and link our personal experiences with their teachings and not to forget that the services availed by their community which also suits our personal interests greatly influence the affinity. The philosophy of polytheism or monotheism is the last thing in people’s minds; people simply choose what they like and what’s more relevant to them.

Another interesting point that needs to be examined in detail is the continuum between culture and religion. The writer correctly states that in adopting a particular religion one doesn’t lose one’s identity. But the fact that religion has a bigger share of influence on culture than others cannot be denied. For example, everyone knows the food habits of Christians are quite liberal where meat eating is not restricted whereas Muslims although liberal, prohibit eating of pork. Likewise the Hindus, Buddhists more or less follow a vegan diet with Jains being the most extreme. Hence it’s visible that changing religion results in culture interference because it changes the food habits. Taking the example of our State where Christianity is prominent and jotting down the changing landscape, I can’t really deny the impact whether positive or negative but for sure changes have taken place with the arrival of Christianity. On a positive

indeed any other religion. We have the right to choose our faith and the path to salvation. In central India and elsewhere where tribals were converted to Christianity often by inducements, it is only fair to use the word “Ghar Wapasi” since the tribes would be returning to their own native faiths. But no one has the right to force the Ghar Wapasi on them. It is a choice they will have to make.

There is however, one point that merits mention. Till date those belonging to the Christian faith get first preference while seeking admissions to Christian missionary run institutions. What is this if not an indirect inducement that if people want admission into Christian schools then they

note education and health sector is their biggest contribution. Even in today’s scenario the share of government run schools and those run by missionaries is incomparable. Hospitals, dispensaries, and skill centres etc had contributed immensely in improving the social indicators. Nevertheless the negative fallout is also visible. Christianity is inherently western in culture and outlook both of which are alien to our people, but its higher status symbol in the social scale attracts many to adopt it even at the cost of losing our core identity. Many families in our city have adopted English as the mother tongue. It’s sad to witness an alien language bridging the communication gap between natives. Learning English for its universal value is significant but assimilating it in toto is a shame. Language is the identity of a culture; if we don’t use it then the culture itself is dead.

Dressing style is another aspect of how religion influences culture. Whether it’s the feeling of modernity or comfort, western style is the first choice no matter how short-long-exposed the attire. Indeed the downside is that our indigenous attire has lost its importance. I’m sure many youngsters now lack the expertise of wearing the Jainsem or Jainboh. The flavour and taste for western musical style and not folk music, the craze for guitar rather than the duitara are all the negative fallouts of Christianity on our soil. Undeniably the faith conversion process had definite role on culture even if doesn’t result in total change but culture dilution is inevitable.

The take away from this article is to let people know that there is no such thing as a perfect religion. After all they are run by mortals open to personal discretions at various levels. Our perspective on many issues are singularly, corroded with bias. Caste and class are the two faces of the same coin. It only depends how we perceive and practice it, and in fact class division is more catastrophic because its ubiquitousness doesn’t attract attention. The rich-poor divide is visible and the gap is widening each day. Thus to find fault only with the caste system of others’ faith and neglect the deep division inside our own is sheer hypocrisy.

should convert to Christianity? And now these missionary run schools have lost their charitable Christian objectives. Mawrie should be looking at correcting all these faults in Christian institutions instead of being overly obsessed with the BJP-RSS which he sees as the natural enemies of Christians. It is unfortunate that a scholar should be so angular in his views.

Yours etc.,
Hastings Shangdiar,
Via email

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

Swiss Bank spills on black money of rich Indians
BJP-led regime refuses to act on its promises

By Krishna Jha

The spilling over of information, from a major chink in Swiss deposits about the huge illegitimate stash amounting Rs 7,000 crore, has proved to be the beginning of a sharp decline in the support base for the ruling regime. The BJP led government had got a massive mandate since it made loud claims to get back the black money from foreign lands and flow it in the bank accounts of people, but now when the reality of black money has come alive, prime minister Narendra Modi has refused to act. His betrayal has led to a downward turn in his vote bank, decisively, as the masses are increasingly getting disillusioned.

The government, in the name of hunting for the black money, took the step of currency scrapping, when it went for demonetizing Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes constituting 86 percent of the currency in circulation. However in reality, it was a step towards whitening the black money only as the reports have proved. The notes of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 denominations poured in from the coffers of BJP big wigs and were converted within the stipulated five days by banks that were under their control. Yet, the amount of domestic black money does not stand anywhere compared to that stashed in foreign banks. The black money within the country is

publicizing their data, it had taken such a steep nose dive, according to the report, though climbing new heights only within a year. The very quality of impregnability of the stashed wealth, adds a touch of uncertainty to the entire affair. The claim that all the money deposited in Swiss banks is not always black, raises another query. Why run all the way to Switzerland to deposit money when all the facilities are available within the country itself? The reply could be in the available option of secrecy despite the heavy premium.

These are the factors that lead the governments and investigative agencies all over the world to term the wealth stashed thus as ‘suspected black money’ when they refer to various tax havens including Swiss bank deposits.

Meanwhile, as the controversy rises over the Swiss Bank deposit leak, minister without portfolio Arun Jaitley came out with a statement saying that it was not possible to conclude that ‘...Money in Swiss Banks is Black’. Jaitley’s remark came at a time when the Modi government is facing criticism after latest data from the Swiss National Bank showed that money parked by Indians in Swiss banks rose over 50 per cent to Swiss Franc (CHF) 1.01 billion (Rs 7,000 crore) in 2017. But then if Swiss

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reported to be around Rs 15 lakh crore, a good amount of which could be in the form of assets such as real estate and financial investments. On the other hand, stashed in banks abroad, the amount could be around Rs 65 lakh crore or more.

A mine of gold, kept under layers of secrecy, with no code words to reveal its glitter to the world, in the coffers of the Swiss banks known for their reluctance to share details with authorities of other countries, are exactly the merits for which those keen to stash their dark side earnings, opt for them. The wealth thus safely stored there costs a hefty premium for secrecy, unavailable in most other financial institutions the world over.

The money stashed thus, however does not remain static. Its graph keeps moving, upwards and downwards both, despite the fact that the walls protecting it remain beyond reach. In 2017, the funds stashed reportedly swelled by over 50 percent, the highest ever, up to CHF (Swiss franc) 1.01 billion (Rs 7,000 crore), according to the official data released by Swiss National Bank (SNB), the central banking authority of the Alpine nation. Interestingly, one year back, in 2016, Indian money in Swiss banks fell by 45 percent, a landmark plunge, underlined as lowest ever yearly downward fall, to CHF 676 million (about Rs 4,500 crore). Never ever since 1987, when they had started

Money is ‘white’, where is ‘Black Money’?

A promise to bring back black money stashed away in foreign banks was a key promise made by PM Modi at election rallies in the run up to the 2014 elections. He had said, “If all the black money from the Swiss banks are brought back, every person will have Rs 15 lakh in his bank account.” But the promise remained as elusive as the black money itself.

The funds, described by SNB as ‘liabilities’ of Swiss banks or ‘amounts due to’ their clients, are the official figures disclosed by the Swiss authorities and do not indicate to the quantum of the much-debated alleged black money held by Indians there.

SNB’s official figures also do not include the money that Indian NRIs or others might have in Swiss banks in the names of entities from different countries. It is also true that Swiss banks are not the only tax havens; there are others like in Singapore, Mauritius and Hong Kong.

In fact there has been leaks through the international media on tax evaders. But, so far as taking steps within the country in locating and acting on black money, very little has been done. There were the Panama Papers, the HSBC list of tax evaders and the more recent Paradise papers. On all of these dark truths, there is a studied silence. Tax evaders in the country continue to rely on tax havens as a better option and Modi government is aware of it. (IPA Service)

Safest places in the world

Five years ago I lived in a housing estate that was so safe that I didn't even own a front door key. Our only line of defence against evil was a deeply confused dog which barked at family members and gave strangers a friendly licking. (My wife tells me to be kind, since dogs have brains the size of walnuts, but I argue that a walnut would be cheaper and more effective, since you can throw it at people and it never needs its poop picked up. But whatever.)

Safe places to live were on my mind after a reader sent in a news report about what is being called "the safest place in the world". Eibenthal is a village with a little church in the mountains of Romania. Inhabitants hang money in bags on lampposts. The baker passes by, takes the money and leaves food behind.

But there are super-safe places everywhere, if you know where to look. India has Shani Shingnapur, a famously low-crime town of 3,000 people in Maharashtra where most houses don't even have doors, let alone locks.

This columnist wrote about it a few years ago when a bank was built there.

Townfolk ordered executives at UCO Bank to follow tradition and have no locks on its doors. The bankers thought this was a bit unusual for a bank, but were willing to cooperate.

You could imagine the discussion:

Townfolk: "You must follow our tradition and not lock the doors of your bank."

Bankers: "Well, okay. It's your money."

Townfolk: "Wait. Maybe we need to talk about this a bit more."

The only grumble came from local police, but they could have

taken inspiration from Sark, an island near England which maintained a tiny security presence. In the 1970s it was invaded by France. The invasion fleet consisted of one Frenchman. The defending army consisted of a part-time policeman, who arrested the Frenchman without harming him. As wars go, it was rather sweet. (You can't say that about a lot of wars.)

Even the United States, which the media paints as a land of guns, has super-safe places. Wikipedia says top of the list is Irvine, California, which had 0.8 of a murder in the most recent year counted. How can you have 0.8 of a murder? Did the guy's hair survive or something?

Now here's the thing: You can create individual safe spots. Over the years, this column has received dozens of news reports about armed robbers who failed because their would-be crimes didn't fit the ambience.

Example: In 2012, a masked man entered a bar in the Netherlands and levelled a

gun at people inside. Lost in the usual fog of drink and chatter you find in European bars, they ignored him. The whole thing is on YouTube, including the deflated robber's sad exit.

At a bank in Kowloon, Hong Kong, staff told a raider that they were far too busy to be robbed. He nodded and left the counter. The whole thing was marvelously civil.

Now I am not saying that our generation is creating a crime-free world. Given the propensity of snacks to disappear in this columnist's house, I can't even create a crime-free apartment. Who took my walnut?

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

Comedy as hero in 'Padosan'

By Shoma A. Chatterji

Padosan, made in 1968, is ageless because everyone will laugh at almost every moment of the film while also rejoicing in the wonderful songs that define it as one of the best entertainers in Hindi cinema. It has some of the best compositions written by Rajender Kishen who also wrote the story and the screenplay with the music for the nine immortal songs scored by Rahul Dev Burman which makes a film an outstanding musical too.

Just as the cast represented a galaxy of some of the best comic actors of the time, it also boasted of the best voices that came together in this film much before Hrishikesh Mukherjee did it in *Anand*. The songs were belted out by Kishore Kumar, Lata Mangeshkar, Manna Dey, and Asha Bhosle, every song a thumping hit.

The song picturisation, orchestration, and positioning of the song sequences are imaginative, innovative and very funny that always leads to side-splitting laughter among the viewers even for repeat viewings.

Comedy in this film is not a relief in an otherwise serious drama or melodrama. It is the very heart and soul of the story enriched by brilliant performances of which, Sunil Dutt's performance as the slightly stupid by simple Bhola is perhaps his career best, trapped that he was in serious roles often laced with heightened melodrama.

Produced jointly by Mehmoond and NC Sippy, *Padosan* (female neighbour) was based on a Bengali story *Pasher Bari* (Next Door Neighbour) penned by Arun Chowdhury and adapted into a Bengali film in 1952. In 1953, there was a Telugu version titled *Pakkinti Ammayi*, followed by the Tamil version in 1960 called *Aaduta Veety Penn* and once again in Telugu as *Pakkinti Ammayi* in 1981.

The time span of the several language versions underscores the entertainment value proving how comedy, if handled well, can cross the time, space, language barriers for the audience craving for entertainment through simple, straightforward fun.

Though the title *Padosan* focuses on the beautiful neighbour Bindu (Saira Banu) who flops in her exams every year, the story is more about how the hero Bhola's friends, comprising Vidyapati (Kishore Kumar), Banarsi (Mukri), Lahoria (Raj Kishore) and Bangaliya (Kesho Mukherjee) rally around him when he is smitten by this beautiful Bindu on his arrival from his village to his aunt's



house as he sets eyes on the neighbour.

But Bindu loves music and her mother is intent on getting her married off as she fails every year—a novel introduction in an Indian film of the time which featured heroes and heroines as "brilliant" never mind if one never saw them pouring over books even if they went to college.

In his attempt to win Bindu's heart, Bhola engages his friend, music teacher Vidyapati.

One does not know if this is a subtle tribute to the famous *Vidyapati* (1937), a memorable musical produced by New Theatres and directed by Debaki Bose in which Pahari Sanyal plays the title role of a talented poet and singer. But this Vidyapati played by Kishore Kumar is different. He begins to tutor Bhola who is as out of tune as a donkey. Vidyapati decides that Bhola will not be able to sing even to save his life.

Vidyapati along with Bhola and his gang hits on a novel idea – Bhola will do the lip-syncing to a song actually sung by

the trained singer Vidyapati in the background. The song?

Mere Saamne Waali Khidki Mein Ek Chaand Ka Tukra Rehna Hai

Bindu is charmed by Bhola's performance but her Masterji Pillai who secretly loves her is piqued.

Then begins an unequal competition between Masterji fighting it alone against Bhola backed by his friends and Vidyapati for the unsuspecting Bindu's hand in marriage.

This masquerading as a singer takes the film along a wonderful journey of fun, music, songs, and drama narrated in a very simple and straightforward manner set out to entertain every member of the audience, man woman or child. *Padosan*, like all comedy films should, is both character-driven and incident-driven.

The characters present a cross-section of Indians across different regions capped by Bindu's Tamilian dance and music

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi Sunday, JULY 8, 2018

It's the mixed time to ponder upon promoting your career prospects as Moon square Mars on your solar return chart. Take hold of the plans you have made and infuse them with newer efforts. Bring a new breath of life to your dreams and act with confidence. Effective communications is the key so arm yourself with the information you need and put on your skills. Try to curb your inclination to overspend and look at consolidating your funds. It is a good time to capitalize. You are far less self-conscious when it comes to articulating yourself creatively, and you are a lot more fun to be round. Children may be a stronger attention as well.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You will be keen to perform some outstanding work in your professional life and the stars are favorable for you to achieve your target. Your inner focus and dynamism will place you in the limelight. It is a time to be on your toes and use your wits for a good cause. Your personality will be remarkable and you will enjoy favours. Romance and love life will give you joy and happiness. Family relations will be amiable. Monetary gains too are expected. You may have some pressure or stress due to work so take care so that it does not affect your health.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

A lot of issues need to be looked into once again. So take stock of different aspects in your life. Also look at your plans in relation to what others around you are doing and see if you can combine forces. Cooperation instead of competition needs to be emphasized which is something that could pay dividends in the future. Take care about your health and avoid any conflict or unnecessary arguments. Keep expenditure under control lest it may disturb your budget. There may be a chance to go on a foreign trip. Hold on to your patience and stamina as you are going to need to draw on your inner strength and fortitude. Family will be supportive and your better half will help you gain insight into certain matters.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Your creativity will be par excellence and this is an excellent period when new ventures can be initiated. You communicate well and are able to put across your viewpoint effectively. Along with your creativity this is where you score over others and many of you may bag excellent offers. However it is also a time for you to exercise caution especially when you are on unfamiliar territory. There may be some thought to buy or construct a home Take care of your health. This is another aspect that you have been neglecting of late and needs your attention. Concentrate on leading a healthy lifestyle especially to keep stress at bay. Personally this is a good period where personal relations thrive and grow positively.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Your potential is realized both by yourself and seniors as you manage professional matters with ease to get desired results. Your image will enhance and you are perceived as confident and courageous. It is a time that you may have to carefully watch your profit making ventures and investments. Financially it is good time and money matters continue to go well. With opportunities for travel - business or personal coming to you, make the most of it, as this travel will pay off. Entertainment and enjoyment is expected in family relations and domestic affairs.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Your search for a rewarding career may be fulfilled now as there is a positive change and communications, contacts and travel will prove to be extremely useful. New horizons are opening up as also the environment that offers new opportunities, connections and new dimensions and you get wonderful results. During this period you may invest funds in property or some long time investment it will be beneficial to you. Go for some adventurous prospectus and you will find a favourable deal waiting for you. An affair is something else to look forward to as you are full of charm and this love affair brings in joy and warmth.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

The stars predict some mixed results for you. Some unseen problems may disturb your personal and family relations so be wise and handle the situation prudently. At first you may find it difficult to tackle the problems but it may be sorted out soon in some time. Special care needs to be paid to your health espe-

cially to keep stress and tension at bay as you could take on more that you can handle; pace yourself. A lot of travel is foreseen for you. Be ready for some unexpected financial gains. Your loved ones and children give you feeling of joy and happiness.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This phase will prove favourable for you in many spheres of your life as efforts will pay off and you shall find the solution of existing problems. You work on new ideas and you are likely to initiate a new project. You will encounter an event that encourages you to experience life in a free-flowing fashion; you may even get off your schedule and go with the flow. Your relationship with your spouse or partner is now on a much firmer footing as you discover some delightful yet hitherto hidden aspects of your partner. Those who are single will find someone who strikes an instant chord and lo behold you are in a wonderful relationship. Minor health problems should not be brushed aside but rather be addressed at the earliest.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

This period may be helpful if you are looking for a good time to change your profession. Your courage and vitality will bring you opportunities to take bold decisions. By believing and making the effort, you're likely to get what you want. Work towards your goals instead of waiting for others to take care of you. Contacts, communications, short journeys enthuse you as you are full of charm, bright ideas and even innovations. Sudden gains are not ruled out. You feel much more stable and comfortable with your monetary situation. Your love life will see you doing things together and bonding well. Take care of your health related problems especially as some old health related issues could resurface.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

It is a time when you may enjoy every good opportunity whether it is your health, love or professional life. Go ahead and put in your best efforts in whatever field you like and you will find yourself riding the wave of success. This will be an excellent period for money and business. Some of you will get an opportunity for overseas travel. Some of you can invest in property or conveyance. There will be much social activity including a celebration of which you will be a part. Monetary profits and finance will give satisfaction and you may be able to get better resources. Some property or home purchase deal may be at your disposal and you may concentrate on making a long term investment. Health will remain good.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

The position of stars may give you some mixed results. This could be a trying phase for you as delays and obstacles will mar efforts. It would absolutely necessary at this point to steer clear of all controversies. You may find that you are powerfully romantically attracted towards a person whose company you find extremely stimulating. You are likely to be creatively inclined and you will be drawn to such activities. This will help you stand out in your professional group where you and your thought shine. Take care of yourself and learn to relax in between all these activities. This will rejuvenate you else you will end up feeling exhausted.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Your monetary and financial problems will get sorted out soon in the near future. In matters related to your career you should be tactful and watch the situation carefully. There may be good response from overseas contacts and you will find favourable news or be able to close a deal. Keep an open mind and be receptive to new ideas and professional opportunities, which could lead to a new job while some of you will be in for perks, recognition and prestige. You are active both professionally and socially, a variety of social activities add to the busy schedule. Travel is also possible for some of you. Your health will need some extra care so go for it and you will find a way.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

On the professional front you start your new project with a bang and come in for praise and accolades. You are brimming with ideas and these are well received in your professional circles. New opportunities for increasing both status and income could come your way. Family life will be smooth and your spouse and children are supportive and shower their love on you. You enjoy time with friends and your social circle expands. There is definite re-bonding with friends. A short trip is on the anvil and will rejuvenate you. Concentrate on changing your lifestyle and adopting a healthier one to keep seasonal ailments at bay and elevate your spirits.

Corporate trainers in demand

By Ranjan K Baruah

One might wonder why we choose trainer as career. Can it be a career and if it is then what is the role or responsibilities? For managing human resources or efficiency and enhancement in any professional field one needs to be trained. Now someone might be wondering if we need trainer then what is the use of teachers.

Teachers are everywhere from schools to colleges or universities. Teachers are doing their jobs according to their capacities and responsibilities. But there are always some differences and there are different roles and responsibilities. There are demands for trainers or moderators for different actions. Right from corporate to social organisation or even government departments all of them take the help of trainers in training programmes.

Training is teaching, or developing in oneself or others, any skill and knowledge that relate to specific useful competencies. Training has specific goals of improving one's capability, capacity, productivity and performance.

People within many professions and occupations may refer to this sort of training as professional development. When we talk of training it might mean soft skill or any other skill related or physical trainer or any other trainer. We are focusing on training related to soft skills or training to corporate or developmental related training and in our edition we are not talking about physical trainer or instructor.

Now the question is whether there is any specific course for becoming trainers? The direct answer is though there is no direct course but there are some special programmes for them.

One of the best examples and common word is like TOT or Training of Trainers. One needs to be very good in communication skill to become a good trainer. The role of good trainer is not just to teach or moderate but also listen from the participants and act accordingly. Effective communications, knowledge about languages are helpful ingredients for a good trainer.

There is a difference between teaching and training. Teaching is simply conveying information, which can be accomplished with a traditional ap-



time by a large company to train new employees and assist in the transition to new business systems. We shall publish more in our next edition of this column.

Updates:

L'Oreal India for Young Women in Science Scholarship 2018: L'Oreal India for Young Women in Science Scholarship 2018 invites applications from girl students who have passed class 12 in 2018 with PCB/PCM. The key objective of the scholarship is to encourage young women belonging to a financially weaker section of society to pursue their career in Science by covering their college fees for studying in a recognized college or university in India.

The scholarship is being offered by L'Oréal India with an objective to support and encourage young women to pursue their career in Science. The scholarship scheme was started in 2003 and has consistently helped young women to pursue scientific studies. Last date to apply is July 16.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, motivational speaker cum trainer and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkranjan@gmail.com)

Safe haven for political mavericks

In the world’s largest democracies, social media is enabling the rise in nationalism but the liberals are not too far behind, report *Humera Lodhi, Yehyun Kim & Sudipto Maity*



The “Unite the Right” rally that turned violent last year in Charlottesville, North Carolina had its own Facebook page for a while.

Nationalists in India vandalised statues of activists and leaders in March in response to social media posts by supporters of the country’s ruling party. Even Parliament member H Raja put up — and quickly deleted — a Facebook post some viewed as a call to destroy statues.

India’s main opposition party, the Congress, challenging the right-wing BJP, which is way ahead in optimising its social media space, equally uses the platforms to post wrong information at times.

In the world’s largest democracies and across the globe, social media is enabling the rise in nationalism, both in government and on the extreme fringes of society. Many of these leaders, whether they are nationalists or from other ideologies, are products of the post-truth world, denoting a kind of politics where “objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief”.

Liberals, who in countries like India are often seen as pseudo-secular forces and accused of appeasing minorities while keeping silent on many inconvenient issues for them, are using the social media to fight their battle against the nationalists as well and often with hate and misinformation campaign in equal measure.

Harry Hughes belongs to the National Socialist Movement, which describes itself as “America’s Premier White Civil Rights Organisation” but which the Southern Poverty Law Centre calls a neo-Nazi hate group.

“Social media allowed our membership to explode. It is a very useful tool for us,” said Hughes, the group’s public relations director. “Social media is basically the key to our ability to get our message out. We don’t have TV stations, we don’t have radio stations, we’re not mainstream. So like any third party out there, we rely on social media.”

The ease by which groups like NSM can spread their ideas raises concern among social media experts. Posts on popular platforms like Facebook and Twitter can promote a sense of false equivalency between hate messages and civilised discourse.

“[Social media] allowed people to express their views, but with this comes some of the chaos inherent in a discussion in which both sides are given equal value,” said Skye Montgomery, a Kinder Research Post-doctoral Fellow at the University of Missouri who studies nationalism in American history. “And at the moment, there’s not really a mechanism for sifting through the value [of these] different



positions.”

Pratik Sinha, co-founder of AltNews, an Indian fact-checking website, said the landscape is similar in India, with political parties and nationalist groups taking advantage of people’s inability to distinguish between fake and real information.

“We are talking about a demographic that is divided hugely in terms of education capabilities,” Sinha said. “You have multiple factions of our population where they’re not educated, and they still have access to tools like WhatsApp through which they get information. But they have no facilities to go and look up... whether the information they have received is authentic or not.”

However, critics say website like AltNews is only identifying the provocative or misleading and incorrect propaganda content of the right wing while sparing the others on the opposite side of the political spectrum.

According to Jaideep Mazumdar, who works for the right-wing Swarajya magazine, social media platforms can be leveraged to promote nationalism, just as they can also be used to promote anti-nationalism and other negative agendas. “It works both ways,” he says.

“It is easy to detect fake news. Anything which sounds fantastical, too good to be true,

unrealistic, patently false, or full of hatred and angst is likely to be fake news,” he says.

“I think the greater danger is posed by biased, partial and one-sided news or news that does not present all sides of the picture,” he said taking a swipe at the mainstream media which often finds it fashionable to take a liberal stance.

Recruiting made easier

In many ways, Montgomery said, nationalists’ recruitment and promotion techniques on social media echo methods of the past.

“The basic process by which we sort of define a national identity and enact it on social media hasn’t actually changed from the same process that we interacted with print media like newspapers and magazines 50 years earlier,” Montgomery said. “The big difference is that with social media it’s a lot easier to find a sense of community over a broader area. So it’s possible for people who might not otherwise have come into contact with one another to find sort of the sense of common ground.”

Unlike today’s recruits, who can find nationalist groups instantly on social media, it took Hughes years of searching before he found the group he felt he belonged to. He looked into sev-

eral nationalist movements and attended small gatherings of nationalists at his local library. It wasn’t until he hosted an after-party following a rally that he was connected with the NSM.

Hughes may very well have found the group sooner had it been on Twitter when he joined in 2009. A 2016 study conducted at George Washington University found major American white nationalist movements collectively gained about 22,000 Twitter followers since 2012.

“Our primary role on social media is to let people know we’re out here,” Hughes said. “For the longest time I actually underestimated Twitter, and then I learned that with the links and hashtags, you can really explore your reach.”

Realising their role in the spread of such groups, some social media platforms have taken a more active role in policing content. NSM found several Twitter accounts were banned over time, and last month, YouTube removed NSM’s channel from its site. Lately, NSM has been turning to alternative social media platforms.

“VK, which is based out of Russia, their terms of service are quite a bit more lenient than Facebook or Twitter or anyone,” Hughes said. “We found ourselves able to reach out to a completely different audience, in different parts of the world.”

A political tool

While social media fuels the growth of extreme groups worldwide, experts say it’s also stoking the overall rise of nationalism -- spreading nationalist ideas put forward by political parties and world leaders.

In America, President Donald Trump has often been criticized for his nationalistic posts on Twitter. In November, Trump retweeted three inflammatory anti-Muslim videos from Britain First, an ultra-nationalist political group in Britain. His tweets seem to resonate with white nationalists. The George Washington University study found white nationalists referenced Trump on Twitter more than almost any other topic.

The only Twitter hashtag more popular than hashtags relating to Trump amongst white nationalists was #whitegenocide.

In India, the federal government is currently led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which originates from Rashtriya Sayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a right-wing Hindu nationalist organization. Political commentator Paranjay Guha Thakurta said the BJP and Hindu nationalists, like Trump, have taken advantage of the opportunities social media has to offer.

“The BJP, more than others, have been able to use the internet and social media to propagate its viewpoint and its ideology, with [a] great de-

gree of effectiveness,” Thakurta said. “While others are learning, the BJP took the lead. It has also been in the forefront of using trolls. Many of the purveyors of fake news are followed by the Prime Ministers [on social media].”

So are other controversial social media accounts. Within the last year, accounts followed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi have mocked the death of a female journalist and activist and suggested dropping an atomic bomb on Pakistan.

“When Modi follows such nationalist accounts, it can give them undue legitimacy, which only makes it more difficult to identify what’s accurate and what’s not,” Sinha of Alt-News said.

Jaideep Mazumdar agreed that the nationalist BJP has the first mover advantage as far as using social media to communicate with a large section of India’s population is concerned.

“The others are trying desperately to catch up, but are still far behind. We have seen many times how the Congress’ [opposition in India] efforts to corner or criticise the BJP have backfired on itself and how their leader Rahul Gandhi is actually the butt of most jokes on social media,” he said.

Just before he was to take over as the president of Congress party in India, Rahul Gandhi, a hope of the liberals now to take on the powerful Modi, posted on Twitter a wrong calculation of a price list of essential food items, only to take down the tweet and the image later with an apology.

According to experts, other political parties have followed the BJP’s lead in social media.

“During the election cycle, all parties do it. There was a time when...the right-wing parties indulged in the social media kind of fake information, more than the non-right wing parties,” Sinha said.

“Because this issue has not been addressed and people find it a convenient way to influence people through this kind of propaganda, I think both parties are doing it.”

Sinha said this allows for critical discussions that don’t take place elsewhere, especially since “there are multiple channels that are dedicated to the government and act as mouthpieces to the government.”

But while social media has its advantages, he said, it also has the potential to spread dangerous ideas, unimpeded.

“People find it more comfortable to express hate on social media than (they) used to before,” Sinha said. “Before, they would put more thought before hating on social. But now, that has gone.”

(India Blooms News Service in collaboration with University of Missouri, USA)

Remembering the master

An exhibition to showcase the last works of Sayed Haider Raza titled Uttar Raag is being organised at the Shridharani Art Gallery in Delhi jointly by the Raza Foundation and Triveni Kala Sangam. The exhibition, which will continue till July 10, have works of the master on canvas as well as paper.

All the works on display ere done when Raza turned more than 90 years of age and they are being publicly exhibited for the first time.

They relate to the period 2011 to 2016 and were painted in his Delhi Studio and inherited by the Raza Foundation. There are 55 works and one of his last

unfinished canvases exhibited at Triveni Kala Sangam.

The managing trustee of Raza Foundation, Ashok Vajpeyi, has described the works ‘not imbued with feelings of leave-taking or saying adieu: they are not farewell lyrics; they are still songs of joy life’. July is the month of Raza’s death.



“A simple rule in dealing with those who are hard to get along with is to remember that this person is striving to assert his superiority; and you must deal with him from that point of view.”

--- Alfred Adler

The Shillong Times

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Normalising lynching

AT a time when the central government claims that it is taking steps to control mob lynching, Union Minister Jayant Sinha felicitated eight people convicted by a lower court in the Ramgarh lynching case in Jharkhand in June last year. The Union Minister of State for Civil Aviation has shocked the nation by garlanding the eight accused at a public function after the Jharkhand High Court granted bail to them. The eight were earlier convicted by a fast track court for lynching a man named Alimuuddin Ansari on the suspicion that he was transporting beef in his vehicle. The vehicle was later set on fire.

Jayant Sinha, an alumnus of IIT Delhi with a string of degrees from international universities of repute including the Harvard Business School is not expected to throw caution to the winds and to crave the kind of populism that other BJP MLAs and MPs thrive on. Sinha is obviously pandering to vote bank politics but at what cost. That a public event was organised to honour the gau rakshaks - notorious for their lynch-mob mentality suggests a new normal that is dangerous because it also sets a new precedent. The Twitter world is ablaze with condemnations of Sinha’s actions. For the Congress Party this is yet another opportunity to flog the BJP. Just a few days ago the Supreme Court had observed that state governments should be held accountable for any lynching that happens under their watch. The apex court said that mob lynching and vigilantism are crimes no matter what the motive is and should be dealt with by relevant sections of the law.

A fast track court had earlier found the 12 people accused in the Ramgarh lynching case, guilty and awarded death sentence to 11 of them since one is a minor being tried in a juvenile court. The High Court has only granted bail to the 8 people, hence the case is sub-judice. These same people may be found guilty by the High Court too then what would Jayant Sinha’s stance be? Electoral politics is all about appeasement but not by publicly condoning lynching, for, that is the message that Jayant Sinha and others in the BJP are sending out – that it is alright to kill people on mere suspicion of carrying beef. Ironically such lynching are rampant in BJP ruled states be it Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Maharashtra or Assam. This does not bode well for India.

TO THE EDITOR

St. Edmund's leads the way yet again

Editor,

St. Edmund's School has for years been one of the premier institutions in the city and in the whole of northeast India. The school has proved it's position by providing quality education. Recently, the school yet again proved that it is one of the best. The Model United Nations conferences are now being held in Shillong and students enthusiastically participate in these events to boost their confidence levels. The sad part is that most of these conferences are conducted with the purpose of making profit rather than providing exposure to the students. Most MUNs in Shillong charge a heavy registration fee and thus many students are unable to engage in this activity. Recently, St. Edmund's School hosted a Model United Nations conference for students from the city to provide them with the MUN experience. The best part is that the school did not charge a single penny for participation and decided to cover all the expenses on its own. The conference was a whopping success which and this can be gauged from the fact that many students participated in the event and gained experience. I wish to congratulate the Principal and faculty of St. Edmund's

School for organizing this conference with a noble purpose. This is also a reminder to other MUN organizers that profit making should not be the aim while planning such events. After this act by St. Edmund’s School I'm looking forward to seeing more non- profit MUNs in Shillong.

Yours etc.,
Ralph Nongbet
Shillong- 14

Shillong a lawless city

Editor,

Through this column I wish to point out how lawless Shillong is. It’s a city where you can do what you want where you want and whenever you want. For example, people park their cars anywhere; throw their garbage anywhere; set up shops anywhere; build anywhere (including on the banks of rivers and streams); let out the waste from their toilets anywhere... the list could go on and on.

To whom and to which authority does one complain is anyone’s guess. It’s not that people have not tried. Those who have were met with the reply, ‘Oh kaba eh phi; ym lah leh eiei’ (Oh it’s pointless; we can’t do anything). As ordinary citizens we are frustrated, so, short of us killing each

Modern Messages from Traditional Festival

A journalist friend from Shillong called me on the morning of July 3, which was the last day of Behdienkhlam and said that he expected that the dominating theme of the Rots or the Rongs during this year’s festival will be around the World Cup 2018. In a way he is right because every four years when the celebration of the Behdienkhlam festival coincides with the football World Cup the popular stories and players during the World Cup competition figure prominently in the Rots prepared by the different communities celebrating the festival in Jowai. But this year it was different.

The penultimate part of the Behdienkhlam on the fourth and the last day of the festival culminates at the sacred Aitnar pond. It is the time when different communities bring their Rots for display to a large spectator coming from far and near. Traditionally Rongs were made just to add colour to the festival but of late the communities that make these Rots also make sure they have messages which are relevant to contemporary society.

The Rot, rath or rong is an item which was incorporated into the festival not so long ago and it is an idea which is borrowed from our neighbours in the plains, which is now Bangladesh. This information was revealed to me by Woh Chaimon Pyrbot an elder of the town when I interviewed him about a decade or so ago. The prayers and rituals which were part of the Behdienkhlam were quite dull and colourless and it is the Rots which add colour to the festival to give it a more vibrant look. This also demonstrates how open Niamtre is to ideas even if they come from outside the tradition as long as it adds colour and festivity to the festival.

In Jowai, traditionally Rots are made in a spire shaped square with wooden planks and coloured papers only but as time passed the shape and sizes of the Rots also changed. At the top of every typical Rong are a

By H H Mohrmen

bunch of flowers again made of coloured paper and one can still see quite a few of these typical Rots on display at Aitnar Jowai in the last Behdienkhlam.

Not only were the Rots made to add colour to the festival but in the very recent past certain communities also made Theng-theng effigies of male and female human figures. The Theng-thengs are effigies with the upper half bearing a human body made of sliced bamboo and cloth. The Theng-thengs are similar to the effigy of Ravana which is burnt with fireworks during the Dusschera festival of the Hindus. Although the Theng-theng has no religious significance but it has become part of the Behdienkhlam. But this year the spectators missed this small part of the festival because none of the community made any Theng-theng to add colour to the celebration.

Behdienkhlam had an unpleasant history during the fag end of the British raj when the powers that be then; for reasons best known to them, prohibited the community from celebrating the festival for about a decade or so. It was only when the country attained its independence and the Sein Raij Jowai (SRJ) was formed that the festival of Behdienkhlam was again revived. And since then, under the stewardship of the SRJ, the communities have never turned back and continued celebrating the Behdienkhlam and also improvised the manner in which the festival is presented to the audience.

For a person who regularly attends the celebration and one who also observes it from a very close quarters, the festival always has an element of surprise every year. This in itself demonstrates that Behdienkhlam not only evolves with time but as time passes the spectators are even provided with messages which are relevant to the society today.

Although it was not intentional but the messages are rather like a sermon in a typical Christian hymn and worship service which tries to bring out to the open, the issues which are of a great concern to the society. After all the rituals, the drum beats and the sound of the flute unlike in a church service or a Namaz of the Muslim, the messages are painted or cut out of colour papers on the Rongs brought by the communities. In a way Rots also reflect the concerns of the community on the social issues or evils that plagues the society and true to the spirit of Behdienkhlam the effort is to rid the community of these evils.

To my journalist friend’s dismay; World Cup Football 2018 in Russia was not a popular theme amongst the Rot makers this year. In fact it was something more profound which caught the attention of the public. Three messages come out prominently in the Rong presented by the communities at Aitnar this year; the influence or rather the power of technology over human life, the evils of human greed when it exceeds their need and which is the root cause of every evil and there was one depicting how the silence of the majority helps aggravates the problems at hand.

The prominent message which has caught the attention of most of the spectators is the domination of technology in the life of the people which is also a current theme we are all grappling with today. The evil unleashed by the army of trolls and the spread of fake news through social media which has taken away many precious lives is a cause of concern for everybody and the simple Rong made by the people of the Loomkyrwiang community aptly depicted this dilemma that we are facing today. Technology is a good servant but a bad master say’s the inscription on the Rot and on the top was a figure of a man chained to smart phones, ipads, tablets and what have you.

There was also a Rot

emblazoned with the famous saying of Gandhi on greed. There is a figure of two farmers, one is trying to pluck oranges and is using a ladder to climb the tree while the other already has a khoh (a cone-shaped basket that farmers use to carry their produces) full or oranges and he is trying to cut the ladder and the tree with a saw. The message is clear; there is enough for everybody’s need but not enough for everyone’s greed.

Last but not least is a saying by the former Member of Parliament in England, Edmund Burke, ‘All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men do nothing,’ which was prominently inscribed in one of the Rots. In a world where stories about evil men and anti-social elements are dominating every available media platform, the message or rather the question from this particular Rong is whether we can continue to remain mere spectators to the unpleasant things that are happening around us.

There were altogether twelve Rots presented by as many communities at the Aitnar pond but every Rong had its unique message. The Rong prepared by lawmusiang locality is on the evils caused by drugs and alcohol abuse issue which is afflicting the society today. By depicting their respective messages, the Rots in their own way have brought to light the social evils plaguing the society today. The objective was to provoke and make people think on these very important issues.

Therefore the closing day of the annual Behdienkhlam is not only meant to be a feast for the eyes for the spectators or simply to witness colour and joy in action (ka rong ka tamasa) but it is also a feast for the soul. True to the meaning of the festival which is to rid off evil, the messages on the Rots are a clarion call to everybody of the need to fight against the evils prevailing in society.

Why is India still a developing nation?

By Subhasish Das

The journey of the Indian subcontinent and its tremendous metamorphosis over the last 5000 years is a great example of how civilizations are formed, cultures developed, and religions born. From establishing the first urban civilization in south Asia in the form of Indus valley civilization, to the forming of the Vedic civilization, to the rise of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, to the Muslim dominance in the medieval era, to the establishment of British colonialism, to the freedom movement leading to the country’s partition and independence, India has had a truly remarkable journey so far.

Notwithstanding its cultural superiority ingested through manifold experiences across centuries and the ability to withstand change continuously yet embosom new civilizations, India still languishes as a developing nation. A country that is seventh largest in the world in size, second largest in human resources, has the world's 3rd largest standing army, a country that propels satellites into space, whose “Yoga” & spiritual way of life have emerged as the greatest healer in modern times, a nation that sends Mars orbiters at a cost lesser than an average Hollywood movie, doesn’t yet find itself in the league of developed nations. Isn’t it intriguing to know as to why such an ancient land, a country with such enormous potential, still struggles to find its rightful place among the developed nations?

As the country liberated itself from British control and enclassed independence in the last century, little did it know that several pernicious seeds had already been sown by the time the British left, tha’t’ll soon enlarge into massive trees of self-destruction and act as major impediments to the country’s development in the years to come. Let’s discuss some of the major factors:

· Poverty: Poverty has been a major hindrance in India’s quest to be a developed nation. 70% of the country’s population lives in rural areas in conditions that have seen little or no improvement since independence. And sadly, poverty is co-related with other social problems like illiteracy, over-population, malnutrition, unemployment, homelessness etc. It’s all linked together in a vicious circle that thrive on each other.

· Corruption: From schools to the parliament, corruption permeates the length and breadth of the country. It has become a part of us and our system in such a way that it’s impossible to spend a day without experiencing it in some way or the other. The fact that it makes our lives so easy, most Indians indulge in it unabashedly fully aware that it’s not right. Corruption has eroded the institutional capacity of governments as procedures are disregarded, resources are misused, and public offices are bought and sold like household items with democratic values such as trust and tolerance getting crushed in the process.

· Religion: Religion has been more of a divider than a unifier in this country. And the reason for this is not just the people who follow it but also the unwanted political interference that has always existed and invigiled people whether educated or illiterate as per their convenience. Religious beliefs have consistently played a crucial role in national politics and decisions irrespective of governments, appeasement playing a major role in ruling over the gullible masses.

· Population: If there could be one single factor that has played the most significant role in decelerating India’s

development march, it has to be population or over-population rather, whichever way you put it. For a country that was ripped off all or most of its treasures and wealth by the erstwhile British rulers who left behind a mess by breaking up the country and manufacturing civil wars, feeding its hungry and ever-multiplying population was a Herculean task. The supply & demand equation has always been highly unbalanced, the latter far exceeding the former thereby creating irreversible imbalances in standard of living, resource utilization, employment, education, opportunities, healthcare, almost in every sphere.

· Illiteracy: India has the highest population of illiterate adults in the world at 287 million. Illiteracy in India is more or less due to the different forms of disparities that exist in our society like gender imbalances, income imbalances, state imbalances, caste imbalances, technological barriers etc. Even more worrying is the fact that illiteracy is directly linked to other social evils like poverty, child labour, child marriage, unemployment, social crimes etc. that should ideally have no place in a developed society.

· Caste system: The division of society into so many castes and sub-castes is sinful as it doesn’t allow upward mobility for persons belonging to the lower strata in society and is replete with gross inequality and injustice. Not just this, it makes a mockery of democracy and its values as people in the world’s largest democracy vote on the basis of caste and religion most often overlooking merit, resulting in unfair selection of candidates throughout the country.

· Terrorism: Be it Pakistan-sponsored, Maoist-sponsored or north-east insurgency, terrorism has slowed down the country’s development in more ways than one. A major portion of the country’s GDP gets diverted towards bolstering defense capabilities that could otherwise have been directed towards other development activities. A terrorist attack, in any part of the country has significant impact on the economic growth, investments, overall expenditure, not to mention the safety and security of the general people.

· Brain drain: India has failed to hold back its talented youth and skilled workforce from emigrating to developed countries that includes doctors, engineers, scientists, technicians etc. and this has had quite a significant impact on the country’s development. The mammoth population, the iniquitous reservation system and the insane cut-offs for admission to top Indian Institutes/Colleges/Universities that deny enrollment to even the deserving candidates, all play their part in this exodus. Besides, better work opportunities, better pay packages, high quality of life & facilities tempt most of the students who go abroad to stay back in their host country thus triggering a prodigious amount of brain drain from India.

These are a few prominent barriers that have always dehorted the country from treading the path of development since independence. Although steps have been taken by governments from time to time to expunge these aforementioned deterrents, their implementation and probity on the part of the people involved has always been questionable. As a matter of fact, challenges of this complexity and magnitude cannot be solved by governments and ministries alone. To rectify these issues, a collaborative approach involving business leaders, members of civil society and academia, youth groups and social entrepreneurs would be required.

“ *Arguing with anonymous strangers on the Internet is a sucker's game because they almost always turn out to be—or to be indistinguishable from—self-righteous sixteen-year-olds possessing infinite amounts of free time.* ”

-- Neal Stephenson

The Shillong Times

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Trade War Resumes

IT appeared that US President Donald Trump had abandoned the idea of starting a trade war with China. But as is his wont, he has finally kicked it off with China retaliating forthwith. The two countries have slapped tit-for-tat duties on \$34 billion worth of the other's imports on Friday. Beijing has accused Washington of triggering the largest-scale trade war. The US President has threatened that the US may ultimately target \$500 worth of Chinese goods. So it may be only the tip of the iceberg. China has targeted US goods including cars, soya beans and lobsters with 25% tariffs. The tariff war has fuelled the fear that a prolonged and escalating battle will hit global trade, investment and growth. US farmers will suffer badly. Food prices in China will shoot up. Some Chinese ports had delayed clearing goods from the US. Chinese state media have slammed Trump's trade policies calling his administration a setup run by a gang of hoodlums. The Chinese Commerce Ministry considers US tariffs a violation of world trade rules. It is said to have initiated the largest trade war in economic history. Trump has been severely critical of China's intellectual property theft. China has also been accused of barring the entry of US business. What effect the conflict will have on the North Korean scenario remains to be seen.

At the same time, Russia has imposed extra duties of 25-40% on some imports from the US. The EU will soon take action to prevent steel produced for the US from flooding into Europe due to tariffs imposed by Trump who seems to be besieged. At this rate India will also have to take a stand that is in its economic interests. But how this trade war will play out in the long run is impossible to predict. What is sure is that the trade wars will affect the global economy of which India is a critical part.

TO THE EDITOR

Pathetic condition of SBI Laban Branch

Editor, Through your esteemed newspaper I would like to bring to public notice the pathetic condition of State Bank of India Laban Branch. Though we are in the new age banking systems most of the customers specially the youth and middle aged groups perform their banking through various online systems but the majority of us and senior citizens still continue with the manual procedures. Hence we need to visit the branch frequently, but performance of the branch at present is less than average. When this branch was opened it was possibly the first ladies' branch in Shillong, and one of the best maintained branches in the city but in course of time it shifted from its founding place to a bigger location which generated more customers comprising of both male and female customers. However, the efficiency which was prevalent in the past gradually disappeared. The sole reason for the inefficiency is manpower shortage. Presently this financial institution is running with just three to four staff. Hence I request the higher authorities of the State Bank of India to generate more staff for smooth day-to-day running of the branch and most importantly so that customers are not harassed by the internal issues of the bank.

Yours etc., Anthony Warjiri Shillong -4

Why online abuse shouldn't be encouraged

Editor, Online abuse is becoming a disturbing trend in the country. This time it is none other than foreign minister Sushma Swaraj who became the victim of the online bad mouthing. For almost a week, she received trolls full in the most scurrilous of language. This trend is really upsetting. The issue started when a passport officer named Vikas Mishra allegedly harassed Tanvi Seth, for marrying a Muslim husband and not changing her name. As a result, the passport officer was transferred and the couple too speedily got the transaction done. However, this issue was viewed as a policy of Muslim appeasement from Sushma Swaraj by the hardline Hindutva brigade and they trolled her viciously. Though later, it emerged that Tanvi Seth's marriage certificate bore a different name - Sadis Anas. The recent reports citing Foreign Ministry sources say that the "marriage certificate is not required for passport application" and the passport official Vikas Mishra overstepped "bounds of duty". Whatever be the case hate trolls targeting Sushma Swaraj or any other person is highly condemnable. This is a very serious case because if the country's foreign minister faces such in-

sulting comments then one can easily imagine what a journalist, blogger, writer, social activist or a common man will face. If that was not enough, Priyanka Chaturvedi, Congress spokesperson's case is even more dangerous. A user attributing a fake tweet to her didn't even hesitate to abuse her ten year old daughter. This is horrendous verbal violence targeting a kid who doesn't even know what is happening around her! Much more worrying is the way the government remains silent on the issue of Sushma Swaraj, one of the most popular and successful cabinet ministers of the Modi government. Swaraj's own party ruling BJP is surprisingly mum on the issue. Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi is quiet, who otherwise is known for tweeting almost on every issue. The two women Cabinet Ministers Smriti Irani and Nirmala Sitharaman too are maintaining a studied silence although two other senior cabinet ministers - Rajnath Singh and Nitin Gadkari came out to support their colleague, Sushma Swaraj. Actually, the BJP and the government's silence is only strengthening those using abusive language online. Most of the trolls of Sushma Swaraj are the self-styled supporters of the BJP and its extended family and this is the reason the party is mum. But they are wrong because if today these supporters who abused Sushma Swaraj are endorsed, tomorrow the next target could be someone else from the BJP and even Prime Minister

Modi himself. Maintaining silence amounts to encouraging the trolls. This could be detrimental for the party and the government in the long run. Already, the silence has tarnished the government's good image. Importantly, another very disturbing issue is the selective highlighting of the abusive trolls. If social media is observed, one would find haters belonging to every political and ideological groups. Even Prime Minister Modi himself continues to receive hate comments, mostly from headline Islamist and the self styled "secular" users. So, if we highlight the case of Sushma Swaraj and Priyanka Chaturvedi and on the other side remain quiet on the other cases - then this amounts to bias. That's why it would be better to speak against all these abusers whether irrespective of their ideological moorings - hardline Hindutva or Islamists or the hardline left wing or secular users who every now and then are engaged in spreading venom on social media. So, it's high time that both the ideologically and politically divided lawmakers and the civil society of the country keeping aside all ideological biases come together to tackle this situation.

Yours etc., Sagameel Sinha, Via email

Clarification from William Carey Univ Editor, Apropos the news item"

Murderous Mob

Social media ‘kills’

By Poonam I Kaushish

Social media 'kills' and how! Mob lynching is back on the political-social scene with 17 cases across 9 States from Assam to Tamil Nadu including Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tripura, Andhra Telangana, Gujarat and West Bengal leaving 27 innocent bystanders murdered by a frenzied crowd, blinded by viral rumours of child-kidnappers or organ harvesters on the prowl. With gossip wining over fact along-with the mob moving faster than the police, predictably a clueless officialdom grappling with ways to control the rising violence is fast losing out to this growing technology-driven serial killer! Interestingly, the latest black spot was the lynching of five in Maharashtra's Dhule district which underscored villagers inflamed by fake warnings of child-trafficking rings on WhatsApp resorted to vigilante justice beating to death innocent unknown people who were merely passing through. Worse, States which had hired "rumour busters," to travel from village to village equipped with loudspeakers, warning of the dangers of fake news in their endeavour to control violence, were lynched too. This has resulting in an anguished Supreme Court terming lynching, "a crime unacceptable in a civilised society and no one could take law into their hands," and thereby placing the onus on States for failing to check such incidents. The SC added that they need to frame guidelines to prevent such occurrences and pay compensation. The Court was hearing pleas seeking directions to formulate guidelines to curb cow vigilantism. All these incidents have exposed how ineffective local intelligence is in alerting the police about tensions or an impending attack; their slow response, ill-preparedness vis-à-vis arms and personnel and low impact of their awareness measures. Killing, yet another signpost of an increasingly enfeebled system, symptomatic of the complete lawlessness that has gripped the country. A new cult is establishing an order of hatred and rage. There is an eerie stillness filling the senses with the smell of death, mayhem and brutal carnage held hostage by rampant goondagardi wherein we continue to remain captive to errant elements of society. Think. The lynchings could have been prevented, if timely intervention had been made. True, mob mayhem is not new and happening with State approval wherein the ruling political class uses it as one of its political instruments - sometimes as a direct tool to influence their constituency to garner political benefits and sometimes conveniently ignores to protect their support base for keeping political power intact. Recall that in the last three years all hell broke loose in Dadri, UP, when a Muslim was lynched to death post a rumour that his family had eaten and stored beef in their refrigerator. Then came Una Gujarat where four Dalits were killed by gau rakshaks for skinning a cow, dairy farmer Pehlu Khan in Alwar for smuggling cows and young Junaid in Faridabad, Haryana over a communal slur, leading to an endless spiral of vicious verbal bashing and counter-wall-ops on cow slaughter and beef eating. This raises a moot point: Do we still have rule of law? Why are we so blasé about mob violence? Why do hooligans always get the better of us? When did we become a morally corrupt society that does such things? Were we always like this or is this something new? If yesterday, people were killed by cow vigilantes and beef ban, today we are lynching a person on hearsay, tomorrow, society might demand that we carry our identity papers always. What next? Unfortunately, with over one billion active mobile phone connections and WhatsApp having more than 200 million users in the country, the Government seems at a loss on how to quell the violence triggered by news fake or real and hearsay, whereby local au-

thorities are left to tackle these as best they can, issuing warnings and employing low-tech methods such as hiring street performers to visit villages to spread public awareness. It's simply not enough for the Government to assert, 'we are doing our best.'Really? Besides, it has found a scapegoat in WhatsApp asking it to "immediately contain the spread of such messages through the application of appropriate technology," thereby, highlighting its misguided approach and lack of understanding of how modern messaging tools works. Alongside, the Government has failed to adequately address the larger issues at play which are to blame for these horrific killings. Mob killings are a law and order problem but the root cause of this are three-fold: One, caste and creed identity. Two, no act of mob violence is punished in court. Even where the State is present, it is unable or unwilling to challenge the mob. Three, law enforcers become participants in the violence as the rule of law is weak. Example is the mob violence to impose beef ban! . Paradoxically, as the 2019 general election looms and WhatsApp expands its outreach Parties are signing up thousands of "WhatsApp warriors" - who, in some cases, are spreading incendiary content themselves. But simultaneously, the Government and Parties need to launch a campaign to encourage people to question the veracity of information they receive via social media and messaging platforms. Additionally, police forces need to identify vulnerable areas, initiate effective measures, be better equipped to respond to crimes connected to the spread of misinformation and need to engage more deeply with communities for creating awareness, earn their trust, prevent vigilantism and mob riots and address citizens' fears about issues like kidnappers on the loose. In blaming WhatsApp for this lynching spree, it's clear that the Government is trying to shirk its responsibilities towards its citizens. It's also missing a key opportunity to connect with people and bet-

ter understand the growing problem of misinformation, and how it could be tackled at the local and national level. Hopefully, it'll look for innovative ways to use technology or collaborate with tech firms to reach its people and counter the effects of virally spread lies. Now if only the Government can find the will to step up to this challenge. As it stands, Governments around the world are considering laws and controls against fake news in the wake of Russian interference in the 2016 US Presidential election and the rise of hate speech. Such reactions have raised free-speech concerns. But the spread of fake news has been particularly pernicious in India, where legions of new, inexperienced smartphone users send billions of messages a day on its largest market. On its part, WhatsApp has introduced a function that allows administrators of groups to control which members can post messages, and the company is testing a plan to label which messages are forwards. Time alone will tell if this is able to quell rumour mongering and lynching. Clearly, lynching marks a dangerous political trend of mob violence, if this trend goes unchecked society will get dangerously fragmented. Thus, the recent incidents make it imperative that we rethink how we want to shape New India. Mob lynching should have no place in society. The time has come for the Government to tackle larger issues which are making people paranoid and vulnerable to the viral spread of lies. It needs to guard against the lynching menace else the day is not far when the mob could well mean just Indian society. Nothing justifies violence or the call to commit violence in direct contravention of the law. The way forward is to desist from fake news and acerbic speeches. Hate crimes don't pay. Time now to invest in citizens and India and undergo a DNA test! --- INFA

P.S Case No 191(11)2017 UIS 65/66 of the Information Technology Act. Here I must say with utmost regret that due to the laxity of the Officer-in- Charge who himself is the Investigating Officer investigating the case, our FIR was not properly investigated. I am compelled to highlight the act of colossal insensitivity of the investigating Officer towards our FIR and his failure to take effective steps to find out the source of issuance of fake degrees in the name of the University and that even after reasonable time the investigating officer could not score any breakthrough. It would not be a misjudgment to construe that due to the Investigating Officer's laxity, inaction and sheer incompetence the unscrupulous persons got emboldened in circulating fake degrees. This catastrophe could have been averted and the conspirators subdued had the investigating officer taken the matter seriously and in a professional manner. In this time of crisis we remain committed to faculty excellence by maintaining the highest standards of research and teaching and would fully co-operate with the law enforcement agency. Yours etc. Dr. B.W. Nongbri Registrar, William Carey University, Shillong

Census of healthcare facilities may be an excellent idea

It should raise the government’s health spend on infrastructure

By Nantoo Banerjee

It may be for the first time that the union health ministry has engaged itself in a serious exercise of conducting a census of over two million healthcare professionals and facilities across the country. Health Minister Jagat Prasad Nadda wants to complete the exercise within the next two months. Lakhs of hospitals, doctors, clinics, diagnostic labs, pharmacies and nursing homes will be mapped under this census on over 1,400 variables including infrastructure and performance of the facilities. The census result should help the government not only map the geographical locations of these healthcare facilities, but also measure their performance. Pilot projects have already taken place in states such as Sikkim, Rajasthan, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh between December 2017 and January 2018. According to health secretary Preeti Sudan, the Prime Minister's Office has directed the ministry to create the repository by September. Although the present government has neither the time nor extra funds to take action on the census findings, it will certainly come handy before the next government if it is serious about improving the country's healthcare service. However, critics have branded the initiative as a pre-Lok Sabha poll propaganda. It has come a bit too late - almost towards the end of the present term of the government. Yet, the exercise is most welcome considering the country's deteriorating healthcare service. The present system dumps a substantial portion of healthcare on private healthcare sharks' hands. It has encouraged a loot by profit-hungry private healthcare facilities and professionals, including private medical colleges and attached hospitals. Even some of the country's top private medical practitioners wish that the government paid much stronger attention to the public healthcare system to improve the situation. The government's latest National Health Protection Scheme (NHPS) is planned to be rolled out from August 15. The scheme would provide 10 crore families a free healthcare policy of Rs.5 lakh/annum. NITI Aayog has estimated an annual cost of the scheme at Rs10,000-12,000 crore (Rs1,000-1,200 per family). It is to be shared between the Centre and state governments at 60:40 ratio. Many analysts have, however, predicted the premium burden on the government to be roughly twice that. The scheme's actual cost could be known only after insurers are awarded contracts to run the scheme through competitive bidding. Leading private healthcare facilities have practically rejected the scheme, in its current form, as 'too meagre' and 'vague'. Most non-BJP states too have turned down 'Modicare,' as it is called. Now, it is to be seen how soon all states come on board and how the scheme actually works to benefit patients and their families, given the current urban-centric private healthcare service, mostly offering limited areas of treatment. Health is basically a state subject though it is in the joint list under the Constitution. In fact, states play a much greater role than the centre in terms of both healthcare and medical and para-medical education. Most non-BJP states question the political motive behind the 'Modicare' scheme, which will have to be 40 percent financed by them. West Bengal and Punjab are among the states which object to the behind-the-scheme political propagation, before the national election. States are required to sign MoUs with the centre to get this scheme implemented. West Bengal's 'Swasthya Sathi' scheme, launched by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in December, 2016 - well before 'Modicare' was announced in 2018 - offers basic health cover for secondary and tertiary care up to Rs.1.5 lakh per annum, which goes up to Rs.5 lakh for critical illnesses like cancer, neuro surgeries, cardiothoracic surgeries, liver diseases and blood disorders. Punjab also has its own version of a mass health insurance scheme. Punjab thinks 'Modicare' is impractical. The biggest objection is to a clause that makes it mandatory for states to pay for claims exceeding certain percentage of the premium. Indirectly, this means that state's liability is not limited to its share of premium amount but also extends to the claim outgo. Rates fixed for claims for treatment and hospitalisation are hardly acceptable to the insurers and health service providers, apart from state governments which would be required to bear excess costs. Insurance can't be a substitute for on-ground healthcare, for which there has to be enough availability of well-equipped hospitals and experienced doctors. The scheme is unlikely to be of any great help to citizens although a section of dishonest private hospitals and healthcare facilities may make some quick bucks without delivery commitments. In fact, healthcare and legal services are two areas where delivery is not guaranteed against expenditure, anyway. The two basic problems of India's healthcare system are: acute shortage of healthcare infrastructure and high private healthcare costs. There is a massive shortage of good government-aided healthcare facilities. The idea of having a mass health insurance scheme without enough number of hospitals, medical education facilities, well-trained doctors, nurses, paramedics, affordable medicines and implants is simply meaningless and, may, at best, fool the public. India currently spends only a little over one percent of its GDP on health, or around Rs. 1,100 in terms of per capita public expenditure. WHO's health financing profile for 2017 shows 67.78 percent of total expenditure on health in India was paid out of private pocket. The world average is 18.20 percent. An allopathic government doctor in India on an average serves a population of 11,082, which is more than 10 times the recommended doctor-population ratio of 1:1000, shows National Health Profile (NHP), 2018 - a comprehensive annual compilation of data on disease incidence, health infrastructure and health finance. Health insurance support to the public without expansion of healthcare infrastructure will only inflate treatment costs. Unless the government fast sorts out the problem of scarcity of public hospitals and doctors, Modicare may effectively become a burden on citizens. (IPA Service)

"In the investigation of a neurotic style of life, we must always suspect an opponent, and note who suffers most because of the patient's condition. Usually this is a member of the family."
--- Alfred Adler

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India- South Korea Accord

SOUTH Korean President Moon-Jae-in's first visit to India was significant in that it strengthens relations between the two countries. Moon had committed to do so in his presidential election campaign. Both countries are aware that the geographical importance of the Indo-Pacific region is increasing. Moon is at the moment vigorously pursuing a policy of reconciliation with North Korea with President Donald Trump of the US promoting it. China is increasing its assertiveness in the Pacific region which is to the detriment of the interest of India and South Korea. At the same time a US-China trade war has started throwing up new challenges in both diplomatic and economic fields. India and South Korea will do well to meet these challenges together. Moon's visit has gone a long way in bringing about fulfillment of this objective. India offers a particularly predictable business environment to South Korea and promises to be the biggest export destination for Seoul. China has lost this advantage in view of South Korea antagonising it by deploying the US missile shield, THAAD.

South Korea offers partnership to India in manufacturing, hi-tech industries and infrastructure development. China has stopped being a low cost manufacturing and hi-tech hub for it. It is also accused of stealing technical knowhow from other countries. This has given India an edge over China in relations with South Korea. In the past, India had abandoned the POSCO steel project offered by South Korea which should have been this country's largest FDI project. This time it should not miss any such opportunities. On Monday Prime Minister Modi and Moon inaugurated Samsung's largest mobile manufacturing factory in Noida, India which is envisaged to create over 1,000 more jobs. Samsung, the South Korean company had committed around Rs 5,000 crore of investment to add new capacity at the Noida plant, under the Uttar Pradesh government's Mega Policy a year ago. This deal will not only make Samsung's business relations with India strong, but also strengthen India's ties with South Korea, Prime Minister Modi had said. The PM also said that with the help of South Korean technological expertise and India's manufacturing power, the economies of the two countries will be empowered. The target is that of the total mobiles produced, 30 percent will be exported to other countries. This is a win- win situation for both countries.

TO THE EDITOR

KHADC shenanigans

Editor,
The CEM of Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC), P.N Syiem, is back in the news after a brief recess. In fact his name has been dominating the vernacular and English media for the last few weeks. Last year he has been in the news for a long time for a variety of reasons. Many were for the wrong reasons while few were for right ones. In fact a section of the society branded him as "the saviour of the Jaithynriew" and "a Hero" who dared to challenge the then strongman of Meghalaya, Dr. Mukul Sangma, the former Chief Minister.

Naturally, being a public representative and also the Chief Executive of an important institution, the KHADC, his name is bound to make news one way or the other. But during his tenure as CEM of the Council his name has been dragged into too many issues, most of them associated with a lot of unsavoury controversies. The good thing about him is that he has been and is very lively, active and a highly ambitious politician, though most of the time he is seen as an over-ambitious politician- CEM. It is high time that he clears all the doubts and aspersions cast on him by fellow MDCs. Surprisingly PN Syiem stepped down before emergent special session scheduled for Tuesday July 10. What does this indicate and why is Syiem hesitant about facing the heat? The public is tired of demands for his removal on several pretexts. Hence, the demand of the MDCs to immediately call a Session of the KHADC is justified to deliberate upon the various alleged omissions and commissions of the present CEM. Those MDCs and Executive members who are against this might have ulterior motives or otherwise. Certainly there

Need to Revive the Tradition of Khasi Nongbah

By Fabian Lyngdoh

The Shillong City we have today was not the traditional Capital (Nongbah) of the Khasis; it was not even the capital of the erstwhile Hima Shillong. It was the Capital of the British colonial administration, established only in 1864 when the British selected a beautiful forest area and made it the centre of their administration for the north eastern region of India. In the past, people from all over the Khasi and Jaintia Hills knew this British administrative centre not as Shillong, but as 'Laban'. Before the advent of the British rule, the society of the 'Hymniew Trep' people in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills was a sort of international order, composed of numerous independent political communities called, 'Raid' or 'Hima'. The 'Raid' was a territorial political community or city state, but the term 'Hima' stands for the voluntary federation of these independent city states. However, small Himas with single Raids were also territorial city states. Usually, the Khasis lived in the 'Nongbah' (Capital) of their own respective traditional city states, where fortresses in the form of natural stone formations and caves, enforced by deep and wide trenches were constructed to protect the inhabitants from possible enemies. Within the Nongbah or outside the Nongbah, a catchment area was consecrated as a sacred grove, to protect the water source and bio-resources of the community. A little away from the fortified Nongbah, the community graveyard was demarcated, where 'ki mawbah' (bone repositories) of respective clans were constructed. Numerous monoliths and dolmens were constructed for different purposes in the Nongbah and outside the Nongbah. Hence, in the past, all the Khasis were the inhabitants of well planned traditional cities, and they identified each other in the context of these city states, such as 'u Thaiang', 'u Nongtluh', 'u Nongkrem', 'u Mushai', 'u Myliem', 'u Jwai', 'u Mukhla', 'u Sohra', etc.

The traditional Khasi city states were not equal to the Greek city states in material civilisation, but they were self-sufficient in natural and cultural resources. The Khasi concept of God might be more logical than the logical Greeks. The ancient Greeks believed that their chief god, Zeus, led a war of the gods and married his sisters, and had sexual affairs with numerous lesser goddesses, nymphs and mortals. But for the Khasi, it is not logical for Almighty God to be under the control of Fate, and much less to be involved in the sexual affairs of men. Under the British rule, the organisation and autonomy of the Khasi traditional political communities have been dissolved and brought into one administrative entity called the 'Khasi and Jaintia Hills District' under the rule of the British Deputy Commissioner. When Shillong became the Nongbah of that new entity, the traditional capitals of the Raids and Himas were made redundant; people from all over the Khasi and Jaintia Hills began migrating to Shillong. A new conceptual division of people into 'ki nongsor' (urbanites) and 'ki nongkyndong' (rural folks) came into existence along with the establishment of Shillong. In the past, there could be 'kyntoits' (sections) of a Nongbah but there was no concept of 'nongkyndong' (peripheral settlements) in the traditional Khasi society. All the people were Nongbah dwellers, and all were equal. Hence, the concept of 'nongsor' and 'nongkyndong' as a conceptual social stratification is traditionally baseless.

Formerly, Shillong was not a particularly significant area in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. But today, it seems that people have begun to believe that it was established by the ancestors since time immemorial as the centre of Khasi tradition and culture. In reality, the Nongbah of all the 'Raids' and 'Himas' in Jaintia Hills, West Khasi Hills, as well as the Ri Bhoi area, were all at the same level of civilisation with the Nongbah of Hima Shillong at Nongkeh, or that of the Hima Sohra. The ancient sites in the Nongbah of the Raids in Ri Bhoi area such as, Iapngar, Thaiang, Nongtung, Nongpoh, Nongtluh, Nongkhrah, and all other Raids in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills had more or less been at the same level of civilisation. It is only the coming of the British that had made the difference. British settlement in Sohra and Shillong, and the emergence of literature in these areas seem to have created the idea of Khasi mainstream-culture as belonging to the people living in the Shillong plateau, and Khasi subaltern-cultures as belonging to the people of other Raids and Himas. The fact is that, the basic values and ideals are the same all through the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, but all the Raids and Himas had their own varied cultural practices, and one was not subordinate to the other. Hence, the present trend to interpret Khasi culture and history in terms of Western feudalistic models would be totally misleading.

By virtue of the tradition of being city dwellers in numerous Nongbah, we should have by now been experts in the art of municipal administration. But, in spite of the wisdom of the ancestors, today we are stuck up in the various muddy pools of British innovations, and we have not been able to improve on our own traditions. We have lost the tradition of equality and federalism, and we have also lost the tradition of living in well organised city states. Our ancestors had as many Capitals as there were the Raids and Himas, with equal level of civilisation and equal dignity. But today, we want only one urban centre in Shillong; and, that every modern facility should be within it. The new State Legislative Assembly building should have been built at Mawdiangdiang, or anywhere else a long time back. But since we have come to believe that the British are our de-facto ancestors, we feel that nothing of worth should be established out of our British legacy. The city of Shillong which the British established according to their own requirement has already become miserably congested and is becoming a big conglomeration of slums and ghettos, and a nightmarish thoroughfare.

Those among us who live and experience life only in Shillong might think that the Ri Khasi is only in Shillong, and that Shillong is the whole of Ri Khasi. But, Shillong is only a dot in the Ri Khasi. The problems of Shillong are not the problems of the entire Ri Khasi. The problems of Shillong become the problems of Ri Khasi only because following in the footsteps of the British, we want only Shillong to be the Nongbah of the whole Khasi tribe. In reality, Shillong is the Nongbah of the British colonial rule, and the Nongbah of Meghalaya today, but not the traditional Nongbah of the Khasi tribe. However, it depends on our choice. If we want that the joys of all blessings should be only in Shillong, we should also have to suffer the sorrow of all the curses; and if we want the benefit of all the good, we should also have to bear the disgust of all the filth. Let us understand that even if Shillong City goes down the drain, the Ri Khasi shall always remain.

But let us think over calmly. We have the tradition of living in numerous Nongbah (Capitals). So, if we insist on having only one Nongbah in Shillong, then all will flock to reside in it; and that has caused miserable congestion. Moreover, even those who do not reside in Shillong, would rush forward to save it, even with weapons of stones and sticks, if there is perception, (whether true or false), that it is in danger. It is here that we have the contemptuous remark; "Save the jaidhynriew at Motphran" because presently, Motphran is the only Capital that Khasis have.

So, for the betterment of all, we have to retrieve our own tradition. Let us establish modern urban centres as replicas of the Nongbah everywhere as in the past. Let all the District Head Quarters and other towns be made urban centres, where all modern facilities are available. Important health centres, educational and economic institutes should be established in all the other towns of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

SC allows live-stream of court-proceedings

Editor
This refers to Supreme Court bench headed by Chief Justice of India on July 9, 2018 expressing willingness for live streaming of its proceedings. But live telecast can be feasible only for few selected court-proceedings. The need is to provide some practical mechanism whereby recordings may be replayed in case of need. It may be recalled that Supreme Court had to issue contempt-notices on September 20, 2012 to two English dailies Pioneer and Indian Express allegedly for their having misreported court-proceedings. With court-rooms equipped with necessary wiring-slots for the purpose, Supreme Court should take immediate steps for compulsory audio-recording of proceedings in all court-rooms right from Supreme Court to trial-courts including High Courts. Such

audio-recordings may be available on annual subscription to those having subscribed for the same, soon after court-proceedings are over for the day. Provision of providing recording of daily proceedings of individual court-rooms may also be there on payment. This system will induce much-needed transparency, accountability and responsibility for all present in court-rooms also effectively checking corruption at different levels in judiciary. It is also observed that at times judges forget their verbal directions on the next date of hearing.

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

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.

Bank Mergers

Creating positive synergy?

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

The NDA Government's decision to merge State-run banks to reduce their losses appears so far to have been taken rightly. The merger of its five subsidiaries with the State Bank of India last year, creating a behemoth with assets of around \$37 trillion, has, helped strengthen the largest commercial bank. It goes without saying that mergers, as being contemplated, would strengthen banks and cut down flab and create positive synergies.

While there is growing speculation of Allahabad Bank being merged with Punjab National Bank, the Government is also toying with the idea of merging four State-run banks --Bank of Baroda, Oriental Bank of Commerce, Central Bank of India and IDBI Bank Ltd. The first merger is justified on the ground that while Allahabad Bank is strong in the eastern region, PNB is a leading bank in the northern region. If the other four State-run banks are merged they would have combined assets worth Rs 16.58 trillion and are expected to become a strong financial entity. The reasoning behind the Government's proposed mergers is not only influenced by the SBI example but that these will help State-run banks to reduce their bad loans and achieve economies of scale as also operational efficiency. However, some experts are not convinced and have differed on the possible benefits of the move. Former PNB Chairman K C Chakravorty, cautioned that merging inefficient banks may not necessarily help create all-round efficiency though productivity may increase a little.

On the other hand, the 2014 committee report of PJ Nayak, former Chairman and CEO, Axis Bank, and Former Country Head, Morgan Stanley India, which was constituted by the RBI, stated the Government has to work towards reducing its liability to recapitalise banks. It made a significant recommendation that either privatisation or consolidation was possibly the only way out. Further, it suggested a phased reform process that envisaged the Bank Boards' Bureau as the first step culminating in the creation of a Bank Investment Company, which holds all government stakes and thereby, governs the public sector banks.

Privatisation to a limited extent may be considered with management control, shared both by the government and the private partner. But apprehensions have been raised in granting majority share in the hands of private partner as it is doubtful whether, in such a situation, the priority lending parameters would be taken care of.

One cannot deny the fact that the Public Sector Undertaking banking sector is facing a critical situation and there is need to revive and make the banks viable entities. Most economists and bankers feel that merger is the first possible step in this direction though, however, there is much more to be done in professionalising the management.

There are experts who are of the opinion that RBI's involvement should be limited while these public sector banks need to embrace higher levels of professionalism and adopt more scientific techniques of decision making and due diligence checks. To start with, the boards of these banks, instead of being filled with Ministry representatives and officials, should have professionals with adequate industry experience. The industry perspective is very

important in taking a view of the bigger picture while evaluating project proposals and then taking credit decisions.

The point regarding granting more independence to banks has been discussed and debated by experts umpteen number of times. However, independence, in the true sense of the term, without interference by the political masters, may no doubt, be a welcome proposition, but is it achievable? The government will need to be tough and at the same time it is necessary to have strict monitoring, at the highest level, so that bankers do not fall into a trap of dishonest businessmen, which the country is now facing to deal with. In fact, granting of big loans needs to be decided and/or sanctioned at the highest levels and responsibility fixed thereof for non-payment.

As of now, it has been noticed that by and large small businessmen do not necessarily default in returning loans but it is the big corporates that do, on various accounts. Sometimes the money may be diverted to other businesses within the group for which the banks have to suffer. The growing demand that names of all big defaulters be made public has unfortunately not yet been carried out. It is high time this is done to check further defaulting forcing banks to burden themselves with the non performing assets.

Meanwhile, in the recently released RBI Financial Stability Report (FRS), it has been revealed that the gross non performing asset (GNPA) ratio has risen from 11.6 per cent in March this year from 1-0.2 per cent in September 2017. The ratio of NPAs advances registered a smaller increase during the period due to increase in provisioning, which has dented the bottom lines of several PSU banks.

However, there are expectations that initiatives such as Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) and norms for prompt resolution of bad loans augur well for financial stability despite short-term pain. This has been pointed out by RBI Deputy Governor Viral Acharya: "At such a juncture, the government's front-loaded recapitalisation programme for the beleaguered PSB's should impart robustness to the financial sector as a whole".

At the same time, there should be no reason why a section of society, particularly the privileged, should be allowed to corner valuable bank money and end up defaulting. Professionalism is the need of the day and a message must be sent that bank loans have to be returned even if it means selling the company's properties and other assets of the directors.

A turnaround may be possible within two years or so and this is what the Government should strive for. In fact, the FSR expressed confidence of coming out of the RBI's Prompt Corrective Action Framework by 2020, following a review by Parliament's Standing Committee on Finance.

The present stagnation in lending operations could be eased if some of the bad loans are recovered, for which all-out efforts are necessary. Moreover, a strict signal would need to be sent by the banks that public money cannot be squandered and if timely payment is not made, strict punishment shall be imposed on wilful defaulters. It goes without saying, faith in the banking system needs to be reposed and sooner the better. ---INFA

“ *Have you ever noticed some people are able to stay organized while getting a massive quantity of work accomplished, while others appear to be busy but never actually produce results? Time management is the key to becoming a successful entrepreneur.* ”

-- Clay Clark

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.331SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JULY 12, 2018

Poor prognosis for Meghalaya

IT is not shocking to learn that Meghalaya is the least favoured destination for doing business. There are wheels within wheels for those wishing to become entrepreneurs. Firstly the banks are averse to funding first generation entrepreneurs. Meghalaya is not an industrial state in the real sense and can do without smoke-stacked industries but for a long time the State has toyed with the idea of it becoming the Information Technology capital of the country. This is the perfect industry for Meghalaya as it is clean and smokeless and it has the potential to absorb many of the young IT professionals who are currently working outside the state. For reasons best known to the successive governments this idea has never taken shape perhaps because the license-permit raj is still alive and kicking in the State.

In the earlier MUA Government a single window clearance facility was created for quick vetting of projects and to ensure that the 'sarkari' delay is avoided. But did that happen? Industrialists, investors in the tourism sector and budding entrepreneurs still had to go from pillar to post and perhaps even grease some palms. Files did not move otherwise.

But what Meghalaya lacks most are venture capitalists who stake their money on a project they believe in. According to a report by the venture debt fund InnoVen Capital, deal activity by angel groups in India has grown significantly in 2016, amounting to Rs 113.7 crores across 69 deals, as compared to Rs 70.3 crores across 47 companies in 2015. This is a something to cheer about as the angel network which was absent four to five years ago is strengthening now. Several new investment avenues and platforms are opening up for entrepreneurs who need help to convert their ideas into businesses. Meghalaya has to build networks with High Net Individuals (HNI's), executives of Indian and Multi National Corporations (MNC's) and industrialists, including our own wealthy businessmen/women to come together to form angel groups. What is also hampering growth of businesses is the land tenure system which is tied up in knots and is nearly always transacted in a non-transparent manner. Industry and entrepreneurship both require land but that does not necessarily mean that land should be alienated. Partnerships ought to be built with tribal land owners on very clear terms. Only this will help create entrepreneurs and in turn generate employment.

TO THE EDITOR

Designated space for hawkers

Editor,

Many are of the opinion that the hawkers need to be given a space of their own where they can do business freely without any fear of eviction as well as without causing any inconvenience to others. One is also mindful of the fact that the people residing at Them Iew Mawlong must be relocated/rehabilitated as the place is not conducive for a healthy and hygienic living, besides, the area has become a cause of inconvenience for passers-by. Thereby, on reading the caption, "Demand for vendors' market in Sweepers' Line" in your news daily, I am glad that a possible spot may be taken into considering for hawkers to also station themselves and have a place of their own. On several occasions through this prestigious daily one had expressed the need for the government

to provide a space for the hawkers. As of today, hawkers are seen encroaching into footpaths, sidewalks and any open space. The discomfort arises when pedestrians can no longer use the footpaths freely. For example, the entry and exit gates at the Shillong Civil Hospital have a line of hawkers selling foodstuff making it impossible for pedestrians to use the footpath. This is the scenario everywhere. The pedestrians have no choice but to simply squeeze their way either by rubbing shoulders with vehicles or simply tip-toeing on sidewalks and pavements and face the risk of losing their step and falling over. Just as one is supportive of providing a common space for these vendors and hawkers so that they can do business without any kind of disturbance one is also advocating a congestion free and a hassle-free sidewalk and footpaths for pedestrians. It is gratifying that Thma U Rangli Juki (TUR

and the Meghalaya and Greater Shillong Progressive Hawkers and Street Vendors Association have come up with a suggestion to set up a vendors' market in Sweepers' Lane. The HLC and the government must take note of this because the menace of hawkers spreading their wares in just about any available space needs to be solved. This time if the hawkers are provided a market and a space of their own, the roads and footpaths can be free of congestion and can be used by one and all. However, in case the Government decides in favour of the hawkers, then it is also binding on them to chalk out rules and laws that hawkers must set up shop only in the market allocated to them and that in future no hawker would be allowed to set up shop in any open space, footpaths and sidewalks by jeopardising the welfare of pedestrians. Would affirming that the hawkers are not an eyesore but many would agree that they are certainly cause inconvenience to all when they spread their

goods everywhere without any qualms and thereby make movement cumbersome for people as well hampering the smooth flow of vehicles.

Yours etc.,
Jenniefar Dkhar,
Via email

World Population Day

Editor,

World Population Day is observed on July 11 every year. It is about time we acknowledged the fact that population is a resource and not a liability. It is a popular misconception that population has crossed the optimum limit in India and therefore population control is the only way to achieve economic and human development. To know how densely a country is populated, we must study the figure of population density and not just the number of people. Population density is calculated

by dividing the population by the area.

According to 2011 census, the population density of India is 382 per square kilometre but it is as high as 488 per square kilometre in the Netherlands. Now, if we compare the Human Development Index ranking of these two countries, we will see that India is stuck at the HDI rank of 131st but the Netherlands is at the enviable 7th position. While we have achieved only 74.4 per cent of literacy, the Netherlands has got 99 per cent. There is also big difference in life expectancy between these two countries as India's life expectancy stands at 64.7 years whereas it is 80.2 in the Netherlands.

We must remember that population is a human resource so it is an asset and not a liability. As a matter of fact, China's huge population (1,349,585,838) is one of the reasons for its astounding economic success whereas very thin population makes it difficult for countries like Sierra Leon (5,612,685) to move upwards

entrepreneur. An entrepreneur is someone who sees a problem and finds innovative solution(s) to those problems and takes action to monetize the innovation. As a result they create jobs; they generate revenue; they boost the economy and ease the burden of all the stakeholders. I believe entrepreneurs are the change agents of society.

Why is entrepreneurship important in our state? It is a known fact that many of our parents do not want their children to become entrepreneurs as it involves some degree of risk taking. They simply want us to get into the government sector or any high paying jobs outside the state. Let us also understand that with the increasing rate of population, graduates and unemployment there is very less chance of the youths getting into the government sector. Many of us don't want to leave our home state but the truth is that the government cannot provide jobs to each and everyone in the state. We have to accept the reality and if we continue to force our youths to join the government sector it will eventually force many of them to take unwanted measures or unfair means to get become government employees.

Let's discuss why entrepreneurship is important. As I've mentioned above, entrepreneurs are the change agents in society. They are the ones who can provide jobs and solutions to the pain points in the society. Let me also tell you one hard fact and that is that entrepreneurship is a calling. Not all are called to this profession. Now if one person answers to that call, he will provide approximately 50-100 jobs in the state. And if at least 100 people answer the call they will provide approximately 2500-10000 jobs. And if the business is grows with time I am sure that the above predictions will also increase with time.

This is not a clarion call to budding entrepreneurs. This is a wake-up call for our government to start taking initiatives to boost the entrepreneurship ecosystem in the state.

(The writer is an aspiring entrepreneur)

from its abysmal 179 HDI rank.

Recently, the government of India has come out with a study that says two-thirds of food to feed 600 million poor Indians is lost. It is lost mainly because hungry millions do not have enough purchasing power to buy the same. Indeed, we have enough food to feed our people. But we fail to adopt labour intensive technology to create an employment bridge that can take the food to hungry mouths. As a result, while astronomical amount of food items are left to rot, 48.2 million children in India are facing hunger, malnutrition and stunted growth.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

Ghosts and Vultures wait in the wings

There is killing to be made in realty

By Sushil Kutty

So far no ghosts! But that's standard ghost-behaviour. The first "sightings" of ghosts in Charki-Dadri, where two aircraft fell after colliding midair, killing over 300, were reported nearly two-and-a-half months after the horrific mishap. The 'House of Horror' deaths are not even a week old. Also, the police are camped outside and cop-fear follows the "guilty" to the grave, and beyond! Superstition? There are laws against superstitious beliefs. But that doesn't stop the superstition machine in the human head. The police have also done nothing to stem the thought that ghosts are waiting in the wings. If, anything, the release of the "supernatural" contents of the 11 diaries have given wings for superstition not to take flight!

The gate to the house

In fact, the number '11' is an unnerving number in the locality. It plagues the Burari mind as much as it marked the 'family-11' that lived and died in the house. Don't be surprised if locals skip '11' when counting from 10 to 12. The number '11' will be a forever proscribed numeral in Burari. Even '1 and 1' stands condemned. But at least one set of '11' is losing some of its baleful meaning: The 11 water-pipes protruding from an outer wall, "gateways for the 11 souls to exit".

is locked but the house is open to the mind to remind! To the locals, what's "inside it" is a constant reminder. Locks can't keep ghosts in or out, can they? Not even double-locked and chained. The cops themselves are positioned a little away, at an angle out of sight of the gate with '11' iron rods. Nobody wants to count the odds.

In fact, the number '11' is an unnerving number in the locality. It plagues the Burari mind as much as it marked the 'family-11' that lived and died in the house. Don't be surprised if locals skip '11' when counting from 10 to 12. The number '11' will be a forever proscribed numeral in Burari. Even '1 and 1' stands condemned.

But at least one set of '11' is losing some of its baleful meaning: The 11 water-pipes protruding from an outer wall, "gateways for the 11 souls to exit". Friday, the police traced the mason who had set the pipes in the wall and he didn't give any sinister reason for them being there. Maybe, he is in cahoots with the bent and straight pipes, covering up for them!

You never know, everything about this case is out of this world, ominous. Could also be because the mason's daughter happened to be a 'Mata' who was "consulted" by 'Daddy Lalit Chundawat'. The police on July 6 questioned 'Geeta Mata' and more or less gave her a clean chit. Reason: Even Lalit was not impressed by her mystical powers. The 'Dongi Mata'!

That said the police are not finished with the case. They are going to undertake what's being

orchestrate a re-enactment of the murders/suicides, a parody of the horror genre. Luckily, for them, the police spotted them unloading their gear at the house gates - as if they had just bought the place and were about to move in - and sent them packing. Good riddance, too!

As if there was not enough entertainment for the ghosts! And, as if there was not enough superstition to muddle minds, Friday, there was talk of razing the building and constructing a temple in its place. When it comes to ghosts, leave it to the gods. Keep the temple gates locked, as all temple gates usually are, and let the gods and ghosts fight it out or come to a communion. Leave poor man alone and save number 11!

But not all men are riveted with 'ghosts.' Some see real estate. Among them relatives of the '11'. These people add 2 and 2 and see 4 & 5 and 6 & 7 in crores of rupees. The relatives are planning to return and do a ghost-buster 'havan'. So are the locals. The police are not allergic to a ghost-buster 'havan'. And the real-estate vultures, they are game for any 'havan', as long as there comes the time to make a killing!

Meanwhile, after the "shared psychosis" that drove the '11' to experiment with death, it is the turn of "fear psychosis." Several student-tenants have vamoosed. And a 21-year-old woman keeps the lights on at all hours and is afraid to bolt the washroom door "from inside". Her mother too is no 'Mrs. Fearless.' She "sees the faces" of the 11, "who keep staring at her."

Did somebody say, "So far no ghosts?" (IPA Service)

“Exaggerated sensitiveness is an expression of the feeling of inferiority.”
--- Alfred Adler

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.331 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 13, 2018

Cracks in NATO

THE NATO summit predictably began with US President Donald Trump launching a tirade against Germany, the most powerful member of the organisation in Europe. He said that a natural gas pipeline deal had left Germany totally controlled by and captive to Russia. He is due to meet Russian president Vladimir Putin shortly and did not see how he could support Germany against Russia. The western powers are critical of Russia's annexation of Crimea and grab for the Baltic Republics. Trump lobbed fresh complaints about delinquent defence pending by the allies. He made a special reference to Germany which was a rich country and should not spend only 2% of its GDP on defence. It may be recalled that former US President Barrack Obama had also made the same complaint but was more compromising. Trump suggested that NATO countries should commit to spending 4% of their GDP on defence which would be double the goal of 2% by 2024.

Donald Trump had a bitter exchange with NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. He repeatedly described Germany as captive to Russia. German Chancellor Angela Merkel pushed back insisting that Germany should be allowed to make its own decisions. She had experienced how her part of Germany was controlled by the Soviet Union. She was happy that the two Germanys were united in freedom as the Federal Republic of Germany. It had been anticipated for some time that President Trump would make a move to pull out of NATO. It is part of US policy of isolationism and its new found alliance with Putin's expansionist Russia. He has already waged a trade war against EU countries. Now comes his imminent break with NATO. All this augurs ill for the war on terrorism especially in Afghanistan and Syria. We are seeing a reorganization of world powers which could have long term impacts. Whether this will be reversed once Trump serves his time as the US President is a matter of conjecture.

LOOKING BACK

May 29, 1989

NSUI to enlist young voters

The National Students Union of India will soon start a mass mobilization programme to enlist young voters and strength panchayati raj institutin and the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana. NSUI joint secretary Brosad Harichandan told newsmen here that his organization had prepared an action plan to bring young voters in its told. They were in the process of setting up committees at the booth level following lowering of voting age to

eighteen years. He said the implementation of the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana was an important decision taken by the Congress(I) leadership. The scheme would benefit at least one member per family in rural areas and ensure that young people get a "fair deal". He said the NSUI had enough strength to take up the challenge of enthusing young people to participate in the task of nation building.

TO THE EDITOR

Rejoinder

Editor,
I am glad that my article, "Religion and Culture" (ST July 6, 2018) has generated a lot of critical reflections on the topic. At least my objective of creating awareness among our Khasi people regarding the dangerous developments in our country has been achieved. From many other verbal responses I have received, many of our people have been forewarned about Hindutva agenda. However, regarding the article of Sonie Kharduit "A reality check on the Caste paradox" (ST July 7, 2018), I feel obliged to correct the misleading concepts that the author has put forth lest the public be misguided.
First of all, it is to be kept in mind that the caste system has never been a religiously sanctioned social system in Christianity like it is in Hinduism. Jesus Christ has always upheld the equality and dignity of human persons. If Christians in parts of India practice caste system (as the author has rightly indicated), it is not because the Gospel teaches them to do so but because Hindu caste mentality has left a deep imprint in them (after all they were Hindus earlier). For that

matter, caste system is so deep rooted in the Indian sub-conscious that it looks impossible to get out of it. A distinction must be clearly made between the caste system practiced by Hindus and Christians of south India. The former practice it as a religious creed prescribed in their scriptures while the latter practice it out of social convenience or personal advantages and never as a religious creed. Why generalize Christians therefore with regard to the practice of caste system? There is no caste system among Christians in Europe or elsewhere. Another fallacy in the write-up is to blame Christianity for change in food habits or in dress code. First of all Christianity unlike Hinduism or Islam is not a religion that forbids the consumption of any type of food. So it is absolutely unreasonable to connect change in food habits with Christianity. The author should realize that what influences food habits and dress code is Hollywood or Bollywood cultures advocated by the media. So here again it is completely misleading to say that religion (Christianity) is responsible for change in culture (food

Sixth Schedule - Instrument Serving the Political Class

Beginning Monday, things will be back to normal, hopefully, and we will not be groggy- eyed after repeated late nights watching the World Cup Football. By then we would have known who is taking the CUP home. And that's when we will start getting to brass tacks about the goings-on in our backyards, because by then the football aficionados (influencers) too would have returned from Russia and get back to smelling the home brand of coffee or tea. And yes there is the election in Ranikor to look forward too. It looks like Ranikor is set to be the battle royale what with PN Syiem jumping into the fray. He has, after all, become persona-non-grata in the Khasi Hills District Council, after his unwillingness to answer how the amount of Rs 33 crore meant for development schemes has been used. Look at the irony here! When PN Syiem challenged the, "One Man, One Post," legislation (which I think to be a good practice because there is a definite conflict of interest in an MDC being also an MLA), initiated by former CM Mukul Sangma, a section of Syiem's cohorts likened him to Tirot Sing the Syiem of Hima Nongkhlaw, for defying Sangma. Some even called him "Nongpynim ka Jaidbynriew (saviour of the Khasi race). Now that Mukul Sangma is out of power and there is no enemy to challenge, PN Syiem has suddenly fallen from grace, having to resign as Chief Executive Member, KHADC. With the credentials that Syiem carried then like a badge of honour one would have thought that he would have easily retained the Mawsynram seat. But that is not what happened. The people of Mawsynram are not easily humoured by populist utterances and the media blitzkrieg their MLA was scoring. They wanted development and they wanted an MLA who would serve their interests - not his own ego. So they voted for change! And now that Syiem is planning to shift constituency, the people of Mawsynram must be thanking their stars.

Like everything else in Meghalaya, the Sixth Schedule too is an emotive issue. Seen as an instrument of empowering the tribals of Meghalaya when they were ruled by the non-tribal elite of Assam, Mr JJM Nichols Roy, a visionary, envisaged this important legislation to be a sheet anchor for the Khasi-Jaintia people of whom he was the

By Patricia Mukhim

spokesperson in the Constitution making body headed by Dr BR Ambedkar. Today politicians use the Sixth Schedule to counter some of the enlightened legislations in this country such as the centrally legislated Mines and Minerals Act. They want Meghalaya to be exempted from this Act because it is a Sixth Schedule State. Does 5the Sixth Schedule also sanction wanton destruction of the environment? The Central Act lays down specific directives on how mining is to be conducted without disturbing the fragile ecological balance that continues to provide clean air and water to the people of Meghalaya. But this has been systemically violated by those mining coal and limestone and also the powerful sand mining lobby which continues to destruct the river systems despite warnings from the Supreme Court.

If the state is rich in natural resources it also has the responsibility to ensure a sustainable form of mining (although sustainable and mining are incompatible). Individual ownership of mines does not give people the absolute right to "exploit" everything that is under the earth or above it that will cause permanent environmental damage and affect the next generation and those coming after them. It is the mandate of the District Councils as the custodians of usufruct rights over land, forests, rivers etc., to ensure that the environmental norms are followed. Instead the opposite is happening. The Sixth Schedule Rights are meant to be enjoyed by all and not by the affluent land owners only. In fact the District Councils are expected to stand with the marginalised and the oppressed among the tribals and to ensure that they get a fair price as land compensation when they cede those lands for road construction or other infrastructural development. The Councils are supposed to be the arbiters for the tribals and not to be selling off their rights to coal miners and to cement companies. Alas! That is what the Councils have done over decades.

Little wonder that many feel that the continued existence of the District Councils might endanger them even more than if they of the state, I am amazed at the way the Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC) is trying to conduct the Meghalaya Civil Service (MCS) exam. The notification was out in the month of July last year, but no proper date had been fixed since then. On July 6, last the MPSC through a press release announced that the examination will be held on August 4, 2018. But to give the candidate just one month's time about an important examination is unfair for all the serious and aspiring candidates. I will also substantiate my point here. Firstly, this exam requires a lot of effort as it is expected that the aspirants need to know everything from the Humanities papers and Mathematics, reasoning power etc. It's like being a Jack of all trades and master of none. Secondly, current affairs play a major role in this exam (judging from recent papers of the UPSC) so following the UPSC convention and style of setting the papers (as MPSC also has adopted the UPSC syllabus) one year of currents events have to be seriously dealt with. Hence, one has to have enough time to study

were not there. For, what is the source of income of the Councils? They collect cess from cut timber being exported through their jurisdiction without exercising their mandate to check such felling of trees at the cost of the environment. They continue to allocate more land for mining purposes; they collect huge amounts from granting trading licenses to non-tribals and for their renewals. The Trading by Non-Tribals Act of the Council clearly says that non-tribals are allowed to conduct trade in areas where the tribals do not yet have expertise. But is that happening? Is the tribal still a stranger to trade and commerce? Is it not true that trading is also hereditary with one generation of non-tribals handing down that trade to the next generation and the next generation? Are the Councils seized of this matter? Of course they are but if the income from granting trading licenses is what sustains them then there is a conflict of interests here. This is a self defeating agenda and I wonder why those who shout the loudest about saving this Jaidbynriew don't see through this ruse.

And then of course you have rabble rousers like PN Syiem who run the Council like a "Hima," where he is accountable to no one. Syiem believes he is making loads of sacrifice for his "people." But which 'people' really? This word "people" is an idiom that lends itself to all kinds of misinterpretation for there is really no "people" unless someone takes a call and does a referendum as to who stands for and with a particular issue and who will sign up for a particular agenda. Anything short of that is a tall claim. And this goes for all the so-called NGOs and pressure groups who repeatedly claim that they stand for the "people" but are never really able to get those people to sign up for anything. Gradually PN Syiem is being exposed. He made the first mistake of issuing a threat to the ruling MDA Government that his MLAs (of which two out of the four are ministers) would pull out of the Government if the KHADC goes into tremors and he is removed. Syiem must be shocked that his MLAs are determined to stay put with the MDA Government. But what never fails to surprise me is the naivety of our people and their strange proclivity to turn heroes out

of ordinary men whose penchant is to garner power and wealth. For what is politics today? It is another job opportunity but it's a job that guarantees quick bucks. Once elected it becomes a continuous fight to remain in power by making regular investments every five years. Sometimes our simplistic mindset makes us believe that this or that political group will lead us out of darkness into light. People who themselves grope in darkness cannot be expected to lead us out of the encircling gloom. Am I sounding pessimistic? If I am, can anyone please show us what is there to be hopeful about?

The first yardstick to gauge the Government with, is its sincerity in what it claims to be doing for the public good. Take a look at the proposed Education Policy. Does it have among its members, school and college teachers who know exactly what ails the education system? Why on earth have a Vice Chancellor as a member when higher education in a central university is not even a state subject? Why are researchers and educationist from the North East Regional Institute of Education (NERIE) not on the Committee? The Vision itself is a hyperbole. It says, "To provide stimulating and equitable education of the highest quality that will foster innovation, transformation and facilitate inclusive growth and development in the State. To attain this vision and to contribute to the prosperity of the Nation, the education system will be qualitatively transformed to ensure all round development and prepare learners for the changing world by inculcating in them original thinking, creativity and problem solving."Firstly the Policy is statist; it is long on ideals but short on how to deliver those platitudes.

I was gratified to read an article by a young entrepreneur - Samran Sing Syiem who knows the strangle-hold that is choking entrepreneurship in Meghalaya when it could be a job-creating engine. Instead Governments are creating more civil sub divisions to create more government jobs. Sigh..Someone correctly observed that the more things change the more they remain the same.

Tharoor gives BJP 'Hindu India' Glee in getting ‘Hindu Pakistan’ on a platter

By Sushil Kutty

The "dominant religion" in the Congress is not 'Hinduism'. Cannot be Islam either. That leaves Christianity. And there are no symbols of that Abrahamic religion in the Congress. If at all the Congress is 'cross', it's with those who beat their 56" Hindutva chest and could in 2019, if they win the general elections one more time, turn India into a "Hindu Pakistan."

Hindu Pakistan! It is a warning. Congress MP Shashi Tharoor pulled it out from his farrago of warnings in Thiruvananthapuram, his parliamentary constituency. Tharoor cannot be faulted. He sees what we all see: a

streets would be the drunk and some of those worried about the drunk. Could be because Kerala is closer to the Equator than, say, Delhi and UP. Thiruvananthapuram is also relatively more conservative and Tharoor is a born-again liberal who has spent the better part of his adult life in the liberal corridors of the United Nations. He probably agrees with the Jordanian, who heads the United Nation's human rights body, that the Indian Army under Modi is "massacring Kashmiris". The new one (constitution) will be the one which enshrines principles of Hindu Rashtra, that will

Tharoor's stark warning sounds ominous: "If they (BJP) win a repeat of their current strength in the Lok Sabha, our democratic Constitution as we understand it will not survive as they will have all the elements they need to tear apart the Constitution of India and write a new one."

farrago of strange happenings, from cow vigilantes being felicitated by a Union minister to signs that the BJP could notch up another Lok Sabha win by consolidating the Hindu vote, which would be a disaster for India, where the dominant religion is not 'Hindu' but 'None of the Above' in the "Religion" column.

Tharoor's stark warning sounds ominous: "If they (BJP) win a repeat of their current strength in the Lok Sabha, our democratic Constitution as we understand it will not survive as they will have all the elements they need to tear apart the Constitution of India and write a new one."

The suave MP, who rattled once with "airlines have a cattle-class" clientele, is bothered that the BJP might notch enough numbers to get a majority in the Rajya Sabha and that will be Kaput! Lead to the formation of a 'Hindu

remove equality for minorities, that'll create a Hindu Pakistan and that isn't what Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad and great heroes of freedom struggle fought for," Tharoor said Wednesday. Thursday he doubled down with a Facebook post after his Wednesday comments went viral on Twitter. "I say it again....," he wrote on Mark Zuckerberg's contribution to Social Media. Now, Facebook is all agog. And Twitter thought it ruled! Tharoor's comments have roiled the BJP base, and the BJP has with alacrity grabbed the unasked for opportunity to press home the advantage given to it on a platter. The "Hindu nationalist party" has picked up Tharoor's gems to pick on the "Congress's inbred contempt for the Hindu". BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra has not stopped talking since 3pm

Tharoor's comments have roiled the BJP base, and the BJP has with alacrity grabbed the unasked for opportunity to press home the advantage given to it on a platter. The "Hindu nationalist party" has picked up Tharoor's gems to pick on the "Congress's inbred contempt for the Hindu".

Pakistan'. Pave the way for a nation much like Pakistan, "where minorities are not respected." Shashi Tharoor's warning is being attributed to Congress President Rahul Gandhi, who, it's being said, after trying "soft Hindutva" and failing to make a dent on the Hindutva vote-bank of the BJP, is now back to "pleasing the Congress base of secular and Muslim voters", and nobody in the realm can accuse the vast majority of Muslims of being secular! How folks in Thiruvananthapuram must have taken Tharoor's warning is debatable. Till a couple of decades ago, Kerala's capital, as opposed to Kerala's commercial hub Kochi, would go dark by 8pm and those on the

Wednesday, and he must have uttered the words "Hindu Pakistan" at least 3,000 times! "Stop this fear-mongering Rahul Gandhi, stop this Muslim appeasement Rahul Gandhi; stop denigrating the Hindu, Mr Rahul Gandhi, stop your diatribe against India, Mr Rahul Gandhi. Every time a Congress leader denigrates India and Hindus, the Congress says 'it is his personal view'. So, what is the Congress view on 'Hindu Pakistan', Mr Rahul Gandhi?" Patra said Thursday. "Congress Hates Hindus" is the new BJP election slogan and from the sound of it, compared to Modi's 2014 "Acche Din Aayenge", it is definitely far more potent. (IPA Service)

Taj Mahal at centre of ugly politics

Editor,
The recent direction of the Supreme Court to the Archeological Survey of India and the UP Govt. to either demolish the Taj

Mahal or restore its lost grandeur, shows the extreme lackadaisical manner in which the iconic 'Monument of Love' has been maintained by our administration. We have a penchant for creating controversy as to which community a particular Historical monument belongs to, but when it comes to their preservation or protection, they are treated as nobody's business! It is agonising to know that even the not so glamorous 'Eiffel Tower' in Paris is able to generate eighty million viewers per year, way ahead of Taj Mahal which generates only 2-4 million tourists per year. If we continue to remain indifferent towards preserving our heritage of enduring significance, then we should not be ashamed when outsiders call India the 'Land of Elephants and Snake Charmers'!

Yours etc.,
Sadiq Hussain Laskar, Guwahati.

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

“It is the patriotic duty of every man to lie for his country.”

--- Alfred Adler

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Dwindling forest cover of Meghalaya

THERE have been repeated incursions and felling of trees inside the Reserved Forests of Garo Hills, particularly East Garo Hills but the State Environment and Forest Department continues to live in denial of this daylight robbery of timber worth crores of rupees. Way back in 2012, Ranjit Singh Gill, Joint Director, Forest Survey of India (FSI) had sent a written complaint to the Director General, FSI about Meghalaya’s forest cover, based on the State Forest Report (SFR), 2009 filed by the Meghalaya Government. Gill’s contention was that the SFR did not mention the two Reserved Forests in Garo Hills which were ravaged due to illegal timber trade. Following his complaint, FSI sent a team of four officials to Meghalaya of which Gill was also a member.

The FSI team inspected Dibru Hills Reserve Forests and Holloidonga Beat in West Garo Hills district and discovered littered tree stumps of grounded trees. The FSI 2009 Report was based on satellite imagery. Gill had alleged that roughly 12 million cubic feet of timber worth several thousand crores of rupees was felled in the reserved forests of Garo Hills. The then Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), Meghalaya rubbished the allegations and derided the FSI survey report. He stated instead that it was the vegetation cover that was assessed and not forest cover. This is a case of semantics. The PCCF tried to explain away the illegal feeling of trees in the Reserve Forests by citing that the FSI report takes includes forests that are outside its ambit. Following Gill’s complaint the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) appointed by the Supreme Court directed the State Forest department to submit details of timber seized in the State between 2002-09 to the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). The State Forest department accordingly submitted the details to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). The PCCF diminished the gravity of the situation by stating that such seizure is a normal thing and that cutting of trees is a minor offence. He even went as far as saying that there is no forest in the entire world where illegalities do not occur (meaning that trees are regularly cut even under areas designated as Reserved Forests. With such an attitude, no wonder the Reserve Forests in Garo Hills have become easy prey for the timber lobby. Will the MDA Govt stop the plunder of forests?

TO THE EDITOR

Riposte to a rejoinder

Editor,

Apropos to the letter ‘Rejoinder’ (ST July 13, 2018) which was specifically meant for me and the subsequent stinging remarks at the end, I feel obliged to explore more on my stand. First of all the intention of my article was less of criticism and more of constructive debate allowing the readers to have a macroscopic view on the issue. Secondly, the essence of my article centred around two main points: 1) To expand the scope of understanding how religion influences culture in bigger ways than other factors and 2) How wrong we are to say one religion suits one community the best than others.

Nowhere throughout my article did I mention that Christianity was the source of the caste system, but one fact is true, caste became part of Christianity in our country because the converts could not escape the age-old social stratification. My arguments revolve around this fact and I just highlighted the reality about how Christianity has failed and has done little to remove this erroneous practice. Both caste and class division goes against the ethos of Christianity i.e., equality and dignity, then why on earth does the silence persist?

The materialistic projection of religious affiliations might sound odd to the writer, but this is the reality. Any person exposed to the brutality of poverty, hunger, sickness etc., will be ready to trade his faith in return for an honourable life. The ease of conversion and reconversion in rural pockets with least developmental indicators is a reflections of this fact, because their religious affiliation becomes the qualifying factor for benefits. The admission procedure to missionary run schools in our state as highlighted by Hasting Shangdiar is very strong argument. In fact there are several points raised by him which sound convincing and to which I wish Mawrie could respond. So how can we ignore the materialistic angle in a country where two-thirds of the population consists of rural poor households!

The food and dress debate too is no rocket science to understand. Christianity has an inherent western outlook so how can we separate clothing from it. Even colours have different meanings for different religions. For some white means purity and the beginning of marital bondage while for others it symbolises widowhood. Having no restriction on food habits in itself

becomes a norm or standard which sets Christianity apart from others.

Finally, on the remarks about my ignorance on the theological aspects, indeed I agree 100%. As laypersons we tend to practice what we understand and believe. The technicality of the subjects is meant for the domain experts. But the world is in turmoil simply because people as propagated by their leaders are busy dissecting and cementing their religious affiliation barriers and showcasing the theological prowess of one over the others only to forget to practice the simple art called HUMANISM. As the Holy Mother Teresa said, “If you spend your time judging people, you have no time to love them.” This indeed is the answer to everything.

Yours etc.,
Sonic Kharduit,
Viaemail

‘Of religious arrogance’

Editor,

This has reference to the rejoinder published in the ST on July 13, 2018, by Barnes Mawrie, SDB in reference to an article by Sonic Kharduit – A Reality Check on the Caste Paradox (July 12, 2018). It is distressing to see people attacking other religions on this space and this displays

an infantile attitude of "mine is better than yours" that does not suit adults far less members of religious orders.

As far as my awareness goes, priests of any religion are not privileged to have the benefit of a comprehensive course in comparative religion. As such their knowledge of other religions is limited. So while it may be alright to comment on their own religion, their comments on other religions are mostly a result of prejudice. In attacking other religions they end up becoming anti-religious because the basic tenet of all religions is love and universal brotherhood. Though there are passages in every religious text which can be held up to attack a religion, such attacks defeat the very purpose of religious practice, especially for those who don the robes of priesthood. Realities such as slavery and caste hood have existed across the globe and have often been upheld by ignorant proponents of their faith at one time or the other.

Though there are many books on comparative religion perhaps they can begin their appreciation of other religions by reading a very basic text, "The Religions of Man", by Huston Smith who was a Professor of Philosophy at the renowned Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Yours etc.,
Paramjit Bakshshi,
Viaemail

Revamp the Fire Service

Editor,

Every time a calamity occurs in the city or its outskirts the first emergency responders are the fire and ambulance services which at times go un-noticed and are often not appreciated. We have witnessed fire incidents in different parts of the city and also outskirts which raises an important question as to whether or not various agencies are aware of the NDRF guidelines and whether or not the disaster management systems are regularly fine-tuned to the changing emergency trends. The state government receives funds to augment and improve its emergency services from the Central Government but of late the fire service department is left to its own devices to render emergency services. Those in authority manning the Department seem to be in deep slumber and are unaware of the future security and emergency needs. This present NPP led-coalition government must start the process of creating or setting -up more fire service stations on a cluster model basis by increasing the number of personnel and equipping them with more modern emergency equipment's, better vehicles

and more importantly making the department more effective. This will go a long way in preparing for natural calamities like cyclones, earthquakes etc., which God forbid should not occur anytime soon.

Yours etc..
Dominic S.Wankhar
Shillong

NEHU delays results of 6th semester

Editor,

Graduating students under North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) are faced with a difficult position while applying for their further studies especially outside Shillong as institutions demand the mark sheets of the 6 semesters, but delay in declaring the results has put students in a dilemma as some institutions are declining admissions of students are unable to present their last semester mark sheet. NEHU is expected to keep this in mind and to declare the 6th semester results for the graduating students of 2018 at the earliest.

Yours etc.,
Queeneerich Km,
Viaemail

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Higher Education growth remains inhibited

By Lalit Sethi

Are too many rules, procedures and regulatory authorities inhibiting the growth of higher education through new universities, autonomous colleges and institutions of excellence, besides financial constraints? To create a new Central university, Parliament has to adopt a Bill; perhaps a State Assembly has to do the same for one in its boundaries.

A Higher Education Commission of India Bill 2018 has been in the public domain and a number of comments have been received, but the key features of the proposed law appear to have been taken for granted, neither commended nor doubted. The HECI Bill vests the power to create or establish a university in the proposed Commission through a set of “transparent criteria and thus eliminates the need for a law for this purpose”. But the Commission will replace the University Grants Commission, which, it is felt, is limited in its overall

based on a proposal by the Reliance Foundation to something to be established in a certain frame of time, it clarifies. Bravo! Better late than never or ever? Unique, indeed it is.

At the same time, a committee of experts has recommended provision of Rs. 1,000 crores to three special institutions and has selected a number of public and private institutions for recognition as those of eminence, but Jawaharlal Nehru University did not make it to the short list.

There has been some debate about setting up new minority or for that matter, “majority” institutions of excellence in the country. The proposed HECI may not have specifically taken a view on it, but apparently the Niti Ayog, which worked on the Bill, appears to be of the opinion that there has never been any problem with diverse groups going ahead with making their valuable contribution to education at all levels and they have over a 100 years or more been in

A specific question was recently brought up that Delhi’s St. Stephen’s College should be able to set up more colleges by the same name in different States. But the Students’ Association of the college rejected the move on the ground that if their nomenclature was freely used, even by the college authorities, they would be reduced to a private college and they would cease to be unique. The matter appears to rest there.

academic purposes because it has been reduced to granting funds for the proposed and existing universities and autonomous colleges.

Even so it is felt that an administrative apparatus, somewhat autonomous, for the release of funds will have to be established within the Ministry of Human Resource Development, especially for the Central Universities. But would the State Governments be left high and dry in the process and be asked to find their own resources for higher education, as at the school level? Would that be a disaster in the making?

Why does this question arise? Because the last Finance Commission allocated 42 per cent of the Divisible Pool of the resources of the Union to the States, believed to be 2 per cent more than it had been in the past to strengthen the process of the federal structure of the nation? Could this question now be left to the new Finance Commission? It is obvious that it cannot be so. Higher education is too grave a matter to be left out of Central responsibilities.

In a surprise move the HRD Ministry has selected the yet-to-be set-up Jio Institute of Reliance Foundation as an institution of eminence even though it is only on paper. Is the Ministry obligated by law to ascertain must establish that it has adequate infrastructure, outstanding faculty, credible research output and a position of prestige in the academic circles. A non-existent university receives top of the line selection out of the blue. The HRD Ministry has now clarified that the selection of eminence is conditional. Was it a wake-up call after Opposition criticism and rubbing of eyes to announce that it had only sent a letter of intent the lead to give a push to advanced learning.

A specific question was recently brought up that Delhi’s St. Stephen’s College should be able to set up more colleges by the same name in different States. But the Students’ Association of the college rejected the move on the ground that if their nomenclature was freely used, even by the college authorities, they would be reduced to a private college and they would cease to be unique. The matter appears to rest there. But Hindu College of Delhi has come up with a move to set up 12 colleges with its name used in different cities. That issue appears to have made no progress as the time does not appear to be ripe.

But in Telengana, the State Government appears to have informally expressed the view that there need be no bar to a dozen odd private or independent colleges and universities being set up. Perhaps it would wish to wait for the Higher Education Commission of India to come up after due legal and parliamentary process and let the new institutions be set up in the new framework.

What is the opinion of other States? It would appear that they would wish the HECI to be in place before they get on with the new structure to take shape. Every State appears to be preoccupied with a number of burning issues, including reduced sowing of seeds by farmers, in spite of floods in Mumbai and Kashmir Valley, besides violence and crime and misuse of the cyber space, which is disturbing law and order as well as cases of child lifting, women’s molestation and lynching of people.

(Lalit Sethi is a Journalist of long standing and a commentator on Political and Social Issues).

Fighting the purple haze



A scene from the film

Shilpi Gulati's long documentary narrates a story of real-life rehabs of people across Punjab, reports Shoma A Chatterji

Drug or alcohol addiction is a contentious problem to tackle in films, a reason why perhaps Bollywood does not deal with this subject much. A recent exception, however, has been Anurag Kashyap's *Udhta Punjab* but it added to the ongoing fireworks between Bollywood and Pehljai Nihalani, the then chairperson of the Central Board of Film Certification due to the many cuts suggested.

Shilpi Gulati, filmmaker and researcher, New Delhi, through her documentary *Lock and Key* looks at the subject of addiction among Punjab's youth in a positive light focusing on rehabilitation of addicts instead of just chronicling the horrible consequences of drug addiction.

Lock and Key (Taala Te Kunjee) explores how seemingly incurable addicts scattered around Punjab have not only returned to the mainstream but are also helping families recover from the rampant drug problem in the state. It is about relationships and everyday struggle to create a new life by the protagonists while their wives too strive to redefine the meaning of love after the frustration and victimisation.

The film happened at the invitation to Gulati by the Hermitage Rehab Home, Punjab, to collaborate on a film project. "I was born and brought up in Delhi and have no association with Punjab. As far as the film is concerned, I feel close to the subject because of the realities of addiction itself. It is a story of households- the physical and mental abuse every addict and his/her family goes through. In a way, I feel it's a universal story and not limited to Punjab alone," says Gulati.

It opens with 57-year-old Jasbir Singh during his exercise regime and his wife narrating the story of living with him through 13 years of multiple drug abuse. "He now spends his time in gardening and physical exercise regularly," says wife Amrit Singh Virk.

"The protagonists of the film are counsellors at the rehab and that is how I got access to their stories," Gulati says, adding, "The purpose of the film is not to look at the macro perspective of drug addiction in Punjab. We wanted to look at the problem of addiction within the intimate

walls of the household."

The protagonists from the film come from a specific background. This is precisely the point of the film — to focus on the dark realities of a certain landed class of the society.

The key to de-addiction lies in the counsellors being de-addicts themselves who speak from experience. Amandeep Pannu, 35, who was a drug addict for 10 years is now conducting regular meetings with addicts in different stages of de-addiction in at the centre.

When Gulati visited the Hermitage de-addiction centre two years ago, she had several conversations with the resident psychiatrist, JPS Bhatia. "Why 'Punjab' is a traumatic question," he says, explaining, "The people of Punjab went through a turmoil that disturbed them through two generations. People from beyond Punjab stepped in to settle down and many local youth were either labelled terrorists or became terrorists. Drugs smuggled from beyond Punjab turns them into addicts. The tragedy is that no one noticed this high rate of addiction until it took the form of an epidemic."

In fact, it was a discovery of sorts for Gulati to find that in-the-process-of- recovery addicts were drawing from their own experiences to counsel others. She found four family counsellors — Nitin Gupta, Aman Pannu, Jasbir Singh and Tejinder Walia. Each of them was in a different stages of recovery and offered a new way of looking at life. "This made me decide that instead of confining the film to a single person, it would become more meaningful to explore the various nuances of recovery through multiple experiences," she says.

Lock and Key was meant to be a short film, but instead extended into an 82-minute chronicle of lives lost and regained. "After a while I was certain that a short film won't do justice to the wide expanse of emotions that we were trying to capture, and that the non-fiction format would perhaps be right for the subject," Gulati explains.

During the course of her research, Gulati spent a lot of time at Hermitage with recovering addicts and their families. She met Gurpratap Singh (GPS) whose story of rehabilitation is amazing



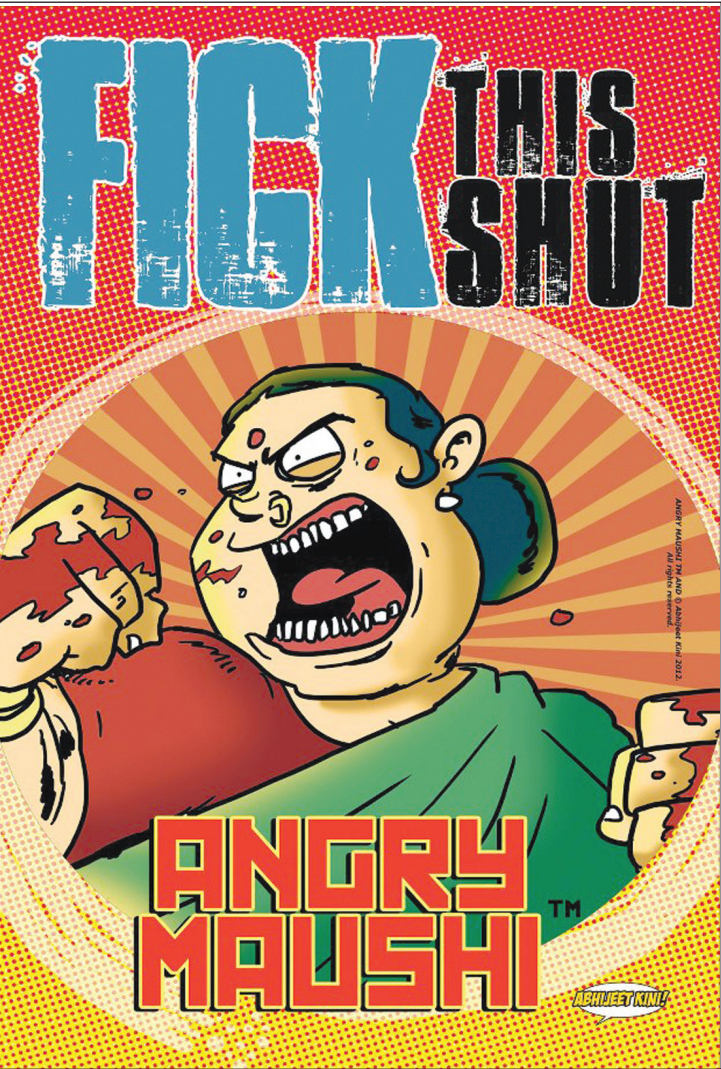
to say the least. The young man has become an inspiration and a mentor for several young boys at the rehab centre which the director found fascinating.

Responding to what made her steer away from a linear narrative of the addicts into rehab by visiting each at home again and again throughout the film, Gulati says, "There is a moment in the film when 63 years old Satpal Kaur shows us her wedding album from the year 1977. She points to her favourite photograph where she is a young bride with tears all over her face. For the longest time I wondered why she chose to point this image out to me. Tejinder Singh Walia, 63, her husband was an alcoholic for 27 years. She was disgusted with him because she had to run the family with three daughters and when he remained confined to his room for days, thought he had died.

"In fact, I couldn't reconcile with the fact that these extremely bold and confident women had chosen not to walk out of violent and abusive marriages. My ideas of feminism didn't have the vocabulary to understand women who, for whatever reason, decided to stay on. "Today, he doesn't miss a single meeting at the Hermitage. "Whatever we have lost, we have gained much more" Kaur says proudly.

Making the film made Gulati see the spirit of the women who can laugh while sharing stories of struggle. "It made me realise that it's because of them that their husbands are leading better lives. In that way, these are ordinary women with extraordinary courage. For me, more than the recovering addicts, Taala Te Kunjee is about the wives."

Gulati's body of work largely engages with themes of gender, performance and oral traditions in India. Her last documentary 'Qissa-e Parsi' (2014) won the National Award for the Best Ethnographic Film and her other works, 'Inside Out' (2010), 'Dere to Delhi' (2012) and 'Naach Bhikhari Naach' (2018) have been screened at various festivals in Asia, Europe and the US. Shilpi is a Fulbright scholar and is currently pursuing her PhD at Jawaharlal Nehru University. (TWF)



E-comics attract smart readers

By Nivedita

Comic books were once the best travel companions. And they remain so in today's digital world, with e-comics and web comics garnering popularity and reaching out to a wider audience — age no bar.

Sailesh Gopalan and Anurudho Chakraborty are among the artists who are giving comics a new meaning with their e-comics platforms Brown Paperbag and Chariot Comics, respectively.

What is e-comic reading and how it is different from other online reading platforms?

"In India, we need to distinguish between two things — web comics and e-comics. E-comics being regular comics that come out in print and are available on platforms like Kindle, Read-where, Comixology; and web comics being comics shared exclusively on the social/digital format, which may also find print runs later on.

"The latter obviously is doing great. E-comics, however, still have some way to go in terms of mass appeal, but I think with smartphone penetration levels

increasing — and, more importantly, the higher uptake of digital payments than a couple of years before — we should see an upward trend soon," Chakraborty told IANS.

ComiXology, an Amazon subsidiary, is a cloud-based digital comics service. With content from over 125 publishers as well as thousands of independent creators around the world, it provides a library of comic books and graphic novels.

Chakraborty says international platforms like ComiXology are gaining traction among local publishers and audiences alike, and even established brands like Raj Comics have forayed into the segment.

Comic Con India is one such initiative that brings Fandom Month every year. It is a four-week long digital initiative to reach out to fans and talk about comics, movies, TV, gaming and more.

Jatin Varma, founder, Comic Con India, says e-comics have picked up a lot.

"I think accessibility and even pricing makes e-comics popular. I personally still prefer the hard



copies, but I have to admit e-comics are convenient, especially if you wish to try out a series instead of committing to buy the entire collection," Varma said.

He said this segment is growing at a good pace and the future looks good as it makes the reading experience more interactive on a tablet or mobile.

"However, it is not necessarily a threat to print comics," he stressed.

For artists Zafar Khurshid and Anant Sagar, with Instagram and Facebook, it has become incred-

ibly easy to post comics on multiple platforms in one swoop.

"Print in general is fading. While India is just seeing the beginning of its modern comic age, print worldwide is waning. There's no doubt that the future is going to favour digital comics — especially as people get more and more accustomed to consuming content in this fashion. Having said that, there will also always be those of us who love to keep the physical alive," Khurshid, who owns Meta Desi Comics with Akshay Dhar, said.

Sagar, who writes and does art work for Khurshid and Dhar, says "e-comics aren't always like your normal comics".

"In most cases, they tend to be quick to read with comparatively simpler artwork as opposed to the detailed stuff we see in the likes of DC and Marvel. Artists don't necessarily need to conform to a particular style, which I feel lends to the frequency and speed regarding the volume that comes out," he said.

So how have the numbers of e-comic reading changed over the years?

"From personal experience,

I've been reading more of my comics online or I download digital (versions). I've started reading a lot of new stuff on websites, Instagram and assorted apps (like the one Marvel has). At conventions, a fair number of people ask us if we have digital versions. Even outside of conventions, I am asked if people can download our comics from somewhere," said Sagar.

However, Khurshid feels that since they are still small and relatively young at Meta Desi, their works' presence is still primarily based on a physical appearance at Comic Con India conventions.

Lastly, is the e-comic trend more apt for children or is it also finding clients among the older lot? "I think e-comics cater to all age groups who have access to the net and devices to download them on. Keeping in mind too much exposure to gadgets when it comes to kids, I think it would be safer to say the youth are the real clients," said Abhijeet Kinni, who has written strips of *Angry Maushi*, *Fanboys* and many others. (IANS)

Photo courtesy: Facebook, Google Images

There’s ample scope in corporate world

By Ranjan K Baruah

In the last edition we have published about training as career. In this edition we are publishing more information related to same. We talk more about soft skills when it comes to training, so we need to know little more about soft skills.

Soft skills are a combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, character traits, attitude, career attributes, social intelligence and emotional intelligence quotients among others that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals with complementing hard skills.

There are demands for trainers or one can get them associated with this professions. The scopes are with corporate, especially all those who deal with human resources or marketing like insurance companies. Most of the corporates also organise trainings for the employees. Trainers are more in demand in social organisations as they conduct capacity building programme with governments.

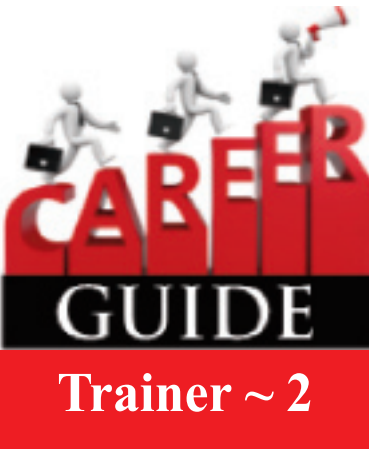
Some of the government departments like National Health Mission, Rashtriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan, Sarva Siksha Abhiyaan, Tourism Department, Social Welfare Department, conduct many training programmes for its staff for progress and efficiency.

There are many agencies of United Nations like United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) conducts training on regular basis related to their programme. There are many companies who are focusing on training and they provide services to their clients.

These companies need trainers on contract or freelance basis. There are advertisements seen in newspapers or other places regarding the requirements of good trainers. A good trainer could be a good motivator too who could motivate and inspire others.

There is demand for training professionals in Meghalaya and the North East apart from other places.

As we do not have many trained people so most of the times resource people are



invited from other parts of the country to impart training.

Young people who are interested to become trainers must be skilled enough in networking with different agencies.

One must brand him or her as a good trainer to get more assignment or regular basis. It is always advisable to aspirants to attend some training programme and learn the skills for their own professional growth. Aspirants may decide on whether they prefer to be a corporate trainer or trainer related to development fields. Skills needed are same but people who want to be trainers in social issues or related to development work should have more passion about it as it is not only to earn money but also contribute in social change.

Perspectives of different trainers may be different as corporate trainer would impart training for the growth of the staff who can contribute to more earning and productivity. On the other hand trainers who conduct programme for NGOs should keep in mind that they are focusing on social change.

Career as trainer is booming and our students may plan to become good trainer and contribute towards development.

Updates:

SIA Youth Scholarship in Singapore 2019: SIA Youth Scholarship in Singapore 2019 invites applications from students who have passed their Class X in 2018 and are willing to study at Pre-University 2-years studies in selected Singapore Junior Colleges in the year 2019. The scholarship is being offered by the Ministry of Education, Singapore, which is responsible for the formulation and implementation of education policies on education structure, curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. An applicant must -be a national of India, be born between 2000 and 2002, have passed class 10 in 2018, possess outstanding academic track record. Aspirants may apply on or before July 22.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, motivational speaker cum trainer and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkranjan@gmail.com)

Poster boy of Hindi tunes

By Shoma A Chatterji

Sudipta Chanda has amassed an amazing collection of around 1,000 film posters in his personal archive. He, along with his concern, The Dreamers Music PR agency, has curated a unique exhibition of film posters to celebrate the 80th birthday last month of late music director and composer RD Burman.

Born into a family of great musical talent, Rahul Dev Burman’s earliest memories of his childhood was to listen to his father and mother soaked in music. Father SD Burman, who was born in the royal family of Tripura, was steeped in music from a young age while his mother Mira was a wonderful singer.

From the 1960s to the 1990s, Burman composed musical scores for 331 films. He was active in Bollywood cinema as composer of infinite variety and dozens of innovations, fusions and creations of the strangest of objects used as musical instruments. He also lent his voice to some of his compositions such as the hit Mehbooba number in *Sholay*. His deep influence on the works and compositions of latter day music directors remains unabated till this day.

Chandra, a diehard fan of RD Burman, says, “From an assistant music director to his legendary father SD Burman to the top as a trendsetter, this music icon still walks tall among all music directors of the past, present or perhaps, also the future. This exhibition of posters is my humble tribute to him.”

“In spite of encountering many ups and downs in his life and career, he was one who never gave up and rose, like Phoenix, from the ashes with the beautiful compositions in Vidhu Vinod Chopra for *1942, A Love Story*. The songs of this last film of his are still on the top of the charts but he did not live to listen to his resurrection,” says Chanda.

RD was away from the music world because he suffered a massive heart attack and had to go to London for surgery. His comeback was marked by *1942 – A Love Story*.

The exhibition named after RD’s nickname Pancham, after the fifth note of the sargam, ran from 20th June to 30th June at the Abanindranath Art Gallery of the Indian Council of Cultural Research, Kolkata.

The exhibition boasted of the poster from the film which marked his debut as an independent music composer in *Chhoti Nawab* till his last film, *1942 – A Love Story*.

Atmaram Golatkar, a veteran publicity designer, once said, “Posters were designed to convey the theme of a film. These were aimed at pulling the audience to the theatres by generating curios-

ity about the film like the promos of television programmes in the present time. ”

“Till the 1980s, film posters did not qualify as an art form. They served as a brief promotional function for the film. Those were the days when colour photography was not common so poster painters used the Black-and-White film stills to hand-paint coloured posters on canvas which were then used as a template for printing posters through lithography,” he added.

The story goes that G Kamble, who was V Shantaram’s favourite poster artist, was com-



posters in terms of their differing sizes beginning with the traditional 20/30/40, two-sheet and even six-sheet posters.

These posters have historical value because in those days, film posters were painted and drawn manually by expert poster painters and lithography was the only technique available for printing posters.

Big budget film producers used to order several posters for the same film to offer a point of attraction for movie buffs. These posters manually drawn and painted with garish colours are a rarity these days and it is only for committed archivists and collectors like Sudipta Chanda to keep this history alive and moving.

Chanda had the foresight to create his own collection because he perhaps understood that poster painters would emerge as an art fraternity unto themselves which they did. They laid the foundation for hand-painted posters and the most famous among them were BR Bhosale, G Kamble, Diwakar, C Mohan and that one and only poster painter who acquired international fame – MF Hussain.

Some hilarious mistakes were also on show at the exhibition. One is the poster of *Do Chor* produced and directed by Raj Khosla and starring Dharmendra. Though RD composed the music for this film, the posters had the name of Laxmikant-Pyarelal!

On the other end is *Parwana*, one of the few films that featured Amitabh Bachchan as a psychopathic villain while Navin Nischol portrayed the hero. The music for this film was by Madan Mohan but the poster printed RD Burman’s name as the composer!

So, poster painters were sometimes also bitten by the painters’ devil! Another interesting poster on display is the Gujarati poster with the Gujarati title of the Rajesh Khanna-Tanuja starrer *Mere Je-evan Sahi*.

All posters and publicity material for Gulzar’s Aandhi disappeared when the film was temporarily banned due to political reasons. But Chanda managed to collect one original poster from this beautiful film for which RD had scored the most melodious, romantic and lyrical music.

Vintage Bollywood posters are displayed prominently at art festivals across the world and the demand for these posters as memorabilia, as historical object de art, as a collectible worthy of museum display is once again rising. Perhaps a show like Pancham Nama, the result of the dedicated and patient commitment of Sudipta Chanda, is a befitting tribute to the man whose music had triggered the imagination of India’s cinegoers sold of the dreams Bollywood films weave. (TWF)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JULY 15, 2018

Moon conjunct Mercury on your solar return chart shows a good year. You have put in a lot in your profession and it is ready to move on to the subsequent level. Not only will your efforts pay off but luck too favours you so be on the search for opportunities taking you closer to your aims. Financially you can discover long term savings tactics. Investments in assets are also on the anvil in this year. By and large it is a passive time at home. It's a good time to rebuild finances and professional network. A long term romantic relationship can come as a windfall. Travels will prove very relevant.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)



Excellent results on the professional front and personal growth are foretold. Those in sports, law and justice would benefit from the planetary alignment as they are infused with positive energy and gain recognition for their talents and hard work. You have more energy for work and your daily routines tend to speed up now. Perhaps you have a larger workload than usual. It might be hard for you to work with others in a harmonious manner during this phase, and disputes with co-workers are possible. This is a time during which you have to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions in your relationship with family and loved ones. You have to pay attention to your image and avoid conflicts and arguments. Strong chances for visit to religious places.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)



This period promises communication and intimacy with loved ones and family. You focus on having fun, enjoying romance, and expressing yourself creatively. Your attention turns to domestic matters most of the time and building, decoration and purchase of household assets for your home figures strongly now. Personal relationships are warm and comfortable as you spend a wonderful time with your family. Social, romantic, intellectual, and financial opportunities arise. Avoid indulging in any arguments and confrontations with senior colleagues and people in authority. A sudden job opportunity or money and property matters could be part of the financial gains. This can also produce an event that requires you to take charge and show your leadership skills. You feel fresh and re-energized after a long walk or light exercises.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)



You would attend to children, family and loved ones with devotion and care. You feel emotionally attached with loved ones and family members. It's time to expand your social circle and to make more contact with groups and friends. It's time to get in touch with exactly what pleasures and comforts you. Short romantic trips entertain you and you enjoy the company of your loved ones. Your efforts have paid off as you strike a balance with love and harmony at home. Attending an important social occasion or festival may put you in the public eye as well. You are ready to perform and express yourself creatively and you would interact with people in business and this brings good results and monetary gains. This is a very significant time, when you are inspired creatively and emotionally. Avoid conflicts in the family as cooperation and harmony in relationships satisfies an instinctive need.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)



This period is good for communication, finances, family and investments related matters. You are most successfully performing tasks that involve cooperation and team harmony with people around you. Creative self-expression of any kind is favored. You instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others. Take advantage of the magnetic energy by surrounding yourself with people. Your career matters come to the fore. Feeling secure and comfortable on the job is important to you now and you try to stick to the work schedule to complete the work in hand. You are coming across as especially smooth, and your good nature is bound to attract some attention. Take care of your health and adopt a regular routine of healthy eating and have fruits and vegetables to avoid stomach ailments.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)



This period brings cooperation and harmony in relationships with people around you. This is an excellent time under which to work on resolving differences in values or problems with joint finances in a close relationship. Your desire for adventure, higher learning, and travel is enhanced. Showing your authority and taking charge on important issues is important now, and you handle it successfully. Feeling secure and comfortable on the job is important to you now. You might spend a lot of time in making long conversations, short frequent trips, meeting friends and loved ones. You regain health and energy after overcoming a physical problem. You enjoy doing things with others at work and home, as synergy and cooperation are available to you now.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)



This is going to be an adventurous phase for you. You take more pride in your creations, love affair, children, and hobbies. Pleasure and amusement play an important role in your search for freedom of self-expression now. An overseas trip brings new opportunities and chances are you may find yourself in a new atmosphere or a new environment. You take overseas projects in hand and enhance your funds. Cooperation and a focus on

harmony and understanding benefits you professionally and enhances your reputation and public standing. You exhibit individualism and brilliance in handling business ventures and collaborations. You need to drop comparison and rivalry in personal relations and competition in professional aspects as they lead to a feeling in inadequacy and stress. You may feel restless at times; eat healthy food additionally yoga and meditation are recommended.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)



This period brings joy, understanding and harmony in personal and professional relationships. It's a good time to travel, learn and do things you normally don't do. It is a favorable time for your own creations, ideas and for you to apply them in your profession. You may also display more responsibility towards your profession and you positively use your talents with confidence. Financial gains are stronger than any other time. It's a time of creativity, drama, and passion. You are more communicative and busy than usual. This is a great time to present your ideas and to improve your communication skills as you would be in association with younger and talented people and this boosts your confidence level too. Remember, domestic relations cannot be resolved through discussion and analysis but through love, acceptance and freedom. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities or a structured exercise routine.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



There is a pleasant atmosphere at work and you enjoy the company of your loved ones. You express yourself with charm and grace, whether it's through what you say or what you write. Creative self-expression of any kind is favored this week. You instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others. You might particularly enjoy discussions with your loved one. In fact, it's a great time to open up conversations with loved ones, as you are more rational when it comes to personal matters now. Your mind often wanders to domestic concerns, and issues surrounding your home, family, and personal life. Domestic relationships and the home environment tend to be harmonious and peaceful this week. You turn your attention to fitness and diet programs.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)



There will be favorable results in domestic and professional life during this period. You might spend time in short frequent trips, communicating and visiting religious places. Your beloved would be supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. Change your priorities and support your spouse with love and affection and make her/him comfortable and secure. This is the best time to use your technical skills as this promotes your business and career prospects. There are strong chances of relocation and a few more responsibilities at work place. There may be a development of romance at your work place. Your style of communication boosts your personality.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



The planetary configuration will improve your professional prospects as you communicate cleverly and interact in a more positive way with people around. Your romantic affair and pleasure-seeking activities gives you a big boost of confidence, and your personal magnetism runs high to be admired and adored. You express true feelings, ideas and plans without being afraid of consequences. You enjoy every moment, whatever it brings and follow your truth and intuition. Married people should take care of family members as the health of a family member may suffer. You tend to get mentally stressed and anxious causing health problems, detach yourself from problems and view them from a different perspective. Meditation and prayer would help you to overcome the recently generated problems.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



This phase brings good luck and appreciations in family, business and love and romance. You would be attracted and impressed by intellectual people. Public relations work, promotion, and other such endeavors are favored now. It is more about how you express yourself than the specifics of what you are saying that helps sway others to your position. This is an excellent time to do some financial planning and strategizing. It's also easier for you to approach sensitive, intimate, and personal matters with rationality and logic. As such, this is a great time to open up conversations about topics such as those revolving around the sharing of power, intimacy, and finances. Give yourself a new fitness routine and healthy diet program to rejuvenate energy.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



People notice and admire you for your pleasant and cheerful personality and this brings financial growth. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for this placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits. Problems in your life may be overcome by bravery, self-assertion, and directness. People in law, justice and related fields will have a great time as they use their talents and skills to meet desired objectives. You will have the ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on cards. You have to be very careful and try to be friendly, cooperative and helpful to resolve issues related to your married life. You need to conserve energy to meet domestic responsibilities. Meditation and yoga would help.

Children need to be told about Tirot Sing

By Uma Purkayastha

It was July 17, 1835. U Tirot Sing, the freedom fighter in the north-east region, died in British custody in Dacca Jail at the age of around 42. No picture other than the death report is available regarding the great hero. Even his mortal body was not brought back to his motherland (the Khasi Hills).

Schoolchildren in Meghalaya enjoy July 17 as a holiday, naming ‘U Tirot Sing’s Day’, but most of them are ignorant of the actual significance of the day because the illustrious contribution of patriotism of the great hero is yet to be specifically included in their curriculum, which each and every student of Meghalaya in particular should know.

Tirot Sing, when in captivity was offered lucrative proposal of Kingship in lieu of allegiance to the British rulers, could roarily say ‘Better die an Independent King than reign as the Vassal’! Protection of sanctity and chastity of his motherland (the Khasi Hills) was the main issue of Tirot Sing’s rebellion against the British. Such a burning spirit of patriotism should be infused in the minds of children through their school lessons and cultural activities like drama, skits etc.

The inspiring patriotic life history of U Tirot Sing should be known by the schoolchildren and the youth of the country more keenly; and more researches should be made on the last days of the great patriot in prison and his subsequent tragic end.

Recently, Governor of Meghalaya Ganga Prasad, while addressing the commemoration of state’s martyrs at Raj Bhavan, very rightly expressed his opinion that the government should take initiatives to include life history of estate martyrs in school curriculum, and I strongly suggest that U Tirot Sing’s name should be placed as the pioneer of the martyrs in the Khasi Hills.

During 1824, when David Scott, an agent to the East India Company, a shrewd person, approached Tirot Sing, Syiem of Nongkhlaw, with the request of sickening permission for con-

structing a link road through the Khasi Hills for the British troops, Tirot with due consultation of his Durbar agreed to the proposal; but there were some conditions that the British Raj should not interfere in any internal affair of the state; and the British Raj should protect the hill estate from foreign enemies.

But within a very short period Tirot could read the evil motive of Scott who betrayed him in some very important matters of the state. Tirot Sing, united with other chiefs of the hills, was determined to drive out the white strangers from his motherland. On April 4, 1829, Tirot sent a band of Khasi warriors and declared war against Lt. Burlton at Nongkhlaw. Lt. Burlton and his soldiers fled towards the plains of Kamrup but were caught and killed by the Khasi warriors.

Tirot spent his last days in confinement and solitude. Nothing is known regarding the physical and mental condition of the leader in British custody

Thousands of young men and women joined Tirot Sing to fight against the foreign power. It was the first uprising against the British power, in the North East region of India, headed by Tirot Sing, which is known as ‘Nongkhlaw Massacre’ (Alexander Mackenzie memorandum 1869).

David Scott, the ring leader of the total betray who was in Cherrapunji, narrowly escaped, but Lt. Bendingfield and Dr H Beadon were brutally killed in that attack. The way Tirot Sing organised the movement and received the co-operation of all the Khasi Syiems and warriors, was highly appreciated by the observers. Tirot, himself could create a terror to the powerful British.

In the book ‘British Paramourty’ and ‘Indian Renaissance’, KM Mun-

shi appreciated the war-skill of Tirot Sing and his super guerilla tactics and compared his talents with that of the great Maratha King, Shivaji as the record reads — ‘Tirot Sing and his associates with a military force estimated to be 10,000 evaded the British, but occasionally swooped down upon the plains, causing alarm all over Assam. Once the panic was so great, even in Gauhati, the head quarters of the British, that large number of people including high officials kept boats ready to evacuate at a moment’s notice’. (Ref:- KM Munshi’s *British Paramouraty and Indian Renaissance*).

Scott observed the strong determination of Tirot Sing and his followers and devised the methods of ‘divide and rule’ by sowing seeds of distrusts among the top leaders of Tirot Sing.

Sing Manik, the chief of the Khyriem state offered his service to the British to negotiate between the Khasi and the British for some peaceful settlement. He arranged a meeting at Nongkhlaw on August 19, 1832; but Tirot declined to meet the British officer, if they were fully armed. It was decided that the parties should attend the meeting unarmed and accordingly the meeting was held on August 23, 1832.

On January 13, 1833, the great Tirot Sing surrendered very gracefully to the British officer Capt. Inglis at Lum Mardiang. In trial, Justice TC Robertson, pronounced the sentence of his life imprisonment, but the council of the supreme government, however revised the order and Tirot was sent to Dacca jail for detention.

When Tirot Sing arrived in Dacca, he was not allowed even any personal belonging except a blanket to cover his whole body. But Tirot bravely claimed royal treatment, from the British ruler and the British government had to treat him as a State prisoner. On July 17, 1835, Tirot Sing died at 1 pm in Dacca Jail under British custody.

Tirot spent his last days in confinement and solitude. Nothing is known so far regarding the physical and mental condition of the great leader in British custody. This untold chapter of the life of the great patriot is a mystery to his countrymen, till the day.

“Every therapeutic cure, and still more, any awkward attempt to show the patient the truth, tears him from the cradle of his freedom from responsibility and must therefore reckon with the most vehement resistance.”

--- Alfred Adler

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Bergman Centenary

THIS year is the birth centenary of the Swedish film Genius, Ingmar Bergman who made waves in India at a number of film festivals. He made over 60 films in five decades. He turned cinema into a philosophical inquiry into existential and fundamental questions. Seem and redemption where his central theme. Against a dark Scandinavian backdrop, he posed questions about god and Faith in his master pieces, The Seventh Seal, Wild Strawberries, Cries and Whispers and presented the star face of alienation in Silence. Other film makers watched but did not try to imitate the inimitable. He drew inspiration from play right August Strindberg. He drew on the talent of great actors like Liv Ullmann, Bibi Anderson, Max Von Sydow and cinematographer Sven Nykvist. His films were in the same league as the numerous novels by Russian novelists Fyodor Dostoevsky delving into the metaphysical conundrum of crime and punishment buchting the human condition and beyond that which would generate the suicidal intellection of an Albert Camus.

Bergman’s films came in the World War II. He did not deal directly with Fascism. But the sense of guilt the European tragedy left behind had its impact in The Seventh Seal. It shows a night playing a game of chase with death in a devastator ambiance following the Crusades. It is an allusion to the post – Hitler moral waste land. Bergman emphasised the sensitive man’s inability to relate to the world and futility of communication in Silence. Cinema has come a long way since then what with the advent of technology and new themes reflecting the times we live in. However, sensitivity in film making is a dwindling art and most people look at the past to understand the present. Local film makers have now come up with themes that reflect the present social crises. It is however impossible to dwell too much in the past since the new generation of film goers looks for a certain kind of cinematic appeal which does not resonate with the movie buffs of the last century. Indeed there is a huge chasm in the cinematic aspirations between then and now. But that is how life is and cine-goers are adjusting.

ADCs : A Game of Snakes and Ladders

By H H Mohrmen

There is a general sense which is growing by the day that the Members of the District Councils have demeaned the Institution which they were elected to serve and are supposed to promote and strengthen. This is obvious from the fact that people are beginning to show signs of their being disinterested in the Autonomous District Councils and one would not be surprised if there is a decline in voter turnout in the next election to the ADCs, particularly amongst the youth. And for this unfortunate development the MDCs have no one but themselves!

The fact of the matter is that the ADCs are becoming mere institutions to accommodate the politicians who had failed to win the assembly election. In fact the ADCs are a springboard for politicians who aspire to become MLAs in the future. The question is what have they achieved in the last five years? Both the ADCs have only been able to bring out the two bills on the administration of the villages and this is also because the two districts were compelled to come with the Act by the Meghalaya High Court.

People should be concerned because these same MDCs, irrespective of their party affiliation or the constituency they represent, have treated the ADCs as a game and they switch their loyalties at the drop of a hat. The MDCs are in the Council for their own interests only. If that were not so, why is there a need to change the ECs in the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council and the Khasi Hills ADC when the election to the two Councils are due in seven or eight months time? What is the NPP which is engineering this change of EC, hoping to achieve within the short span of time?

The NPP’s interest is only to accommodate their party leaders in the top position of the Council and nothing else. And in Khasi hills, it has now put a master of all defectors (because he is the only politician who had been a member of almost all the political parties in the State) in the hot seat of the KHADC. This brings us to

the next important question and that is whether the National Parties have any business in the ADCs? In fact if a study is conducted to find out the cause of frequent change of Executive Committees in almost all the ADCs, one obvious finding will be that every time there is a move to change the EC, there is an invisible hand of the National Parties holding the threat and playing with the ADCs like the puppeteer does with his puppets.

P.N. Syiem too has to pay for his adventure in Ranikor when he tried to gather support for a consensus candidate to contest against Martin Danggo a former Congress legislator who resigned and will now contest on the NPP ticket. NPP leadership had calculated the damage that Syiem’s adventure or rather misadventure could do to the NPP candidate and decided to clip his wings at the earliest. The leadership in the NPP knows that if the other parties can arrive at a consensus then without any doubt Danggo will be defeated and it will be an embarrassment for the NPP which is leading the government in the State and which is also now; holding the reins of all the ADCs - the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia hills Autonomous District Council.

A divided opposition is an advantage for the NPP candidate, hence they want to ensure that many candidates contest the Ranikor by-election because like the old adage says – the more the merrier. The Congress too is holding its cards close to its chest because in the battle for a single largest party in the State Assembly, in Danggo’s resignation the party has lost one very important seat. In the last LA election the UDP candidate came a close second when Danggo won the seat as a Congress candidate. One option for the Congress is to play spoilsport for the UDP by acting like the proverbial dog in the manger and let the NPP win the seat. Or it can officially or unofficially

support the United Democratic Party candidate to help it win the Ranikor seat.

The Congress will have to decide which is more important; the NPP winning Ranikor and increasing the numbers of the party’s MLA in the Assembly or sacrifice its pride and help the UDP win the seat and Congress continues to remain the single largest party in the house, albeit a very thin majority. With regards to Ranikor the ball like they say is in the Congress court and if the party is anticipating a change of power in Delhi post the 2019 general election which will also directly influence the politics in the State, then it should play its card very carefully.

Congress’ only chance of coming to power again in Meghalaya post 2019 general election is a change of government in Delhi and the support of the regional parties in the state. Otherwise it will have to eat humble pie and remain in the opposition the entire five year term. P.N. Syiem’s move will also be important if he wants to checkmate the NPP which had betrayed him by removing him unceremoniously from the office of the Chief Executive Member of the KHADC at a very critical juncture when the Council is due to go to the polls soon.

Now it will also be interesting to see how the drama in Syiem’s new party will unfold. Will he demand that his MLAs withdraw support to the NPP led government? Or maybe he will not because he already anticipated the outcome - which is that the MLAs will not resign and he wants to save himself the embarrassment that his colleague Ardent Basaiawmoit had to face. P.N. Syiem is a politician who likes to fight many battles at a time; he would have been able to strengthen and do his party a service if he had spent his time and energy in preparing for the ensuing District Council elections to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills but instead he chose to indulge in the by-election which has cost him dearly.

The question that we need to ask is if in the whole five year term all that the two ADCs have achieved is to come up with the Village Administration Bill, then isn’t this a colossal waste of public money? They have not been able to come up with policies to protect our rivers, our hills, forest, our land and more importantly our culture; so where is the need to continue supporting these institutions? The voters are also to blame for the current scenario, because we are the ones who elected them and put them in the position they are in now. We are the ones who made them into some sort of demi-gods.

Now that there ios a move to amend the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution we can come up with few suggestions. The only solution to this chronic problem that the ADCs are facing is to support the idea mooted by John Kharshiing which is to make ADCs party-less institutions. And if that is not possible, then the Government come up with legislation that only regional parties can contest the election to the ADCs, because national parties have no business in the ADCs other than to destabilise their functions. If that is not possible then perhaps the last option is to join Mr Michael Syiem the former student leader who has spearheaded a move to do away with the ADCs altogether.

It is obvious that of late there is a growing disinterest in the function of the ADC amongst a large section of the young population in the state who have even questioned the relevance of the Institution. And if the MDCs continue to treat the ADCs like a game of snakes and ladders that they play in their smart phones then they have themselves to blame if there are an increasing number of youths who refuse to vote in the ensuing ADC elections and make the ADCs ultimately redundant.

Centre should pay heed to Supreme Court’s warning on Taj Mahal Both UP govt and ASI have failed to discharge responsibilities

By Harihar Swarup

The Supreme Court is rightly concerned over the “apathy” of the Centre and the U.P. government towards preserving the Taj Mahal. It gave an ultimatum to the government--- either restore the pristine beauty of the Taj or demolish it. The apex court has been monitoring preservation of the world heritage site for 31 years and has passed a slew of orders from time to time for preservation of the monument. But the court’s efforts seem to be futile with the Taj being damaged by rising pollution level. The monument is becoming green and blue in patches which is attributed to rising pollution and poor maintenance.

As the Centre and the UP government failed to give a blue print to save the Taj, the highest court of the land, in a strong incitement of the two governments observed; “It is sheer apathy. You are absolutely not bothered about it”. The court told the Union Government—you can shut down the Taj. You can demolish it if you like and you can also do away with

"Crown of the Palace" is an ivory-white marble mausoleum on the south bank of the Yamuna river in Agra. It was commissioned in 1632 by the Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan (reigned from 1628 to 1658), to house the tomb of his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal. The tomb is the centre piece of a 17-hectare (42-acre) [5] complex, which includes a mosque and a guest house, and is set in formal gardens bounded on three sides by a crenellated wall.

Construction of the mausoleum was essentially completed in 1643 but work continued on other phases of the project for another 10 years. The Taj Mahal complex is believed to have been completed in its entirety in 1653 at a cost estimated at the time to be around 32 million rupees, which in 2015 would be approximately 52.8 billion rupees (U.S. \$827 million). The construction project employed some 20,000 artisans under the guidance of a board of architects led by the court architect to the emperor, Ustad Ahmad Lahauri.

The Taj Mahal was commissioned by Shah Jahan in 1631, to be built in the memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal, a Persian princess who died giving birth to their 14th child. Construction of the Taj Mahal began in 1632. The imperial court documenting Shah Jahan's grief after the death of Mumtaz Mahal illustrate the love story held as the inspiration for Taj Mahal. The principal mausoleum was completed in 1643 and the surrounding buildings and garden were finished about five years later.

it if you have already decided..... no plan or vision document has come yet. Either you demolish the Taj or restore it". The court decided to hear the case on day-to-day basis to bring the hearing to a logical conclusion for protection of monument.

The authorities were allowing expansion of Industrial units in the vicinity of Taj Mahal which could add to pollution. The court summoned the chairman of Taj Trapezium Zone and Commissioner of Agra to be present before it to explain why industrial units were coming up in the area in violation of its order.

The court had restrained the authorities from allowing establishment of polluting units and also barred cutting of any three without its permission in the Taj Trapezium Zone -- a 10,400 square km trapezium-shaped area covering the five districts of the Agra region. Drawing a parallel with Eiffel towers in Paris, the court observed that the tower remained preserved despite attracting eight times more tourist in comparison to Taj.

Noting that Archaeological Survey of India has failed to protect Tal Mahal, the court had earlier raised the question whether ASI could be divested of its task to manage the affairs of the monument. It had said that ASI was not properly discharging its duty in maintaining the beauty of the Taj and asked the Centre to consider whether some other organization be given the responsibility to protect and preserve the 17th century heritage.

The Taj Mahal, meaning

The Taj Mahal was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983 for being "the jewel of Muslim art in India and one of the universally admired masterpieces of the world's heritage". It is regarded by many as the best example of Mughal architecture and a symbol of India's rich history. The Taj Mahal attracts 7–8 million visitors a year. In 2007, it was declared a winner of the New 7 Wonders of the World (2000–2007) initiative.

The Taj Mahal was commissioned by Shah Jahan in 1631, to be built in the memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal, a Persian princess who died giving birth to their 14th child. Construction of the Taj Mahal began in 1632. The imperial court documenting Shah Jahan's grief after the death of Mumtaz Mahal illustrate the love story held as the inspiration for Taj Mahal. The principal mausoleum was completed in 1643 and the surrounding buildings and garden were finished about five years later.

The Taj Mahal was constructed using materials from all over India and Asia. It is believed over 1,000 elephants were used to transport building materials. The translucent white marble was brought from Makrana, Rajasthan, the jasper from Punjab, jade and crystal from China. The turquoise was from Tibet and the Lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, while the sapphire came from Sri Lanka and the carnelian from Arabia. In all, twenty-eight types of precious and semi-precious stones were inlaid into the white marble. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Further Response

Editor,
Reading through the response of Sonie Kharduit to my rejoinder, I feel obliged to provide a further response because silence in such a situation like this, could be taken negatively by the public. The writer by associating material benefits to religious affiliation, has indirectly accused Christianity of forced conversion. His reference to Christians being given preference in school or college admissions has raised another contentious issue which needs clarification. His statement that it is the poor people in rural areas who are attracted to Christianity because of material benefits they get, is totally unacceptable.
First of all, not all Christians are poor be it in the urban or rural areas. Why do so many rich families accept Christianity? Is it because they still need some material benefits? That is absurd. Secondly, the statement is also an insult to all poor people because it reduces them to “miserable beings without any degree of human dignity who would simply sell themselves to any religion for a morsel of bread.” The accusation is tantamount to saying that doing good to someone becomes an incentive for conversion. If such perception is accepted, then no good should be done

by anyone at all.
A Hindu or a Muslim or a Christian should not do good to any person or else that person would seek affiliation to any of these religions. Imagine if members of all religions cease doing good to others for fear of being accused of forced conversion, then who suffers if not humanity itself. Christianity is undoubtedly the most distinguished religion with regard to humanitarian service.
The Church has done tremendous service to our countrymen. How many millions have been educated in Christian institutions and how many millions more have benefitted from Christian health ministry etc. Yet think of this, 2000+ years of Christianity in India (since the arrival of Thomas the Apostle), yet today Christians are just a little more than 2% of the total population.
In 2000 years if forced conversion were to be carried out, as the writer implies, then 50% of Indians if not more, would be Christians by now. Is this not a real indication that there is no such a thing as forced conversion or inducement but that the Church does good primarily on human grounds? At the same time, when an adult person is touched by the love and concern of a missionary and seeks

affiliation to a religion, what right is there for others to prevent him from doing so? Does not our Constitution guarantee freedom of belief? Speaking of our Khasi people, Mr Kharduit should know that most Khasi people accept Christianity not because of material benefits but because of the great appeal Christianity has which in many ways corresponds to their traditional beliefs. Otherwise how do you explain the fact that Khasis did not respond similarly to the Ramakrishna missionaries who came here much before the Christian missionaries? Are they also not engaged in a lot of charitable services? Many Christians like me, would feel highly insulted to be told that we became Christians because of material gains.
As regard, preference of admission to Christian schools and colleges given to Christian students, I simply say “charity begins at home.” When two equally needy persons come to you for help and if one happens to be your family member, whom are you obliged to help first? I think this question is self explanatory and would justify why Christian institutions should first cater to the needy of their own family.
After all why should only Christians build quality educational institutions? Why not other religious

groups, so that they could also cater to their own followers? It is therefore unjust to be grudging about Christian students being given preference in Christian institutions. I will not be wrong to affirm that many non-Christians in India including many of our political leaders, have benefitted much from Christian educational institutions. So “why bite the hand that feeds you?”
Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie sdb,
Viaemail

Conundrum in education funding

Editor,
Torist Mark in his thought provoking column “Funding Non Government Educational Institutions” in Meghalaya (ST May 17, 2018) suggested out of the box reforms in respect of grants–in-aid for secondary education in Meghalaya.
It is true that the existing multi-layered system of grants –in-aid should progressively be reduced. We have age old multi-layered system of grants –in-aid, viz. Deficit, Adhoc, Deficit pattern, newly permitted, i.e. ventured schools, etc. At the same time the age old practice of upgrading established Adhoc Schools to the

Deficit System was pursued as legacy from undivided Assam. Of course, the term deficit is no longer valid as the Government provides the entire recurring grants for maintenance of approved teaching and non- teaching staff without sharing any revenue with the school management. There are 126 Deficit Schools in Meghalaya and some of them are almost centuries old and some of them are the backbone of secondary level education in the State.

All these institutions carry Government Sanctioned Posts and all appointments are required to be approved by the Government. Because of that many talented students are attracted to these Schools. It will be very difficult to bring all schools enjoying different types of grants-in –aid at the same level and to have one category of non-Government school. There are 384 Ad-hoc Secondary and 69 Higher Secondary Schools. Out of these there are some very established good Ad-hoc Schools, which deserve up gradation at the Deficit level . After 1986, there was complete moratorium in upgrading these old Ad-hoc schools except for a negligible number that got the benefit of deficit pattern under political pressure. All other Ad-hoc schools are treated as one category and salary of teachers enhanced from

time to time but it may be difficult to bring all schools to the level of deficit grants.

The quality and standards need to be enforced through an accreditation body rather than through micro management of the Government. This provision was there in Education Policy 2009. A separate body is required to be set up as it is there in the Higher Education for accreditation purpose.

When MBOSE announces SSLC/HSSLC results, it is shows how many schools got cent percent pass. This year, in SSLC examination 127 & HSSLC 40 schools got cent percent pass result. There is competition among schools to get cent percent achievement. In order to achieve the cent percent result, some schools detain students in selection test without considering that these students will ultimately drop out of the school system. If required these weak students should be screened at the Class VIII level.

Yours etc.
Dr. S.K.Chattopadhyay
Former Director
Education, Meghalaya.

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

“ *The political process does not end on Election Day. Young people need to stay involved in the process by continuing to pay attention to the conversation and holding their leaders accountable for the decisions they make.* ”

-- Patrick Murphy

The Shillong Times

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MDA – the inherent contradictions

COALITION politics is at best a marriage of convenience and at worst a nightmare. Satisfying the demands of coalition partners can often be a nightmare. The events playing out before the by-election to the Ranikor and South Tura assembly constituencies are bizarre. In Ranikor all three parties –the NPP, UDP, PDF who are part of the ruling coalition are fielding their own candidates. In Meghalaya the phrase “friendly fight” is common parlance. In the past too when regional parties have had pre-poll alliances they surprised all by setting up candidates in the same constituencies. Naturally the national political parties were able to win over the divided regional parties. In fact this is one reason why regional parties have not been able to successfully form a government in Meghalaya. Right from the inception of the State of Meghalaya, regional parties have had to depend on the Congress Party for support. That the regional parties refuse to learn any lessons from these fatal behavioural flaws is a sad commentary on their lack of political maturity and the political ego that disrupts regional party unity.

It was a bit of a surprise to learn that the UDP would even be putting up a candidate against Chief Minister Conrad Sangma from South Tura constituency. It is in fact a contradiction in terms since the wise elder of the UDP, namely its President and the present Speaker of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, Dr Donkupar Roy recently said that Conrad Sangma will win the South Tura seat. If so, why does the UDP not consolidate its votes in favour of Conrad Sangma and its coalition partner the NPP? Even if the UDP were to win the Ranikor seat or the South Tura seat they would still not be able to form a government without the NPP. The UDP with 7 MLAs now (if two more are added it would be only 9) would still not be able to call the shots and take the leadership position unless the Party is mooted the possibility of tying up with its old ally the Congress. And politics being the art of the possible nothing can be ruled out. We can only wait and watch.

TO THE EDITOR

Democratic engagement on health matters

Editor,
It seems that there is no end to the controversies surrounding the ambitious initiative of the Government of Meghalaya to set up two medical colleges in the state . The site initially selected for the construction at Garo Hills did not meet the mandatory requirements and a fresh site was chosen much later which caused delay . The construction of the other medical college at Shillong is delayed too since the shifting of the existing TB hospital at Jhalupara to make way for the construction of the college at the site is held up . As reported lately the almost completed TB hospital building at Umsawli is not as per the strict specifications required for a centre treating tuberculosis and that the number of beds is well below the intended requirement and all these will require necessary rectification which require additional funds and more time for completion .
Controversies and delays apart, the intention of the previous state government

to set up two medical colleges at a time, though impressive, seems superfluous. It is doubtful that a state with limited resources could sustain both medical colleges and make them viable enterprises in the long run .Secondly, there might be the difficulty of recruiting or retaining adequate quality faculty members throughout for both colleges - a situation which seems to occur even in well established government medical colleges in the country. Inadequate faculty members will affect the delivery standard.
The intention to establish a medical college in the heart of Shillong is also contentious. For a start it involves shifting of an existing TB hospital which by virtue of its history and long existence could instead be a heritage site with proper upkeep. The proposed college would also increase vehicle flow of visitors which will add to the city's traffic congestion while it can also strain the over-stretched civic amenities of the city. The limited space available may also hinder the college future expansion needs.
With controversies and

delays dogging the initiative and with the hovering apprehension of adverse consequences of it coming short of the expectations if accomplished there perhaps could be scope for review particularly if nothing specific to these college has happened on the ground so far. No doubt commitments or agreements must have been made in the process of establishing these colleges but it might not be the first time that government rescinds from such obligations if it chooses to do so and it could be worthwhile if viewed from the long term beneficial and productive results that could come with fresh and judiciously planned initiatives. The Umsawli building can be alternatively utilized for other ever demanding structures for health purposes.
Conversely, it would perhaps be pragmatic to get one college up and going first and if so decided all irrelevant considerations while choosing the site for the college are to be set aside. A favorable site is one where sufficient land is available and which is close to a highway, airport and railhead to facilitate flow of students, faculties or visiting experts from out-

side also and for facilitating flow of inputs for future construction and expansion needs. Subject to land availability a site close to Nongpoh will have these advantages and the existing Civil Hospital at Nongpoh would justify establishing of the medical college close by.
While it could be awkward for one to question the decision of those who govern us, however, the practice of democracy depends on greater use of informed public reasoning to play a vital role in the transformation of policies on issues of public importance. In this case “medical college “ relates to health and there is nothing more important than health for human well being and the quality of life. Therefore it perhaps calls for a more democratic engagements and calling out for opinions on the contentious issues of these proposed medical colleges and on other touchy matters related to health care services . Silence on these would instead contribute to health remaining a protracted problem for the State of Meghalaya.
Yours etc.,
K L Tariang,
Via email

What Ranikor has done!

By Albert Thyrniong

sembly Elections. This takes us to the next point.
The move of the Government on Ranikor has made other MLAs line up to demand for creation of more civil sub-divisions and other similar claims. Mawsynram, Mawlai, Umroi, Pathar-khmah and Rongjeng are in the queue. The Speaker of the Legislative Assembly went a step further to demand that Sohra and Mairang be upgraded to districts. In the meantime the GSU has lobbied for Dadenggre civil sub-division to be bifurcated from West Garo Hills District. The list will only multiply.
Following Danggo's example and the Ranikor logic the MLAs of the above constituencies are assured of their demand if they resign as MLAs and probably contest on the ruling party's flag. We will soon have by-elections in all the above constituencies after the new civil-sub-divisions and districted are inaugurated (pun intended). The MDA government will then be known as the 'Civil sub-division and district creating Government'.
Ranikor has created a rift between the NPP and the UDP. Upset about Danggo's resignation and his joining the NPP, the major coalition partner, UDP, on record, stated that it was never consulted. Its chief, Donkupar Roy, who happens to be the Speaker of the Legislature, was made to accept the resignation in Kolkata (that came through a messenger). He termed Danggo's switching party, 'legalised defection'. The party then lost no time in declaring the candidate against the de facto NPP candidate. The Khasi Hills regional party is also lobbying for Pius Marwein of the UDP as the common candidate of all 'anti-NPP' parties to ensure the defeat of the Ranikor strongman. The rift could be extended to South Tura as the Garo Hills UDP is keen to put up a challenger against Conrad Sangma, the very person the UDP installed as the Chief Minister in March last.
Speaking about South Tura by-election, it is obviously early days but it is safe to say that the Chief Minister and his supporters desire not just a win but a win by the biggest margin. Being at ground zero one

hears names doing the rounds, but the person who will affect the winning margin of the CM will be Billykid A Sangma, the runner-up in the last election. My primary sources have confirmed that the former Tura legislator has decided to opt out of election this time and extended his support to the CM.
Leaving South Tura aside for the time being, we return to Ranikor. Ranikor has also exposed the 'disunity' among the MDA coalition partners. All is not well within the alliance. After the UDP, the PDF's supremo, PN Syiem held a series of consultation to promote himself as the regional party consensus candidate. Finding few takers, his campaign for regional unity against the NPP in Ranikor hastened his downfall as Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC). The NPP MDCs withdrew support to him in the Council. He threatened that the four PDF MLAs would pull out of the MDA government. To his surprised he faced the same unwanted and embarrassing situation that Ardent Basaiawmoit did months ago. The PDF legislators defied him and pledged their support to the Chief Minister. To cut the story short, 17 MDCs rebelled against him and he had to 'cowardly' resign as CEM without facing the scheduled trial of strength at the emergent special session of the Council.
The drama in the KHADC will continue but let us answer the questions as to why UDP and PDF (and other regional parties) are making all out effort not to let Danggo have a free run. They are compelled to retain their congested and limited political space. They are worried they are losing ground in their own turf. Congress is not their only rivals. They must be concerned with the emergence of the NPP as the 'national' party that has further shrunk their space. It is now a question of survival and relevance.
In 2013 the UDP secured 225,676 votes with a 17.1% vote share and won 8 seats but in 2018 they had only 182,491 voters with 11.6% vote share that fetched them just 6 seats. The HSPDP who managed to get 55,049 voters with a vote share of 4.2% had 4 MLAs in 2013 while in 2018 though their voters marginally increased to 84,011 with the corresponding vote share

of 5.3% they actually won just 2 seats. The new entrant, People's Democratic Front (PDF) with 128,413 voters (8.2% vote share) and 4 seats ate into the votes of UDP and HSPDP besides the Congress, of course. But the worry for the regional party particularly in Khasi Hills (which obvious they don't openly acknowledge right now) is the NPP. From zero seat in 2013 they went up to 8 in 2018 in Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills. If they don't unitedly fight Ranikor the NPP will further dent their space. Therefore, from the regional parties' perspective it is understandable if political compulsion is preferred over government's stability.
I see also an unwritten trend. The present leadership of the regional parties do not command respect and reverence from their elected representatives. The HSPDP MLAs have already confirmed it when they defied the dictat of their boss, Ardent Basaiawmoit and joined the MDA government in February rendering his leadership untenable. The PDF MLAs too probably disregarded the threat of their Chief, PN Syiem to withdraw from the Conrad-led government by meeting the CM and pledging their support to him. That Basaiawmoit and Syiem lost their own elections did not help their cause. The UDP too may not be immune to its MLAs undermining the authority of their leadership. Except Donkupar Roy, the other most visible leaders of UDP too have lost election.
So the point is that even if Ranikor has exposed a crack between the NPP and the regional parties, the stability of the State Government does not seem to have affected. The MLAs of the regional parties prefer that the government stay rather than go. They prefer to remain ministers rather than ordinary legislators. Even if the difference with the NPP comes to a point when their leadership issue an ultimatum for them to withdraw from the government I get a guts feeling that they will defy that order. They could even defect to the NPP. Sound weird? Not music to the ears of the leaders of regional parties! Ranikor might well strengthen the NPP.

Alarming rise in drug peddling and drug use

By Salil Gewali

When desire overwhelms the logical mind, human beings take the path of least resistance. This subsequently goads a person to go down the slippery slope of bad habits. Sometimes such wrong steps can be brutal and cost lives. While high society is now blindly groping in the darkness of materialism, a section of misguided youths are longing for a “quick fix” and so they are doping themselves with a range of intoxicants. Drugs with various combinations and names have penetrated so deeply into our society that Government agencies and its police force are caught between the devil and the deep sea. With cutting edge technology at our command the menace has only acquired serious dimensions. Any unsuspecting corner could be the hotspot even while WhatsApp and mobile messengers are the faithful interface. They easily help pull off the dope deal anytime.
Here, I squarely blame the culture that advocates personal freedom for youngsters at an age when

less than 5 grams of drugs. This Act is being exploited to get the peddlers out of prison. Most of the hardcore peddlers, with the help of their lawyers peddle the stories of innocence too quickly and too easily. The addicted are caressed; hence a peddler pretends to be the addict!
Yes, with the increase in drug abuse and its adverse impact on society I would sincerely ask the law practitioners to throw ethics to the wind and put the soul up for sale! Many worried parents and also police officers have accounted how certain lawyers cleverly use the loopholes in the NDPS Act to save the cruel peddlers. Don't the lawyers know it is the narcotic peddlers who usually entice our unsuspecting children with doses of opium first and then push them into the pit of no-return? Do the lawyers have no grown-up children at home who might in a twist of fate be caught up by such peddlers to teach them this dangerous habit?
The Jhalupara OC, who burns the midnight oil in ar-

The Jhalupara OC, who burns the midnight oil in arresting a good number of peddlers in two months, rues - “all those drug dealers were released on bail in no time. Many have again got into the same trade/habit. This fact alone discourages us to hunt around for the peddlers on a war footing. Besides, we also have to go through lengthy procedures and papers formalities before arresting any peddler.” This is the ground really directly from the horse’s mouth.

they cannot distinguish between good and bad, decent from indecent and nectar from poison. Not just that, in the thick delusion of dope pleasure and its addiction, many have begun to see even their household members as their deadly enemies. The other day I read in the news that a father was beaten black and blue by his own son. The son, with his face masked did this only to snatch away the money which the father was carrying after drawing his monthly salary. Just look at the degree of desperation that drives the addicted to act so abnormally and with such cruelty. Procuring the addictive stuff is their only goal, no matter how; no matter what. There are countless mothers who are constantly tormented by drug-dependent adolescent children. An increasing number of petty thefts, muggings, burglaries, lootings and a host of violent attacks, which often disrupt the peace in the society, have usually to do with those who have fallen victims to narcotics. It's reported that in a span of one year there is about 30% rise in substance abuse in the state. The MLA of South Shillong Constituency, Sanbor Shullai in his informal meeting recently, lamented thus- “Unemployment is one of the main reasons for an upsurge in drug menace. The frustrated lot is quite prone to seek escape and take refuge in substances. I and many of my colleagues are very much disturbed by this development.” True, the saying -- ‘the devil makes work for idle hands’ should always make the government and parents extra alert.
In this aspect what intensely upsets our police fraternity is the NDPS act (Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances) that lets off the addict/seller with

resting a good number of peddlers in two months, rues - “all those drug dealers were released on bail in no time. Many have again got into the same trade/habit. This fact alone discourages us to hunt around for the peddlers on a war footing. Besides, we also have to go through lengthy procedures and papers formalities before arresting any peddler.” This is the ground really directly from the horse’s mouth. Why does the Government not consider relieving the police of the work of gathering evidence and of maintaining the tedious paper work? For that let there be a separate cell with narcotics experts. The police job should end immediately with the arrest of the culprit. This way we can achieve better results, else, the society will be further afflicted with the scourge.
A concerned headman of Upper Mawprem, Johnny Kharmawlong thoughtfully says, “Parents these days feel happy about buying expensive mobile phones for their children. Do they really care to know what other detrimental activities their grown-up children are accomplishing through those devices? As far as my knowledge goes sending drug-related messages is only one of the many vices.” The Secretary of “Upper Mawprem Welfare Taskforce”, Deepak Wahlang, who has repeatedly asked me to write about the rise of drug menace, says, “All should join hands to contain the menace. The parents should not be complacent after sending their children to college and tuition armed with cell phones.”Indeed, Wahlang is very correct that the parents must be extra watchful now than ever before. The vices now come and attack us through the digital format but we have as yet not devised any counter mechanism to fight back this menace.

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.

“ *Planting native species in our gardens and communities is increasingly important, because indigenous insects, birds and wildlife rely on them. Over thousands, and sometimes millions, of years they have co-evolved to live in local climate and soil conditions.*”

-- David Suzuki

The Shillong Times

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Our health at stake

THAT fish procured from Andhra Pradesh is laced with formalin was rumoured since long. But despite having a medical doctor as Chief Minister for nearly seven years and despite his strident criticism that fish coming from outside the state, especially from Andhra Pradesh is ‘denatured’ meaning that it is depleted of nutrients, not much was done by his Government to address the problem. Former Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma made this prescient statement when his Government launched the Aquaculture Mission in 2012. At the time it was said that fish farmers would be assisted through the Mission to grow fish locally as there is a huge market for fish in Meghalaya. The demand for fish per annum is 30,000 metric tonnes (MT), whereas production is only 8,000 MT. Hence there is a shortfall of 22,000 MT of fish which is imported majorly from Andhra Pradesh. It is learnt that over Rs 440 crore leaches out from the State treasury annually for import of fish.

While Dr Mukul Sangma had cautioned people against consuming denatured fish and publicly confessed that he and his family consumed only local fish, he never spoke about the dangers of fish preserved with formalin. Hence the unsuspecting people of Meghalaya have for decades been consuming fish along with formalin, a chemical which is usually injected into human corpses to preserve their bodies from rapid deterioration. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is part of the World Health Organization (WHO). Its major goal is to identify causes of cancer. IARC has concluded that formaldehyde (formalin) is "carcinogenic (can cause cancer) to humans" based on higher risks of nasopharyngeal cancer and leukemia.

The State Government appoints Food Inspectors who are expected to regularly check the food quality and standards in restaurants and the quality of meat, fish and other consumables sold in the markets. Hence the response by Health Minister, AL Hek, that fish coming from Andhra Pradesh has not been tested yet since there have been no complaints from the public, is troubling. Ensuring the health safety of citizens is the onus of the state. It is incumbent on the present Government to give us a clear indication whether we should continue to consume fish imported from Andhra Pradesh. Obviously there will be pressure on the Government from the fish vendors who make a roaring business by selling Andhra fish. But are the livelihoods of the fish vendors more important than the health of the citizens. The Government has to take a call.

TO THE EDITOR

On Misquotations!

Editor,
Apropos to the letter ‘further rejoinder’ (ST July 16, 2018) I just want to remind the writer to stop misinterpreting the subject of discussion. At no point was the subject of forced conversion explicitly or implicitly raised. Faith building process is not as easy as putting a gun on someone’s head and coercing or giving out goodies and pampering people to come to the faith. A belief system is a complex chain involving the value systems, attitudinal formation and behavioural outcomes. In a similar fashion how religious affiliations occur follows the same path. Faith cannot be bought or sold for a price. But my intention of highlighting the materialistic aspects from the poor man’s perspectives is the issue of sentimental obligation! If a poor man is showered with a kind gesture from another entity for a continuous period, it generates a guilt feeling which transforms into a moral obligation for the poor

to offer something back in return. When they possess nothing then their service and faith alignment becomes the last resort to subdue the guilt. Contribution of missionaries in health, education, skill sector etc., I clearly mentioned, from the beginning, but then extolling one’s good acts is to defeat the very meaning of charity.
To another point raised by the writer is that Christianity has been present in Indian soil 2000 years plus yet constituting only 2% of the total population, the answer for this 2% debate is our historical background rather the non-coerciveness of Christianity. The evils of colonialism that the British left behind and the multi-pronged exploitation is not a memory which will be erased any time soon. Our region did not directly feel the agony of the freedom struggle because it was not the centre of the struggle. In fact the region experienced only the rosy side of colonialism with the arrival of western missionaries. The same pain that peoples of

Indigenous food system: A bulwark against food insecurity

By Bhogtoram Mawroh and Lamphrang Diengdoh

important attribute of food security: “Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences in order to lead a healthy and active life” (Food and Agricultural Organisation). Indigenous food systems fulfil all the criteria mentioned, i.e., regularity, access and safety for creating a resolute and vibrant food secure community. NESFAS is therefore working closely with The Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (TIP) headed by Phrang Roy to form a global Indigenous Food Communities Alliance (IFCA).

In general food procurement constitutes over half of the disposable income of low income households. This leaves very little for fulfilling other consumption needs and savings for investments. This is circumvented when the community produces most of its own food, as in the case of Nongtraw. However, this keeps the community tied to farming which because of its subsistence nature does not bring great financial returns. As such, many in the local community supplement local food production with daily wage labour. As opportunities and markets for non-farm labour increases, this brings additional income but also reduces supply of farm labour. In this context, cash cropping becomes highly attractive. All these attractions point to a change in the political economy of the landscape, i.e., replacement of an economy of (if not total but partial) self-sufficiency by a market economy based on displacement of the importance of the local situation. Production is for the market (local and distant) rather than for the community with goods (including food) required by the community being purchased from the market. This system may sound rational but in fact it is not. The biggest danger of this change is the increasing vulnerability of the local population to market fluctuations which are an endemic feature of the global business cycle.
Between 2005 and 2011, world prices for rice, wheat, and maize rose 102 %, 115 %, and 204 % (FAO). This rise in prices led to food riots in different parts of the world, e.g., Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Egypt, Haiti, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Latin

America, Mexico, Mozambique, Pakistan, Senegal, Somalia, Yemen, and others. The market is the place where everything can be purchased at a price but this price is out of reach for the poor. With Meghalaya being categorised as one of the least developed states of the country, there are plenty of poor people in our own State. Many of them live in rural landscapes like Nongtraw. For now they have been buffered by the shocks of the market because of the resilience of their indigenous food production system. But what will happen when that is no longer the case?
Nongtraw does take part in market transactions (commodities including food items entering and leaving the village) as a result of which items like rice have become a staple diet for the community in place of locally grown sweet potato, yam and millet. The penetration of the market though has not become all-pervasive as to make the community totally dependent on it. People may face some hardship if the market fails but they will not go to bed hungry, a sad reality for the 194 million people in India.
At the beginning of his semester course on Geography, David Harvey, eminent social scientist, often asks his students where their last meal comes from. Tracing back all the items used in the production does not reveal “whether the food has been produced by happy labourers working in a co-operative in Italy, grossly exploited labourers working under conditions of apartheid in South Africa, or wage labourers protected by adequate labour and wage agreements in Sweden”. Not just labour relations but production process also remains hidden. In search of greater yield, tons of fertilizers and pesticides dumped in the fields not only kill the soil but poison the food as well. Such practises are not surprising considering profit is the only motive.
In contrast indigenous food systems focus not only on profit but also in safety and building a trusting relationship between the community members and the local weekly markets. The community in Nongtraw have vowed to never use chemicals in their fields. This commitment was reaffirmed when a visiting farmer from Himachal Pradesh (participant of recent All India Millet Sisters Network meeting organised by NEN at the Barapani ICAR Complex) told the community how use of chemicals resulted in a lot of people falling sick in his area. Indigenous food system, in contrast to industrial

farming, is based on the principles of communal good which goes beyond monetary gains.
Food is integral to indigenous rights because it represents control over the most basic requirement for decent life – affordable and safe food. When that is lost the indigenous people also lose a part of their sovereignty. Almost 70% of the food in the world is produced by small farmers, like those of Nongtraw. These small actors though are always forgotten. It happened during the Green Revolution and it is still happening now. India is a food-surplus country but still has nearly 20% of its population going hungry. Communities like Nongtraw stand as a bulwark against such a prospect for the State. The future for food security in the State will depend on whether communities like Nongtraw are forgotten again or they become the foundation on which the State designs its food production system.
“My grandfather used to say that once in your life you need a doctor, a lawyer, a policeman and a preacher but every day, three times a day, you need a farmer” (Brenda Schoepp, inspirational speaker).
About the authors:
Bhogtoram Mawroh is working as Senior Associate, Research and Knowledge Management NESFAS, Shillong.
Lamphrang Diengdoh is a resident of Nongtraw who is helping the NESFAS team in conducting the study on indigenous food systems.
(This research is part of an initiative on indigenous food systems led by Bioversity International and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in close collaboration with indigenous communities, the Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (TIP), Italy, the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD), France and the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Indonesia. This initiative creates a platform for indigenous communities to advocate for the importance of their food systems, supporting their recognition and protection. NESFAS is a partner for India. Ethical clearance of the methodology of the Study was given by MLCU for the Nongtraw site).

selective in her service then she would not have been the saint she is today. When two needy persons approach, charity demands the acceptance of both rather than differentiating family from a non-family member. Jesus’s sacrifice and death on the cross is a pure act of unconditional love, hence it’s a shame for all of us who fail to follow his path and are busy in this blame-game conundrum. This whole discussion would have been more productive if writers and readers start viewing and understanding the multi-dimensional aspects on an issue rather getting bounded or blinded sitting on by commenting from one side of the fence.
Yours etc.,
Sonie Kharduit,
Via email

Banks must make paradigm shift

Editor,
Apropos the article, "Creating positive synergy?" by

Should Khasi Christians lose ST status?

By Fabian Lyngdoh

It seems that the discourse on the issue of the “Religious Minority Act,” has strayed from the legal implications of the Act from social living, into the theological doctrine of religions. As a concerned Khasi citizen of India I feel deeply bound to mediate in this seemingly endless debate on the platform of your respectable column. Christianity and some other religions are being recognised as religious minorities under Indian law. The Khasis who belong to the so called ‘Niam Khasi Tynrai’ or ‘Niam Tre’ (I put the words ‘so called’ intentionally) had so far been classified as belonging to no particular religion and indicated in the Census as ‘other religions’ without a definite identity. However, at the individual level, all the Khasis, either belonging to Christian Churches or professing to belong to the so called indigenous faith availed the same benefits as people belonging to Khasi scheduled tribe. There is a pending case in the Supreme Court seeking recognition of the so called Khasi indigenous religion as a religious minority. If Khasi Christians had been provided special facilities

are free to have their own convictions. No one can force them to believe; it is as simple as that. Even those who are baptised are still free to move out at any time without any legally binding penalty whatsoever. As for the charge that conversion has been done by force or fraud, only those who were converted can testify, but not by those outside the flock who only imagine it to be so. It is too simplistic for those who are not Christians to imagine that all the Khasis who became Christians did so only because of some worldly factors. With due respect to the view of Sonie Kharduit a vast majority of Khasi Christians today would testify that they chose to be Christians out of their own conviction. The whole clan to which I belong chose to become Christians only after the last grandmother and the last chief maternal uncle of the clan who were in the old tradition declared that “the old religion would no longer sustain, so you have to adopt a religion that would sustain your present needs as well as continue with the tradition of the ancestors.” Is anyone out there to challenge the declaration of the lawbei and Suidnia of my

“At the State level, Christians in Meghalaya are in majority, but at the national level Christians are in a minority. Therefore, Christians cannot claim minority rights at the State level, but they can still claim minority rights at the national level, if there is any such right.”

ties and assistance on the basis of being Christian minority, then I support the move of the so called indigenous Khasi religion hundred per cent. They are indeed a minority group not only at the national level, but also at the state level. All their activities aiming for social wellbeing and overall justice, including health care and education must be provided special support.
At the State level, Christians in Meghalaya are in majority, but at the national level Christians are in a minority. Therefore, Christians cannot claim minority rights at the State level, but they can still claim minority rights at the national level, if there is any such right. The so called Khasi indigenous religion should have a minority status at the State level if there is any such right, and they should also have religious minority right at the national level as a distinct religion.
However, the move of the so called indigenous Khasi religious group to achieve constitutional recognition as a distinct religion should not affect the rights of Khasi Christians as members of the Khasi scheduled tribe. The rights of the Khasis to the constitutional provisions as Scheduled Tribes is not based on religion but on the basis of being Khasis; and that should be left to local definition. If the leaders of the so called Khasi indigenous Khasi religion think that Khasi Christians are no longer Khasis and they have no right to the Constitutional provisions of being Scheduled Tribes, then they are digging the grave of the tribe only to placate the Hindutva ideology.

own clan as far as their descendants are concerned? It seems clear that the true religion of the Khasis has become grossly innovated through misinterpretation of the political and economic elites of the twentieth century who became partly influenced by Hinduism and Christianity. The believers of the so called indigenous Khasi faith are a minority today because that kind of faith itself is not traditional though it might be an indigenous evolution. It is similar to the Heraka faith movement which replaced the real traditional religion of the Zeliangrong Nagas called ‘Paupai Renet’ by a new religion based on a new cult introduced by Haipou Jadonang in the late 1920’s after spiritual inspiration from the temple of the Hindu god Vishnu on the Bhuban Hill in East Cachar, and vigorously followed up by a woman disciple Rani Gaidinliu.
However, the field is free for those who think that Khasis had become Christians by force or by the lure of worldly benefits, to organise a ‘ghar wapasi’ for the imaginary forced/influenced/indoctrinated Christians to leave their faith because the Christians are free to do so without ‘ka sang’ (sacrilege) as there is no spiritual covenant, law or magic to keep them from remaining as Christians. Khasi champions of ‘ghar wapasi’ with Hindu inclination have the right to do scientific investigation to find out how many Christians feel that they have been forced by any circumstance to remain Christians. Mere imagination is no proof.
I respect the new Niam Khasi as the Nagas respect the new Heraka movement, and I support the idea that they should have constitutional religious minority rights, but to say that Christians or those who do not belong to the new Khasi religion are no longer Khasis and they should no longer avail Scheduled Tribe benefit is not an issue of the Khasi tribe but an issue of the Hindutva ideology which is downright condemnable.

“If one advances confidently in the directions of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.”

---- David Henry Thoreau

The Shillong Times

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Congress weighed down by Dynasty

IN the Congress Party, the more things change the more they remain the same. On Monday July 16, when Congress President, Rahul Gandhi reconstituted the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the party's highest decision-making body, with a mix of young and old leaders everyone expected to see more dynamism and a change of faces. But that was not to be. The seven North Eastern states have only three representatives of which two are from Assam and one from Manipur. The father-son duo of Tarun Gogoi and Gaurav Gogoi are both in the CWC while veterans from the other states were given a go by. While the CWC cannot be top heavy and unwieldy, but including two people from the same family reflects a replay of dynasty and is sure to have its repercussions sooner than later. Gaurav Gogoi is yet to comprehend the rough and tumble of grass-roots politics. There are more competent leaders who have served the Party for decades who deserve to be inducted.

Meghalaya and Mizoram are two states where the Congress has its stronghold. It is in Assam that the Congress is decimated. So what is the strategy that Rahul Gandhi is trying to unleash? If Gaurav Gogoi and his father are expected to revive the Party's fortunes in Assam and the other North-Eastern states then Rahul Gandhi has misread the mind of the voters. The new CWC includes 23 members, 19 permanent invitees and 9 special invitees. Independent members will be appointed to be in-charge of various states. In the past, these nominees often played dubious roles. In some cases they acted like liaisons between the State Chief Ministers or wannabe CMs and the then Party President, Sonia Gandhi, trying to wrest favours for a price. This is one of the fatal flaws of the Congress Party. The heads of five frontal organisations of the party—INTUC, Sewa Dal, Youth Congress, Mahila Congress and NSUI, will be special invitees. In most states of the North East, the frontal organisations like Sewa Dal are hardly present. The Mahila Congress too is a spent force and it takes a lot to revive these dormant frontal wings. Even the INTUC only makes occasional noises. Organisationally they are all weak and need to be infused with fresh energy. But this is a major challenge given the faces in the CWC.

Govt Should Accord Top Priority to Public Health

By Patricia Mukhim

“The health of people is the foundation upon which all their happiness and all their powers as a state depend”

– Benjamin Disraeli, British Prime Minister.

Going by the above prescient quote from one of the great British Prime Ministers it should have been the remit of the Government of Meghalaya to ensure that its people do not ingest poison indirectly by consuming food and water that are toxic and breathing air that is heavily polluted. That would have been the responsibility of a government that cares for its people; not for the market forces. However, ensuring that people enjoy optimum health would also mean that the Government follows a set of policies that should have been crafted after due research about the present health status of the people of Meghalaya; the major health threats in the different districts of the state and coping mechanisms of people and also in understanding the new health challenges posed by climate change which essentially means dealing with new and more life-threatening diseases. Even today, Meghalaya has a huge population suffering from Basic TB, multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB, extensive drug resistant (XDR) TB and TB linked to HIV. It's a different matter that mining data and statistics for all this is a difficult job unless a state-wide screening is done.

In the month of March this year the State Tuberculosis Officer, Meghalaya, DG Nongkynrih informed that in 2017, a total of 27,588 patients were screened out of whom 3,791 were diagnosed with Basic-TB, 252 of multi-drug-resistant TB, 13 cases related to XDR-TB, 53 cases of patients co-infected with TB-HIV and 206 cases of paediatric TB. The number of patients screened constituted only 0.91% (less than even 1% which is enough to arrive at any conclusion) of Meghalaya's population. Out of this population 15% suffer some form of TB. A state-wide screening would give us a more graphic picture of the real situation. But TB is not the only disease we are grappling with. There is growing incidence of cancer too, much of which is linked to our food habits.

Statistics say that a total of 8338 cancer patients were registered in the Cancer Department of Shillong Civil Hospital between 2010 till 2017 and the patients included more males than females. Between January - March 2018, altogether 192 patients were diagnosed with Cancer. We have the numbers of only those patients who come to the Civil Hospital. Many more who can afford treatment outside the State are perhaps not registered. India's North East has the highest number of Cancer cases and Meghalaya ranks fourth after Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. In the April session of the Assembly, Congress MLA Zenith Sangma had cautioned about the chemically enhanced vegetables and foods that bring the risk of cancer. And George Lyngdoh, the MLA from Umroi had made a very pertinent point. He said food products should be inspected including local breweries.

And this brings me to the purpose of this article. For a while now we have been hearing the Health Minister, AL Hek blowing hot and cold over fish imported from Andhra. On Thursday the Health Minister informed us that 13 samples of fish sent for testing were found negative. Then he says that a formaldehyde detection kit was introduced for the purpose. Why should Meghalaya have to procure the kit when the testing is done in Guwahati? Why is the Pasteur Institute not upgraded into a multiple-testing laboratory since there is need to test soil, water, certain forest products and more. Why depend on Guwahati for issues of public health? That the State of Meghalaya till date does not even have a multiple facility laboratory for testing food products including fish and meat and has to send these to Guwahati is a shocker. In fact, even forensic tests are conducted at the labs in Guwahati. So this tells us how low on priority public health is in Meghalaya.

And now we are informed by a person with a vested interest in peddling fish and who is the President of the Khasi-Jaintia Fish Wholesaler and Retailer Association, Mitchell Wankhar that the fish coming from Andhra Pradesh has no trace of formalin. So we have to rely on a trader to certify the quality of the fish we are consuming. And sadly the public is just a disinterested onlooker. That precisely is the problem with public health in India – the public thinks

the Government is doing it a favour by providing health care. Well, health is a human right and it is our duty to demand from the Government a better disease prevention regime, rather than just health care facilities. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) which is part of the World Health Organization (WHO) has concluded that formaldehyde is "carcinogenic to humans" based on higher risks of nasopharyngeal cancer and leukemia.

In Bhubaneswar recently formalin was found in fish stocks available in the markets. According to Fisheries and Animal Resources Development Department Secretary, Govt of Odisha, Vishal Gagan traces of cancer-causing formalin were found in Pomfret fish samples, collected from the Unit-IV fish market in Bhubaneswar. A 12-member team from the department collected samples of around nine varieties of fish including marine, freshwater, and brackish water from the market. Since formalin content was found in Pomfret fish samples, Gagan said the entire stock will be destroyed if more fish tested positive. The Odisha Government took this step after the Assam government banned the import of fish from Andhra Pradesh. Odisha like most states mostly depends on Andhra Pradesh to meet its demand for fish.

This writer spoke to some scientists from NEHU to find out if there are adequate facilities for testing the presence of formalin in fish in their laboratories. They said they would need the formalin testing kit. They also informed that the State Government had sent two fishes in a plastic bag recently and wanted those to be tested but without any forwarding letter of any kind. If this is the kind of seriousness shown to a health threat then the public ought to be more proactive and demand that the fish be tested in their presence. Mr Wankhar and his ilk should not be the deciding factors in whether or not fish from Andhra Pradesh should be banned. The accurate findings from an accredited laboratory should determine whether we should still import Andhra fish into Meghalaya.

Contribution to the health of a population derives from social determinants like living conditions, nutrition, safe drinking water,

sanitation, education, early child development and social security measures. What is appalling lacking in Meghalaya is community participation on governance issues related to public health. Public health should be a shared concern across the various sectors and although it is a politically challenging strategy such collective action is crucial.

Also a good system of regulation is fundamental to successful public health outcomes. It reduces exposure to disease through enforcement of sanitary codes, e.g., water quality monitoring, slaughterhouse hygiene and food safety. Wide gaps exist in the enforcement, monitoring and evaluation, resulting in a weak public health system. This is partly due to poor financing for public health, lack of leadership and commitment of public health functionaries and lack of community involvement. Government needs to implement public health laws by consulting stakeholders and by creating public awareness of existing laws and their enforcement procedures. The Health Department cannot work in a silo because many factors influencing the health outcomes of the public are outside their direct jurisdiction. Hence public health should become a shared value across the various sectors. This undoubtedly is politically challenging but not impossible. Above all, such collective action is crucial.

We the people of Meghalaya need to know we are not consuming poison through our food systems. And if other states have taken precautions why is Meghalaya on the back foot? Whose interests is the Government protecting?

We are aware that several fish merchants have invested heavily in fish ponds in Andhra Pradesh. So should that bear upon the Government more heavily than the health of its citizens? I am quite sure that with the scare of formalin laced fish having hit the headlines, the fish coming to Meghalaya might be temporarily devoid of formalin. But how does fish keep fresh in a 10-12 day journey over very hot climatic zones? Can anyone explain? Our lives are at stake!

households through the SHG movement in those years even when the NGT ban came became instead a wasted effort. The Block Resources Management Committee's or BRMC's that were set up to bridge the link between the government departments and the rural folks were left to wither and became defunct. Today the IBDLP has become more of a so-called learning center with no inkling about rural issues and problems and how to address them. The need of the hour is for this new Government to revamp and ramp up the entire IBDLP Project and ensure that it integrates into the system a robust external monitoring and evaluation system like the IFAD Project had so that course correction is possible and tangible changes at the ground are measured.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S.Wankhar
Viaemail

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

POLITICAL DELICACIES

By Rahil Nora Chopra

NITISH STILL KEEPING RJD BRIDGE OPEN

Although Amit Shah declared after the dinner diplomacy with Nitish Kumar in Patna last week that the two parties will fight the coming Lok Sabha election jointly and win all the 40 Lok Sabha seats, the JD(U) leaders are still not confident of getting 25 seats from BJP as the party has to accommodate Ram Vilas Paswan and Upendra Kushwaha parties. As such, Nitish Babu is said to be keeping his options open for an alliance with RJD-Congress combine as well. If BJP fails to give the promised 25 seats, he might just switch sides and go with RJD-Congress. Nitish Kumar's campaign strategist Prashant Kishore is believed to be negotiating with the RJD-Congress alliance. But Lalu Prasad's son Tejaswi Yadav is opposing Nitish Kumar's entry.

DIPLOMATS LOOK FOR CLUES AS SEOUL EMBRACES MODI

South Korea is obviously putting great faith on Narendra Modi

of ticket aspirants is often accompanied by open infighting between party workers. At some places the workers are seen wearing T-shirt with the names of their candidates. Pilot started this programme to give a chance to ticket seekers to show their strength. And the BJP seems to be worried about the enthusiastic response to the campaign.

UTTARAKHAND INFIGHTING BACK WITH ABANG

Although the infighting in the Uttarakhand BJP seemed to subside with the visit of Amit Shah, the problem is cropping up again. BJP MLA from Hardwar Swami Yatiswarananda and Sanjay Gupta have opened a Morcha against Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat and his cabinet. BJP state president Ajay Bhatt has issued a show cause notice to Sanjay Gupta why action should not be taken against him. He has been given 10 days to respond. According to Sanjay Gupta, the chief minister and his cabinet ministers had time to attend former MLA Mohammed Shahzad son's marriage but

The world's biggest factory of Samsung mobile hardware on 35 acres in Noida is taken to be an indication of how South Korea is giving a fond bear hug to the Modi government in an election year. Consider also the fact that President Moon Jae-in has invited PM Modi to Seoul in 2020. Not everyone is as confident though. Many of the envoys residing on the two sides of Shanti Path have been holding lunches for small groups, particularly political commentators, to figure out which way the wind is blowing. One of the envoys quipped it's better to read the tea leaves in advance. Another diplomat of an EU-member country was particularly worried about the destiny of defence deals, whether those would go into deep freeze in case there's a change of guard.

coming back to power in 2019. The world's biggest factory of Samsung mobile hardware on 35 acres in Noida is taken to be an indication of how South Korea is giving a fond bear hug to the Modi government in an election year. Consider also the fact that President Moon Jae-in has invited PM Modi to Seoul in 2020. Not everyone is as confident though. Many of the envoys residing on the two sides of Shanti Path have been holding lunches for small groups, particularly political commentators, to figure out which way the wind is blowing. One of the envoys quipped it's better to read the tea leaves in advance. Another diplomat of an EU-member country was particularly worried about the destiny of defence deals, whether those would go into deep freeze in case there's a change of guard. The curiosity also transcends to Rahul Gandhi and his future plans.

BIG RUSH FOR R A J A S T H A N CONGRESS TICKETS

After the by-election results and keeping the trend of opposition party coming to power alternately in Rajasthan assembly elections in view, the chances of Congress winning is considered to be greater this time, which is manifested by the demand for Congress tickets in every seat. State party president Sachin Pilot has started "Booth Mera Gourav" programme in every assembly segment, in which Ashok Gehlot and other central office bearers are participating. The rush

had no time to visit the International Arya Samaj Samelan organised in Gurukul Kangri University. There has been much bad blood between former chief minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank, now MP from Hardwar, and cabinet minister Madan Kaushik from Hardwar over the event. Both Swami Yatiswarananda and Sanjay Gupta are followers of Nishank and they met to discuss the strategy in an ashram. According to these MLAs, the chief minister also found time to join former chief minister Harish Rawat's mango party but had no time to spare for the party MLAs.

BABBAR TO STAY UPCCCHIEF

After so much speculation about the impending change of Uttar Pradesh Congress leadership, the high command seems to have finally settled for Raj Babbar to continue till the Lok Sabha Election in 2019. In fact, Raj Babbar along with Ghulam Nabi Azad is expected to soon bring changes in the city and District Congress Committees. Half of the district and city Congress committees are in control of the same person for the last four years. The high command has instructed the state leadership to replace these persons and also include persons who have joined Congress on the initiative of Congress president Rahul Gandhi. The high command is also keen to see Youth Congress and NSUI workers included in the new set-up and also said to be preparing a list of three aspirants for each parliamentary seat. (IPA)

NEHU failing the students

Editor,
NEHU announced that the last date of submission of applications for PG courses is July 18. If one looks at the application form there is no option for 'Results Awaited' and it is mandatory to fill up the total percentage of the UG course. But the BA results are not out yet and those who have already filled out the forms counted the marks up to the 5th Semester. When the students went to submit the forms in the Department, the ones in the office would not accept the forms because results of the 6th Semester was not filled up. Students were told that those who have already submitted have a great chance of being rejected. This has left the students confused because the results are not out yet so they submitted incomplete forms and now their forms are at the risk of being rejected. Is it the student's fault that they failed to produce results of the 6th Semester? No! B.Sc, B.Com and BSW results were declared last week but not BA. Why are they taking such a

long time? Results in other Universities are already out and some have already started their PG Courses in the month of June. Students who wish to take up B.Ed course could not fill up the forms because the 6th Semester results were mandatory and hence they could not apply. So one whole year has gone to waste! Many students are missing out on so many great opportunities just because NEHU is taking such a long time to declare the results.

When will wake up?
Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

Meghalaya: Paradise gone awry

Editor,
Through your paper I wish to highlight as to how filthy and dirty Shillong has become. Even our tourist spots are full of garbage and litter. What I find difficult to comprehend is why people feel the need to eat and drink wherever they go ? I

suppose it's alright to do so but how responsible are we when it comes to disposing off LITTER and GARBAGE. Sad to say none at all! Somehow we feel that its someone else's responsibility and that sense of Pride and Belonging is totally absent. People drive around in fancy cars but throw their garbage out of their cars onto the road. Spitting is another menace. The point being that if something is so tasty as Kwai or paan the why then the need to spit it out? And oh yes the trend is to have a dog and I can understand that the dog needs to be walked but when the dog litters on the pavement.... then what? Whose duty is it to clean that litter?

What is even more amazing is that Assam is capitalizing on the beauty of Meghalaya. Most of the tour operators are from Assam judging from the number of AS Number plate cars that ply on our roads. What is even more amazing is nothing is being done about it. Our local people make absolutely nothing from these tourists except the

paltry sum made from the fee for visiting the spot.

I asked a cabbie once whether he got tourists to take around in Shillong and not surprisingly his reply was 'No' So then I went a step further as asked if he did belong to an association and collectively they could do something about it. His reply was shocking. According to him if the tourist cabs from Assam were stopped somewhere before entering Shillong and tourists were made to use local transport, then what if Assam does not allow them to ply from Shillong to Guwahati airport??

I had no answer to that.....

Yours etc.,
Christine Nonhuloo,
Shillong-3

IBDLP needs a revamp

Editor,
The previous Congress led-government that has successfully established the Meghalaya Rural Development Society

“A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight.”
--- Henry David Thoreau

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LX No.339 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JULY 21, 2018

No-trust at wrong turn
WHAT started as a mild storm was destined to end with a whimper. No one expected the Modi government to fall right now; least of all the Opposition. Yet, the big question was why a No-Trust motion at this precise hour. Having gone through the grind thereof, it was but natural that the last laugh was reserved for the ruling side – past the hug and wink. It would be safe to infer that the ruling BJP, or PM Modi in particular, was game with the Opposition frenzy for a no-trust at the start of the Monsoon session of Parliament. For one, the government faced no serious crisis. It faced no situation of a major scam or scandal, or even a scenario of an error of judgement. Modi might not be performing in the best possible way, but the government was quietly carrying on. If the aim of the Opposition – principally the Congress – was to “expose” the government with its omissions and commissions, it didn’t come well-prepared. By raising the Rafale issue, Rahul Gandhi has not scored points; rather, he came across as irresponsible and immature.

If the many cases of lynching were what could have put the Modi government on the mat, home minister Rajnath Singh saved the day for Modi by shifting the focus to the 1984 riots in Delhi. He stressed that 1984 presented the worst scenario of lynching – of Sikhs by pro-Congress gangs -- the nation had ever witnessed directly under the watch of then Congress PM Rajiv Gandhi. A stout defence of his government’s performance by PM Modi was only to be expected by way of a summing up of the debate. And Modi took full advantage of the opportunity to hit out at the Opposition, particularly the Congress and its leader Rahul Gandhi. A no-confidence motion at this juncture was uncalled for. The Opposition rather wasted a precious opportunity. It cannot come up with a no-trust move against the Modi government, as there is a minimum requirement of six months for tabling another such motion. By then, Modi would already be in the campaign mode for the general elections 2019. No-trust motions are, by convention, brought about at critical junctures. The past 15 years saw no no-trust motion in Parliament; the last one being during the Vajpayee era. There, perhaps, was a scope for such a push against Modi immediately after the hugely controversial Demonetisation step. He has already weathered that storm. Ultimately, the Modi Government will be judged by the people of India. So much for “no confidence” motions!

Who are the minorities?

By Sonie Kharduit

It was refreshing to read the topic raised by Fabian Lyngdoh titled, “Should Khasi Christians lose ST status”. It was informative and insightful because it was a multi-dimensional analysis not constrained by a singular perspective. I just want to add extra inputs to this topic, considering the importance of this issue in a state where people are part of the entity called MINORITY.

Constitutionally the word ‘minority’ was not defined anywhere, but two attributes were identified in this regard meant to safeguard and protect the people falling in this segment, i.e. the linguistic basis and religious basis. Unfortunately when debates around the topic of minority arises generally dwell only on the religious component and not the linguistic basis. As correctly pointed out by the writer, granting Schedules Tribe (ST) status is not done on the religious basis but it’s on other criteria that defines a person that qualifies to be an ST. The arguments stating that someone may lose their ST status on the basis of faith conversion is far from the truth. A Khasi will be an ST whether he/she practices the indigenous faith or Christianity or other faiths. The perks of being under the religious minority tag is altogether a different subject which will be discussed later. The nodal authority authorised to grant the ST status lies with the President of India in consultation with the Governor of the State.

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs does follow certain benchmarks in the assessment process, hence this limits any scope for discretionary decision of the President or Governor. Some criteria in the appraisal process while granting the ST status includes indication of “primitive” traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, “shyness of connect” with the community at large, and “backwardness”. Factoring the above criteria, the three tribes in our state and other aboriginal tribes in Northeastern states and certain backward pockets of India’s mainland deserve the preferential treatment. Hence the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, a constitutional body was established to safeguard the interests of the ST community.

The debate on this Minority status is a highly complex phenomenon, because of the heterogeneous structural arrangement of Indian society, not to forget that the benefits of being an ST add additional flavour. For example the composition of Indian society has spatial variation throughout the its

territory, Punjab being a Sikh dominant state does get to enjoy the religious minority status but is exempted from ST or SC status, because of better socio-economic indicators. Whereas in Manipur, which is a geographically and economically disadvantaged state, the inhabitants such as the Meities (constituting 53%) of the population, are still deprived of the ST status. Our state has been fortunate in that the three dominant tribes) get to enjoy the benefits of both statuses (ST status and religious minority status). But the one on the losing side is the indigenous faith of the Khasi (Niam Tre) (Seng Khasi) because in a big way they are deprived of the benefits enjoyed by religious minority institutions. The fundamental rights under Article 29(1) clearly give adequate scope for ‘any section of the society’ to safeguard their own identity further strengthened by the benefits under Article 30, but Niam Khasi/NiamTre stand deprived of both.

This minority issue debacle when viewed from the religious angle becomes more labyrinthian. There are thousands of indigenous faiths associated with tribal communities spread throughout our country and all of them become victims of exclusion. The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) notification 1992 notifies only six religious communities, viz; Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Zoroastrians (Parsis) and Jains in the Gazette of India as minority communities by the Union Government all over India, hence all those outside the list stand to lose the benefits entitled under the Fundamental Rights granted to linguistic and religious minorities.

Another interesting aspect of this discussion as highlighted by Fabian Lyngdoh is the fact of spatial differences in religious dominance. The same Hindu which is pan majority on national scale becomes the minority in our state. When viewed at a global scale the minority-majority debate becomes even more complex. Religious dominance is synchronized with political boundaries. The South American continent is dominated by Roman Catholics, whereas the Middle East is the zone of Islamic dominance, Eastern Europe and North America is the zone of Protestant

Church dominance and then East Asia with the Confucians in China etc. So the world is highly fractured on the basis of religious dogmas, but peace prevails more on those territories with high Human developmental Index (HDI) simply because of the egalitarian set up. The equitable distribution of resources among the population leaves no room nor reasons for conflict between the two groups. Nordic countries are the best examples in this case. But in poor countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and several distressed countries in the African continent, majority-minority conflict is a regular phenomenon simply because the inequitable resource distribution and the rich-poor divide is huge and hence religious conflict may become a reality because it has the inherent potential to create divisions and people may use it just to have greater share from the limited resources (the word ‘resource’ here may include food security, social security, job opportunities, access to education- health, income security etc).

The Jharkhand story last year generated loads of criticism mainly from the Christian community because they felt the excessive intrusion of the state in the aspects of religious matters by enacting the “religious freedom act 2017,” prohibiting any forceful conversion, incitement, allurements with punishment of 3 years jail term and Rs 50,000 fine. In fact Jharkhand is the eighth state enacting such Act. Arunachal Pradesh is one among the NE states that enacted the anti-conversion Act. Anti-conversion is bi-directional act means it prohibits conversion both ways. Christian converts may face the same punishment as Hindu converts or a Muslim converts etc. Moreover the Right to Religious Freedom is not absolute either as stated in the Constitution; the state can always interfere to prevent any coercive conversion but on what basis the Jharkhand government enacted this act is altogether a different debate. Coming back to the Sindri tribe conversion and other Ghar Wapasi controversies in Jharkhand, who is right and wrong is no one’s business to dictate judgment from 1000 miles away without knowing the facts, but what is relevant for us is the arguments regarding the loss of ST status connected with this Act as reported by some writer is not convincing. As Fabian Lyngdoh and I concur to the fact that granting ST status is totally separate from

religious affiliation, so whether the Sindri tribe converts to Christianity from Hinduism or the Khunti indigenous faith or vice versa, the ST status is intact no matter what faith they profess because the tribal identity is the determining factor and not religion.

The take-away from the Jharkhand episode is that many of us view it only through the lens of religion and not the overall features of the inhabitants. Jharkhand is known as a resource cursed state with plenty of mineral resources but with minimal development, inhabited by several tribal groups and Munda tribe being the prominent one. Hence it’s a fertile ground for all religious faiths to prove their supremacy (whether as a Good Samaritan or mere religious empire expansion). As the story narrated by one distressed family, the reason of conversion to Christianity as facilitated by one pastor is to get the cure of her ailing mother, expecting miracles to happen in this new faith. But with time the real miracle did not come neither from the Hindu nor Christian nor Islam religion but from her indigenous Khunti faith (nature worship) in the form of herbal medicines practiced by the community for ages. This incident is not to be interpreted as ‘no miracle can happen in some established religion’ around the world but where it went wrong is the thought that miracle which is nothing but God’s divine touch is the sole property of one religion. Any righteous heart deserves a miracle no matter what faith we follow because God is one and he judges nobody.

Finally on the debate whether Khasi community should lose the ST status on account of faith conversion, the simple answer is NO. It would be ultra-vires violating the constitutional mandate and the Supreme Court will not allow such provisions. On the issue whether the Niam Khasi/ Niam Tre deserves the religious minority status, logically the answer is YES but practically the process is a herculean task, keeping in mind the close nexus between religion and politics and how they influence each other as witnesses recently with the Lingayat episode in Karnataka. The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) being a mere advisory body further complicates the problems.

The Wolf and the Quake together An intensely played match with no result

By Sushil Kutty

Wolf Aaya, Wolf Aaya... But Congress President Rahul Gandhi had also promised a ‘Bhookamp’ if allowed 15-minute one-on-one with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. On Friday, he went on the rampage, shaking the foundations of the Modi government in a speech that rocked Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to her feet, with Rahul telling her to her face that she was a ‘liar!’ And that no less than President Macron of France had told him that. Then, roping Prime Minister Narendra Modi into the Rafale deal, Rahul Gandhi challenged him to “look me in the eye”; going on to declare, “He can’t, he cannot look me in the eye!”

High drama, and it was past noon. The stage: Lok Sabha, a One-Act Play, part of the No-Confidence Motion against the Modi Government. “This wolf comes as a wolf” was the conclusion drawn in many a mind and either of the two individuals (Rahul and Modi) could qualify for the ‘wolf’ sobriquet. At his histrionic best, with twitter on a blast strumming the guitar in and against his favour, Rahul Gandhi blasted the treasury with Jumla Strike No.1, 2, 3 and 4...

“This government is all Jumla strikes,” he said,

Monday. Unseated by lopsided Mathematics, would he still be on India’s version of ‘Air Force One’? Modi’s love for ‘overseas diplomacy’ is such that it has left de jure External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj confined to the Twitter plane! That said, Friday Fever gripped all of India. Opposition parties whipped up no-confidence. The ruling dispensation went through the motion with the whip. Mamma and papa ordered children to remain in the House. There could be ‘Ladoo’ in the evening. And everybody knew ‘ladoo’ can be sweet or nothing!

The last time Sonia Gandhi did a no-confidence number in the Lok Sabha, 22 years ago, she cut short the verse of poet-Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, putting an end to his short stanza. But proving his name right, Atal returned to pen another poem, and this one he finished with his trademark flourish.

The question on Friday was: Could Sonia’s ‘Mathematics’ triumph? Logic said Modi had the numbers. Sonia’s 48 up against his 273. Add to that other NDA numbers and it would even be two-thirds majority. Calls to allies were made. Shotgun Sinha was whipped into submission. Kirti Azad was told his

The considered view was she’ll have to go into an abandoned rabbit hole to pull out the magic number: 273! In the unlikely scenario that she pulled off the numbers, it would be a Rahul Gandhi Sorcar. Magic! Like the one put on display by the late PC Sorcar!

“Jumla which leave people in anxiety and the symptoms are excitement and happiness to begin with but which at a later stage are overtaken by feelings of shock and 8-hour long speeches on foreign shores.”

The Congress president, with the fresh shave of the morning still lighting up his face, concluded with “I’m Congress” but not before walking across and stunning Narendra Modi with a bent hug and an arm around. Modi called him back and said something in Rahul’s ear and what Rahul heard must come out at some time, unless the two sign a confidentiality clause.

Like the one France and India signed on the Rafale deal, and on which “Nirmala Sitharaman lied.” Did she? No! Allowed to defend herself, the Defence Minister produced documents signed by predecessor AK Antony that there was indeed a secret pact between France and India on the Rafale deal and Rahul Gandhi was talking through his hat. Of course, Rahul heard the “evidence” but kept mum, the adrenaline rush gone, and the aftershock leaving him drained.

All in all, an explosive start to the no-confidence motion after a TDP MP and a BJP MP set the ball rolling with two comatose speeches which did nothing to rock the House. What was expected was Sonia Gandhi’s Mathematics and Narendra Modi’s Logic. Both subjects infallible. The UPA chairperson had said, “Who says we don’t have the numbers?”

The considered view was she’ll have to go into an abandoned rabbit hole to pull out the magic number: 273! In the unlikely scenario that she pulled off the numbers, it would be a Rahul Gandhi Sorcar. Magic! Like the one put on display by the late PC Sorcar!

And, if that happened, did Uganda have a Plan ‘B’? Prime Minister Narendra Modi was scheduled to fly off on an African tour on

freedom stood curtailed. Those sick in bed were told to take their pills or else they would be in the ICU, and the Modi Government in the mortuary!

But that was only stretching the imagination, a Jumla! Friday, there were whispers that the Bharatiya ‘Jumla’ Party was in for a drubbing. The best of Congress speakers were in the Rajya Sabha, but there was a sampling in the lower house, who could stand up to the treasury word for word, Jumla for Jumla!

Sonia Gandhi, with her quaint foreign accent; Rahul Gandhi, with his intensity of narration; Jyotiraditya Scindia, with his royal emphasis; Malikaarjun Kharge, armed with his unique baritone. Above all, the peerless Shashi Tharoor, with his flawless farrago of indescribably incredible lexicon! Besides, who could say, who others the hour would throw up? Everybody knew looking back on Friday would be rewarding in more ways than one. It would be launch day for Election 2019 for both NDA and UPA/Grand Alliance. Rahul Gandhi said as much as he finished his speech with “Modi is staring at defeat in 2019.”

The talk went like this: “If Modi loses, the grand alliance will come alive with a combination and permutation not expected before. If Sonia’s Mathematics goes wrong, NDA will sprint through with a snap poll in the shortest possible time.”

Speculation aside, the no-confidence motion went way off the script it was called for to take: Special Status for Andhra Pradesh. As it turned out the debate on the no-trust vote drowned Andhra Pradesh in the Bay of Bengal, much to the delight of TRS MPs. At the end of the day, nobody knew who won and who lost because the ‘Jumla strikes’ came from both sides, raised excitement which receded as the evening progressed, till the Prime Minister spoke. Bhookamp Aaya. Bhookamp Aaya! (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Tobacco & Betel Nut major cause of Cancer

Editor,
Apropos the article, by Patricia Mukhim, 'Govt should accord top priority to Public Health'(ST July 20, 2018), I was glad to see a very pertinent issue being raised. But while the writer had raised the issue of high incidence of cancer in Meghalaya(and the Northeast region), I was disappointed at the glaring omission of the major causes of cancer. While contaminants in food may cause cancer, it is well known that substances such as tobacco and betel nut are the major causes of cancer. According to the GATS 2 (global adult tobacco survey), while the national average for consumption of tobacco is 28.6% of all persons over the age of 15 years, the same is as high as 47% for Meghalaya. The state is spending a lot of resources on treating cancer, which, if spent on preventive

aspects of healthcare, would be much more effective and economical. Also, this would result in better productivity of the population. If the existing laws on tobacco control are better implemented, this would go a long way in improving public health.

Smoking in public places, sale of tobacco products to minors, sale of tobacco products near educational institutions, sale of loose cigarettes, etc are all banned by existing laws such as COTPA and Juvenile Justice Act, but need to be enforced. This will not be possible unless there is a concerted effort by various departments of the Government concerned. I appeal to the media and the public to ensure that the role of tobacco and betel nut as the prime carcinogens is not diluted by other issues. And, as stressed in the article, the state should follow policies which focus on Public Health and ensure that youngsters should grow in an environment free of the evil influence of

tobacco and betel nut. Yours etc., Dr. Caleb Harris M.Ch. Surgical Oncologist, Shillong -18

MPSC – belated attempts at transparency

Editor,
Apropos the news item, "Provide Info on Affected Candidates"(ST July 19, 2018), firstly I would refrain from touching upon the exchanges between the KSU and MPSC and restrict myself to commenting on the new measures adopted or yet to be adopted by the MPSC to bring in more transparency and accountability in its process of recruitment.

MPSC may have started to disclose the marks obtained in Written Tests/ Interviews but this measure was introduced only recently after prolonged resistance by the Commission that a few candidates were opposed to

having their scores displayed on the public domain. Nevertheless, the above step adopted by MPSC, though belatedly, should be appreciated. However, this action should be construed as being only one step in the right direction and MPSC should take more steps to ensure that its recruitment process become free of any scope/possibility for undue influences.

For instance, if MPSC wishes to be seen as practicing fair selection of candidates, it should immediately dispense with the requirement of conducting interviews for all Group C and non-gazetted Group B posts as has already been done by the Central Government and later on implemented by 21 States in the country so far. In this connection, I would like to refer to my earlier letter to the editor of this newspaper entitled, "When Will Meghalaya Abolish Interviews" (ST May25, 2018) where I had tried to draw attention to newspaper reports (ST

May19th&20th) about the Central Government censuring nine states (including Meghalaya) for ignoring to implement the "no more interviews" policy for the categories of posts mentioned earlier and of Tripura becoming the 21st state to adopt this policy.

It may be informed that 21 states implemented the above policy consequent to Letter No.39020/09/2015-Esstt(B) dated 28th January 2016 circulated to all the States and Union Territories by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions with the objective of eliminating unfairness in appointment to government posts. This letter is on the public domain and can be accessed from the above Ministry's Website.

Significantly, the above letter also refers to correspondences dated Sep 4, 2015 and Sep 29, 2015 from the Secretary(Personnel) of the above Central Ministry addressed to all State Chief Secretaries and from the concerned Minister of State

addressed to all Chief Ministers emphasising that no more interviews should be undertaken for the mentioned categories of posts. Perhaps our Government/MPSC are in the know of these developments and if so ,it shows their deep reluctance to implement this policy which is simply astounding. A clarification from concerned authorities would clear the air, I suppose.

To conclude, those in authority should not be surprised at all that there exists an atmosphere of deep distrust surrounding Government Job Recruitment especially in the aftermath of the disastrous teachers' recruitment controversy which is still awaiting resolution.

Yours etc., Samuel Swett Shillong - 2.

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‘Indian fixation with marriage & kids a hurdle to LGBTQ acceptance’

A cancer research scientist, model, an LGBTQ activist and a writer, Kolkata boy **Samarpan Maiti**, who added another feather in his cap finishing second runner-up in Mr Gay World 2018 this year in South Africa’s Knysna, speaks to **Sudipto Maity**.

Belated congratulations on the achievement. From being a bullied kid in some rural part in West Bengal to walking the ramp at Mr Gay World 2018, how has the journey been so far?

It may look like a fairy tale but the journey was not that easy. There were times when I contemplated quitting everything, but never gave up. My father always used to say, “Life is a lot like travelling, so don’t take the shortcut, or you will miss many beautiful things.” I have nothing to prove to anyone, I follow my heart. The pageant experience was a dream come true as I always wanted to represent my country and win. (Reality TV chef from Australia Jordan Bruno was crowned Mr Gay World 2018 while the first runner up was Ricky Devine-White from New Zealand).

When did you decide to come out? How hard was it to accept yourself the way you are or to make your parents understand?

In 2016, my family was planning for my marriage, and I was planning to participate in Mr Gay World, so I thought it was the time I should tell them about myself.

Since my adolescence I was attracted to men. But I had neither heard about the term ‘gay’ nor did I have any idea about ‘sexual orientation’. Part of it was due to the fact that in India, our academic course lacks sex education.

As a child, I was a victim of sexual abuse. My neighbour, also the perpetrator, had warned me against disclosing it to anyone and I kept mum out of fear. Even though it stayed with me, I felt everything would change and life would be fine once I grew up. I learned about the existence of the internet after I moved to a city to pursue higher studies. It was then that I heard of this particular term-LGBTQ-and, I could finally relate to it.

It was depressing to live with this hidden identity. I used to pretend that I was straight and to validate it, had “girlfriends” like others. Still I was driven out of my hostel because a few people suspected and termed the bonding between me and one of my friends as a ‘gay relationship’. We were subjected to abuse and bullying as the society didn’t believe us, even at a time when he supported me emotionally, following the death of my father. Today, he’s married to my sister and continues to support me.



About acceptance, I accepted myself easily. The challenging part was to come out publicly. I was more worried about my family, as I never wanted them to face any trouble because of me.

Were your parents supportive of your sexuality? If not, have they changed their minds now? How’s it now?

My family consists of me, my sister and my mother. Mom was either indifferent or pretended to show indifference about my sexuality. But she believes in me and knows that I can’t do anything wrong. She understands me and is very supportive of whatever I do now.

Apart from being an active member of the LGBTQ community, you are also a model and scientist. Do you think that at times the latter (you being a scientist) gets shadowed and your sexuality takes centre stage?

I don’t think so, rather, I think the other way around. Being a scientist, I am still able to both work as a model and take part in Gay beauty pageants, and even win the competition. I have broken the stereotype. My message is clear, the LGBTQ community can excel in every possible field. I want the society to give me equal respect for both my research work and sexual orientation.

Do you watch movies? Are you happy the way the gay community

is portrayed in movies/books, other mediums now as opposed to a decade ago?

There are movies and books where the real struggle and lifestyle of LGBTQ community is portrayed, but at the same time, there are movies and TV shows where they making fun of the community, in an inappropriate way. In our country, the “censor board” is quick to bring down the scissors on intimate scenes in a movie or a TV show. They say, it’s against our culture. They are quick to edit political or religious satire, stating that it’s against a particular group or religion. But fun at the LGBTQ community’s expense incurs no such actions from the certification board. What happens is our society looks up to Bollywood for ideas and when they start making fun of us, society follows suit.

Is there greater acceptance today for gay themed films?

Acceptance remains exclusively in the highly educated part of the society, not in general. However, we will witness a change if a commercially successful actor decides to portray such a role in a mainstream Bollywood movie.

What do you make of the Indian society’s outlook towards the LGBTQ community?

The Indian population is driven by the question “what will the society say” without realising that it is us who form the very society that we so frequently talk about. So, if we change and ac-

cept, it will influence others to do the same. Just giving you an example — in my village, after marriage you have to wear a saree and use ‘ghomta’ (using one end of the garment to cover the head as a sign of respect towards elders). But a few women started to change the trend. They ditched the saree for salwar kameez. Initially, people talked a lot, but now everyone is accustomed with that, nobody speaks about all these. A major hindrance towards the acceptance of the LGBTQ people in India lies in the fact that the Indian society is preoccupied with marriage, children and future generations. We need to set more examples so that they can see it in regular basis and can overcome the inhibitions.

In a recent disclosure, you had mentioned bias among gay community based on looks and money. Share your experience and how you overcame it.

See, we can’t deny that to most people looks is the major factor while choosing someone. My concern was about body shaming. In LGBTQ dating apps, you will find profile with hate messages such as ‘big no to fatty, trans, sissy, ugly’. I wanted to say that you can’t shame anyone for their looks and appearance. For me, when I came to Kolkata, people used to avoid me for my rural background and my difficulty in speaking the English language. I was bullied for my fashion sense, for my simple lifestyle and so many other issues. But I channelised all that through stories and poetry. Af-



(Clockwise from top left) Maiti is a scientist and model; at the Mr Gay World 2018; and with winner Jordan Bruno

ter they were published, the educated part of the society started interacting with me and that is how I overcame my plight.

What’s next in store for Samarpan Maiti?
I find myself very unpredictable, but

again, I am very much focused once I decide to do something. Someone offered me a role in a biopic. Though not sure yet, you may find me acting in that biopic soon. (IBNS/TWF)

Images: Mr Gay World organisation & Gerhard Meirine

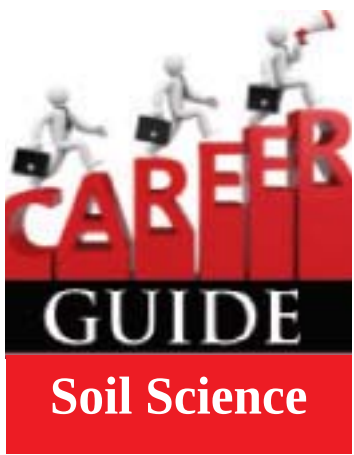
Studying growth of the soil

By **Ranjan K Baruah**

Many people are not aware of desertification and how it is affecting millions around the world. Desertification is the degradation of land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. It is caused primarily by human activities and climatic variations. Desertification does not refer to the expansion of existing deserts. It occurs because dry land ecosystems, which cover over one third of the world’s land area, are extremely vulnerable to overexploitation and inappropriate land use. Poverty, political instability, deforestation, overgrazing and bad irrigation practices can all undermine the productivity of the land.

We should know that over 250 million people are directly affected by desertification, and about one billion people in over one hundred countries are at risk. These people include many of the world’s poorest, most marginalised and politically weak citizens.

Readers might be wondering why we are talking about desertification in our career page. It is a phenomenon that ranks among the greatest environmental challenges of our time. As it brings challenges for us, so, we have to also think of potential solutions and innovations. One of the fields



of study or career choice related to this is Soil Science. Soil science, which is taught in different agricultural colleges, is

the study of soil as a natural resource on the surface of the earth including soil formation, classification and mapping; physical, chemical, biological, and fertility properties of soils; and these properties in relation to the use and management of soils.

Sometimes terms which refer to branches of soil science, such as pedology (formation, chemistry, morphology, and classification of soil) and edaphology (how soils interact with living things, especially plants), are used as if synonymous with soil science. The diversity of names associated with this discipline is related to the various associations concerned. Indeed, engineers, agronomists, chemists, geologists, physical geographers, ecologists, biologists,

microbiologists, silviculturists, sanitarians, archaeologists, and specialists in regional planning, all contribute to further knowledge of soils and the advancement of the soil sciences.

Agricultural soil science is a branch of soil science that deals with the study of edaphic conditions as they relate to the production of food and fibre.

In this context, it is also a constituent of the field of agronomy and is thus also described as soil agronomy. Soil Science plays an important role in the life of a human being. Students of soil science learn to identify, interpret, and manage soils for agriculture, forestry, rangeland, ecosystems, urban uses, and mining and reclamation in an environmentally

responsible way.

There are different job roles for the aspirants. Some of the roles are Soil Scientist, Teachers in Colleges and Universities, Ecologist, Environmental Scientist, Scientific Laboratory Technician, Soil Conservation Technician, Natural Resource Managers, etc. They may get jobs in government departments, NGOs, research institutes, developmental organisation, etc apart from being entrepreneur. Scope may be in India and also abroad as we have already mentioned about desertification. To combat desertification new innovative ideas and technologies are required and in this way people who possess expertise on soil science may get opportunities.

Students passing senior secondary in science stream may take up admission in different agricultural colleges or universities and study soil science. Later they may also do specialisation on same topic and become experts. The role of a soil scientist is highly desirable in agriculture and they are in great demand for managerial and executive positions in several environment and agro-consulting firms, both in India and abroad.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor cum skill trainer and can be reached at 8473943734 bkranjan@gmail.com)

Scholarships

Nanyang Technological University NIE PhD Scholarship 2018: Candidates, fulfilling the minimum requirement of TOEFL or 7 in IELTS, along with the GRE score and 90 per cent marks in GATE, are eligible. Selected scholars will be privileged with a monthly stipend of SGD 3,000, annual tuition fees, one time conference allowance and airfare. Bachelor or Master degree holders with academic brilliance, who are willing to undertake PhD in the field of Humanities, Education, Sciences and Physical Education, are invited by Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, to apply for this scholarship.

Vidyasaarathi-SNL Bearings Scholarship (B.E/B. Tech) 2018: Students, who have secured at least 50 per cent in senior and higher secondary, with minimum family income of Rs 5 lakh p.a., are eligible. Each selected scholar will be awarded up to Rs 25,000 for 1 year. Class XII pass students, who are pursuing or have applied for full-time graduation (BE, B.Tech) from recognised Indian university, are invited by Vidyasaarathi, Mumbai, to apply for the scholarship.

The Rhodes Scholarships, University of Oxford 2019: Candidates, who have scored at least 3.7 GPA or equivalent, and are born between 30th September 1994 to 1st October 2000, are eligible for this call. The University of Oxford, England, is inviting students who have or are about to complete their graduation and are willing to undertake post-graduation programme in the field of Management, Law, Medicine, Computer Science, Pathology, Philosophy, Archaeology etc., to apply for the scholarship. Selected scholars will be privileged with full tuition fee, maintenance stipend, and round trip airfare. The last date for application for the courses is July 31.

(Courtesy: Buddy4Study India Foundation)

Getting beach body for the summer

My wife’s magazines make me laugh. On the cover, one headline is always something like ‘Learn To Love Yourself As You Are’, another is ‘Lose 5 kg In Two Weeks’ and a third is ‘New Pasta Recipes’.

It seems these days we all want to slim.

One colleague shared a motivational tip that is “guaranteed” to make one eat less: “You put a large mirror by your dining table and eat all your meals naked.”

Nice idea, but it would be hard to get buy-in from my wife and children.

Googling for better advice led me to stumble on an interesting true story.

A guy called Mike Lee, due to have a beach wedding, decided to get in shape.

A fitness trainer handed him a pencil and a book of numbers, telling him: “Add up the calories of everything you eat and deduct the calories of everything you burn in physical activity.”

Ding! Mike had a flash of inspiration. Being a nerd, he wrote a programme to do it automatically, called it ‘MyFitnessPal’, and later sold it for almost half a billion US dollars.

A colleague who swears by this app explained its magic: “You don’t have to keep typing in foods because it learns your eating habits and you don’t have to type in your activity level since it takes the information from how much your smartphone moves around every day.”

In other words, it is a fitness app for people who think a bit of typing is way too much hard work. Oooooo-kay. My kind of people.

Fun fact: Did you know that the Germans have a word for comfort eating? ‘Kummerspeck’ literally means ‘griefbacon’. If you point at a German’s bulging midriff, he or she will

say: “My life is stressful so what you see is the bacon of grief.”

One colleague said we should all buy that Samsung Galaxy smart-phone which has a built-in filter that makes you skinnier in photos. I said: “But the downside is that you can never meet your relatives face-to-face again.”

“How is that a downside?” he asked. Good point.

Tip for husbands: If you ever walk into a bathroom and see your spouse weighing herself, you say: “Ignore the weighing scales. They don’t measure sexiness.” (Seriously. They totally like this.)

This columnist used to just stick to Ms Piggy’s Rule of Nutrition, which says: “Never eat anything that you can’t lift.”

But lately I concocted a three-part dieting plan.

Get rid of all the bad food from your fridge. (I did this. It was delicious.)

If you eat illicit snacks, always eat the whole bag of chips at once because if you save half for later that’s two failures

instead of one.

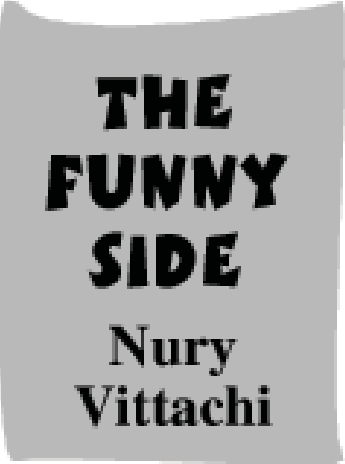
When you weigh yourself, always deduct 3 pounds or 1.4 kilos as it would be wrong to count your amazing brain against you, right?

In the end, this columnist decided to skip the diet and take a philosophical stance instead.

I shouldn’t complain about carrying a couple of extra kilos because it would be unfair to everyone else if I was this intelligent, cute, warm and slim too.

And if anyone comments, I shall simply point to my stomach and tell them: “I have children. This is the bacon of grief.”

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



How to fight fake news

By BK Mishra

Rumours spread like wildfire on instant messaging platforms such as WhatsApp about children being kidnapped from neighboring villages and killed for organ harvesting, leading to mob violence in many parts of the country.

The issue of fake news has become very prominent in recent months. Its power to mislead and misinform has been made evident around the world.

Fake Whatsapp forward have triggered a spate of incidents involving mob fury, the recent case of mob lynching where two Assamese youth were beaten to death by local villagers for being mistaken as child abductors in remote areas of Karbi Anglong district of Assam.

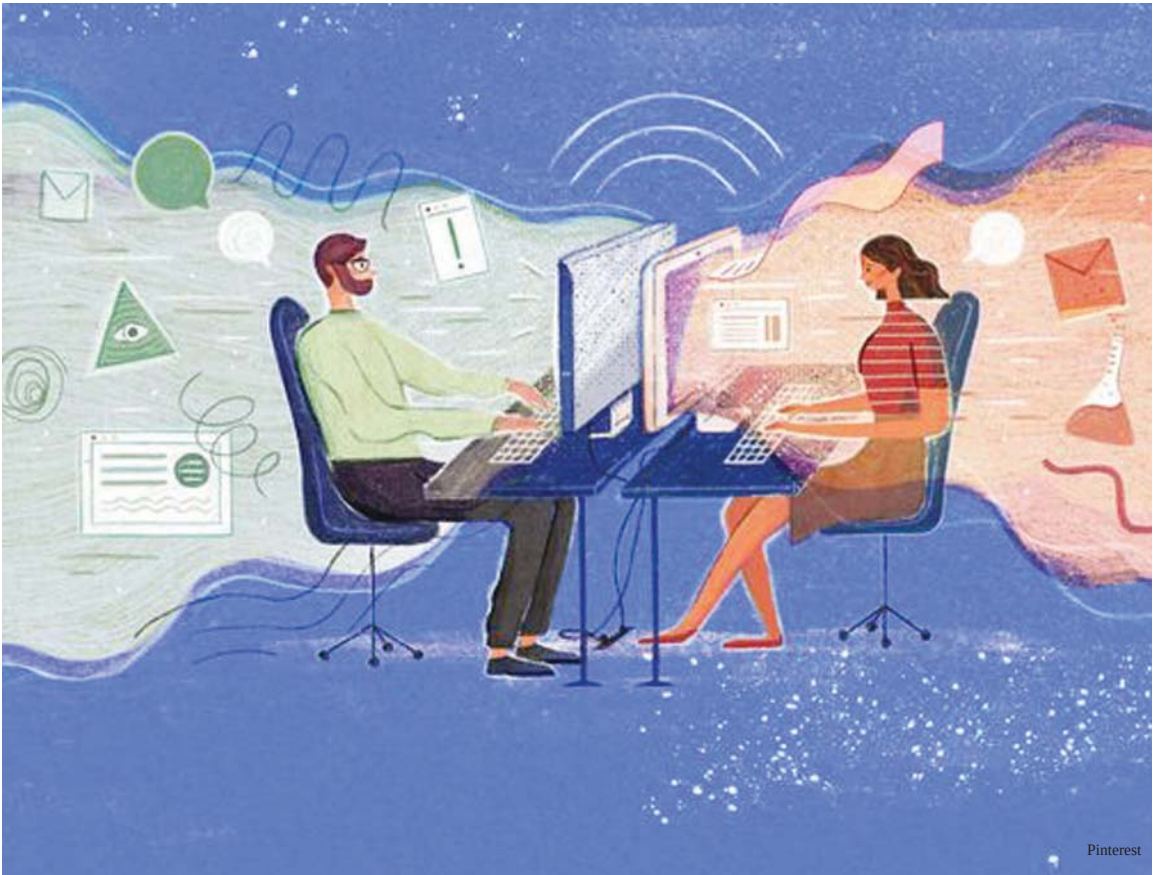
The Assam incident is not an isolated case; it has taken its toll in west Bengal. Jharkhand, Mysore ,Telengana and Andhra Pradesh and the latest being lynching of five men on the suspicion of being child-lifters in Maharashtra's Rainpada village of Dhule district. It has been reported that Fake Whatsapp forward and Facebook hate messages is also one of the reason for recent unrest in Shillong, thereby prompting the government to ban internet.

Umpteen number of news/information portals are being set up as there are few entry barriers unlike in traditional media.

In addition, growing polarization of society on ideological lines has made the job of spreading fake news easier. Content that denigrates leaders/groups of opposite ideology based on falsehoods, deepens communal polarisation or incites hatred.

While media researchers around the world are investigating the fake news scene, little credible information is available on the creators and their intention behind it. But if what has been found is true, it is purely a way to make advertising money through click baits, enticing people to click and continue reading, and is organised by political or other social groups.

Both Google and Facebook, as



the largest platforms for content distribution, are said to be creating systems that will filter fake news. But these efforts are relatively new. The biggest vector of fake news in India — WhatsApp — is still grappling with compromising mechanisms for privacy like encryption.

Most digital media outlets do not have basic information regarding editors, publishers or the physical address of the registered entity. We could do well to begin with some basic regulation for digital media outlets like compulsory and online registration of details.

How to help ourselves

Has our insatiable desire to share unverified news turned Whatsapp into a killer APP? Well how do you find the truth on Whatsapp ?

Most people don’t want to; if it suits their ideology they want to believe it. It is called confirmation bias ,and its one if the reasons why fake news becomes so popular .

Whatsapp now has 1.5 billion monthly users, 200 million users in India and everyday more users are signing up ,the App has emerged as a big black hole of unchecked ,unverified news

How do these hoax-slayers dig out the lies? While software tools are used to trace videos on YouTube,

key words are reverse googled to find the original context.

Data analytics can show us the ethnicity and gender profile of those forwarding a certain piece of news that help us determine whether it is false or not, but the nature of WhatsApp encryption makes it difficult to counter it. Google reverse image search is favored by all of the Indian myth-busters. It allows you to upload an image online and then search for where it may have appeared.

Tin Eye also allows readers to check if images have been manipulated. The free video-to-jpg converter transforms video into images that can then be searched separately. InVid has developed a browser application that allows people to add video links into it. It then provides detailed analysis about the video in question. The *Quint* has also started a section called Webqut that debunks fake news.

(The author can be contacted at mishrabasant24@yahoo.in)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JULY 22, 2018

A good year awaits you as Moon trine Sun on your solar return chart and will provide you with the best of prospects as you focus on professional commitments. The planetary energy creates a delightful environment all around you as you develop contacts. Efforts and turn of events will lead to victory in endeavors, for some of you long distance travel is definite so be prepared. You impress people with your talent and attractiveness and invite renewed opportunities. Professional transactions and business deals could be lead successfully. Just the precise time to keep going on the small but active changes that you have brought about in your lifestyle; the results will soon be yours to get.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Your self confidence and outstanding personality may lead you towards achievement in matters related to your profession and finance. You will have an inclination for learning, higher education and gaining knowledge. Your professional requirements will be fulfilled and you will create an opening for enhancing your career. This is a phase when your charm and magnetic personality will prove irresistible to your partner. Your income will rise and financial dealings will prove to be beneficial at a later stage. Your communication skills will enhance your interpersonal relations. Both health and family life require greater attention so do not neglect these aspects.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Your stars in this phase predict that your career problems will soon be sorted out. If you are thinking of taking a step to bring about a change in your career then this is a good time to do so. Your expenditure may take a rise. There is a good time to go on a journey. Do not make any promises as the same may get delayed. Your health may need a little care so keep a watch and do not neglect even problems that seem small. You will enjoy romantic moments with your beloved. Time spent with children will be joyful.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

The position of stars indicates mixed results. You will have to keep your wits in order to resolve career related problems. Professionally set your house in order on a priority basis. Your family and domestic problems will draw your attention and keep you involved so considerable energy and time may have to be spent there. You will plan to buy a property or to invest in real estate and funds may be arranged for the same. This is a time you need to look after your health and keep a close watch and take necessary steps and precautions.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Your financial issues will come into focus. There may be sudden unexpected gains and you may be on the lookout for new opportunities and profitable ventures. A professional or reputation matter will need your attention once you have addressed this issue, your work will be recognized and will be appreciated by your seniors. There is bound to be an enhancement in your image too. Entertainment and enjoyment are in focus as you rejoice with family as well as among loved ones. The unattached have much to look forward to as they are more communicative and expressive about their feelings.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You will find good relations among loved ones and family and your children will show their respect and affection for you. Romance and love matters are expected to favour you and you may reignite your old relationships now. At your work place this is a right time to choose a better job prospect. Your seniors will respect and praise your work and you will gain popularity. In your monetary dealings you will find ready money at your disposal as fast earnings come your way. Your health related problems will disturb you; so take care. Be careful of the company you keep.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

There are good chances of monetary gains and you may depend on the situation to create new things in the form of relations, profession or love. You may expect a gain in your

professional relations and in personal relationships too. You find yourself to be more religious and spiritual minded. There may be an unexpected expenditure involved. You may go on a pilgrimage to fulfill your religious desires. On the domestic front, the family environment will be invigorating and joyful. You may also be filled with a desire to take up some social work and you will find solace in this activity.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)



The planetary configuration indicates mixed results for you and you need to put in your best efforts in order to get things organized. You may think of a better alliance and match in your personal as well as professional matters. It is better not to go on a long trip right now and if it is a necessity then care for your belongings and health. At this time you are in a position to have access to money and you will have to manage some surplus funds. Sudden unexpected money will come but there are openings for outlets also so spend wisely.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)



Your attention will be on your monetary funds and it will be better managed now. In order to enhance your image you may hone your interpersonal skills and establish important contacts. At this time you may have to spend more although your earnings will cover the situation. Your attention may also be focused on some spiritual gains. Your personal feelings may get hurt so avoid raking up past issues. Respect and affection will come to you from your family and you will enjoy a happy time among your children. Some good friends would come forward to extend their support.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)



Your luck will favour you in monetary gains involving matters at your work place. Some unexpected help is forthcoming in matters of your progress in financial or professional gains. This is a time you may develop good social relations. Personal and family relations will also improve. An atmosphere of change is indicated in property dealings and you may have to make some innovations in your plans. Some old issues related to real estate may get resolved. Your health will improve as you bring in some long overdue changes in your lifestyle. Spend some quality time with children and benefit from their company.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)



At this time you may enjoy a profitable dealing which will swing in your favour to give you monetary gains. You are in a position where you will make a little detour in your career so think wisely. Interaction with elders and their advice may further illuminate the path to success. There may be circumstances and developments which will bring about an overseas trip for you. Your partner may not support you in some matters so try to make the extra effort to strengthen your bond. Enhancing communications will help you tremendously in this regard. The health of someone in the family could cause some anxious moments.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)



You will be facing some unusual circumstances at your home or work place so try to maintain focus in all you do as well as an inner focus. Your thinking involves fear and contradictions in your actions and communications so keep your mind alert and not think in negative manner. You will soon get out of the situation and be back on track. Devote some time in meditation and yoga. Your professional and monetary matters will get resolved and you may consult friends for the benefits to be gained. Your spouse will extend support.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)



Monetary and financial issues are expected to be your main objective at this time. You will have a suitable as well as a profitable venture at your disposal now and you will see that monetary gains are in hand. Your professional dealings will bear fruits and you will have chances of promotion also. Relations in the family will soar to new heights. Matters of romance and love are required to be wisely dealt with and the relationship will be filled with joy. You may decide to purchase some things related to home renovation. Your health requires to be looked after particularly while travelling.

Esha’s Bengali bride look

Bollywood actress Esha Deol Takhtani who marks her comeback in Ram Kamal Mukherjee’s film Cakewalk, recently unveiled her Bengali bride look in Kolkata at Slyfox Gastro Pub.

The actress plays the role of a chef in this 22-minute feature film, said, “It took almost three hours for me to get the look right. Thanks to my director Ram Kamal who was very particular about every details.”

Esha plays the role of a Bengali bride for the first time. She has been styled by Kareen Punjwani for this look. The heavy gold embroidered Benarasi saree was sourced out by Kareen for just one shot in the film. The poster has been designed by Ekta Bhattacharya from Kolkata.

Director Ram Kamal says, “The poster tells a lot about the film. I wanted a dichotomy that would create that characteristic rift. Esha is a gifted actor, and she is natural. That’s what makes her look so convincing as Shilpa Sen.”

“If you want to know the more about the bridal scene then you will have to wait and watch the film,” says Esha. The “shanka” and “pola” (red and white bangles) that a bride wears as auspicious sign of a married woman was specially ordered from Kalighat temple in Kolkata. The gold jewellery were specially designed by Shyam Sunder Jewellers from Kolkata to give Esha an ethnic look.

“Ram Kamal made me do almost the rituals for the shoot, and we were joking that I am forever stuck in a wedding ritual. As before Radhya was born we have a Sindhri ritual where the bride and groom takes ‘pheras’ again. And again I am in this bridal outfit for Cakewalk, and now in Ramayan ballet also I do Sita’s swayamvar scene,”



says Esha jokingly.

The film is co-directed by Abhra Chakraborty and produced by Dinesh Gupta, Shailendra Kumar and Aritra Das under the banner of Assorted Motion Pictures and SS1 Entertainment.

The film also marks Bollywood debut of television actor Tarun Malhotra and Anindita Chatterjee. “We have shot extensively in Kolkata and I could feel the vibes of this city. I have visited the famous Dakhineswar Temple, this time

Ram Kamal promised me Kalighat darshan, let’s hope we can make it to the temple,” added Esha.

The essence of Kolkata has been beautifully captured by cinematographer Pravatendu Mondol.

Incidentally, the teaser poster of Cakewalk was launched by dream girl Hema Malini in London few weeks ago, and now with the Kolkata poster launch, the official promotion of Cakewalk starts with much aplomb. The film is slated for October release.

“I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by conscious endeavor.”
--- Henry David Thoreau

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.341 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 23, 2018

Public resource, private profit
THE Government of Meghalaya will be scrapping 50 out of the 120 buses sanctioned under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). These buses have been of great help to commuters within Shillong city and its suburbs. Taking away 50 vehicles off the road, means that some destinations would no longer be served, unless, these 50 are replaced by newer vehicles. But more importantly it is important to scrutinize the terms under which the buses were let out to private operators by the Meghalaya Urban Development Authority (MUDA). From what is observed, the buses are ill-maintained and decrepit; they are parked anywhere during the night and no one cares about their road-worthiness. If the private operators are paying MUDA regularly and at the contracted price then why is MUDA not maintaining these public carriers? Some of the buses were launched in 2011 but many were pressed into service some years later hence they are not more than seven years old. Yet 50 buses have to be condemned! Many of them might be sold as scrap. Recently the NITI Ayog had stated that only vehicles that are 15 years old may be scrapped in the interest of reducing pollution. By then most vehicles would have served their purpose and if they are privately run would have broken even.

The problem with public-private partnerships is that the contracts always favour the private party. The contractors running these buses must have made their profits without any responsibility of maintaining them. Whichever way we look at this arrangement it is a flawed one. Government’s contention is that it is not meant to do business hence the most viable option is to outsource the buses to private parties. Indeed, there are examples galore of how the Meghalaya Transport Corporation (MTC) has all but collapsed and how its fleet of buses are now reduced to a few long distance ones because the manpower requirement per bus is much higher than that required by private operators. However, outsourcing a service does not mean that the private party should be the sole beneficiary of the transaction. The terms of the agreement should be mutually beneficial. In the case of the Shillong Public Transport Service (SPTS) buses and also the Maxi taxis they are all in a run-down condition. The MDA Government needs to revoke all the contracts and call for a transparent and open tendering process henceforth.

TO THE EDITOR

Filing GST returns too taxing

Editor,
No doubt the NDA government has brought about major changes in the market and the fiscal policy. One of those includes GST with a strong backup of digital technology. No one would disagree that this will contribute immensely to nation building and boosting its economy. Many world economists are lauding India’s move in this direction. Well, for all such dramatic changes our techno-savvy PM Modi’s relentless dedication and innovation is praiseworthy. But there are murmurs of dissatisfaction among the middle-class traders these days. The displeasure expressed by the business community is about the government’s rigid diktat for filing GST. The government is apparently putting a hard squeeze on the middle and upper middle class traders and entrepreneurs to file GST before the 20th of each month. In case of a delay, a penalty of Rs 50 per day is levied. This is a huge disappointment. How on earth does the government expect each trader to have

computer knowledge? Usually they all rush to the nearby tax professionals to do the job. Just imagine how a few tax experts in the town match up to the countless GST payers. Can ten thousand sick patients be treated by one single doctor in a short span of time? This is totally impractical. Each tax expert has to file returns for a minimum of 300 to 800 clients per month and that number is increasing by the day. The traders are required to keep detailed accounts of all sales and purchases throughout the month and hence incur incidental expenditures. Many erroneous entries are usually made while filing, but once the file is submitted it cannot be revised. Usually, the last two days of the GST filing is a nightmare because the site is clogged due to heavy traffic. Does the government want the small traders to be harassed like this? Merely imposing strict regulations will never yield positive results. There is another shocker from the Modi Government. It has made it mandatory for tax payers to file their income tax returns by July 31. In case of delay and fine of Rs. 5000 per file

Of Caves and World Cup - The Cup that comes to us in a platter

The two stories captivated the entire world in the last fortnight. The first is the FIFA World Cup Football that comes once in four years. The second story that has attracted global attention is also connected to football but it is not a game. It was the news about 12 members of a football team called Wild Boars trapped inside a cave in Thailand along with their 25 year-old coach. The ordeal that the foot ball team went through inside the cave and how they were successfully rescued, has some connection with Meghalaya. One may ask how or where the connection is. While I was watching the efforts to rescue the team I asked myself, “What if this happened in Meghalaya.” We cannot rule out such an incident here. After all we have more than a thousand caves which the Meghalaya Adventures Association (MAA) have surveyed and mapped throughout the length and breadth of the state and of course there are still many more yet to be surveyed.

There is no guarantee that such incidents will not happen as there are always dare devils around town who would like to be adventurous and try out new things. As a matter of fact Brian Kharpran Daly shared a story he had also published which has a similar story line. Brian along with a very important tourist had encountered a very unhappy incident when he took the person and his team inside a cave. It was a bright sunny day; a good day to go caving but the unpredictable weather as always played spoilt sport. While they were inside the cave, rain started falling and all of a sudden water began to fill the cave. To cut a long story short, its was a God-send that Brian knew the cave like the back of his hand and so he was able to take the tourist to safety. The truth is not all caves are tourist friendly and even for the so called friendly caves, the guides need experience and proper gears to go inside one. Brian has published a book titled ‘Caves for the uninitiated’ which should be a guide for all those who are interested in the caves. Now that we know that our caves are also treasure houses for information and our caves have made our state famous; this book should in fact be a

By H H Mohrmen

prescribed text book for certain levels of college going students. If the Government decides to promote some of the tourist friendly cave for tourism, again Brian had for countless number of times categorically stated that the Government should consult the experts before it executes the idea. There were instances where with all our good intentions to attract tourists we have instead spoiled the cave in the process. Some caves which are long and treacherous should be set aside for only trained professional cavers to enter. The longest and deepest caves in India are located in Meghalaya hence the pertinent question is; how can Government prevent unfortunate incidents like the one that happened in Thailand from happening here in Meghalaya? And the big question is - does Meghalaya have a standard operating

The truth is not all caves are tourist friendly and even for the so called friendly caves, the guides need experience and proper gears to go inside one. Brian has published a book titled ‘Caves for the uninitiated’ which should be a guide for all those who are interested in the caves.

procedure (SOP) in place to deal with such an eventuality? I had the opportunity to visit the cavers in many of their expeditions. For a layman like me, at a glance seems like the team is there only for the fun of exploring the caves to fulfil their selfish interests and of course with lots of beer to guzzle. But that is far from the truth. In the makeshift camp, apart from the place to sleep and eat, there is a work station with computers and all the gadgets needed to map and survey the cave. What I mean to say is that it is hard and onerous work because after every trip to the new caves that is explored the cavers have to feed all the data and information collected into the systems which are then published in a book. The team has already published two volumes of the book called ‘The Cave Pearls of Meghalaya.’ In the first volume there is information about caves in the Pala range and Kopili

valley including caves found in other parts of Meghalaya. Similarly in volume 2 there is information predominantly about the cave north of Shnongrim ridge and the Liat Prah cave system, and of course there is also information about other caves in the state. After watching the incident in Thailand unfurling in front of our eyes I read the books again and realized that they were not only a store-house of information about the caves and everything inside them but more importantly the books which have been painstakingly compiled could be the first thing that the search and rescue operation team will need in case of any eventuality. The books have detailed descriptions of all the caves that were surveyed, with maps meticulously drawn by the cavers who explored the caves. This will go a long way in helping the rescue operations. Now our caves have

catapulted Meghalaya to very important position in the world geological map and for this we have to thank the Meghalaya Adventurers’ Association for that journey that it has undertaken which begin in 1992. Since then they have regularly organised caving expeditions called ‘Caving in the abode of the Clouds’ for more than twenty times now. The expeditions not only survey and map the cave passages but they have documented all the aquatic lives and the fauna found inside the caves. The books mentioned have information about the subterranean ecology of Meghalaya, and about new and exotic species of bats and fishes found in the cave, but the startling finding was the fact that the stalagmite from Mawmluh helped geologists decide on the onset of a new Meghalayan age. Again Brian in one of our discussions mentioned this to me a couple of year ago that scientists even use the caves in Meghalaya to study

climate change. He lamented that nobody from the local scholars showed interest in studying the caves and the biodiversity inside it. Who would have thought that a cave would make this small state of India very famous so as to name the age of the Earth after Meghalaya. The football team from across the world sweated it out to win the coveted world cup but they can hold the cup for four years only. Here Meghalaya was awarded a different world cup altogether and it will be with us for eternity because no one can take it away from us. The caves are therefore very important heritage that we have inherited and it is our duty to protect them and hand it over to our children. It would also not be out of place to recall here that on February 14, 2007 there was news report that the cavers who were camping then at Shnongrim were asked to leave the area by people under the leadership of Sonny Khryiem and Vincent Pala (then Engineer PWD) and the Director General of the Police W.R. Marbaniang had no other option but to advise them to call off their expedition. The point is; Meghalaya is in the limelight now because of the caves and there are also be people who would see limestone or coal and not the caves and the fragile heritage in it. The government therefore must come up with a policy to protect these caves and the biodiversity therein. The government should make it mandatory that our students learn about caves in school and colleges so that they will learn to appreciate these natural heritages that we have inherited. One of the suggestions was to select certain ridges or ranges which have large concentration of caves and declare them as a protected area, but the experts know best. One clear and definite suggestion was made by Dr Glenn C Kharkongor who said that the Government should start an initiative to declare Mawmluh cave as a UNESCO heritage site and maybe we can add some more area to the list. We were handed over the Cup; We must all learn to cheer it too.!

Frequent power cuts in Jowai town

Editor,
There is unprecedented load shedding by the MeECL at all hours of the day and night. What do the concerned have to day about this and why is Jowai Town being penalised? Just when we are about to cook our food the electricity vanishes leaving the food half cooked. It seems that the MeECL uses sub-standard materials which is why there is constant power failure. We the consumers pay a substantial amount as electricity bills every month and we wonder on what basis the bills are calculated when we have such frequent power cuts. Is the MeECL actually reading the meter or are they simply adjusting the amount? I request the MEECL to provide regular energy for the benefit of the people especially in this age of technology where everything works on electricity. Yours etc., Omarga Laloo, Mynthong, Jowai.

Cameras wink at Rahul’s eye to total effect Everything scripted, including histrionics?

By Sushil Kutty

In Dante’s hell, corrupt politicians end up in a lake of boiling pitch. Demons with evil claws and grappling hooks guard the lake. Raksha Mantri Nirmala Sitharaman looked like she saw Dante’s Hell when Rahul Gandhi accused her of speaking ‘untruth’ in the Rafale deal? UPA-II was sent to Purgatory in 2014 for being corrupt. Now, a year short of another General Elections, the Congress is doing its best to parcel BJP to the same hell with Rafale. And the BJP is pinning its faith on Westland Augusta to do the same. One a jet, the other a chopper! Embarrassing moments for Nirmala Sitharaman. Divine Comedy! With nothing amusing in it for the Raksha Mantri. The ‘secret’ was out. Advantage Congress! If only Rahul had stood his place after daring Modi to “look him in the eye”, it would have left a lasting wound. But Rahul strayed from the script (written by Jairam Ramesh?). He embraced the 56” chest. Then, he winked. Sitharaman produced evidence and France backed her up. There was a “secrecy clause” and no need to make a song and dance of it. Later, when the “sun went silent”, Modi showed the error of Rahul’s ways: No one dare look a ‘Naamdar’ (a member of the Gandhi family) in the eye and get away with it, he said, listing out names of those who dared and lost. From Netaji Bose to Sardar Patel, Pranab Mukherjee and HD Deve Gowda! The PM forgot. There is one eye that could look Rahul in the eye – the Lok Sabha TV eye! It looked the Congress president in the eye and caught him doing a Priyanka Warrior! He winked. He let it out that it was all histrionics, scripted. And Rahul Gandhi lost. “The Oscar for the Best Actor goes to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his blockbuster act,” the Telugu Desam Party announced. BJP MPs did not do somersaults in the aisles. They said Rahul should have got it for the “worst act” in Parliament, ever! The Day After’s newspapers told the story. Rahul hugging the “hugging PM” was on every front-page. Rahul-supporters called it out-and-out a ‘Rahul Victory’. The headlines said Modi won. Except one which balanced the act: ‘Modi wins trust, Rahul gains confidence.’ Shashi Tharoor tweeted: “Basic message is that the journey is more important than the destination. Failures of the BJP government were put before the nation. Outcome was predictable but the process was successful.” Media

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Rafale apart, it appeared that the Congress and other opposition parties believed that BJP members of Lok Sabha would vote in favour of the trust vote. Rahul alluded to it when he said he was greeted with smiles “and a handshake” by BJP MPs during the short adjournment in the middle of his speech. NCP leader Tariq Anwar said BJP MPs were squirming under the “oppressive hand” of Modi & Shah. “Why issue a two-line whip?” he asked. Was Sonia Gandhi also banking on a revolt in BJP ranks when she asked, “Kaun Kahta Hai Hamare Paas Number Nahin?” The BJP won the trust vote 325/126. Actor and MP Paresh Rawal tweeted, “Big moment for Congress, Rahul loses first no-confidence vote.” Jokes apart, “what must the grand alliance be thinking?” Especially, Mayawati, and Mamata Banerjee. Both aspire to become Prime Minister, and the spotlight on Rahul Gandhi must have jolted. Mamata has now given a call for ‘Chalo Dilli’ and Mayawati’s BSP has already passed a resolution to make her Prime Minister. Finally, the anger is not only in Andhra Pradesh for making a mockery of TDP’s no-confidence motion. It’s also in Tamil Nadu! The ATADMK is believed to have voted against the no-trust vote. “Hell has no fury like the wrath of a Tamilian”, tweeted a Tamizhan. Dante’s Inferno after 12 hours in Purgatory. (IPA Service)

“*Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it*”
--- Henry David Thoreau

The Shillong Times

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PM in Africa

AFRICA did not figure much in the scheme of things of jet-set Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his four-year rule. Nor did the ‘dark’ continent matter much for previous Indian governments. This had largely to do with the thinking in New Delhi that Africa did not set the global agenda and remained side-lined in the international power play. The present visit by PM Modi to three African nations – Rwanda, Uganda and South Africa – in the run-up to the BRICS summit, also is a tame affair. Yet, there’s some buzz as to what the Indian PM is up to this time, mainly because China’s Leader for Life, Xi Jinping, is also in close proximity. Fact is that while India looked the other way, China was quietly engaging Africa. It engaged the continent and the nations thereof through multiple channels and initiatives. China took large swathes of land in African countries on lease; it took mines on lease; and it established large business connections with these countries in the last two decades with a rare zeal. Little wonder then that China matters more to some African countries than India despite the fact the ties between India and Africa are long-standing. China started courting Africa in recent years. A well-acknowledged fact is that the Chinese deal with Africans with less of racial prejudices; for, what mattered to Chinese delegations visiting or dealing with Africa was business.

The large number of Indian settlers in Africa, on the other hand, had often set themselves against the natives. This, despite the historic Gandhi stamp on Africa. Notably, new entrant China’s annual trade volume with Africa is double of the volume India has with the continent. So with Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows. So with diplomatic engagements. China’s ambitious One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative does not limit itself to Asia but has a significant African component too. Billions are given to African nations as loan by China, while India failed to warm up to them. Even the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project that reaches up close to Africa ensures easy reach of Chinese products to African markets – where India had significant presence in the past. Visit by leaders from one side to the other or signing of some bilateral agreements by themselves are of little help in the age of economic hyper activity. The failure on the part of successive Indian governments to realize the potential of Africa in matters of natural resources is today to the great advantage of China. If PM Modi’s present visit can repair the damage even to a small extent, then its a good sign.

TO THE EDITOR

Prayer to extend MA admission date

Editor, ,
Our esteemed NEHU declared the B.A on July 20, 2018 at night and the last date for submission of forms for Masters Degree is July 23, 2018. July 21& 22 were weekends (Saturday & Sunday). On this basis we would like to express our grievances at this lack of sensitivity of NEHU. It will be a tough task for us to do the same in just one day (especially the rural students living in far flung areas). We want to inform you that most of the students from rural areas cannot apply online as mobile connectivity is extremely poor and not all of us have computers.
We therefore beg and pray that NEHU will extend the last date of submission of forms.
Yours etc.,
Concerned students,
Name withheld on request

Dearth of real leaders in Meghalaya

Editor,
The recent development in the KHADC has very little hope to offer our state. In fact it is questionable if the KHADC has anything at all to offer. Ever since the time that these members were

elected, the only thing that stands exposed is the kind of immature and self-centered leaders that our State has produced, particularly among the Khasi and Jaintia people. I might be wrong and might even be accused of overstepping my limits but it seems that when it comes to leadership, firstly the disease of not wanting other people to succeed is so deeply rooted in our culture that any hope of any good being done seems completely out of reach. Secondly, the desire to promote the self is so strong that all good causes have simply had to suffer the consequences of never being accomplished. Thirdly, the desire to make one self rich is so embedded in our DNA that any schemes or benefits that should have been made available to the public have unashamedly been leaked out from the bucket. The present situation indicates that we now have a leader in the KHADC, who has managed to change more parties within a span of just one year than some of us would have managed to change our clothes in a week. This takes me to the fourth point that if we have people who cannot even be loyal to a party through which they have been elected then what guarantee can they give that they will be loyal to the cause for which they have been elected? As long as

individuals are larger than the cause, we will all have to be content to sit down, relax and simply choose to enjoy watching this vicious cycle. Is it not true that if we repeatedly watch a bad show and even more so if it's the only show, then somehow after sometime it starts to become enjoyable. I guess if a name could be given to this disease it should be called, " The I disease".

Yours etc.,
Pyndapbha Warjri
Jaiaw laitdom

Will the Govt show concern for the disabled?

Editor,
Your report of July 10 on Meghalaya’s request to the NEC for finance mentioned the opening of a school for the Children with Special needs. Thank you, Mr. Chief Minister, for your concern for the disabled. It came to me as a surprise – a very pleasant one indeed. It took me back nearly seventeen years when the Department of Education, Government of Meghalaya by its letter No. RC/PER/EDUCATION/ 2000/25 of October 27, 2000 had proposed a School for the disabled. Nothing concrete happened since then. The Government after discussing the proposal with us realised the necessity of qualified dedicated Special Educators

and the high cost of running a Special School. I now sincerely hope that the State does open a School for children with Special Needs and that it alternatively also subsidises the existing Special Schools by paying a reasonable amount towards the salaries of the Special Educators to enable them a decent life. As per the Central Government’s Scheme under the DDRS a Special Educator gets Rs. 6,900 (Seventy five percent) Rs. 5,175 per month. But even this peanut of a salary arrives after nearly three years. Dwar Jingkymren is not able to meet the demands for admission due to the non-availability of accommodation hence further construction of additional class rooms is proposed. This will entail an expenditure of Rs.12 lakhs. Will the State Government help to meet this genuine expense to help its own children? .
Yours etc,
Sajjad Ali ,
Dwar Jingkymren,
Viaemail

Horrendous Upper Shillong Traffic

Editor
The traffic problem of Upper Shillong seems insurmountable with traffic jams starting as early as 8 in the morning but what

really amazes me is the mysterious nature of the traffic. No one knows where it starts or where it ends; no one knows why it starts. There are no big trucks or road constructions or accidents taking place that can be said to cause the traffic jam but it's just the vehicles only. You'll be stuck in the same place for 30-45 minutes and the next things is that the road will be as free as a bandh day. The presence of Traffic Cops at 3rd mile, Upper Shillong doesn't help ease the traffic but creates more problems instead. It seems like the cops aren't trained enough on how to handle traffic. In fact it seems like the drivers know better than the cops on how to handle traffic.
The daily traffic jam is creating a lot of problems for people of all walks of life, especially the students. The concerned authorities need to take a hard look at the traffic problem. The Government too should do something about the increasing numbers of cars even while the size of the road is still the same.
Yours etc.,
Reakor Shisha
Kharkrang
Shillong - 9

Parliamentary debates key to democracy

Editor,
We should be attracted to

US misadventure in Helsinki

By TP Sreenivasan

where the relationship could go in the future." One Western diplomat predicted that any commitments Trump made to Putin at the summit would not lead to tangible changes in US policy toward Russia.
A State Department spokesperson dismissed talk of "agreements" and said Wednesday that there were three "modest" takeaways from the meeting "that we are currently assessing." "These proposals include a high-level working group with business leaders from both countries, convening an expert council of political scientists, diplomats, former diplomats and former military officials from the United States and from Russia; and that the US and Russian national security councils will meet to discuss follow-up meetings.
The Washington community is now quite accustomed to expecting the unexpected from Trump. The Helsinki summit reached a new low in terms of available information about what really happened between the two leaders when they were together, except for two interpreters. There is a move to obtain the notes of the interpreters, if no recording of the conversations turns up. Meanwhile the focus is on the next summit in Washington at which Trump and Putin are likely to articulate their agreements.
A new attitude seems to be emerging among the American people to the decisions and statements of Trump. Unless they have any immediate impact on them, they have decided to wait out for the next President in the hope that Trump's irrational actions will not outlast him. (Courtesy PENNEWS)
(The writer is former Ambassador of India and Governor for India of the IAEA, Chairman, Academic Council and Director, NSS Academy of Civil Services & Director General, Kerala International Centre).

listen to parliamentary debates to make our democracy more meaningful. The most Sacred Temple of democratic India ought to be our Parliament and the most Holy Book should undoubtedly be our C o n s t i t u t i o n . Unfortunately, we tend to forget that democracy cannot survive without healthy parliamentary debates. Such debates and discussions are necessary not only to make the electorate politically conscious but also to make the Members of Parliament accountable to the voters.
The debate on no-confidence motion in the Parliament along with its live telecast has generated interest among the electorate. Such interest is a must for the vivacity of our democracy. This monsoon session of Parliament has brought a refreshing drizzle after days of drought in vox pop in our Parliament. But this drizzle could have been turned into a much needed rain for two consecutive days. It would be better if two days had been allotted instead of a single day for the debate on no-confidence motion as there were instances of Parliament sitting on Saturdays.
Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Beyond hug-n-wink: What roadmap for 2019? Will Opposition unite behind Rahul Gandhi?

By Kalyani Shankar

Now that the Narendra Modi government has won the trust vote on Friday, what next? The dramatic ‘hug’ and ‘wink’ of the Congress President Rahul Gandhi while speaking on the no-trust motion on Friday might have become news, but the real question is whether the Opposition is really ready to take on the BJP in 2019 and also who will lead the Opposition.
Though the trust motion was aimed attesting the NDA numbers, battle lines for 2019 polls are drawn after the heated debate. The next step to show opposition unity will be in the election of the Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha, but the BJP is not keen to hold the elections unless it mobilises the number for its own candidate or a BJP backed candidate. So it is likely to be postponed to the Winter session of Parliament by which time the polls for the Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh would be over.
While by and large there was Opposition unity in strategy to reach out to them and win back their trust,” he told the CWC.
On forming the alliances, Sonia Gandhi who might play a bigger role in her capacity as the chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party observed: “The need of the hour is the opposition unity and the ‘opposition has to get together in strategic alliances, keeping aside personal ambitions.’
However, both tasks are difficult. Regional satraps like Mamata Banerjee (Trinamool Congress), Mayawati (BSP), Chandra Babu Naidu (Telugu Desam Party) and Sharad Pawar (NCP) are not willing to accept Rahul Gandhi as the Opposition prime ministerial candidate, though they did not show any hesitation in accepting Sonia Gandhi in 2004 when she cobbled up a coalition, which came to power. In the present political atmosphere, Rahul must find a way to work with these strong and egoistic leaders and win over them. It is a million dollar question

The BJP too has the task of keeping the NDA flock together and get new friends. Though it gained the JD (U) and some smaller Northeastern regional partners, the TDP walked out of the NDA in March and the Shiv Sena, its oldest ally is practically out. Smaller parties like Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, Hindustani Awam Morcha and RLSP also quit the NDA. The BJP itself pulled out its support to the PDP government. The party managers expected to get about 350 votes, much beyond the NDA strength in the house (314) but got 25 votes less despite getting the 37 votes from the AIADMK.

Parliament, the efforts to get parties like the BJD did not succeed. The TRS (11) and BJD (20) stayed away. NDA ally Shiv Sena (18) also stayed away. They had been banking on 129 votes including smaller parties and got 125. Clearly, much more needs to be done to take on Modi.
The BJP too has the task of keeping the NDA flock together and get new friends. Though it gained the JD (U) and some smaller Northeastern regional partners, the TDP walked out of the NDA in March and the Shiv Sena, its oldest ally is practically out. Smaller parties like Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, Hindustani Awam Morcha and RLSP also quit the NDA. The BJP itself pulled out its support to the PDP government. The party managers expected to get about 350 votes, much beyond the NDA strength in the house (314) but got 25 votes less despite getting the 37 votes from the AIADMK.
The Congress, if it wants to project its president Rahul Gandhi as a challenger to Modi, much needs to be done to establish his supremacy in the opposition. He has emerged much more confident and the transition from Sonia to Rahul has been smooth. The first meeting of the Congress Working Committee chaired by Rahul on Sunday, authorized him to go ahead and form poll alliances and also draw up the road map ahead of 2019. Rahul realizes the difficult task of expanding the Congress vote base. “In each constituency, we have to find people who have not voted for us and develop a as all of them nourish prime ministerial ambitions whether they will accept Rahul as their leader.
Bringing new friends to the opposition ranks is going to be equally difficult as regional parties like the BJD and TRS want to keep equidistance from both the BJP and the Congress, as they are their main rivals in their states. The Congress does not want to include the AAP in the opposition group. Parties like INLD, PDP, Rajinikanth’s new outfit, YSR Congress and other smaller parties are averse to Congress. Since the DMK is already with the Congress, the AIADMK will not join the opposition group.
In such situation will Congress support anyone else after declaring Rahul Gandhi as its prime ministerial candidate? Sensing the opportunity to become the face of Opposition, Mamata Banerjee roared at a rally on Saturday “Bengal will show the way for the 2019 Lok Sabha polls” and announced that she will bring all the opposition leaders in one platform in a rally proposed to be organised on January 19, 2019 at the Kolkata Brigade Grounds. It is obvious that Mamata wants to wow the country with a massive show of strength. The BSP wants Mayawati to be declared as prime ministerial candidate. There are others. With so many ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’ the Congress must win over new friends and keep old allies if it means business. It is not impossible, as alliances need a give and take attitude from both sides. (IPA Service)

“ One of the most destructive things that's happening in modern society is that we are losing our sense of the bonds that bind people together - which can lead to nightmares of social collapse.”

-- Alexander McCall Smith

The Shillong Times

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GST goes ahead

THE GST council has decided to reduce rates on 88 items which include TV, Washing Machines and Refrigerators down from 28% to 18%. It is the fifth round of rationalisation of the rates. Revenues from GST are going up- from Rs. 90,000 crore last fiscal to the Rs 103, 00, 000 Crore in April this year and that accounts for the fact that monthly returns are not mandatory and that quarterly returns will do for business turnover up to Rs 5 Crore. The tax cuts amount to a fiscal stimulus which will boost private consumption. The fiscal stimulus will also mean that the cuts in GST rates will be more than offset by increase in private purchases prompted by increased consumer spending. The levy of 28% on a building material like cement is however far from justified. It appears that the Council has been prompted by fears of a significant revenue loss to take this step about an essential material like cement. What has been overlooked is that a reduction in the GST rate on cement would have been offset by transactions of higher volumes.

In the next one year, the GST Council should aim at lowering the tax rate from the 18% slab to 16% if the optimistic 15% is not readily achievable. The slabs should be broken down from five categories- 0, 5, 12, 18 and 28 to three. Besides, there should be cuts of 0.25% for rough diamonds and precious stones and 3% for gold and silver. What seems encouraging is that GST has proved to be reformative. But there will be much to be desired unless the issues mentioned above are not suitably addressed.

Besides the above, there are significant of small and medium businesses in the rural outback of this country that are not digitally robust. Not much has been done to reduce the plight of this section which has to rely heavily on the tax assistants who are making a killing at these times. Government needs to devise means to bridge the digital divide between rural and urban India to make the GST a successful and sustainable reforms process.

TO THE EDITOR

NEHU clarification

Editor,

In the recent past, there have been news items concerning delay in publication of Undergraduate results, publication of merit list etc. The University would like to apprise the students concerned in particular and other stakeholders in general as under:

It is a fact that North-Eastern Hill University was set up with the aspiration that it would lift the higher education scenario of the region and bring the students of this region at par with their counterparts in the rest of the country. In this direction, the University has established a number of Academic Departments where the students can pursue their higher education without resorting to admission in other parts of the country.

The University has been offering a number of courses including Undergraduate courses at the affiliated colleges in the state of Meghalaya. Under the banner of Undergraduate courses there are Annual Systems of examinations and Semester System of ex-

aminations being conducted by the University.

Normally, the Undergraduate Annual System examinations commences from the middle of February of each year but because of the state elections held in February 2018, the said examinations commenced from 7th of March and continued till 18th of April 2018 inclusive of Practical Examinations. Immediately after completion of examinations, necessary steps were taken to announce the results by following the required procedures. The first results under the Annual System was declared on June 14, 2018 and completed on June 29, 2018.

During the currency of the announcement of Annual results, the University had notified the Examination Programme for the Even Semester Examinations which includes the final semester (6th semester of 2015 batch for the first time). The Even Semester Examinations commenced from April 25, 2018 and concluded in the middle of June 2018. During the currency of Even Semester Examinations, the University had initiated the process of evalu-

ation for the concluded examinations so as to ensure that the final semester / 6th semester examination results are announced latest by first week of July 2018. Unfortunately, the University could not meet its target due to total dislocation of the evaluation process during the period from May 31, 2018 till June 10, 2018 due to unrest in the city.

However, with the active support from the College teachers the University could announce most of the final semester results by July 20, 2018. Anticipating marginal delay in publication of results, the University has already extended the time for admission of various Postgraduate courses in NEHU from July 18 to July 23rd 2018 so as to enable the students to submit their applications. As the admission in the University is resorted to through online system, therefore the students should not have been affected in submission of their applications even if the BA results were announced on July 20, 2018.

In so far the publication of Merit List of results are concerned, the same has been kept in abeyance because the re-evaluation results of odd semesters (1st,

3rd and 5th semester) belonging to 2015 batch students is under process. Without taking into account the re-evaluated results, there could be a cascading effect on the overall merit List. Meanwhile efforts are being made to release the Merit List in a phased manner at the earliest possible time.

On the issue of WIFI services, the University has two WIFI segments: (1) Department WIFI across the campus fully funded by MHRD operational since May 29, 2017 and (2) Hostel WIFI in 23 hostels and operational since July 2014 from the University's fund and being fully utilised by all hostellers free of cost and not only during the NAAC/NIRF visit as claimed by the aggrieved hostellers. The system logs all activities.

It is true that WIFI in several hostels and not only Pahsyntiew were down from May 12, 2018 because of three major lighting strikes one after another in subsequent weeks. Switches & APs were replaced from the available spares with the first two strikes but new ones have to be procured as warranty/AMC does

not cover lightning strikes. The University in the meantime is also in the process of putting in place lighting strikes safety measures for devices in all hostels which are very prone to frequent lightning strikes. The Internet Access is however available in all other hostels and departments for the same aggrieved hostellers to use till such time the new equipment is installed.

With regards to the claim of inadequate water supply, the Assistant Engineer (Civil), Campus Development Department has clarified that the Department did not receive any complaints regarding the same. In fact, water supply has been normal since January 2018. Water supply gets interrupted only when there is no current. In case of water shortage, water tanks are deployed as and when the situation arises.

Finally, the university assures the student community that the University is all out to fulfill the aspirations of the students for a better future.

Yours etc.,
G. Umdor,
Public Relations Officer,
North-Eastern Hill University,
Shillong

Why demean our mothers?

Editor,

The ban on entry of women aged between 10 and 50 years into the Sabarimala temple in Kerala is ridiculous. If women are to be treated as untouchables for their menstrual cycles then we all need to be treated as such as women during that very period of their lives gave birth to all of us. To despise women in general and to despise their menstrual periods in particular is nothing but to despise our very birth and our lifeblood. Indeed. Such primitive attitude of demeaning our own birth keeps a woman in quarantine before she goes into labour.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

India’s urban nightmares

Warned yet unprepared, why?

By Poonam I Kaushish

the mess, misery and damage is certainly man-made and mostly caused by human error.

This is primarily, because our policies are based on poor land management and myopic flood-control strategies. In fact, a cursory glance at the Parliamentary Standing Committee Report on Disaster Management shows that over 67.4 per cent area of the country is vulnerable to natural disasters like floods, cyclonic winds and storms. Yet the Government's couldn't care less, ke pharak painda hai.

Moreover, why do politicians feel that mere sanctioning of hundreds of crores will solve the problem? Little do they realize that funds doled out instead of helping the people, are used by most State Governments for purposes other than disaster management. Bluntly, neither the Central Disaster Management Authority nor the State Disaster Boards implemented any project properly. Unfortunately, many civic officials spend years lining their pockets instead of taking care of civic facilities.

Lack of coordination between bodies makes matters worse. Delhi has it the worst, with five independent municipal bodies, the State Government-run Public Works Department and a police force under the Central Government. Resulting in a perennial mess year round: Jams, chaos and confusion.

Think. It is open knowledge that extreme weather events become more frequent and intense due to climate change. Yet our cities are not designed to withstand these as nothing is being done to make cities more resilient. Heavy development has destroyed green spaces and mangrove forests, its natural flood protection resultant in inadequate drainage system as no amount of man-made storm water drains can make up for natural drains.

No effort is being made to reduce the higher population density in urban areas and make them less vulnerable to the changing climate leading to greater loss of life and property

than rural areas. Extreme rainfall also leaves cities at greater economic risk. The economic loss to Chennai from the 2015 floods cost \$3.5 billion (Rs 21,381 crores).

Scandalously, a total of 15 States including Rajasthan, Himachal, Kerala and Manipur did not have a flood forecasting system till August 2016. What makes the situation more precarious is that most telemetry stations are non-functional. Of the 375 telemetry stations installed country-wide to get real-time data on water level in rivers and rainfall, 222 (59%) were non-operational. While flood-prone States have yet to demarcate specific areas vulnerable to flooding.

If there are trees, plants and open areas around, rain water will be absorbed by the Earth, but if we continue to build concrete jungles, flooding should not surprise us. Undoubtedly, this will come at an enormous cost. We would need thousands of crores to deal with national calamities like the annual kahein-sukhaa-kahein-baaarh ritual.

If India is to progress rapidly, its cities cannot come to a halt during monsoons. Sure, heavy rains will slow things down and there will be some amount of traffic jams and water-logging, but better planning and preparedness can ensure that monsoons do not lead to an economic blackout. The Government is making several 'Smart Cities' but where is the civic planning?

In sum, there are no short-cuts. We need to highlight our priorities, formulate policies based on needs and find solutions. It is now imperative to re-think our strategies and approaches to safeguard the environment, build infrastructure, improve service delivery, establish close links between policy, research and service with the aam aadmi at the centre of development.

Our polity needs to pull up their bootstraps and focus on long-term rather than short-term planning and shed their passion to pander to vote-banks. One needs neither a bleeding heart nor blindness to know what should be done. Decisive indecisiveness will not do. It only holds out promises of more misery, more wrenching news bulletins and more cries for the Government to act. The time is far gone to play the pied piper and aver it's only life, stupid! ---- INFA

Waiting for Modi’s secret diary ‘written by himself’

Defence deals are prickly affairs in India

By Sushil Kutty

Tom Horn was a tracker of renegade Red Indians and cattle rustlers. He had powerful fists and was a marksman of note. Horn wrote his story and the publishers put on the cover the words 'Written by Himself'. It was quaint. Now, there are lots of Indian stories, 'Indian' not 'Red Indian', but what if things told stories and publishers put it on the cover 'Written by Itself'?

Like the Bofors story. Agusta Westland story. The Rafale story. Bofors roiled Indian politics for a long time. Those who could patch up a credible, closer to truth, story are all dead -

time a jet chosen is delivered a newer, more stealthier, sleeker version has taken to the sky! Two, it leaves in its wake a constant hunger to cannibalize. Jet-parts lose their edge and are hard to come by.

But 'three' is the worst - the 'politics' that dogs deals. Successive governments have not held back from politicising arms deals for partisan political ends. To believe that there are no crooked components to arms deals is to believe in God! But to make a spectacle of a good jet in Parliament, mount sorties on the government of the day, while IAF aces wait to

“Is there proof that the Rafale deal is crooked to the jet's core? Show evidence. The political climate since May 26, 2014 has vitiated to such an extent that it will take more than proof to get the Rafale to fly. To a great extent it has to do with the personalities involved - Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress President Rahul Gandhi.”

Rajiv Gandhi, Win Chadda and Ottavio Quattrocchi. Bofors has done good service to the artillery, proving its worth during the Kargil War, as the Pakistani intruders, some of whose bones are buried on Kargil heights, would testify.

The French Rafale jets are yet to contribute their bit to the Indian Air Force's might. It's said to be no less a fighter-jet than the F-35 and what have you in the Chinese fleet. But it will take time to take to the skies in Indian colours because for years the Rafale was flown in by the Congress to mount sorties against the Modi government.

The Indo-French deal, struck first by the UPA-II government, was facing turbulence even before the Modi government stepped in with a deal of its own. The allegation post-UPA-II is that Modi sidelined his own Defence Minister to work out a lucrative deal for one of his '10-15' cash-heavy businessmen friends, crony capitalists.

The Congress alleged Modi was hiding behind a "secrecy clause" penned into the arrangement. Behind the allegation was the charge that a far higher price was paid for a Rafale jet than should have been. Hidden in the charge was the allegation that kickbacks accrued to interested parties, the standard Indian template for all defence deals with foreign arms suppliers.

There is nothing like a defence deal to raise suspicion of graft. Arms dealers in Armani suits are believed to be behind much of the world's conflicts. It keeps them in business. And there are many Indians who are believed to be neck-deep in dubious, shady arms deals. Several of them retired defence personnel with knowledge of India's defence requirements, their specifics, with tentacles running deep into the Defence Ministry and its multitude of arms.

Defence deals are prickly affairs. India is the largest importer of arms. Unlike Russia, China and the USA, all three of whom have an indigenously-made arms backbone, spine! Of the three defence arms of the Indian armed forces, the IAF is the most vulnerable because India has nothing of substance in as far as a defence industry of its own is concerned.

The IAF may boast of being the 'top air-force' on the planet but to fly high on borrowed wings, even if paid for, is fraught with risk. One, it takes time to arm and by the

engage in mock dogfights, is simply unacceptable.

Is there proof that the Rafale deal is crooked to the jet's core? Show evidence. The political climate since May 26, 2014 has vitiated to such an extent that it will take more than proof to get the Rafale to fly. To a great extent it has to do with the personalities involved - Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress President Rahul Gandhi.

Both hate each other. There is no respect in the equation. Modi looks at Rahul as an upstart, 'there' only because he's a 'dynast', a 'Naamdar', not worth the time to sit across the table and tell secrets. Rahul Gandhi in turn sees in Modi an interloper, somebody who doesn't have a leader's track record.

The two act and talk as they could do without the other around. Their armies of trolls are ever present to crank up the feeling. Add to that the fact that Modi is kind of a very secretive person. He seems to like the enigma that surrounds him. People are told he works 18-20 hours but nobody is sure.

He doesn't seem to be hobnobbing with business tycoons. But there are occasional Jio-like beeps. Ambani and Adani are always within whisper distance to feed the feeling that for all his grass-roots upbringing, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is quite comfortable in elite surroundings. He seems sold to private enterprise.

But for Rahul Gandhi calling out Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, details of the Rafale deal wouldn't have been rolled out. Tuesday, TV news channels, surgical strikes-like, produced documents to prove Rahul Gandhi was wrong that the government paid Rs 1,600 crore per Rafale jetfighter. In fact, less was paid.

So, why couldn't the government clear that up before? Why keep the country on tenterhook and waste crores of rupees in wasted Parliament hours? The answer to that is in the Prime Minister's personality. He is one who doesn't choose timing. He's the kind of man whose silence is more paralyzing than a Manmohan Singh-tongued-tied. Everything about his government leaks.

So, Rafale will fly, but when? Till the other day, only rumours flew! A correct reading of Modi's rule and Rafale will be possible only if a publisher can persuade him to tell his story and carry on the book-cover 'Written by Himself' (IPA Service)

“*Disobedience is the true foundation of liberty. The obedient must be slaves.*”

--- Henry David Thoreau

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LX No.345 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 27, 2018

A Confused Pakistan

Granted that there’s substance to the charge “the military sought to manipulate the election results” in Pakistan, there still is the inescapable feeling today that the established political parties there have taken a severe beating in the parliamentary polls. That said, the final outcome of the polls is anybody’s guess for the reason that the court there can intervene to set things right or play spoilsport. The impressive gains made by cricketer-turned politician Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) were no surprise. With the ruling PML-N of Nawaz Sharif having taken a severe beating in the backdrop of the Panama Papers leak and court indictment of the seasoned leader in corruption cases, the mood was set against the party. Sharif’s jailing, of late, was seen by some as a step that would help his party win sympathy votes. Others thought that it was reaffirmation of his corrupt image. Clearly, the people were not enthused at the turn of events. The last straw that possibly worked against the PML, now led by his brother, were reports that Nawaz Sharif is critically ill due to kidney ailment.

Imran Khan is no saint. India has reasons to be wary of him on two counts. One, he is believed to have the backing of the Pakistani army and its notorious intelligence wing the ISI. Two, he has a direct line with the fundamentalist forces in the country, which are making a mess of life in Pakistan on the one hand, and raising the public mood against India on the other. The Election Commission granting permission to the army to be present in polling booths was invitation to trouble. This offered a window of opportunity to the soldiers to subvert the will of the people. Allegations by PPP and PML-N, among others, were that soldiers threw out political party agents at many booths and manipulated the polls from within. Under the present state of affairs there, anything is possible. A politically unstable Pakistan is of grave concern to India. Chances are that the army would seek to further complicate matters vis-à-vis India. A strong leader at the helm, like Nawaz Sharif, was some guarantee that the political establishment there would act with a sense of responsibility. With parliamentary elections ending in a flurry of contesting claims and counter-claims and vote-rigging allegations, a smooth transition of power is unlikely. All eyes are on the court too, as to what impediments can come in the way of the political process.

LOOKING BACK

May 29, 1989

NSUI to enlist young voters

“The bringing of school under the deficit system is not “brightlight.” Minister for Education Mr D D Lapang said during the inauguration of the new school building of the Umsohpieng M.E. School. He warned that the grant could be withdrawn if the school did not function properly, or if there was a fall

in the standard of education. He exhorted the parents and the teachers to guide the children in constructive fields and warned students against being influenced by the ‘negative elements’ that worked only at the cost of the careers of the students themselves.

TO THE EDITOR

Multiple authority confusion at Themmetor

Editor,

In Meghalaya, we have multi- layered authorities all committed, “ban iada ia ka ri bad ka jaidbynriew” (to save the nation and its people). We have the State Government, the District Councils, the Syiems/ the Dalois/ the Nokmas and the Dorbar Shnongs all interlinked. The State Government has the District Council Affairs department to look after the affairs of the ADCs. The Khasi and Jaintia hills District Councils have the United Khasi & Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Appointment and Succession of Chief and Headmen) Act 1959, to regulate the functioning of the Syiems/ Dalois and the Rangbah Shnongs.

But in the recent flare-up at Themmetor, Iewmawlong, the confusion in the functioning of these multi layered authorities came out in the open. We read media reports about the different claims of ownership by different authorities; one

authority blaming the other; sometimes one authority not knowing what the other is doing and here we see the overlapping of powers in situations that sometimes reflect a state within a state, thereby making the problem more complex and leaving the general public more confused.

There is a saying in Political Science that ‘less of government is the best government.’ It is therefore time for a political reformation of our political institutions to identify which institutions are still relevant and which are not and which institutions need a clear cut definition of their powers and functions so that decision making can be streamlined and accountability and responsibility can be fixed.

This political reformation or whatever you call it, is urgently required especially when, Meghalaya is ranked at the bottom 29th among 30 states in India in terms of overall performance in governance as per the Public Affairs Index 2018 released by the Public Affairs Centre, Bengaluru, (according to press reports). The multiplicity of

Making women the scapegoat for the failure of politics

Politics of Paranoia

By Patricia Mukhim

Congratulations Mr HS Shylla for a masterstroke of a Bill. Indeed if not for the Khasi woman and her revolting baggage of the non-Khasi husband, life in Meghalaya would have been Paradise! Why not banish women completely? It would make life easier for you and other politicians. Thank you indeed for importing the Khap Panchayat to Meghalaya where the KHADC will now decide who women will marry and who they should 'not' marry. You are not different from the Taliban either! In fact if you were to become the Chief Minister of Meghalaya that's where you would take the State, wouldn't you? Thankfully you lost the Assembly election in March this year.

Now hang on a minute. Are women really the cause of relentless corruption in the Khasi Hills District Council? Are women doing roaring benami business with non-tribals having deep pockets? Did women privatize all the community land including the water sources and are they the principal reason for the present landlessness in Meghalaya? Are they responsible for jobs not being created and Government running on auto pilot without a radar? So you use women as an excuse to camouflage all the failures of the Council! How shameless is that!

So here goes. On July 25, the Khasi Hills District Council came up with a grandiloquent proposal to 'save' this tiny population of 11 lakh Khasis from becoming strangers in their homeland (Khasiland) by proposing amendments to the Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Khasi Social Custom Of Lineage Act, 1997, which received the assent of Governor in 2005). The previous Act accepted all children born out of a Khasi mother and non-tribal father who practice the Khasi customs. They continued to hold Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. This time the proposed Amendment reverses this clause. It says a Khasi woman marrying a non-Khasi male would be deprived of her ST status and so too her children. This has raised hackles of women who have been made scapegoats for a society that is torn between schizophrenia and paranoia about a perceived bleak future.

For a long time politicians have used fear as a weapon to spread a divisive agenda. They did that especially before elections to deflect critical questions about their non-performance and non-delivery. The District Council elections are scheduled for early 2019 and

the Councillors are in election mode. In a State where people do not demand hard evidence and statistics for claims made, it is easy for politicians to mislead and create a fear psychosis that Khasis would disappear from the face of the earth if women are not reined in from marrying "outsiders." The words "Tnga Dhkar" (wife of a non-Khasi) are uttered with such venom that you can literally see them foaming at the mouth.

Section 19 of the 1997 Act says, 'Bar of jurisdiction of Civil Court.' No Civil Court shall have jurisdiction to settle, decide or deal with any matter or to determine any matter which is, by or under this Act, required to be settled, decided or dealt with or to be determined by the registration authority or the Executive Committee.' What happens if Khasis excommunicated from the society because of marriage, desire to take the matter to a court of law to correctly interpret the fundamental right to marry a person of one's choice? Can the KHADC prevent citizens from seeking justice?

Interestingly, in what is a typically patriarchal response which exposes the cleverly hidden facets of masculinity and patriarchy in Khasi matrilineal society, the Khasi male marrying a non-Khasi woman is exempted from the tentacles of the Act. For good measure, Shylla trots out a lame excuse that at some point the Act would also be applied to Khasi men marrying non-Khasi women. That the women legislators in the KHADC stoutly supported the Amendments suggests that they too are trapped in patriarchy.

The arguments in favour of the Amendments are that too many non-Khasi, non-tribals marrying Khasi women take advantage of the ST status of their wives to conduct their businesses without acquiring the mandatory trading license from the KHADC. They are also exempted from paying income tax. While it is a fact that some without any Khasi roots are taking advantage of their connection to some Khasi genes in order to claim certain benefits you cannot disenfranchise a whole community of women who marry outside their tribes and deprive them and their children of their Khasi and ST status. Not everyone is a merchant and the District Councils have enough laws

to prevent fortune hunters from taking advantage of the local customs and traditions. That they have not done so shows the corruption that is embedded in the Councils.

Considering that Khasi society is matrilineal, the proposed Amendment by the KHADC at once discredits the time-tested Khasi culture. And what if the lady who is excommunicated owns land? What happens to that land? Will it be impounded by the State or go to the next of kin? This is not going to stand judicial scrutiny and I am sure this Act will soon be challenged in a Court of Law. I hope someone does that before the Council elections because this Amended Act will become the election winning narrative. I can imagine Shylla saying, "Look I have tried to save the jaidbynriew (Khasi race) from falling into the precipice of destruction by outsiders who enter our economic system through our women." And there will be claps galore...

Since 1979, Meghalaya has been held captive by the politics of paranoia. We fear that our jobs and other economic opportunities will be taken away by, "outsiders," despite no hard evidence to support that claim and despite enjoying 80% reservation in employment and education. Creating this paranoia is essentially a political ploy. It is a tool for emotionally blackmailing a gullible, unquestioning citizenry that is never known to use the rational mind. This is further compounded by the fact that debates on issues that matter are not part of our electoral strategies. People love to listen to rhetoric; they love jokes, anecdotes, and candidates bashing their opponents in choicest language. And at the end of the lecture it clap, clap... clap and having food, drinks and the joyride back to their homes. It's a good 'paid' day with no work done except to clap on cue. This is our democracy. It's also true that money talks and bullshit (pardon my language) walks. So those with money but politically hollow and noisy will take the trophy.

HS Shylla is known for his crazy, populist moves. In January 2007, when he was Chairman, KHADC he had a sudden brainwave to award women having a dozen kids and above. He gave monetary awards amounting ranging from Rs 15,000 - 16,000. His defence of this bizarre action while speaking to the BBC South Asia correspondent was, "We have enough land but if our Khasi people don't grow in numbers, migrants from

Bangladesh or elsewhere in India will occupy that living space. We are encouraging our people to grow more. The Khasi population is around one million in Meghalaya, but we want it to double in the next 10 years."

Just thin! A onetime grant of Rs 16,000 which given to "fertile" women including one who had 25 deliveries is poor tokenism. Shylla has never followed up on how these women are faring with so many kids. This is how poverty is recycled.

What is currently proposed by the KHADC is a desperate remedy for something that is inherently flawed in the Khasi political DNA. One is the sheer lack of understanding of the science of governance and being pushed to take hasty decisions by interest groups with a vested agenda. Two, the reluctance for scientific enquiry and statistics before proposing remedies. Three, the absence of policies to take us to the goalpost. These all add up to the collective dystopia. Without policies to pin-point an area of potential growth how is g o v e r n m e n t ' s effectiveness measured? And now when repeated failures have compounded the problems and the inequalities in society are so blatant, these politicians are holding women squarely responsible for the political chaos. As if disenfranchising women would rectify all the political fault-lines.

The society is comfortable with slogans and rhetoric. Often we envision the brain to be an organ whose ultimate function is to think. We see it as a sort of biological headquarter for imagination, rumination and ideas. But while the brain does execute those functions, they are not the brain's main agenda. The brain has evolved to control our bodies more than our minds, so that our bodies can manipulate our environment and govern our surroundings. For politicians who fail or are failing, the need to control the environment is extreme. They want to be in power at any cost and the brain directs them to that goal including taking decisions that will ultimately ruin society although they appear as if they are medicines aimed at healing societal sores. What a catastrophe Indeed!

Will the women of Meghalaya fight this ultimate assertion of patriarchy?

What’s a little Formalin?

Dr. Caleb Harris M.Ch. (Surgical Oncology)

“*What’s a little formalin in comparison to the loads of tobacco and kwai?*”, I responded to a message forwarded to me on social media by a doctor. It was the order issued by the Commissioner of Food Safety, Government of Meghalaya, which stated that in view of fish samples testing positive for formalin, there would be prohibition on ‘fresh’ fish and crustaceans brought from outside the state.

The mention of formalin took us down memory lane, to our first year in medical college. My initiation into surgery started at the old anatomy hall of a Government Medical College in Tamilnadu, where the first lesson taught was to respect the cadaver(preserved human body) which enabled us to learn human anatomy, which is the study of the internal structure of the human body. Formalin is the main component of the preservative used and hence the entire hall would be filled with the pungent smell. The first week was spent sitting around the cadaver, in an effort to get acclimatized to the odour, and it sure helped us.

My friend recalled her experience, at a Central Government Institution in South India, wherein the dissection hour was followed by the lunch break. She said they were neither allowed to use gloves for dissection nor were there any forks and spoons in the hostel dining hall! I was glad to hear it was the same in

newspaper a few days ago, highlighting this incident and the need to have a health policy which would focus on the prevention of deadly diseases. Prevention is the way forward, but there is a lot to be done. While the efforts of the government in protecting the public from such ‘cancer-causing fish’ needs to be lauded, it would be nice if the other carcinogens are also acted upon.

July 27th is observed as World Head and Neck Cancer Day internationally, in an effort to increase awareness about this cancer. The nasopharyngeal and nasal cancers caused by formaldehyde are also part of head and neck cancers, with the nasal cancer involving the ‘sinuses’ which are in the head and the nasopharynx being the part behind the nose.

The bulk of Head and Neck Cancers are seen in the ‘oral cavity’, which is the mouth. Mouth cancers are invariably associated with use of tobacco and betel nut. India has among the highest burden of head and neck cancers in the world and there are no prizes for guessing why. The widespread habit of chewing tobacco is one of the main culprits for this cancer. The Global Adult Tobacco Survey(GATS) is a global standard for systematic monitoring of adult tobacco use and helps in tracking the key tobacco control indicators. GATS is a household survey of persons aged 15 years and above in all the 30 states and

Formalin is an aqueous solution of formaldehyde, which, apart from use in mortuaries and laboratories to preserve biological specimens, is also used in the pressed-wood industry, glues and adhesives, and certain insulation materials.

other medical colleges too.The problem was worse in our college, with the taps in the anatomy hall running dry just around noon, and us not being accustomed to forks and spoons. So she agreed with me, ‘What’s a little formalin!’. I’m sure many doctors would remember their early years, wherein they left the anatomy hall with a layer of formalin on their hands.

Formalin is an aqueous solution of formaldehyde, which, apart from use in mortuaries and laboratories to preserve biological specimens, is also used in the pressed-wood industry, glues and adhesives, and certain insulation materials. It is also used as an industrial fungicide, germicide and disinfectant. The main source of exposure for non-industrial workers is from indoor air, which contains formaldehyde released from the wood products which use it. The acute (short term) effects of exposure to formaldehyde are mainly due to the irritation of the airway and lungs and can result in cough, wheeze, and irritation of the nose and eyes.

The chronic (long term) effects are mainly respiratory problems, skin lesions and menstrual irregularities. There is increased risk of cancer too, and the IARC(International Agency for Research on Cancer) monograph classifies it as a Group 1 carcinogen, which means that it has a role in causing cancer in humans. Formaldehyde is known to cause some leukemia(blood cancer), nasopharyngeal cancer and nasal(paranasal sinus) cancer.

Most of the media hype surrounding this ban on ‘imported’ formalin-laced fish is due to its ‘Cancer-causing’ potential, and it is heartening to see this concern for public health. There was an editorial in this

two union territories of India. The first round was conducted in 2009-10 and the second round in 2016-17. This was conducted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences for the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt of India.

GATS 2 showed that tobacco use is reducing in most parts of the country, including Meghalaya, but this is mostly tobacco smoking. The habit of tobacco-chewing is widespread and unless this is curbed, there will not be a reduction in the incidence of Head and Neck Cancers. The use of kwai(betel nut) can also independently(without the use of tobacco) cause oral cancers.

While tobacco, betel nut and alcohol are all group 1 carcinogens, they are used with apparent impunity by all, including minors. The evidence with regard to the carcinogenicity of formaldehyde is weak, compared to the very strong role played by tobacco and betel nut in causing cancers, but still these factors enjoy strong patronage.

If the media would divert some of the many resources it is using in highlighting the formalin-laced fish on tobacco, betel nut and alcohol, we would have lesser cancers in Meghalaya. The state is staring at a big public health problem caused by the high incidence of cancers and it is important to go after the main cause of this problem, rather than be diverted by smaller carcinogens. While the state has banned crustaceans brought from outside, it should also ban the crab(*cancer*)within, by curbing tobacco, betel nut and alcohol.

Dr. Caleb Harris M.Ch.(Surgical Oncology) Assistant Professor and HOD, Department of Surgical Oncology, NEIGRIHMS, Shillong

“ Life is full of beauty. Notice it. Notice the bumble bee, the small child, and the smiling faces. Smell the rain, and feel the wind. Live your life to the fullest potential, and fight for your dreams. ”

-- Ashley Smith

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KHADC Khasi Lineage Bill

A Bill that seeks to bring radical societal changes cannot be passed in haste. The Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act 1997, which was passed by the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) in March 1997, and received the Governor’s assent in February, 2005 was recently amended to add two rigid clauses relating to marriage of a Khasi woman to a non-Khasi man. The latest amendments seek to strip a woman who marries a non-Khasi and her offsprings of their Khasi and Schedule Tribe status. Under Para 3 of the Sixth Schedule the District Councils can makes laws on marriage, divorce and social customs but those laws must stand judicial scrutiny and must be compliant with the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. Archaic customs and traditions of the past which have suppressed women’s rights cannot be brought in as baggage if they violate the principle tenets of the Constitution.

In a matrilineal society where lineage is from the mother’s clan line this amended Bill has serious and far reaching ramifications. It means that if the Bill is passed there could be many women and children who would no longer be Khasis because they have, in effect, been socially ostracised. The 29 Councillors who have passed the Bill have trotted out a weak argument that it does not infringe into the Constitutional rights of a woman to marry anyone she chooses. But they then show their fangs by putting a rider that if a woman marries a non-Khasi she does do so at the risk of losing her Khasi identity and with it the concessions she enjoys as a Scheduled Tribes. So the precondition set before women today is that if they want to continue to be Khasi and enjoy the ST benefits they should marry a Khasi male. But is marriage so transactional and emotionless? The very term marriage is a mutual desire of a man and a woman to share their lives, and if they choose to, then to give birth to offsprings. No one in their right minds and certainly not a Constitutionally created institution like the District Council should venture into something as private and personal as a marriage.

More than anything else this hastily passed Bill was not even debated and put up for public scrutiny. So the question is why the haste? The answer is clear. More than a genuine concern for the Khasi society it is self-serving politics of those in the Khasi Hills District Council who will be seeking re-election in early 2019, which weighs more heavily. This is where the real problem lies.

TO THE EDITOR

Unscientific Tribalism

Editor,
Patriotism, or rather chauvinism, is the proverbial last refuge of the politician. Unfortunately for them it is an uncertain place for retreat. Ethnic purity, from which ethnic cleansing and other racial horrors emanate, is ultimately an attempt by men to control women’s reproductive rights and regulate women’s social and sexual freedom. This intolerable gender discrimination is explained (mansplaining) on the basis of maintaining racial identity.
If one imagines that there is such a thing as Khasi racial purity, it is just a fond hope. Very few ethnic groups are genetically pure. Only isolated groups like the tribes of the Andamans would have genetic uniqueness.
In recent years, numerous genetic studies have been conducted in Northeast India. This region has been a natural corridor for ancient migrations, where Australoid, Mongoloid and Caucasoid populations have crisscrossed over the millennia. The Austro-Asiatic Khasi were the earliest settlers of the region and from these early populations, succeeding generations migrated to South China, Southeast Asia and to Australasia. Maps of these mi-

grations, based on genetic studies can be accessed on the National Geographic website.
An article in the journal Human Biology published in 2004 examined the genetic diversity of the various Khasi tribes: Nongtrai, Maram, Khyntiam, Pnar, War Khasi, War Jaintia, Bhoi and Lyngngam. As the Lyngngam are culturally intermediate between the Khasi and Garo, blood samples were also drawn from Garo subjects. The results showed a high degree of admixture between the tribes. Indeed there was a high degree of genetic similarity between almost all the Khasi tribes and Garo individuals, rendering them virtually indistinguishable. The only outlier group were the War Khasi, whose genetic pool is relatively uncontaminated because of geographic isolation till recent years.
It is well-known that offspring carry the genes of both parents. The DNA of these genes come from the nuclei of the male sperm and the female egg. However there is a small amount of DNA present outside the nucleus of these cells located in a cell organ called the mitochondria. The male mitochondrial DNA is not transmitted to the child, only the

mother contributes this type of DNA to the baby. So from generation to generation, it is only the mother that contributes to this continuity, irrespective of who is the father.
The National Geographic Genographic Project conducts genetic studies for any individual who sends in a sample of saliva. Recently, a prominent Khasi doctor got his DNA analysed and was surprised to find out that his DNA showed ancestors from Nepal and China. He put the report on his Facebook page. It would be very interesting to conduct DNA studies on the honorable members of the KHADC. Without question it would show mixed ancestries of many kinds, just like for the rest of us.
In the end, culture is a garb we wear, foods we enjoy, festivals we celebrate and a worldview we share. Traditionally Khasis have been peaceful and inclusive, with cultural provisions to admit non-Khasis to the fold, unlike some tribes in the Northeast that have martial histories and exclusive traditions. So we should include everyone who identifies as a Khasi and is proud of this identity. To base it on marriage, or parenthood, or genes is a flimsy argument.
Yours etc,
Glenn C. Kharkongor,
Via email

Maratha, truckers stir

Rising discontent hits all

By Shivaji Sarkar

Manmohanomics has thrown the doors open for global players and the farmers have gone into a severe distress zone.
The Government is aware of it but is unable to look for a system that would give these groups relief. Higher MSP has not helped them either. Policies to increase farm production have led to a glut of wheat, sugar and pulses. Should they produce more and earn

cuts by RTOs and other law enforcing agencies amounting to thousands of crores of fleeing.
So what they are demanding is logical. Insurance has become the biggest business and all the time they pressurise the government to allow them raising premium for virtually nothing. Even the farmers, it is now known, get less of insurance benefit and help insurance companies multiply their profits.

“Their grudge is not unfounded. Private sector is not creating jobs and the ones they get lack basic wages and respect for humanity. It is the Government alone which remains the model employer. On the other side, the truckers’ strike has disrupted supplies in many parts of the country. Their demands are genuine as they are finding it difficult to have even the minimum margins. Among other demands, they are asking for a cut in Central and State levies on diesel to make their operational costs affordable.”

less? Today, the Government has also decided to open pulses stock in the market.
Obviously, this would lead to crash in prices. Note that sugar is also critical in the Indian and international markets. Farmers are not getting remunerative prices and government job-holder is clearly envy for them. So why not join the government and at least be assured of a minimum living standard, which farming is not giving them, is the question before them. Besides, loan-waivers are of least help to them. Why can’t the Government, Opposition, farmers and policy planners sit together to evolve workable system?
Similar is the issue with the truckers. They are the nation’s lifeline. If their work does not assure minimum income, it is not worth doing it. While farmers are suffering for apathy, the truckers are having problems of over-attention. Everyone considers it to be a lucrative business, so there are direct levies and indirect

In addition, there still is a plethora of indirect taxes. The 2-rupee road cess on every litre of fuel has been replaced with Rs 8 per litre road and infrastructure cess on petrol and high-speed diesel. This was announced in the Budget 2018 and is to realise Rs 1.13 lakh crore. Plus, there is toll at almost every 20 km, which causes traffic jams, fuel and time loss, delays and puts a heavy burden on all.
When people are already paying Rs 1.13 lakh crore annually, which was about Rs 32,000 crore till 2017, why should there be a concessionaire to collect toll? And for whom are they collecting?
A sensible government needs to immediately abolish the toll. Not only does it fleece, but causes delays and given rise to a mafia, which triggers law and order problems. As per NHAIs collection figures the tolls used to cost the nation approximately Rs 25,000 crore. So why is this huge inflationary levy?
The Government must consider doing away with it immediately for both political

and economic reasons. Further, the NHAIs expenses are not transparent, a point the truckers have repeatedly raised. This only means the tolls are bleeding the nation too.
Who does it affect? It hits the farmers, whose products, because of dual levies – fuel cess and tolls – become doubly expensive as also gives the truckers and farmers less margins. It hurts the consumers, who have to bear continuously an illegal tax. It does not help either the Central or State governments as they have to unnecessarily incur huge expenses to keep the toll gates brawl-free. The NHAIs is on record that it does not receive more than one-third of the levies collected by concessionaires, which in effect means that it neither needs the tolls nor the concessionaires.
Importantly, the strike is said to cost over Rs 5,000 crore a day to the truckers. In addition manufacturers have been forced to shut down or cut production. It has disrupted supply of essential commodities, particularly vegetables, fruit and dairy products, which is affecting farmers. Many FMCG firms are also facing supply disruption and so also are online firms’ supplies hit. However, so far there is no move at Transport Bhavan in Delhi or in States.
It is time to give a serious thought to the fleeing levies being realised. The cess on fuel is itself inflationary. Levies such as tolls and GST almost on every tax, including house tax, defy logic. In 2014 polls, promises were made to do away with income-tax, road tolls and many other taxes. Except GST, which has subsumed central levies, most levies remain like that except States having changed their nomenclature.
Now it must be implemented. A toll-free highway journey is the right of the people after imposition of heavy Rs 8 per litre road cess. An affordable road travel will help all -- the farmers, truckers and the people. The sooner it is done the better as it would lead to progress and development -- the call of the hour.---INFA

legislation. This issue must be publicly debated.
The Governor needs to reject this Bill. Personal liberty is an integral part of the Constitution (article 21), and our women deserve that liberty. Protecting and safeguarding the Khasi tribe is not the sole duty of women; Khasi men too need to share the responsibility. If our men are qualified enough to take the challenge then our women don’t have to find men outside the tribe with whom they can share the burden of sustaining the family. Moreover matrimonial alliance is not the only culprit in the erosion of tribal identity. The problem is deeply entrenched with politico-economic aspects and governance paralysis of KHADC itself.
The pride of being a matrilineal society is indeed simply a written script on paper, whereas in reality the alpha-male dominance is apparent in every walk of life. By virtue of being the other half of the society, women folk shouldn’t endure such irrational and insensible legislation, hence it needs to be condemned and challenged in the court of law if needed.
Yours etc.,
Sonie Kharduit,
Via email

Islamabad enters Imran era as clouds gather

An economic nightmare awaits the captain

By Sankar Ray

Stupefying poll-pundits, the 65-year-old cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan, president of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (meaning Pakistan Movement for Justice) has ‘out-Bruce-d Robert Brucc by racing up to the coveted seat of Pakistan premier after a 22-year battle. The first cricketer to be elected as Prime Minister in the history of parliamentary politics, Khan is the fifth Oxford –educated PM of Pakistan. After lifting World Cup trophy for his country in 1992, the victory of PTI in the 11th general elections is the most important milestone in his career.
Aptly worded tweets came from his first wife Jemima Goldsmith with whom he remained in wedlock for nine years: “22 years later, after humiliations, hurdles and sacrifices, my sons’ father is Pakistan’s next PM. It’s an incredible lesson in tenacity, belief & refusal to accept defeat. The challenge now is to remember why he entered politics in the 1st place. Congratulations”. She hastened to add nostalgically, “I remember IK’s 1st election in 1997- untested, idealistic & politically naive. I waited up for the call in LHR with 3 mo old Sulaiman, who I had lugged around the country”.
PTI failed to reach the magic figure of 137 seats as it has to be happy with less than 120 directly elected members of National Assembly. The rival Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) is expected to bag 63, followed by 38 of Bilawal Zardari Bhutto-led Pakistan People’s Party. Khan eyes the ‘other block’ comprising 50 MNAs for cross the magic number.
Going by poll data, released by the Election Commission of Pakistan, the PTI chairman won from three constituencies, NA-131, NA-243 and NA-95, apparently an impress of overall acceptability of his party and his pledge to build a ‘Naya Pakistan and Islamic welfare state’ to the 105 million electorate. But the allegation of rigging and manipulation in favour of PTI by two major rivals, PML-N and PPP, sticks. PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari’s daughter Bakhtawar has shared a photo on Twitter of a form from Jhang on how 12,000 votes in favour of a PPP candidate were cancelled. “In case anyone was wondering how #PTI ‘won’ so drastically, here’s another example from #Jhang... 12K votes cancelled,” she quipped. Michael Gahler, head of the European Union’s election monitoring mission in Pakistan, too noted that media access was restricted by soldiers posted at polling stations. His preliminary report is awaited. No less intriguing is an unprecedented number of extremist religious parties that are awaited. No less intriguing is an unprecedented number of extremist religious parties that are awaited. No less intriguing is an unprecedented number of extremist religious parties that are awaited.
Friday Times editor Najam Shetty in his latest commentary snapped fingers at the triumvirate, the Miltabishment, Supreme Court and ECP. “Before the elections, every political party (except PTI), every foreign newspaper and every independent journalist had concluded that The Aliens, Khalai Makhluk, Agriculture Department, Miltabishment, Whatever, had conclusively pre-rigged the elections in an unprecedented manner. A day after the elections, every political party (except PTI), every foreign newspaper and every independent

journalist has confirmed the finding. Before the elections, Media were on trial. After the elections, the Election Commission of Pakistan has joined them in the dock”. Doubting the ECP’s claim that the Remote Transmission System, bought from a British company broke down, causing delay in announcing results, he bluntly wrote, “Was the RTS deliberately glitched because the Agriculture Department panicked when the opposition began to weigh in and something had to be done to get things back on track? Even if it was an unforeseen breakdown, this does not explain why the polling agents were kicked out while the votes were being tabulated or why such lengthy delays ensued”.
Obviously, the ‘miltabishment’ is happy .especially after Khan made a significant statement that to criticise the army is unpatriotic. But conscientious voiced warned ahead of the polling day against the risk of emotional welcome to the PTI. Pervez Hoodbhoy, distinguished Professor of Physics and Mathematics at Forman Christian College, Lahore, and listed among the 100 most influential global thinkers by Foreign Policy magazine in 2011, branded Khan as Pakistan’s Donald Trump -- the same narcissism, the same disregard for moral values, the same hatred for liberals” The PTI chief, he reminded, gave a Rupees 300 million dote to the madrasa that produced the once top global Taliban dictator Mullah Omar. The boss was banteringly called ‘Taliban’ Khan by some of his adversaries. His brighter side – honesty and aversion to monetary greed -- is marred by such aberrant signs attached to political ambitions.
Little wonder, the bourses are bullish as Khan’s party will form the government. The Karachi Stock Exchange index - KSE-100 index – is up by 767 points to reach 42,106 points – a reflection that business community is happy that the PTI is to call the shots in the coalition government as Pakistan has to go to the IMF in September to ask for the biggest bailout in Pakistan’s history, somewhere between \$15 billion and \$18 billion. The current account deficit peaked to a record high of \$17.994 billion (5.7 per cent of gross domestic product at the end of last fiscal, ended 30 June, 2018 mainly due to exorbitant imports and less-than-projected inflows. It means a 44.7 per cent rise from \$12.44 billion recorded in the previous fiscal. A tensed-up State Bank of Pakistan governor Tariq Bajwa termed the gap as of “unsustainable level” keeping in mind the soaring aggregate demand in the economy. Nonetheless, a stable government is a need at the moment. Adnan Rasool of Georgia State University stated, “If you have a strong coalition you can push through policy measures that we need in order to secure that kind of bailout, which is to take away subsidies and reduce budget deficit and reduce the value of the currency – again.”
However, pragmatic financial analysts in Karachi, the financial capital of India’s troubled neighbour, are of the view that it is absurd to expect that the World Bank twin will agree to grant even \$4 billion. So the former skipper has many a nightmare ahead, as China is not expected to help Pakistan reduce the huge current account deficit. (IPA Service)

Hyperloop gains traction

Transportation pioneers in the US & India have converged on a sustainable, futuristic solution. *Yanqi Xu, Brooke Vaughan, Souryaprokas Bhaduri & Maiyankini Bose* report

On a sunny Thursday in April, Jenna Remack packed up her 2011 Kia Sorrento and strapped her 20-month-old son, Sawyer, into his car seat. Sawyer babbled in the back seat as the two set off on their six-hour drive from Independence, Missouri, to Springfield, Illinois.

After moving to the Kansas City metro area about four years ago, Jenna and her husband Bobby planned to visit their family in Illinois four times a year. But the distance makes such frequent visits impossible. With two jobs, a toddler, and a baby on the way, the couple can't easily manage 12 hours of commuting — although they really want their relatives to be involved in their children's lives.

Travel time is a global concern for the modern commuter, as are pollution, congestion and cost. Realising this, transportation pioneers in the US and India have converged on a sustainable, futuristic solution — the hyperloop, a high-speed pod in a vacuum tube.

Travelling with minimal friction, hyperloop may go as fast as 700 mph and presents an energy-efficient alternative to traditional modes of transportation. But sceptics doubt the hyperloop will become a reality anytime soon. While plans are further along in India than in the US, obstacles abound in both countries.

Many commuters hope the sceptics are wrong. Not only would the hyperloop make it easier to work in distant cities, it would help solve nightmarish traffic snarls.

Shasheesh Tiwari, a graphic designer from Bangalore, said it takes an hour and a half to make a mere 18-km trip to his office by rideshare services like Uber.

"Bangalore has grown in an unplanned way at exponential pace in the last decade. Most roads are narrow, leading to traffic congestion in every part of the city," he said. "It's a constant and defeating exercise to beat the mounting traffic in the city."

An old dream in a new age

George Medhurst, an 18th century British inventor and engineer, first envisioned vacuum-pipe transportation. The idea has since been revived by modern entrepreneurs, such as Elon Musk, the founder of SpaceX.

SpaceX is now working to maximise



A hyperloop pod designed by MIT students; (below) the under-water metro tunnel under construction in Kolkata

speed in the hyperloop pod, while another company — Virgin Hyperloop One — is working to commercialise the hyperloop.

Virgin Hyperloop One built the first full-scale test track in Nevada, setting a record speed of 240 mph in 2017. "We want to get the system at least operational first for testing and certification by the year 2023," said Dan Katz, the company's director of global policy.

Virgin Hyperloop One has long been seeking a location for the first real hyperloop system, and asked innovators across the world for route possibilities in its Global Challenge contest in 2016.

The Missouri Department of Transportation responded by submitting its proposal for a Hyperloop One route from St. Louis to Kansas City via Columbia. Tom Blair, St. Louis District Engineer at the Missouri Department of Transportation, spent five hours meeting with the Hyperloop One team in early 2016. "I walked out somewhat of a believer that these individuals might

actually create a new mode of transportation," he said.

Soon the Missouri Hyperloop Coalition was formed, comprising representatives from the transportation department, the St. Louis Regional Chamber of Commerce and other groups.

They envision a system better than the so-called "bullet trains" — less dependent on weather, quieter, and able to carry both passengers and valuable freight. Hyperloop would travel faster than high-speed rail systems in China, Japan and Germany, and also require less maintenance, said Bill Turpin, CEO of Missouri Innovation Center, a member of the Missouri Hyperloop Coalition.

Although Missouri wasn't a finalist in the Global Challenge, its coalition has created a public-private partnership that is still working toward a St. Louis-Kansas City hyperloop route that would take about 25 minutes to travel.

In January, the coalition announced it would launch a feasibility study, which is expected to conclude in October.

A month later, in India, the winning route from the west coast of Mumbai to Pune announced a feasibility study of its own. (India also has winning routes from Bengaluru to Chennai and Mumbai to Chennai.)

Winner Hyperloop India, a team of students from several Indian colleges, is also working on a second-generation pod for the 2018 SpaceX Pod Competition. The pod is designed to reach 500 kilometers, or about 310 miles per hour, said Vinayak Kamal Ghosh, a member of the business development team of Hyperloop India.

"We are currently working on manufacturing the pod in Bangalore," he said, adding that they are seeking funds from the government and corporate groups in order to finance the construction and assembly of the pod prototype and facilitate the functioning of the team.

Dubai's Gulf News reported that India and the United Arab Emirates are the likeliest countries, according to Virgin Hyperloop One's CEO, to be selected for the first commercially viable hyperloop.

Why Hyperloop?

Enthusiasts consider the hyperloop a great mode of transportation for all ages, from children to senior citizens who can no longer drive.

"They could get on the hyperloop, go to the football game and be back that night, or go to the basketball game or go to the concert," said Drew Thompson, director of data center solutions at Black & Veatch, the engineering firm conducting the feasibility study.

Technologies like the hyperloop may bring a business model that not only pays for itself through tickets and fares, but also generates revenue — a business model more akin to airline companies.

"Missouri, for us, is a very exciting project," Katz said, "because we have the opportunity to look very specifically at how hyperloop can remake what was traditionally just the highway into a transportation corridor of the future."

Besides creating shortened trips for

residents on either side of Missouri, advocates say the hyperloop, when built, would attract people who normally wouldn't travel back and forth -- and perhaps tourism.

In the meantime, they said, it would create construction jobs, increase demand for restaurants and hotels, and hopefully attract more business to Missouri.

Indian officials say the hyperloop would solve many problems for their country as well.

Megacities in the developing country are battling transportation unreliability, congestion and pollution, said Bishwanath Deewanjee, chief engineer at the Kolkata Metro Rail Corporation Ltd., which is now building the East-West Metro Corridor in Kolkata, a city of over 14 millions combing its outskirts.

In the capital city of Delhi, drivers with odd- and even-numbered license plates must alternate days to restrict the number of exhaust-spewing vehicles on the roads. In the long run, Deewanjee said, transportation systems that emphasize walking, cycling and public transportation would be better than continuing to depend on "the use of private cars, which would in turn lead to more pollution."

One option being constructed to ease congestion now is East West Metro in Kolkata, which includes an underwater tunnel beneath the Hooghly River, he said, adding this is the first of its kind in India. Further down the road is the hyperloop.

Will the dream of the hyperloop remain a dream?

But plans in both countries face a big roadblock: Money.

There hasn't been a cost estimate for Hyperloop One in Missouri. "But it is not going to be cheap," said Ryan Weber, director of KC Tech Council, a member of the coalition.

The feasibility study will determine the estimate and set a price range for fares, Thompson said. He said the start-

ing point of the study will be the routing (most likely along I-70).

Andrew Smith, vice president of the St. Louis Regional Chamber of Commerce, said the feasibility study should answer "everything from the route alignment along I-70 to station locations ... right of way issues, environmental and economic impact ... regulations and then, ultimately, business models."

Whatever the final estimate, paying for the hyperloop won't be easy. Funding for transportation in Missouri relies solely on the \$0.17-per-gallon gas tax, which hasn't risen in decades.

All this means Missouri will have to rely on private industry to move ahead on the hyperloop, which everyone agrees would be a multi-billion-dollar investment.

Katz said the Indian hyperloop proposal also comes down to partnership. "We have a number of partners coming together, including the government," a leading port operator and financial backers, Katz said.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis touted the benefits of Virgin Hyperloop One, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi witnessed the signing of agreement for the Mumbai-Pune route.

Across the world, hyperloop proponents remain optimistic.

Underwater tunnel in Kolkata

While Hyperloop is still at its conceptualization stage, India is trying to expand its metro network in different cities in the past years.

Kolkata, which got India's first underground metro in 1984, is one such city which like any other Indian urban centre is bursting to the seams owing to its population pressure and transportation bottlenecks.

But there's light, at the end of the tunnel, it seems. And these, 'tunnels' are at work now as a part of its East-West Metro Corridor which attempts to solve a major part of the transportation problem of the city.

The East-West metro corridor, which includes India's first underwater tunnel beneath the Hooghly River, stretches from Howrah Maidan in the east to IT hub Salt Lake Sector V in the west covering a distance of 16.6 km.

This would be a big step in solving problems related to transportation in this part of the country, reckons chief (civil) engineer of the project, Bishwanath Deewanjee.

"See, considering Kolkata as a megacity in a developing country, it has got all kinds of transportation problems, ranging from overpopulation, lack of safety, lack of reliability, lack of proper passenger information among others," he said.

"It would solve the transportation problems I believe. This corridor would connect two major railway terminals- Howrah and Sealdah. It would connect Esplanade where three metros are converging- East- West, North-South and the Joka-BBD Bag corridor.

"There is a big bus and tram joint in Esplanade which is connecting the central business district of Kolkata and at the same time, it is also connecting the Salt Lake and the IT sector. So, if you connect all these fringes together, I think it is going to be a big solution to the transportation problem in Kolkata," he added. (IBNS-TWF)

Find inner peace in your professional life

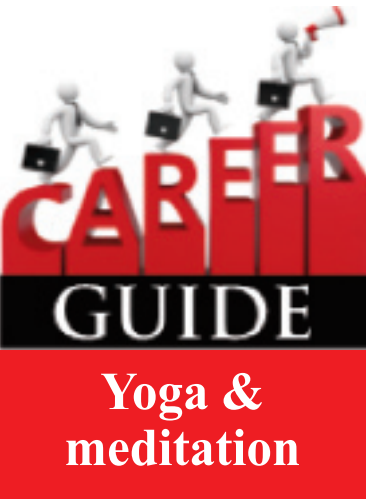
By Ranjan K Baruah

New career options and opportunities have emerged due to change in lifestyle. We could see new options in career due to rapid change in science and technology. Different professions have emerged which keep us busy and many of us do not get time to take care of our health.

Physical and mental stress has increased among young working professionals. We need to cope with stress and maintain good health for which we need to practise certain things. Eating healthy food regularly has also become a challenge.

One or two career options which come to our mind in this regard in yoga and meditation. Yoga and meditation help us stay healthy and also focus our mind. For a bright future it is good for us if we practise yoga or meditation. These also bring opportunity for people who are expert in yoga or meditation. Meditation can be defined as

a practice where an individual uses a technique such as focusing their mind on a particular object, thought or activity, to achieve a



mentally clear and emotionally calm state. Meditation has been practised since antiquity in numerous religious traditions and beliefs.

Since the 19th century, it has spread from its origins to other cultures where it is commonly practised in private and business life. Meditation may be used with the aim of reducing stress, anxiety, depression and pain, and increasing peace, perception and wellbeing.

Meditation is under research to define its possible health (psychological, neurological and cardiovascular) and other effects.

Yoga is an ancient physical, mental and spiritual practice that originated in India.

The word 'yoga' derives from Sanskrit and means to join or to unite, symbolising the union of body and consciousness. Today it is practiced in various forms around the world and continues to grow in popularity. June 21 is observed as International Yoga Day. Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga (MDNIY) is an autonomous organisation under Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India. MDNIY is a focal Institute for Planning, Training, Promotion and

Coordination of Yoga Education, Training, Therapy and Research in all its aspects. MDNIY aims to promote deeper understanding of Yoga philosophy and practices based on classical Yoga amongst people. There are other institutes in India which imparts training and certificate courses apart from other courses related to yoga.

Aspirants may become self employed with their expertise in meditation and yoga. They may join other meditation centres/yoga studios or may start their own ventures. There are opportunities in educational institutions and even corporate and other institutes. Opportunity is not only in India but abroad too hence it brings more opportunities for our young people to take up meditation and yoga as career.

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

Scholarship Alerts

►University of Sussex India Scholarship 2018: Applicant must have the offer letter for the same and should be able to finance oneself. Last date to apply is August 1

►Newton Bhabha PhD Placement Programme 2018: Candidate must be from 2015 batch of INSPIRE PhD Senior Research Fellows in STEM and Life Science. PhD scholars,

excluding INSPIRE fellows, who have cleared national level test and are in the mid second or third year of Life Sciences, are eligible. Last date to apply is August 4.

►INSEAD Deepak & Sunita Gupta Endowed Scholarships 2018-19: Candidate must have enrolled in In-sead MBA programme. Last date to apply is August 13

(Courtesy: www.buddy4study.com)

‘Stop mining in high cave density areas’

The beauty of Meghalaya lies not in the waterfalls and hills but in the numerous caves, believes **Brian Dermot Kharpran Daly**, the famous caver. The 71-year-old adventurer, who has been organising cave explorations for the past 26 years and has authored seven books and written several essays and articles on the subject, says Meghalaya is the only state in India that has numerous and unique caves, many of which are yet to be explored.

Ask Daly what is so special about the dark and damp structures and he can go on talking about the beauty of the natural structures and how important they are in determining history of civilisations. Daly has explored, documented and mapped over 1,000 caves in the state so far. But for him, it is not yet time to stop, even if there is no government help or support from any quarters. “With no support it becomes a difficult task because the expenses are high. Many a time I have to shell out from my pocket but I still don’t mind because this is my passion,” says the adventurer.

When asked about his age, Daly laughs and says, “Why don’t you guess?” The guess was wild but surprisingly almost hit the bullseye. He defies age and lives for his passion, to explore the unknown. The secret — healthy food and daily fitness regime.

In a tête-à-tête with **Nabamita Mitra**, Daly, who is a nature lover, talks about his inspiration, the caves and the harsh reality of the money-driven world.

What inspired you to take up caving? I was always keen on adventure but during our time, there was less scope as adventure clubs and groups were non-existent. An incident in 1964 was significant and needs mention. We went to a place in Cherrapunji from school. I had heard about the existence of caves in the area and wanted to explore but none of my friends was willing to accompany me. So I befriended two local boys and convinced them to take me to the cave. They took local kerosene lamps with them and we went inside the cave. It was pitch dark and there was fear that the lamps would extinguish. So it was a hurried tour of the place.

After many years when I started working with State Bank of Mysore, I used to travel a lot. It was then that I went for my first major trek to Sandakphu. And then I formed the Meghalaya Adventurers Association in 1990. It



TALKING POINT

BRIAN D KHARPRAN DALY

all started with rock climbing. Later, I started cave explorations.

How many caves have you explored? How many are there in Meghalaya? Many caves were unexplored and unmapped in the state when we started exploration practically with no training and no proper equipment at our disposal. Some caves were documented by the British and that was all. In March-April 1992, we first went to Krem Syndai in West Jaintia Hills. We went back to the same place in 1993 and heard from locals that a group of British explorers had come. I found them out and contacted them.

In 1994, I started organising expeditions. This year we completed our 26th expedition. We have explored over 1,000 caves and are still counting.

How did the Meghalayan Age come into being? Ashish Sinha, a researcher from California, contacted me in 2003. I took him to Mawmluh cave and we brought two stalagmites from there. Later, another scientist from Berlin joined in the research. Before the discovery in

Mawmluh, scientists had known about the 200-year-long drought that ended all major civilisations in the world. But before Mawmluh, the evidences were not strong and the chemical signature in the stalagmites found here was clear. Hence the name Meghalayan Age.

In case of the sandstone cave (Krem Puri) too, a villager had come to me in 2015 with the request to explore a particular cave. The first time we went there, we explored 8km. We went back in 2017 and completed some more distance covering a total of 12.5km. In 2018, we explored more and the total distance covered was approximately 24.5km. It turned out to be the longest cave in the world. But it does not end at 24.5km. There can be more. We have to find out.

What are the challenges of cave exploration? The physical challenges are there. Caving is a blend of both mountaineering and diving. For example, Krem Chympe in Jaintia Hills that is 18km long has a stretch of 4km where you have to swim. Some caves are vertical and one has to drop down using a

rope. That needs training. So you have to have that physical fitness to endure such strenuous journey. Also, caving equipment are expensive and with no help from the government or any organisation, the pocket pinch is too much. You need the confidence too as it is dark inside the cave and one has to get accustomed to it.

What is the status of preservation of caves in Meghalaya? Nobody bothers about that. The most extensive caves here are of limestone and rampant mining is destroying them.

Caves are a scientific resource and people researching on any science subject can benefit from the information that is embedded in caves. The temperature inside a cave remains more or less the same and so natural data is preserved. This is the reason why caves should be preserved. But the authorities are apathetic.

What steps have you taken so far to ensure preservation?

You see I have been trying to convince the government and writing to it about preservation since 1997. I had also filed a PIL (regarding Mawmluh cave). But the court dismissed the case in 2010 because it was happy with the state government’s compliances, one of which was mining policy. It has been eight years now and where is the mining policy? The Mawmluh cave is not stable and will collapse sooner or later if mining for the cement factory, which is again a government unit, continues unabated. I had taken big officials of the cement factory into the cave and explained to them the vulnerable situation but nothing has happened so far.

As I said earlier, caves need to be preserved because it also help us study evolution. The creatures which have been dwelling inside caves for centuries adapt to the environment. For example, the fauna do not need eyes as it is dark inside. So instead of eyes they develop sensory hairs. Like a cave cricket has sensory antennae which are 10 times longer than its body. Also, fauna like fish do not have skin pigment because they do not come out in the sun and are white in colour. So these are signs of evolution and one can study that. Caves also help study climate changes and monsoon patterns over years. A cave expedition is not just adventure but an adventure with an academic cause. In western countries, people are more aware of such things and they spend time and money on preservation but here things are different (scoffs).

What is the attitude of the new government? I have not met the chief minister yet because he is busy. But I will soon meet him and try to explain the urgency of the situation.

Do you think the NGT ban on mining has come as a boon for the preservation of caves? Yes to some extent but illegal mining is still going on. The mining scenario is controlled by a few barons. The power is with them. The poor villagers also earn so they do not say anything despite the fact that they are directly affected. I know it is not possible to stop mining but it can be done sensibly. There are some areas like the Sohra Rim where density of caves is heavy and there are some areas where there are



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not many caves. So mining should be prohibited in the first type of areas. I have identified the areas and am willing to co-ordinate with the government if it is serious about conservation.

What is the future of caving in Meghalaya after you? Well my son and daughter are also into cave explorations. But I want to train young people. Again the problem of funds comes in. Training people will require money because you have to take the youths to the caves. The equipment are costly and without the right gear it is risky to go inside. The

ropes used for the purpose are also specially made and are not available here. **What are your other interests?** I do bonsai plantation and have a wide collection at home, maybe the largest in the city. I also make wine from indigenous fruits. I write poetry and novels based on the theme of caves. **Which cave will you explore next?** We are going back to Krem Sakwa and Krem Puri in East Jaintia Hills. There are other caves too which are unexplored.

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi Sunday, JULY 29, 2018

Your career progress would be mixed as Moon opposite Mercury on your solar return chart. Many things take outline and your image will enhance. Impending tasks will be completed and you will get a new spurt of energy and passion to get on to more projects and jobs. Many new contacts have been developed and these will pay-off. On the personal front, friends will cooperate enormously in fact some of this goodwill falls over to your professional field too and you realize benefits. Family ties will be robust. You find again the forgotten common interests. Expenditures slow down and you are in a position to combine and earn from investments.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) You would express your views, terms and conditions without hesitation and deal with many issues bravely and successfully. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with people. With luck on your side, your focus on having fun, enjoying sports and expressing yourself efficiently. Your hobbies, leisure time, moments spent with children, all come into focus. Give yourself a fitness routine and healthy diet program. This is a good time to build your skills, to get organized, and to attend to your health and well being. There are strong chances of a pilgrimage and you may visit a holy place.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) Good fortune at work opens new horizons for expansion and growth. You might be a bit of a showman at this time. It's a great time to make improvements to your regular routine. Your self-esteem and ego are tied up in the work you do. This phase highlights friendship, love, romance and children in your life. New beginnings are in store, whether this means a fresh start in existing relationships or new ones altogether. An established business concern flourishes and partnerships may expand into triangular collaborations. You may visit and spend a lot of time in the company of your beloved one. This is a favorable time to go for higher learning and joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) The planetary configuration this week brings communication, creativity and authority. This is the right time to participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you. This is a good time to promote harmony and goodwill on the job front. You instill good team spirit and you are more tactful with your co-workers and this brings harmony and a joyous atmosphere at the work place. Avoid conflicts with family members. Intimacy and warmth are powerful stimulants for you.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) This period brings good financial returns as you communicate well with co workers. You would exchange ideas with people beloved. Along the same lines, do not keep yourself away from people. Enjoy the feeling of togetherness. You have been highly motivated to make more money and improve your financial status. You would be able to finalize a property related issue and this brings monetary gains. Your domestic life takes top priority and you devote time with them to boost your feeling of stability and support within the family. There is strength in your feelings of love and the power of attraction, which may open the door to new romantic relationships.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) As the planetary configuration boosts your self-confidence you meet difficult tasks and resolve work related issues confidently and boldly. Take advantage of your courage and go ahead towards achieving desired goals. Your thinking is more creative than usual. You are filled with new ideas and would be very good in expressing them to others. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor. You give a new approach to communication projects. You may be especially focused on pleasing your partner and together you may do some redecorating. You might also enjoy analyzing different health or nutrition programs.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) There will be enhanced sensitivity in your relationships. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental. You would work in association of likeminded people and this brings confidence and you use your best talents and collaborate all activities related to business, work and growth oppor-

tunities in the world of competition. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering during this phase. The desire for some form of recognition is going to be fulfilled. Financial success is stronger than any other time enhanced now. Brisk walk and timely eating would be helpful.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) This period brings good-luck for people in love as they spend great time together and listen to the inner feelings of each other. You may explore new technology and improve office infrastructure as this brings more efficiency and creativity in your work. There are chances of new associations and beginnings as new opportunities and changes may come. Your family would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You handle conversations, seminars, meetings and express yourself more specifically about the subject. An overseas trip is on cards. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) Good financial returns are foretold at this time. You might have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort and status. You would also lean towards extravagance. You will be able to make good use of your talents, work experience and would incorporate creativity into your work and projects in hand. You may visit religious places and strong feelings towards religion are enhanced. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities or a structured exercise routine.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) You resolve an important issue that has been causing stress for some time. You also give a new approach to handling money and personal resources or new sources of income. Express your views and conditions clearly when it comes to business and financial dealings as your continuous efforts will bring fruitful results. Avoid confrontations and arguments at the work place, as this would spoil time and energy and bring no results. You have more work, less time so go ahead to meet challenges and complete the desired task. There may be a development of romance at your work place.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) The planetary configuration during this period will promote your luck in service and work related areas. You could be stressed while meeting people's expectations and approval. Try to compromise and adjust and take a soft approach when meeting people. It is advisable to be prudent in matters of career. Avoid hasty and rash decision when it comes to change. Give the matter a new thought and consideration as it deserves more time to materialize a deal. At home, change your priorities and support your spouse with love and affection. Give yourself a new fitness routine and healthy diet programme to rejuvenate energy.

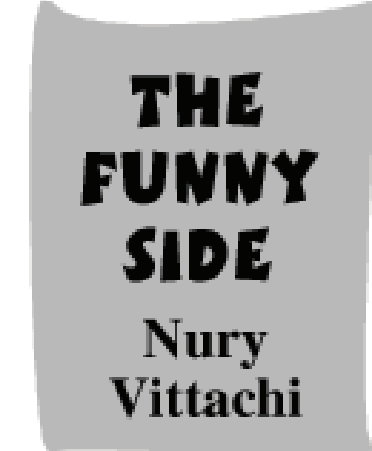
Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) This period bodes well for good luck in family and with people you care for. Sharing your philosophical interests with a romantic partner may be especially appealing to you. You will have the ability to build on financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on the cards. Your style of communication boosts your magnetic powers and this brings favorable results. Cooperation and a focus on harmony and understanding benefit you professionally and will enhance your reputation and public standing. You may feel restless at times; eat healthy food. Yoga and meditation are recommended at this time to alleviate stress.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) There would be more cooperation and harmony in relationships. You are patient, laborious and clever with material aspects and manage finances and business ventures with ingenuity and success. You tackle a multitude of domestic and work related issues and handle all matters successfully. The ability to express and communicate your ideas is extremely important to you this time. Surprises surrounding intimate matters, shared finances and resources and financial support may be in store. You might pay attention to various ways to increase personal funds, resulting in more than one avenue for monetary gain. There will be a fluctuation in energy levels before a balance is achieved.

People love to be angry

This columnist once wrote to a friend gently suggesting that he was not cut out to be an anger management therapist. He replied in capital letters: “SO. WHAT. ARE. YOU. SAYING?” People love being angry these days, and the problem is getting worse. When I look at Facebook, I feel I need to stand well back. “The aviation industry suffers the most,” said a reader who works in that sector. She showed me a news report expressing outrage about an airline which threw a passenger off the flight “because she was breast-feeding”. Another was about an airline which ejected a man “for having a tattoo”. A third report was about a flight in which staff stopped the plane to escort a “feminist activist” off. “But not one of them happened as reported,” said the woman, who did not want her name printed. “In each case, the passenger was actually thrown off for breaching industry-wide safety rules. But journalists prefer to say it was because the person was breastfeeding or whatever because anger gets all the clicks.” A typical case was reported last December. Just as a Delta Airlines plane was about to take off from Atlanta, a man rose from his seat and went to the toilet. The crew scolded him and booted him off the flight — so he called reporters and told them: “It’s

because I’m black.” The good news is that such cases are mostly limited to the Western media. “On the East side of the planet, there is no assumption that authority figures are automatically wrong,” she said. Interesting. I mean, there’s a lot of bad things you can say about Asian journalists, such as the fact that we



are often corrupt, lazy, bribe-taking, careless, woefully inaccurate, gullible, and seem incapable of critical thinking, let alone good writing, and I forgot where I was going with this sentence so I think I’ll just end it here. These days, the Asian media does

the anger thing in some countries, while in others, news items are bland and emotionless. In some Indo-China nations, the first item on the TV news is always the same: “Premier cuts ribbon.” Sometimes the entire news bulletin is the premier cutting various ribbons. Aliens intercepting those transmissions must think this is a planet in which fame and fortune go to men who can use scissors. But elsewhere, the modern love of anger can have bad results. A few days ago, the New York Times told the shocking story of a bird scientist who did his job: He caught and dissected a bird as a specimen for his museum’s million-piece research collection. An angry web-surfer published his name on the Internet as a “bird murderer”. The scientist got so many angry death threats that he needed police protection. The Internet, and particularly Facebook and Twitter, are magnets for the Super Angry. One of my social media friends thunders: “I don’t need anger management. Everyone else needs stupidity management.” To him, life seems horribly unfair. “When Thor throws his hammer he’s a hero. When I throw a hammer I need therapy,” he grumbles. Stand well back. Literally. (Nury Vittachi is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send comments and suggestions via his Facebook page)

“ *Why is a woman to be treated differently? Woman suffrage will succeed, despite this miserable guerilla opposition.*”

-- Victoria Claflin Woodhull

The Shillong Times

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Alert in Doklam

THERE, again, have been misgivings about the Chinese intentions in Doklam, or Doka La, the Bhutanese territory close to Sikkim. The about 75-day crisis in June last year saw the Chinese and Indian troops engaging face-to-face in a war-like scenario. Chinese PLA’s evil designs to put India more on the defensive in the sensitive region by its military actions in a disputed area were ably challenged by the Indian army. The Chinese have not moved forward there, but they have not retreated either. News now, from America, is that the Chinese side has resumed their activities in the disputed area. This calls for serious concern.

Seen alongside is a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of a BRICS summit in South Africa this past week. The two leaders have reiterated their resolve to “ensure peace and tranquillity along the border, in what turned out to be their third bilateral meeting in as many months. Notably, Xi is now more powerful than ever, after having been anointed President for Life by the ruling Chinese Communist Party. Responsibility for regional peace now rests on his shoulders. He’s no more in a position to respond to pressures from the Chinese military brass, as was suspected to be the case till a while ago.

India is China's major trading partner. Peace with India should be a matter of first priority to China also for the reason that China cannot afford to have a military engagement at this time of its high economic growth. It emerged from the shadows to the present status of a super power in Asia and beyond by keeping its territorial usurpation ambitions firmly under control and by concentrating fully on economic growth. But, with economic strength came its new era of aggressiveness in the South China Sea (SCS) on the one hand, and along India’s northern border region on the other. Its aggressive stance in SCS is facing stiff resistance from the US; India has so far stood its ground—more or less, but it’s time for increased vigil.

Xi’s promises on peace cannot be taken for granted; more so, as China had acted in a treacherous manner by engaging India in a war in 1962 – a disastrous experience for this country in the Nehru era. Huge tracts of Indian land along the Himalayas and beyond are still in Chinese possession. One can only hope against hope that Xi would act in a responsible manner to maintain regional peace and stability.

Women: A soft target for the KHADC

By HH Mohrmen

The Bill to amend the Khasi Social Custom lineage Act (1997) passed by the KHADC has only brought to light the realities of the Khasi society (or at least the political class) of the society as being nothing but a bunch of male chauvinistic group. The Bill which denies a woman who marries a non Khasi-Pnar and her offsprings the right to be a Khasi while allowing the tradition of Tangjait for men to continue is the height of hypocrisy. More seriously it will also create a schism in the tribe where none existed before.

The question is how different is the Khasi matrilineal system from other patriarchal societies when it is alright for men to marry outside the tribe while it is not for women? The other pertinent question is also why the tradition is silent on women marrying outside their tribe? Or why is there no tradition like Tangjait for women if they enter into wedlock with men from outside the tribe? Tangjait is a tradition which allows tribal men to marry a nontribal woman and it not only sanctifies their marriage but also accommodates the new family and recognises it as a new Khasi clan.

One thing is certain – if men can intermarry with women from other communities then women too would do so, because Khasi society does not keep its women inside the house. From time immemorial Khasis have interacted and had trade relationships with other communities (particularly in the border) and with an open society like ours intermarriages on both sides and sexes happen. So if it is not uncommon for women to marry outside why is there is no ritual like Tangjait for women too? The answer is simple. It is because no matter whichever male the Khasi women marries she remains a Khasi. There is no need to perform any rituals because lineage will always be through the mother.

The grand purpose of every tribe is to increase its population and domination and while Khasi women marrying a non-Khasi-Pnar will help expand the tribe because the offspring will automatically take the mother’s lineage, every Tangjait will add a new clan to help increase the population of the tribe. This is genius at work because it not only helps increase the population of the tribe but it also helps to enrich the gene pool of the community.

It may be mentioned that Tangjait is a tradition followed by the Khasis only.

The Pnars (Jaintias) and the Bhois have no such tradition. And it cannot be true that Pnar men and women do not intermarry with other tribes or communities because there is already an inter-racial marriage in the royal family. The Jaintia royal family entered into matrimony with non tribal royal families. The last one was with the Tripuri royal family. This also explains why the royal family and some Pnars in Nartiang and Jaintiapur also follow certain aspects of Hinduism.

One unique aspect of the Khasi-Pnar tradition is the concept of Tingkur, (to be connected by lineage)common amongst the Pnar and Khasis too. So one clan is related to three

presumably are the Biates. But there is another group the Pnar call the Hadem and they are the Hadem of Saitsama village. The Hadem of Saitsama though similar are not Hmars because they have migrated to Jaintia Hills much earlier while the Hmars came later and lived in Khaddum and some at Tongseng village.

There are intermarriages between the Biates and the Pnars in Nongkhlieh and Saipung in spite of the fact that the Biates follow a different culture and speak a language akin to Mizo. The current MDC from the Saipung area is a product of a Biate-Pnar intermarriage.

Therefore the JHADC cannot bring a Bill similar to the one that KHADC did be-

“The Pnars and the Hadems of Saitsama who have lived together for centuries are unique in that although they follow a different lineage system which is matrilineal and patriarchal, do intermarry and they see no problem in that.”

other clans! Some of the Pnar clan also Ting kur with clans from the Karbi community. This is prevalent especially amongst those who live in the Assam-Meghalaya border. The relationship between the Pnars and the other tribes transcends borders and all inter-tribal distinction that we may have.

Then there is also a question of the lawbei and Thawlang of the clan. As far as I know the lawbei of the lawchibidi clan to which the Laloo, the Lamin, the Diengdoh and the Marngar belong came from Raid lapngar and the folk narrative says that Iapngar which is now in Assam was ruled by a Hadem king then. Whether lawchibidi is a Hadem or not is a million dollar question but one thing is true. Till date people in Jowai still call those from the kur Laloo clan as “ki Laloo Bhoi.” The inference is very clear that it is not because their lawbei migrated from raid Iapngar to the hills of Khasi and Jaintia but because they are Bhois which we now call Karbis.

The Pnars knows about the Bhois because they have a very close interaction with them and in the Pnar parlance. They also talk about the Hadems who

cause apart from the Pnars and Wars who speak the Austro-Asiatic language and also share the same culture, language and tradition with the Khasis, there are the Biates, the Hmars and the Hadem in Saitsama who belong to a different tribe and practise patriarchy.

The Pnars and the Hadems of Saitsama who have lived together for centuries are unique in that although they follow a different lineage system which is matrilineal and patriarchal, do intermarry and they see no problem in that. One may ask how the two communities following divergent customs decide whether the children will take the mother’s or the father’s clan name. The answer is that it is always amicably decided by the parents. It’s as simple as that.

The other pertinent question is - what or who is a Khasi according to this Bill? Does it mean that to be a genuine Khasi you only need to have both of your parents from the same tribe and the rest is insignificant? It does not matter if the person does not speak the local language or follow the culture but as long as both his parents are from the same tribe, he is qualified to be a Khasi. And on the other hand, it does not matter if the children follow every bit of the Khasi culture and speak the local language but

the mere fact that their father is not a Khasi, they cannot claim to be a Khasi!

If being a genuine Khasi is based on the mere fact that true Khasi blood flows in his veins then the next question is - how certain are we that hundred percent Khasi blood flows through our veins? How many Khasis have done DNA tests to prove that they are hundred percent pure Khasi by blood? How many Khasis can claim that their ancestor have never had intermarriages?

This Bill will create more complications where there were none before, like what will happen if the son of Khasi woman and non- Khasi man then marries a Khasi woman? What will the tribe of the kids born from that wedlock be? If there is anything that this Bill has achieved is to divide the jaidbynriew; now there will be a class amongst the Khasis, the pure Khasi (Khasi paka) bad the not so pure one (ba lah khleh) H.S. Shylla has created history by creating a schism where none existed.

This Bill also contradicts the manner in which the traditional and other faith groups understand marriage. According to the Pnar tradition marriages like any other thing in life is one’s fate or destiny and we have a saying (jar jiar la ka slabhah da booh da bynta) which means that it is pre-ordained. It also contradicts the Church’s teaching that woman was created from the ribs of a man (Genesis) and that marriages are made in heaven. Sadly the Bill has also turned what Mark beautifully said in his gospel “Therefore what God has joined together let no one separate” (10:9) upside down.

There is also this flimsy argument that since a Khasi woman married a man from a forward community, she and her offspring cannot claim Scheduled Tribe status. The question that comes to mind whether the KHADC wants to hinder progress and keep us from moving forward with the rest of the world? Does it mean that the objectives of the ADCs is to continue to keep us backward lest the Institution itself becomes obsolete and irrelevant.

This Bill therefore contravenes tradition which it is expected to protect. It divides the jaidbynriew and uses women as soft targets.

Time the church took the confession test

NCW demand stirs a hornet’s nest

By Sushil Kutty

A confession in Church could invite blackmail as one woman found to her horror. She confessed to pre-marital sex with a priest to another priest. That libido in robes told the secret to two other ‘brothers’. And all three had a time blackmailing her to submit to the missionary position!

Four priests in all. It was exploitative. It was humiliating. With her confession and details thereof, it was sufficient to make life hell for her. Years later, the woman with moral support from her husband made public her confession and the four priests are in the dock. Along with ‘confession’ itself!

The basic requirement for ‘confession’ is a good, fat sin – a ‘mortal sin’. And feelings of guilt! Conscience should prick. Confession is ‘tell-all’ – make a clean breast of. Get the weight of guilt off the chest. Find closure with the plea ‘God I’ve sinned, so help me God!’

‘Contrition’ is the word for ‘confession’.

Confession is also a ‘Sacrament of Penance’. Sit behind a screen and ‘confess’ to a priest on the ‘other side’ of the screen. The identity remains ‘Anonymous’. There is an SOP. At the end of the confession, the priest may pass penance. If, in the rush of emotion, a particular sin is missed out, note it in the mental diary. There is always another confession.

God is overburdened by mountains of sins committed by mortals. He has to be told, reminded. And there ought to be a conduit – an ordained priest and the Church. And, at that, only a male priest! Pleas to give nuns the right are not entertained. It’s a sin! Gender equality doesn’t stalk church aisles. The likes of Tripti Desai wouldn’t be able to hold a candle in church!

The National Commission for Women (NCW) is more broadminded. With the Kerala woman’s ‘violated confession’ making national headlines, the panel asked for an immediate halt to ‘confession’, saying that the case is just the tip of the iceberg. Thousands more must have gone unreported and women, especially young girls and children, are vulnerable.

The demand stirred the proverbial ‘hornet’s nest’. The Catholic Church wants the Centre to make its position clear. Speaking for the government, Union Minister KJ Alphons spoke for the Church! A Catholic, he said ‘No way’ to the NCW’s “shocking statement”. To the Church, if misdemeanours are committed by ordained priests, it’s ‘part and

parcel’.

That being said, Jesus did not introduce ‘confession’ to the faithful. Neither did his apostles come up with the bright idea. Confession is the Church’s doing to rid the flock of individual undoing. Come confess to your sins, be a part of the beautiful endeavour to rid the world of sin, not sinners!

Those who commit mortal sin get another shot at being good Christians. It’s like a dip in the Ganges for Hindus. For the Church, confession brought with it double benefits. One, it bound the faithful to the faith. Two, it strengthened the impression that the Church had a direct link with Jesus; Virgin Mary, too.

Confessions give evangelicals the strength of conviction to berate the flock. Remind the congregation that there is no escaping the wages of sin. In God’s compound all mortals are sinners. Only a few get to become saints.

What of sinners within the Church’s fold? Those with libidos that overflow robes. Like the priest who took the young woman’s confession and blackmailed her! Who will he confess to? What about his penance? The unholy four face the law of the land now only because this one woman spoke up.

Sister Jesme, who appeared in a talk show on the subject, says it’s an internal affair of the Church and reformation should come from within. Former NCW chairperson L. Kumaramangalam begs to differ. She says the Church doesn’t seem to be in any hurry or mood to reform. Father S. Muthu Shankar, spokesperson of Delhi Catholic Archdiocese, says some black sheep cannot hold the entire Church hostage.

Father Shankar says confession is “voluntary”. Sister Jesme cites what is called in Kerala the Aandu Kumbasaram or annual confession, which is “compulsory”. Lawyer Karuna Nandy says the Church appears to be “defiant”, to say the least, unwilling to accept to what Sister Jesme calls “evils” plaguing the Church.

The Catholic Action Council tends to agree with Sister Jesme. It flays the misuse of “confession secret” to “sexually exploit women” and decries the Church’s attempts to “find fault with women”; that women are the ones “trying to seduce priests hearing confessions.” All four priests, who violated the woman’s confession, are on trial. But the Church gives the impression that a tap on the wrists would do for penance. *(IPA Service)*

TO THE EDITOR

Flawed KHADC Bill

Editor, The Bill, KHADC (Khasi Social Custom of Lineage) (2nd Amendment) Bill, 2018 of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council sounds the death knell of the jaitbynriew

Khasi. While the world at large has become a global village, the Khasi race, through the KHADC has retreated into the cave, effectively isolating itself completely. It must be understood that the cave cannot protect the jaitbynriew Khasi, rather they will starve to death inside.

As of now many of the Khasi youths both men and women, are well educated, but hardly find employment in Meghalaya. In order to stave off hunger they have to find employment all over the world for they cannot starve in their own hearth and home. Frankly speaking the Khasi Hills in particular and Meghalaya at large cannot and will not be able to provide jobs for all of them. As such they have to mi-

grate and work all over the world to earn their livelihood. Nobody wants to stay at home and beg. Moreover wherever they work, you cannot expect them to be able to live alone as they need to marry and have a family. Intermarriage is unavoidable in this case.

The action of the KHADC will deprive the Khasi race of its pool of well educated Khasis whose earnings through remittances enhance the income of the Khasi Hills.

A Question may be asked at this point: Can the KHADC provide employment to the majority of Khasis both educated and uneducated? As a matter of fact the KHADC should think twice before passing the Bill. Has the KHADC ever passed a Bill to create employment for Khasis? Has the KHADC ever passed a Bill on the economic policy to enhance the economy of the Khasi Hills? Before passing any Bill on the cultural and social security of the Khasis, first and foremost, it should provide jobs and economic security to the

people of Meghalaya, so that they will not migrate and intermarry elsewhere. In this way the KHADC will be able to maintain a pool of pure Khasi blood that is, if there is still any left.

History itself has shown that the then UK & JHADC (United Khasi & Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council) and the now KHADC are failed institutions. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India has mandated through the word “autonomous” that the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) may run independently, Primary Schools (in their own mother tongues), Primary Health Centres, Agriculture, Fishery and Veterinary Centres. In the Khasi Hills where are the results now? Nowhere to be seen! Hence no economic and social security for the people; it has failed in every front, failed to bring in sound economic stability for the people of the Khasi Hills. It was the failure of the then UK & JHADC (United Khasi & Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council) and the KHADC that culminated in the creation of Meghalaya

State. Now, even Meghalaya has not been able to bring in and build up the economic stability of the state.

Without economic stability no tribe or community - Khasi, Jaintia or Garo can maintain cultural stability. The people will forget culture when there is hunger in their stomachs.

The Bill, KHADC (Khasi Social Custom of Lineage) (2nd Amendment) Bill, 2018 of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council is, therefore, suicidal for the Khasi culture at large unless the KHADC from this moment on, brings in economic recovery so fast that educated Khasi youths need not go looking for work outside the state, prosper well at home and protect the “purity” of the Khasi blood. As of now, in the total absence of economic stability in Meghalaya, this is an appeal to the Governor of Meghalaya not to give his assent to the flawed Bill.

Yours etc., Baston S. Lyngdoh, Via email

KHADC Bill discriminatory!

Editor, As a concerned citizen of Meghalaya and a daughter of the Indian state, I want to share my voice on this present issue. I am sure the knowledgeable people of the Khasi Hills and the people who know what the Matrilineal system really means, would agree with me. It is unfortunate that the social media sites today are full of posts where Khasi men are verbally abusing Khasi women. How can there be unity in inequality? And despite of all this happening such provocative and vulgar statements are still not considered as cyber crime! This is shocking to say the least. And our culture talks about protecting our women! It is sad that the police are doing nothing to stop all this; no tracking down of those who write disrespectful words and descriptions about their own Khasi women; no ban on the internet? Simply nothing!

Are all those harsh words that these Khasi men are using against their own tribe uplifting for the Khasi society? Or are they dragging it down to the grave? So far there has never been any tribal community whose men would bring down their own folks to such a disgraceful level.

This indeed is the raw mentality of the Khasi male. While Khasi women are actually praised by the people around the world and the nation, for their lifestyle and the way they present themselves to the world, here in our own State we are living in fear of our own Khasi leaders who have taken the law in their hands. At the present moment a lot of slander against women is taking place. If this is not gender bias then what is? Where is the gender equality in Khasi society? Is this even a democratic state any longer?

To the statement made by a member of the KHADC that “our legis-

lation is to check those who are exploiting the Scheduled Tribe status for benefits”, let me enlighten you with certain facts which it seems you are not aware of.

There are men from the Khasi tribe who are married to non tribal women. Such women take the Khasi clan of their Khasi husbands as is their custom. This is not done only by the non-tribal wife but also by their offsprings. And surprisingly even after divorce takes place in these intermarriages, the woman and her children still continue to enjoy the Scheduled Tribe benefits as they retain their Khasi clan name. But according to the proposed Bill, a Khasi woman who marries a non-Khasi will be, together with her off springs born out of such marriage, deemed as non-Khasi and shall lose the Khasi status and all the privileges and benefits of a member of the Khasi tribe. The question here is- what about those non-tribal women having Khasi husbands who together with their

offsprings are enjoying the Khasi status and the privileges and benefits as members of the Khasi? Has the KHADC not recognised them as members of the Khasi tribe?

In a Patrilineal/Patriarchal society, a woman, after marriage takes the title of her husband. So ours being a Matrilineal society, the KHADC should formulate a Bill where a man, after marriage should take the clan name of his wife. That would be a fair deal instead of bringing up a Bill that invokes gender inequality.

Finally we would like to know if this issue is really a concern relating to Scheduled Tribe status or a diversion from some other major issue? Yours etc... Ridalin Shullai 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.

“Assert your right to make a few mistakes. If people can't accept your imperfections, that's their fault.”

--- David M. Burns

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Mamata- Abdullah Meet

WEST Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee moves centre stage in national politics with J&K National Conference leader Omar Abdullah visiting Kolkata and extending cooperation to Didi in forming a Federal Front against the BJP in the 2019 General Election. Abdullah stressed the need for anti-NDA parties closing ranks in spite of whatever minor differences there may be among the constituents. The meeting was significant in view of the vast swathes of land between Kashmir and West Bengal. Abdullah and Mamata Banerjee were united in their resentment against the dictatorial big brotherly attitude of the BJP in various parts of the country. Though the National Conference was not party to it, Abdullah was against BJP high-handedness which led to the fall of the PDP-BJP government in Srinagar bringing in odious and oppressive governor's rule making and nonsense of Narendra Modi's talk of Kashmiriyat. With Pakistan's Prime Minister designate Imran Khan focusing on Kashmir being the core issue in bilateral talks with India, the crisis in the valley had possibly deepened.

Mamata Banerjee referred to Trinamool MP Derek O Brien being threatened by a central BJP minister that Bengal will not be spared if the Trinamool Congress persisted in its anti-BJP stance. This was counter to her conception of a Government of the people, for the people and by the people. She had demonstrated the need for a united opposition on July 21, TMC's Martyrs day. She had even stated that the Trinamool Congress would win 42 Lok Sabha seats. But unless the opposition parties back her in her home state, the BJP can be up to its tricks with money and muscle power. But her one on one fight against the BJP in every state may not be possible. Mamata Banerjee makes an annual ritual of welcoming turn coats from other parties into the TMC on Martyrs' Day, July 21. Recently the Rajya Sabha BJP MP, Chandan Mitra who is being sidelined by the BJP leadership has also joined the Trinamool Congress. What is of concern for Mamata is probably the thin attendance at the rally this year. She attributed it to the fact that a train could not be rented to transport people from various districts to Kolkata. Mamata's ambitions to lead the country as Prime Minister is not hidden. The problem is that there are other regional satraps with similar ambitions. Will they all agree to be led by one strong leader? And how do they arrive at such a consensus?

Khasi Lineage Amendment Bill - Thoughtless proposition

By Albert Thyrniang

My late father had the prefix 'khar' to his clan name. He openly and even proudly declared that one of his fore parents, either from the mother or father's side, was a 'dkhar' from Bangladesh. The 'dkharness' was incorporated into his 'Jahrin' surname to become 'Kharjahrin'. Probably that is how the other clans with the prefix 'khar' like 'K h a r s y n t i e w', 'K h a r d e w s a w', 'K h a r m a w p h l a n g', 'Kharmaalong', 'Kharbhih', 'Kharlyngdoh' came into being. We have also the title 'Dhar' among the Khasis. Was it that once upon the time a Khasi man married a 'dkhar' (non Khasi woman) and the husband surrendered his Khasi title in favour of his wife? Yet his offspring remained Khasis and were accepted as Khasis though they were probably called or branded as 'dkhar.' So probably the 'khars' or 'dkhars' might have originated from inter racial marriages. Otherwise what explanation can we offer?

These offsprings of 'mixed descents' have been have been considered full-fledged Khasis. At no point of time were their Khasi status questioned. All possess the tribal certificate. Until recently no one made an issue out of it. Our forefathers and mothers were able to assimilate them into the mainstream Khasi society. They were not discriminated against. The present generation too do not face any discrimination because of their last name. They are not even aware of the 'dkharness' in their family name.

My hypothesis of 'khar'/'dkhar' might be baseless. However, there is no denying the fact that inter-racial marriages in the Khasi Society were always there from time immemorial and their off-springs have been happily accepted into the tribal fold. Today there are hundreds and thousands of Khasi women marrying non-Khasi men and children are born out of such unions. In many cases they are looked upon askance but they still have the right to belong to the indigenous tribe legally.

Now with the passing of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (Khasi Social Custom of Lineage) (Second amendment) Bill, 2018 the age-old practices could be altered all of a sudden. The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, the custodian of customary laws under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, on July 25, passed a Bill that proposes to deem Khasi women who marry non-Khasis and their

children too as non-Khasis. If the Governor of the state gives his assent to the Bill the above will be stripped of their Khasi status, their Scheduled Tribe status and the other constitutional privileges entitled to them as Khasis.

The Bill that was passed unanimously by the 29 members of the council states, "Any Khasi woman who marries a Non-Khasi as well as her offspring[s] born out of such marriage[s] shall be deemed as Non-Khasi who shall lose the Khasi status and all privileges and benefits as a member of the Khasi Tribe who cannot claim preferential privileges under any law."

The Bill defines a non-Khasi as "a person not belonging to indigenous Khasi Tribe classified as Scheduled Tribe under the Constitution (Scheduled Tribe) Order, 1950 (Part III- Rules and Orders Under the Constitution) Part XI - Meghalaya".

As no law is retrospective, the present KHADC Amendment Bill too will not have retrospective effect. It will not be applicable to mixed marriages that have taken place before the Bill and more specifically before the assent of the Governor. Here is the crucial point. Will the Governor give his assent? How long will he take to sign on the dotted lines? Will it be sent back to the Council for consideration? Will he sleep over the Bill as it often happens to bills sent by District Councils for approval? Will the Bill lapse so that it dies a natural death? Will this controversial KHADC Bill meet the fate of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (2017) Bill which also sought to declare the children of mixed couples as non-Garos?

The Bill is seen as a protective mechanism against the 'alarming' rate of women marrying non-Khasis. It is hoped it will deter women from choosing non-Khasis as their life partner as they and their children will be declared non-Khasis. The proponents of the Bill will now expect women to start and build a family with a fellow Khasi man even if they wish otherwise. It will compel them to 'fall in line'. Thus it is hoped that the Bill will be the panacea to the imminent dangers and threats to the very survival of 1.41 million Khasi community in Meghalaya. It will contribute to the

preservation, conservation and promotion of social customs, practices and tradition of the 'Hynniew Trep-Hynniew Skum' (Khasi Race). It is to keep and preserve the traditional matrilineal system of Khasi society.

The Bill might also be seen as a tool to tackle job reservation, quota in courses of study, land and business ownership, etc. Hence forth only 'pure' Khasis will get the jobs reserved for them, only 'Khasi students' will be eligible for quota meant for the community in various educational institutes in the state and in the country, only Khasis will own land, business and other assets in the region. The Benami practice of land and business ownership will stop the Council hopes. It is claimed that unscrupulous men marry Khasi women to do business, own proxy land and business establishments in the name of their spouse. By default they derive constitutional benefits, concessions and privileges, like tax exemption, conferred on only Khasis.

Though the Bill does not infringe on the rights of women to marry anyone they choose to, the repercussions could be grave. It will create divisions, confusion and splits in families and society. It is best explained by means of an example. Suppose there are three girls in a family. Two of them marry Khasi men. They and their children will be naturally Khasis. The third girl marries a non-Khasi. Here as per the KHADC Amendment Bill, she and her children will be non-Khasis. What will happen to the family? The members of that family will lose the Khasi status. In effect, the mother has no more right over ancestral land and property? Where will the family go? Should they live like refugees? Will the clan, the community, the 'Syiemship' and the Council itself readily ostracise such families? In this light, the Bill is a thoughtless Bill.

What about the social customs and practices? Can the Council debar the so-called 'non-Khasis' from donning traditional costumes? Can they be barred from observing Khasi customs, practices and laws? Should they be prohibited from attending 'dorbars'? Or will the Council say, 'you are welcome to don Khasi outfits, participate in festivals, practice Khasi customs and practices but you are not Khasis. This is sheer hypocrisy. Obviously it is an unwise Bill passed by the 'wise men and women' of the district council.

That it is a thoughtless Bill is clear from the fact that there was no consultation whatsoever before the passing of the Bill. Few had any clue that such a Bill would be passed. The 29 MDCs thought they are the wisest. They need no advice from anyone. No wonder the traditional heads have raised objections and reservations against the Bill because they foresee the negative repercussions of the Bill. If passed and implemented the Bill will bring total confusion and even anarchy in the land. The best option is to withdraw the Bill in the present form because the Governor is unlikely to give his assent to such an ill-considered Bill.

Rightly women have also opposed the Bill. It is termed 'gender biased'. It is alleged it targets women. Others are sure it won't stand the scrutiny of law. It dares women to marry non-Khasi and lose their tribal status. Defacto, it 'forces' women to marry a Khasi man for the love of the tribe rather than for the love of the person they will live with forever!

Speaking about marriage or dating non-Khasi/tribals, of late, pictures and video of tribal females with non-tribal males went viral in Facebook and Whatsapp. They were trolled badly online with hate and demoralising messages. Some were physically abused by individuals and groups involved in moral policing. One woman who was trolled stated, 'I want to marry a hard working businessman but I can't find one in my community. What shall I do?' The problem is much deeper. It cannot be solved by law. As time progresses, with influence of urbanisation and globalisation more and more mixed marriages will happen. A time may come when tribal status will matter little. Women will look for education, entrepreneurship, finance, income, security and the like as criteria for tying the knot. Racial, community and religious affiliation may be secondary or of no consideration at all. The tribal certificate may also be of no value. Life will be comfortable without it. In such an eventuality few will give a damn to the KHADC Amendment Bill. So, looking within might be wiser and more beneficial than expecting an external agency to address our social maladies.

Law Against Lynching Transform religious outlook

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Religious fanatics have led to undermining the interests of the minority, thereby fomenting communal tensions and creating social upheavals. The true secular aspect of the country's social fabric has suffered a jolt. In fact, a recent study has pointed out that true secularism leads to growth and prosperity. According to a 109-country study, secularism and tolerance for individuals appear to precede economic development. Researchers, have for the first time, analysed the changing levels of secularism, tolerance and the gross domestic product of countries across the 20th century.

The findings hold significance for India, where it was perceived that in 2014 many had set aside concerns on secularism and voted for Narendra Modi's promises on economic growth. In fact, Daniel Lawson, of the University of Bristol and a senior member of the research team found that cultural values of secularism and tolerance have "historically been very important in creating societies that go on to becoming economically successful". The study found that a single unity of a quantitative measure of secularism corresponded to a \$1000 increase in the per capita GDP after ten years, \$2000 after 20 years and \$5000 after 30 years.

One may mention here that economists of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had earlier indicated that tolerance expands opportunities for economic activity to previously excluded groups. However, in many countries, including India, recent events have demonstrated that tolerance levels of socio-religious groups have been on the decline. Rather, there is a growing trend towards right-wing governments.

This brings us to the question of the formation of a committee by the NDA government to probe matters pertaining to the rising lynching incidents and mob violence following the Supreme Court's adverse comments that both the Centre and States need to do much more to curb the trend. This committee in turn is expected to recommend to a Union Cabinet committee the framing a law against lynching as was specifically directed by the Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, in an advisory, the Union Home Ministry has pointed out that "incidents of violence and lynching by mobs in some parts of the country, fuelled by various kinds of rumours and unverified news such as child-lifting, theft, cattle smuggling are a matter of serious concern". The question arises whether framing a Central law alone would help contain the incidents as it is equally important that there is a political will on the issue. Laws are no deterrent when mindsets are polluted with silent support from those who encourage the culture of hate.

A July 19 report by IndiaSpend, a website found that 98 per cent of all cow-related violence since 2010 had taken place after Modi came to power in May 2014 and that 33 people were lynched in 86 attacks, mostly in BJP-ruled States. This clearly proves that the political will is somewhat missing among the political leaders in a utopian thinking of promoting Hinduism.

Another study found that India witnessed 822 communal flare-ups in 2017, the highest for a year and a 27 per cent rise from 2014, wherein 111 people were killed, according to data provided by Union Home Ministry to the Rajya Sabha, on July 27.

The whole understanding of life and society has to change not just towards religion but also towards the community, whose interests and lifestyles need to be respected. How can one think that only the religious and social interests of a group - may be being in the majority -- would rule while those of others be neglected? Fellow feeling and understanding needs to be encouraged in a big way as this has always been our religious tradition and heritage.

Remember, Swami Vivekananda had boldly maintained the need and importance of understanding and appreciating each other's religion and called for unity among all religions. But precious little has been done thus far to synthesize the salient issues of all religions and generating awareness in this regard. It is vital that this has to start right from the school level and also at religious congregations to make the people realise that all religions propagate tolerance, love and compassion.

It is believed that while Western culture has made us narrow-minded and sectarian, it has also had an effect on the aggressiveness of people, who think themselves superior and what they preach and practice is the best. Such an opinion has to change and instead transform the minds of people, a little away from promoting fanatic religion to welfare issues of the poor and the neglected in that particular religious group.

Recently an eminent monk, the Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission, told the undersigned that he was an ardent supporter of V i v e k a n a n d a ' s understanding of life and thus believed that a person who spends even a little time working for his community may be considered a more religious person than his counterpart, who just prays before the almighty without any creative work for the masses. This approach needs to be emulated by our religious leaders so that we can overcome the materialistic influx and aggressiveness that has vitiated life and society.

It is foolish to expect at this point that the political class will speak in one voice as their political interests i.e. the strategy to garner votes at any cost is uppermost in their scheme of things. The perspective of transforming society has taken a back seat and that is why real concern for the people is less cared for.

However, even without the support of the political class, we may try to help change the people's thinking as some religious leaders preach and practice Swami Vivekananda's thinking pertaining to unity of all religions and bringing various such groups together. Moreover, he gave much emphasis on socio-economic development of the people and improving their living conditions, which unfortunately remains somewhat stagnant. Is it not bewildering that three young girls died of starvation, perhaps may also be illness, in the nation's capital, Delhi, when we are trying to become a super power?

If the nation has to stride towards over all development, then a secular culture has to transcend and this can only be made possible, at least to a limited extent, by the efforts of intellectuals and voluntary agencies working at the grass-root levels. Religious and secular values must definitely be respected but the primary focus of attention has to equally be on the socio-economic development of the masses.--INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Bill that seeks to divide

Editor, The Khasi Lineage Bill, whether it passes or not, has already succeeded in stirring up quite a debate within our society. In relation to the concern regarding the future of the community, the more vocal viewpoint has been that only the children of two Khasi parents can be Khasis and hence perpetuate the community. To this I wish to say that there are many, whose parents or grandparent(s) are of another community, who still strongly identify as Khasi.

This is apparent in their observance of language and culture and therein lies the keyword, Culture. Shouldn't cultural identity also count? Why would this constitute an external threat? This is how we have come to be and it will continue to be so. As far as lineage goes, by tradition we have been a matrilineal society i.e if one's mother is Khasi, then one is a Khasi too. In other patrilineal cultures, similarly, the lineage would be

traced through the father (whether the mother is of the same community or not). Furthermore, questioning one's 'Khasi-ness' is quite redundant. We'd have to go back at least a hundred and fifty years if preservation of homogeneity is the ideal. We are all culturally Khasi even if we vary on the aforementioned degree of 'Khasi-ness'.

I would also like to add that even if, for fairness' sake, it is argued that the bill ought to extend to Khasi men who marry outside the community, it would be equally unjust. No law or government should attempt to take away one's identity. Overall, it would not bode well for the future of the community if we seek to protect it by abandoning our own, as a consequence of whom they marry. Both men and women are a vital part of our society and we simply cannot rise by pulling the other down.

Yours etc., Riabaki Laloo Shillong - 14

Alternative site for Medical college

Editor, The proposed site for Shillong Medical College in the public private partnership (PPP) mode in the present Reid Chest Hospital, Mawbah appears to be improper in view of the facts noted below :

1. The existing Reid Chest (TB) Hospital which is the proposed site for setting up the Shillong Medical College is very congested and the entrance to the premises is through a crowded junction. Chances of having an alternative entrance route appears futile in view of the topography with steep slopes at the site location. 2. A Medical College, supposedly, should be located at a distance from immediate habitations so that the people residing in the vicinity of the area are free from toxic substances caused by medical or pathological waste like blood-borne pathogens, used medical instruments

like syringe, etc. Areas like Mawprem, Mawbah, Lummawbah, etc. are very close to the site and also densely populated. It is therefore not conducive for the setting up of such proposed medical college. Medical Colleges should possess a sufficiently expansive space so that the in-house activities are well managed to ensure that the waste is disposed off responsibly with more environment-friendly methods.

3. According to the norms of the Medical Council of India (MCI), land requirement for the buildings for the College, Hospital, Hostels for students, interns, pg/ residents, nurses, Laboratories and Library should not be less than 10 acres in a place of gentle slopes in hilly areas.. Hence, the proposed Shillong Medical College should comply to the MCI norms.

4. It is understandable that the Shillong Medical College will initially have a capacity of 50 students, which is why it is justifiable to have it set up at the

proposed site. But there is always that element of future expansion which should be taken into account and dealt with, hence, the alternate desire for an expansive site.

5. The proposed Medical College project under the PPP mode will be beneficial only for well-to-do families and it will not serve the low and middle income indigenous people of the State as the fees will be exorbitant

In view of the above-mentioned points the Shillong Medical College (SMC) project approved by the previous State Government under PPP should be reviewed. The Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) may review the earlier decision by taking into consideration the MCI norms and also the issues that will be faced by the people of Meghalaya and the people living in Khasi-Jaintia Hills Districts in particular. Below are some of the suggestions:

The proposed SMC may be changed to State Government MC and be shifted to New Shillong Township or any other place nearby in an area of not less

than 300 acres.Government of India may be requested to sanction another State Govt. MC in addition to the one in Tura. Central Government in Delhi will definitely approve the said SMC(State Govt. not PPP) in Shillong besides the Central MC in NEIGHIMS in the interest of the economically weaker families of Meghalaya.

The proposed MC site at Mawbah (TB Hospital) may be considered for other Health centres with full equipments and it will relieve the problems faced by Shillong Civil Hospital to attend to ever increasing patients who always fail to receive proper attention and accommodation.

The approved Medical College under PPP may be done away with and in its place, Shillong Medical C o l l e g e (S t a t e Government) may be set up in a suitable area and a proper site.

Yours etc., W. Liningstar Lyngdoh, Shillong-6