

“A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.”

--- Mark Twain

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Rahul's fight in the South

Congress president Rahul Gandhi is going South, to Wayanad in Kerala, to fight the Lok Sabha polls from a second constituency. The foray in the South is not new to the Nehru family. The decision comes at a time when the undercurrents in his Amethi constituency are not inspiring for Rahul. His lead had gone down in the 2014 polls, and Union Minister Smriti Irani is locking horns with him for a fresh fight. For the Congress and Rahul Gandhi, ensuring his presence in the new Lok Sabha is all the more important this time. The party is making a strong bid to grab power. Wayanad has been carefully chosen as the safest seat for Rahul. For one, the seat was won by the Congress in the last LS polls. This apart, Muslims and tribals are a prominent presence in the constituency, which must help the Congress to retain the seat. The two Communist parties who run the LDF government in the state are likely to avoid a tough fight in view of the close association the two sides are having at the national level. This rules out a do-or-die battle. Rather, it could be a tame affair. While the LDF candidate is a Muslim, the politically active community is expected to strongly back Rahul Gandhi this time, as they see him as the best bet against Narendra Modi and the BJP in Delhi.

The Congress is projecting Rahul Gandhi's fight in Wayanad – set at the tri-junction of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala – as a symbolic fight against the BJP's and Modi government's moves to “undercut the culture and traditions of the South”. This is a lame excuse or justification, as overall no such sentiment exists in the South. One will rather have to invent it. The Modi government as also the BJP has been careful enough not to rub the southerners the wrong way. No national party can afford to antagonise major segments of the population. At the same time, both the Congress and the Left will have a lot of explaining to do as to how Rahul Gandhi is fighting the Left, its close ally. This could cause considerable confusion. Notably, the fight at the hustings at the national level is bound to be more interesting this time. Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi is in half a mind to enter the fray in Varanasi and throw a direct challenge to PM Modi. This could be prescription for more trouble to Modi.

How Strong is our Nation: Time to Introspect

By HH Mohrmen

Every election is as important as the last one; this one is no different except that we are at a crucial time when everything that we know is being turned upside down by those in power. There were climate denial governments but the most frightening development is when there is bias towards one religion or race. The hoi-polloi are fed with half-truths and thereby made to confuse science with myths – a deliberate ploy to make sure that they are not able to make a difference anymore. The country, which since its inception is proud of its plurality and respects its diversity, is now in a dilemma. Every voice of dissent is silenced and those who raise their voices are made to understand that unless one toes the government line, they become the enemies of the country thereby anti-national.

With regards to statistics and data, the common people are left in a dilemma as we are fed with half-truths and do not get the right information anymore. We do not know whether unemployment rate has grown or fallen; whether the economy is growing at the expected rate or is not, because we do not know whom to rely on for this important information anymore. And in time when we have to make hard and difficult decisions, the different agencies and even the government is not of any help. They instead make the task more difficult for the commoners. They are making the people more confused with their statistics and information which contradict each other. And this Lok Sabha election unlike the previous one is unpredictable. It can go any way and the fear is writ large on the faces of the leaders of both the opposition and the ruling dispensation.

On the eve of elections we are made to understand that the nation is strong and in safe hands because we have made a surgical strikes on land, in the air and towards the sky. Is that so? The need of the hour is to ponder hard and ask ourselves the question as to what are the factors that go towards making the country strong. In times like this when emotions run high and rhetoric adds more fuel to the fire, it is easy to

find oneself joining the bandwagon of stereotypes which believe that the strength of the country is on how we deal with our neighbours, or with our attitude towards others.

But is that the basis on which this nation was built? We are stronger, not because we are a nuclear power country, or that the country possesses the technical capability to shoot the stars. The strength of the country is on something which is inside; its inner strength is if freedom prevails; if the rule of law is respected and there is a healthy democracy. The country is strong when peace prevails in the whole country and people live in peace and harmony. I hope that is the ideal that the freedom fighters had when they fought for our freedom.

The strength of the country relies chiefly on the fact that it was able to live up on the principles on which the country was built by its founding fathers, the values enshrined in the Constitution and which has kept this country together so far. The strength of the country lies on the fact that the citizens of the country are free to worship any God as one is given to understand or not to worship any God at all. The country is strong when there is security in the land and every citizen of the country irrespective of creed/caste/religion/gender or sexual orientation lives without any fear or apprehension or to borrow from Tagore's poem, ‘Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high.’ The nation is strong when peace and understanding reign supreme in every nook and corner of the country.

The country is strong when the press is free to disseminate news which is based on truth as one understands it and when media persons can remain true to the dictates of their conscience. The nation is strong when there is self-censorship amongst media persons to ensure that only that which is true is shared with the public and again to take leave from Tagore's song which says, ‘where words come out from the depths of truth.’

A Democratic country can only succeed when people communicate freely with each other and with their government and can even criticise it without any fear. A Country is strong when there is transparency and accountability in the function of every aspect of government. A strong nation would in fact encourage debate and know that people are intelligent enough to agree to disagree in spite of all the differences they have.

The strength of India is on the richness of its culture and the diversity of its people and it will become stronger only when every section of the population are treated equally and allowed to develop and prosper on their own and at their own pace. A country is strong when the wealth and the resources of the country are shared equally by its people, instead of it being concentrated in the pockets of few people only. And a strong country is led by leaders who work for the welfare of the commoners particularly the poor and the neglected and is not influenced by the rich and the influential.

The country is strong when there is independence in the judiciary, when the police, the military, the navy, the air force, the CBI and others serve the public according to the laws of the land and their decisions are not influenced by the powers that be, but by what is right. The country is strong when we have a government which does not seek to influence the functions or the decision of its agencies, but instead ensures that they maintain their independence.

The Country is strong when the institutes of higher education function independently and the pursuit of education is free from any kind of influences. Education is the vehicle of the nation's growth and it can help the country develop only when it is free, and when the students are allowed to fly higher and reach for the stars. A country is strong when its education system is based on what is true and right and is not influenced by any ideology. A strong nation is when all its children can have access to education and its citizens can access

health care and where no one is deprived of one's basic needs.

A strong nation also looks at the future and plans and accepts reality as it happens. This is the time to elect leaders who understand that climate change is real and is staring us in our faces. A strong nation has strong leaders who work towards mitigation of the impacts of climate change and work for a sustainable development in the country.

Can we call a country strong when its leaders stoop so low and indulge in cheap tactics of piggy-back riding on the success of the country's Space agency just for the sake of winning the elections in spite of the fact that the model code of conduct is in operation? Can a leader abuse his office as the caretaker PM by disrespecting rule of law for his own vested interests? One expects that he would ask himself these questions: Is it the right time? “Am I doing the right thing to allow the biopic of my life to be released now?” Even if this does not amount to violating the model code of conduct, it is ethically wrong and amounts to disrespecting the rule of law by those in power. It is also not giving a level playing field to opponents. This will only lead to chaos and anarchy in the country. The question before us is: If the chowkidar is abusing his power, then who will watch the chowkidar?

The strength of the nation is not on one or two leaders, or the size of his hand or stomach, it does not depend on the leader's way of dressing or not even his charisma. In a parliamentary democracy like ours, it largely depends on the collective wisdom of the five hundred odd MPs that we elect and that is why we need to choose our MPs wisely.

The country is strong if the foundations on which it was founded are strong and when all the institutes, organs and agencies in the country work to strengthen these basic principles and for the common good of all the citizens of the country. The nation is strong when there is respect for the rule of law and respect for all citizens of the country.

SP-BSP alliance has to work harder to meet BJP challenge No Modi wave in Uttar Pradesh on Lok Sabha poll-eve

By B. Sivaraman

During the current elections there is neither a pro-Modi wave as in 2014 nor a strong anti-incumbency against the Modi Government. While drawing overall balance-sheet, everyone, including many sober BJP organisers, agree that Modi's 2014 tally would come down but by what number is the billion dollar question. So, in a scenario of wave-less impasse, secondary factors like vote-banks, index of opposition unity, strength of the booth-level election machinery of the parties and even choice of candidates etc., might play proportionately a greater role compared to a wave-situation.

The main opposition of SP-BSP alliance has pinned its hopes on electoral arithmetic, some kind of social engineering of a core consolidation of Yadavs (around 9 per cent of the State population), Muslims (19.26 per cent) and Jatav/Chamars among Dalits (around 9 per cent, the main base of Mayawati) around which they hope to attract sections of other OBCs to reach the winning cut-off of around 45 per cent. This kind of electoral arithmetic worked in Saharanpur and Phulpur by-elections. But in general elections, where the foremost consideration is a stable government at the Centre and a strong leader as PM, will mere arithmetic work?

It might work only partially and not to the same extent as anticipated immediately in the wake of Phulpur-Gorakhpur by-polls as well as at the time of Congress victory in MP-Rajasthan-Chhattisgarh, argues Arun Pandey, a veteran journalist and the political editor in a leading Hindi TV channel. His main argument is that it is advantage Modi after Pulwama-Balakot when BJP's brand of (anti-Pakistan) nationalism finds some social echo and can to some extent act as a solvent against social engineering. In any case, he argues, that except in the case of Muslims, vote-bank politics is not intact as it used to be in the social justice heydays of 1980s. BJP too, even while working for a core consolidation of upper caste votes, has been working with a conscious strategy to polarise and divide the OBCs to pre-empt an OBC consolidation around SP. This they did by wooing back Lodhs through Kalyan Singh and by appointing a Murya leader as Deputy CM. Only Apna Dal has dissented and left NDA and joined SP-BSP but BJP managed to retain a splinter faction of it.

BJP also came up with a devious strategy to break up OBC unity by appointing Justice Raghavendra Kumar panel for compartmentalised reservation among OBCs. Arguing that Yadavs and Kurmis dominate OBC reservations, the panel submitted its report on the election eve, on 18 December 2018, recommending restriction of reservation to Yadavs and Kurmis/Patels and a few other castes to 7 per cent only out of a total of 27 per cent for all OBCs while offering 11 per cent to ‘More backward Classes’ of Gujjar, Lodh, Kushwaha, Nai, Mali & Teli etc. and 9 per cent separately to the ‘Most Backward Castes’ of Mallah/Nishad, Bind, Rajbhar and Ghosi etc. How much impact this will have remains to be seen.

Mayawati, after BSP's 2014 debacle, and Akhilesh, after criticism by his father-uncle duo that he had conceded half the seats to Mayawati, are both engaged in a battle for survival. Such a compulsion, while making them desperate for seat numbers this time, blinds them to the possibility of the crucial addition of winning margin of votes a broader alliance with Congress could bring in several constituencies of close contest. Congress is the only party with a universal appeal and hence retains some pockets of influence among secular middle classes and Muslims concedes Shiv Sevak, a BSP corporator in Allahabad.

With SP-BSP making an insulting offer of only 3 seats to Congress, more than broader unity, the very survival of Congress with dignity and avoiding a fate of ‘Congress-Mukt UP’ naturally became the main consideration and hence the desperate launch of Ms. Priyanka Gandhi. Mayawati's prime ministerial ambition also puts her in contention with Rahul. But in the post-Pulwama changed situation, observers do not rule out a last minute deal between Congress and SP-BSP.

Voters rate Modi high but not Yogi similarly. Effective management of Kumbh is not a substitute for industrial development and educated unemployment is severe. Hence, there is some disquiet among non-Rajput upper castes but they think that stakes are high in general elections and local scores with Yogi can be settled later.

One factor adding to the overall uncertainty about UP poll outcome is the lack of clear picture on how the Jat community would vote. Kairana assembly by-poll showed Jat alienation from the BJP. Modi's quickly came up with Rs.5000 crore handout to Yogi to clear sugarcane dues from mills to the farmers to assuage Jat farmers' anger. So, in the national elections, a section of Jats might go back to BJP.

As BJP directly takes the cut from the businessmen and contractors avoiding middlemen, an impression has been created that corruption has come down from the level of Akhilesh and Mayawati regimes. Moreover, Centre's direct cash transfer of subsidies is also being perceived as an anti-corruption measure. More importantly, Centre's schemes like giving free gas stoves and houses for urban poor had developed a base among Dalits and lower OBCs for BJP. BJP is being seen primarily as a party of governance and a ruling party and not just as a communal outfit. Rural areas which had never seen power are now getting 6-9 hours regular power supply and powercuts have drastically come down in cities. Rural roads have also made a visible impact among voters. At the grassroots, Dalits and Yadavs now are aware that political circumstances have brought them on the same side but in some pockets dalit labourers and well-to-do Yadav farmers are socially at loggerheads, and hence two-way vote transfer between them might not happen in some constituencies.

Above all, the UP voters' historical psyche that they are the prime kingmakers in Delhi and most ardent champions of nationalism and defenders of national security appears to be at play once again. UP usually makes or breaks the chances of top contenders for power at Delhi but the suspense over how many less seats BJP would get this time has cast a pall of uncertainty over Modi's margin. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

On Rahul Gandhi's NYAY scheme

Editor,
Apropos the letter "Rahul's final assault on poverty" (ST March 30, 2019) by S Bandopadhyay, it is true that the announcement had come at a time that gives space to critics with respect to its timing. On the matter of it's being implementable or not, it should be noted that the MIGS had been carefully examined and discussed at length by the party in consultation with leading economists of the country. Now to expect that a leader of a political class should have a doctorate on a scheme he proposes and it's bearing on science, climate change, telecommunication, health etc., is simply absurd. For example in the ministry of power generation we cannot expect all ministers to have a doctorate on electrical engineering or solar plants or nuclear physics. Every ministry has a host of experts in it's field to guide and work on the concerned matter. As regards to the second point – the Rafale aircraft deal, I believe the writer of the letter is better informed than I am to expect any arguments as the matter is sub-judice, and as such we ought to abide by the rule of law.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Nongthymmai.

Salute Shillong Trade Fair!

Editor,
I was overwhelmed with emotion and indebtedness as I visited the 20th International Shillong Trade Fair at Fire Brigade Ground the other day. I became emotional because it reminded me of my father who took me to the fair 20 years ago as a class V student. He must be smiling from heaven today seeing his grown up son taking his little granddaughterto the same fair to celebrate its 20 glorious years. Secondly, I feel indebted because this Fair played a crucial role in the formation of my life and career. As a normal boy from Shillong I dreamt of opening a small garment shop at Police Bazar. But, this Fair taught me to dream big and opened an entirely new world for me outside Meghalaya.

Today, I am one of the few lucky ones from Shillong who is based in Mumbai exporting garments to Thailand and Dubai. Thanks to Shillong Trade Fair for giving me the opportunity to interact with foreign participants especially from Thailand. The Thai traders imbibed in methem sense of professionalism and competitiveness. I am a clear cut example of social and economic transformation that Shillong Trade Fair has brought to

Meghalaya. Like a silent warrior and crusader this Fair has taken the Brand Meghalaya to different countries across South East Asia. I started my business in Dubai and Thailand based on my relations with Shillong Trade Fair, and its organiser ITFAA. The Indian Embassy in Bangkok accorded a red carpet welcome to me when I informed them about my relations with the Fair.

I sincerely think that the Government and people of Meghalaya should officially recognise and reward ITFAA which is organising this Fair in Shillong for the last 20 years bringing a sea change to the brand image of Shillong in particular and Meghalaya in general.

I also had the good fortune of benefiting from one of its social welfare activities. My late father's last trip to hospital was made possible by the ambulance donated by ITFAA to the Laitumkrah Dorbar. I would like to congratulate the Laitumkrah Dorbar for taking the historic step 20 years back in joining hands with ITFAA to organise International Shillong Trade Fair at Fire Brigade Ground, Laitumkrah. I doubt whether any other Dorbar in Shillong is running an ambulance service for the benefit of the common people. The

initiative taken by the local Dorbar by allowing ITFAA to organise fairs in Fire Brigade Ground will be remembered in golden letters in the history of Shillong.

I am sure my sentiment and emotions will be echoed by thousands of youths from Shillong regarding the yeoman service played by Shillong Trade Fair in the formation of their life and careers.

Yours etc.,
Peter Lyngdoh,
Mumbai

Indira Gandhi & the Division of Pakistan

Editor,
Amidst the recent jingoism of the current dispensation at the Centre taking the credit of being "macho" and entering the enemy territory (read Pakistan) with surgical strikes, it is important to remember that long years back (about 47 years ago in 1971), India, with Indira Gandhi at the helm as the Prime Minister, had intervened militarily and helped in creation of Bangladesh with the division of Pakistan. The Pakistan army had surrendered to the Indian forces on December 16, 1971. This was, by far, the biggest military victory of India over Pakistan, and

never ever, before or after, could India could humiliate Pakistan the way it did in 1971. Even at that point in India, it was about a fight between India and Pakistan, and was never projected as a fight between the Pakistani and Indian Governments. It is definitely important to remember that Governments (specially federal ones) belong to the entire country, and NOT just a to a section. Similarly, when a federal government acts, especially in external situations, it is the Country that acts, and NOT just the Government.

However, in India, specially of late, it has become a norm to term any act by the federal government (meaning the Government at the Centre) as an act of the Government or its leader, and NOT the Country; which indirectly means that the entire Country is NOT included in the Government.

To our good fortune, whenever, there were external threats or international issues, the country stood as one, and except for a few rare instances, the opposition political parties have also supported the actions of the Government at the Centre. Alas, in these times, only a leader or a party seems to usurp and take all the credit for all

actions by different constituents of the country. This does not augur well for the country.

Yours etc.,
A Bhuyan
Nagaon (Assam)

Why the job crisis?

Editor,
A large part of the so-called job crisis is because of demand for government jobs, not jobs per se. It is clear that due to the implementation of demonetisation, GST Tax and automation the job crisis has increased. It indicates a situation where the total number of job vacancies is much less than the total number of job seekers in India. It would now be better to look at the current estimates of employment and unemployment in the country made by Planning Commission. One thing is sure that politically, job crisis or youth unemployment will be an important agenda for the 2019 election.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit,
Ahmedabad

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

“The Great Depression, like most other periods of severe unemployment, was produced by government mismanagement rather than by any inherent instability of the private economy.”

--- Milton Friedman

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Youth unemployment soaring in Meghalaya

LABOUR Minister, Prestone Tynsong informed the Assembly in March 2018 that youth unemployment ratio in the age group of 15-29 years is 115/1000. In the age group of 30 years and above the unemployment figure is 11/1000. As of March 2018 there were 43,000 registered unemployed youth in Meghalaya. Many who have dropped out of school and colleges are not registered with the employment agency. The Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) had recently done a national unemployment survey and found Meghalaya to be having the highest number of urban unemployed youth in the country. This could be due to large scale migration of youth from rural Meghalaya to the urban hubs in search of jobs. So far, the Government has been the single largest job provider in Meghalaya. In the absence of any industrial growth, this trend continues. The few cement companies and other industries can at best employ a few thousand skilled, employable youth. Tynsong stated that the youth are neither skilled nor employable. This is not new information. Yet nothing has been done to create vocational studies centres other than the Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), which are stuck with the same curriculum even when the market today is in need of different skill sets.

It is ironic that not a single MLA has so far called for a research on the reasons for the high unemployment rate. Where is the mismatch between the education provided by our educational institutions and the skills required? Why is there a mismatch? What are skill sets that our young people are inclined towards? Are these skills being honed or are the skills training provided by government agencies not matching the aptitude and attitudes of our youth? There is a big thrust by government to push the youth towards entrepreneurship; to become job creators instead of job seekers. Well, not all the youth have the aptitude for running a business or starting an enterprise. This requires diligent hand-holding by agencies that provide the skilling. Skills-training is a value chain. It cannot stop with just providing the training. Budding entrepreneurs need seed money and there have to be angel funding agencies or micro-credit societies that invest in enterprises which show the potential for taking off.

It is a pity that even in the run-up to the Lok Sabha election none of the candidates are flagging the issue of youth unemployment which is going to take a serious toll on the State if it is not addressed. Unemployment is an issue of concern even at the national level.

Stop the blame game on coal mining: In-depth debate required

By Albert Thyrniang

In the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections scheduled for April 11 next, the ban on coal mining has taken centre-stage yet again. A 'tu-tu main-main' blame game has broken out between the two main rivals, the ruling NPP (plus allies) and the Opposition, Congress. The Congress blames the Conrad Sangma led MDA government for its failure to have the NGT's ban lifted despite its promise to do so before last year's Assembly election. In reply, NPP's chief protagonist, Chief Minister, Conrad K. Sangma came out with all guns blazing alleging that it was the erstwhile Mukul Sangma-led Congress which never intentionally challenged the judgement of the Green Tribunal.

It is understandable that the proscriber coal mining activity is a burning issue for all political parties this election too. Politicians want us to believe that the coal ban has impacted the livelihoods of common people and caused revenue loss for the state. But the ulterior motive which has been exposed umpteen times is that those running the coal business (often referred to as the coal mafia) are politically connected. The shady reality is that coal barons, businessmen and owners fund political parties. There is a nexus between the coal barons and politicians. Top politicians in the state are themselves towering stakeholders in the industry. There is black money flowing from coal mines to politics. Coal controls Meghalaya politics.

All political parties impatiently crave for coal mining to be made legal again. The BJP candidate, Sanbor Shullai goes to the extent of promising to lift the ban within a short time if he is sent to Delhi. He even boasts that had his party been voted to power in the last Assembly election, mining of the black diamond would have resumed by now. The NPP informs us that it is fighting the case in the Supreme Court and it will be able to convince NGT to revoke its 2014 ruling. The Congress too must be assuring voters to banish the ban in Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills.

We must thank the All Dimas Students' Union for filing a PIL in the Supreme Court which led to rat-hole mining being banned on April 17, 2014. The ban is specifically on 'rat-hole' mining on two counts (a) because of the extensive damage to the environment (b) the unsafe and unregulated mining practice. Let

citizens know that the ban was imposed by the Supreme Court and the Court alone can lift the ban. It is a legal and a highly technical matter. Politicians can't just promise to re-start mining. They know it too well that it is next to impossible to satisfy the court to revoke its verdict. It is but a 'jumla' merely to secure votes.

For the NGT/Supreme Court it is very clear. A policy which will fully address the environmental concerns and the safety of miners is essential. Do political parties have a blue print, the implementation of which will have little impact on the environment? Do they have a master plan that will rule out deforestation? Do they have a comprehensive plan to free land, water

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and air from pollution? How do they guarantee that fish, animals and other organisms won't be affected? If I were the NGT, I would also demand for reparations of the past. That is to say, an actionable plan to restore the environment to what it was before coal mining started in earnest! The Supreme Court should see that the environment is first restored before entertaining any idea of lifting the current ban. An embargo of at least 15 years should be a pre-requisite condition before any concession is made for re-starting coal mining.

What about the mining technique itself? What is the stand of political parties on 'rat-hole mining'? Will they propose to the Supreme Court to continue with the inhuman, unsafe and cruel practice? What will be the high safety norms to be strictly adhered to, to uncompromisingly guarantee the safety and dignity of miners? What will be the full-proof measures to be employed to eliminate any future accidents in the 'death traps'? If the method of extracting coal from narrow horizontal tunnels of the height of 3-4 feet, thus literally turning human being into rats, is out-dated, dangerous and degrading, then what will be the alternative technique?

The only solution, pro-

mining groups might say, is scientific mining. Even this proposal might not satisfy the court. Experts opine that scientific mining in the state is even more damaging to the environment. In places like Assam and Jharkhand, the coal seam is broader and is located vertically. But in Meghalaya the width of the coal seam runs horizontally measuring 2-3 feet. Hence while it is possible to extract a certain amount of coal within a kilometre, here one has to mine for several kilometres to get the equivalent amount. Therefore, scientific mining may not even be an option.

What do political parties have to say about regulation? Will the totally unregulated mining con-

tragedies take place.

The blame game on coal mining is to divert from real issues and responsibilities. The Congress candidate has been our representative for ten years. There is no report card on his achievements. We are told to go to websites to study his MPLADs' utilisation. We know that there are discrepancies between records and the ground reality. No one investigates because MP schemes are allotted to opposition MLAs and MDCs as well. So, on what basis do we decide to re-elect our Shillong MP? On merit does he deserve to be re-elected as MP? Will an anti-BJP posture be the main reason for a third straight term? If the electorate decide to discard the old guard will a new parliamentarian be better? What is his vision and road map for his constituency and the country? Will the UDP and its candidate ride only on the vague and sentimental appeal of the 'Jaitbynriew'? Will we have a new law maker just because the NPP is not in the fray?

In Tura the Congress candidate is former CM for eight years. If he had done his work well during his tenures why does he rely on punching the BJP/NPP? Why can't he allow his developmental works to speak for themselves? Once again the NPP nominee is vying for the passport to the Lok Sabha. But does she merit another opportunity when her previous performance was pathetic? Records against her name are, attendance 49%, Private Member's Bill zero, Parliamentary Debate zero and question asked zero. She vaguely claims that MDA has done more in one year than the UPA did in five years. Well, much was expected from this government at the start of its term. Policies on education, health, agriculture, and youth and of course, mining were readily promised during the pre and post government formation. After a year there is nothing to cheer about. What we have is an unknown education policy. Change in governance was anticipated but what we have is a government that is preoccupied with coal. Just like the failed Prime Minister at the centre, here we have a Chief Minister who only blames the previous government for all the ills of the state.

The discourse so far is quite bereft of real issues. Instead we have rhetoric, anti-BJP/NPP narrative and the much repeated blame game on coal ban.

Is education a discriminating factor today?

By Barnes Mawrie

In India we speak of a variety of discriminations like social discrimination in the form of caste system, racial discrimination, economic discrimination, religious discrimination, political discrimination etc. In the last few decades a new type of discrimination has emerged and that is educational discrimination. In the past, education was of an equal level in most parts of the country. Any person who completed his or her graduation or post-graduation from any university, would easily be absorbed in the employment market. There was a high degree of egalitarianism in education and so discrimination on this ground was unheard of. The phenomenon of expensive private schools and colleges was still absent. Today however, we are witnessing a great disparity in the level of education all over the country. This is seen at different levels of education:

At the primary education level, we have English medium schools which cater to the elite class and vernacu-

easily traceable in our present educational system:

First of all, education has become extremely expensive and so the majority of the people who are poor cannot afford it. Educational costs rise higher as a person goes into higher education. Moreover, private institutions who provide quality education demand higher fees from students. This naturally excludes the poor from accessing such facilities.

Secondly, the shamble in which government educational institutions are, brings down the quality of education provided there. The poorer classes who can only afford to study in such institutions get only a third-class type of education. It is not unusual to see that in rural areas government schools do not even function normally. Lack of basic infrastructure and adequate qualified teachers spell doom for these schools.

Thirdly, the present educational system in India is a cut-throat competitive system where marks decide the

There are those meant for the elites and others meant for the poorer classes. So what is actually happening is that discrimination sets in right from the start of a child's educational pursuit. It is evident that elite schools would have the best of infrastructure and the best of teachers.

lar medium schools which cater to the poorer classes. Most of the former type of schools are located in urban areas while the latter are mostly found in rural areas. The same is with Secondary and Higher Secondary levels. There are those meant for the elites and others meant for the poorer classes. So what is actually happening is that discrimination sets in right from the start of a child's educational pursuit. It is evident that elite schools would have the best of infrastructure and the best of teachers. The reason is that the school fees are exorbitant and so they can afford to provide such high standards. The poor schools on the other hand usually do not even have the basic infrastructure and much less qualified teachers since the fees are comparatively low. Such schools are more prevalent in rural areas where the population is poor and backward.

When it comes to higher education, the poor students are always left behind in the race since they have no financial back up. As of today, higher and professional education is meant only for the rich people. Who are those able to afford to procure admission in IIT, IIM, Medical and Engineering Institutes? They are the well to do students whose parents can afford to spend lakhs of rupees. It is a fact that such professional and specialized education is reserved for the rich classes. The poor are meant to content themselves with simple graduation from ordinary colleges. In most cases they are doomed to be either unemployed or doing some small clerical jobs or become daily labourers. Who are those who climb up the social ladder and become bureaucrats and powerful persons who are at the helm of state affairs? They are those born with the silver spoon in their mouths, whose families can afford to pay for their higher education. There is a lot of injustice in our present educational system which if not addressed immediately will worsen discrimination in our country. The maladies are

fate of a student. Cut-off marks for admission in all colleges, universities and professional institutes are monstrously high that they automatically exclude the poorer classes. Students hailing from poor families who study in third-rated institutions cannot compete with rich students from elite educational institutions. Therefore as long as admission is based on marks system, only the privileged students will get the opportunity for higher education.

The only solution perhaps is through levelling of education in the whole country as done in the west. Some sort of egalitarianism and uniformity must be brought into our educational system. This can be done if the government gives priority to education as a national investment. In last year's central government budget education gets only Rs. 85,000 crores while Defence gets 2.95 lakh crores. This indicates how little importance education is given by the nation in general. If the government were to invest more in education, it could provide equal financial assistance to all educational institutions and it could afford better scholarships for students from poorer families. This would bring down the educational fees and give more access to higher education for the economically poorer students. The government must understand that investment in human resource is of primary concern; and what is more valuable and more effective for nation building than educating its citizens? The present system in our education is a malicious method of perpetuating domination of the higher castes over the low castes. George H. W. Bush has rightly observed that "education is the key to opportunity. It is a ticket out of poverty." I hope our leaders and our governments understand this and revamp our educational system so as to make all levels of education accessible to the poorest of the poor. Then only can the massive population of poor Indians get out of their age-old ignorance and misery.

TO THE EDITOR

Squeezing the middle class

Editor,
Apropos the letter, "Rahul's final assault on poverty", by Samares Bandyopadhyay (ST, March 30, 2019), I am in total agreement with the contents of his letter. Doles/freebies promised by our politicians on the eve of elections inflict serious injury to the country's financial health after every election. The politicians would not pay a single paisa from their own pocket. So how will the extra expenses be met after Govt formation? Where will such huge amounts of money come from? Let me assure you, the political parties know very well about the source of funds! Where does the proposed the fund lie? Well, the inevitable answer is, with, "the middle class". Yes, they would gleefully squeeze the middle class in every way possible

in order to please their "poorest 25 crore" after the election. This is not the first occasion that a political party promised something very big for their favourite "poor" electorates. But every time the victim is one and only one, be it the distribution of 2/3 Rupees per kg rice or free laptops/bicycles or free medical facilities! And this is the middle class! The middle class is very cleverly and shamelessly, made to compensate for the shortfall in the exchequer due to expenses made on freebies/doles. As for myself, I am compelled to pay Rs 950-1000 at present for a bag of rice for which I used to pay Rs.650-700 a couple of years ago. Now, my question is: Why on earth should a "poor" person feel the necessity to work at all if he/she is getting everything free of cost? Am I wrong? Please take the pain of correcting me if anyone feels that I

am wrong.

Yours etc.,
PS Gupta,
Via email

Non-functioning Lokayukta

Editor,
It is a matter of great concern for the general public that the Govt, of Meghalaya has taken no steps to activate the functioning of the office of the Meghalaya Lokayukta for reasons best known to them. It may be recalled that the Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, 2013 was passed by Parliament as far back as on January 1, 2013, by which each State was required to establish the Lokayukta within one year i.e. latest by 31st December 2013. The Meghalaya Lokayukta Act was passed thereafter in March 2014. However,

even after that, it took Meghalaya more than four years before the Chairperson of the LokAyukta was finally appointed by the present Government and sworn in by the Hon'ble Governor in November 2018, after a strict order was passed by the Supreme Court.

At long last I have seen a news item in your esteemed newspaper dated March 24, 2019 that complaints can be filed with the Secretary of the LokAyukta but even now the LokAyukta has no office premises and no staff. If a complaint is filed it will surely be only lying pending in the absence of any office or staff or Inspection or prosecution wings. The Government has appointed a lame-duck LokAyukta. I hope and trust that the Government will take urgent steps to activate the LokAyukta so that it can start functioning effectively.

Yours etc.,
Pawan Sharma
Shillong - 2

Say 'No' to NOTA

Editor,
As the Lok Sabha election is nearing we have a vital role to play in ensuring the credibility and sanctity of the electoral process so that democracy works smoothly. We can strengthen the government structure by ensuring that the right kind of representatives is elected. We should not get carried away by some evil forces that vitiate the positive environment by their malicious campaigns, or those that compromise with the unity, integrity, security, eternal value systems and the developmental journey of our country. We must use our valuable right to cast our votes and elect an empow-

ered, able and responsive government. We should not press NOTA in the EVM as that is a manifestation of regressive politics without any productivity. It simply increases the probability of electing the wrong candidate. Representatives are elected by the people, so we must come out and vote for a representative who is committed to national interests, people's welfare and eternal value system with focus on developmental governance. We must give priority to our nation and use our right to elect a sensible people's representative.

Yours etc.,
Anil Singh Roka,
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.

"When someone loves you, the way they talk about you is different. You feel safe and comfortable."

--- Jess C. Scott

The Shillong Times

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Congress's Promise—all Manifesto

EIGHT days before the first phase of the Lok Sabha election scheduled for April 11, the Congress Party releases its 55-page manifesto. A manifesto is merely that – a set of promises, many of which remain unfulfilled. Captioned, "Congress Will Deliver," this time the Party claims that the manifesto reflects the aspirations of the people. The major themes on which the manifesto rests are Kaam (employment and growth), Daam (an economy that works for all), Shaan (pride in hard work and soft power), Sushashan (good governance through independent and accountable institutions) Swabhimaan (self esteem for the deprived), Samman (life of dignity for all) The Congress manifesto has been cleverly crafted to include those aspects of governance which the Modi government is perceived to have failed on. The appeal of the Congress Party, "Let us rebuild India. Together, let us get India moving again," assumes that the five year rule of the NDA Government has destroyed the fabric that held the nation together and which should therefore be rebuilt. It presupposes that India had come unstuck these last five years and must therefore rev up its engine post May 23. This is an ambitious manifesto, well crafted by the backroom boys in the Congress war room. In its breadth and comprehensiveness it seems to have covered every aspect of the citizen's life from economic security to internal security and food security. Climate resilience and disaster management have found mention. Hopefully this will look into the disastrous extractive coal mining methods of states like Meghalaya where the environment has suffered irreversibly.

The Congress promises to bring Electoral Reforms, Police Reforms, Media and Freedom of The Media and to address the concerns of the LGBTQIA + community. These proposed reforms would resonate with a large section of the citizenry. Police reforms have been pushed to the backburner by successive governments thereby turning the different branches of policing, including the CBI into political tools. Since 2014 the media has been operating in a climate of oppression by those in power. Journalists have been booked for sedition for raising their voices against the ruling party and government. The North Eastern states have been listed as the deprived category needing special attention along with several other categories such as ST, SC, and denotified tribes. Women's empowerment and gender justice also find mention although these are clichéd promises made by all political parties to appear politically correct. However, the manner in which the Congress has distributed tickets this time belies its claims to gender justice since many women were left out of the fray.

Regional political parties are now perceived collectively as a separate category playing the biggest role in 2019 General Election, compelling us to revise our understanding and assessment of both federalism and political parties in India. Party politics is convincingly proving that the federal system in our country is not merely a constitutional arrangement to rule the multi-lingual, multi-cultural nation, but is actually a political process to keep together a conglomeration of varied interests holding together for a larger purpose beyond their individual capacity to manage.

The units in the Indian federation need a strong Centre and the Centre wants cooperating States. How this interdependence is actually played out makes up the political and presently the electoral process.

The primary reason for emergence of regional political parties is the reality of the existence of regional needs and interests that a national party cannot or is not inclined to fulfil. Similarly, sub-regional issues have given rise to State parties, and local territorial or sectional issues to smaller political groupings and pressure groups -- all in recognition of the overwhelming acceptance that politics is primarily and is the prime driving force in society.

In the early years after Independence, central concerns of Parliament revolved around the federal organisation of the polity. Linguistic reorganisation of States was thought of as a solution to accommodating all regional aspirations within national unity. Federal thrust was manifest in linguistic demands and agitations that pushed back several important national priorities. Language appropriated such disproportionate political attention that it was not realised that language was only one among numerous federal problems.

A number of regional parties claiming regional identity and aspiring State autonomy in the federal structure became a prominent feature of Indian politics in the 1970s. Parties catering to special caste and group interests also surfaced all over the country from the 1980s. Then onwards, Indian polity presented a curious mixture of diversity and identity concerns which got into electoral and parliamentary politics

Federalism & Regional Parties

Towards Bargaining Democracy

By Dr.S.Saraswathi

through proliferation of political groups and parties at various levels. Globalisation has no impact on localisation of parties.

This development, synchronising with the decline of one-party dominance, gave rise to coalition politics. Parties had to pool their strength not only to capture power, but even to provide effective Opposition.

A new phase in federal politics started, accompanied with growth in the number of parties fighting elections. From a principle of distribution of

participation have come about, but twisted at the cost of national concerns. It has become common and legitimate to advocate and champion the interests of one's state/region unmindful of the repercussions on others.

With coalition governments at the Centre, regional parties have gained bargaining power not only at the States, but also at the Centre. Both regional and federal issues have become equally important at the national level party politics before as well as after elections. Ministry formation at the Centre and

to create a viable federal party structure with sufficient authority to the units and refuses to recognise regional leaders. Centralised control and lack of inner democracy in parties are inconsistent with federalism and encourage regionalism within national parties.

In Tamil Nadu, where by-election for 18 Assembly constituencies are also to take place, the DMK has released two manifestos - one on macro issues and the other on local issues. Constituency level promises are also made as the by-elections are crucial to decide the future government in the State.

All these developments are underlying current state of electoral politics which regional parties want to dominate.

Most regional parties behave as if they exist solely to promote regional interests. Some of their leaders have even exposed their ignorance of national issues and lack of any opinion on major national matters in TV interviews.

States are parts of the Indian Union and the federal system does not mean compartmentalisation of Centre-State spheres. Regional parties cannot remain isolated from national politics especially in the context of coalition governments and federal front. Present poll time politics has uncovered the gross inadequacy of some of the regional parties to handle national issues.

No regional leader can aspire to become a national leader without the support of a national party. On the other hand, national leaders cannot be made in Delhi or elsewhere without the support of strong State units and/or national acceptance.

The situation demands structural, organisational, and functional federalism of national political parties, healthy coordination between them, and a national spirit binding the federal units. Since all parties, however small and localised are keen to have a share in the Union Government at the Centre, a sense of nationalism and a dominating national spirit must underlie all political parties contesting elections.

However, we cannot overlook a perceptible change in the thinking of national and regional leaders which accepts coalitions as the need of a federal system and enter into the bargaining process. ---INFA

The calculation of State parties in conformity with the very reason of their existence increasingly tended to be regionalised while extending support to a national party at the national level. As a result, some of them restrict their interest and learning to State-related issues and manipulate national politics with regional point of view.

powers and an administrative device to govern a nation of diversities, there came a shift in the focus of politics from integration to autonomy and self-interest of States.

The calculation of State parties in conformity with the very reason of their existence increasingly tended to be regionalised while extending support to a national party at the national level. As a result, some of them restrict their interest and learning to State-related issues and manipulate national politics with regional point of view.

No State, however big, and no regional party, however strong, could have a decisive say in federal affairs. There is a relative equality of federal units that is being asserted along with greater focus of their representatives to further the interests of their respective units. Regionally based parties basically work to advance the interests of their respective regions and thereby consolidate their hold within the region which is necessary for winning elections and becoming a strong force at the Centre.

Thus, the very notion of representation has undergone a change. Democracy and democratic ideals of inclusiveness and wider

States in coalition governments is an exercise in accommodating regional interests of power sharers. A kind of bargaining democracy has established itself in the last about 25 years.

TDP and DMK are champions of State autonomy - the former insisting on special status for AP and the latter clamouring for more powers for States. The DMK has long time ago coined the slogan "Autonomy for States, and Coalition at the Centre". Shiv Sena and AGP insist on the theory of "Sons of Soil" to the advantage of local people against migrants from other States. TMC resents Central authority in the State. Akali Dal wants a broad-based federal structure.

JD(U) formed by the merger of Janata Party and a number of small parties in 1988 came to power as National Front, but split into many groups - RJD in Bihar, BJD in Odisha, JD(Secular) in Karnataka and Kerala. They are all in favour of decentralisation of political and economic power.

Split in the national Congress party in some States since the 1990s, has given rise to some prominent regional parties -- TMC, NCP, and Tamil Maanila Congress confirming the reality of unfulfilled regional aspirations within the national party. Splits occur when a national party fails

market players and a fascist government have a symbiotic relationship.

Tenth ~ it suppresses labour power as it is the only real threat to a fascist government. Labour unions are either eliminated entirely or suppressed.

Eleventh ~ there will be a disdain for intellectuals and the arts. Fascist nations promote hostility towards higher education and academia. It is not uncommon for professors and other academics to be censored or even arrested.

Twelfth ~ it is obsessed with crime and punishment. The people are forced to forsake civil liberties for patriotism.

Thirteenth ~ there exist rampant cronyism and corruption. Fascist regimes use governmental power and authority to protect their friends.

And finally the fourteenth is fraudulent elections. Sometimes elections in fascist nations turn out to be a complete

farce. Smear campaigns against opposition candidates, use of legislation to control voting numbers, manipulation of the media to manipulate elections have sometimes been adopted by a fascist government.

If we want to enjoy democracy which is undoubtedly the best and the most non-violent form of government then we have to be cautious about the symptoms of fascism. Simultaneously, we ourselves must try to be truly democratic in our family and workplace as it is rightly said that the people will get the government they deserve.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Viaemail

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

Present electoral bonds scheme encourages political corruption Supreme Court must restore credibility of party funding

By Amritananda Chakravorty

On April 2, 2019, the Supreme Court is set to hear a bunch of petitions challenging the validity of electoral bonds scheme, 2018, which was notified by the Central Government on January 2, 2018. Vide the amendments in the Finance Act, 2017, the Government made many changes in the Reserve Bank of India Act 1934, Representation of Peoples Act 1951, Income Tax Act 1961 and Companies Act, 2013, in order to bring out the scheme. According to the scheme, an electoral bond is like a bearer promissory note, which can be purchased by any buyer from any authorised branch of the State Bank of India, without mentioning the name of the buyer or the payee, and will be known only to the bank.

The buyer can be either an individual citizen, or a body incorporated in India. After purchasing the bond, which would be in the denomination of Rs 1000/-, 10,000/-, 1,00,000/-, 10,00,000/- or 1,00,00,000/-, the buyer can then endorse it to a payee political party as a donation, and will be valid for 15 days, within which it has to be encashed. Most importantly, the

banking route to donate, with their identity captured by the issuing authority. This will ensure transparency, accountability and a big step towards electoral reform".

Most importantly, the Election Commission of India has opposed the Electoral Bonds Scheme stating that these changes would "have serious repercussions/impact on the transparency aspect of political finance/funding of political parties." Referring to the scheme, the ECI contended that if the donations cannot be reported to the Commission, then it would be difficult to ascertain if the parties were receiving donations from government companies or from foreign sources, thereby casting huge doubts on the transparency of the political funding. It also noted that they had informed the Government in March, 2017 about the pitfalls of the scheme and the effect of the amendments in the Finance Act.

It is noted that the ECI has taken a completely opposite position to the Government's stand on

The petitions have been filed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and Association for Democratic Reforms ('ADR'), who have challenged the scheme as "an obscure funding system which is unchecked by any authority". As per ADR, 95% of the electoral bonds sold so far have been in favour of the BJP, and that too in 10 lakhs or 1 crore denomination, thereby indicating that it's the corporate bodies, and not common citizens, who are making donations in complete secrecy.

scheme exempts the political parties to disclose the donations received by way of electoral bonds to the Election Commission of India, as part of its annual declaration. It also removes the cap of 7.5% imposed by the Companies Act on the donation by companies to political groups, or donation received from foreign sources.

The petitions have been filed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and Association for Democratic Reforms ('ADR'), who have challenged the scheme as

"an obscure funding system which is unchecked by any authority". As per ADR, 95% of the electoral bonds sold so far have been in favour of the BJP, and that too in 10 lakhs or 1 crore denomination, thereby indicating that it's the corporate bodies, and not common citizens, who are making donations in complete secrecy. Accordingly, they have asked for an immediate stay of the scheme before the elections, besides challenging its validity, since there's a complete fear that the ruling party would have a clear advantage over the other parties in terms of monetary resources.

Denying these allegations, the Central Government contended that "the scheme envisages building a transparent system of acquiring bonds with validated KYC and an audit trail. Besides, a limited window and a very short maturity period shall make any misuse improbable. Donors who buy these bonds, their balance sheet will reflect such donations made. The electoral bonds will prompt donors to take

electoral bonds, and have in fact supported the petitioners' contentions that the scheme is a huge backward step on the decade long efforts to clean up the system of political funding, bring in more transparency, and sift out black money from the electoral system. In the name of channeling the money through the banking system, which ostensibly makes it 'white', the Government is making a mockery of the laws and the electoral funding system.

To exempt political parties from disclosing the donations received through electoral bonds is basically providing a single window opportunity to corporates to just flush the parties with money, and influence policy decisions. It is well-known which parties receive thousands of crores of money in donation, and can spend 5000 crores on election funding. The electoral bonds scheme is a completely opaque system, designed to favour the ruling party by the corporates, and to convert their black money into white. It's another form of demonetisation.

The Supreme Court ought to have heard this matter months back, and not just days before the general elections of 2019. It is an issue of seminal importance, where the core of our democratic system, i.e., the credibility of elections, is at stake, and one hopes that the Court rises to the occasion, and declares the scheme as unconstitutional. The elections in the world's largest democracy cannot become a mockery, despite the efforts of the Government of the day. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Unfair critique

Editor,
Apropos the letter, "squeezing the middle class" (ST April 2, 2019) by P.S Gupta, I fully agree that before election, Parties would announce lots of schemes that would never be implemented when they come to power. Every sentence is supported by facts, but the words, "a particular party" and "poor people" in one paragraph reveals what the writer's motive is all about. He has shown the notoriety of, "a particular party" and this is very correct. He should have also questioned how someone from the "particular party" on February alone inaugurated one hundred and sixty projects worth crores of rupees and that too most of them in governments in the south. One should as well question the timing of shooting the low orbit satellite. Just few days after that on March 31, 2019, DRDO has shown it's future plans to now focus on

identifying enemy satellites to be able to destroy them. This would take months if not years. Thus while appreciating our scientists who work tirelessly to make us safe and secure in matters of space war, let us know that there is still much to be done before we can rest with the knowledge that we are completely safe. Let us also not take credit of our scientists' achievements and use it for political gains. I do believe that this letter is a fitting rebuttal to the above letter.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Shillong- 14

Facets of fascism we should know

Editor,
Renowned political scientist, Dr. Lawrence Britt has carried out extensive research on fascist regimes. The end result of this is his excellent article ~ "Fascism

Anyone?" ~ which needs to be read by all the people of the world to prevent the disease called fascism. It is rightly said that prevention is better than cure. To save democracy and to prevent the onslaught of fascism, we must understand the symptoms of the disease. For this we need to know what Dr. Britt identified as 14 common symptoms or characteristics of fascism.

The first symptom is powerful nationalism. A regime having an inclination towards fascism makes constant display of patriotic mottos, slogans, symbols, songs and flags.

Second ~ it treats human rights with contempt. It views human rights as roadblocks to eliminate enemies. It gives tacit support to lynching and assassinations.

Third ~ there will be hysteria to make the people rally into a unifying patriotic frenzy to banish a perceived common enemy or racial or religious

minorities as well as liberals, communists and socialists.

Fourth ~ military issues outweigh domestic ones. The military is given a disproportionate amount of government funding neglecting the domestic problems.

The fifth is rampant sexism. In fascist regimes, traditional gender roles tend to get more rigid.

Sixth ~ it tries either to directly control the media or at least to indirectly pull strings by regulation or by creating sympathetic media spokes-persons and anchors.

Seventh ~ it has an obsession with national security because it wants to use fear to motivate the common people.

Eighth ~ religion and government get interwoven with each other. It is found that governments in fascist nations use majority religion to control public opinion.

Ninth ~ it protects corporate power. The elite

"To make democracy work, we must be a nation of participants, not simply observers. One who does not vote has no right to complain."

--- Louis L'Amour

The Shillong Times

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In politics old is not gold

OLD is gold is a common adage. But how old can old really be, is a big question in public life, politics and power structures. JDU leader and former prime minister, 85-year-old Deve Gowda, is re-entering the electoral contest for Parliament this time. Deceased nonagenarian DMK leader M Karunanidhi carried on in Tamil Nadu assembly till his demise. Many are not as lucky, though.

While the BJP generally bars those above 75 from electoral contests, there have been exceptions. The 91-year-old LK Advani was excluded from the contest this time, and apparently against his will. So was 85-year-old Murli Manohar Joshi, who openly expressed his unhappiness at being omitted. BJP veterans Jaswant Singh and Yashwant Sinha are 80-plus and are sore about their exclusion from the power edifice after Prime Minister Modi took over. By the same token, Modi at 68 now will not be fully justified if he contests the 2024 polls.

Gowda's take is that he's contesting the polls this time in national interest. When he was PM, 20 years ago, he was often seen on public platforms or media meets in sleeping mode. If he returns to Parliament this time, one can hazard a safe guess as to how he would conduct himself inside the house. He could even stake claim for the post of prime minister; such is our system. In the meantime, Gowda has brought in his entire family into the business of politics, helping his sons and grandsons into positions of power. This was topped by one son being installed as chief minister after much bargaining with the Congress.

Family politics reigns supreme in several southern states as also in Maharashtra, Punjab, Bihar, J and K, and Punjab - fathers passing on the mantle to the next generation and still holding on to power themselves. Chief Ministers KCR in Telangana and Chandrababu Naidu in Andhra Pradesh have lined up their sons to take over from them and Orissa has a son as CM.

Across India, political parties and leaders are bent on carrying on and on in politics, zealously ignoring the concept of a retirement age. Unlike what Deve Gowda claimed, national interest demands that only those in proper health run the affairs of the nation. Reforms in political process, encompassing all aspects of democracy are an urgent requirement. The five years of Modi rule have not touched on several such aspects. The only reform he came up with was the GST tax unification, but this too was conceived by the previous Congress-UPA government. Systems need be perfected over the years.

Money makes the clogged, polluted and corrupt political mare go around, and how! In the on-going Great Indian Dance of Democracy, Parties have opened their secret war chests and are busy 'funding' their vacuous promises. After all, what better time to hit the jackpot!

Think. In 2017-18, the income of six national Parties stood at Rs 1293.05 crores, but nearly Rs 700 crores of this came from unknown sources as the Election Commission doesn't require Parties to declare the source of earning below Rs 20,000. Scandalously, since 2004-05 national Parties have collected Rs 9000 crores from 'nameless' entities.

Unsurprisingly, the ruling BJP got a total of Rs 1,027.3 crores of which Rs 553.4 crores came from mysterious sources. Naturally, Opposition Parties fared poorly. The Congress netted Rs 199.2 crores of which 119.9 crores were unknown, CPM 'earned' Rs 104.9 crores, Mayawati's BSP Rs 51.7 crores, Pawar's NCP Rs 8.2 crores, Mamata's Trinimool Rs 5.2 crores and CPI Rs 1.6 crores.

Undeniably, donations are not altruistic. It is a business proposition and political insurance, a quid pro quo as a Party is not a bank or mutual fund which offers interest and good returns yet businessmen put their money on it. Also it has nothing to do with preference for Parties or their ideologies but all about power.

Any wonder the donation cup overflows whenever a Party is in power at the Centre or States. The modus operandi is simple. A person helps a Party with funds and, in return, gets his job done. It is not for nothing that businessmen are known as king-makers, specially, a handful of top industrial houses that boast of their clout in the corridors of power.

Donations for 2011 and 2004-5 showed how the fortunes of the ruling Party differed from the one out of power. While the then ruling Congress garnered Rs 1,951 crores from unidentified sources, the BJP received Rs 952.5 crores. In 2003-04, the 'collection' was opposite. While the

BJP managed over Rs 11.69 crores, the Congress 'officially' received just Rs 2.81 crores.

A cursory glance of affi-

davits filed with the EC over the years revealed the bizarre realities of politics. It showcased significant contributions from several business houses that directly benefited from the Party in power. A metal and mineral baron who had funded the BJP in 2000, became the proud owner of 51% of Bharat Aluminum Co Ltd (BALCO). By paying \$121 million sparking off protests that it was under-valued.

A steel magnate paid Rs 50 crores and got highway construction contracts. Another industrialist paid Rs 50 lakhs to Congress in 2003 and was inducted into

electoral arena.

Sadly, there is brazen hypocrisy and humbug in what transpires under framed rules. Today, a candidate spends over Rs 15 crores per election instead of Rs 70 lakhs allowed by the Law. Hypothetically, the minimum amount needed by each Party for the 545 Lok Sabha seats would be Rs 8175 crores. Multiplied by 10 candidates per constituency, it adds up to a mind-boggling Rs 81,750 crores. Are we expected to believe that this amount is collected by cheques?

To end this scourge the

Undeniably, donations are not altruistic. It is a business proposition and political insurance, a quid pro quo as a Party is not a bank or mutual fund which offers interest and good returns yet businessmen put their money on it.

the Party. However, in the 2004 Lok Sabha poll he was one of BJP's highest donors even though he contested on Congress ticket and won. Truly, playing both ends against the middle.

Underscoring the symbiotic and partly antagonistic relations between industry and politics various Governments have tried bringing legislation to regulate Party funds, their distribution and spending during polls by getting them to maintain regular accounts and make these available for inspection. It even held out threats of de-recognition if Parties filed false and incorrect election returns. But nothing worked. Even as poll costs continue to increase.

Parties spend huge amounts for elections but the economics of running a poll campaign remain a hush-hush affair. Primarily, because elections are used to amass wealth for Parties, themselves and future polls. Like politics, polls have become a business --- like businessmen, politicians too balk at the idea of controls and regulations. That is why no Party, however vocal about the matter in opposition, has made an attempt at stanching the flow of black money into the

Government has mooted electoral bonds to pay for elections and help cleanse political funding. This allows anonymous donations through bonds which can be bought at a bank in denominations ranging from Rs 1,000 to Rs 1 crore and given to a Party, which can exchange them for cash. But the donor is faceless.

However, the EC opposes this as it would have a "serious impact" and reduce transparency in political funding by legalizing large unknown contributions which can potentially lead to businesses and foreign companies gaining influence over elections. Also, it would be impossible to determine whether donations to Parties came from companies breaking the law, State-owned public sector units or foreign sources.

But, the Government's explanation that bonds have to be bought at the State Bank and would be "white" does not hold good as anonymity makes it impossible to keep a check on who is funding a Party. The Government for reasons best known to it has taken away checks that ensured only profitable companies which existed

Congress manifesto focuses on healthcare for all

Free public hospitals model will bring real benefits to citizens

By Nitya Chakraborty

The Congress manifesto for 2019 Lok Sabha elections, released by the Party President Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday has many positive features with potential for transforming the lives of the common Indians, but the programmes for healthcare and the senior citizens have policies which really can act as a game changer in bringing about radical improvement in the medicare facilities for all citizens of the country. The Congress scheme is on the lines of the Obamacare and the basic difference of this Congress programme with the current Ayushman Bharat scheme of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi is that the Congress scheme is of universal health care and based on public hospital services as against the insurance companies based programme of the Modi regime.

The manifesto promises to enact the right to healthcare act that will guarantee to every citizen the right to healthcare services including free diagnostics, out patient care, medicines and hospitalisation through a network of public hospitals and enlisted private hospitals. The manifesto mentions that the insurance based model can not be the preferred model to provide universal healthcare in a developing country like India. Only free public hospital model can ensure universal healthcare.

This shift is a positive one and it is achievable. The scheme is far more beneficial to the common people than the Prime Minister's present scheme which is supposed to cover 10 crore families that is 50 crore people with a coverage of Rs. 5 lakh for secondary and tertiary hospitalization care. With India's population estimated at around 130 crore, about 80 crore people will be kept out of the Prime Minister's present scheme which he claims as the biggest health insurance scheme in the world. The fact is that very few of the 80 crore left are having the financial capacity to bear the cost of the high medical expenses on their own.

The income limit for households for qualifying as a beneficiary under the BPL (below poverty line) list is at about Rs. 27,000 per annum. A household with annual earnings of more than Rs. 27,000 will stand excluded from the BPL list. The upper limit has been arrived at by allowing five earning persons in a household with a per capita monthly income of about Rs. 447/- per month in the rural areas, which works out roughly to Rs. 2,250 per month per household. This is too meager an income to meet basic needs for a healthy life. Large number of our population are thus little above this level who are unable to support their basic healthcare needs who would be devoid of any benefit of the Ayushman Bharat.

Since the scheme will cover only the hospitalized patients and not the outpatient care or the preventive healthcare, it does nowhere meet the criteria of comprehensive universal health care. Nearly eighty per cent of the time, the out-of-pocket expenditure of patients is on outpatient care which is not covered under NHPS. It is also not clear whether post hospitalization expenses will be met by the insurance companies or by the patient. In many diseases, post hospitalization care is very expensive and lifelong.

Senior citizens are the most vulnerable population who need continuous care and empathy. Most of the diseases that occur at this age are chronic in nature, which demand repeated visits to doctors. At a time when the earnings have come down substantially or have become nil, it becomes difficult for the senior citizens to bear with. In the absence of coverage of OPD care, even those who will be enrolled in the NHPS, will not benefit much. Elderly have special nutritional needs which need to be fulfilled. In the Ayushman Bharat there is no such mention of these requirements.

The social determinants of health like supply of clean drinking water, adequate sanitation system, proper housing, nutrition and sufficient wages to meet these day to day needs and health education are the primary factors related to healthcare. However these determinants are not integrated in government's policy making in practice.

According to the experts, it is well known that the insurance companies' primary motive is to earn profit. It is presumed that since the number of insured in the NHPS will be very large and as at any given time very few people are hospitalized, this will give enough scope to the companies to reap profits. But if at any stage the companies find it to be unviable, they would not hesitate to pull out on one excuse or the other. If the premium is low then many of them may not join the scheme at all.

Those not covered under the scheme will be left to the mercy of insurance companies whose coverage is premium based. More the premium, more the coverage! The premiums have become very high and out of reach of most of our population. For example a family of five with three senior citizens has to shelve around one lakh rupees annually as premium to get a coverage of 5 Lakh rupees even in the public sector insurance companies. This is impossible for most of those uncovered under NHPS.

As against all these low coverage and uncertainties regarding role of the private insurance companies, the Congress manifesto has clear guidelines about covering all the people under its medicare for all scheme. This has been the demand of the public health campaigners for years and in a country like India with such high level of the people below the poverty line, there is every scope of the private insurance companies fleecing the patients as also the hospital authorities. The Congress scheme has no scope for such developments since the stress is on the public hospitals and full coordination with the state governments in running efficiently the public health centres.

The Congress manifesto has promised to implement a programme that will enable the state governments to revamp and renovate the primary health centres in the states. This will be a case of perfect coordination between the centre and the states which is of paramount importance in providing a decent healthcare to the citizens in every nook and corner of the country. Providing healthcare is a shared responsibility of the states and the centre and the Congress manifesto has set a good example for the basis of such collaboration. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

MSC Mains exams just a distant dream?

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily, I wish to draw the urgent attention of the Hon'ble Chairman and Members, Meghalaya Public Service Commission to an important matter mentioned hereafter. When the results of the Meghalaya Civil Service (Preliminary) Examination were declared on October 5, 2018, the 576 successful candidates were ecstatic not because they qualified for the next round (Mains), but because the results were declared two months after the Preliminary Examination conducted on August 4, 2018, thus giving the candidates immense hope that this time around, things would be different with the MPSC in so far as conducting the MCS examination is concerned because it was said that this particular examination would follow the UPSC pattern. Hope however, was short-lived. Problems first arose when applications for the Mains Examination were called on October 25, 2018. Citing various reasons,

MPSC extended the application period for a very long period of time i.e till January 15, 2019. Ideally, 30-45 days would have been sufficient to complete the entire application process for MCS Mains (as is the case with UPSC which handles tens of thousands of applications for the IAS Mains) but to allot 75 days for 576 applicants is rather amusing. Furthermore, though it is now past two months since the January 15, deadline, the candidates have so far received no news whatsoever about the dates for the Mains Examinations. So six months have elapsed without any word as to the status of the examination. The "powers that be" in the MPSC and by extension the state government should understand that this illogical delay is taking a toll on the candidates mental state. Many deserving and brilliant candidates by virtue of this delay will become age-barred, thus depriving them of the golden opportunity to serve in the state bureaucracy and make a change in society. With regards to the common excuse given by MPSC staff about the delay by blaming the upcoming Lok Sabha

elections, many of us strongly believe that Lok Sabha elections should not have been an excuse to begin with. With just a meagre 576 candidates, two halls (one at Shillong and the other at Tura) would be more than enough to accommodate the examinees! Manpower to conduct the examination would also not have been a problem as MPSC has been conducting many other examinations since October last till date. Interestingly, the calendar of the upcoming screening tests for the month of April shows that MPSC will be conducting two major examinations.

Perhaps it is the lack of political will to complete the recruitment drive to appoint MCS officers or maybe there is a greater political motive behind it. Those are things that we as common citizens will never know.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

Who will NPP support in Parliament?

Editor,

Elections to the two Parliamentary Constituencies of the state are to be held soon and the people are ready to elect their choice of representatives to the House of the People. However, many voters are confused about the MDA common candidate from Shillong, Dr. Jemino Mawthoh and NPP candidate from Tura, Ms. Agatha Sangma. The cause of the confusion is this: if they are to win the elections, who would they support at the Centre. It is quite obvious that if the Congress wins then Dr. Mawthoh and Ms. Sangma would be in the opposition, but what if the BJP and the NDA win? What would they do if there were to be a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha?

The fact that Dr Jemino is from the UDP, would obviously mean that he will vote against the government, since the UDP has distanced itself from the BJP. To be a "non-BJP, non-Congress" MP at the Centre, with a single seat from the North East makes it insignificant since Parliament is all about numbers. Voting against al-

most everything done by either governments (UPA or NDA) would make things infructuous. MDA partners such as the HSPDP and the PDF are certain to not support the BJP at the Centre; however it is the chief member, the NPP which may be at loggerheads with the others. We can point to the fact that they are alliance partners with the BJP in Manipur and are also part of the NEDA (their membership of this convention is also very unclear) and also, the BJP is a part of the MDA Government. The NPP might say that it doesn't support the BJP but it has to make its stand clear as to what action it will take if it wins many seats from all the states that the Party is contesting in the North East. Therefore, in order to clear the air, I would like them to tell the voters of not just Meghalaya but the entire North East, their future plans in the Lok Sabha and whom would they support and what would be the issues they would present and confront in the Lok Sabha.

Yours etc.,
C.H. Caren,
Via email

Don't misread facts

Editor,
Apropos the rejoinder to my letter by M Khyriem (ST April 3, 2019), I would like to state that in my letter of April 2, 2019, I never ever used the term, 'a particular party.' My intention was to project the woes of the middle class in this country and also to critique the mindless pre-poll announcements by our politicians/political parties which hardly benefit anyone. I request the writer to revisit the contents of my letter. I would also like to clarify that I would neither support nor oppose any particular political party. I have always preferred to vote for a party or alliance, either national or regional, which shows/has shown its grit to deliver to the people irrespective of caste, class or religion.

Yours etc.,
PS Gupta,
Via email

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

"In a time of deceit telling the truth is a revolutionary act."

--- George Orwell

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, APRIL 5, 2019

Coal mafia resurfaces

THAT AN NGO from Ri Bhoi district has been warned of dire consequences for reporting the illegal transportation of coal despite the Supreme Court embargo should tell us how ruthless this coal mining lobby is. In fact this is a blatant contempt of the Supreme Court order. The apex court naturally expects the state government to exercise its mandate of enforcing the order. But as is clearly visible, there is neither law nor order in Meghalaya today. Daily hundreds of trucks continue to transport coal out of the state. Anyone who comes in the way of this illegal transaction is intimidated or physically attacked. It is unbelievable how these trucks pass through the police check points along the way without being stopped, much less penalized. From the accounts given by the NGO members the Ri Bhoi police are reluctant to register the FIR filed against the illegal transportation of coal. The Officer-in-Charge even had the audacity to say that he has to get the permission of the SP of the District before registering the FIR. What is happening here? Is the coal mafia-police nexus a fait accompli? What does the DG Police have to say about this complete lack of ethics and morality among the men in uniform? Is there a punishment for such errant police personnel or are they merely carrying out the diktat of a superior force up the political hierarchy?

Ever since the MDA Government took over the reins of governance, illegal mining and transportation of coal is in the upswing. It appears that the Government has decided to look the other way at this racket and with a reason. It is an established fact that coal drives politics. The reliance on this mineral is so overwhelming that the Government is willing to compromise on law and order, but at what cost? Law and order is a sine-qua-non of governance. Today it is the coal lobby that's breaking the law without batting an eyelid; tomorrow it could be another criminal group. Who will stop this erosion of the rule of law? A Government that compromises on law and order will have to pay a heavy price in the long run. It goes without saying that Democracy goes hand in hand with the rule of law. States cannot and must not, forsake one for the other. For, democracy without the rule of law is but a political tyrant with a better name! Meghalaya is in danger of succumbing to the rule by the mafia.

LOOKING BACK

June 15, 1989

Buta invites Majumder to discuss Chakma

Union Home Minister Mr Buta Singh has invited Tripura Chief Minister Mr Sudhir Ranjan Majumder to Delhi to discuss the Chakma refugee issue. Disclosing this to newsmen here yesterday, Mr Majumder said besides the refugee issue, "other important matters would also be discussed."

Mr Majumder denied CPI(M) charge that there was lack of unity in the state's

coalition government. There was no misunderstanding among the ruling partners, he asserted.

Mr Majumder denied any starvation deaths in the state Denying CPI(M) state committee's allegation that at least 19 people died of starvation in the state recently, Mr Majumder told that there is no truth in the allegation.

NEIGRIHMS: The withering away of a premier health care and research Institution

By Patricia Mukhim

"No amount of personal competency can compensate for personal insecurity."

-Wayne Smith

The duty of the media is to highlight the ills and areas of malfunction in every public funded institution. Unless we do that we are failing in our duties because these institutions are created to serve the public good. When the North East India Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS) started in Shillong there were high hopes that those from the region would not need to undertake rigorous trips to health care centres outside the region at great cost to the patients and their care givers.

Lest we forget, on January 22, 2000, the then Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee declared NEIGRIHMS as an 'Institute of National Importance'. The Institute was also declared as an "Institution of Excellence" by an Act of Parliament vide Gazette of India Notification dated 4th January 2007. This is the only Medical Institute that has been given such a status in the country.

NEIGRIHMS was conceived in 1987 and started with minimal services in 1998. The in-patient services started in 2001 with only 30 beds. Since then NEIGRIHMS has come a long way with 531 beds at present and an annual patient load of 2, 26,308 out-patients and 15,568 in-patients as of 2013-14. Currently the Institute conducts high end diagnostics and medicare in interventional cardiology, open heart surgery, neurology, neurosurgery, CT-guided interventional Radiology video-endoscopic, laparoscopic facilities in general surgery, internal medicine, orthopedics, obstetrics & gynaecology, ophthalmology, critical care medicine, emergency medicine and resuscitation, urological surgery besides state-of-the-art medi-care in specialties like joint replacements, arthroscopy, GI endoscopy etc.

The present Director, Dr DM Thappa joined in April 2017. In November 2017, the NEIGRIHMS Faculty Association (NFA) held its general body meeting where 70 faculty members attended, making it more than two-thirds of the faculty strength. The meeting discussed the administrative vagaries where important orders which had far reaching effects on the careers of the faculty were taken without consulting them. The faculty said this style of functioning has demoralized them and hurt the work atmosphere and the output. Faculty complained about being denied study leave on flimsy pretext. The meeting demanded that a Faculty

Development Cell be created to enable more transparent decision making processes.

After Dr Thappa joined the Institution the administration came up with a vacation schedule that left the Institute without doctors in critical departments because there was not enough faculty strength in many departments. This schedule would have been fine for an Institution with the full faculty strength; not NEIGRIHMS with its skeletal strength. Naturally, this badly affected patient care. But the major impact was felt by those needing surgery. The number of operating days was reduced to half and the list of patients needing surgery was very long due to the non-availability of Anesthesiologists. Even during the non-vacation period only two surgeries per day are conducted.

Most of the post graduate programmes have been de-recognised by the Medical Council of India (MCI). Instead of taking up this matter with the seriousness it deserves the faculty posts sanctioned by the Health Ministry were tampered with and faculty members were asked to sign on those tampered representations against their wishes. Those who protested were served with "memos" which has now become the norm in NEIGRIHMS. The major flaw pointed out by the MCI was that the Department of General Surgery and Anesthesia have not performed adequate number of operations. This could have been remedied by increasing the number of operating days which is a feasible option, considering that infrastructure is available and in place. Instead of that, the Director amalgamated the Super-specialty Surgical Branch with General Surgery without taking into consideration that this is a violation of MCI guidelines.

The NEIGRIHMS faculty is also aggrieved by the fact that the Assessment Promotion Scheme which is applied across all central government medical institutes has not been implemented in their Institute. This has affected the career graph of the existing faculty and their morale as well. Interestingly, since the Director joined in April 2017 up until November 2017, he has not called a single meeting to address their grievances or even to consider ways and means to improve the functioning of NEIGRIHMS so that it meets up with public

expectations.

In June 2018, the NEIGRIHMS Faculty Association also wrote to Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma asking the state government to establish the State Medical Council as a regulatory body that can keep a check on the quality of medical practitioners. At present the graduates passing their MBBS from NEIGRIHMS have to register with Assam Medical Council. A state medical council further enables medical professionals to earn credit hours for workshops and conferences and continuing medical education (CME) seminars which are integral to the professional growth of the faculty.

What has triggered the present stand-off between the Institution and the NEIGRIHMS Resident Doctors Association (NRDA) is yet another arbitrary action of the Director. He asked Dr Tony Ete from the Department of Cardiology who had successfully completed his DM (Cardiology) and was to be appointed in the same Department where he has been working during his study period, to submit a character certificate, as a condition for his appointment in the Institute. The Dean of Studies NEIGRIHMS then gave a certificate that was adverse and would affect his career in the long run. The Director then used that same certificate to cancel the appointment of Dr Tony Ete. That this action of the Director is not only vindictive but a calculated move to punish someone for standing up to his coercive measures is a well established fact. As a result the NRDA had gone on strike on April 4.

Normally, the head of any institution should try and win the goodwill of his colleagues, including his juniors and peers. From observing the goings-on in NEIGRIHMS since April 2017, it appears that the Director has done everything possible to alienate the fraternity. The North East is a region with no caste system or the unhealthy culture of hegemony, unlike the rest of India and particularly in the medical profession. Here a team leader is just the first among equals. It is unfortunate that people with no understanding of the cultural nuances of this region are posted here to throw their weights around.

Every institution grows or withers away depending on the leadership at the helm. Someone has rightly stated that when it comes to what's going on in the organization, leaders are either making it happen (good or bad), allowing it to happen (good or bad), or preventing it from happening (good or bad).

Ultimately, the top leader is responsible, whether they accept responsibility or not. Psychologists have cautioned about insecure individuals heading major institutions because they are sure to bring down that institution to their level of insecurity.

High impact transformational leaders are what we need to build and sustain institutions. High-impact leaders take responsibility for everything that is happening in the institution but low-impact leaders avoid taking responsibility for readily pass the blame on to others. They create a tremendous amount of distrust throughout the organization as they try to maintain power and control.

The North East India Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS) has been under assault since 2017, when the present director, DM Thappa, a Dermatologist from JIPMER, Pondicherry joined the Institute. NEIGRIHMS is both an academic and scientific institution providing space for educational research in the different fields of medicine. The stakeholders are the medical fraternity, teachers, students, administrative staff and the civil society around where the Institution is built. It would be wrong of any Director to think that the people of Meghalaya and of Shillong in particular do not have a say in the goings-on of NEIGRIHMS. Of course they do. But it also reflects badly on our civil society here and the ruling Government that they have allowed NEIGRIHMS to wither away.

Another very troubling aspect about NEIGRIHMS is that its Governing Council has not met a single time since it was constituted in 2014. On the website, amongst the names of nominated members (non-official) is that of late PA Sangma, who remains as a member. The other members are L Rynjah, IAS (Retd) based in New Delhi, Dr TM Mohapatra, Ex Director, Institute of Medical Sciences, BHU, Varanasi, Toki Blah, Retired IAS Shillong, Anil Pradhan, Retired IPS, Shillong, Wansuk Syiem, Rajya Sabha MP. That Mr PA Sangma's name continues to appear means that no one really cares about this toothless Governing Council. And yet, the Governing Council is the governing body of NEIGRIHMS and should exercise general oversight over the institution. With such prominent non-official members on the Governing Council one wonders why they are all sitting back even while NEIGRIHMS is experiencing its worst ever assault.

Rahul's southern venture will serve hardly any purpose, therefore, to counter an already weak BJP in Kerala and will only take his time and attention away from Amethi and other areas where he is virtually the only leader who is carrying the entire burden of the opposition's campaign on his shoulders. The Wayanad excursion will, therefore, be a pointless distraction.

The Congress's other mistake is to go it alone in Delhi. The decision, however, is seemingly in keeping with the belief that the party has for all practical

The wayanad excursion could prove to be costly Rahul Gandhi should have stuck only to Amethi

By Amulya Ganguli

Even by the Congress's standards, two false steps in a single day can be considered odd. The party usually misses its footing once in a while. But perhaps the proximity of the elections has blurred its focus. Hence, the mistakes.

The most egregious of them was also one which was uncalculated. There was no need for Rahul Gandhi to contest from two seats when there isn't a ghost of a chance that he will lose in Amethi, one of the Congress's bailiwicks.

Now, however, when he has shown that he is not fully confident about his chances, there may be a measure of resentment among a section of voters in the constituency over the Congress president's decision to look for another "safe" seat when Amethi should have been deemed safe enough.

Nor is Wayanad very safe considering that both Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan and former CPI(M) general secretary, the Stalinist Prakash Karat, have let it be known that they will try their best to defeat Rahul since their dialectical interpretation of his decision to contest is that he is fighting more against the Left than the BJP. So much for the idea of a gathbandhan.

In any event, Rahul's choice of Wayanad is odd since his opponent in Amethi can hardly be regarded as a formidable politician. Instead, Smriti Irani is a former star in a trashy (though popular) soap opera, and a former human resource development minister whose inadequate educational qualifications made her eminently unsuitable for the post. To give such a person the opportunity to say that the Shehzada has run away is a blunder.

The explanation given by the Congress's spokespersons that Rahul's decision was a riposte to the BJP's attempts to create a North-South divide does not hold water in view of the BJP's minimal influence in the south, except in Karnataka. The party may be trying to exploit the Sabarimala issue to secure a foothold in Kerala. But the move has only confirmed its essentially communal and pseudo-religious outlook.

Rahul's southern venture will serve hardly any purpose, therefore, to counter an already weak BJP in Kerala and will only take his time and attention away from Amethi and other areas where he is virtually the only leader who is carrying the entire burden of the opposition's campaign on his shoulders. The Wayanad excursion will, therefore, be a pointless distraction.

The Congress's other mistake is to go it alone in Delhi. The decision, however, is seemingly in keeping with the belief that the party has for all practical

purposes given up hopes about the forthcoming elections and is preparing for 2024 by building up the organization. If so, it does not speak well of its stamina or resilience or fighting spirit. In fact, it denotes a defeatist outlook. A resounding defeat cannot be a good omen for 2024.

However, it is also possible that the Congress hasn't shed its inborn hauteur even after the recent electoral setbacks, including the humiliating drubbing in 2014. Instead, it regards the other parties, including the BJP, as interlopers which have entered the corridors of power by chance and will soon be out as the electorate realizes its mistake.

It is this habitual arrogance which made Ghulam Nabi Azad announce that his party will contest all the 80 seats in U.P. as soon as it became evident that there will be no understanding between the Congress and the SP-BSP-RLD combine in the state.

Given the Congress's present weakened condition in U.P., the boastful declaration made little political sense. Fortunately, the Congress subsequently backtracked, but not enough to prevent a three-cornered fight between the SP-BSP-RLD, the Congress and the BJP. There is little doubt that the latter will be pleased.

The Congress's attitude can seem all the more haughty in the context of the surprisingly accommodative initiatives of the BJP, notwithstanding the reputation of both Narendra Modi and Amit Shah as being cold and immodest.

Although several senior leaders such as Sharad Pawar and Chandrababu Naidu tried to bring about a rapprochement between the Congress and the Aam Admi Party (AAP), it was to no avail apparently because Sheila Dixit hasn't forgiven the AAP for her crushing defeat in 2015. So, as in U.P., a three-cornered fight between the AAP, the BJP and the Congress in Delhi would be a godsend for the saffron outfit.

It is obvious that Rahul is yet to understand the need for advances and retreats in political negotiations and for reaching out persistently as Amit Shah did to bring Uddhav Thackeray, Nitish Kumar and Ramvilas Paswan on board following signs of discontent.

Having clawed its way up to the top from two seats in the Lok Sabha in 1984, the BJP has apparently learnt the art of politicking the hard way. The Congress, on the other hand, has had it much too easy, so much so that its admirers like H.D. Kumaraswamy, M.K. Stalin and Tejasvi Yadav can believe that Rahul can be the PM even when there are doubts that the Congress can reach the three-figure mark in this election. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Think before voting

Editor,
I am very intrigued with the headline, "Conrad roots for regional force against national parties," ST April 3, 2019) As a citizen I have been observing the events happening in our country in general and in our State in particular, especially after the elections to the State Legislative Assembly, 2018. Our regional parties are not performing as per the expectations of the people who voted for them. What we see is a tussle for power and self-aggrandizement instead, as is evident during their mad rush to the Raj Bhavan as soon as the BJP leaders Nalin Kohli and Himanta Biswa

Sarma arrived in Shillong. It's as if they're panicking lest they miss the opportunity to grab power. Remember there was no clear mandate, and I also vividly remember the saffronising oath taking ceremony! Lets also not forget that NPP, UDP and other regional parties are already in the NEDA umbrella of the BJP, which they are till now, so who are they trying to fool? Other smaller regional parties in our State will only sway where the wind blows, so they're not stable either. Those who make a lot of noise about caring for the jaitbynriew will not hesitate to betray their principles. We are not bothered about any of the no "pre-poll alliance" with the BJP as

denied by Conrad Sangma, but what we're apprehensive of is the "post-poll arrangement or alliance" that will emerge after May 23, 2019. We, as citizens of this country have witnessed time and again the lynching, injustices, manipulations, polarization and the hate crimes that are venomously spreading across the country and which in an unprecedented move even the four judges of the Supreme Court had to appear in the media to alert and let know the happenings under this present dispensation. We have people of repute in their own spheres, the economists, the intelligentsia and renowned film personalities raising

these disturbing issues that are facing us now. Moreover, have we also quickly forgotten the harassment imposed on us through 'demonetization'? But that is not all. Who knows what else is to come in the future if we don't act now. As some have already hinted, we might not have any elections again in India, which is quite scary to even think of.

Therefore, I appeal all parties in our State not to fool the people and to be truthful in their plans, speeches, ideas as they will be responsible for us all. To the people who will vote I appeal that you exercise your rights judiciously so that we ensure that we have peace and harmony, equity and

justice by which means we will be able to grow and prosper, for our sake and for our children's sake. Let us not be selfish and foolish lest we may not even have the freedom to regret.

Yours etc.
Valerie War
Shillong-14

Terrorism has no religion

Editor,
"Is there a single incident in history of Hindu engaging in terrorism?" This question was asked by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday at an election rally in Wardha, Maharashtra. If we consider the official religion of some of the

terrorists like the one who killed the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, then the answer will be ~ yes, there were many such incidents. Even the answer will remain in the affirmative if the question is raised on whether there were terrorists who used terrorism in the name of Hindu religion. But the answer will be a big NO if it is asked whether all Hindus can be tagged as terrorists.

As a matter of fact, this is applicable to all religions. Indeed, we cannot tag Christians as terrorists for the Holocaust against Jews. We cannot tag Buddhists for the Rohingya massacre in Myanmar. Also, we cannot tag Hindus as terrorists for

the 1984 riots against Sikhs and the 2002 riots against Muslims. Similarly, it is equally absurd to hold all the Muslims responsible for the terror strike at Pulwama in Kashmir.

It will be a logical fallacy called "hasty generalization" if we paint all the people of a religion with a single brush. The CRPF personnel who were killed in the Pulwama attack showcased how fallacious such an attempt could be. We have Kashmiri Muslim, Bengali Hindu, Punjabi Sikh and tribal Jharkhandi among the martyrs.

The Election Commission must not let any political party misuse either majority religion or any minority religion during the time of

election. Section 123 (3A) in the Representation of the People Act specifically says that the promotion of or attempt to promote feelings of enmity or hatred between different classes of the citizens of India on grounds of religion, race, caste, community or language ... for the furtherance of the prospects of the election of any candidate shall be deemed to be corrupt practices. The Election Commission must not let any political party violate this Act. The history of the British rule in India must be enough for all of us to learn about the danger of divide and rule policy.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De.
Viaemail

“Life is pleasant. Death is peaceful. It's the transition that's troublesome.”

--- Isaac Asimov

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SHILLONG, SATURDAY, APRIL 6, 2019

Rumblings in BJP

THE ruling BJP is faced with serious dissensions, right at the doorstep of the Lok Sabha polls, and all eyes are on the RSS to see how things will pan out. The immediate provocation is the denial of LS tickets to LK Advani aged 91 and Murli Manohar Joshi, 85, which is seen as a fresh "insult", coming on top of their virtual banishment from power circles after PM Modi took the reins in Delhi in 2014. This is likely to snowball into a major threat to the existence of BJP as a cohesive force, unless the RSS succeeds in calming down the two. Having been dumped in the Margdarshak Mandal - advisory council - for five long years, and having had no major say in the running of the government or the nation, the two leaders obviously felt being insulted. Reports now present strange possibilities, like a Congress-led opposition fielding Joshi in Varanasi, a seat he had vacated for the rising star in 2014. With powerful Brahmin support which Joshi can rightly expect in the confluence of Hinduism's holy rivers, chances are that Modi will lose his sleep. Chances are also that the PM will survive such odds with the clout he has with the general masses.

Even without Advani and Joshi, the going has not been all that comfortable for Modi all through the past five years. He has faced situations of embarrassment from senior ministers like Nitin Gadkari, often cited as the blue-eyed boy of the RSS in Nagpur. Among the ministers in the Modi government, he enjoys unique strengths to take on Modi. He had held the post of BJP national chief when Modi was still concentrating his attention on Gujarat. Gadkari had on one occasion proposed the possibility of him being the next PM if the BJP failed to get a majority and a situation arose in which allies like the Shiv Sena could act as the kingmaker in Delhi. So far, the PM gave little space for those inside the BJP or those like the Sena from outside to flex their muscles in Delhi. That scenario could change after the results of the present polls are out. No one thinks the BJP can again win a majority in the Lok Sabha, as it did in 2014. In the past five years, Modi has built clout in some respects and lost clout in others. Within BJP, more heads could rise. A weak PM is an altogether bad idea, though.

LOOKING BACK

June 17, 1989

‘Special category’ States

The Conference of special category hill states held in New Delhi recently to discuss the development strategy for these areas in the context of the Eighth Plan encompassed in its recommendations a wide range of subjects crucial for them. Its attention naturally was drawn to the first report of the Ninth Finance Commission for 1989-90, which had left large resource gaps in all the special category hill states. This aroused genuine concern among them and therefore the conference justifiably recommended that the second and final report of the Ninth Finance Commission should ensure the special character of these states in terms of their poor fiscal capabilities and higher development needs. The earlier Finance Commission had recognized this basic approach to the question and there is no justification for the current one to deviate from this basic concept. The Ninth Finance Commission's thinking in the matter is not clear yet, and in any case any compensating alternative scheme may not be as effective as what has held the field so long.

The Conference wants the fiscal deficiencies of these States to be recognized through preferential treatment in the matter of norms for assessing their receipts and expenditure and in the recommendations for devolution of resources, debt restructuring and relief expenditure. There was a broad consensus at the Conference on the vital areas for development in the hill states, particularly on development of social services diversification of agriculture and horticulture, exploitation of hydel potential, conservation of forest wealth and development of infrastructure and tourism. All this considered in totality, the conference felt that the needs of these States merit at least doubling of the Seventh Plan expenditure for arriving at the Eighth plan outlays. It is good that the Ninth Finance Commission has been reminded of these needs well in advance so that the case of the special category states, and particularly the tiny hill states in this region, may not go by default.

US-China Rivalry India's Key Stakes

By Dr. D.K. Giri

The rivalry between the US and China should intensify until one of them, mainly the latter concurs in the US position as sole super power, that it has been since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The rivalry manifests currently as trade war, US imposing taxes on Chinese products, sanctions etc., but it runs much deeper covering many other facets. India has a lot at stake in the US-China competition, and unless, it plays its cards well, it may lose heavier than China, or USA.

I intend to adumbrate India's approach to US-China turf war, as evidently, New Delhi's China policy appears to be muddled. My contention, which I have elaborated in this column in last two weeks, in two consecutive pieces, is that Nehru fumbled on China, made big mistakes for which India has to face serious negative consequences. Worse, the NDA governments principally the present one, now facing elections, could not correct the fault lines although it claimed to undergo a radical departure from the Nehruvian approach both in domestic and foreign policies.

How should India redraw her strategy vis-a-vis China, and especially in the light of US-China contest for world supremacy? Before that, we should unravel the rivalry; identify its nature, dimensions etc.

From the China watchers in USA, it is understood that the US would need China to be a market based economy, which is open to competition. It should also facilitate free trade under WTO rules. The second big concern of USA is to protect its intellectual property from theft and forced transfer by China. The Trump administration has made it crystal clear that, unless these two issues are addressed by Beijing sooner than later, there will be a bigger trade war to the detriment of China. So Beijing can no longer soft-pedal these issues.

Evidently, China is attempting to steal intellectual property in

order to become a leader in the areas of space technology, artificial intelligence, Robotics and quantum computing. China wants to take over USA and India in software in the foregoing four areas. The United States has detected the threat and is drastically re-adjusting its China strategy to address it. Is India doing the same? One is not sure.

On global expansion, China is trying to outmanoeuvre US through its ambitious Silk Road through Italy to Europe, through Pakistan to Central and South Asia, and through Bangladesh to South-East Asia. All three countries targeted by China are the failed States and are vulnerable to Chinese economic power and domination. But the European Union, at the behest of the US or otherwise, is trying to dissuade its member-State Italy from falling into the Chinese trap. They are contemplating vetoing Italy's joining the Silk Road.

Why has India not done such a thing to pull two SAARC members out of Beijing's grasp? India has failed to wheedle Bangladesh out of falling into Chinese debt trap. New Delhi has declared Pakistan as its sworn, incorrigible enemy, while it is quiet on China's aggressive agenda. The current government found Pakistan-bashing easier than taking on China.

True that Pakistan's nefarious intentions and actions have to be rebuffed with a multi-pronged retaliation. Yet, we could pause a bit and explore if New Delhi during China would also hold Pakistan back. Pakistan on its own is incapable of inflicting any damage on India. Islamabad was earlier using dubiously the US support to foment trouble in India, now it is doing so openly with backing from Beijing.

Talking of the economic warfare, the key to Beijing's internationalism, the US is not interested in low cost manufacturing

that boosted Chinese economy, and as the FDI to China depletes, New Delhi should quickly step in to replace China as the manufacturing hub of the world. India enjoys the same comparative demographic and labour advantage as China did. New Delhi is lagging instead of adopting an aggressive posturing on this.

The US has its focus on space and military superiority using automated planes, ships, submarines, tanks and drones etc. The US thinks that it is unbeatable in these areas, and it can control the space better than anyone, and can prevent the militarisation of the space. India is catching up slowly after it has launched its satellite this month. It is now one of the four world powers in space technology, USA, Russia, China and India. Yet, admittedly, it has a long way to compete with other three in this field.

China is an authoritarian State, suppressing any form of dissent. It believes that its command economy is better managed than those of USA and India who facilitate free market in a democratic political structure. China also believes that its quasi-police State with state control of politics and economy is more conducive to growth and governance. Beijing wishes to advocate its model of growth as better than those of USA and India, and other countries believing in freedom of speech, free enterprise etc. It has built a state capitalist economy, and the next stage, according to Marx, is imperialism, and China is ostensibly trying to move to the next stage. In its quest for the status of world power, China sees India backed by the US as major threat. Beijing competes with Washington and sees New Delhi as a 'thorn in the flesh'.

Strangely, New Delhi fails to recognise the Chinese threat and is falling into Chinese trap. New Delhi is not forcing a permanent resolution of

the boarder conflicts with China which keeps racking it up to justify conflicts and continued antagonism. India is likely to concede its edge in software as it is not building the embedded technology driven by artificial intelligence. New Delhi must do all it can to retain the market edge it possesses internationally. It must identify the areas which China is focusing to beat India.

Beijing is wanting to bleed India by supporting her neighbours - Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Maldives, Myanmar and even Bhutan. It is trying to drive a wedge between India and US, so that the latter does not build India as a counter-weight in its Asia strategy. New Delhi failed to see this during Nehru era, and even now. Narendra Modi took a non-confrontational approach to China, which weakens India. One is not sure if South Block is aware of China's designs on India, or is taking an ostrich-like attitude.

To be sure, if China becomes stronger, neutralises US vis-a-vis India, it would make India a subservient State. It has already sounded its bugle on India. It claims Arunchal Pradesh, a large State of India in the North-East. It has said it would not accept the next Dalai Lama from India. There are many more contentious bilateral issues China raises off and on, in addition to encircling India, having bought-into her neighbours.

My strong contention is India has earned Chinese antagonism forever by sheltering Tibetan leadership and Dalai Lama. Why is it still wanting to play the balancing-game which made us the loser in the past and will do so in future? Why is India avoiding deeper military cooperation with the US and pursuing a go-alone strategy? Why is it taking one step forward and two steps backward towards China? These are the questions the present government must answer in the election time, not seek a mandate on Pulwama alone, and purely an anti-Pakistan stance. ---INFA

(The writer is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

TO THE EDITOR

Time to stop casteist gradation

Editor,

A friend of mine invited me to attend his wife's art exhibition and its inauguration ceremony a few months ago. It was a delightful experience to see some good works of art. The ceremony was to begin after lighting the lamps. There were five lamps to be lit. Four artists lit four lamps one by one. My friend requested me to light up the last one. I was taken aback. Me? "It is true that I love to dabble in painting but I'm not an artist," I said to myself. Then I thought that I was after all a human being like those four famous artists and my refusal might sound like supporting the existing practice of casteist categorisation of human beings that I was vehemently against.

So, I went ahead and did my little job. After that an artist who was to preside the ceremony went to grace his chair on the stage and called the artist of the day ~ my friend's wife ~ to take the chair beside him. But she declined saying that she could not sit beside him.

Again, I was taken aback as I thought her action of turning down the request to

sit on the dais might hurt the renowned artist. I thought that some in the audience might infer that she was hinting at some negative aspect of the character of the artist on the centre-stage! But I gathered there was no such misunderstanding. That she was showing her humility and high esteem for the artist had been accepted by all including the artist himself, with a grin.

Is it at all humility to belittle our own self? The answer is simply ~ no. C. S. Lewis had once said, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less." Indeed, we must not think that we are less capable. Just like a small banyan seed that has a magic blueprint within it to grow up to become a very big tree if it gets a field to grow; every human being has immense potential to become a great person if she/he gets a level playing field to nurture her/ his talent.

But one must not think only about oneself as it is a falsehood to separate ourselves from the whole universe. By thinking of ourselves less, we will actually be able to enlarge us to live infinitely and live oneness where there is no room for vanity, self-

complacency and self-pity. And this will help us say a firm NO to casteist gradation.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

Blatant violation of MV Act

Editor,

A common sight in the congested and clogged streets of Shillong that we witness daily are mini vans and trucks carrying boulders, sand, stones and other heavy and sharp objects sticking out, outside the carrier, thereby posing grave threats to commuters and pedestrians. Often these vehicles ply during peak school and office hours and are seen in all the main thoroughfare of the city! Is this the way to transport rods that stick out of the trailers of jeeps and pick-up vans and which ply unconcerned under the nose of the traffic police? Is this not being done in complete violation of the law that prohibits carrying of such heavy and dangerous articles in this manner?

Why are they allowed to ply during peak traffic hours to slow down the already sluggish city traffic apart from posing grave risks?

What if the ropes used to tie these heavy objects were to snap and these sharp objects roll over the hilly terrain of Shillong? Who will take the blame and bear the consequences if a tragedy was to occur? The driver; the contractor; the owner; the traffic police; the transport department or the government? This question merits an answer.

Are we citizens watching all these violations and waiting for a disaster to happen before the law is enforced? It's time to put a stop to this method of transporting dangerous materials on the main thoroughfare immediately! As the State goes to the polls on April 11, and candidates of respective parties make promises to uplift the lives of the people, I hope they also take note of such daily irritants which endanger the lives of citizens. This archaic method of transporting dangerous items needs to be halted immediately.

Yours etc.,
Moushumi Dey,
Via email

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North-South divide still dominates Indian polity

Can Rahul Gandhi represent the voice of one nation?

By Aditya Aamir

For the first time in any general elections, North India and South India; Northerners and Easterners have become part of election rhetoric and accusations and counter-accusations are being levelled along parochial lines, a new low that political parties are touching in their bid to fashion victories any which way. 'Lovely, Praji' like a Punjabi will say, and 'Nala,' like a Malayali will add.

Politicians are talking of North India's supremacy and the political and economic costs South India and East India are being compelled to shell out because electoral democracy dictates so. It was, in fact, waiting to happen for a long time. But so long as so-called secular parties were at the helm, this question stayed on the back-burner, simmering.

The Congress and the Left parties are "national" and their acceptance countrywide. The Bharatiya Janata Party has, on the other hand, the Achilles heel of being considered a party of North India by north Indians for north Indians. And North India limited to Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh. Bihar an adjunct.

Come to think of it, these were the contours of 'India' for all political purposes for

Modi was following policy set by the Manmohan Singh government. He could have reversed the policy. But India is an emerging economic superpower and it doesn't look good accepting aid from a country a 100 times less powerful.

Anyway, the Malayali is not in a mood to forgive Modi. Also, there are other things which sets a Malayali apart. Beef-eating is one part, the cow vigilantism that marked Modi-raj and Modi's inability to rein in the gaurakshaks were seen as deliberate and "very Hindutva."

The Malayali is a peculiar-secular. He is conservative as Carnatic music. And Kathakali. But is largely liberal when dealing with his and another man's religion. Hindutva is slowly but surely taking hold of Kerala society. There's a still a long way to go for BJP and RSS to capture Malayali minds in a benign manner. Kerala is Congress and Left-entrenched. The Malayali doesn't quite recognize Modi as the legitimate political heir.

Rahul Gandhi's choice to contest from Wayanad has brought the north-south divide into stark relief. Modi regards it as political cowardice. He terms Rahul

The election of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister, however, marked an inflexion point. For some reason, Modi could not win the trust of South Indians, especially the Malayali and the Tamil, and the Bengali to an extent. It's not language. It's 'he', 'him' - it's Modi. The man and his personality. And this is kind of odd. Modi has never with word slighted the South Indian, Malayali or Tamil.

all these 70 years. These states set the agenda for all of India. Whether it is about who'll be Prime Minister of India; which political party will head a coalition government or will/should there be war? And barring Gujarat, the rest are all basically Hindi-speaking states though accents and dialects differ.

So long as Congress ruled, language and regional divisions rarely became election issues. Regional disparities, deliberate negligence of non-Hindi speaking states and dominance of Hindi-speakers did not become part of political discourse. This was so even when Atal Bihari Vajpayee became Prime Minister.

The election of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister, however, marked an inflexion point. For some reason, Modi could not win the trust of South Indians, especially the Malayali and the Tamil, and the Bengali to an extent. It's not language. It's 'he', 'him' - it's Modi. The man and his personality. And this is kind of odd. Modi has never with word slighted the South Indian, Malayali or Tamil.

Some of his actions and decisions, however, worked against him. Refusing to give special status to Andhra Pradesh that both Chandrababu Naidu and Jagan Reddy seek, left him alienated in Andhra Pradesh. At least that was the perception created. And Chandrababu Naidu's attitude did not help matters improve.

Similarly, the Malayali, though considered level-headed and practical, got carried away by Modi's refusal to accept UAE-aid for flood-hit Kerala last August.

running off to contest from a 'non-Hindu state'. And Rahul Gandhi returned the compliment by alleging that ever since Modi became Prime Minister, South India has been neglected and alienated.

Both these thoughts will reflect in the voting, this north-south rhetoric. And, now, we have Mamata Banerjee talking the same language. That the BJP and Modi are imposing North Indian ethos on the 'Bangaliana' of Bengal! Mamata 'Didi' hammers down on the 'Hindi-speaking North Indians' who have no clue of the "ethos of Bengal", who woefully lack an understanding of 'Bengaliness.'

Needless to say, this sort of parochial politics will leave scars on the Indian polity. Whether it is Rahul Gandhi or Mamata Banerjee, if either one of them gets to become Prime Minister of India, they will have to assuage the feelings of North Indians while at the same time bring about a level-playing field for all Indians. The wind is out there blowing, the whirlwind will not be far behind.

The BJP and Modi should also learn from this awakening. As India develops rapidly and awareness increases, no one region or people should feel left out of the development process. Whoever is Prime Minister and whichever party is in power should take everybody along. A pipe dream, the Malayali will say. Not if Mamata becomes Prime Minister, the Bengali will smile. (IPA Service)

LET'S TALK PERIOD

Health & care



Google Images

Men too need awareness on menstrual health & hygiene

By Daiaphira Kharsati & Nabamita Mitra

In this age of women empowerment, menstruation still remains a taboo. The topic is rarely discussed in public despite the fact that it is a natural phenomenon.

Menstruation is often considered 'dirty' in many parts of India and women are often barred from entering temples and kitchens during those days of the month. In Nepal, a menstruating woman is not allowed to sleep inside the house. This is ironic as menstrual cycle is the sign of fertility and hope for a new life.

In Meghalaya, especially in the city, the extent of the taboo associated with period is not severe but talking about it openly still remains a big challenge.

To break this silence and make women aware of menstrual health and hygiene, Lady Keane College in Shillong recently organised a discussion and health camp on menstruation and hygiene. Students of Class XII and degree courses were the active participants.

Dorothy Pakyntein, a student of Class XII, smiled when asked about period. "Yes we do discuss about period and the problems with friends but not with boys. I can talk about it with my mother but not with anyone else at home," she said holding a packet of sanitary napkins. Packets of napkins were distributed among students during the programme.

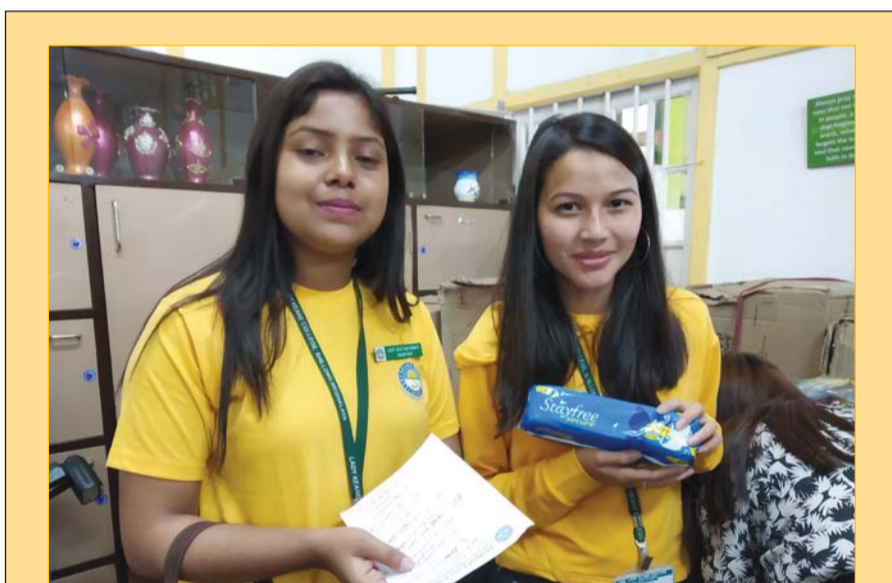
Two doctors and three assistants from NEIGRIHMS and counsellors from the college were present at the programme to tell students about hygiene and why it is necessary to be more careful during period.

Khayingwon Kashung Shimrah, the general secretary, said most women here are open to talk about menstruation.

"We talk about period even with some of our male friends but the wall still exists. But there is a need to overcome that as it is a natural process. It is also quite painful for many women," said Shimrah.

The young student said menstruation is something to be proud of as women bear children. "We give birth and that is the power we have."

Anjalee Shangpliang, a member of the Women Care Cell at the college, said the



Volunteers at the free sanitary napkin counter. (ST)

The college screened *Period. End of Sentence*, an Oscar award-winning documentary short film directed by Rayka Zehtabchi. The film traces the struggle of a group of women in Hapur, a city in Uttar Pradesh, to create awareness on the importance of using sanitary napkins and make cheap pads for poor women. Another Bollywood movie, *Padman*, starring Akshay Kumar, was released last February. The film was inspired by the life of Arunachalam Muruganatham, a social activist who invented a machine to make affordable napkins.

response was impressive. However, she admitted that students are still embarrassed to talk about period. "Some of them do not even know how to use sanitary napkins because they come from rural areas," she added.

To a query, she said women in India are still lagging behind. "There is some restraint as they are not being able to speak out and discuss openly."

She also raised a concern that there are students who are anaemic and do not know the right kind of food to eat which will build their health.

In rural areas, use of sanitary napkins is still not popular and women prefer to use clothes which often lead to infection.

Bharati Boro, deputy nursing superintendent at NEIGRIHMS, believes there is a need for women to know about menstrual health as during that time, "they undergo a lot of hormonal changes".

Mood swings, depression, crankiness, cramps, backache are common during menstruation and until one is aware of these health hazards, "she can really get depressed".

Boro does not think menstruation is a so-

cial taboo in this part of India. The mother of two, a son and a daughter, also feels that parents, especially mothers should provide basic sex education to their children. "Mothers have to be friendly with her children. I talk frankly with my son and daughter now that they have attained puberty," she said as she highlighted the importance of sex education.

Christy Najiar, adolescent counsellor, echoed Boro's views. "Menstrual health in Shillong is not a taboo and is openly discussed. Even boys and men do not have any problem. They should know because it is a natural phenomenon in a woman's life. They should know about the changes and what happens to the body. Knowledge and awareness are important and there is no harm in talking about it. Knowledge is power," she added.

But not all men in the matrilineal society are comfortable talking about period or discussing menstruation and hygiene with women. Two male staff in the college were left red-faced when they were asked about menstruation. Though they agreed that with time, there has to be a change in people's mindset, they abstained from talking on the issue or giving their names because "in Khasi society, we do not speak about it openly".

There are exceptions to all rules and in this case too, an exception was found. Sanchari Roychowdhury, a student volunteer at the event, narrated a story about one of her male friends "who is very understanding". She said once the institute where he studies prohibited menstruating girls from using the toilet and "he was furious and spoke up".

Such examples show ray of hope. "The barrier should break and educated people like us should be in the forefront to do so," said Shangpliang with conviction.

Shimrah, who was also the poster girl for the programme, said society is changing fast. "Some local pharmacies run by men helped us for this programme," she gave an example to prove her point.

Women are the strength of any society and "for a woman to enjoy the glow of her skin, she must stay healthy and hygienic as nothing is more beautiful than a woman who is happy to be herself", the young volunteer summed up the essence of the programme.

By Karun Lama

Healthcare is the most important element in life. In the prevailing times, our first priority has always been maintaining good health while 'education', 'entertainment' etc come next to it. For instance, a sick person will always opt for visiting a doctor rather than attending a lecture, seminar or watching a movie.

Good health is the most valuable asset that a person can have. One might have to give away everything when it comes to paying the price for regaining one's health once it deteriorates irrespective of how rich or poor the person is. Having aware of this fact, small negligence may lead to a great loss and perhaps one's life. One can see tragic scenes of countless people suffering in hospitals every day.

Malnutrition has been a major reason across the globe for various diseases resulting in the reduction of one's life span and even loss of life. In India, major health issues arise due to malnutrition. It includes deficiencies, excesses in

a person's diet which result in an imbalance in the body height-weight ratio and its growth and development. Also, it leads to non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, heart diseases and so on.

Reports say that malnutrition has prominently affected states like Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Bihar in the recent past.

HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, diarrhoea, malaria, pneumonia are some major communicable diseases which have claimed countless lives all over the world.

According to the 2018 Global Hunger Index (GHI) prepared jointly by global NGOs namely, Concern Worldwide (Ireland) and Welthungerhilfe (Germany), published on October 10, 2018, India was ranked 103rd out of 119 qualifying countries, which gives a distressing insight into the present scenario in our nation.

The World Health Organisation and other health-related organisations have been playing a vital role in the governance of health and diseases globally. WHO's main objective, being the attainment by all people of the highest possible level of health, focuses primarily on eradicating

communicable diseases as its current priorities.

Every year, on April 7, World Health Day is celebrated all over the world under the sponsorship of WHO and other health organisations as a global health awareness day. WHO had laid its foundation on the same date back in 1948 and with immediate effect from 1950, the day is commemorated with a specific health theme every year. Well, the theme for 2019 is Universal health coverage: everyone, everywhere. As the name suggests, Universal Health Coverage is about ensuring access to quality health services for all people and communities.

A lot of efforts has been put in by various organisations at both national and international levels to build a healthy world. However, the major challenge lies within us, each one of us i.e. at the individual level.

Keeping oneself and the surroundings clean,

consuming healthy food, regular exercises, proper nutrition, human interaction and so on are the principle duties which one must do in order to live a happy

and healthy life. According to a report by WHO in 2018, India is the most depressed country in the world among all others. One would be shocked to know that about 300 million people worldwide are suffering from depression. A person is healthy only when he or she is in good physical and mental condition.

Nowadays, people are more dependent on medicines. Medicines and treatment costs have also risen higher with inflation. What if instead of medicines, we spend on good food and nutritious products before it's late? There is a famous saying by Thomas Edison - "The doctor of the future will no longer treat the human frame with drugs, but rather will cure and prevent disease with nutrition." This gives us a vision to work ahead for disease-free and healthy lives across the whole world. In order to make this a reality, we must treat each day as a health day, literally meaning to place 'health' in the first place throughout the journey of our life.

(The author is a student of MA in Political Science)

(References: Wikipedia and WHO official website)

By Mary Magdalene Rynjah

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is about ensuring that people belonging to all communities have access to quality health services whenever and wherever needed and without having to face any financial hardship. These services include health promotion in prevention, treatment, rehabilitation as well as palliative care and all this is to be achieved through the primary healthcare system. The three main objectives of UHC are equity in accessing health services, delivering the health services of effective quality and people protection against financial-risk (WHO).

Still a Long Way for India?

Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said, "Only Swasth Bharat can be a Samridha Bharat", meaning 'Healthy India is Prosperous India' and 'India cannot realise its demographic dividend without its citizens being healthy'. Without a doubt, the Indian government has brought about several initiatives to enable achieving UHC. Such initiatives include:

The National Health Protection Scheme - the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), a promising programme that will cover over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families (approximately 50 crore beneficiaries) providing coverage up to Rs 5

lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary hospitalisation.

1.5 lakh health and wellness centres, which will bring health services closer to people's homes providing comprehensive care in addition with non-communicable diseases, maternal and child services.

Free essential drugs and diagnostic services and allocation of 1,200 crores for the programme.

Nutritional support of Rs 500 to each TB patient for the duration of their treatment.

All these are very ambitious initiatives in the approach to achieve India's target for UHC by 2022 but with policy; infrastructure and implementation as well as sustenance must go hand in hand. All these policies are meant to bring healthcare nearer to people's homes, reaching the unreached as well as in reducing the out of pocket expenditure (OOPE) which India stands at 62 per cent currently as only 15 per cent of the population are covered by health insurance (bulletin of WHO). India stands as the sixth biggest out-of-pocket (OOP) health spender among the low-middle income group of 50 nations as reported by IndiaSpend on 2017.

The Planning Commission of India constituted the high-level expert

group (HLEG) on UHC in 2010 and submitted its report in 2011, achieving UHC for India by 2022. India is marching towards UHC like many other countries. However, are we on the right track? The WHO Constitution states, "the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition". Will this right be fulfilled for 1.3 billion citizen of this country? The second largest most populated country in the world. That is the bigger question!

Challenges

The cost: According to recent article published in Business Standards on June 2018, Rs 3 per day and Rs 1,112 per person in a year is the amount spent by the Indian Government on health for its citizens. In a study conducted by the WHO (2018), the cost estimate of delivering UHC in India through the combined efforts of public and private sectors would be Rs 1,713 per person per year.

On extrapolation of these costs, the Indian government needs to spend 3.8 per cent (2.1-6.8 per cent) of the GDP for universalising healthcare services.

However, currently the GDP spent on health in our country is a little over 1 per cent which is more than three times lesser to the model estimate. Our neighboring country like Sri Lanka is spending four times more on GDP for health than our country (Business Standards).

NITI Aayog has projected a premium of Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,200 per family per annum for the five lakh health insurance coverage. With the recent National Health protection Scheme covering 10 crore families, the total estimated expenditure from the central and state government comes to 12,000 crore per annum with a ratio of 60:40, respectively. The Union budget has allocated Rs 2,000 crore in 2018-19 health budget for the partial implementation of the programme.

Manpower in rural areas: The problem of deploying the healthcare professionals especially doctors has been a challenge in the Indian healthcare system. According to the National Health Profile (2018), there is only one doctor for 11,082 people across the country with a shortage of 10 doctors for another ten thousand people. As per the prescribed recommendations of the WHO the doctor population ratio is 1:1000. India is also at a shortage of 1.94 million nurses, as re-

ported by NDTV-IndiaSpend analysis (2017) of data from the Indian Nursing Council (INC) and World Health Organization (WHO). With such a deficiency in the health workforce, deploying and sustaining them at the periphery would be a mountain that the Indian healthcare system is anticipating to conquer.

The Scenario in NE

Meghalaya with a population of more than 29 lakhs people (Census 2011) is significantly at a better position in per capita healthcare expenditure with Rs 2,366 and is among the top ten states with highest health spending (Observer Research Foundation). Meghalaya Government in an endeavor to achieve universal health coverage, started the Megha Health Insurance Scheme (MHIS) in 2012 in the state that does not confine to only BPL families but has been extended to everyone. Data from MHIS source reports that in the third phase of MHIS, out of the total 8,86,034 households; 4,36,788 were enrolled under the scheme resulting in a total coverage of nearly 50% households in the state. With the fourth phase being implemented working in convergence with Ayushman Bharat, the insurance

cover has increased from Rs 2,80,000 (five members) to Rs 5 lakh for all families of the state, excluding State and Central government employees. As per the Department of Health and Family Welfare (Government of Meghalaya) website, the total number of doctors, nurses and ANMs working under the government are 684, 893 and 758 (2008-09) respectively.

Mizoram's per capita health expenditure is Rs 5,862, which is almost five times than the Indian average (4.4 per cent of GDP on health), followed by Arunachal Pradesh (Rs 5,177) and Sikkim (5,126) at the top while Nagaland spends Rs 2,450 on health per person per year (Observer Research Foundation). The health expenditure alone cannot boost the health outcomes in the state but is a critical component in laying the foundation towards the right direction.

It is essential that the healthcare policies planned and implemented in the country follows in the direction of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in ensuring good health and well-being for all and at all ages. UHC is expected to overcome the inequalities faced by the people related to healthcare access, especially addressing the concern of the poor and vulnerable- 'to reach the unreached'.

(The author is an intern at the Indian Institute of Public Health, Shillong)

Universal Health Coverage & India

Young & concerned

By Afaque Hussain

First-time voters want hard-working leaders, accountability

Meghalaya has the largest number of young voters in the country and the level of energy and excitement is also the highest.

Young and first-time voters are excited to exercise their franchise, to bring about a change and be part of the world's biggest democracy. The Shillong Times spoke to several young voters and first-timers and all of them believe that every vote counts as this will give them better opportunities.

However, before they choose their leaders, the youths want an assurance on accountability. They also want their future MPs to address their concerns like corruption in the system, discrimination on the basis of race, religion, colour and caste and widespread joblessness. They want the leaders to be committed to secularism and sincere in resolving the issues which are affecting the country socially, economically and politically.

Samrat Sarkar, who is voting for the first time in the Lok Sabha elections, said he wants a good leader who can take the masses together and solve all the issues of a common man, be it shortage of electricity or providing good healthcare service to the common man.

Echoing similar views, Nafisabet Malngiang adds that unemployment is the biggest fear among youths today and the MPs as well as the state government should try to provide employment to the youths.

"Unemployment is the biggest problem and youths after completing their graduation are finding it tough to earn a sustained livelihood," says first-time voter Emanuel G Momin.

Momin points out the ripple effect of unemployment on society. He says many jobless and frustrated youths and turning to drug abuse and finally crime. "Job is the immediate requirement," he adds.

Another first timer, Nafisa Khan, says she is really excited to vote as she feels matured enough to be part of the country's future build-



ing. But she is concerned about the dichotomy in the politicians' actions. They promise the moon before elections but forget to even deliver the basic amenities after the polls. Khan wants the elected leaders to fulfil their promises made during campaigning.

Pappu Yadav agrees, saying, "This trend has to change to take the country forward and make development inclusive."

Yadav wants to be a responsible voter and does not want to make a choice in a hurry. He wants a true leader who would not discriminate among his or her constituents on the basis of religion,



caste, tribe and creed.

Politicking is now all about religion. Many parties harp on religious sentiments of supporters to

strengthen their camps. But Elina R Marak says it is wrong to "drag religion into politics".

"I want a leader who does not

use religion and works hard and makes efforts to eradicate unemployment," she adds.

Arvind Kumar is concerned about the present education system and feels improvements can be made. "It is high time that sex education be given importance as well," he strongly believes.

Kumar says whichever government comes to power at the Centre should take measures to improve literacy rate in the country and the state.

Suraj Joshi says this is the time when voters can show their real power and people should select the best person who can lead the country.

YOUTH SPEAK

“ Road connectivity is the need of the hour. Rural problems like health facility and energy need to be addressed. Education and experienced teachers are the need of the hour... The only candidate I prefer is NOTA

HERMAN LYNGDOH | SELF-EMPLOYED

Unemployment is the biggest problem and youths after completing their graduation are finding it tough to earn a sustained livelihood



EMANUEL G MOMIN | FIRST-TIME VOTER

People in Meghalaya are mostly dependent on government jobs. There are very less private firms. Plus, the system of government recruitment in Meghalaya is very poor. People cross the age limit waiting for jobs. It is getting harder for lower grade jobs. Degree certificates are of no value... You can see a Class XII pass and a Master degree competing for the same post. A peon in central/state government jobs getting more paid than an engineer on contractual basis. The government only talks but has not done anything about the rise in immigration from neighbouring countries. The government only focuses on urban issues... and ignores rural issues even if rural problems are highlighted. One can never understand the problems faced by rural people. It is easy to make a study and jump into conclusion but understanding the problems faced by the rural people is not a cup of tea.

CILMA NONGBAK | PROFESSIONAL

I am really excited to vote. But I am concerned about politicians not keeping promises. I want the elected leaders to fulfil their promises made during campaigning

NAFISA KHAN | FIRST-TIME VOTER

To win people's mandate, candidates make emotional speeches on pertinent issues. That's their main motive to attract voters. Every election, candidates come up with different promises... As I am working in Bangalore, coming home is a hassle. We need a full-fledged airport so that coming home will not be so tiresome. I hope people make the right choice. We have good candidates but I don't know the agenda of each one. For rural people, election is "go vote" and their job is done. Awareness programmes, campaigns should be highlighted more so that they also make the right choice

CYNTHIA NONGKYNRH | PROFESSIONAL

I am concerned about the present education system and I feel improvements can be made for a better system. Also, it is high time that sex education be given importance as well



ARVIND KUMAR | STUDENT

This is the time when voters can show their real power and people should select the best person who can lead the country

SURAJ JOSHI | STUDENT

Additional quotes compiled by Heather Cecilia Phanwar

WOMENWISE

Though today women are considered equal to men in every aspect, reality is far removed.



The government must ensure that women are treated equally in all aspects in real terms

MADHAVI CHHETRY | TEACHER

Women suffer a lot and the MPs and the government must see that all cases of crime against them

and children are properly investigated and severest of punishment meted out to the culprits who commit heinous crimes against women. There is a rise in domestic violence. Besides, there are many loan sharks in the state who harass women and the government must do something

AGNES KHARSHING | ACTIVIST

It is high time the manifestos of political parties and contesting candidates talk about the important issue of rights and livelihood of women

HASINA KHARBHIH | IMPULSE NGO

More in number but little heard

By Afaque Hussain

Meghalaya is a state where women voters outnumber their male counterparts but surprisingly, most of the political parties here, male-dominated that they are, hardly focus on issues pertaining to them. As the state readies for the April 11 Lok Sabha elections, women voters want their many issues and concerns to be addressed by the future MPs and the new government at the Centre.

The Shillong Times spoke to women from across the spectrum to know their expectations.

Madhavi Chhetry, a teacher at Gorkha Pathshala Higher Secondary School, said though today women are considered equal to men in every aspect, reality is far removed. "The government must ensure that women are treated equally in all aspects in real terms," she added.

Asserting that crime against women and children are increasing by the day, she urged the government to come up with policies for protecting women and putting an end to atrocities on them which would ultimately make Meghalaya a better place.

On the other hand, CSWO president Agnes Kharshing, who was a victim of a brutal attack by goons in East Jaintia Hills last year, said women suffer a lot and the MPs and the government must see that all cases of crime against them and children are properly investigated and severest of punishment meted out to the culprits who commit heinous crimes against women

She also lamented the rise in domestic violence against women. Besides, she said there are many loan sharks in the state who harass women and the government must do something in this regard.

A 33-year-old woman, who works as a domestic help, said there are many problems which women in the state face everyday "but there is none to address our issues".

"No candidate has ever asked me about the problems that I face as a woman. The only thing they ask me during elections is 'you know me right?' or 'remember me,'" she added.

However, she is aware that the Lok Sabha election is important because "we need a responsible person to represent the state in Parliament and the one who can speak on behalf of all of us".

"I will go and cast my vote, and I know



whom to vote," she added.

It is high time that the manifestos of all political parties and the candidates who are contesting the elections talk about the important issue of rights and livelihood of women, said Hasina Kharbhih from Impulse NGO.

She also said many women today are aspiring to take up political leadership and parties should create a platform for them.

Rikynti Marwein, a senior journalist from the city, said, "I am sure they know their job and role... that's why they are in the fray."

She said people can expect many things from them as they make a lot of promises every five years. "It's a fact that sometimes it's difficult to meet the ever growing ex-

pectations but at least we expect to see performing MPs, ones who are transparent and accountable, decision-makers who we can trust," she added.

Former Cabinet minister and MLA Ampareen Lyngdoh said no candidate in Meghalaya can win the elections without the active support of women as they are involved in every segment of the elections be it campaigning, managing booths etc.

Recalling her experience when she won four elections consecutively, she said that it was a challenging task for her to contest the elections as she had to look after her family as well even as she admitted that women are hesitant to step into politics because of their household duties.

“The lessons this life has planted in my heart pertain more to caring than crops, more to Golden Rule than gold, more to the proper choice than to the popular choice.”

--- Kirby Larson

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The Maldives decide

MALDIVES, an archipelago of nearly 1200 islands forming into a tourism paradise in the Indian Ocean, has re-asserted its commitment to democracy. Exiled former president Mohamed Nasheed, who returned six months ago to fight the polls, won a resounding two-thirds majority in parliament for his Maldivian Democratic Party in an impressive show of people's support. This is good news for India and further promotes the cause of democracy in Asia. The people's verdict in an orderly poll comes as a vote against the five-year-long autocratic rule of Abdullah Yameen, which saw imposition of Emergency and a distancing of Maldives from its long-time ally, India. Yameen's party, the Progressive Party of Maldives, got just a handful of seats this time, which meant the people were sick of his style. Yameen's ouster from power and winning of the presidential poll by Nasheed's close associate Ibrahim Mohamed Saleh in September last year was the starting point for the return of the democratic process there. Yameen, on a roll, had imposed Emergency in February and ordered a crackdown on his opponents as also the judiciary. His period in power had seen Pakistan increasingly dabbling in the affairs of Maldives through the help of fundamentalists and seeking to raise anti-India feelings there. Yameen downplayed Maldives' traditionally strong ties with India and sought to give larger space for China to step in and play geopolitical games. In the process, Yameen also earned a bad name for corrupt practices. Now, investigations into huge holding of funds in his bank vaults would follow.

Notably, Nasheed is now aiming to scrap the executive presidential system adopted by Maldives in 2008 and restore parliamentary democracy wherein people's elected representatives will have a bigger say. At the same time, with conflicting interests being at work in the political realm and the judiciary having an unpredictable approach to matters, both Nasheed and Saleh will have to tread a careful path. The positives are there too. On the one side, the dissidents exiled by Yameen are back in the island, whose support is vital for the new government. However, the coalition of parties that had helped Saleh win the September presidential polls has failed to hold together. Yameen is down but not out. The high court has only a week ago lifted a freeze on his controversial bank accounts even as the court said the corruption cases against him would go on. Neither China nor Pakistan, his well-wishers, would be comfortable with the present turn of events. They would be biding their time to work against India via Maldives, again.

How MeECL has failed its consumers

By HH Mohrmen

Every year during lean season, consumers of the Meghalaya Energy Corporation Limited (MeECL) in the entire state have to suffer a controlled shutdown for reasons best known to the Corporation. This year the people of Jowai which is one of the oldest towns in the state have had to put up with regular load shedding at what is considered a very weird timing. Why do consumers have to suffer load shedding? Or why impose the shutdown at the most awkward timings of the day?

Jowai town has to suffer the most because load shedding begins at 9 till 12 midnight. People wonder why MeECL has to start the shutdown at 9 PM. It is a very odd time to effect a shut-down. Hence, the people of Jowai scurry home before 9 PM or, before the entire town turns pitch-dark. In fact the people of Jowai should award a prize to those who decide on the timings of the shutdown because it is the most awkward time of all. For people who are interested in watching TV, this is prime-time and only programs with high television rating points (TRP) are scheduled during that particular time. But the most important point to note is that this is election time when people would like to watch the news to keep themselves abreast with what is happening, so that they are able to make an informed decision and vote for the right candidate/party. But the high and the mighty of MeECL do not think so! In their scheme of things that is not important at all. As soon as the clock strikes 9, everything has to come to a grinding halt in Jowai because the MeECL has decided to implement its rule on the hapless consumers.

In fact, it appears that the MeECL is more powerful than the Election Commission too because candidates who campaign in the rural areas in the evening have to pack their bags before 9 PM. This happens despite the fact that as per the Election Commission's Model Code of Conduct, election campaigns can go on till 10 PM. No candidate has the guts to complain against this or perhaps the candidates do not consider rural areas as important or they have considered it to be in their pockets, so this is not an issue at all. It may not be an issue for those who visit the place only to

campaign once every five years, but there are those whose livelihoods depend on the kind of electricity that MeECL supplies.

Those who are engaged in Micro, Medium and Small Enterprises are the worst affected by the load shedding, but they do not complain. People who are engaged in businesses like photo-copying shops, steel and wooden furniture etc., are running at a loss whereas big industries like cement plants are not affected by load shedding. The reason is because some of the cement plants have their own captive power plants, but even those who do not have their own CPP, are not affected by shutdowns. The cement plants at Narpuh area

The Government-owned Corporation has not only failed to provide stable energy to the consumers, but it has also failed to provide electricity connection to every house in the state. The central government has announced that it is providing electricity connection to every household, but Meghalaya is one of the few states which has not been able to meet the target.

never ever experience load shedding; not even those who have defaulted in paying their electricity bills. Recently a certain company defaulted in paying its dues and electricity connection to its plant was cut off by the MeECL only to be restored later, after it had paid some of the amount due. Obviously only the public and those who engage in small business have to go through the planned shutdown.

The first question that needs to be asked is why is it necessary for the MeECL to impose this load shedding on its consumers? Is it because the consumers have defaulted in paying the electricity bills and this in turn forced the Corporation to default in payment for the energy it buys from NEEPCO or from the National Grid? Is this the reason which has compelled the Corporation to insist on shutdown to save some energy, thereby saving money for the MeECL? If so, what is the percentage of the consumers who have defaulted in paying their

bills? The consumers have the right to have answers to all these questions. Otherwise why impose this blanket shutdown on all the consumers? Why punish those who pay their dues regularly? Why not punish only those who have defaulted on paying their dues? Why would MeECL punish its consumers for the crime they have not committed? Isn't this a reason to take the Corporation to the Consumer Protection forum or the Court?

Or is the load shedding due to the mismanagement of the Corporation, which makes the MeECL default in paying the energy suppliers what it buys from them? Why is it that every year at the end of the financial year, the Corporation always

The Government-owned Corporation has not only failed to provide stable energy to the consumers, but it has also failed to provide electricity connection to every house in the state. The central government has announced that it is providing electricity connection to every household, but Meghalaya is one of the few states which has not been able to meet the target. The people have the right to know why the State has failed to provide electricity connection to every household, in spite of the fact that ample funds were provided by the central government.

Obviously one of the reasons that the Corporation has a lackadaisical attitude is because of the monopoly that the MeECL is enjoying and those at the helm of power know that consumers will have to depend on the Corporation come what may? The other reason is also because the Corporation is so in name only, while the people who run it and those who work in the setup still have a sarkari-mindset.

But the most important factor which encourages the MeECL to ill-treat its consumers is because they know that the people of the state (particularly the Pnars) are all 'ksan rympei rem dorbar' those who whine and open their big mouths only around the fire place and not beyond that. Nobody, not even the public representative will dare to complain, leave alone take the matter to the consumer protection forum. Instead of making complaints to their public representatives, people find it easy to complain to leaders of pressure group like the JSU, KSU and others. The question is where have their MLAs, their MDCs gone? Or is this because the local representatives have bought their support during election therefore the public have to fend for themselves now?

MeECL should be ashamed of putting its consumers in such a situation every year in spite of the fact that they pay their bills regularly. Why can't the Corporation provide uninterrupted power supply to its consumers in the State, when the only job that MeECL is expected to perform is doing just that?

Can we expect the Power Minister to answer the above questions?

Need for a total package for urban labour in India

Rahul's minimum income guarantee a welcome move

By B. Sivaraman

Four major current developments have brought some labour concerns into the spotlight, some of which are expected to figure as election issues as well.

First, the release of Congress poll manifesto the main highlight of which is the Nyay, the minimum income guarantee of Rs. 72,000 per year or Rs. 6000 per month. While offering some solace to the very poor, will it also act inadvertently as an income dampener as the Congress party has not spelt out its stand on the demand of the trade unions for a minimum wage of Rs.18,000 per month? There are teething problems of practical implementation of Nyay as well. For instance, will it translate into transfer of Rs.6000 per month from the state uniformly for all the undefined very poor beneficiaries supposed to comprise 5 per cent of the population irrespective of their current earnings?

If that happens, it would be a game-changer, be it increasing the per capita income or eliminating poverty and malnutrition or even in giving political dividends to the Congress. But if it is going to be adjusted with the prevailing wages, only a small section of the low wage earners not getting even Rs.6000 per month presently is going to be benefited fully. In that case, how would they still arrive at this adjustment? Congress has not made it clear.

In any case, what is the point in announcing an income guarantee, that too covering the entire household and not the individual, which is pegged at one-third the minimum wage meant for an individual worker? This is not only a demand of the TUs but this much or more is actually being paid in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry and Goa etc., in some industries? Anyway, the Congress promise is a good income guarantee for paupers no doubt!

The second important development is the release of the State of Working India 2019 report by the Centre for Sustainable Employment (CSE) of the Azim Premji University which proposes an employment guarantee scheme for urban workers in small towns. But going by the experience of the MGNREGA for rural workers, there are no takers for NREGA work in some States like Kerala and parts of Tamil Nadu etc., because of the low NREGA wages pegged in parity with the State minimum wages which are far below the prevailing market wages and more so because of undue delay in payment of wages stretching even upto six months.

So, after marshalling powerful arguments as the rationale for an urban employment guarantee scheme, the report summarises the prevailing wage rates in urban India for three categories of workers based on CMIE Consumer Pyramids Survey. According to these data, median earnings reported by casual wage labourers in urban India in 2018 were Rs.9625 per month or Rs.370 per day assuming a 26-day working month. Self-employed informal entrepreneurs reported median monthly earnings of Rs.12,500 or Rs.480 per day while white-collar clerical workers reported median earnings of Rs.28,125 per month or Rs.1082 per day.

After taking these prevailing median wage rates into account, the Azim Premji University report proposes 150 days of work for an estimated 5.9 crore informal workers in small towns in 2 categories: a general category of unskilled work at Rs.500 wage per day and Rs.13,000 per month for a second category of 150 days of skill development training as apprentices in a year. But the report doesn't say anything about hiking the floor minimum wages to Rs.18,000 and introducing strong legal guarantees for their enforcement and periodical revision. Why is it so? When asked about this, Prof. Amit Basole, Chief of CSE, clarified that they came up with a compromise figure of Rs. 500 as the total fiscal bill for this itself would come to Rs.2.8 lakh crore or 1.7 per cent of the GDP which he said would be fiscally sustainable and would lift up the income level of a majority of the urban informal workers.

The third important development is the release of the report of the expert committee on minimum wages formed by the Ministry of Labour and Employment which recommends hiking the "floor minimum wage" from the present Rs.4576 to Rs.9750 plus an additional house rent allowance of Rs. 1430 a month. This is ridiculous as, to cite a few examples, the basic minimum wage in Kerala is Rs.18,000 per month in all occupations and it is fixed at Rs.20,000 for nurses and the sanitation workers in Bangalore get a minimum wage of Rs.14,040. These are statutorily fixed minimum wages and in many cases the market wages are much higher. No wonder, all major trade unions have condemned this recommendation of the experts' committee.

The fourth important development is the scheduled release of a People's Agenda by the name Jan Sarokar (People's Concerns) by around 200 NGOs which they call People's Manifesto for the elections. Sources indicate that they are also contemplating inclusion of higher minimum wage and employment guarantee in urban areas too.

The UN Urban Population Prospects 2018 report puts the present Indian urban population at 34 per cent and it is expected to cross 40 per cent by next elections in 2024 and half the India is estimated to be urban by 2029. As per ILO figures, 81 per cent of the workers in India are in the informal sector now and they are equally divided between urban and rural areas. It is a paradox that the incidence of urban poverty in 2011-12 was 13.6 per cent but the share of the slum population is increasing. So what is needed for urban informal workers is an integral package including Right to Housing and affordable houses for the poor, subsidies for education even in private educational institutions of one's choice, extension of Ayushman Bharat kind of health insurance but with universal coverage and subsidies for informal workers in urban public transport besides an increase in minimum wage. One can only hope that the fragmentary proposals being raised now would evolve over time into such an integral package. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Of first names and clan names

Editor,
Much has been written about the former C.E.M. of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, Shri H.S. Shylla and some of the controversial Bills he wanted to implement with regards to putting pressure on the Khasi tribe by bulldozing his own views over others in the community who have differences of opinions. Take for example his desire to remove the so called English surnames. My question is: what about the first name? Mr Shylla's first name, "Hispreaching Son is not Khasi at all. They are English words.

Ironically, the others who have blindly assented to the Bill during the previous Council have not raised their voices. That Council had names like Manstudy, Blanding, Equator, James, Grace etc. Interestingly his former colleague Teinwell who is now the Chairman of KHADC also does not have a Khasi name. So too names like

Titosstar, Markle, Paul, Victor, Mitchel, etc.

The present respected members of KHADC should never be dictated by the whims and fancies of Hispreaching Son Shylla who has his own agenda, and now through a clan organization he has formed an organization - Ka Bri U Hynniewtrep through which he plans to put across a number of controversial ideas at the expense of people who do not see eye to eye with him on the issue of, 'Who is a Khasi?' If Shylla had his way then even the founder of the District Council, Rev J J M Nichols Roy and others like him would not be Khasis merely because they took the surname of the father.

Can you imagine the confusion that will ensue? Khasis who have taken the clan names of their grandfathers and fathers will be classified as non-Khasis and their offsprings too will not be considered Khasis and because of which they would not be able to hold office as MDCs and MLAs as those are

reserved only for the locals. And such Khasis would henceforth have to pay income tax. Is anybody out there listening or even concerned about this societal conundrum?

Yours etc.,
I.R. Lyngdoh
Shillong-2

NYAY scheme will benefit the poorest

Editor,
This refers to the letter, "On Rahul Gandhi's NYAY scheme" (ST, April 1, 2019) by Peter Lyngdoh. The Congress in its manifesto has made a promise of giving Rs 72,000 a year directly to the bank accounts of the poorest 5 crore (50 million) families if it comes to power. It is named NYAY (Nunyatam Aye Yojana) ie Minimum Income Guarantee scheme. Given that the Congress President Rahul Gandhi has promised that there will be no increase in taxes for the middle class and no

withdrawal of existing major social welfare programmes the question is, in what way this can be done?

The World Inequality Lab, a group of economists based at the Paris School of Economics has predicted a probable way of getting the necessary funds. As the income inequality in India has reached an all time high, it says that the rich should be taxed to fund the NYAY. A two per cent tax on the total wealth on households owning more than Rs 2.5 crore of wealth would yield Rs 2.3 lakh crore or 1.1 per cent of GDP. This will affect only the top 0.1 per cent of households and leave out 99.9 per cent households.

This is not only the probable way but the best way of doing it. The super rich of our country are taxed much less than their counterparts in other countries that have achieved high ranks in human development. Moreover, inequality is much higher in India.

According to the 2019 Oxfam Inequality Report, the wealth of the top nine billionaires in India is equivalent to the wealth of the bottom 50 per cent of our population. Imagine that a balance can now stand in a perfect equilibrium holding only 9 Indians at one end and 67 crore Indians at the other!

In such a scenario, a little more tax for the super rich will bring justice and equality. Moreover, even the rich will be benefited by this scheme. Extra money in the hands of the rich will go to either Indian or foreign banks. But for a poor family whose family income is less than Rs 12,000, the extra amount of Rs. 6000 per month will go straight to the market and benefit the market players. The Nyay money will act as a bridge between the surplus farm production and the hungry malnourished Indians. Thus, it will bring smiles both to farmers and the poor people of our country.

On the Nyay scheme, well known economist and former RBI Governor

Raghuram Rajan says that it is a doable and a scheme well worth considering. He says it is a misreading of the scheme by the critics who claim this will make people not to work at all. On the contrary, this scheme will indeed energize the poor people of our country with confidence, nutrition and motivation to fight depression, malnutrition and widespread diseases like anaemia and tuberculosis.

It is a good idea to directly transfer the money to the bank account of a female member of a family as far as possible. It will minimize the money going to the alcohol market as only 2 to 5 per cent of Indian women consume alcohol and Indian men use alcohol 9.7 times more than Indian women.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

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“Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.”

--- Oscar Wilde

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SHILLONG, TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2019

Meghalaya – a rogue state?

THE coal ban by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) since April 2014 has made a mockery of the Tribunal. On the morning of April 8, those travelling on the Shillong-Guwahati highway witnessed two coal-laden trucks that had turned turtle and spilt the coal in the middle of the road thereby exposing the lies of the state government and its shameless police force. The Supreme Court which is hearing the case ought to be briefed about this serious violation of its orders. In normal circumstances the violation of court orders should have led to the state administrative head and the police chief being hauled up for their inability to implement ban in letter and spirit. But Meghalaya seems to have reached a state of no return, as far the collapse of law and order is concerned. Serious crimes of murder and arson right from 1979 when a communal frenzy saw many non-tribals uprooted from their hearths and homes and some even being burnt alive or lynched, have reached a dead end. That not a single perpetrator of those heinous crimes has been booked till date tells the story of how difficult it is for anyone to get justice in this state. Police have never been known to be pro-active about solving crime.

The fact that corrupt police personnel that are hand in glove with politicians in furthering their vested interests are allowed to hold important positions also lends credence to the allegations that policing in Meghalaya is never about protecting the citizens but about guarding the interests of the powerful and affluent class. A few who carry out their duties judiciously are soon shunted out to be replaced by pliable ones. So much so that those with the resolve to execute their Constitutional duties are disillusioned and would rather work outside the state. Much has been discussed about the corruption in the police service starting at the entry point. It is true that quite a few state police service officers have come in through political string-pulling. They are visibly feathering their own nests. It is impossible that the coal trucks could move even an inch without the connivance of the police heads in the coal mining districts of East Jaintia Hills, West Khasi Hills and Garo Hills. This is a money-making project for all involved. And it seems that they are unstoppable. The NGT ban has all but failed since it is unable to ensure that its orders are effectively implemented. The bare-faced violation of the ban on coal mining makes Meghalaya a shining example of how the law has been rendered ineffective by law keepers themselves because they are on the payroll of the coal mafia.

Elections and the Church as a Social Entrepreneur

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The biggest ‘dance of democracy’ is well on its way. It is an election fiesta spread across 43 days altogether. The Shillong and Tura seats are faced with the unpleasant prospect of being amongst the first to go to polls and thereby having to wait throughout to know their fates. Thus, with the schedule put to rest, the guns of manifestos, perceptions, perspectives, arguments, opinions, views and counterviews are traded against one another and these are there for all to see. However, there is a caveat. It is called ‘money’. Elections in Meghalaya are no longer purely about wit and argument; about debate and dissent. The role of money power is ever increasing. In general, there is a viewpoint that ‘unless one has money and is willing to dish it out during the poll process, his/her chances are dismal’. In fact, this is what an election strategist (of most candidates) primarily does. It evaluates the influence of money and calculates a relationship between money and votes. Add to this, the potentially destructive role of social media through its quagmire of misinformation/manipulation/fake content/intentionally distorted UGC (user generated content), etc., and we have a dangerous cocktail of elements. To this end, we do need a mediating/intervening factor to bring some sense into it all. As such, the church stepping in and speaking up is a step in the right direction. However, what does this entail? Accordingly, I place the following pointers –

Firstly, let us contextualize social entrepreneurship. To begin with, ‘entrepreneurship’ as a field of study under management discipline is very old. It is synonymous with the famous traits of innovation, risk-taking and alertness. Notably, these traits are more in line with the economic well-being of self while gradually percolating into society. Here, economics is the pivot around which everything revolves. As a result of these limiting factors, a more recent area of interest which developed towards the latter half of the 20th century is ‘social’ entrepreneurship. However, it was

not till the turn of the millennium that it received worldwide attention. The crux of the matter is that if entrepreneurship as we know is ‘predominantly economics’, social entrepreneurship focuses on transformation of a ‘holistic society’. As such, comes the era of the social entrepreneur who are defined as ‘change agents with a social mission for creating social value’ (Gregory Dees, 2001). These are people/organizations that thrive for social well-being through the mitigation of

‘further playing’ the role of a ‘social entrepreneur’ (they have been into it through schools, colleges, hospitals, etc). It is trying to instill efforts of change with a mission to elect effective representatives. In fact, this persuasion was there even for the MLA and the very recent MDC elections. This is very apt in keeping with the increased role of money, power politics and intimidation at play. In addition, it is likely to have an impact on the social media electioneering positioning/discourse as

democratic! Be that as it may, these inquiries must not dishearten the noble cause. On hindsight, these only help in reaffirming the efforts and thereby lead to repositioning and restructuring of the message to the masses. In reality, the real question for now is to what extent will the exhortation of the church resonate amongst the electorate? Will there be any impact? Only time will answer these questions. Moreover, keeping in perspective the enticement of money and how it has played a role in the recent past elections, we are in for a tough time indeed. Nonetheless, the social entrepreneurial effort should continue; after all, Rome was not built in a day!

Fourthly, I would like to draw attention to my earlier articles on this related matter (read ‘A reverend in politics’ dated ST 27th March and 29th March, 2014 and ‘Election 2018 and the business of giving fish’ dated ST 7th October, 2017). There is need to seriously revisit the ‘inherent’ nature of politics and the value of any electoral process. In the perception of the Greeks, ‘politics is good and for the benefit of a common people’. Somehow this messaging and understanding is missing for now. Moreover, money in elections is a fuzzy issue. In truth, election is more of a one-time investment for the candidates. If you win, there is no better investment. For the underprivileged (and for all who wish to partake), money offered by the candidates during the electoral process in indeed enticing. This is because they believe that ‘whether you elect A or B or any other’ their lives are not going to change. Hence, as it is just take whatever is on offer. As such the problem is two-fold. Importantly, this represents an opportunity for the church to work even further. The spark must now burn.

Lastly, the church is known to go into a shell of eerie silence after speaking up on issues. For many, its speaking is more of ‘a one-off’ and ‘few and far between’. It is time to change the trend and speak and act continuously. After all, that is what ‘social entrepreneurs’ do!

Elections in Meghalaya are no longer purely about wit and argument; about debate and dissent. The role of money power is ever increasing. In general, there is a viewpoint that ‘unless one has money and is willing to dish it out during the poll process, his/her chances are dismal’.

social issues/problems. The point to be noted here is that they too have the traits of innovation, risk-taking and alertness, but their orientation is totally social and for a societal cause. They are not-for-profit organizations with a social vision. Come to think of it, in this world of hunger, limits of shelter, health, proper education, etc; social entrepreneurs are the need of the hour.

Secondly, let me lay down a marker! The church is inherently and by ethos a spiritual organization. There can be no contestation to this point. However, in the context of sociology; it is also a social organization. It exists in society. It is a small part of a bigger social structure. That way it has a ‘major role’ to play in social transformation. One might argue, ‘a powerful role’. Moreover, the need of the hour is to do this ‘explicitly’. Speaking extensively on the ensuing MP elections is one indicator of such explicitness. As such, by doing so the church is

well. It is true that there are many other domains in which the church can act as a social entrepreneur. Nonetheless, let us not discount this nascent start that has a potential to develop into something bigger.

Thirdly and in relation to the above, there is a need to guard against ‘activism’. That is a different ball game altogether. Activism is myopic and short-term only. There is lack of continuity and hence, ineffective. The church has to stick to its role as a social entrepreneur; with that comes a need to continuously engage for social transformation across domains for the foreseeable future. In this process, there will be genuine questions and meaningful debate. However, this does not mean the church should backtrack from its role of social change and social value. Contemporarily, numerous questions are raised; ranging from should the church have spoken up? Will that not influence voters? In fact, some say that it is downright un-

BJP to lose in Uttar Pradesh and North East seats

Congress set to gain both in north and south

By Gyan Pathak

The picture emerged in the fag-end of the first phase of election campaign for 91 Lok Sabha seats spread over 20 states going to vote on April 11 suggests the most unexpected results from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. BJP may lose in UP and North-East but is comfortable in Maharashtra and Bihar. Congress is set to gain a little in North-East, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra and in some UTs. Among the regional parties, TDP, TRS, and YSRCP fortunes may surprise all.

Among the 42 constituencies in Andhra Pradesh (25) and Telangana (17), BJP seems to be in contest on only three seats – Narsapuram and Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh (AP) and Secunderabad in Telangana.

In 2014, BJP’s Sushil Kumar Singh could win the Aurangabad seat by a margin of only 8.63 per cent. He is seeking re-election this time too. He is facing a tough fight from HAM(S) candidate Upendra Prasad. Gaya seat has gone to NDA partner JD(U) while Nawada to LJP. Chirag Paswan is seeking re-election from Jamui. NDA is comfortable in all the seats except Aurangabad.

Only Bastar is going to have poll in this phase in Chhattisgarh. This seat may be retained by the BJP, though there is tough fight with the Congress.

In Jammu and Kashmir, BJP is in comfortable position and can retain the seat. However in Baramulla Congress is in contest with JKDP. Congress may hope for this seat this time.

“Congress may increase its tally by a couple of seats in AP-Telangana where it presently holds only two seats, because there is a little anti-incumbency against the states’ ruling parties.”

No wonder if they could not win even a single seat in Andhra Pradesh due to anti-incumbency. Congress may increase its tally by a couple of seats in AP-Telangana where it presently holds only two seats, because there is a little anti-incumbency against the states’ ruling parties. Most surprising results will come from these two states because 25 of the 42 constituencies had less than ten per cent winning margin in the 2014 elections. These are Anakapalle TDP winning margin (wm) 4.21, Anantapur TDP wm 5.15, Bapatla TDP wm 2.78, Bhongir TRS wm 2.54, Chelvela TRS wm 5.59, Chittoor TDP wm 3.70, Eluru TDP wm 8.54, Guntur TDP wm 5.59, Hindupur TDP wm 8.33, Kakinada TDP wm 0.31, Khammam YSRCP wm 1.04, Kurnool YSRCP wm 4.18, Machilipatnam TDP wm 7.15, Mahabubabad TRS wm 3.13, Mahabubnagar TRS wm 0.26, Malkajgiri TDP wm 1.75, Nandyal YSRCP wm 8.83, Narasaraopet TDP wm 2.76, Narsapuram BJP wm 7.90, Nellore YSRCP wm 1.14, Ongole YSRCP wm 1.29, Tirupati YSRCP wm 3.11, Vijayawada TDP wm 6.28, Visakhapatnam BJP wm 7.83, and Vizianagaram TDP wm 9.60.

The states in the North-East may dishearten the BJP. In Arunachal Pradesh, though there is anti-incumbency against the BJP, it seems status quo may continue – one seat to go to Congress and the other to BJP. Congress may retain the Outer Manipur seat along with Shillong and Tura seats of Meghalaya. It may lose the Mizoram seat. NDDP is better placed in Nagaland compared to Congress. SDF is again set to win Sikkim Lok Sabha seat while CPM is well placed in Tripura West. In Kaliaor in Assam, the fight is between AGP and Congress. It is most probable that Congress may retain this seat. In Jorhat, Dibrugarh, and Lakhimpur, BJP candidates have upper hand, but in Tejur BJP candidate is facing real challenge from the Congress candidate. This seat was won by BJP last time by a margin of only 8.92 per cent. Congress may wrest this seat from BJP this time.

Among the four seats of Bihar – Aurangabad, Gaya, and Nawada are BJP seats while Jamui is held by LJP. At the height of Modi wave

Wardha, Ramtek, Nagpur, Bhandara-Gondiya, Gadchiroli-Chimur, Chandrapur, and Yavatmal-Washim seats of Maharashtra are going to poll in this phase. BJP is comfortable in Nagpur, Gadchiroli-Chimur, Bhandara-Gondiya, Chandrapur and Wardha. They are likely to retain these seats. Ramtek seat is held by SHS and is faring well, but in Yavatmal-Washim it is in a tough fight with Congress. In 2014, SHS had won this seat by a margin of only 9.13 per cent. Anti-incumbency may cost them the seat this time and may go to Congress.

BJD is facing a tough challenge from Congress in Kalahandi, Nabarangpur and Koraput in Odisha. BJD had won these seats last time by margins of only 5.14, 0.21, 2.02 per cent respectively. They may lose these seats to Congress this time. BJP is faring well in all the five constituencies in Uttarakhand where it is likely to retain all the seats.

The most bitter fight is taking place in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Bagpat, Ghaziabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, and Meerut are most likely to re-elect BJP. However, BJP may lose Saharnpur which has won the seat in 2014 by a margin of only 5.48 per cent. SP-BSP alliance is giving tough fight to BJP in Bijnor. BJP may not retain this seat this time.

Coochbehar in West Bengal has become a tough seat of AITC and it may lose this seat this time. The party had won this seat last time by a margin of only 6.59 per cent. This seat may be wrested by Left Front. In Alipurduars constituency, which AITC had won by a small margin of 1.78 per cent, there is a tough triangular fight involving AITC, Left Front, and BJP. A small swing of votes may tilt the balance. BJP has changed its candidate fearing anti-incumbency in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Congress is giving tough fight on the seat and it has become doubtful if BJP can retain this seat. The winning margin on this seat last time was only 4.14 per cent. Congress has upper hand in Lakshadweep seat and may win this time. NCP had won this seat in 2014 by a very thin margin of only 3.56 per cent. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

India’s A-SAT Test

Editor,
India’s shooting down its own low orbit satellite with a ground-to-space missile making the country a “space power” is a historic feat. The US space agency (NASA)’s chief criticised India and termed its anti-satellite weapon test a “terrible thing” for creating about 400 pieces of orbital debris. ISRO Chairman K Sivan has dispelled the allegations/apprehension made by NASA Administrator James/Jim Bridenstine. Sivan said that the test was done in the lower atmosphere to ensure that no space debris is created. As per ISRO whatever debris is generated will decay and fall back onto the earth surface within weeks. Ministry of External Affairs also confirmed/communicated the same soon after the test. India has now joined the trinity club of the US, Russia and China who have anti-satellite (missile) capabilities on March 2019.

Developed countries specially China and the US do not like India to emerge as a global powerful nation. Under the ploy of “terrible thing of resulting 400 pieces of orbital debris” NASA has simply laid bare its dubious intent. By their various experiments and tests US has already vitiated the space at-

mosphere. The US polluted the Asian Continent environment irretrievably right from atom-bombing of Hiroshima & Nagasaki up to involvement with the Vietnam war when they used chemical and bacterial arsenals. The US has already vitiated the atmosphere by their various experiments and tests with space-shuttles. However good sense has prevailed upon them and Jim Bridenstine has assured the ISRO chairman that based on the guidance received from the White House he is looking forward to continuing to work with ISRO on a host of issues including human space flights as a damage control measure to maintain the bi-partite Indo-US relations intact and undamaged.

Mahindra group chairperson Anand Mahindra, on April 2, called out the hypocrisy of US’s National Aeronautical Space Agency (NASA), after NASA had called India’s successful test of the A-SAT weapon system a ‘terrible thing’. Mr Mahindra appropriately said further that NASA chief Jim Bridenstine’s statement is a case of ‘the pot calling the kettle black’.

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata High
Court

False and tall claims

Editor,
The INC candidate from 1-Shillong Parliamentary Constituency, Vincent Pala, has claimed during his Press Conference at Shillong Press Club and during his interview with the special correspondent of your paper that he was responsible for the actualisation of the Shillong-Guwahati four lane, the Shillong By-Pass, the Shillong-Nongstoin-Tura two lane and Guwahati-Tura two lane roads. This is not only a tall claim but also a false claim. This type of lie is always told during elections to impress voters to vote for him. The fact of the matter was that these roads came into fruition because of a series of efforts undertaken by Meghalaya State PWD under successive state governments beginning from MPA and MUA governments and not by Vincent Pala. It is totally wrong to claim credit for oneself when somebody else has done the job. In Khasi it is called, “Kyntur u sniang knieh burum u ksew” (literally means the pig has done all the leg work but the dog has taken all the credit). This is very serious indeed.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via-Email.

Do not lay country to waste

Editor,
I believe many will agree that Prime Minister Modi is fairly unpopular among a certain popular elite within the country. However, he has earned an immeasurable number of admirers outside the country. The reason why he is an eyesore for certain groups of people and celebrities, while they are supportive towards dull-witted and inexperienced leaders is inexplicable. This phenomenon defies the long-held assumption that “education” makes one rational and free from psychological shortfalls. However, PM Modi is least bothered about what his detractors think and do. He hardly wishes evil on anyone. He has multiple reasons to stay buoyed and cheery. The flood of praises coming from outside the country has always swelled PM Modi’s chest. Therefore, even on foreign soil he goes without a hitch, shouting at full throttle -- ‘Bharat Mata Ki Jai’.

Indeed it’s totally wrong to ignore the many achievements associated with PM Modi. He was honoured with the highest civilian award - Order of Zayed by the UAE government. Not just that but countries like

Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Palestine also have come forward to honour the Indian PM with their respective highest awards. A few months ago the UN as well has crowned him with the Champions of the Earth, the highest environmental honour. His unfaltering dedication and devotion to execute formulated policies and plans have yielded positive results, though some try to undermine those efforts. What is most attractive in PM Modi is that he is smartly clever to strike personal kinship with any individual foreign leaders and diplomats. Yes, due to his personal touch and warmth, the Modi government has been able to pull off many thorny external issues very quickly. This is undoubtedly praiseworthy. The truth should be not suppressed and falsehoods should not be exaggerated.

However, a very strange vibe is noticed in the country. It is nothing but an unenthusiastic silence maintained by the popular media when Modi receives some accolades and appreciation. Many choose not to mention it at all, not even as news-item. This makes everything all the more conspicuous. This, in fact, only prompts the swarm of netizens to be more active in social media, their battle-

fields. They are seen furiously vocal. The ranting, raving, and name-calling against the backdrop the importance given to a certain class of leaders make the situation less pleasant. Not just that, but people on the social media are quick to throw up contrasting examples citing how media goes gaga over a “less intelligent lot” while keeping deafening silence over things that bring glory and fame to the nation. This way the detractors or opponents always run the risk of losing their own integrity. A business done by sacrificing integrity ends up in disaster. Opposition to ideas and political parties is always welcome and democratic but the biased attitude against the “truth” and positivity can only dilute the sanctity of the enterprise and professionalism.

As concerned citizens, should we not first want that the light of glory and joy dispel the gloom of darkness and despair in the country? Let’s not waste our precious life by struggling to call the untruth as truth and vice versa. This exercise only contributes to polluting our mindset and the country becomes less peaceful and more vulnerable.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gawai,
Viaemail

“He only earns his freedom and existence who daily conquers them anew.”

--- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The Shillong Times

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BJP's Election Manifesto

IF anyone thought, the BJP would go for the kill, it didn't. Beyond the huge Union Budget promises to farmers and the unorganised labour by way of pensions, no big surprises were in store as the saffron manifesto was released Monday. It, though, has promised to extend the pension scheme to retail shopkeepers, the large army of them across India. If the BJP returns to power, shopkeepers above age 60 can hopefully get pension and be on par with several other segments the BJP has already wooed with doles. But, if by chance the Congress comes to power too, all these segments can have attractive monthly support in the name of the minimum income guarantee scheme as promised by the tricolour party manifesto. Notably, the BJP manifesto lays stress on a national level piped drinking water scheme. The promise is to extend it's connection speedily to all families -- meaning even in the remotest village. This comes over and above the promise by BJP and Modi to reach electricity to all villages. The work had been taken up with all seriousness in the last five years. The piped water scheme must be seen as the logical next step.

The manifesto also reiterates the BJP's commitment to follow up on the national citizenship registry by way of effective implementation in the North East and it's extension to other parts of the country. Another offer in the manifesto is to follow up on the promise of 33 per cent reservations for women in representative bodies like Parliament and state assemblies. Election manifestoes are not the last word, though. Promises were often broken than implemented. Yet, there is reason to cheer, as rival political parties are falling over heels to care for the so far uncared multitudes. Hopefully, the same enthusiasm will prevail after the polling day too. What could be the proverbial red rag for the citizens of North East India is the BJP's iteration that it would implement the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) if it returns to power. The CAB had already seen a lot of protests after it was passed in the Lok Sabha. The Congress has promised to scrap this contentious bill. The people of this region are now divided on this Bill. There is a large section which believes that their Hindu kin in Bangladesh must be able to settle in India, a country where Hindus are in the majority. The tribes on the other hand fear the prospect of being overwhelmed by immigrants. It is in this climate of fear and suspicion that the region goes to vote for the first phase on April 11.

LOOKING BACK

June 17, 1989

Bodo bandh cripples life

Life was paralysed in Bodo inhabited areas of Kokrajhar district and Udalguri sub-division of Darrang district of Assam following a 36-hour statewide bandh called by the All Bodo Students Union from five am today. Official reports received here said all shops and business establishments in other parts of Kokrajhar district and Udalguri sub division remained closed and vehicles

were off the road. Most of the government offices virtually remained closed. The bandh had however no impact in the commercial town of Bongaigaon in Kokrajhar district.

The bandh was in protest against the alleged police atrocities on the Bodo people. No untoward incident was reported from any part of the state. The bandh had no impact in the rest of the state.

In defence of NEIGRIHMS

By Dr DM Thappa

My critics are my best friend is the philosophy of the present director of the North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS), Shillong. He has to embrace people of different shades, but not at the cost of maintaining discipline and conduct rules laid by Central Government. Ignorance of these rules and going to media and press by faculty, staff members or students, cannot be ignored by the institute but has to be noted.

Just declaring an institute "an Institute of National Importance (INI)" in parliament, but not making it a fully autonomous institute by an act of parliament, taking out of the purview of Medical Council of India still a far reality. In the last year (June 2017), with the intervention by Hon'ble Chief Minister, Shri Conrad Sangma and Hon'ble Health Minister, Shri A L Hek, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW), Government of Meghalaya, MOHFW, New Delhi took up the discussion on giving full autonomy to this institute. The question asked was which area the institute has achieved "Excellence" as at present all departments have not even set up the postgraduate programmes as there are shortage of faculty in many of these departments.

For postgraduate programme to be established, there are minimum standards and norms of the Medical Council of India which the Institute needs to fulfill. The current faculty members are yet to be given any incentives out of the "Institution of Excellence", and continuation of the Assessment Promotion Scheme from 2014. Promotion through the Assessment Promotion Scheme to the faculty members is yet to happen from 2014, for no fault of theirs. In pay scales, Faculty have parity with AIIMS, New Delhi, but the learning resource allowance has been discontinued from 2013 onwards on the observation of audit. For last 2 years, efforts are on with Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to implement "Assessment Promotion Scheme" for Faculty posts, learning resource allowance at par with AIIMS, New Delhi, and enhanced academic allowance. Under the circumstances, I salute the faculty of NEIGRIHMS who are serving this institute with sincerity and fervor. Certainly, lack of promotion avenues to NEIGRIHMS faculty affects their career progress as well as their morale. Since joining of the Director, interaction is taking place every Saturday interactive programme with each specialty, through hospital council/medical faculty council/interaction with head of departments at regular interval. Time to time special meetings are being arranged with faculty members to sort out various issues related to their department.

Regarding vacation, it is being clarified that even before joining of the present director, the faculty of NEIGRIHMS was taking 39 days vacation in two parts in a flexible way against the norms of any other autonomous institute. On the other hand, Nursing college was strictly following the nine days summer vacation schedule and thirty days winter vacation schedule. To bring uniformity, same Nursing College schedule was put in place as people were taking split vacation like earned leave disrupting the normal routine in busy days when MBBS teaching programmes are being organized and vacation schedule to match with MBBS and Nursing students vacation schedule.

Four postgraduate courses in the discipline of Radiodiagnosis, General Medicine, General Surgery and Anesthesiology were facing recognition problem in April-May 2017. With due interventions, MD Radiodiagnosis got recognition for 5 years in March 2018 for 2 seats per year and MD General Medicine got recognition for 5 years in March 2019 for 2 seats per year. Efforts are on to rejuvenate MS General Surgery and MD Anesthesiology. One additional seat in MD Pathology got recognition in 2018.

Major issue in the General Surgery is lack of one Associate Professor and four Assistant Professors. Some of these posts are reserved for OBC and SC, no faculty member has been selected for last two decades or so in spite of repeated advertisements. This department requires three units with 30 beds each. First unit to be headed by Professor, rest two to be headed at least by Associate Professors. Hence, other super-specialty surgical departments faculty (who are not running MCh programme) were asked to support General Surgery. In the absence faculty and necessary bed strength, how department of General Surgery can achieve magic figure in operative procedures.

Another department facing various issues is Anesthesiology department, which maintains state of art "Intensive care unit". It has requisite faculty to support postgraduate programme, but one of the Associate Professor does not fulfill criteria. At present, just 4 senior residents are working against the sanctioned strength of 12 posts. Gas Manifold (Gas pipe line system) non-existence was another issue pending for last 12 years in this hospital. From August 2018, its installation process had begun and had disrupted some services for short duration of 10-15 days in those areas. Gas Manifold will be soon operational in next 2-3 months. To strengthen operative procedures, eight modular operation theatres proposal are being processed and to strengthen Anesthesia services, proposal for according sanction of creating 15 faculty posts and 30 senior resident is in advanced stage with MOHFW.

The department of Pediatrics is running with half the strength of faculty. Unfortunately, in spite of eight senior resident posts available, none is available

as none applied for these posts as they are in great demand. In the December 2018, ministry had sanctioned 301 posts in nursing. This will help to overcome the shortages of nurses in NEIGRIHMS. These posts will be advertised after code of conduct period for parliamentary elections is over.

MCI cell was created in 2017 to give inputs regarding starting new courses. Necessary infrastructure requirements were put in place and finally in 2018, we applied for starting six new postgraduate courses in the discipline of ENT, Dermatology, Venereology and Leprosy, Forensic Medicine, Ophthalmology, Biochemistry and Pharmacology. The applications for the same were sent to Director General of Health Services for the same in September to December 2019. Assessments were held in December 2018 to March 2019. As a consequence of that letter of permission was obtained from Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in March 2019 for starting new courses in MS ENT (2 seats), MD Dermatology, Venereology and Leprosy (2 seats), Forensic Medicine (3 seats). These PG seats will be filled through NEET PG counseling.

This year NEIGRIHMS has added 9 additional postgraduate seats from 4 departments a major boost to postgraduate programme. In December 2018, Cardiothoracic and vascular surgery (CTVS) department had a meeting with director to start MCh programme in 2019 and put a proposal for the same as they had full compliment of faculty and infrastructure probably the best in whole North East India. But rather, Dr. JP Kalita, Associate Professor of CTVS department put forward his resignation letter which MOHFW has accepted. How Director is thus against the development of super specialty departments?

Administration is open to any suggestion from Faculty of resident doctors and students studying here, for their upliftment and betterment. All the issues related to resident doctors will be looked into and sorted out as per the norms and rules of this institute. Medical fraternity is involved in all the spheres of this institute and working with the cooperation of the all.

In spite of all the efforts, the Director has been targeted by vested interests as only because he wanted to bring discipline and vigilance in the institution. This temple of learning "NEIGRIHMS" has to revered with dedication, director has to act as guardian for students and public to be treated its customers with respect. Affordable health care is the motto of this institute for its patients who are its valuable clients.

NEIGRIHMS is known for affordable healthcare that is being visited on daily basis by more than 2000 patients per day. Pharmacies in the institute are being strengthened. They provide subsidized

drugs, stents, valves, pacemakers, implants etc. If some of these implants are not available, orders can be placed with them, so that same can be made available within 24-48 hours to them.

People can approach AMRIT pharmacy, Life care pharmacy (inside the hospital) and Lucky pharmacy in Public Utility Block (near Bank of Baroda and Post Office).

As per the Central Government directive, it has been instructed that poor patients may be directed to buy their medicines, stents, pacemakers, valves, implants from hospital pharmacies so that they can avoid paying double the price for the same from pharmacies outside the hospital. Ministry wants this information to be widely distributed.

Recently, AMRIT pharmacy at NEIGRIHMS, Shillong has started providing stents at subsidized cost inside the hospital and it is also taking order for providing pacemakers, valves, and implants etc. Any patient having any complaint related these services inside NEIGRIHMS may contact Medical Superintendent (Near OPD entrance) or Vigilance Officer (at First Floor at Pain and Palliative care unit). Governing council agenda was given to the ministry last year but date is still awaited. Two governing members names were recommended by the director last year on ministry request, and approval is still awaited. The director is not vary of facing governing council. Rather he wants to hold the meeting at the earliest so that important issues facing the institute are taken up and direction from its members and president is utilized.

The present institute started working from present campus in Mawdiangiang Shillong from year 2006. From the year 2017, major expansion programme for Nursing College and its hostels for 100 BSc Nursing students and 20 MSc Nursing students, Medical College building for 100 MBBS student admission including Hostels for 600 students, and Internee Hostel, and Regional Cancer Centre with 252 beds, state of art equipments, guest house for patients with 28 rooms. Nursing college with hostels and guesthouse are likely to be completed by April 2019 or so. Other projects are likely to be completed by 2019-year end. The completion of these projects will provide many job opportunities and enhance patient care services.

Let the people guess now, whether institute is on the verge of collapse, withering away or standing up and blooming in spite of various challenges. Northeast India should demand attention of stakeholders and others so that people wishes can be fulfilled. Whether Dr. Thappa stays here or not for long, he will continue to strive his best with dedication, for the overall upliftment of this Premiere Institute and benefit of the patients at large to the best of his abilities.

(This article had been reproduced verbatim)

109 cases were registered till December 2018 against those involved in illegal extraction of coal, since the interdiction by the Hon'ble NGT in 2014, in the whole state of Meghalaya.

Nevertheless, in the interest of all at large, the Director General of Police, Meghalaya has constituted a fact finding committee, where an ADGP rank officer along with three DIGs of the state have been entrusted the task of ascertaining the facts and circumstances regarding the various allegations published from time to time.

Yours etc.,
G. K. Ingrai, MPS AIG (A), Meghalaya Police, Shillong.

Cong Promise on Education Major reforms imperative

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

It is indeed good to hear the just released Congress manifesto promising school education to be made free up to Class XII by amending the Right to Education Act. More so, as reports have surfaced that many poor but deserving students cannot complete high schools as they have to pay fees after Class VIII. This augurs well for the somewhat neglected education sector because the party assured to double allocation in this sector to six per cent of GDP till 2023-24. Another significant aspect of the party's manifesto is the pledge to restore real autonomy in colleges and universities and entrust their regulation, grading and funding to separate organisations.

These reassuring developments come in the midst of widespread reports of lack of quality teaching in schools and colleges as also the lack of initiative of teachers in most of these institutions. Teacher absenteeism accounts for the loss of one quarter of primary school spending. A World Bank report estimated the loss to be a staggering \$2 billion a year in the country, just at the primary level. It needs to be mentioned here that the poor and the impoverished sections suffer the most for such absenteeism in school and colleges as they cannot afford private tuition to compensate the loss of institutional teaching.

One may refer here to a recent study by Niti Aayog and Boston Consulting Group which found that though 100 per cent enrolment in primary schools has been largely met, the problem remains in qualitative improvement. Though India has three times more schools than in our country have less than 50 students and a maximum of two teachers. Around 1.5 crore students study in such unviable schools, as per the study.

The deterioration in quality in publicly-funded institutions, specially in rural and semi-urban areas has been the subject of much discussion but there has been very little intervention to remedy the situation. Not that all teachers lack merit, but the lack of initiative and sometimes the involvement with students are the major reasons. It has been found that as teachers come from relatively well-off backgrounds they cannot communicate effectively and be a friend, philosopher and guide to the poor students, who may need a little more attention.

This point has been reiterated in the latest assessment of how children are faring in schools in rural areas and indicates there has been no improvement in learning outcomes. The picture that emerges from the Annual Status of Education Report, Rural (2018), released in January this year, is one of a moribund system of early schooling in many States, with no remarkable progress from the base year of 2008. Except for a small section at the top of the class, the majority of students have obviously been let down.

It is disturbing that dropout rates increase as children move up. "Around 30 per cent enrolled in Class I graduate from Class XII. Of those who do, the majority don't possess requisite skills to be readily employable" stated the Niti Aayog report.

The other distressing factor is the shortage of 10 lakh teachers and what is more disturbing is the fact that distribution has been found to be uneven with urban schools having surplus teachers. Thus without adequate number of teachers, quality standards cannot improve in any way. The report has thus rightly suggested consolidating several schools within a short distance and some headway

has been made in States such as Rajasthan and Jharkhand.

The lack of teachers should not be allowed to continue. If States do not have budgetary resources to appoint teachers giving them pay scales, the other alternative would be to hire para teachers, as has been done in Bengal and some other States. This would at least generate some employment while at the same time ensure that teaching of children remains unhindered.

Training of teachers in government schools, specially in rural and backward areas, could go a long way in improving performance of teachers. Certain States have already initiated action in this regard. However, it needs to be mentioned that parental support may not be to the desired extent, specially in rural schools as they are mostly uneducated and cannot help in their ward's education.

The obvious question at this juncture is why should children of the poor and the economically weaker sections not get quality education that is given in private schools? The Right to Education Act (RTE) was implemented to ensure that all children are assured of education but certain sections of the population do not have the means to send their wards to private schools. While the government is advertising Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on the occasion of year-long celebration of the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, there is also a necessity to ensure that all children get basic education within a stipulated time frame.

However, though we hear of transformation in education, there is need for schools not just to stick to the formal syllabus but simultaneously train students - say from Class V onwards - on some vocation or skill that could help them earn a living. This has to be seriously considered, keeping in view Gandhiji's concept of nai talim (new education). It is also a fact that unemployment is quite high in the country and before a student reaches Class X or XII, if he or she is well-versed in some trade, there could be an opportunity to earn something and add to family income.

There is need to seriously examine the somewhat outdated syllabus and make it tuned to current needs and demands so that a student after passing Class X, would be able to carve out a career through skills gained during his years in school. Skills' training is thus vital and this should form part of the modified syllabus.

Better education is crucial for narrowing inequality gap as also for the country's long term growth scenario. The story of the demographic dividend can go completely wrong unless we undertake reforms in school education on an urgent footing. While resources are no doubt necessary for upgrading primary education, there is need for sincere monitoring at the district and block levels, which are unfortunately very poor or non-existent. If 100 million children do not learn the basic skills of reading and arithmetic and also gain skills training, it is unlikely that India will grow into a mature economy or a mature democracy.

Importantly, the Congress manifesto has made a big promise. But the question is where the funds would be found to give free education. Plus, ensuring autonomy of institutions is vital, but given past experience political interference defeats the aim. Guess, the Congress will need to cross the bridge when it comes to it. And even if it doesn't, hope has been raised for the others to seriously give it a thought. - -- INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Rebuttal from Meghalaya Police

Editor,
First and foremost, I take this opportunity to praise the fourth pillar of democracy for being active on the core issue of illegal mining and transportation, which has been published in the esteemed daily from time to time, emphasizing on the need to address the ensuing issues post the Hon'ble NGT order prohibiting extraction and transportation of coal. In a vibrant democracy like ours, it is imperative for fourth pillars to keep a balance and disseminate information after

a considerate examination of truth pertinent to any such allegations or information. Therefore, on the basis of the same principle of propagating facts, I am to elucidate on the matter apposite to your column under the caption "Coal mafia resurface" (ST April 5, 2019), where a vigilant NGO on discerning several trucks parking along the by-pass, had lodged an FIR implicating that these trucks were involved in transportation of coal. Subsequent, to receiving this information, a case was registered on the same day vide Umiam PS case No. 22(4)19 u/s 118/34 IPC R/W Sec. 21 MMDR Act and Sec. 15 of EP Act

and investigation to ascertain the facts and circumstances of the case ensued. However, it is worth mentioning, that during the course of investigation it was ascertained that the trucks against which complaints were filed were possessing relevant documents and were transporting clinkers, cement and back load goods.

Further, it is also important to articulate that since there is a No- Entry into Guwahati city starting from Jorabadi from 07:00 am to 08:30 pm, heavy vehicles transporting goods and commodities parked their vehicles along the by-pass awaiting permission to enter

Assam. Supervening this matter was another incident which transpired, when the General Secretary of RBYO, lodged an FIR, incriminating some unknown persons including truck owners for threatening him, as the offence was cognizable as per law, a case vide Umiam PS No. 23(4)19 u/s 506/34 IPC was registered and investigation on the same is still taking place.

I am to also further accentuate, on the exigent fact that the allegations of passivity on the part of Officer-in-Charge is erroneous and misleading, as both the information received were duly registered as cognizable

cases and investigations have already been initiated. It was also alleged that permission had to be obtained from the Superintendent of Police to register the case. This itself is a misnomer, as it was only an intimation to a senior officer and not seeking for permission to register the case. The allegations that trucks passes through police check point without being checked or penalized is imprecise and ambiguous as in Ri-Bhoi District alone a total of 343 cases were registered. To add to this, a total of 1174 cases have been registered till December 2018, against those involved in illegal transportation of coal and

“The one sure way of participating in the process of nation-building is to vote on the election day.”

--- Mohit Chauhan

The Shillong Times

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Delayed Rafale deal

THE Rafale fighter jets case has crossed a hurdle Wednesday when the Supreme Court made it clear the documents leaked from the central government files will not be excluded from consideration. The Modi government took a hit. The court has rejected the government's argument that the leaked documents, "privileged" in nature, posed a threat to national security. Hopefully, the review petitions filed by a legal activist and a set of BJP's own estranged leaders will now carry forward with all the seriousness it deserves.

Notably, the review petitions have surfaced after the apex court rejected a batch of petitions on December 14 last and cleared the procurement of a set of 36 Rafale fighter jets. The review would now go into aspects of pricing of the jets and selection of the Anil Ambani group as the Indian offset partner for Dassault Aviation -- the French manufacturer that entered into the Rafale deal with India. Caught in the web of allegations is also a submission that the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) directly interfered into the making of the deal and interacted with the French agencies, while this should have been the exclusive job of the defence ministry. Leaked records claim to have testified to such "interference." Whether this was an intervention with national interests in mind, or an "interference" to help the Anil Ambani group, was a salient point being raised. The court, in its wisdom, has found it necessary to accept the review petitions though it had in its December order made it clear there was no reason to doubt the decision-making process or ordering a cancellation of the contract.

It is important that the case is taken to its logical conclusion without further loss of time. Notably, the Rafale deal was originally signed by the UPA II government in the beginning of 2012 for delivery of a set of 126 fighter jets, but procedural and other contentious issues led to delays and the Modi government reworked the agreement and limited purchases to 36, to start with. Eight years have passed and India is still fighting cases and not seeing delivery of the fighter jets. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has gone on record to state that India's positioning vis-a-vis its neighbours -- read China and Pakistan -- would have been different if the Rafale jets were in the possession of the Indian Air Force. These being critical times, it is hoped that the apex court would study related matters and arrive at a final judgement at the earliest. Time is of the essence.

TO THE EDITOR

NEIGRIHMS goings-on

Editor,
This is with reference to the article "NEIGRIHMS: the withering away of a premier health and research Institute" by Patricia Mukhim, (ST April 5, 2019). In the article Kong Patricia had raised some very pertinent issues relating to the crisis faced by NEIGRIHMS especially the current stand-off between the Resident Doctors of the institute and its Director Dr D M Thappa. I am a Governing Council member of NEIGRIHMS and I wish here to make some clarifications over some of the remarks made in the above article.

Firstly I would like to clarify that the members of the Governing Council namely Kong Wansuk Syiem, Anil Pradhan and myself have not, as alleged, remained blind nor indifferent to the ongoing crisis within NEIGRIHMS. Actually we had taken note of it when it first came to our notice a year ago and had taken positive steps, vide our letter of 11th May 2018, to appraise and caution the Union Minister Health and Family Welfare and the Secretary Health and Family Welfare, Govt of India with copy to the Minister Health, Govt of Meghalaya, of the brewing

tensions within NEIGRIHMS with a request that remedial steps be initiated to resolve the problem.

Among the many points raised were (a) the absence of Governing Council meetings since 2015 and the urgent need for the same to address the disturbing issues of the institute (b) the apparent lack of administrative acumen and understanding in the dealings of the incumbent Director towards his staff which appears to be at the root of the problem (b) apparent lack of sensitivity by NEIGRIHMS top management towards simple basic human needs of faculty and staff and last but not least that all the above have contributed towards a vicious atmosphere within the working ambience of the institute and that Government intervention into the matter is urgently called for.

Unfortunately this note of caution of the Governing Council members from the region was met with a resounding silence from the Central Government. No remedial steps were taken to contain the rot that was tearing NEIGRIHMS apart. The rest is history and the crisis has only worsened. NEIGRIHMS dirty linen continues to be washed in public; throes of internal

In this theekhamasaledar electioneering season our netagan seem to have taken loads of tips from Bollywood and produced their own version of putrid entertainment: under-the-belt speeches, freebies and more giveaways! Spiced with the right caste and communal combinations! Swaying to the heady tinkle of money, cheap thrills and seetees they gleefully hope this would bring them political tript!

Welcome Election 2019 wherein immorality is the flavour of the season. From desh bhaktis to desh drohis. The ball was set rolling by Modi who called the Congress and everyone questioning the Balakot strikes as "Spokespersons of Pakistan," which was countered with "Chowkidar chor hai."

Undeniably, in a milieu where politics has degenerated to a euphemism for abuse and maliciousness, the Election Commission's (EC) Model Code of Conduct (MCC) has become the most potent missile in the arsenal of political rivals and jaani dushman. With none caring a damn for its seven Dos and Don'ts about general conduct, meetings, processions, polling day, polling booth observers and the Party in power.

After all, how would their art of double-speak succeed if the preachers of morality were to start practicing it? Polls mean scoring brownie points against rivals, forget the Commission reading the riot act under the MCC. Ends matter not the means.

The culprits? All Parties. UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has got into the EC's crosshairs by calling India's Armed Forces as "Modi ki sena". The EC has taken him to task and "advised he be more careful" as candidates and campaigners are barred from "any political propaganda involving activities of defence forces"

The next Modi bhakt is Rajasthan Governor and former UP Chief Minister Kalyan Singh who asserted, "We are workers of BJP....we definitely want the BJP to win. For the sake of the country and society everyone wants that Modi ji should become PM once more," conveniently forgetting that he adorns a Con-

conflict continue to shake the hospital and the apathy of the Central Government towards the ills of the hospital continues unabated. For the record, the Council members have sent another letter of caution to the Central Govt with the hope that this time someone will listen.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah
Member Governing Council NEIGRIHMS

No one is unintelligent

Editor,
The letter by Sailil Gewali "Do not lay the country to waste" (ST April 8, 2019) reeks of a bias towards BJP and contempt for the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi who is being termed as unintelligent.. It has come in the nick of time. One thing I fail to agree is about the foreign awards given to our Prime Minister. Let us realise one fact that we the people of India are closer than those award giving countries. The award given by the people of India would be known only on the 23rd May 2019. How many of them are in line with the writer's view and how many are not, will be known only then. One thing I would like

Code of 'misconduct'

Toothless EC, netas merry

By Poonam I Kaushish

stitutional apolitical position. Obviously, the EC complained to President Kovind seeking action against Singh, who has forwarded it to the Home Ministry. A decision is awaited.

BSP Mayawati 'killed' both Modi and Congress with one stone by likening demonitisation to Emergency with NaMo on his way out. A BJP leader hit back, "Mayawati khud roz facial karwati hain....unke baal paka hua hai aur rangeen karwake ke aaj bhi apne ap ko Mayawati jawan saabit karti hain. 60 varsh umar ho gayi lekin sab baal kaale hain." Added SP's Akhilesh Yadav for good measure, "Is there any chowkidar to check the theft in the Rafale deal?"

The EC has expressed its "displeasure" to NITI Ayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar

are for the job.

However, all is not lost. Though the model code puts a moral obligation on contestants to make elections free and fair, most of its stipulations do fall under various laws, thus enabling the EC to order filing of cases against violators, including initiating criminal cases under the Indian Penal Code.

Asserted a former Commissioner, "Filing an FIR, particularly against a senior leader during elections, in itself becomes a huge embarrassment to his Party. It presents the neta as ethically wrong to voters. That is the reason most leaders castigated for breaking the MCC don't usually repeat their mistake."

Also, many netas favour making the MCC legally tenable as it clears them of

After all, how would their art of double-speak succeed if the preachers of morality were to start practicing it?

of speaking like a BJP spokesperson dismissing Congress's NYAY scheme by saying the Party can "say and do anything to win elections".

With these comments going viral on social and digital media it raises a moot point: Why shouldn't there be immediate action, considering there is no point acting against complaints post polls? Moreover, going by the low conviction rate, are MCC cases purely symbolic? Would cases stemming from such FIRs gain more strength if the Code was legal? Would it justify giving statutory status to all MCC stipulations as suggested by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice in 2013?

Experts aver following the model code purely hinges on morality, not fear of law. Since poll campaigns are turning uglier, more personal and combative, the moral obligation entailed in the MCC could really bear down heavily on candidates at a time when they are trying to show voters how upright and competent they

morality during elections. When the EC issues show cause notice to a candidate, he has to respond within 48 hours. This is a deterrent unlike a case against a candidate in court which might linger, giving him the benefit of doubt. Also, this prevents one from seeing the Code as only voluntary, a reason why the 2013 Parliamentary Standing Committee suggested the remaining stipulations be accorded statutory backing.

Alas, it is not this election alone, the story is the same every election wherein the EC is grappling with the same questions. And by the time the Commission arrives at an answer, votes would have been cast. So what happens to violations of the MCC? Zilch. They die a natural death.

Sadly, the truth is that the Code is only a voluntary compact arrived between the EC and Parties and has no statutory binding. With Parties and candidates wantonly violating it, the Commission is powerless. Asserted a senior official, "The Code lacks legal sanction and is in-

tended to work as a moral policeman to ensure free and fair elections. We can only freeze a Party's election symbol or derecognize it as a national Party. Nothing more, nothing less." In other words one can merily violate the Code wantonly and yet get elected to the Lok Sabha and Assemblies.

Clearly, the time has come to take a good fresh look at the Code of Conduct and recast it. Importantly, there is urgent need to convert the Code into a law with the Commission having the power to take punitive actions. As another EC official confessed, "Presently our power is restricted to poll violations by Parties and cannot always be used. The Commission cannot withdraw the symbol every time."

"On individual candidates who violate the Code, the Commission could think of imposition of monetary penalty, disqualification and in an extreme case countermanding the election. Unacceptable behaviour by our netagan should be adversely publicized and the Government and Parties should publicly reprimand their candidate. But first we have to give more teeth to the Commission. Notwithstanding, that the Code might never become law as there are too many political interests aligned against it."

It is simply stupid to lament about the falling standards of morality in politics in these bad times. At the end of the day, it matters little who wins the elections as we the people are the ultimate losers. As the system, Government, politicians and politics, everything is game to deprive the aam janata of a better life.

As India readies to vote we must not allow ourselves to be taken for granted any more. We must demand that electoral reforms be implemented to make our democracy truly representative. Stop voting for the shameless, self-serving netas who put a premium on immorality. Will licentiousness be the bedrock of India's democracy? Can a nation be bare and bereft of all sense of morality? And, for how long? Think. --- INFA

same implemented if it comes to power. This is primarily with an eye for votes (in West Bengal, and some pockets in the North East parts of the country), and against the will of the people of Assam and the North Eastern region. What is even more perturbing is that the AGP, the regional party, that had severed its ties with BJP on this issue, has once again become a pre-poll partner of the ruling alliance. Post-poll, AGP can never say that it was not on the same page with BJP, as BJP's election manifesto clearly states its position.

BJP has once again proved that it is against the wishes of the public in general, and the Party would exploit the people of Assam and the North East to its own advantage. All like-minded pressure groups who had protested against the passing of CAB in Parliament, are now absolutely right in asking the electorate to vote against the Bill. The AASU, NESO, KMSS, etc should step up the pressure so that the nefarious designs of the BJP are defeated at all costs.

Yours etc.,
A Bhuyan,
Via email

BJP, AGP, & CAB

Editor,
It is very disturbing to know that BJP has once again reiterated its stand on Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), and is hell bent on reintroducing the Bill in Parliament and getting the

Pervasive insecurity

Will next govt alter situation?

By Dr Oishee Mukherjee

The ongoing debate about present-day insecurity that we are witnessing in society is growing all the more with elections underway. Whoever may emerge the winner, will the sense of fear and uncertainty disappear is a nagging question. Speaking against the authorities or the party in power is not largely not being tolerated as politicians have become narrow minded and are not willing to accept dissent. Though they talk of ideals and the country being the world's largest democracy, they are literally unaware of what really democracy stands for and the values associated with it as enunciated by its proponents.

Another symptom that is being manifest in the country is the centralisation of power. This is not just within the government -- be it Central or State -- but also in most political parties. The impression going is party members or even ministers are not allowed to speak their minds and only one or two persons air the views. This trend has become manifest across the nation, while it is no secret that at the Centre the ruling party has taken control even of academic bodies, universities and autonomous institutions. According to sociologists, such situations lead to a kind of neurosis where people become nervous and edgy and they tend to blame others for things beyond their control. Similarly, sociologists and psychologists point out that individuals want to enjoy power and authority and are unwilling to trust many persons except their chosen few. Constantly suffering from fear psychosis, they become intolerant even when decisions taken by them backfires and are not accepted.

Obviously, these powerful patriarchs always like to be praised and cannot digest dissent. Thus it is quite natural that there is a robust and healthy democracy is under threat in the nation but also within political parties. Whether it is Narendra Modi or Mamata Banerjee or Mayawati -- or in the past, late Jaylalitha -- all have been found autocratic in their functioning and are averse to dissenting opinion, even if these are constructive and judicious. It may not be out of place to consider that women political leaders, at the helm of affairs, have been found to be more autocratic and centralised in their decision-making process.

However, the trend is not just limited to India but has become a common feature in most parts of the world given the rise in right-wing politics, though the degree differs from country-wise. It is generally observed that in countries which are marked by inequality, poverty and low level of education levels are low, there is a tendency for the regime to be autocratic. One is inclined here to refer to a recent order of the Delhi High Court which, while restoring to an Indian-American doctor his Overseas Citizen of India card, which had been cancelled following allegations he was preaching Christianity and carrying out conversions, came down heavily on the government. Given the doctor's plea that his stated purpose was to provide medical service in Bihar's Raxaul, the Court ticked off the Government, which claimed the doctor was working against the sovereignty and integrity of the Country. Justice Vibhu Bakhru observed: "It has perhaps escaped their attention that India is a secular country..."

While the Modi government is accused of exceeding all norms in violating individual's right to free living and with dignity, the future does not augur well. Even if in these General elections, there is a coalition government at the Centre, it is hard

to believe that it would restore security and freedom in society. Most of the regional leaders too are not much tolerant and, as such, they may not be either.

The present trends of insecurity are further compounded by rising unemployment and political pressure at every step. The youth, even the educated ones, are way laid into activities under the patronage of local goons which help them extract money and earn a living. The law and order situation, business and other spheres all become part of the pervasive rot. This has led to widespread corruption and misuse of power at every level. It is indeed distressing that very few people protest against corrupt practices such as from getting admission to hospitals, schools to getting the minimum support price.

Apart from this the police machinery appears to have become a pawn of the ruling party, taking orders from their leaders. The entire system, many feel is being ruled by unhealthy individuals who become part and parcel of this unethical game. Small traders and business people are the worst sufferers as they end up having to pay up as per calculations of local leaders and their representatives, when demanded. Cases of local police looking the other way are not few.

Sometimes ordinary citizens are harassed and may face false charges, possibly because they may have gone against the ruling party line. Similarly, the rich and the powerful as also politicians owing allegiance to some other party are now increasingly being reportedly harassed by the Income Tax department and Enforcement Directorate to exert pressure to toe line or clamp down.

With quality education not reaching the masses, they remain ignorant about their rights and are not in a position to challenge the political and economic order. Moreover, the clamour to respect religion and the firm impression that the Centre is concerned with the Hindu majority, half educated people get swayed and start to believe that the minority community, particularly Muslims are invaders and destructors, as being prompted by the BJP. Meeting the essentials of life like better health facility or education in villages no longer remains a priority, which is instead overtaken by the zest to have the Ram mandir constructed.

It is indeed distressing that society today has made life insecure for the common man. He/she lives in a state of fear and insecurity as law-abiding citizens as they have no other alternative. Plus, on the one hand, big statuses are being constructed and Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary is being celebrated with leaders talking about his life and mission, on the other, they are violating the basic principles of equality and justice. Can we not say that right to life is being violated at every step by the government? While the Modi government has exceeded in its intolerance, the future does not appear quite encouraging. Though the possibility of the regional parties combine coming to power appears bleak, the situation a number of analysts fear may turn out disastrous if the NDA is re-elected and continues with its present policies. However, another set feels that the aggressive Hindutva and the pro-business approach of the NDA may change as it would eventually have to focus on economic regeneration. How much individual rights, specially of those belonging to the poor and weaker sections, would be upheld remains to be seen. ---INFA

“Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

--- Barack Obama

The Shillong Times

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In Meghalaya the die is cast

MEGHALAYA has voted for its two MPs. The jury of course is still out on who, among the contenders will win the race. People have danced to the tune of democracy. The Election Commission of India has done its job commendably surpassing past efforts and actually turning the phrase “No voter will be left behind,” a reality, unless voters themselves consciously decide to abstain from voting. At the national level, Prime Minister Modi's biopic meant to emotionally influence gullible voters has been kept on hold by the Election Commission of India (ECI), based on a petition from retired civil servants. This time the State Chief Electoral Officer, FR Kharkongor has pulled all the stops to enable physically disabled voters and the elderly to cast their votes without hassle. Creches for babies have been organised to enable mothers to vote with a carefree mind. Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, and NSS volunteers were seen assisting voters and volunteering happily in all these activities.

As always, women voters seem to have surpassed men. At the IIM Shillong polling station, the women's queue was at least one kilometre long in the morning hours whereas the male line had two or three in the line-up. Women perhaps vote with hope for a better future for themselves and the younger generation. No wonder male candidates are hugely dependent on women canvassers and volunteers, without whose help and support, they cannot win elections. Women show a remarkable sense of responsibility when it comes to casting their votes. While the final voting figures will emerge quite late on Thursday, as of 5 pm, the voting percentage of Shillong was 63.56% while Tura polled 75.6%. Clearly, despite the exhortation by the Election Commission there are a substantial number in Shillong Parliamentary Constituency that did not cast their votes. What was predicted all along about voters apathy has turned out correct. People have no emotional attachment to the idea of voting because they think their interface with the MP is minimal. As always, the Assembly elections are always more exciting because the MLA is the go-to person for all our public and personal needs. The MP is a someone you see once in a while; his contribution to the State is minimal. Also there is hardly any direct contact between the MP and the electorate. Time was when stalwarts like GG Swell and Hoover Hynniewta in Khasi Hills and PA Sangma in Garo Hills could connect to people because they had the stature of national leaders. It's been a while now since Meghalaya produced leaders of such distinction.

Issues don't really matter in elections

So people have voted and they hope

By Patricia Mukhim

ranking intellect high above emotions. Pointing out to the American election that voted Trump, as a striking example Westen says, “It is puzzling that so many voters elect Republican candidates who then enact laws that truly benefit only a tiny percentage of the country's wealthiest elite, while bringing about disastrous economic problems for the vast majority of Republican voters. One answer to this enigma seems to be the emotionally determined, irrational attitudes voters have to economic issues.

The only purpose for writing this article is because elections are the current topic of discussion and will be until May 23 when we will know who the best dancer in this Dance of Democracy is. But one thing is for sure. Candidates are definitely not elected because of their virtuosity; their erudition and their ability to deliver development. Increasingly we find that candidates that try to address issues which benefit the larger population nearly always lose the next election. Those that serve the personal needs of their constituents win regularly and are called good constituency managers. Unfortunately the thinking class indulge in the original sin of believing that elections are won or lost on issues. Look at the BJP's manifesto this time. It's bland and inspires no confidence. It promises little and will try and ride the waves of nationalism as opposed to a promise - all manifesto of the Congress Party.

Perhaps the BJP has done its homework and is wary of tall promises lest they come to haunt it in the next election. What the BJP promised in 2014 remains vacuous. Perhaps that is what also pushes the BJP on a dogged pursuit of a strident Hindutva agenda and now a nationalistic fervour that threatens to push those that do not subscribe to hardcore masochistic militarism into a corner to be labelled as anti-national and even pro-Pakistani. It does not have to be this way does it? When our choices and our personal and public expressions are posited as binaries much like the favourite Bush junior's phrase after 9/11 - ‘those who are not with us are against us,’ then the nation stands polarised.

But the BJP knows its constituents. Many of them are parroting the phrase,

“Nation First.” National pride is today a platform that the BJP is riding on. Young Indians are made to feel a sense of pride in their nation. And why not? That is a necessary emotion. We cannot be deprecating India at every given platform, but, neither should we be forced to wear our nationalism/ patriotism on our sleeves. Also the BJP has a huge chunk of ideological fans who will continue to bat for the Party come what may. They will deflect all and any criticism against the Party and point to the response of the Modi-led NDA Government to the continued needling by Pakistan and its subversive warfare on India. Many even among the thinking class believe that India is becoming a world power by putting Pakistan in its place through the Balakot strike and the recent anti-satellite (ASAT) launch. Human development and the unemployment crisis seem to have receded to the background. Even the alleged scam in the Rafale aircraft deal seems to have run its course.

Closer home, sitting MP, Vincent Pala has turned the electoral debate into a laundry list of achievements in the past ten years. As alleged by a letter writer in this paper, he even claimed credit for projects that were pursued with singular zeal by the state government. To take up development projects for Meghalaya is what Mr Pala is elected for and also why he is paid a salary, no matter how modest when compared to his private earnings. An MP has obligations to the people and the state and in pursuing that agenda he does no one any favour. Only when an MP goes out of the way to push a Private Member's Bill or is part of the NE MP's Forum to take up issues that affect the region as a whole, can he actually claim credit to have gone beyond the call of duty. I cannot recall any such issue.

The last time when the Ksan Mine incident happened, some of us tweeted that Mr Pala should have raised the issue in Parliament about the perfunctory rescue operations and weak-kneed response from the state government. We expected him to draw national attention to the poorly executed rescue operations by forcing the central government to put together a well co-ordinated

team comprising the army, navy and air force as well as companies like Kirloskar Brothers that have the capacity to supply the pumps for dewatering the mines and the National Institute of Hydrology for comprehensive hydrological mapping of the mines. In fact Mr Pala had himself stated that dewatering the mines is a technique well known to the mine owners but he never attempted to put together such an action plan. And Mr Pala did push in a Private Member's Bill but that was only to appease the mine owners. He pleaded in Parliament that rat-hole mining be regularised and the ban on mining be lifted. This is an utterly selfish agenda, not expected of an MP representing the entire Shillong parliamentary constituency and not just a few hundred mine owners. If voters were to think a little more intensely on these points, they might not be inclined to vote Mr Pala for a third term.

Coming to Mr Pala's closest adversary Dr Jemino Mawthoh, the feeling among a section of voters is that the stand of the UDP which is a part of the NPP-led MDA Government is ambiguous and misleading. The CAB has exposed the dichotomies among the partners of the ruling MDA government including the NPP. People wonder what seating arrangement will be made for Dr Mawthoh in Parliament, as an Independent MP. Parliament is all about lobbying. Independent MPs will have a tough time lobbying in a House of 543 elected members. In the Tura seat where the NPP and Congress are vying for the seat, the NPP is a constituent of the BJP so Agatha Sangma at least has a lobby group behind her but whether she is able to actually lobby for anything is the question. She was tried and tested and found wanting. Her rival Dr Mukul Sangma has the Congress Party to back him in the House and he can be expected to raise his voice in Parliament should the Congress be in the Opposition and to raise the pitch for the holistic development of the State of Meghalaya.

But if as stated by Drew Westen voters are led by emotions so the virtues of the candidate are of no consequence. The winner will ultimately be a tear jerker - one adept at emotional blackmailing. Other things don't really matter.

Both ethnicity and religion polarise Assam

BJP and Congress spat over citizenship amendment bill

By Ashis Biswas

With the first phase of Lok Sabha Elections 2019 scheduled on April 11, the ethnically diverse electorate in Assam remains more sharply polarised than ever before. Once more, the issue of peoples' empowerment based on religious/linguistic identities of the voters concerned, will prove decisive in making their political choices, in India's Northeast.

Identity assertion in Assam in NE states has always been a sensitive exercise. But on the whole, political parties as well as common people of the state deserve much credit for maintaining peace and harmony, generally speaking. However, this time the upgrading of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) is taking place at the same time as the general elections, generating fresh to administrative complexities and political tensions.

To give only one instance of how wires are getting crossed within the already overworked administration: it appears that two persons, both residents of Morigaon district, should be able to cast their votes in 2019. Their names figure in the revised voters' list, no problems there.

But there is a big problem elsewhere: Authorities of the Second Foreigners' Tribunal have in both cases declared them as ‘foreigners’, after checking their documents. They are Zainal Abedin, husband of Anwara Begum, with two daughters and one son; all have been declared as foreigners. The other is Rafiqul Islam of the same district. Both men appealed in the High court and lost. They are continuing their legal battle, but their status remains unchanged!

The Supreme Court in such cases has ordered that the right to vote cannot be denied, obviously assuming that the matter will eventually get sorted out. This applies to people left out of the upgraded NRC lists as well. But at a politically sensitive time like the elections, such instances have the potential to make things unnecessarily difficult and lead to frayed tempers on a community basis. The fact that both men are Muslims does not help matters at all.

There have been many complaints filed by both Hindus and Muslims against what they felt was the arbitrary exercise of their powers by some NRC officials. At least 10 persons, mostly in the Barak valley, have committed suicide over their failure to convince officialdom that they were not foreigners, rightly or wrongly.

What has been glossed over is the kind of harassment, mental tensions and expenditure the common man has to face in proving his citizenship--assuming a person is not a foreigner as defined by the law.

There can be no denying that for most barely literate, poor citizens living in interior villages in Assam for generations, meeting every demand made by NRC officials for official documents etc, can prove a near impossible task. It is generally conceded that any misapplication of justice can result in ruining the lives of families as well as individuals. This is not to blame the NRC authorities either, as they have to take hard decisions, working under great pressure and the rules prescribed for them. On the other hand, as civil rights

campaigners suggest, there should also be sufficient legal safeguards and provisions to ensure that the administration suitably compensates anyone unfairly harassed and hounded.

With the pre-poll campaign in full swing in Assam, such issues have taken a backseat for now. Eager to score debating points and win as many seats as possible in these high stakes elections, both national parties the Indian National Congress(INC) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), are back to doing what they do best anyway--blaming each other!

It is not as though the BJP is the only party to leave most voters in Assam and the other states in the Northeast badly confused and divided on the critical issue of future citizenship and stability. The INC is no different. Worse, the parties themselves are divided on the issue.

While Mr. Amit Shah, BJP President has made it amply clear that it will re-introduce the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) in Parliament again, Mr. Kiren Rijiju Union MoS Home has clarified for local consumption that its provisions will not apply to the NE region. THE CAB assures citizenship status to people of Indian origin displaced or driven out of countries like Pakistan Afghanistan or Bangladesh, provided they are Hindus, Parsis, Christians, Buddhists or Jains, etc. Parties with a sizable Muslim vote bank, such as the INC the Trinamool Congress etc, have strongly opposed the CAB for what they consider its communal, anti-Muslim approach.

The confusion -- until the BJP released its poll manifesto, it did not officially endorse Rijiju's stand -- left most major ethnic and tribal groups, as well as the Assamiyas, restive about their future. Most political parties and major ethnic groups have reiterated their fears of being swamped in their homeland again in fresh statements today, led by Samujjal Bhattacharya of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), even after the BJP has clarified its stand at the central level, endorsing Rijiju's stand.

The BJP also has exposed what it calls the INC's duplicity over the CAB. Assam BJP leaders Mr Ramen Deka MP and former State Minister Kabindra Purakayastha have alleged that the INC had earlier supported the idea of citizenship for Bengali Hindus coming over from Bangladesh. Mr. Purakayastha accused the Congress Party's of opportunism as the party did not clarify its stand on Bengali Hindus living in the NE.

Mr. Deka went further and gave details to the Assamiya media. He claimed possession of documents sent by Assam Government during the tenure of Mr. Tarun Gogoi as the Chief Minister, to the UPA and NDA Governments in Delhi. In memos dated April 20, 2012, July 16, 2014, June 1, 2015 and again later in 2015, the Assam Government had sent proposals to confer a citizenship status for the Bengali Hindus living in the state. Both accused the Congress of pandering to Muslim sentiments and keeping their vote bank politics alive, by maintaining an opportunistic silence on the status of Bengali Hindus now. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Might I be denied voting?

Editor,
Election to the next Lok Sabha in our State is scheduled for the 11th April next. Co-incidentally just over a month back, polls to the KHADC and JHADC were jointly conducted on February 28, 2019. And as a responsible citizen, I had duly cast my vote to elect a member of my respective constituency to the District Council.

However, the indelible ink-mark pasted on my left index finger by the polling Officer on that date in question is still noticeable. And on account of this visibility, I am afraid that on that fateful day my right to vote could be barred by the Election officials owing to the fading but recognizable ink-mark on my finger which is still sticking out as if I'm playing like an ill-at-ease host to an unwanted guest. In view of this worrisome nagging fact, I, therefore,

appeal to the incumbent Chief Election Officer of Meghalaya to ensure that I, or perhaps others like me, am not denied of my inalienable right of exercising a franchise on April 11th, 2019 or, much less, accused of being an impostor either!

Yours etc.,
Jerome K. Diengdoh,
Shillong-2

Ksan tragedy a slur on Meghalaya

Editor,
The Ksan mining tragedy in East Jaintia Hills on December 13, 2018 has exposed the reality of rat hole mining; how dangerous it is and how much it affects the life of the poor who enter those death traps. But why is it that coal owners still employ people to dig out coal despite the danger that they know these labourers face? Most of the time the

answer is, "because coal mining is their only livelihood." Every mine owner says this and makes it appear that hundreds and thousands of people depend on this inhuman mode of mining coal. These owners need to understand that earning money at the cost of endangering lives is a violation of human rights. The owners are already financially well established in their lives so starting a new business should not be much of a problem. They must realize that coal should not be their only means of earning money.

The owners must realize that this form mining is not only illegal but dangerous to the environment and to the lives of people as well. The other problem with rat hole mining is that these labourers do not know most of their rights and are easily exploited by their owners. They work without proper safeguards and no medical facilities. They are not made aware on what to do during an

emergency. Most of the owners are also responsible for employing persons without a proper background check which is again an illegal act and an offence.

The incident at Ksan has brought shame upon the owners and the people and Government of Meghalaya as a whole. The Government should be strict to the extent that no such incident should ever happen again otherwise it won't be long before the National Green Tribunal (NGT) imposes another 100 crore fine on the state Government.

Yours etc.,
Reakor Shisha
Kharkrang,
Shillong - 9

Time to stop ghost schools in Meghalaya

Editor,
It is not only unfortunate but also frightening to

of these officers or that they are prevented by powerful people in government and politics not to touch these schools. It is high time that these types of schools are closed down and those who perpetrate this evil deed should be put behind bars. I appeal to the Education Minister, Lakhmen Rymbui, to make a serious and time-bound enquiry into such schools throughout the state and if such schools are found they should be shut down for good and the wrong doers be punished according to law. They should also be made to refund whatever grants that they have drawn from Government so far.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
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.

“Never tell the truth to people who are not worthy of it.”

--- Mark Twain

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Imran on Kashmir

PAKISTAN'S Prime Minister Imran Khan has stirred a hornet's nest, and understandably so. His take at the doorsteps of parliamentary elections in India – that a return of PM Modi and his BJP is the best bet for solving the vexed Kashmir issue – might or might not help the saffron party win more votes. But, it's safe to assume that Khan made the statement after a down-to-earth assessment of the present situations in the subcontinent. For one thing, the Pathan that he's, it is more likely he's brutally frank; something hills people are known for. He based his proposition on the ground that the rival Congress party will be too scared to take meaningful steps to solve the Kashmir crisis, while the rightists carried with them more strength to take decisions.

Kashmir remains a festering wound for seven decades, and even UN interventions had not helped settle matters. Fact is also that Kashmir is being used by the Pakistani military as a cover to settle scores with India after its defeat in the war in East Pakistan against the civil society offensives there in the 1970s; time when India under Indira Gandhi ably backed the Bengali-speaking population there. The ISI's stated objective is to inflict a thousand wounds on India. Yet, Imran Khan says it's time to change things for the better and that he has the army's support to put down the militant-terrorist groups there. Pakistan itself is at the receiving end of terrorism from home-grown fighters as well as those nurtured in Afghanistan's soil. The context is important. While the Pakistani establishment keeps saying the February 26 bombing did no harm other than for the loss of some pine trees, there's more to it. For one, the long pause Pakistan took to take a media-diplomats team to the supposed spot meant it had things to hide. Even granted that nothing of the sort that India claimed had happened there, the IAF reaching unchallenged up to 80km inside the Pakistani territory, not far from the military headquarters, spoke volumes about the embarrassment and loss of security comfort Pakistan suffered. The Pakistani airports still remain closed after the abrupt shutdown since February 26, fearing more of IAF offensives. This meant life in Pakistan remains largely unsettled since the day Balakot happened. Pakistan paid a big price for what happened in Pulwama. So, it is likely the Islamic nation is forced to have a re-thinking on its stands vis-a-vis Kashmir.

Indian air today is filled with politics of elections. Political discourse dominating all forms of private and public communication, there is need for maintaining a certain standard of quality in contents and decency and decorum in rendering. Unfortunately, the danger of the shallow nature of the discourse tends to override real and serious issues with free use of abusive language of communication. As a result, ideological differences are converted into group wars and personality clashes.

Political speech, formally delivered from a platform or issued as statements through various media, is a principal form of establishing political relations. Speeches constitute the contacts between parties and between politicians and citizens.

Speech-making and speech-writing are important tasks in the practice of politics as a career. There is no good speech without a good speech-writer whether both are handled by the same person or by different persons. Rhetoric matters immensely in politics particularly in election campaigns. It is an art of persuasion based on emotional appeal.

But, rhetoric cannot come without fund of information and convincing contents. A good speaker or a good writer is basically one with sound knowledge of the subject matter. Many political parties have created the post of propagandists, some of whom like Jayalalitha grew up very fast in politics. In these days of TV debates, parties have their spokespersons to explain, defend, and promote their party stand on various issues. Good spokespersons are rewarded in all parties which is evidence of the immense importance of professional political discourse bridging people and politicians.

From the classical oratory of Roman era to contemporary election speeches, the speakers and speech-writers have played a major role to link political leaders and the public.

In the multi-lingual India, the impact of speeches depends much on the ability of translators also. Political discourse in India

Political Discourse Need for quality control

By Dr.S.Saraswathi

is facing today two kinds of obstacles – one is the language problem of the speaker to communicate and interact directly with the audience, and the other, the degeneration of the vocabulary of political language to ridicule opponents in a theatrical style to retain audience interest.

Who is “chor” (thief) or who is “buffoon” are not the questions to be decided in this election. There are other forums for that. Campaigns are reduced to fancy dress competitions and slogans are raised to malign opponents. Promises are liberally extended to woo the voters.

The language of political discourse through any media matters a lot. Populist rhetoric has become the style of electoral campaigning. A new form of communication has developed for electioneering in all parties as it is a political competition to be fought on equal level with similar equipments and equal vigour.

The debate between US presidential candidates Kennedy and Nixon in 1960 is cited in textbooks as the start of effective television-age election campaigning. Visual image was believed to have an impact on the audience for good or bad. Hence, the performers are likely to be self-conscious throughout their performance. However, within a few years, serious issues began to lose their importance yielding place to emotional appeals in all democracies. Hence, visits to places of worship, exhibiting sympathy to victims of natural disasters, and taking food with slum dwellers are believed to have more political impact than offers of long-term relief measures and welfare schemes.

Surcharged emotions have resulted in personal attacks including name calling, mixing up public issues with private life to extremely low levels, and even making baseless allegations. Instead of elevating the level of political discussions so as to educate the masses to become useful participants

in the political process, the discourses many a times do just the opposite.

Resulting coarseness of political discourses has affected the culture of electoral campaigning in 2019 to an extent unknown in the past. India has fallen to the growing global trend of “vituperative rancour” in political discourse and is rapidly taking a lead. Open messages that some particular people should be defeated in the election by any means have become commonly circulated advice. Negativism is the unifying factor in many places and it breeds hatred. Intolerance of opponents is the central feature of inter-party relationships between non-allies.

A new profession of campaign organizers and media managers has come up. Acclaimed expert campaign consultants are in great demand. Highly educated spokespersons are trained with necessary inputs by different parties to handle media discourses, platform speeches, and press briefings.

The purpose of political discourse during election time is in theory related to aid and advise the voters to choose their candidates. In concrete situations, it means clarifying citizens' understanding of political issues, party positions, etc., promoting citizens' participation in the political process, helping them to reach sound judgement between parties and candidates.

These functions can be carried out only if political discourses are conducted in an orderly manner and the participants take part with adequate and authentic information. Direct one-to-one debates between principal contenders to power are not in practice in India. Even the Lok Sabha – the forum for debates – is not fully utilised for this purpose and often converted as protest platform. Challenges are voiced for debates by leaders, but never carried out.

After years of resistance, UK introduced the practice of direct debates in 2010. When first mooted in 1964, then PM Douglas-Home dismissed it saying: “You will get the best actor as leader of the country, and the actor will be prompted

by script writer”.

The Election Commission is the sole authority to make political parties comply with the basic rules of dialogue and lecture and adhere to the moral code of conduct and engage in ethical politics. For those fighting solely for power and positions, ethics is a stumbling block.

True, politics has always been personal, passionate, and contentious from the days of legends in the East and the West. Be it Mahabharata or 2019 Lok Sabha election, personalities are targets of political attack with or without basis.

The concept of “alien” is commonly used in political discourses in India today with reference to candidates and voters making a mockery of the fundamental right of all citizens to move throughout the country without any restriction. Central authority is resented by some regional parties.

The net result is replacement of the coveted “cooperative federalism” with a spirit of absolute independence fostered by rhetoric in State languages to the amusement of local audience mistaking parochial outbursts as manifestation of self-respect.

A prominent feature of political discourse in India today is the polarisation of positions. Every issue is dividing people sharply in two camps, but still there is no bi-polar contest.

The degeneration of political discourse must be immediately corrected wherever it curbs nationalism, constitutionality, orderliness, and basic ethics. No need to mention that care must be taken to safeguard rights and freedoms granted under the Constitution. As Dr. Ambedkar observed, the grammar of anarchy can never strengthen democracy; it renders democracy unfunctional.

There is an urgent need for quality control of political discourse. Control is anathema if it is external, and hence, it has to be intrinsic to the system and procedure. Unless actors want decent discourse, it cannot be externally imposed.—INFA

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

Former Civil Servants letter exposes Election Commission Prime Minister is still getting away with his vote for Army speech

By Nitya Chakraborty

As the historic elections for the 17th Lok Sabha constitution began on April 11, the focus has shifted on the functioning of the Election Commission in the next six weeks till the counting of the votes on May 23. The contending parties will make claims and counterclaims during this period and for ensuring fair and impartial polling, it is the EC who is the supreme authority during this crucial period. The sad part is that the present EC members have failed in discharging their responsibility as per the Constitution. Therein lies the danger to the Indian democracy.

That the Election Commission is continuously making flip flops and it is facing a credibility crisis, are now known facts. The latest salvo has been fired by a group of most distinguished bureaucrats in a letter to the President of India in which they have alleged that the Model Code of Conduct has been violated by the senior ruling party leaders consistently and the present EC has failed to take action. As a result, the BJP leaders, especially the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP president Amit Shah have been continuously making reference of the army action and the airstrike in their speeches and urging the

to garner free publicity for a political person (and his party). “If this biopic is released even while the election process is ongoing, we contend that the entire expenses on the production, distribution and publicity of the biopic should be debited to the election expenses of Narendra Modi,” the group said. However, the EC finally ruled that the biopic will be released only after the elections.

The group also accused the ECI of acting with “lethargy” in respect of the NaMo TV channel and transfer of three top police officers and the Chief Secretary in Andhra Pradesh and four top police officers in West Bengal.

“No such steps have been taken in Tamil Nadu, where the present Director General of Police (DGP) is reportedly under investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation in the Gutkha scam case and there have been repeated appeals by the Opposition parties in Tamil Nadu seeking his removal from that post,” they said.

Raising concerns over the Rajasthan Governor Kalyan Singh's statement supporting Modi, the group demanded his removal from the post. They also demanded strong action against Uttar Pradesh Chief

The ECI's independence, fairness, impartiality and efficiency are perceived to be compromised today, thereby endangering the integrity of the electoral process which is the very foundation of Indian democracy."

people to vote for them since only they could teach Pakistan a lesson.

The BJP leaders are regularly taking a Hindu majoritarian position and blaming the Congress for betraying the Hindus. PM himself crossed all limits in accusing Rahul Gandhi of choosing Wayanad constituency because it has a majority Muslim population. All these are against the existing MCC but the Election Commission has not got the guts to reprimand the PM and the BJP President for their highly communal speeches.

The civil servants in their letter aptly expressed the present situation when they said “We write to express our deep anguish that the ECI is suffering from a crisis of credibility today. The ECI's independence, fairness, impartiality and efficiency are perceived to be compromised today, thereby endangering the integrity of the electoral process which is the very foundation of Indian democracy.”

The civil servants said they were distressed to note the “misuse, abuse and blatant disregard” of the MCC by the ruling party at the Centre and the ECI's “pusillanimity” in coming down with a heavy hand on these violations.

Referring to the ECI's clean cheat to Prime Minister's public announcement on March 27 about the successful launch of India's first anti-satellite weapon (ASAT), they said that parading the achievements of a government after the announcement of elections was tantamount to a “serious breach of propriety”. “The ECI's decision does not stand up to the standards of impartiality expected of it,” they said.

Over the controversy surrounding release of a biopic on the Prime Minister, the group opined that it represents a backdoor effort

Minister Yogi Adityanath and union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi for their “Modi Ki Sena” remarks and accused the ECI of contenting itself in the cases with a mild reprimand.

“We certainly hope and pray that such mild responses do not embolden others to violate the MCC and weaken the institutions that support our democracy,” they said in the letter.

The group also alleged that Modi made “divisive speeches” during his election rallies in Maharashtra and urged the poll body to take appropriate strict action to discourage all “incendiary” speeches.

Expressing their “deep concern” about the “weak-kneed” conduct of the poll body, the group said any erosion in the people's confidence in the fairness of the ECI has very grave consequences for the future of our democracy.

They appealed the President that the ECI to conduct itself in a manner where its independence, fairness, impartiality and efficiency was not questioned and to firmly exercised the extensive mandate given to it under Article 324 of the Constitution to ensure that the Indian voter is able to exercise her/his franchise without fear or favour.

The Election Commission is on trial during the next six weeks. The EC is the supreme authority for conducting elections, but if it takes any partial position to the present power elites, that will be a big affront to the Indian democracy. If that happens, the very essence of the people's mandate will be lost. The EC members who are also senior bureaucrats, must uphold the banners of impartial functioning and they must ensure the MCC will be applicable to one and all, irrespective of the powers they wield. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Taken for a ride!

Editor,

A customer entered a cozy restaurant which offered enticing food packages. According to the Ads displayed in the Board outside, it says “Come and enjoy mouth-watering delicacies at your own Choice”. After going through the Menu, he found out that the packages offered contained a long list of items along with prices against each one. Further, each package has a price tag ranging from Rs 300 upwards, depending on the quality of the ingredients on offer. However, there were certain items that were not palatable and unthinkable, at least for his personal taste, which were included in a package he would like to settle for. So he approached the Manager sitting at the counter and politely asked whether he could make his own choice and strike out unwanted items. The manager with a smirking look on his face shot back with a stern “No”. The Customer pointed out that according to the displayed Ads it clearly said that he could make his own choice. Interestingly, the manager hesitantly explained that the management had an alternate offer of smaller packages containing exclusively only approved brands; however

these packages proved to be so complicated and time-consuming which dampened most of the customers' keenness. Since there were no other eating places around the vicinity, the customer was left with no other alternative save to take whatever was there on offer. He finally settled for a Rs 500 package and took whatever items caught his eyes leaving the rest untouched. Alas! To the customer's dismay, he had to shell out Rs 600 for his bill. On enquiring the reason for the extra Rs 70 he had to shell out, he was told that was for Service Charge and GST!!

The customer was aghast to realize that after paying for untouched food again he was fleeced by the system. Had he been allowed to choose according to his taste he would have spent not more than half of the amount!! Again, the customer confronted the manager along with the demand to meet the management concerned. Poor fellow! The answer he received was that it was impossible for him to meet the management as it was based somewhere in mainland India!

To the discerning readers the story above may appear as a ridiculously and foolishly concocted piece of a story or a figment of an

imagination of a deranged mind! Well No! Dear readers, for us who took Set Top Box Cable connections and Dish TV networks, we are no more and no less than the above mentioned poor dumb-cluck of an eatery customer! In the guise of Infotainment, we have been duped for several years by the Service Providers in wasting our hard earned money by paying for a number of TV Channels which we never even have a peep at! Presently with the introduction of the new sets of regulations, like it or not, we are being unnecessarily forced to subscribe packages containing unwanted channels. Personally, not being a technology savvy person, I can somehow understand the technical glitches and complications in catering to thousands and thousands of customers' choices. However, some technological arrangements should have been in place so as to do away with this highly illogical and unacceptable malpractice. In fact, if one calculates the subscription rates (plus GST) of the channels that one regularly watches, the total monthly amount would not even cross an average of three hundred rupees and four hundred rupees for normal/regular and HD channels respectively. Alas!

As luck would have it, we are being turned into victims of circumstances!

Is there anybody out there who could offer any remedy? Or are we all so deaf and dumb in being so indifferent for so long? Or are we spineless enough to succumb to a purely illegal practice of camouflaged extortion? Is this not a case worth to be tried as per provisions of the Consumers' Protection Act? Or is the answer blown away by the wind?

Yours etc.,
P Marbaniang
Shillong -22

Meghalaya is home not just for tribals

Editor,
Salil Gwali in his recent letter to the editor has hardly concealed his over-zealous support for the saffron party and also berated others who he believes are infantile in their approach to politics and we know from his insinuations that he is hinting at Rahul Gandhi. Time and again Gwali has exposed his Hindutva stance by castigating all criticism against Narendra Modi. In a democracy no one questions the personal, political choices

of a person but we don't expect that person to publicly espouse those causes through a letter in a newspaper – a space that is otherwise meant for addressing grievances related to the non-performance of the administration and other governance anomalies. In comparison it is always so delightful to read the letters by Sujit De which are based on human compassion and are philosophically and spiritually grounded without taking any strong religio-political positioning. Those are the kind of letters that will build the minds of young people. Letters like those of Gwali's will polarise the society and divide it between Hindus on one side who seem to have found their mojo in Narendra Modi and non-Hindus on the other side who he believes are supporting the Congress Party and Rahul Gandhi.

For those that believe in a free, secular and democratic country, the BJP is a party that is disruptive and seeks to divide rather than unite. Gwali lives in Meghalaya, a state that has seen deep communal fissures since 1979. Living in such a situation has meant that people have been suppressed from expressing themselves. Many have felt frustrated and now believe that a strong ruler like

Narendra Modi will protect them in a manner that past governments have failed here in Meghalaya to give the non-tribal permanent residents their due rights. This, however, gives all if us some food for thought. Any group of people that are suppressed for too long seek to find their voices and Gwali must be just one of those. There may be many others who have no voice or the ability to communicate their thoughts in writing. For a long time the tribals of Meghalaya have believed that they alone have a right to all the resources in the state. No one grudges them their ST status by virtue of which they are exempted from paying income tax and also to have reservations in government services and in education. They should not grudge others their rights too as Indian citizens.

It's time to realise that Meghalaya cannot be built by the tribals alone but by all those who feel a sense of duty to this state and its includes all – tribals and non-tribals and people of all genders. You cannot build a state and society by putting others on notice all the time. A time has come when all must learn to cooperate in making Meghalaya a progressive state.

Yours etc.,
AK Singh,
Vi a email

Does death become us?

A documentary portrays people on death row, says **Shoma A Chatterji**



Death penalty is a cankerous issue — should it stay or should be abolished in this modern age, endlessly debated in countries where it is still practised, India being one of them. Students of the National Law University, assisted by the Law Commission, are currently engaged in a study in a wider consultation with different stakeholders on the issue.

Social activist and feminist Vani Subramanian focuses on the subject in her documentary *The Death of Us* juxtaposed with interviews with some of the prisoners sentenced to death. She also examines how the police and the judiciary perceive their crimes.

The study by the Law University includes interviews with 373 death row convicts over a 15-year period. Founder of Human Rights Law Network and senior advocate Colin Gonsalves holds similar views.

"The finding that 75 per cent of the



(Top) A sand sculpture of Afzal Guru after he was executed in 2013; Vani Subramanian

death row convicts are poor is the absolute minimum. The rich mostly get away while the very poor, especially Dalits and tribals, get the short shrift."

Himanshi Dhawan and Pradeep Thakur in a report (TNN, July 15, 2015) point out that the reason why the poor, Dalits and those from the backward castes get a rougher treatment from our courts is more often than not their inability to find a competent lawyer to contest their conviction. As many as 93.5 per cent of those sentenced to death for terror offences are Dalits or religious minorities.

They go on to quote from the report that over three-fourths of the prisoners on death row belong to backward classes and religious minorities; over 75 per cent are economically vulnerable; they are not allowed to attend proceedings and have limited or no interaction with lawyers; they are not permitted to work inside the prisons and are lodged in separate cells and mostly, in solitary confinement; 23 per cent have no schooling while the rest have not completed secondary education.

The film aptly quotes a paragraph from Bhagat Singh's famous article Why am I an atheist? "What of a person who is born in a lower caste family? His fate is that people of higher castes will treat him with hate, disgust and scorn. His lack of education, his poverty and the contempt he faces from them will most likely harden his heart. If he commits a crime, who should be held responsible? God? Or, him? Or, the pandits and intellectuals of his society?"

K Thiagarajan, one of the convicts interviewed, was born on the day Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated. After meeting Charu Majumdar, leader of the Naxalite movement in the 70s, he burnt his certificates and documents, left his family and became an extremist, the first Tamil youth to do so. His sentence is linked to the Kilvelman case, the site of the first massacre of Dalits in inde-

pendent India. When Dalit farm labourers, supported by the Communist Party, fought for fair wages, the president of the paddy producers' association, Gopal Krishna Naidu decided to crush them.

On December 25, 1968, Naidu and 300 others attacked Kilvelman. They shot and knifed the people who scattered to save their lives. The rest were rounded up and set ablaze. There were 23 children, 16 women and five men all burnt to death. The attackers served light sentences or were released.

Thirty Dalit men got rigorous imprisonment but Naidu remained free. The rebels in a revenge attack, after their first attempt failed, launched the second one. The main perpetrator, Thiruconam Muttuthangappa, was a cruel landlord and a caste fanatic and his crimes against women were notorious. Thiagarajan attacked him from behind and killed him. Later, he was asked whether he would want to be an approver for a lighter sentence but his mother told him not to betray his other two partners in this attack. The verdict was announced by the High Court on September 27, 1970, in Thanjavur district where one person was sentenced to life imprisonment and three were sentenced to death. Thiagarajan has since been acquitted.

Says Subramanian, "In an increasingly fascist state, the enforcement of and demand for the death penalty are worrying signs that while being conducted in the name of nation/people/honour, in fact only serve to further strengthen the state and its power over the people."

She goes on to add, "The title draws from the illusion that we the people may have that we are becoming stronger when we seek the death of others; but in fact, every time we seek it, and strengthen the state something in us dies."

"Thus she questions, while the death penalty may kill a handful of people, doesn't it destroy something in each of us — as a society, as a race? "I believe

we each die a little (or at least our sense of compassion, faith in humanity etc does) whenever someone is executed," she says.

SAR Geelani of New Delhi was arrested for the attack on Parliament House on 13 December 2001 in which 14 people died and 18 were injured. The crime led to a sentence of rigorous imprisonment for one and a death sentence for three declared by a Special Court. One of the three has already been executed.

"The day the Parliament attack took place, I was at home. I switched on the television, heard the news for a while and then left home. The bus was almost empty. Then, out of the blue, a man asked me to make space at my seat. Then, he said that his boss wished to talk to me and when I asked him who he was, he said, 'Delhi police,' recalls Geelani. He is now a free man

On November 29, 2013, K Prasath, Pambam was arrested in Palk Straits on the Indian Ocean on a charge of drug smuggling. Three Sri Lankans and five Indians were sentenced to death in the High Court in Colombo. "We were celebrating our child's first birthday. Though we had gone only to fish, our trawler was stopped between two Sri Lankan Navy ships and we were arrested for smuggling of drugs," says Prasath who has since come home after having been released.

An out-of-the-box feature in this evocative film which took four years to make is the use of the hanging rope as a metaphor used right through the film. The film opens with a scene of a rope coiling and uncoiling unto itself captured through different angles in close-ups which, given the title of the film, is quite scary because you are actually looking at a rope made exclusively for hanging a man/woman sentenced to death. The voice-over states that these ropes are made in the Buxar Central Jail in Patna, Bihar. (TWF)

Dance of happy souls

It is said that rituals and dance have been a way of human expression towards the creator and it is celebrated with happiness and gaiety since the earliest civilisations as it was believed to be the form of celebration of the existence of mankind. In this context, the thanksgiving dance symbolises our expression of gratitude to God.

In 1902, the first thanksgiving dance was held at the front yard of the property of (Late) Shri Sujit Nongkynrih in Mawkhar. An initiative was taken towards the inception of a dance which will be symbolic with the culture and religion of the indigenous people at a time when there was a trend of adherence to new faiths and beliefs. At this juncture, this dance was known as 'Shad Sujit' where the venue of the event was near the Dorbar of Hima Myllem with only a handful of participants.

Over the years this dance evolved which saw more participants and the situation demanded for a more spacious location leading to another property that of (late) Shri Mohon Massar which was located in Mawkhar as well. By this time, with the increasing participation and popularity the new name of 'Shad Shira' was given due to the fact that the participants were given a refreshment break served with black tea and 'shira' (a preparation from rice).

This thanksgiving dance became an important event and in the year 1911, for the first time the dance was held at the new location at Weiking Ground in Jaiaiw. The Weiking Ground was the property of Seng Khasi and no longer the private property of any individual. This location was beside the Wah Umkrah stream which at that time was famous for its crystal clear water flowing in its pristine glory. Opposite the ground where the dance took place, there was a whirlpool at a juncture of the Wah Umkrah and by looking at it, it seemed as if the water was being stirred or 'king' as in the local dialect thereby acquiring the name of Shad Weiking or Weiking Dance as it is known today.

It is, however, worth mentioning that in the initial years when the Weiking Dance was held, the Seng Khasi had its share of obstacles and stiff opposition due to a series of conflict of interests and misunderstandings between some misguided individuals which ultimately led to a court case based on the validity of the dance to be held at the said location.

There was a contention regarding the ownership rights of the Weiking Ground and, on this basis after a prolonged hearing on the case, the verdict was finally given in favour of Seng Khasi and once again it was a victory to be cherished. This verdict led to the dance being given the name Shad Suk Mynsiem or the dance of



There was a contention regarding the ownership rights of the Weiking Ground and after a prolonged hearing on the case, the verdict was finally given in favour of Seng Khasi

happy souls as now they can truly dance with an open mind and heart.

With the passage of time, in future there will be new conflicts, new changes, new ways of thinking and new ideas where our generations to come who would be seeing things in a new perspective will face stronger challenges and even a more daunting task of preserving the culture, tradition and belief which is being dearly upheld now. However we have a firm belief that they will be able to stand up to expectations and taking the ideas of a new era in their stride they will take the indigenous practices and culture to new heights where our traditions, culture and religion will be exposed to the world and gain more respect and acceptance.

Once again I wish everyone a Happy Shad Suk Mynsiem to be celebrated with happiness and pride and hope that sense of understanding prevails amongst all. Lastly, we should always be reminded of our ancestors' important teaching that we should love our own culture and religion and learn to respect other religions as well.

(Contributed by Dapbiang Kharmih)

Konyak record

By **Anshul Akhoury**

The starting of April's Harvest Season holds significance in India. Every community celebrates the arrival of this phase in their own unique way. In Assam, it is called Bihu, in Arunachal Pradesh, the Galo Tribe celebrates Mopin Festival, up north in Punjab it becomes Baisakhi and is known as Gudi Padwa in Maharashtra.

The Konyak tribe of Nagaland celebrates this festival with much enthusiasm. The three-day extravaganza is known as Aolaeng Festival. Various parts of Mon district, where this community is present in majority, organise their own events that go on for a day or two. Mon, however, has the grandest celebration.

Every Konyak woman is a leader and she has an active role in the matters of the household as well as the important social decisions. Women pass on the traditional values like folk stories, dance and music to the coming generations so that it is not lost. This year, the community decided to recognize these qualities and offer the respect to their women-folks in the most beautiful way possible.

The last day of Aolaeng Festival saw a gathering of 4,707 women from various colonies of Mon Town. These women in their traditional clothing, jewellery and

makeup performed their traditional dance. The mission was to attempt an entry into the Guinness Book of World Records. The condition laid by the official committee was that a troop of 2,500 women performs the dance for five minutes. They completed the time limit and with almost double the number of performers the organisers had aimed for.

It rained heavily on the day of performance. It seemed that the activity would be called off. Despite the bad weather, women dressed up and left to practise at 7 am. By 10 am, a huge crowd had gathered inside and outside Mon Ground. The drum played at 11 am and everyone cheered wishing them good luck. The women performed their dance which from an aerial view looked as if a field with beautiful flowers in colours of black, yellow and white were slowly and delicately floating in the wind.

Travelling to Mon is not easy. A 14-hour journey from Dimapur is very tiring and back-breaking. But once you see the sights of the valley and the hills, that restlessness goes away and you find a new energy. Mon is a lovely place with rich culture worthy of visiting at-least once.

(The author is a solo traveller and backpacker. He frequently collaborates with magazines and newspapers for travel articles & photographs)



Culture of spirituality

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



It is natural for human intelligence to seek what is life and beyond – to look at life and to long to know. So how can you avoid

spirituality?

You have managed to avoid it for a long time because you are deeply attached and identified with things that you are not. When I say things that you are not, it includes your body and your mind. Once you are identified with something that you are not, your intelligence is twisted-out. It cannot see anything straight because from then on, it works only from that identity.

Suppose you say, “I am a woman,” the way you think, the way you feel, everything is like a woman. You got identified with a few body parts. Your intelligence cannot see anything straight.

This is the reason a “spiritual program” becomes necessary. If people were not twisted-out, spirituality would be a natural thing.

It would not be something that someone has to teach you and remind you of. It is very natural for you to look around and see that there seems to be something beyond the physicality of life – it is so simple to know it. It is unbelievable how such a large segment of population goes without noticing it. If you just close your eyes for two minutes, you can see that you seem to be a little more than a body. So why does someone have to come and remind you?

Anyone can see it, but just a handful of people do, because right from childhood, everybody around you is a vested interest. Everybody is encouraging you to get identified with them. Your parents want you to get identified with them, your teachers want you to get identified with them and their kind of education, your leaders and others want you to get identified with their nation, caste, creed and whatever else, because everybody has their own agenda, their own desire to gather people and use them for their purposes.

I am not saying all the activity that is being done is of no worth. There is worth to it, but just because you are doing something, there is no need to be identified

with it, even if it is extremely useful.

The moment you get identified, you get twisted-out, and twisted-out human beings cannot truly bring wellbeing to people. The moment you are identified with something, you split the world into a million pieces.

Once you split everything in your perception, everything that you do will only enhance that split and that is not for the ultimate wellbeing of humanity at all.

In a way, it is really a shame that we have to go about reminding people about their spirituality. We want the spiritual process to become a part of living culture. Like how a mother teaches a child to brush his teeth, we want the spiritual process to become like that – without any effort, without the mother knowing about it, she teaches her child the spiritual process. It was so in this culture just a generation or two ago. Even today in India, the essence of the spiritual process is not controlled by any one organisation. There is no one guiding and controlling it as it is done in other parts of the world. It is just a part of one’s life. Everyone teaches it the way they know it. The spiritual process was made so much a part of life.

It has been left unregulated like this because it was never an organized process of religion. It was just various methods for one’s evolution. This country is the only godless country on the planet because there is no concretised idea of God here. Anyone can worship whatever they feel like.

People are worshipping all kinds of things. There is no such word as “heretic” in India because every human being has some sense of love or devotion towards something. Somebody loves their mother, somebody loves their god, somebody loves money, somebody loves their work, somebody loves their dog, somebody loves their cow. It doesn’t matter what, he is on the spiritual path. The question is just whether his spiritual path is feeble or strong; but there is nobody who is not on the path. Everybody is on the path in his own erratic way.

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

Autism: life with difference

Dr Anjana Kannankara

When the world commemorated one more World Autism Awareness Week, let us genuinely undertake our duty as fellow social beings towards those people around us who have been living a less colourful life after being diagnosed autistic. It’s worth taking some time out to pay silent regards to their strong-willed mothers who never complain but longingly look forward to seeing their children carry out their day to day routine independently. We must imbibe a couple of lessons from those ‘superhuman souls’ who have not broken down at the cruel twist of fate but have risen up to face the harsh reality of having to extend lifelong assistance to their children, lending them the much needed support, love and care unconditionally, expecting nothing back from them with only hope in their aching hearts for a better day and life for their little ones.

Understanding Autism

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is explained as a neuro-developmental disorder that refers to a broad range of conditions characterised by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviours, speech and nonverbal communication.

Autistic people see, hear and feel the world differently from other people. If one is autistic, he is autistic for life; autism is not an illness or disease hence cannot be cured while treatments can be helpful in many ways.

Autism is a spectrum condition. All autistic people share certain difficulties but being autistic will affect them in different ways. Some autistic people also have learning disabilities, mental health issues or other conditions, which means people need different levels of support. All people

Last week was dedicated to World Autism Awareness



on the autism spectrum can learn and develop. With the right sort of support, they can be helped to live a more fulfilling life of their own choosing.

How common is it?

Autism is more common than most people think. People from all nationalities, cultural, religious and social backgrounds can be autistic, although it appears to affect more men than women.

According to the Center for Disease Control, autism affects an estimated 1 per cent of the world population with 1 in 59 children affected in the US today. Experts say there are around 700,000 autistic people in the UK alone and 1 in 68 children in India are diagnosed with autism with an overall of more than 1 million cases reported per year.

Causes

Research into causes suggests that a combination of factors, genetic and environmental, may account for differences in development. Autism is not caused by a person’s upbringing or their social circumstances, nor is it the fault of the individual with the condition.

Diagnosis

Autism is tough to

be diagnosed up to 18 months. A formal timely diagnosis by an expert team, including speech and language therapists, paediatrician along with a psychiatrist and psychologist is most essential to help identify the condition if possible in the early stages itself. This will help the persons and their families to understand why they are experiencing such difficulties and how they can be helped. It can also mean access to right kind of support and services to make their life better.

Symptoms

The range and severity of symptoms can vary widely as it involves developmental, behavioural, cognitive and psychological aspects. Common symptoms include:

1. Poor eye contact and the lack of smile
2. Not responsive to their names
3. Hypersensitivity to noise
4. Lost in thoughts
5. Hitting or biting themselves
6. Not using gestures while communicating
7. Inability to follow objects visually
8. Inability to make friends
9. Repetitive body movements or repeating their own sentences
10. Unaware of others’ emotions or depression
11. Learning disability or speech delay in a child
12. Intense interest in a limited number of things or prob-

lem in paying attention

Treatment

The ideal time to start treatment is by one to two years of age. But due to ignorance or issues of the family in coping with the situation, often a delay is caused which will place the autistic person in a difficulty to gain from the treatment measures.

Early recognition, as well as behavioural, educational and family therapies may reduce symptoms and support development and learning. Antipsychotic drugs may be also prescribed according to the assessment of the medical team depending on the severity of the case.

Therapies

The most important thing is to provide ‘sensory diet’ that can provide the child with the sensory input he or she needs to be in a “just right” state, as part of sensory integration therapy. This can include simple activities like blowing bubbles, swinging or eating crunchy vegetables to the use of tools like squish sand or slime, therapy balls, specially designed pathways to walk, lighted bricks and balls etc to enhance their hand and eye coordination, motor skills and overall functions. Behavioural therapy, hydro therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, animal assisted therapy and music therapy are beneficial too to channelise their en-

ergy thus soothing their minds to relieve the aggressiveness. Stem cell treatment is being talked about as an effective option in future.

Certain homoeopathic medicines are reported to provide better control over excretory functions. The massage by an osteopath proves beneficial in relaxing their muscles, rendering flexibility and enhances better locomotor abilities, as per the experience shared by parents.

Awareness Week

Every year, April 1-7 marks World Autism Awareness Week, by the international community and April 2 is regarded as World Autism Day after being adopted by the United Nations to enrich the lives of people on the autism spectrum. According to the UN, the purpose is to highlight the need to help improve the quality of life of those with autism so they can lead full and meaningful lives as an integral part of society.

The puzzle ribbon was adopted in 1999 as the universal sign of autism awareness which denotes the diversity and complexity of the people with such condition. A ‘light it up blue’ campaign is also conducted where many landmarks around the globe will be lighted blue in colour as part of the programme.

How can we involve

The first step should be to learn properly about the condition. To stress upon their abilities, not disabilities should be the motto. One can get involved in campaigns and activities for awareness as well as acceptance of autism in the society. Undergoing training to become well-equipped in aiding a colleague in school or workplace should be a major point of preference. We can also engage in real life interactions with autistic people, spend time with them to understand the difficulties and offer practical solutions by forming a care team. Another efficient method is to partner with several organisations who work seriously in this area to chart out and plan beneficial programmes that also includes promoting autism-friendly business to support the autistic people in the long run.

(The author is chairperson, Institution for Differently abled)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, APRIL 14, 2019

Venus is forming an angle of 40 degrees with Uranus on your solar return chart indicates a mixed year. While you may get an opportunity to start new work, you are also likely to face some problems. You may have to depart with some friends. Your extended family members may cause you some problems too. If you are not patient, you may develop some bad habits this year. It will become harder for you to control your anger and ego, which can cause some harm to your reputation as well as your finances. At the same time, you will get the blessings of your guru and learned people.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

The week begins on a positive note. The planetary configuration indicates that your efforts, confidence and courage bring success in monetary gains and your energy increases for work projects. Your job environment is lively. Your outlook on life has been a little more serious and responsible. In the past while, you might have reached out to others in an attempt to validate yourself, looking for ways to boost your confidence. Health is likely to prosper and medical procedures or programs, if necessary, are more likely to be successful.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

This week brings love, harmony and entertainment in professional and personal relations. Your physical body and mannerisms are a focus. There would be a newfound identity and a realistic understanding of your own limitations and your capabilities as well. In terms of career and projects, outward signs of progress would lay a foundation for future success and progress. Lifeless or outworn relationships may have been especially hard to bear for you. You could take up some form of physical program that completely changes the way you feel about yourself. The things that give you joy and positive feedback figure prominently and you feel renewed and regenerated.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

This phase brings success in professional and personal relations. You would feel particularly strong and personally powerful. There is no such thing as playing the victim, you’re the victor and you feel it. You enjoy an increased ability to concentrate and focus on what really matters to you. It would be wise to make something of your hobbies—even if it doesn’t bring an income, you might find that expressing yourself creatively really helps to define yourself and to understand yourself better. Health is likely to be balanced.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

This is favorable period for hobbies, sports and competitive exams. Your creative abilities are reflected in your outlook on life and love and romance are life experiences you strongly identify with. You display great skills in sports or physical activity that wins you appreciation and an opportunity to travel. Try to be just and fair when making decisions, as you do your best to see both sides of an issue. People notice and admire you for your pleasant and cheerful personality. You are bolder in expressing your love, yet not aggressive either. Artistic self-expression is important, possibly through music, fashion and writing. A strong desire for companionship dominates at this time.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

The first phase of this year increases confidence and courage at work place. It’s a great time to do something entirely new and pioneering. Discussions and ideas about finances and material security figure strongly. Although you like the good things of life and may spend quite a bit on clothes, furniture, and entertainment, your innate sense of security will not permit you to go overboard to the point of extravagance. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for this planetary placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

An excellent week for money, career, and romance awaits you. Friends and loved ones take priority. You don’t find yourself lacking in opportunities to socialize. You are likely to enjoy a strong feeling of happiness and solidarity in friendship, or with groups of like-minded individuals. You are more peace loving than usual and slightly detached on

a personal level as you feel drawn towards religion and spiritualism. This is a good time for research and meditation; but do avoid being dragged down by issues that have outgrown their worth and purpose. Examining the past in order to improve the future is certainly worthwhile, as long as you don’t waste your energy.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

The planetary configuration brings success, responsibility and maturity. You have much energy for new moneymaking projects, or for stepping up existing ones. Matters of the heart touch you deeply. You may willingly play a supportive role to the family and offer compassion and selfless love. This is a rather happy, goal-oriented time on the professional front. Relationships take on a fun outlook and activities with children increase. You possess extra charm in your professional interactions. A new affair is in the offing for the unattached. More opportunities to socialize and network could present themselves now.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

This period is good for money, family, status and happiness. Money matters come into focus for you. You adopt a serious approach to business because you are in the spotlight. The desire for some form of recognition and financial success is apparent. Being part of a community or circle of friends and building your social network is important to you at this time. Your love life is more attractive and charming. Public relations work, marketing, promotional activities and other such endeavors are favored now. You may face some minor ailments on the health front.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

Diplomacy, correctness in manner, finesse, and charm will be a big plus in aiding financial gains, especially in areas requiring public contact. You feel drawn to intellectuals with whom you can communicate well and exchange ideas. You know how to relate to others and you do so in a natural and warm manner. Your vision is practical right now, and you want to see tangible results for your efforts. Recognition is likely to come your way whether you ask for it or not along with the responsibility that comes right along with it. Do what you feel is right, keeping in mind that you are in the limelight during this phase.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

This is an excellent time to create a budget or financial plan, or to rid yourself of old habits that undermine your sense of personal power and self-mastery. Smoothing out your close personal relationships is what makes you happy. If single, you are more than willing to enter into a committed relationship. In general, you are adaptable when it comes to your affections. You pour more energy into self-promotion or business activities. Foreign places may particularly appeal now. You tend to be expansive and generous when it comes to love. Dealing with one situation at a time releases some tension and anxiety.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering at this time. On a more practical level, you may be dealing with joint finances and shared resources. Social life takes priority in your life. You would become serious about family relations and feel responsible towards them. Social interactions of a personal, one-on-one kind are emphasized. Conflicts with a partner over values or personal possessions are likely to occur. You are more willing than usual to explore life’s secrets. Taking care of business is your main focus. A health routine started now is likely to be successful.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

This is a generous, pleasantly emotional, and creative phase. Striking a balance between your attention to your career and to your family life is necessary. Taking steps to improve your family and home life as well as your career and public life will be in order. You will also thoroughly enjoy artistic, musical, or cultural events and activities, especially in the company of a loved one. You need the energies, companionship, and support of other people, and they may also seek out your support and companionship. It’s important to include others rather than to go solo for the time being. However, bending too much to the will of another is not advised either.

Jobs market is changing

By Ranjan K Baruah

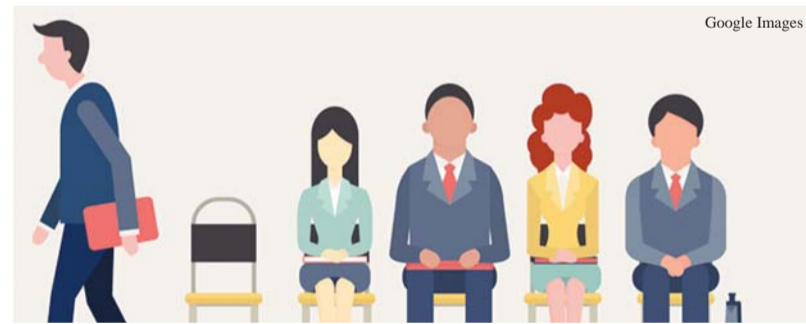
Many students and parents ask me different questions related to career options and opportunities. It is very challenging to choose the right career at the right time. As time has changed, mere qualification is not enough to get a good job or to be self-employed and earn well. Gone are the days when one could dream of a job related to his or her subjects. Students from engineering background are doing well in banks and social sector which they do not learn when they study engineering in colleges.

Our students and parents or guardians must be aware of the present job market and prepare well since secondary level to get employed. Few attributes or necessities for career are given below and these are based on my experiences:

Qualification: An academic degree is a qualification awarded to students upon successful completion of a course of study in higher education, normally at a college or university. These institutions commonly offer degrees at various levels, typically including bachelors, masters and doctorates, often alongside other academic certificates and professional degrees.

More academic qualification means better for the aspirant but getting high marks do not guarantee a job. We see required qualification for various jobs with minimum marks. There is no job for any maximum mark, so even if we do not get cent per cent we should not worry because if we have the minimum qualification then we can apply for jobs. But it is always advisable to get good marks as marks and skills mean guaranteed success in future.

Planning: Career planning is must to be successful in life. It consists of



activities and actions which one take to achieve his or her individual career goal. Career planning is the ongoing process where one explores interests and abilities and plans strategically. Planning must be done on the basis of SWOT analysis and authentic information. Wrong or misleading information is dangerous. It encourages individuals to explore and gather information, which enables them to gain competencies, make decisions, set goals and take action.

Hard Work: We are aware that there is no shortcut to success and similarly there is no successful career without hard work. The problem with many of us is that instead of hard work

we ‘hardly work.’ As we are aware of it so I am skipping more about hard work. All of us talk about this but many of us do not follow, so it’s up to us whether we are going to work hard or be reluctant.

Information: For any good career we must have authentic information. Information related to subjects and also about the future jobs associated with different streams and subjects. Many of our students are negatively motivated by elders. I have come across one common thing that negatively motivates many students. Many people say there is no scope or limited scope if a student takes admission in arts or commerce. Well, I would appeal to our readers that if anyone says so then please tell in front of that person that he has no scope in life as only frustrated people disappoint others. Any positive person with information would share information and help others. There are many sources for collecting authentic information. We must cross-check information which we collect online from different websites.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, skill trainer, academic consultant and strategic planner and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)

“I believe in everything until it's disproved. So I believe in fairies, the myths, dragons. It all exists, even if it's in your mind. Who's to say that dreams and nightmares aren't as real as the here and now?”

--- John Lennon

The Shillong Times

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Campaign sans punch

AS the Lok Sabha polling process is on alongside the campaigning, there is little yet to gauge the voter mood. Prime Minister Modi's claim about a repeat of the Modi wave being in evidence across the country must be taken with a pinch of salt. To be fair, there is no perceptible anti-incumbency sentiment at play; nor is there a pro-Modi or pro-BJP wave. This is because the Modi government's performance gets only average marks. Tempers ran high only in Andhra Pradesh, resulting in two killings, and this is because of the high-voltage fight between the ruling Telugu Desam and a buoyant YSR Congress.

The mood in the Congress-led UPA camp is not very upbeat either. One reason is the failure on the part of the grand old party to seal alliances with regional entities in several states, most notably in Delhi. The Congress leadership blames the AAP and chief minister Arvind Kejriwal of not warming up to the UPA, while AAP is putting the blame on the Congress. For the AAP, this though is a tricky situation. The regional party came into being by raising the charge of the Congress being an extremely corrupt entity. The allegation, with substance, went beyond the sphere of former CM Sheila Dikshit and spanned other serious allegations of corruption under the UPA II led by then PM Manmohan Singh. While Rahul Gandhi raises the Rafale issue to some good effect, the voters are aware it came after Bofors in which both his mother and father were allegedly involved. This is reason why Modi seems to be getting away with the allegations surrounding the Rafale deal, even as a fellow Gujarati in the name of Anil Ambani is involved – not covertly, but openly as part of a recorded deal. The Congress, and by extension the UPA, might gain steam if Priyanka Gandhi is fielded from Varanasi against PM Modi this time, as is proposed. While Arvind Kejriwal could not make any dent in Varanasi in 2014, the powerful Brahmin support for Priyanka could give Modi a run for his money. The reverberations of such a high-stakes fight will be felt across India and the campaign scene can dramatically turn surcharged. At the same time, if Priyanka Gandhi wins Varanasi against the PM, the Congress politics is bound to shift base from Rahul Gandhi to his sister with more ease; which might not be to the liking of both Sonia Gandhi and Rahul. For now, it's campaigning sans punch.

The Election: New Frontlines

By H H Mohrmen

We have only been able to complete the first phase of the largest election in the world called the dance of democracy and yet so much has happened which will help teach us about the changes that occur with the election process in course of time. The changes are those which happened in the nation at large and as a matter of fact even the small state like Meghalaya is catching up with the changes that are happening in the country. The office of the Chief Election Officer deserves a pat on the back not only for running the election without any major glitch but more importantly for ushering in new technology and introducing new initiatives in running the present election.

In its effort to realise the theme 'no voters shall be left behind', the office of the CEO was able to issue election photo identity card in Braille to visually impaired voters; this is a major achievement at bringing inclusiveness in the way elections are conducted in the state. The office has also moved one step ahead and made it a point that differently-able people and senior citizens exercise their rights without any hassles by making the polling booths accessible to them. The support of volunteers like the Scouts and Guides, the NSS and the NCC is another new initiative in making young people engage in democracy and to have firsthand experience in the electoral process. Then there are pink polling stations and even childcare facilities in some places, but the major achievement of the office of the CEO is enrolling more than 19 lakhs voters in the entire state.

The credit of the successful running of the election also goes to the officials who manned the election from the Returning Officers at the different district headquarters, the presiding and polling officers to the drivers and the security personnel who guard the polling stations. The political parties, the party workers and the public too deserved a pat on the back because all have contributed in making the general election in the state a successful exercise. Although there is not much pomp and gaiety in the election, but the turn-up was much better than at any other time in the past.

The election in the state was lacklustre. The reason perhaps is because none of the star campaigners major from the national political parties visited the state. But

the lack of festivity in the general election is also because of the absence of the major motivating factor, and that is money. Monetary influence in this election is negligible perhaps because the election office has been able to strictly enforce the model code of conduct and it was seen that poll official conducted intensive checks on vehicles which were plying in the state. Or because unlike the MLA and MDC elections, influence of money in the Lok Sabha election is negligible; the candidates are few and they are far away and beyond the reach of the general public.

This is evident from the fact that votes polled in the by-election to Selsella Assembly constituency conducted on the same day had a turn-out of 82 percent, whereas the average turn-out, for the MP election is 63.56 for Shillong parliamentary constituency and 75.60 percent for Tura. This time the office of the CEO received few complaints against politicians violating the model code of conduct and incidentally both of those who were complained against are BJP MLAs. While there was no complaint against the state election office, the election commission has received both bouquets and brickbats from both sides of the divide from across the country.

The people have not only made a beeline of complaints with the Election Commission, but this time people even took election related issues to the Supreme Court too. There were complaints about the launching of Namo TV, the Modi biopic, where people questioned the timing of the release and the launch of a TV channel. There were election related complaints made even to the office of the President against the government misusing the armed forces and the governor campaigning for a political party.

This time around there is another development in which people of various professions also indirectly took part in campaigning for the party or the alliance they support. The theatre artists, film personalities, retired bureaucrats, the retired heads of armed forces also came out openly against the ruling dispensation while others came out openly in support

of the government. But also the most important development this time around is that the election is also being fought on new frontier and that is the virtual world.

This election has broken new grounds in which the election is not only being fought on the ground by organising marches, campaigns and rallies. It is also no longer a battle for the eyeballs on TV, but altogether a new frontline has emerged in the way the election is fought. The new election battleground are the different social media platforms, be it Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and what have you and the two major contenders in this battle are the Congress and the BJP. The print media too has come of age and not only made its presence felt on the internet by having its own e-version of the papers or magazines to make it easy for people to share but the electronic media too, are now deliberately making short videos to make it easy for sharing on the internet.

No doubt other contenders also made their presence felt in the virtual world, but the biggest battle on the internet is between the supporters of the two major political parties who try to troll each other and share memes, videos and stories to get the better of the other. The battle to outsmart each other has led to introducing of fake news and misleading memes from both sides. Thankfully the responsibility of administering and controlling the news shared and posts updated in the different social media platforms is now in the hands of those who run these different media platforms, otherwise government will find it difficult to control what is being shared on social media.

Now even different countries and particularly our neighbours are trying to influence the outcome of the elections, the case in point is that of Imran Khan commenting that it is better if the BJP and Modi win the election. Imran's statement is like a double-edged sword. On one hand people are saying that this only proves that Modi has close relations with Imran hence the statement will in a way help the BJP; others have a different opinion. Others are saying that Imran is the head of the government which is the major enemy of the India, a country which

has left no stone unturned to punish India. Since their inception, both the two neighbours have been at odds with each other. Pakistan has made all out efforts to create trouble in Kashmir and even make use every opportunity available to take the Kashmir issue to the international forum.

Therefore Imran deliberately made the announcement because he really wants BJP to win the election. The reason is, looking at the way the BJP-led government handled or mishandled Kashmir in the last five years has been to Pakistan's advantage. Hence if he is given another term Pakistan will not have to waste time in interfering in the Kashmir issue anymore to send terrorists from across the border, because Kashmiri youths have taken up arms against the government now and it will not take much time before Kashmir will slip from India's hand. And if as promised in its manifesto, BJP try to tinker with Article 370 then not only will Kashmiri youths will take up arms against India, the entire Kashmir will be up in arms against the government. There is therefore no surprise why Pakistan supports the BJP.

Then we have the award stories where we have countries like Saudi Arabia, Russia and others making announcements of giving the highest award of their country to Modi. It is an honour that our Prime minister is receiving a galaxy of awards but the question is the timing. The pertinent question is whether these countries are trying to influence the outcome of the elections in the country? The good thing is that all these issues and many others have been debated in the different social media platforms which helps enlighten the voters. Hence social media is not only the new frontier but it will be the most important election battlefield in the years to come.

If in the television medium the battle is for the eyeballs, in the social media the battle is for likes and views, but the ultimate goal of every media outlet is for shares and more importantly for its stories or videos to go viral. Social media is the real battle ground because one can see the supporters fight it out in these media platforms by commenting and making counter comments on a particular post. This also helps give us some idea on which direction the country is going.

Modi narrative: The swing from hope to fear Joblessness can turn the tide against ruling front

By K Raveendran

Modi in 2019 is a study in contrast to his own self in 2014. In 2014, he was selling to the Indian people a new hope and dream. In 2019, he is peddling fear. In his first bid to the prime ministerial office, Modi was a lot more positive. Today he is negative to the extreme.

Even if the BJP claim that the promise to bring back all the black money stashed outside and deposit it to the bank account of every Indian @ Rs 15 lakh per person is taken on its face value, the promise of achche din, where there would be plenty of opportunities to work for the able and willing; and money in hand to enjoy a better life, enthused the common man to come out and vote for Modi. But as Modi is about to complete his term, they got neither. If anything, their plight has worsened.

Obviously, Modi has changed his narrative for 2019. This time he wants people to vote him because

according to him India is capable of handling.

“...our national security depends primarily on our economic strength. If we do not have strong job-creating economic growth in coming years, we will suffer on multiple fronts. We will not have the resources to upgrade our military's equipment. We will not have the economic clout that will persuade other nations to arrest our terrorists and extradite those who flee our laws. And we will have rising levels of internal political unrest as our unemployed youths start venting their frustration. One cannot have meaningful national security without strong job-creating economic growth,” he wrote in a newspaper article.

That is certainly not music to the ears of the BJP leaders, who have been presuming an adversarial role for the former RBI governor ever since he advised Modi not

Modi has made national security the defining issue in this election campaign. There is need for a strong government so that there can be a strong nation. And only BJP can provide a strong government. Pulwama, Balakot and the surgical strikes define the contours of the 2019 Modi narrative. And he is seeking votes not on his own behalf, but in the name of Indian security forces, members of which have made the supreme sacrifice in protecting the nation. His lieutenants have even made it appear that the credit for the achievements of Indian security forces belongs to the BJP, creating a storm of protest, with calls all around not to drag the security forces into politicking.

he is required to be around to protect them from danger, both external and internal. Detractors have not missed the similarity between his new line and the infamous Indira Gandhi doctrine of India is Indira. BJP supporters have stopped short of calling Modi Bharat, but they insist that he has to be there to make India go. The idea is to scare.

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There is need for a strong government so that there can be a strong nation. And only BJP can provide a strong government. Pulwama, Balakot and the surgical strikes define the contours of the 2019 Modi narrative. And he is seeking votes not on his own behalf, but in the name of Indian security forces, members of which have made the supreme sacrifice in protecting the nation. His lieutenants have even made it appear that the credit for the achievements of Indian security forces belongs to the BJP, creating a storm of protest, with calls all around not to drag the security forces into politicking.

Modi is right in warning against national security. But the threat may not be from within as he claims. There is threat to the Indian nationhood because the state has failed the Indian people. And unfortunately, Modi has solution in hand.

Former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan hit the nail when he said in a recent article that there is threat to national stability, but not necessarily due to cross border intervention, which

to go ahead with his ill-fated demonetisation plan. In the end, events proved Rajan right and Modi wrong.

Modi is fully aware of the pitfalls of his government when it comes to national security on this count. That is why his government has initiated a whole new manufacturing process to produce favourable job data. The saffron camp knows for sure that there is a perception battle to be won. Perhaps the Modi government is facing its biggest threat on account of its dismal job creation record, which has been cited by several opinion polls as the biggest worry of Indians these days. The numbers are not at all reassuring for the saffron supporters.

According to a statistical analysis of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, there are about 140 constituencies, where the average size of jobless exceeds 50,000. A most worrisome part is that the margin of victory for whoever got elected from these constituencies was less than 50,000. And this means that the unemployed voters are in a strong position to decide the fate of candidates in these constituencies.

It should cause real concern to BJP and the NDA partners that at least 40 of these seats were won by them, and if the disgruntled unemployed voters decide to punish the Modi government, they have the wherewithal to do that. And in a situation where most pre-poll surveys are forecasting trouble for BJP in hitting the magic number, this could turn out to be crucial. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

The power of a vote!

Editor,

I strongly believe that, in India, no political party can claim to be virtuous in their approach. If one party is playing the Hindu card then the other is playing the Muslim card and yet another is busy establishing that it is the true messiah of Dalits. But the ground reality is significantly different from what the parties exhibit in public. Actually, almost all the political parties in India are pursuing their vested interests only. None has been able to establish, till date, that it is serious about delivering governance to the people and meeting their basic requirements. This is the reason why we are fighting among ourselves even after 72 years of Independence. Around 30% of our people are still considered to be very poor and cannot sustain a respectable living for themselves. The very identity of the middle class of the country is also under tremendous stress. For reasons unknown, almost every political party/government seems to be hell-bent in undermining the interests of that class! Hence

as members of the public we should not resort to cat-fights among ourselves just to establish that someone is right in supporting one party and it's ideologies or that another is extremely wrong in favouring another. Every person has the right to agree or disagree or to express his/her views in a democracy so long as it does not cross the limits of decency. My earnest appeal to the readers of The Shillong Times in particular, is that, they have tremendous opportunity to contribute their bit to the democratic process by making the poor/down-trodden/illiterate/uneducated people understand the power of their votes and also the importance of exercising their franchise in a rational manner.

Yours etc.,
PS Gupta,
Via email

Time to stop the rhetoric

Editor,
April 10, 2019 saw at 11 am the Rafael case come up for another hearing in the Supreme Court; in the

evening the judgement on the Modi biopic and lastly the statement of Prime Minister Imran Khan wishing that Modi should return to power. All this has turned the tide in favour of the opposition. It would be proper if the rhetoric used for the last one month is not reciprocated. Real issues like parliamentary speeches on women's empowerment, joblessness, farmer's distress and many problems that the common citizens are facing should be discussed. Avoid talking on Rafael. Only legal experts are able to understand the details of the deal such as escrow accounts and letter of sovereignty. Even if aeronautical engineers are in the audience they may not be able to understand how pricing would reveal the secrets of a fighter jet.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Shillong- 14

Sycophantic allegations against ECI

Editor,
As reported by a section of the print media a Trinamul

Congress delegation led by its leader in the Rajya Sabha visited the Election Commission of India (ECI), headquarters in New Delhi on April 10, seeking immediate intervention and action. The delegation accused the ECI of bias and alleged that the IPS officers appointed by the panel recently were having "secret parleys" with the BJP and might "endanger the life of" Mamata Banerjee. In a clear dichotomy the ruling party delegation did not point fingers at the new Cooch Behar district chief who has been replaced by the EC promptly after a complaint was lodged by the TMC party.

In a memorandum submitted to the Commission, Trinamul MPs alleged that the IPS officers appointed as replacements of the police commissioners of Calcutta and Bidhannagar, besides the district police chiefs of Diamond Harbour and Birbhum had been acting, "in tandem with the BJP leader." The memorandum reads, "some of them are having secret parleys with and taking suggestions from a few provincial and central leaders of the BJP,

which requires immediate inquiry and action." It effectively leveled allegations against new police commissioners of Kolkata and Bidhannagar, Rajesh Kumar and N R Babu, respectively and Birbhum district police chief A Ravindranath and his Diamond Harbour counterpart Srihari Pandey. The memorandum also says that Trinamul MPs strongly felt the situation may not only affect the electorate's right to vote but also endanger the life of the chief minister.

Such allegations should be dismissed as outlandish. Those officers have no bearing on the security of the chief minister and other high-profile protectees which is handled by the director (security) Vineet Goyal, who has not been replaced. The Trinamul leadership, rather the think-tank group, are unhappy over the controls and curbs imposed by the ECI for repetitive violations of the model code of conduct (MCC) by the Trinamul president of Birbhum district which would have ensured the right to vote in a large number of electorate fearlessly, in contrast to the ridiculous claim/allegation

of TMC delegation to EC that transfer of the police chiefs would affect the right to vote of the electorate in most of the sensitive districts of West Bengal. The ruling dispensation is also uncomfortable and scared of the disruption caused by the ECI by effecting transfer of their pet police chiefs and exposure of their plans of rigging the polls in the entire state of West Bengal.

The contents of the Memorandum submitted by the group of MPs is a n obsequious display of sycophancy in order to gain favour from their inspirational Didi and be nominated to the Rajya Sabha or for grabbing lucrative political posts after the Parliamentary elections are over.

Yours etc.,
Samares
Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata
High Court

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

“History reminds us that dictators and despots arise during times of severe economic crisis.”

--- Robert Kiyosaki

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Green volunteers conclave

THE environment today is in great stress and much of that is caused by anthropogenic (humanly induced) activities resulting from a poor understanding of what the earth is and why we should treat it with respect. One of the embedded principles in all tribal communities vis-a-vis their relationship with nature is that they give it the status of a mother. If so, the earth should have been protected from the daily onslaughts on it by polluting our rivers and generating plastic waste that is not bio-degradable. Finding space dump such garbage is well nigh impossible and recycling plastic waste has other consequences. The Meghalaya Basin Development Authority has been forming groups of young volunteers who are cleaning up rivers, across the state and picking up carelessly strewn garbage to throw it at designated places. These young volunteers deserve commendation even though not much is reported in the mainstream media about their activities. It is ironic that while the youth are conscious of their responsibilities towards the environment, the elderly don't seem to have got their act together. Voluntarism by the young is in fact our only hope for the future. But voluntarism must also lead to policy advocacy if the movement is to sustain itself.

A recent effort by 16 villages in Ri Bhoi district to clean up the rivers in that district is music to the ears. This is the beginning of the human endeavour to restore the environment. Other districts should also strive to follow this brilliant example. The coal mining areas have already lost their rivers to acid mine drainage but the mine owners have not even started to retrieve these rivers from the devastation they have caused through the decades. The mine owners believe that paying a token amount to the Government in the name of Environment Protection Fund releases them from the burden of responsibility for the damage caused to nature. ‘Mother Earth’ (Ka Mei Ramew) as Khasis call this earth is now groaning with pain but no one pays attention. The coal mine owners violate mining regulations with impunity despite the regular rap on the knuckles by the National Green Tribunal (NGT). What is ironic here is that the civil societies in all the coal mining districts are all silent because of the fear of consequences that would visit any action on their part. Can we as a state sacrifice mother earth at the altar of private profit? The Green Volunteers Conclave should start venturing into coal and limestone territory to contain the rapid ecological destruction of those fragile ecosystems.

In our electoral dance of democracy it's raining pedigree. No, I am not talking about the canine variety, but our political lineage, specially the millennial brat pack wherein, our Parties are busy invoking the dynastic Gods to reap rich political dividends. A fool-proof way for India's polity to go to the dogs!

If Indian democracy rests on the one-man-one-vote principle, then elections are all about one family and as many tickets as you can wangle norm. The Congress wins hands down offering Nehru-Gandhi's Gen Next and other dynasts while the BJP sways to the lilting tune of Bhai, Bahen and Bandhu alongside the NaMo jaap.

The regional satraps Thackeray's Shiv Sena, Chautala's INLD, Badal's Akali Dal, Abdullah's NC, Lalu's RJD, Mulayam's Samajwadi, Patnaik's BJD, Ajit Singh's RLD, Mehbooba's PDP and Paswan's LJP believe in Patni and Putra-Putri Prem! A no-holds barred gharelu nautanki which has surpassed India's Got Talent TRP rating. Indeed, India's son's is shining, and, how!

Undeniably, India has entered the era of oligarchy. Scandalously, 157 Lok Sabha MPs or 30% belong to political families. If this continues soon a time will come when most MPs would be by heredity alone. Welcome our neo-Maharajas. Think. Twenty eight beta-beti politicians have claimed “their birthright of carrying forward the family legacy.” Be it Congress, BJP, Samajwadi, BSP, Trinamool, NCP, NC, TDP, DMK, RJD and LJP. They hail from J&K to Tamil Nadu, Nagaland to Maharashtra and heartland UP, MP and Bihar.

Ironically, even as Congress President Rahul harps on democratising the Party yet patriarchy and familial ties continue to be the buzzword. Name any Chief Minister or PCC Chief and one will invariably find his aankhon ka tara son-daughter in politics. From MP Chief Minister Kamal Nath's son who is in the poll fray from Chhindwara to his predecessor Digvijaya and J&K Soz's sons, Union Minister Santosh Mohan Dev's beti et al.

Ditto ex-Finance Minis-

Parties invoke dynastic gods

Millennial brat pack bro!

By Poonam I Kaushish

ter Chidambaram and former Assam and Haryana Chief Ministers Gogoi and Hooda's sons, former Union Minister PM Sayeed sons to dynasty retainer Murlu Deora, late Rajesh Pilot and Jitendra Prasad putras down Sunil Dutt's daughter Priya Dutt and Punjab Raja Amrinder's Rani.

Modi might scoff at Congress's dynastic politics breeding “termites” but the BJP too stands “Congressised” and has its fair share of progenies. Of the BJP's 75 new faces who made their electoral debut in Rajasthan, MP and Chhattisgarh in the recent Assembly polls 33 are sons or daughters of leaders who have crossed 75 years.

Besides the other Gandhis — Maneka-Varun, there is Home Minister Rajnath Singh's son, deceased Goa and Delhi Chief Ministers Parrikar and Sahib Singh's betas alongside erstwhile Union Minister Yashwant Sinha and Himachal Chief Minister Dhumal ladlas, late Promod Mahajan and Munde's daughters and MP strongman Vijayvargiya son. There's dear Akhilesh Yadav who followed daddy Mulayam as UP Chief Minister and nominated wife-uncles-cousins as MPs and not-so-youth but still in papa's footsteps is Shiv Sena's Uddhav Thackeray hailing his rising son Aditya. Ditto TDP's Naidu's and TRS Rao's beta-beti, Mamata and Pawan's bhatijas, Mayawati's bhai and Omar Abdullah, who's followed father Farooq and grandfather Sheikh and Mehbooba who took-over the baton from daddy dearest in Kashmir. Lalu-Rabri family concern RJD has ladli Misa in Rajya Sabha, while her siblings Tej Pratap-Teshasvi fight for the family political spoils, Paswan is busy lighting the ‘chirag’ for son as is Ajit Singh, Punjab's Akali father-son shop has Badal daughter-in-law as Union Minister and her brother as MLA. The entire Scindia family of Gwalior has smoothly transitioned from monarchy to politics: Congress has Madhav's son Jyotirmayditya and BJP ex Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasudhara's ladla and

bahen.

Besides, political legatees are getting younger, hungrier and meaner. Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Odisha are classic cases where dynasty rules the roost. You simply cannot aspire to achieve anything worthwhile in politics if you are not the son or daughter of a prominent leader. Besides Hooda, Rao Birendra Singh and Surjewala have their sons and daughter respectively in the poll fray. Erstwhile Chief Minister Bhajan Lal's son and Devi Lal's progeny have regional outfits. On one side Ajay Chautala's son Dushyant is pitted against chacha Abay.

Down South there is DMK patriarch Karunanidhi's son-daughter-nephew clan. Not to be left behind rival AIADMK has fielded Dy Chief Minister Panneerselvam and ex-Mayor's sons. A never ending lineage whereby polls and Parties are one. In Odisha several political families are in the fray, some seeking re-election or crossing swords with their kin as Parties have fielded various family members from different constituencies.

In Sundergarh ex-Congress Chief Minister Biswal's two daughters are in the fray, one BJD's Lok Sabha candidate, the other Congress's Assembly contender. In another constituency the Congress has given the father the responsibility to retain an Assembly seat and son to wrest a Lok Sabha seat from rival BJD. A BJD MP has transferred his baton to wife. Also in the fray is erstwhile Paralakhemundi King Gajapati's great granddaughter.

All of the above are parroting the same hackneyed diatribe. Only our dynasty can provide a Government of the people, by the people and for the people. Sprinkled liberally with loads of balidaan and деш bhakti! Hoping that a billion plus vassals will be mesmerized by the dynastic Gods to shower their choicest blessing. What is material is not whether the candidates are deserving but that they are “made deserving”, by virtue of their hereditary factor.

If truth be told, we are still unabashedly feudal in our outlook and jo hukum thought process, notwithstanding that dynasty is an antithesis to democracy and electoral politics. Most elected leaders prefer to function in the style of old feudal lords. Party tickets are distributed not on the basis of merit, but feudal laws and connections. If a Minister dies, give his place to the wife, son or daughter.

This is today's political culture reeking off a shameless feudalistic India where families, even extended ones, invoke the dynastic Gods. Some see the netas bachhas invasion as leaders cloning themselves to fortify their empires. All this under the fallacy that charisma and money rather than democratically choosing the best candidate, serve the needs of the constituency and voters. Ascerted a senior family patriarch: “Is it not normal for the offspring of mice to dig burrows? Children of political parents will know politics best”. Perhaps the best way to explain a rat race!

In a milieu where politics has transcended to business, a political family like a business house is busy leveraging its assets. Under the misconception it owns a constituency and has the right to pass it on to whomever it pleases, thereby reducing “worthy candidates” into a farce. Sadly, deserving candidates and Party workers are dumped as principles are unceremoniously buried thereby, creating confusion, causing rifts and fist fights. Indeed, all Parties have their share of black eyes resulting in sons, daughters and sons-in-law becoming an integral part of statecraft — leading to new rules, guidelines and extra-Constitutional centres of power. Now matters have reached such a pass that a neta's clout is gauged by who and how many family members he has got accommodated as Party candidates. What next? With top leaders making their ‘issues’ an election subject, ideology has been cast aside. Notwithstanding, in the long run short-term feudal gains will sound our polity's death-knell. All busy hailing and serenading each other — the new rajas and ranis and my feudal India.--INFA

Policy paralysis

Economic crisis looms

By Shivaji Sarkar

Election time is show time. The minuses are swept under the carpet as rhetoric rules the roost. Manifestos are not necessarily about substance or firm promises. These might be real in some cases and away from the reality in most others. In this electoral din, the US withdrawal of zero-duty entry for Indian exports under the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) went unnoticed. The Opposition, in disarray, has not been able to rake up pressing issues. For any ruling Party, this is a matter of relief.

Surprising is the silence of business chambers as America's decision would have a direct impact on Indian exports and balance of payment. This required intense diplomacy but the NDA Government had been rigid despite US warnings since early 2018. The Government could have accepted the US demand for allowing imports of American dairy products. This could have helped Indian businesses.

The complexities of Brexit will also impact Indian exports. This is also not being discussed. Pertinently, it is in contrast to the foreign policy stress of Indira Gandhi's 1971 election manifesto when Indian Ocean littoral states took significant space. Add to this, industrial production in February grew by only 0.1%.

Politically, economic diplomacy is not easy to explain to the electorate, who are suffering from job losses, inflation despite a low WPI, high bank charges, tolls and the threat of losing their ten-year old vehicles to quixotic NGT rules that allow pollution by factories but not small emissions from a car. Alas, all manifestos have ignored pressing issues and are not even considering ecological issues of building roads and airports indiscriminately.

After several promises in the Congress manifesto, a similar expectation was expected in the BJP manifesto. It, however, is not harping so much on development as it did in 2014. In fact, many past promises of the BJP have been incorporated by the Congress and stress on delivery. In tune with the campaign, the Saffron Singh is harping on issues that would boost a nationalistic approach. It dwells on erstwhile Jan Singh's Articles 35 A and 370 on Kashmir which panders to religious sentiments, not Lord Ram. And unleashes the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in the North East thereby reviving the sentiments of Partition.

The BJP manifesto is light on legal reform whether in terms of legislation, policy proposals or judicial reform. May be the 2014 document had an overdose of it and as it stands the Modi Government has repealed 1200 redundant laws.

In contrast, the Congress proposes 14 new legal reforms. While manifestos of regional Samajwadi-type Parties are hardly readable. The BJP, like the Congress, targets farmers. It has already transferred Rs 2000 of the Rs 6000 a year to them as promised. Now it assures Rs 25 lakh crores investments in the agri-rural sector. This looks attractive but the mode of raising fund has not been discussed. Obviously, the Government does not have that kind of money as for the past many years any investment in the farm sector has come through bank credit. The MUDRA and Stand Up India programmes have further added to bank NPAs.

Besides, corporate investment has been minimal. Now banks cannot be further stressed and depositors are in a crisis as their interest accruals have come down while tax components have increased. Sadly, none is bothered about this. The BJP manifesto stress

on turning the country in to a defence production hub is yet to be understood. This will require massive investments but no one discusses the criticality of military productions. Would it also cause problems that the US and many western countries are afflicted with?

In 2014, the BJP had promised abolition or maximum relaxation in income-tax rates. It did so only partially in the 2019 budget by raising the limit to Rs 5 lakhs. But those above it will not get any benefit as taxes would be calculated at the threshold limit of Rs 2.5 lakhs plus standard deduction.

The new manifesto again says that taxes would be relooked into. But like in 2014, the Party had promised to do away with road toll on private vehicles and later reneged, obviously this has not led to enthusiasm.

The BJP Sankalp Patra is also silent on the stray cattle menace, a product of cow vigilantism, destroying crops in the cow belt. Neither does demonitisation find a mention. Politically, it should have stressed on its benefits.

Somewhat, Odisha's KAALIA scheme has its echo. The BJP has promised taking care of pensions for 60+ farmers, shopkeepers and has already introduced it in the Budget pension for unorganized workers.

True, the welfare schemes are good but its economic costs certainly have not been estimated during poll time. The KAALIA looks good as is MNREGA.

But both have created a system of lazy people who because of these doles shun working. This has led to an influx of labourers from Jharkhand, West Bengal and neighbouring States to Odisha. In simple terms, it is a double whammy for State economy. It has more outgo and consequently society is also paying as a large part of the State GDP goes out due to import of labour and supporting a class of inactive people.

Clearly, poll time is also the time to discuss critical issues. But the Election Commission has sanitised campaigns to such an extent that Parties are neither approaching voters nor are they discussing problems with them. Thus the process stymies democratic discussion. That is possibly the reason for a low voter turnout in the first phase of polls. Voters apparently are feeling cut-off. Family-based Parties bereft of ideology do not create confidence though this seems the alternative. Politically, voters are confused. The common refrain is that nobody is listening to them and nor is anybody talking to them.

Door-to-door contacts are not there. It is an uncertain situation and there is fear and apprehension. More. Social media has not been able to replace personal contacts and dialogue.

Importantly, Parties have to realise that 2019 may spell disaster for social media campaigning. One lesson that nobody is learning is the failure of Manmohanomics — that ensured pro-corporate profits and jobless growth.

Today the BJP's problem emanates from it. Worse, its manifesto has not evolved a new policy. Even if the Party is able to form a Government it exemplifies policy wilderness. Post election this would be the crucial task.

In sum, winning the poll battle is not enough. Welfare economics charms but is devoid of hard realities. Contesting a key election without national policies on jobs, farms, industrial production, low inflation and sound financial institutions might prove to be costly. Post-poll the path has to change. ---INFA

TO THE EDITOR

One should not be judgmental

Editor,
Apropos the letter, “Meghalaya is home not just for tribals” (ST April 13, 2019) by AK Singh I have much to say but not everything in this rejoinder. At the outset, how dare Mr Singh say that I am a supporter the saffron party? But even if I am a supporter, what is the big deal about it? Here my pointed question to him is, why does he support those parties and those “forces” whose “integrity” is doubtful? If espousing the “truth” and human “values” is equated with supporting the saffron party of India then I will not mind the whole world calling me a leader of that party. Why should one deviate from the pathway of truth only because of the fear of being labelled as one thing or other?

Please watch out, if the same principle is applied, the leaders and country heads of UAE, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Palestine, South Korea, Japan are fast becoming followers of the saffron party. They all have applauded the activities of the supreme head of the saffron party — Mr. Narendra Modi and awarded him with the states' highest honours. What is disquieting here is that the president of Russia - Vladimir Putin has

also jumped on the bandwagon. His government has just announced that it would honour Narendra Modi with the country's highest award - Order of St. Andrew the Apostle. According to AK Singh, this would be objectionable. Well, barring a few, all world leaders have established a personal relationship with the saffron head. Is my friend AK Singh aware that Tulsi Gabbard, who is now running for the President of America, is a passionate follower of Narendra Modi? One wonders what Mr. Singh and his ilk will do if the US Congress' leaders will cry at the top their lungs — “America Mata Jai” in case Ms. Tulsi wins the elections in 2020? Her name itself is so off-putting, isn't it?

Further, I guess, the writer must not have completely read my letter, and therefore he is conveniently misinterpreting it to create confusion among the readers. His intention is seemingly not very clear. Almost all my letters and also articles, starting from 1992 have invariably sought to bring about the harmony, peace, and co-existence among all peoples and the welfare of the entire humanity. I personally have never compromised on the misconceived ideas and principles against human values; nor have I

knowingly ever set out to cause division, hostility, acrimony and hatred through my write-ups. And, despite that, if anyone draws negative meanings from my writings then I am totally helpless. Of course, people usually understand a subject which is based on already programmed and conditioned mind. The acquired information and impressions in the past only help them form the ideas and conclusions. We usually become “victims” of wrong propaganda and misinformation and start to believe them as being right. One has to be extra alert in this age of digital media as there are many wrong propagandists around.

Please re-read the last lines of my letter ‘Do not lay the country to waste’ — “Let's not waste our precious life by struggling to call the untruth as truth and vice versa. This exercise only contributes to polluting our mindset and the country becomes less peaceful and more vulnerable.” Are not my intentions clear? Mr AK Singh should note that I can clearly differentiate between right and wrong, and virtue and evil. Hence I will not call “aluminum” as “gold” and bet my money on the former.

Yours etc.,
Salil Grewal,
Via email

Voting the only tool of the oppressed

Editor,
Dr BR Ambedkar was born on April 14, 1891. This year his birthday brought a special message. The message tells every adult Indian citizen to vote as his birthday this year was timed to coincide with the parliamentary election. Indeed, the people's aspiration through ballot and peaceful movements make some countries score high in human development and become truly welfare states. For example, the people of Nordic countries make their government take an amalgamated path of socialist equality and capitalist liberty and become happy and human developed countries. They have achieved it in a peaceful and democratic process.

I have a great admiration for BR Ambedkar and for his efforts at giving us Universal Adult Suffrage. India has a democratic set up with all citizens having equal rights. Article 326 of the Indian Constitution says, “The elections to the House of the People and to the Legislative Assembly of every State

shall be on the basis of adult suffrage...” Every person who is a citizen of India and who is not less than 18 years of age is entitled to get registered as a voter if not otherwise disqualified by law on grounds of “non-residence, unsoundness of mind, crime or corrupt or illegal practice”. In 1928, Dr B.R. Ambedkar appeared before the Simon Commission and insisted on incorporating universal adult franchise in the Constitution of India. He said that vote was “a weapon in the hands of the most oppressed sections of society”. The Indian National Congress took a stand in favour of political equality at the 1931 Karachi session. India has made great strides towards democracy and political equality by accepting the modern concept of giving equal value for every vote. Election is the most peaceful way to bring change. We need to vote after thinking about who should be our representatives in the Parliament for the next five years. Come rain or shine, vote we must because vote is “a weapon in the hands of the most oppressed sections of society.”

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

Acknowledging Jallianwala

Editor,
As India marks the 100th anniversary of Jallianwala Bagh massacre, dreams of getting an apology from Britain has fallen short. The tragedy cannot be reversed. An unconditional apology from the British Government is long overdue and would demonstrate its recognition and remorse for this dastardly attack. As Shashi Tharoor rightly proclaimed in his now famous speech at Oxford Union, reparations or an official apology from Britain should not be viewed as a tool for empowering Indians. Instead, it offers Britons a chance to atone for the wrongs that should never have been committed or celebrated in the first place. The massacre had all the trappings of a crime against humanity. It is one of the worst atrocities of British colonial rule. It is the defining moment of British rule and made people realise that imperial rule was neither enlightened nor benevolent but brutalising dehumanising and murderous.

Yours etc.,
Adv. Mominul Haque,
Shillong-6

“Perhaps one did not want to be loved so much as to be understood.”

--- George Orwell

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 2019

Downgrading democratic values

Politicians across the country are pulling all the stops to convince voters to vote them along caste and religious lines. In this fast and furious race the notables are Mayawati, Menaka Gandhi, Yogi Aditya Nath and Azam Khan amongst others. Thankfully, the Election Commission has stepped up its vigil and is taking necessary action against these political deviants who have no respect for the diversity and constitutional values that this country professes and has professed for over 70 years. It is, of course pointless to expect politicians who have not transcended their petty political aspirations to understand the democratic ethos of this country. For them it's all or nothing. It's all about grabbing power and nothing about governance. The soft underbelly of democracy is being exposed every time politicians with no respect for democratic principles take the elevated podium of addressing voters with the purpose and intent of making them feel they are an exclusive category needing special privileges which the political leader alone is able to deliver. Such political messaging is divisive and exclusive and exposes the fact that India's political class have always tried to find that vulnerable thread of caste and religion to goad people to vote on those lines. The idea of India as a country of one people whose religious affiliations are varied have not been imbibed by the political class because for them it's more important to win votes than to think of the larger goal and purpose of nation building.

And now into this mess steps Rahul Gandhi with his cheap rhetoric of “Chowkidar chor hai,” where the Congress President accuses Prime Minister Modi of stealing from the Rafal deal to bail out Anil Ambani the failed businessman. All was fine with this blame game narrative until Rahul Gandhi dragged in the Supreme Court to buttress his own allegations of corruption against Modi. Now the Congress President has landed himself with a contempt of court notice on a petition from a BJP MP, Meenakshi Lekhi. The Supreme Court has warned politicians not to attribute any meaning to court orders while addressing election rallies or while speaking to the media unless such views, observations or findings are recorded by the Court. This is in the fairness of things. Politicians cannot drag every institution, the judiciary included, to their level of political bickering. India today is at a juncture when its democratic values are under threat. It is futile to expect politicians to mend the fissures they have created. It is for the people of India to reclaim those attributes of our democratic traditions that have held us together as a nation.

TO THE EDITOR

Riding Shotgun, Meghalaya style

Editor,
This is a letter in the form of a story for the readers of this esteemed paper.

A throwback to the days of the American Wild West. A western movie on the big screen. A stage coach thundering across the plains of the American prairie. Alongside the stagecoach driver sits a guard with a gun across his thighs. He is riding shotgun to protect the coach and its cargo. Suddenly an outlaw appears on the scene with the vile intent at daylight robbery.

He throws out a challenge. “Stop! Your money or your life!”

The shotgun rider replies with a thunderous volley from his shotgun. The outlaw backs off and the stage continues on its way safely to distant Dodge City. Evil is defeated. Truth prevails.

Fast forward to 21st century Meghalaya, sometimes in the month of April 2019, a 12-wheeled truck laden with illegally mined coal rolls surreptitiously in the night along the National Highway from East Jaintia Hills on its way to the coal depots of Beltola. At a check gate, a police officer torch in

hand and in all his splendid khaki regalia of office, waves the truck to a halt.

“Kit aiu? Dewiong ne? Mem tip ka long bean? Don kot don sla?” (What are you transporting? Coal? Don't you know its illegal? Show me your papers) demands the majesty of the law.

The driver of the truck pokes his head out of his cabin and languidly answers, “Don re. Sa batai malik ba wan nadien (Don't have any papers. The owner following behind will explain).”

A Duster that had been trailing the truck from behind slides up silently besides the policeman. A hand with a bundle of 2000 rupee notes reaches out. A short whispered conversation ensues and the policeman then waves the truck forward with the command “Khie Iaid” (Proceed on your way). It trundles on its way to Beltola city. No shooting. No violence. Riding shotgun the Coal Mafia way, Meghalaya style!

In the morning a SUV with Govt nameplates, accompanied by gun toting security men visits the police checkgate. The police officer of the night before emerges and hands

In recent days there have been voices of protest from a cross section of society against the policies of the present government. Even BJP veteran, L.K. Advani, who has been sidelined in the party, has talked of the need for freedom of expression and the controversy centred around what is really Indian nationalism. As he aptly pointed out: “The party has been committed to freedom of choice of every citizen at the personal as well as political level”. Advani clearly stated that, “we never regarded those who disagree with us politically as ‘anti national’.

Before Advani's post, theatre figures issued a joint statement in 12 languages which stated that the Constitution is under threat. “The institutions that have to nurture argument, debate and debate have been suffocated. To question, to call out lies, to speak the truth is branded ‘anti national’. The seeds of hatred have entered our food, prayers and festivals”. The statement regretted that the ways hatred has seeped into our daily fabric are ‘alarming’ and it has to stop. The appeal clearly urged the people to “vote bigotry, hatred and apathy out of power” and named the BJP and its allies.

Even a group of 150 scientists from top academic institutions recently observed the need to protect the most fundamental guarantees of the Constitution, including the rights of faith, personal liberty and freedom of expression. “To defend these rights, we must reject those who lurch or assault people, those who discriminate against people because of religion, caste, gender, language or region”. They further pointed out “we cannot endorse politics that divides us, creates fears, marginalises a large fraction of our society – women, dalits, adivasis, religious minorities, persons with disabilities or the poor”.

It may be pertinent here to mention that scientists from across the country had over the past three years or so expressed concern at what they viewed as poor governance of scientific institutions, lack of autonomy in these institutions and retreat from evidence based policies to

growth of lumpen populism. In fact, some political leaders of the ruling party have referred to mythology to negate proven scientific achievements and substantiate India's role in this regard. Though there has been no open criticism, the international scientific community has made a mockery of such claims. Finally, some retired bureaucrats in 15 open letters have stated of attempts to weaken the constitutional framework and frequent departures from the rule of law. This collective that goes by the name of Constitutional Conduct first sent out an open letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in

Elections have already started at such a critical and unprecedented situation. There are two clear indications of the present state of things – one, that every individual who matters and also every organization cannot retain its independence and has to toe the government line and second, the secular fabric of the country would not be allowed to continue.

June 2017 articulating their deep discontent over religious intolerance, particularly targeting Muslims.

Elections have already started at such a critical and unprecedented situation. There are two clear indications of the present state of things – one, that every individual who matters and also every organization cannot retain its independence and has to toe the government line and second, the secular fabric of the country would not be allowed to continue. These clearly reflect strands of autocracy and fascism creeping into political fabric. In fact, the ‘State of Democracy in the World 2018’ titled Me Too? Political Participation, Protest and Democracy made news last year when India slipped 10 straight positions from 32 to 42, ranking below Latvia and South Africa.

The centralised manner in which the government

has been functioning would thus continue if the party in power is re-elected. Moreover, even educational institutions run by the government would have very little or virtually no autonomy not to speak of institutions like the Reserve Bank of India, CBI etc. The control will be at the top in the hands of one or two persons who would dictate matters. Obviously this would not improve governance and efficiency which would mean the bottom segments of society would suffer.

The centralisation of power is manifest in most political parties. The decision making is centralised at the apex level amongst a very few leaders,

unity of religions and not imposing one's religion and religious practices on the other. The ruling dispensation is interested in furthering its own interest in being in power at any cost. As their working clearly shows, they have very little regard for democratic values and cannot tolerate any form of dissent. This trend is dangerous for a country like India where diverse forms of interest persist and where there is a sizeable section of minorities.

In the economic front, the same strategy of controlling every institution like the NSSO has been amply manifest. The autocratic manner in which demonetization was announced not only affected small traders but had an overall a negative effect on the economy. There have been allegations of the government's pro rich attitude and ignoring the interests of the poor, specially the rural impoverished and the farming community.

Delving into the problem, one finds that the government lacks an effective plan to generate employment and very little encouragement has been given to labour-intensive sectors. Also though much hype was generated on ‘Made in India’ programme, but due to various factors, manufacturing activities did not pick up. It needs to be mentioned here that there was need to give a boost to set up small and micro industries, specially in the rural and semi urban areas but this was not on the government's agenda. The government's focus was on modernizing airports, building expressways, starting bullet trains all of which did not benefit the common man nor generate jobs. But though these may be failures that could be rectified, the social fabric suffered with the government encouraging division on the basis of religion, caste etc. Democratic values were being thrown to the winds and secular outlook that bind Indian society were getting loosened. Due to all of this apprehensions have been expressed about the threat to the Constitution and the government's fascist tendencies which may get aggravated if voted to power once again.---INFA

Readers have a right to their views

Editor,

Apropos the letter “One should not be judgemental,” by Salil Gwali (ST April 16 2019), I once again have to intervene. A.K Singh had crossed the line. A full stop at a particular paragraph should suffice what the writer wants to express and the readers could already grasp the meaning - We shall not pass judgement that may have hurt someone. Again awards and awardees crop up and let me clarify that all these awards are driven by political compulsions and better International trade relations. Putin's award that had been announced may be because of the good relation India has had with USSR especially in defence procurement and I do believe there is nothing wrong at all with the timing. Prime Minister Modi's contributing a Library in Afghanistan might have been the cause for the award.

It is rather sad that even after seventy two years of Independence, with the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre

never forgotten, we still have an inferiority complex. With DRDO's successes, we are at par with any developing country in the world. Who cares if some NRI in USA fights the election and what is the profit we would harvest? Rather talk on the Balakot air strike with Modi as the hero, millions of megawatt of power for rural India, crores of LPG connection to the rural poor, lakhs of houses and toilets in rural India, health care at Rs 6000 per year for farmers, honouring the MSP statue of unity, cleansing the CBI, strengthening the ED's and IT's which had performed yeoman service and many more. Let us also advise that writers should never be enthusiastic to the point of believing that

any one rooting for Modi is standing for truth and anyone against Modi is untrue. As a referee assisted by reviews let me advise Mr AK Singh not to be judgmental and to Mr Gwali not to be over enthusiastic. With six phases of elections still to go, readers had better be advised not to miss a single paper everyday.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Shillong- 14

BJP will find it tough to repeat 2014 performance in 2019

By Dr Satish Misra

By the time the second phase of the seven-phased general elections is over on April 18, the fate of 188 seats-a decimal point over one third seats would have been sealed in the EVMs but initial trends are strongly suggesting that while the electoral battle is wide open, the ruling dispensation is fighting it out with its back towards the wall.

In the first two phases of the ongoing general elections, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had won 59 seats on its own while its main challenger-the Congress had mere 19 seats in 2014. In the first phase polling on April 11, barring Andhra Pradesh and Telangana the BJP enjoyed upper hand in 49 seats of which it won 29. Rest three seats in the first phase were won by the BJP in Andhra and Telangana. In the Hindi heartland states of Bihar, Uttarakhhand and Uttar Pradesh, today's ruling party won 16 of the 17 seats in 2014.

In West Bengal where the polling percentage remained

that the Modi government had brought in parliament but could not be passed, the BJP is facing an uphill task particularly since the saffron party is missing no chance to repeat its determination to get the bill controversial bill into an act.

Experts and seasoned poll observers are ruling out a repeat of the 2014 performance by the BJP which if translated in numbers means a loss of about 20 seats over last time and a gain of four seats at the maximum. Polling for the second phase will be held on April 18 and 97 Lok Sabha seats in 12 states and a Union Territory of Puducherry are at stake. Elections for 39 Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu are also scheduled in this phase. The BJP had won one Lok Sabha seat from the southern state in 2014 and hopes to gain few more this time in alliance with the AIADMK. The ruling party at the Centre has been given five seats to contest by the AIADMK.

The BJP had won 27 seats in 2014 while the

Experts and seasoned poll observers are ruling out a repeat of the 2014 performance by the BJP which if translated in numbers means a loss of about 20 seats over last time and a gain of four seats at the maximum. Polling for the second phase will be held on April 18 and 97 Lok Sabha seats in 12 states and a Union Territory of Puducherry are at stake. Elections for 39 Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu are also scheduled in this phase. The BJP had won one Lok Sabha seat from the southern state in 2014 and hopes to gain few more this time in alliance with the AIADMK. The ruling party at the Centre has been given five seats to contest by the AIADMK.

good, the BJP is expected to gain. In 2014, both the seats were won by the Trinamool Congress but the BJP is likely to wrest one seat from Mamata Banerjee's party. Similarly, in Tripura West and Outer Manipur, the saffron party stands a fair chance to win. In rest of BJP-held seats, battle has been tough and reports are indicating that the BJP may be likely to suffer losses.

The BJP had won all the 13 seats that went to poll in UP and Uttarakhhand in the first phase, losses are going to be heaviest. The ruling party is expected to lose between seven and 10 seats. In Bihar out of four seats that went to poll, the BJP had held three seats but this time it is contesting one seat only. The NDA allies are battling out in the rest three seats. The BJP leadership is keeping its fingers crossed hoping that allies win them though the contest is tough and fortunes may favour either of the two alliances.

The last general election in Maharashtra witnessed a one-sided contest. The BJP and its Sena had won all the seven seats that were at stake in the first phase. While the BJP had won five, the Shiv Sena two. In four of these seats, victory margin was more than 20 percent but ground reports suggest that it may be impossible for the BJP to retain its tally of last time. Experts and ground reports are suggesting a possible loss between two to three seats.

Out of the 14 total seats in Assam, five seats went to poll on April 11. The BJP had won four seats in 2014 with a victory margin of 15 percent votes. Gaurav Gagoi of the Congress had won the fifth seat. In the wake of the controversial citizenship bill

Congress had won 12 seats in Bihar, five seats- Banka, Bhagalpur, Katihar, Kishanganj and Purnea- are being contested and the BJP had not won any of these five seats in 2014.

However in UP and Chhattisgarh, where 11 seats are going to poll, the BJP had won all the seats in 2014. In both the states, it is an impossible task to win all the seats. In Chhattisgarh particularly where the BJP has denied tickets to all the sitting 10 MPs, it is facing an uphill task to retain three seats in the second phase.

There are 24 seats in Karnataka and Maharashtra that are going to polls in the second phase. In 2014, the BJP had 11 seats while its ally Shiv Sena had won five seats. The BJP's spectacular performance was the result of the strong Modi wave that swept the country but situation has changed considerably now.

In the second phase too, the BJP's tally is not going to improve rather it is going to be reduced by a minimum of 10 seats. Gain by its allies are also not in sight.

Competition between the ruling BJP and the opposition parties despite the lack of unity among them appears to be tough but then why majority of opinion polls have predicted an electoral edge for the BJP led NDA?

Answer to this puzzle is not far to seek. It is because there is a big gap between the support that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is getting in urban townships and metro cities and that he is getting in rural areas.

Dr. Satish Misra is a Veteran Journalist & Research Associate with Observer Research Foundation.

“ In addition to joblessness, of course, by the working of supply and demand, when you have a larger number of people unemployed, wages do not rise at the normal level, so that we had last year a drop in real wages. ”

--- Tim Bishop

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2019

Some jobs, some joblessness

THERE'S fresh concern that the scenario of joblessness in India is worsening. The reference is to a report released by the Centre for Sustainable Employment under Azim Premji University, which found in a study that some 50 lakh jobs were lost since the time of Demonetisation in November, 2016. Without doubt, Demonetisation halted money circulation for a period and resultantly slowed down manufacturing and economic growth, even as PM Modi's controversial step had its positive sides.

For one, huge amounts of hidden funds came into the formal economy driven by the banking sector and this is having a salutary effect on tax collections. For another, demonetisation applied partial brakes on black money circulation and new rules thereof make it more difficult to deal with cash in hidden modes. The positive effects of all these could be long-term. The roll-out of the GST upset the marketing systems even as it aimed at unifying market taxation systems across the country. This too is a work in progress, and a beginning has been made. At the same time, prima facie, demonetisation will remain as a stigma on the image of the Modi government. The present Lok Sabha polls are fought by the Opposition by highlighting this issue as well. More of emphasis on the part of the principal Opposition and its leader Rahul Gandhi, though, is now on the Rafale deal in which an alleged Modi crony, Anil Ambani, pocketed a huge commission.

It is also noted in the study that fall in jobs graph is on for many years – after Liberalization and globalization which led to the flooding of Chinese goods into the Indian market, and a resultant downturn for Indian manufacturing sector. “After remaining at around 2 to 3 per cent for the first decade, the unemployment rate steadily increased to around 5 per cent in 2015 and then just over 6 per cent in 2018,” the study noted. Mahatma Gandhi, in his wisdom, had sought to encourage the small-scale and cottage industries sector that offered jobs to the rural population, alongside agriculture.

Now, essential items like clothes and soap are mass produced by machines. At the same time, new sectors of employment have sprung up, which are largely urban-centred; like the services sector which is giving jobs to millions as technicians and sales and marketing personnel. Their numbers are not finding full reflection in studies on job generation. Overall, thus, the actual scenario of job loss might not be as worse as studies project.

SC corrects election commission's diabetic foot

By Sushil Kutty

Uttar Pradesh, made a lewd khaki-coloured comment against BJP rival Jayaprada. The National Commission for Women issued notice to Khan. That worthy said he did not commit zilh. Azam Khan considers himself Rampur's son. But Rampur's name to fame is the Rampuriya knife. Cutting-edge technology that dates back centuries. Azam Khan might have cut into forbidden turf because Rampur is Muslim-majority constituency. And Jayaprada is a two-time Rampur MP with influence among voters.

Post-slur khaki, Jayaprada, in her atrocious Hindi, promised to teach Azam Khan a lesson. She's pissed off that Akhilesh Yadav and

SP-BSP pact is an equal partnership but whichever party gets more seats will be the one calling the shots. The SP cannot be trusted, though. Once before Mulayam Singh Yadav had landed at Sonia Gandhi's door to bail UPA out of trouble. 2019, Mulayam and son Akhilesh might repeat the feat and land up at Rahul Gandhi's door post-poll, leaving Mayawati by the roadside. The Samajwadi Party is known to go astray and Mayawati must have factored in such errors when tying the rakhi.

The Samajwadi Party is known to go astray, but Azam Khan is not alone in the subversion of electoral norms. BJP candidate from Sultanpur Maneka Gandhi is no less a politician going

That is the whole idea of democracy and Maneka Gandhi is setting and foisting her own rules of democracy, which in an electoral democracy disqualifies her from being part of the electoral process. Period. Such people are the ones who nurture and sustain vote-banks. It reminds us of BR Ambedkar calling for a separate Dalit electorate and Mahatma Gandhi opposing the call. Maneka surely has not read history and for her “liberty and fraternity” are alien. It seems a lot of Sanjay Gandhi's philosophy has rubbed on her but this “groupism” would sound preposterous even to him. Son Varun Gandhi should sit Mummy Maneka down and ask what her intentions are?

While on intentions, Yogi Adityanath's were never in doubt. The Yogi is not khaki, he's saffron personified. And if there are cattle rampaging and ravaging standing crops in Western Uttar Pradesh and other places east, it's because the Yogi loves the cow like only a ‘gaurakshak’ can. The Yogi is also good at picking up English and Hindi words to state his case, which is to divide and divide the electorate along green and saffron lines. ‘Green Virus’ and ‘Ali-Bajrangibali’ will go down in the electoral history of Bharat Desh in no uncertain terms. The EC slapped a 72-hour ban on Yogi campaigning but with television around there's no stopping Yogi Adityanath from reading the Hanuman Chalisa to send a subtle message to the Election Commission and the Supreme Court!

Mayawati took her grudge against the EC to the Supreme Court and the apex court told her to stick to ban. The top court in fact broke her heart and calculations. It praised the Election Commission for coming out of its stupor and acting against communally-divided politicians. But, what about Namo TV and the Narendra Modi biopic. Namo TV continues to telecast Namo alone and the Namo biopic will get a special screening for EC officials, courtesy the Supreme Court. Will the officials show the same courage they displayed against Maya, Maneka, Yogi and Azam and ban it for being capable of influencing voters or will they watch Namo on screen and declare Narendra Modi a blockbuster hit! (IPA Service)

berserk, allegedly “black-mailing” Muslim voters of Sultanpur with threats that she'll see to it they did not get government jobs and government favours if they do not vote for her. Not satisfied with that alone, she followed it up with dividing Sultanpur's electorate into villages and the villages into groups A, B, C and D. ‘A’ will be those where 80% voted for her; ‘B’ those where 60% voted her; ‘C’ where 40% voted her and ‘D’ where less than 40% voted Maneka Gandhi. Group ‘A’ villages will get her 100% help post-poll, which she “will win for sure”. Group ‘B’ villages will get 60% help. Group ‘C’ 40% of her help and Group ‘D’ none at all!

What do you with such candidates? Defeat them, of course. Imagine the ‘Sansad’ setting out to an ‘A’ village all smiles and largesse and her cavalcade passing by Group ‘D’ villages not caring to know their woes, not even thinking that in every milieu there are those who vote for and those who vote against.

Of varied political ideologies

Editor, Every person has a right to their political views. As a regular reader of your newspaper I see that you allow all kinds of views and also the rejoinders to those views from readers. Hence it is unbecoming of people to take offence when someone reacts to such views. We are all discerning readers; we know which political party or ideology a person leans towards even when they cloak their views with platitudes. There are many in our city that believe in Prime Minister

“ Mayawati, banned for 48 hours, held a televised presser to protest the violation of her fundamental rights, “as given to all citizens by BR Ambedkar”, the rights of mobility and freedom of expression. As an antidote, she promised (read threat) to teach EC officials a lesson when she ascends the PM's chair.”

Mulayam Singh Yadav allowed Azam Khan to muddy her clothes. The Samajwadi Party is quite okay with Azam Khan's khaki-coloured description of Jayaprada's underclothes. Azam Khan made the sexist remark in the presence of Akhilesh Yadav and Akhilesh's only affinity with the ‘bi’ is the party symbol ‘bicycle’; he is not moved by ‘bi’ in bi-gender. Hardly thawed by EC's restrictions, Azam Khan is going around telling supporters not to be scared of “collector-volunteers”, that he'll get Mayawati to make such “salaried sort” wipe shoes. Appears like Azam Khan is eyeing Dalit votes and ‘Maya’ is password to open sesame Dalit Vote-bank.

Mayawati herself has been victim of Samajwadi Party machismo, having been cornered and gheraoed in what is known as the ‘Guesthouse Khand.’ But the times, they have a changed. Today, Mayawati and Mulayam Singh Yadav are on the same side and Mayawati is angling to become Prime Minister. The

The knives are out for polarizing politicians. Election Commission knives! Politicians dividing the electorate along communal lines are being punished. Of course, this courage came only after the Supreme Court of India dropped in with energy and more. The top court noted that India's poll panel is bereft of basic powers to muzzle divisive voices and the EC got its Boost and Bournvita and placed temporary campaign bans on a clutch of the divisive politician. Then, again, the temporary campaign bans on Yogi Adityanath, Mayawati, Maneka Gandhi and Azam Khan have not shut them up. It's difficult when there's television and social media to give them coverage and more.

Mayawati, banned for 48 hours, held a televised presser to protest the violation of her fundamental rights, “as given to all citizens by BR Ambedkar”, the rights of mobility and freedom of expression. As an antidote, she promised (read threat) to teach EC officials a lesson when she ascends the PM's chair. This is getting to be a habit, the revenge and will avenge threat. Samajwadi Party rabble-rouser Azam Khan and BJP politician Maneka Gandhi have similar “teach a lesson” ambitions. It seems vindictiveness is a qualification and politicians are not beyond using it as a weapon choice to be elected to power.

The Supreme Court noticed the EC's trouble walking its role and it pulled up the poll panel EC for “dragging its feet”, not taking action against divisive politicians. While on the question of EC's diabetic foot, is the Election Commission Prime Minister Narendra Modi's lackey? Is it turning a blind eye on poll code violations by Modi and Amit Shah? Mayawati thinks so. The Congress also. TDP boss Chandrababu Naidu is convinced compromised EVMs have him locked out of power in Andhra Pradesh, which saw polling in the first-phase, April 11. CJI Ranjan Gogoi says the EC has “woken up to its role and no further action is required”. Opposition parties have a different point of view and so will sections of the electorate.

BJP politician Maneka Gandhi's anti-Muslim rant and Azam Khan sexual innuendo-laced remarks against a BJP rival hit high octaves. Azam Khan, contesting from Rampur in

a number of issues? Yours etc., E Syiemiong, MA, DU, Shollong-2

Rafale deal and investigative journalism

Editor, This refers to your editorial, “Delayed Rafale deal” (ST, April 11, 2019). In its order on the Rafale deal, the Supreme Court of India has rightly drawn a parallel with the US Supreme Court's verdict on unhindered publication of the Pentagon Papers and held that the publication of three documents by the Hindu newspaper on Rafale was in consonance with the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech. In the 1971 historic legal battle between the US executive and the fourth estate, the US Supreme Court had thwarted the Nixon administration's attempt to block the publication of information on the Vietnam War.

While rejecting the Government of India's plea that the review petition on the Rafale deal was not main-

tainable as they were based on “stolen” documents, the Court said, “No law enacted by Parliament specifically barring or prohibiting the publication of such documents on any of the grounds mentioned in Article 19(2) of the Constitution has been brought to our notice. In fact, the publication of the said documents in ‘The Hindu’ newspaper reminds the Court of the consistent views of this Court upholding the freedom of the press in a long line of decisions commencing from Romesh Thappar vs. State of Madras and Brij Bhushan vs. The State of Delhi.”

It is clear that the government's argument is about ethics ~ about the way those documents had been procured and not about its authenticity. Moreover, by tagging the documents as “stolen”, the government has given a seal on their authenticity.

The question is: Can the fourth estate investigate the dealings of the executive, even sometimes crossing the boundary of the Official Secrets Act? The answer lies in the counter question: What then is in-

Electoral bonds

Transparency via secrecy

By Dr S Saraswathi

The Supreme Court has passed a very important interim order concerning funding of political parties for election. It has directed all political parties to provide complete information to the Election Commission in sealed covers on every single donor and contribution received through electoral bonds till date. It was hearing a PIL brought by an NGO challenging the issue of bonds on grounds of lack of transparency.

The bench headed by the CJI admitted that these were “weighty issues with tremendous bearing on the sanctity of the electoral process in the country”. The Court refused to stay the Electoral Bonds scheme, but has introduced some restrictions.

This scheme, a new channel for private funding of political parties, was promulgated by the Government of India under the Reserve Bank of India Act by a notification issued in January 2018. India is the first country to issue such a bond in the nature of a promissory note which is a bearer banking instrument without carrying the name of the buyer or the payee. The buyer need not declare the name of the beneficiary. Bonds are available in the denominations of one and ten thousand, one lakh, one million, and ten million.

The buyer can donate them to political parties which can encash them. Only parties registered under the Representation of People Act 1951 and have secured at least one per cent of votes polled in the latest Parliament or State election are eligible to receive donations under the scheme. Bonds are valid for 15 days from the date of purchase and are sold at specified time of the year.

The Attorney General argued that there is no reason to disclose the names of donors and the source of political funds to the citizens. Parties also cannot produce the details demanded by the Court as they themselves receive the donations without any official information about the donors. Except the CPM, all political parties are in favour of maintaining secrecy in the matter of political funding. Transparency in funding is indeed hard to achieve.

The bond scheme was introduced as an experiment with the object of eradicating black money and the government does not want the court to intervene now and put an end to it. But, the Supreme Court is of the view that if the identity of the donors buying electoral bonds is not known, government efforts to check black money would be futile. It looks like an effort of the government to achieve transparent dealings in party funding in the interest of eradicating corruption by maintaining secrecy. How this can be achieved through this indigenous Indian experiment is anxiously watched by the citizens.

The EC is taking a different stand holding that voters should know the source of funding of the parties also. It rejects the argument that the scheme will help poll reform. To stop financing of election campaigns using black money, the EC urged the government to amend laws to ban anonymous contributions of Rs.2,000 and above made to political parties. When the bond scheme was mooted in 2017, the EC observed that by removing the cap on donations of 7.5 per cent of the average net profit of the preceding three years, bonds could open the “possibility of shell companies being set up for the sole purpose of making donations to political parties”. Anonymity could help channeling money through troubled, dying, and bogus

companies and thus instead of cleansing party funds, would add to sources of black money trail.

The “cost of democracy”, which includes the cost of electoral campaigning and conducting elections, has been increasing like all other goods and services all over the world. According to an expert estimation, 2019 general election in India may cost up to \$10 billion which is said to be nearly \$4 billion more than American presidential election expenditure in 2016. Figures vary in different estimates, but uniform in suggesting much higher election expenditure in India compared to the US.

Representative system of government formed by popular voting is unable to regulate the flow of money in politics. We believe that there is no democracy without an electoral system. We also have to believe and admit that a general election cannot be held without huge expenditure. The inevitable consequence is enormous and almost unstoppable money power dominating elections which is clearly visible in the assets declared by candidates and their rapid rise. The ceiling put on election expenditure of candidates as Rs.28 lakh for Assembly and Rs.70 lakh for Parliament constituencies in bigger States and much less for smaller States is itself so unrealistic and becomes the starting point for making money matter opaque in party system and electioneering.

Issue of coupons printed by the parties themselves, said to be a way of collecting donations without limit does not seem to be in practice. In 2016, the EC asked the Law Ministry to ensure that political parties register details of donors for coupons of all amounts on the basis of a Supreme Court order issued in 1996. The situation raises a serious question of transparency in electoral funding.

In Britain, the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act 1883 is an effort to regulate financial aspect of political competition. The Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act 1925 aimed at ending the practice of selling titles in exchange for donations to political parties. In 1976, the Committee on Financial Aid to Political Parties recommended two kinds of aid -- lump sum grant to the central party organisation or reimbursement of election expenditure to candidates. Excessive spending by candidates is being controlled by legislations. Checking expenditure seems to be more effective than limiting donations.

Despite these regulations, Britain faced “Cash for honours” scandal in 2006 which led to enquiries. Putting a ceiling on individual donations and on funding political campaigns, and increasing State funding were then recommended. The UN Convention Against Corruption encouraged member-countries to “enhance transparency in the funding of candidates for elected public office and when applicable, the funding of political parties”.

French presidential candidates are prohibited by law from receiving more than the prescribed limit of donations to their election campaigns. Limits are prescribed for individual donations to parties and to presidential candidates. Corporate firms and other legal entities with the exception of political parties and movements are prohibited from financing candidates. Contestants have to submit their accounts to the National Commission for Campaign Accounts and Political Financing. ---INFA (The writer is former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

TO THE EDITOR

Meghalaya ADCs not keeping up with technology

Editor, This is an appeal to the Chief Minister of Meghalaya (who runs an IT Company) to kindly set aside funds for urgently introducing information technology and manpower, training in the three District Councils of Meghalaya. A time has also come for the ADCs to be absorbed into the “Department of Tribal Affairs” because it is a tragedy for us to continue to be chained to the incompetence of the ADCs. The top political leaders of our state now and in the past have all turned a blind eye about upscaling the working of the ADCs and have only used to suit their electoral fortunes. In fact all MLAs and MDCs continue to use the Sixth Schedule only for their vested interests. What have they achieved through the Sixth Schedule? Can we list those achievements?

One small example: For years NGOs like KSU,

HNYP, HYC, FKJGP, and so many vigilante groups go around town to harass and shut the shops of non-tribals. Things would have been so simple if the ADCs had wisely spent their earlier central grants of almost Rs 1000 crores in upgrading their IT systems. Instead of urgently introducing IT to make governance more effective and also appointing professional companies to issue Online Trading License in one day which would have made things easier, they are appointing more and more staff as political patronage. In many areas such as the issuance of passports etc., human interface has been reduced as long as one has all the documents. The same could be applied to all other applications. They should happen online. Of course, this will also limit the scope for bribing, blackmailing etc, by unscrupulous employees and politicians in the ADCs. Why can't all NGOs engage with the State Government on the real purpose and the effectiveness of the ADCs as they lack legislative competence on

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.

“He only earns his freedom and existence who daily conquers them anew.”

--- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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NIT Imbroglia – whither law enforcement

THE brawl that took place between the students of NIT Meghalaya and local pressure groups is not new. It has happened in the past too. So why have the NIT authorities not tightened up security within the campus? It's a different matter that in the absence of a separate campus which is still under construction in Sohra, the NIT students have to reside in different places within the city and in the campus of North Eastern Hill University (NEHU). This makes them vulnerable to vicious attacks as happened recently when they were observing their annual cultural programme. It has always been the case that whenever there are any student brawls within the NEHU campus and in the NIT things have spiralled out of control and students' and youth groups that claim to be the custodians of ethnic pride have entered the campuses without any restrictions. So who is responsible for the safety and security of the students from outside Meghalaya, who have come here to study? What is the role of the Director of the Institute in this matter?

In the recent incident the attackers even boarded the bus that was to drop the NIT students to the NEHU campus. Clearly this is a planned attack and the attackers are known to be members of a particular youth group. Only the Meghalaya Police seem to be ignorant of this fact. Otherwise by now the members of that youth group should have been picked up for questioning. There is always an undercurrent of communalism in Meghalaya and this plays itself out time and again. Only the naive believe that such feelings are in the past now. There are groups in this State that have always believed that might is right and that by virtue of being sons of the soil they can take the law in their own hands. Now that the NIT students are protesting right at the corridors of power in New Delhi and are expressing their fears of returning to the campus, who will be held accountable? Meghalaya does not deserve institutions of national importance if the Government is going to be a mute spectator to these acts of aggression as happened in the NIT students' hostel. Or is the Government too intimidated by the culture vultures that have held the state to ransom in the past and are seeking to do so now? Who are the leaders of these groups? Does the Special Branch of the Police have no clue about the identity of the trouble makers? It is hard to believe so. The point is also that we get the Police Force we deserve.

LOOKING BACK

June 17, 1989

Brahma held back to scuttle Bodo talks?

The continued absence of Mr Upen Brahma, the President. All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), from the centre stage of the Bodo drama has raised doubts whether he has been deliberately kept away by interested quarters to frustrated any move for a negotiated settlement.

Mr Brahma has not been seen in public since he was re-elected to the presidentship for another term at the Bambari conference in last December 1981. It was in this conference that the ABSU dropped its 92 major political demands including that of a separate State. The Assam government believes this changeover was done at the instance of a central agency at the behest of political bosses in the Union Home Ministry to pave the way for central intervention at an appropriate time. Mr Upen Brahma's withdrawal from the scene coincided with this

shift in ABSU's strategy. Mr Upen Brahma is a chronic patient of colitis and he perhaps required some treatment at that point of time, as he was reportedly admitted to a nursing home in Coochbehar for treatment in January, when a new phase of ABSU agitation had begun. Later when he was claimed to be under treatment at Calcutta and New Delhi, he was actually found to be moving around in those places in company of a self-styled Student leader of Cachar Mr Brahma who was believed to be more interested in exploiting the ABSU contacts in a central intelligence bureau than to be used as a pawn in their hands could not perhaps arouse confidence in the minds officials entrusted to deal with the Bodo movement to fit in with a centrally planned political design.

The agony of Gethsemane

By Rev. Lyndan Syiem

Gethsemane is one of the most sacred places in the Bible. Gethsemane was a garden, located about 1 km outside Jerusalem, just across a brook named Kidron. In spring time, there was usually plenty of water in the Kidron. There was also a channel flowing from the Temple down to the brook Kidron that carried the leftover from the sacrifices offered at the altar. The blood of the sacrificial animals was poured into that channel and it flowed down into the Kidron. That Thursday night, as Jesus and his disciples crossed the Kidron, it was blood-red with the early Passover sacrifices. As Jesus looked at that blood-red stream, it is possible he realized that in just a few hours his own blood would be pouring from his own body upon the altar of the Cross on Mount Golgotha.

Gethsemane means 'oil press.' It was evidently a garden of olive trees with an olive press nearby. It was here that the olives were crushed to extract olive oil. Similarly Jesus Christ, as Saviour of the world, would soon be crushed like olives in a press. From his crushed body, the oil of salvation would flow. Here in Gethsemane we get a glimpse of just how much Jesus had to suffer in order to bring us salvation. After the Last Supper, while walking to the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus predicted that all his disciples would desert him that night. He has already predicted that Judas would betray him. Peter became very angry when prophesied that he would desert his Lord, and claimed the other disciples might desert you, but I never will. But Jesus knew that not only would Peter desert him like the others, he would even deny with curses and oaths that he knew the Lord.

Gethsemane and Golgotha were lonely places for Jesus. His closest friends would abandon him for fear of their lives. His Heavenly Father would abandon him because he bore upon himself the sins of the world. There was an oil press at Gethsemane. A heavy beam would be placed on a sack of olives and heavy stones placed upon it until the weight pressed the oil out of the olives. When Jesus arrived at Gethsemane, he

left the other disciples outside and took Peter, James and John inside the garden with him. The three disciples saw that Jesus was deeply distressed and troubled. Jesus told them his soul was very sorrowful, to the point of death. Like the weight added to the beam to crush and press the oil out of the olives, the dread of what was coming began to press on Jesus.

This is not the normal fear of dying. It was not the dread of the physical pain of Crucifixion, it is much deeper than that. In the quiet garden of Gethsemane Jesus saw the horror of the sins of the world that he would have to bear. He saw the heavy punishment for sins that would fall upon him. He saw the fierce wrath of God upon sin. He saw the hatred of Satan and the demonic hordes that wanted to destroy him. It seemed as if everybody was conspiring against Jesus. On the Cross, Jesus who knew no sin would be made to be sin. All the evil deeds and the sinful lifestyle of the entire human race would be laid upon the perfect, spotless Jesus. And his Heavenly Father, with whom he had enjoyed unbroken fellowship for all of eternity, would turn his face away from him. In an act of divine justice that the Bible describes, but which is difficult for humankind to fathom, God would pour out his punishment not upon sinful humanity but upon the spotless Jesus. At Gethsemane, the weight of what Jesus would face pressed down on his soul until he was nearly crushed under its weight.

And yet the Father allowed the weight on Jesus' soul because he had a loving purpose: to save a lost and dying world. What was finally pressed out of Jesus' soul was perfect obedience to his Father and purest love for humankind – the obedience and love that purchased our salvation. At Gethsemane, it was not just olives that was pressed. It was also the heart of Jesus. Looking back at Gethsemane, we realize that the mental and

spiritual agony that Jesus bore was unprecedented and unparalleled. Gethsemane is unique to Jesus. No other person in history has gone through or will ever go through 'Gethsemane.' We may go through times of suffering and loneliness, but they cannot compare with Gethsemane. Because none of us will ever be asked to drink the bitter cup containing all the sins of the world. None of us will ever face the wrath of God upon sin the way Jesus did on the Cross.

Jesus was so overcome by the weight that in his humanity he prayed a heart-rending prayer: "Father ... remove this cup from me." Jesus already knew that the cup could not be removed but in his humanity he desperately appealed to God. The agony was almost impossible for his human nature to bear. ... But his prayer did not end with "remove this cup." It ended with "Yet, not what I will, but your will be done." Jesus submitted himself perfectly to the will of God: he loved God's will even more than he loved his life. The olive press of Gethsemane yielded perfect and pure obedience out of Jesus. He obeyed his Father even to the point of death.

In our lives we sometimes experience dark nights when fear and despair overwhelm our soul. It happens when we experience the loss of a loved one. It is the normal order of this fallen world that our loved ones will eventually pass away and leave us. It happens when we fall into bad choices and sins and habits that we later bitterly regret. Or it could be something terrible that someone did to us. We feel betrayed by that person, or deserted by someone who loved us. These are the moments of suffering and loneliness that assail us.

Like Jesus we prefer not to go through Gethsemane, but it is inescapable. We pray that God will take our troubles away and God sometimes answers yes. But there are times when he says no, or wait. Day after day, week after week, month after month, our troubles don't go away but like an olive oil press, the weight continues to press on our

souls. Such times are often accompanied by deep loneliness. Our friends desert us, or don't care quite enough. Most times they don't understand our troubles. These dark nights of the soul often cannot be shared with others. We have to face them ourselves. Suffering is more intense when it is combined with loneliness. But Jesus Christ suffered Gethsemane so that he can help us when we face suffering and loneliness. Gethsemane calls us to open our hearts to Jesus.

In the midst of his intense suffering at Gethsemane, Jesus found strength in honest, passionate prayer. He prostrated himself and cried out with a loud voice. This wasn't a formal prayer with polite words. Hebrews 5:7-9 says that Jesus cried out to God with everything in his being. He prayed with such agony that blood flowed out with his sweat. Three times he came to his three disciples, three times he found them sleeping, and three times he returned to pray alone, forsaken by his closest friends. But when he arose from that third prayer at Gethsemane, that internal struggle was over. He had firmly conquered the dread of suffering and loneliness. He was never shaken or discouraged again.

That same night Jesus faced the arrest, the five trials in one night, the humiliation, the mockery, the scourging, and the Crucifixion, all with a resolution and certainty that was unshakable. The greatest thing about Gethsemane is that Jesus in his humanity confronted his deepest fears, he conquered his soul and submitted his temporal will to the eternal will of the Godhead. This is the significance of Gethsemane in the Good Friday narrative. Gethsemane was the place of inner, spiritual wrestling that preceded the physical suffering at Mount Golgotha. It was only because of the agony of Gethsemane that Jesus was able to face the hardships and the torture of Golgotha. Yes Jesus went to the Cross, but in the end he was resurrected to life and now reigns in heaven forevermore.

TO THE EDITOR

Easter - Then and Now

Editor,

It was real then. It is real now in 2019. The Resurrection-of Jesus Christ is more than a history lesson. Resurrection is an ongoing reality. Easter-celebrations should be occurring regularly because men and women are experiencing a newness of life a fresh start; because they are able to walk from despair and find new life; because they are able to discover that their lives can have meaning and significance.

Can you imagine what it might have been like in and around that first/Easter? Imagine: you are one of Jesus' followers. You are drowning in despondency. Your Lord has died, with Him, all your hopes and dreams. That was no fake death. You helped take the body down from the cross. You assisted in placing it so carefully in the tomb. He was dead. Period.

Someone comes to your door and knocks. You know him and let him in. "Listen," he says, "believe it or not, but it's a fact. Jesus is alive. He has risen from the dead. How do I know? I saw Him with my own eyes." A few days later you are with some of your fellow believers. Suddenly, without fanfare, Jesus is right beside you. And He speaks "Peace be with you."

The elements were all

there to make up an incredible drama - surprise, questions, convictions, new hopes, new life, new men, new women. What more could you want? No wonder that to this day the drama continues to excite and intrigue people. To this day, April 21, 2019, newly-born Easter people are still an amazing surprise, not only to themselves but also to those who knew them before. The change can be something bordering on the miraculous - new attitudes, new insights, new resolve. In short, a new person!

Some people just can't appreciate the fact that God continues to work in the lives of people in 2019 people. It defies description. Yes, extraordinary happenings can occur for someone down the street. We too can have access to the remarkable transforming power of the Risen Christ. New hopes, new life, new men and women - the Easter people of 2019.

Yours etc.,
Rev. Presley Lyngdoh
Priest
All Saints' Cathedral
Shillong

Every citizen should be a watchdog

Editor,
Apropos the letter

"Meghalaya is home not just for tribals," by AK Singh published in your paper, I would like to express my displeasure about the same. Blaming a veteran writer, Salil Gwalji is unfounded. The writer's aversion to the leadership of Narendra Modi is evident. What is understandable is AK Singh has no problem with other parties, nor with the party that is being held like the property of one family. However, I have nothing to say over the writer's personal choice and he has his democratic right to his views. But so far as my knowledge is concerned the Congress Party is basically undemocratic. No one has any say in this party except the Gandhi family. Manmohan Singh was picked up to be Prime Minister because he was pliable and would never cause problems to this family. Many veteran leaders from Meghalaya and former CM, DD Lapang were sidelined. In spite of having many other veteran leaders, the Congress has again projected Rahul Gandhi as the prime ministerial candidate. Rahul lacks the skill of politics and has no clear vision. He scarcely can evaluate issues systematically. The party current manifesto is full of controversial promises. I think this has been prepared with an aim to weaken this nation by being soft on terror groups and other

foreign infiltrators. In the manifesto the party has promised to scrap the sedition laws. What will be the consequences then? Things will get worse. The objective of the Congress party is to open the floodgates to infiltrators and allow them to outnumber the indigenous citizens like in Kashmir, Assam, West Bengal and Kerala and increase their vote banks. Any layman can understand this plan. I appreciate Gwalji's articles which genuinely alert us of the possible ramifications.

We would appreciate if no one pokes his nose into tribal and non-tribal issues to create misunderstandings. Except for a few past instances we are living in peace with non-tribals. Meghalaya may become another Assam if we get misled. Each citizen of Meghalaya, including the permanent non-tribals who genuinely love this state, should be watchdogs to protect the State from outside infiltrators. These are my personal opinion based on my observations.

Yours etc.,
Earnest Mawrie
Shillong-21

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

BJP set to communalise poll campaign in Madhya Pradesh

Pragya Thakur's nomination from Bhopal a disturbing sign

By L S Herdenia

Finally failing to persuade any party stalwart to challenge Digvijaya Singh the BJP had to borrow an outsider to take up the task on Bhopal Lok Sabha seat. Perhaps BJP realised that Hindu-Muslim polarisation strategy may alone yield the result. How much importance the BJP gave to Bhopal can be appreciated by the fact that the party decided to rush its organisation secretary Ram Lal to Bhopal to formally adopt Pragya Thakur as a party member. After three hours of her admission in the party, she was named as party candidate for Bhopal seat. According to BJP insiders Thakur's candidature has been decided at the behest of RSS, the Sangh fountain head.

After agreeing to contest from Bhopal, Pragya told the media "After spending 10 years in jail due to Congress conspiracy I have come here to fight a political and religious war. I will fight this election to serve the nation. Congress and Digvijaya Singh are no challenge to

Malegaon near a mosque in which 40 worshippers were killed. The term 'saffron terror' was reportedly coined after the 2008 blasts, following the arrest of Thakur and others in the case. Digvijaya Singh has often used the term while targeting BJP.

Saffron clad Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur with her trademark short hair and sporting a Rudraksh mala was arrested by the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad in this case. On December 27, 2017 a special NIA court had dropped stringent Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act charges against Lt. Colonel Prasad Purohit, Samir Kulkarni, Sadhvi Pragya and other accused in the blasé case. But she still faces other charges. She was imprisoned for nine years and has alleged that she was tortured during her incarceration that led to spinal injuries.

Currently Pragya is out on bail. Born in Bhind district of Madhya Pradesh Pragya had a long association with the RSS. A

Digvijaya welcomed the contest and tweeted a video saying "I welcome Sadhvi Pragya to Bhopal. Hope you will like the serene, educated and civilised atmosphere of this enchanting city". He later told reporters that Pragya Thakur is to him "what any other BJP candidate would have been." Pragya Thakur had volunteered to take on Digvijay only a day after Congress announced his name on March 23. It took BJP 25 days to take up her offer. In the meantime the Sangh Parivar tried to persuade party stalwart Uma Bharti and Shivraj Singh Chouhan to contest from Bhopal but they declined.

me or BJP. I have the party organisation's support. We will fight unitedly against the people who are conspiring against the nation. We will win this 'Dharmyudh'."

Digvijaya welcomed the contest and tweeted a video saying "I welcome Sadhvi Pragya to Bhopal. Hope you will like the serene, educated and civilised atmosphere of this enchanting city". He later told reporters that Pragya Thakur is to him "what any other BJP candidate would have been." Pragya Thakur had volunteered to take on Digvijay only a day after Congress announced his name on March 23. It took BJP 25 days to take up her offer. In the meantime the Sangh Parivar tried to persuade party stalwart Uma Bharti and Shivraj Singh Chouhan to contest from Bhopal but they declined.

Former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said "There was no delay by the party in announcing name for the Bhopal Lok Sabha seat. Sadhvi Pragya's name has been declared after thorough consideration and at the right time. She is an eligible and capable candidate. Just the announcement of her name is enough for BJP to win this election".

Six persons were killed and 101 were injured when an improvised explosive device strapped on a motorcycle went off at Malegaon on September 29, 2008. The motorcycle was left near a hotel at Bhiku Chowk. The motorcycle was registered in Pragya's name. Two years prior to this, there was another blast in

post-graduate in history Pragya worked with the RSS student wing Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad and Durga Vahini, women's wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

It may be mentioned here that after 1992 riots Bhopal has already become a polarised city. Before that Bhopal was regarded as citadel of Ganga-Jamuni culture. Even at the height of post-partition communal tension Bhopal was island of peace and harmony. At that crucial time Bhopal gave shelter to Hindu and Muslim victims of communal violence. Shakir Ali, communist leader who was known as Sher-e-Bhopal played crucial role in extending all possible civic amenities to those who came to Bhopal. But this decades old island of peace became scene of communal flare up following the demolition of Babri Mosque.

At that time BJP led government was ruling the state. The 1992 riots polarised the city and for the first time a BJP candidate was elected from the old Bhopal assembly constituency. BJP now hopes that polarised Bhopal may result in the victory of its candidate. At present out of 8 segments of Bhopal, 3 are with the Congress and 5 with the BJP. Out of three Congress MLAs, two are Muslims.

It is premature to speculate how other constituencies will be affected by Pragya's candidature. But the possibility to polarise the constituencies surrounding Bhopal is not ruled out. (IPA Service)

UN-FAIR GAME OF POLITICS

Women remain foreigners in the field of politics even in countries which celebrate gender equality



By Esha Chaudhuri

In India, empirically and factually analysing women's presence in politics remains largely underrepresented. The abysmal numbers that make it to the data charts owe credit to their associations with dynastic links. However, this analogy applies to women actively participating in the elections as leaders and representatives. This equivalence does not run as a parallel with regards to women as voters, as evident from the most recent election trends (Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram) where women comprised a large share of the electorate and in which the voting trends shaped the outcome of those elections.

It can be one prism that views women as actively leading and the other wherein one capitalises on changing trends from down below at an operational level as voters. However, like any other professional field, the graph isn't a linear one when it concerns women and their representation, as one treads up the ladder and focuses on the echelons of power.

As I explore the many reasons which aid and factor the lack of presence of women or that make it frictional path for women to enter politics, I will also unravel the linkage of women and their family lineage that aids to their benefit making it a less troublesome road for women from political families to participate as representatives.

Firstly, the defaulter of generic gendered disadvantage that stems from the gender norms and roles that are bestowed to the binaries of men and women do not consider women as a

potential player in the game of politics; creating a stark segregation of the public versus private debate. In short, elections are considered a male bastion.

Secondly, while there are women who break such shackles and aspire to become political leaders, mainstream political parties do not lose focus from the winnable attributes of candidates. In politics, numbers are everything — a game changer/breaker and while tokenism and identity politics is an element of or causal influence on the electorate, it is strategically calculated on the basis of victory that is assured with a nominee. This, ordinarily is usually seen to favour male contenders over females.

While the causal factors 1 and 2 (generic gender disadvantage and winnable attributes of candidates) are conventionally considered shortcomings when it comes to women's underrepresentation in politics, the clucking of the two equals a situation wherein women with advantage (through lineage and political backgrounds) find it easier to enter politics and also win elections and nullify the frictional patterns. Situation is one of token but definitely gives women a way into politics — Indira Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Jayalalitha, Sheikh Hasina, Benazir Bhutto, Queen Elizabeth are historical examples of women owing their political careers to their family yokes. It is imperative at this point to flag that dynasties do not always create a hotbed for women to enter politics but make for comparatively less challenging roads — Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's recent advent, as well as Pramod Mahajan's daughter's entry after his sudden demise. Drawing a parallel,

names such as Agatha Sangma, Miani Shira and Amparen Lyngdoh echo in our very own Meghalaya.



Dynasticism enables women to overcome obstacles to their entering electoral politics. (Clockwise from top left) Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Agatha Sangma and Miani D Shira

How does dynasticism help women in politics? Dynasticism enables women to overcome obstacles to their entering electoral politics. One of these in the Indian context is the ever-increasing criminalisation of politics. Women politicians encounter slan-

derous campaigns their male rivals direct against them. Their dynastic background provides them protection. Their rivals will hesitate to risk the wrath of an entrenched political dynasty.

Therefore, as many academics argue that if there is a lack of democratic affirmative for the lack of representation of women in politics, and if dy-

nasties ensure a fair number of women being represented in elections, then it is safe to say that two negatives create a positive.

Internationally too, this pattern finds resonance — in China for example, in a study of Chinese voters, one factor that was considered in selecting the leading body of China was candidates from a powerful family background called princelings. Candidates with princeling status implied that they would have more access to resources and networks to their advantage. If the princelings were descendants of a political family, it was assumed that they had more familiarity and loyalty to a political party and its regime.

"In the US Congress, female legislators are nearly three times as likely as men to come from dynastic families — 31.2 per cent versus 8.4 per cent, respectively," writes Anurita Basu, who furnishes a list of women leaders who followed male members of their families into politics.

Basu has authored a book on gender and political dynasties.

All in all, women in general are considered foreigners in the field of politics even in countries which celebrate gender equality in higher volumes — US (no female president till date) as it is a male bastion. It is not to say that I'm justifying the presence of political dynasties and neither am I claiming that such dynasties will always favour women's candidature in politics.

I'm simply making an analytical inference that while dynasties themselves would prefer a male inheritor, they still make women's entry point to politics less detrimental, as compared to an ordinary situation. For instance,

during the period between 1996 and 2007, over 90 per cent of Japanese politicians were male and some 30 per cent of the Japanese parliament was from political dynasties and daughters were unlikely to form part of political dynasties in that country, as power is often passed on to sons.

There is a long way to go before this misogynistic mindset changes and accepts women as one of its own. Winnability is trumped by gender biases even in those parties that are led by women. In the case of women, since they're not viewed to be natural leaders, often questioning their credentials to contest elections and also emerging victorious is a major feat of debate.

It'll also make for an interesting study to see the percentage of tickets given to women candidates by leading parties in the upcoming general elections in the country where till date there are 11 per cent female representatives in the lower house of the Parliament. Typically then, women who come from a certain family, holding decades of power in a constituency, district, state or such clusters are often given weightage over those who do not have a male superseding their existence. Kinship association continues to boost women into national electoral politics, which is due to women's dependence upon familial capital to augment the opportunity structure, particularly when there is late entry into politics.

(The author is a master's graduate from London School of Economics and works on gender issues in the interiors of India. The original article was first published in *She The People*)



By Rajesh Choudhury

Rajib's family was excited about getting new furniture, curtains and even a beautiful showpiece for their living room, just before Diwali. However, their excitement soon turned into anxiety when they realised that the probable price of all this would be around Rs 1,00,000. They knew they could charge the entire amount to their credit card. But after a

little discussion among themselves they came up with another possible way to fund this home improvement — taking a Personal Loan.

In both the cases the way to achieve their dream was only by borrowing, either by credit card or a Personal Loan. Because Rajib and his family had fixed monthly expenses, they could not afford to pay more than Rs 3,000 additionally, after meeting their monthly obligations. So opting for a loan was the only choice they

Towards a debt-free life

had — the EMI (equated monthly instalment) option.

EMI has become a household word across the country and its promotions are tagged to every product and even services today. Advertisements act as a strong reminder of this financial panacea to realise materialist dreams, just like for Rajib and his family.

EMI is nothing but a loan or debt designed in such a way so as to woo consumers during decision-making about purchases. The concept of EMI holds good not only for Rajib and his family but also for more and more people in our society. The number of those who have accepted this practice as an ultimate way to satisfy their wants and desires is engulfing our population at an exponential rate.

Is this really the way to satisfy our material desires, by taking loans, or is it becoming just debt addiction?

Herbert A. Simon, the American economist and a Nobel Prize winner, remarked, "A decision maker did not always make the best financial decision because of limited resources and personal inclinations."

Lending has existed for thousands of years and has taken on many forms. Traditional loan can be traced back to the beginning of civilisation. Basically grain loans were given to farmers and traders who carried goods between cities. This began around 2000 BC in Assyria in northern Mesopotamia.

Mortgages were developed for the real estate or property buyers just 100 years back. This kind of a loan is called 'good debts' as they create value in the long run.

But the generic purpose of loans has drastically changed down the line since ancient times, primarily because of its easy availability with upgraded technology. The mindset of buying every product by borrowing is gaining

popularity by leaps and bounds.

Even in India, till 30 years ago, society at large never thought of taking multiple loans to fund their household goods like washing machines, television sets, two-wheelers, smart phones or even clothing. This trend is not a healthy sign as the financial stability of most households is in question today.

Even big decisions of once in a lifetime buying, like homes, have some interesting statistics. HDFC was the first organised player in the Home Loan market. The average loan amount was Rs 30,000 to build a project of Rs 70,000 in Mumbai's Malad area way back in 1978, meaning that around 43 per cent was self-funded by the borrower. Borrowers never thought to fund their house by 80 per cent through a loan as they do today.

Today, surprisingly, one can take a loan even for a dinner at a five-star hotel and make the payments by EMI. This is becoming a serious issue that our society needs to address as the continuing practice of such activity will not only hamper our financial life but also affect our children's behaviour towards money.

The mindset has changed over a period of just a few years in financial decision making, especially during the making of purchases. We are satisfying not just our needs here but our desire to possess all the goods out there, being advertised day and night, luring us to buy them, posing themselves as things which will make us happy, and paying for them all through EMI. It is an illusion that we can enjoy all the luxury of life at this cost when, in fact, we are paying a price significantly higher than the published MRP.

The following points may open up our minds to understand how loans and debts are actually bad financial practices and deteriorate our financial health.

If we are in debt for the next 20 years, we land up paying principle plus interest nearly three times of our loan on the principal amount borrowed.

Credit Card the "anytime loan dispenser" is a magic wand, which increases the impulse to buy now and pay later and pushes us further into debt traps.

If we buy on loan goods which are actually depreciating then, in fact, we are creating liabilities. Good debts like for a home or land will generally appreciate in time, increasing their value.

Borrowing can make us fall into a trap from which escape could take decades or more.

Once people make it a habit to purchase things by EMI payments, they feel at ease and unknowingly a false sense develops, making them feel as if they are paying less while in reality they are in a trap, the "Debt Trap".

But habits can be changed. Budgeting is the first and fundamental tool to put one's spending and saving under control. Accumulation of wealth and staying debt free does not require someone to earn a very high income. All they need is to be prudent in managing their expenses.

Impulse buying is a weakness that many succumb to unknowingly and the household budget is the best tool to control this too. Budgeting helps us to review our entire financial health regularly. As they say, if someone practises anything for a minimum of 21 days they can change a habit. So the EMI habit too can be changed and by household budgeting one can save and plan the future purchase in advance and can easily avoid falling into the debt trap.

Let not debts control our lives.

(The author is a finance expert)

A perfect union

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



In the very nature of things, life can never get perfect — there is always room for improvement. But the geometrical alignment behind creation is in a certain state of perfection. Only because of this perfect geometrical alignment, life flourishes the way it does. If you look at human life, how fragile it is, and at the same time, how sturdy — how much a human being can do. This is because the geometrical design behind the creative process is so perfect.

There is a whole science today that examines the geometry behind the atomic and molecular structure of every form.

In its fundamental essence, the geometry of all forms, from the atomic to the cosmic, is absolutely the same, and it is such a perfect design that life is so gentle, so fragile, but at the same time so firm and so beautiful.

The pursuit of manifesting this fundamental perfection of geometry in one's life led to a phenomenally complex and sophisticated system of yoga.

The yogic system is all about how to get your whole system — the physical body, the mental structure, the emotional framework, the karmic structure, and the fundamental energy basis — into a perfect geometrical symmetry, so that you can achieve a union with the cosmic nature.

A little over 15,000 years ago, Adiyogi Shiva, attained to this state of perfection. He became so absolutely still that onlookers could not make out whether he was truly alive. The only sign of life were tears of ecstasy running down his cheeks.

From this state of absolute stillness, Adiyogi would suddenly spring into a dance of ecstasy. This tandava demonstrated that the perfect geometry that he achieved within himself is not a restraint — he need not sit in one place. He can dance wildly, in absolute abandon, and still not lose this perfect state of a alignment within himself and with the larger cosmic nature.

A state of yoga does not mean standing on one's head, or on one leg instead of two — yoga means

being in a state of union. When an individual, who is otherwise trapped within the boundaries of his own body and sensations, achieves a kind of perfection within himself, where in his experience, he has become one with everything, then he is in a state of yoga. This is a possibility that every human being carries as a seed within himself or herself. If you are willing to strive, you can experience the whole cosmos within yourself.

This perfection of geometry can be attained in many different ways. Through intellect, through emotion, through energy, through sheer perfection of action, and above all through devotion — all these are essentially tools to come to a state of union with the rest of the cosmos.

A human being experiences even just an incremental sense of perfection only in some state of union. If this longing for union finds physical expression, it gets termed as sexuality. If it finds emotional expression, it is called love or compassion. If it finds expression through one's mental framework, it gets termed as success, conquest, or these days, shopping. But if it finds an enduring expression of one's being, it is called yoga.

There is always a longing for union. Whether someone is running after wealth, money, conquest, success, pleasure, or intoxication — it is just out of a longing for union.

For ages, people have attempted to come to a state of union through these ways, but it has never really worked for anyone. Yoga is not against anything except inefficiency.

Having been on the top of the pile of evolution on this planet, we as human beings are expected to function a little more intelligently and competently. I want all of you to take this vow within yourself that we as a generation will do things in an enduring way. If we achieve union, we achieve union in an enduring way. This is something that all of you have to take deep into your hearts and minds.

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

A centuries-old ghat restored in Varanasi

Since 1735, pilgrims have travelled from all over India to Varanasi to visit an expansive and striking stone staircase, stretching downward from the banks of the Ganges river to the water's edge, as well as to experience the ornate and imposing palace that reaches skyward from the staircase's top.

Whether for praying or performing rituals, bathing in the holy river or cremating the dead, visitors to the revered Balaji Ghat in the city has made it one of India's most visited religious destinations. Such popularity is decidedly bittersweet though, as the centuries-long flow of devotees contributed not just to the ghat's legacy, but also to a trajectory of deterioration.

In 1999, as a result of factors like heavy use, lack of maintenance, earthquakes and floods, part of the Balaji Ghat collapsed. For a decade thereafter, the structure stood as it was, weakened and deteriorating. In September 2009, a second catastrophic collapse struck, this time, consisting of the naubakhana's floor. Naubakhana is where shehnai maestro Ustad Eismillah Khan practised and played his music.

Without immediate intervention, it seemed the site would soon become little more than dust, debris and memories.

Luckily, the same year as the second collapse, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting and conserving India's heritage, began documenting the site. And, in 2012, a major, international restoration effort followed. INTACH's efforts to save and restore the ghat were supported by sources including the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) of the U.S. State Department as well as the New York-based nonprofit organization World Monuments Fund through a grant from American Express. AFCP supports the preservation of cultural sites, cultural objects and forms of traditional cultural expression in more than 100 countries around the world.



In the case of Balaji Ghat, the AFCP grant to INTACH made possible the detailed documentation of the building, a necessary foundation upon which the restoration work could progress. Yet, even before the first structural drawing could be rendered, a formidable amount of work was required. According to World Monuments Fund, which included Balaji Ghat in its 2012 World Monuments Watch List, "seven hundred tons of debris were removed from the collapsed portion of the structure and examined to determine which pieces could be re-used when reconstruction began." The World



Monuments Watch, a global programme of the organization, identifies endangered heritage sites and directs financial and technical support for their preservation.

Initial documentation efforts included archival research to help INTACH fully understand the structure's past, as well as detailed photographic documentation of the building's windows and

doors, construction materials and architectural ornamentation. Accompanying this visual record was a series of measured drawings, meant to record the building's proportions, character and architectural details, and guide INTACH's experts through the restoration process.

The AFCP grant also supported the surveying and documentation of the build-

ing's bones, bricks and mortar. Experts tested wood for moisture and decay, while bricks and lime stone used in the construction were examined for strength, behaviour when exposed to water, and more. This was to understand how the ghat's basic building blocks would withstand the centuries to come, and to select new materials for the restoration that would integrate organically with the existing structure.

Such early tasks were key to the project's eventual success. "The Ambassadors Fund grant was the first important step that led to the revival and restoration of the Balaji Ghat," says Bindu Manchanda, project director for the Architectural Heritage Division of INTACH.

As Manchanda, Divya Gupta and other INTACH colleagues worked hard to restore the structure in the years that followed, they strove not only to keep the reborn Balaji Ghat as true to its heritage as possible, but to make it even more welcoming to visitors. After the restoration, the grand building was adapted to be reused as a museum and cultural center, writes Manchanda in her book, *The City Forever: Varanasi Balaji Ghat Initiative*. She describes the project as the first of its kind in Varanasi, one that she expects to have far-reaching educational benefits for local residents and visitors alike.

"This project is even more important, as this is the only ghat in Varanasi that has been revived for non-religious, non-commercial use, entirely for the benefit of the community," says Manchanda. "It houses a museum, an interpretation center and an auditorium for cultural activities showcasing the life, crafts and culture of Varanasi's people and its environs."

(S.P. DATTA)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhanji

Sunday, April 21, 2019

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon swells Saturn on your solar return chart denotes a good year. Improving your skills will be a focus in this year, and some of you will do so formally, benefiting greatly from it. There is a growing need to buckle down with your education or to learn more specific skills rather than broad topics now. This is an excellent period for skills development no matter what your age, and you'll want to prepare for the cycle that begins the following year. The Star urges you to discipline yourself in your professional life and reminds you of the importance of structure, responsibility, and reputation. A career peak of sorts is on its way. This week for you

Aries (March 21 - April 20) The planetary configuration brings mixed results for you. You are compassionate and generous with family, friends and relatives. You are likely to see benefits and improvements in the areas of work and health, as well as daily routines. Your ability to handle the details required to do a good job is significantly enhanced and others increasingly become more aware of your skills. Benefits may come through co-workers or employees during this period. You spend more time on phone calls, emails, short frequent trips and communicating with friends.

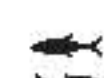
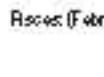
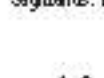
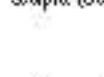
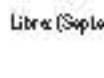
Taurus (April 21 - May 21) You are patient, laborious and clever with material aspects and manage finances and business ventures with ingenuity and success. There would be cooperation and understanding in professional and relationships. You might pay attention to various aspects to increase personal funds, resulting in more than one avenue for monetary gain. You would always be willing to work all the more harder to meet your new responsibilities. Your love life has been erratic for some time, and this trend continues. You could find that you invest in real estate. You would also bring a more playful environment to your home. There will be a dust-up in energy levels.

Gemini (May 22 - June 21) The planetary configuration of this phase brings good results. Any type of service that you provide is likely to go well. You are more successful in hiring people to work for you and improve your own working environment are likely. You find more enjoyment in the work you do, and it is easier than usual to find employment now. You may get a new job during this period. Others will derive more enjoyment from the current job. Work tends to be very easily accessible to you. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Cancer (June 22 - July 22) Your natural talents would meet with reward and acceptance. Practical matters are a large focus and are very strong. More security in your job is likely. You are more willing than usual to work diligently for money, and your natural talents are likely to be utilized more in the work you do and appreciated by others. You could enjoy some time with family and find affection and love. This is altogether a happy and relaxed time for you. Take care of your health and adopt a routine of regular walk and exercise.

Leo (July 23 - August 23) Communication, creativity and authority in professional matters are highlighted as an exciting job offer, reward, recognition, or promotion is possible. An opportunity to expand on a global level arises now. You would have more energy for work and your daily routines tend to speed up now. Perhaps you have always worked that hard. You are ready to perform and express yourself and take charge and responsibilities on your shoulders. This is a very significant period when you are inspired creatively and emotionally. Romance could make you think about serious or practical lives and look to a more committed relationship.

Virgo (August 24 - September 23) This phase is about bringing stability, entertaining words and happiness to others. Your attentiveness, self-care and finances are also highlighted. This stage of your life



may be marred by hard work. Financial success may not be remarkable, yet it is generally steady, if slow to come by. Matters of personal courage, confidence and independence are emerging. Issues surrounding income from foreign sources could also figure at this time. You should be careful not to over-engage your relationships. You feel on top of things with good health and positive energy.

Libra (September 23 - October 23) You would participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you. You are in opposition to inspire others through what you create. Turning a hobby or favorite pastime into a career could also figure. Partnership ups and downs continue to persist, as you struggle with matters of freedom and dependency. Children may require more discipline or attention. You may also bring more creativity into the work you do. Health is likely to prosper and medical procedures or programs, if necessary, are more apt to be successful.

Scorpio (October 24 - November 23) Good financial returns are on the cards. 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 probably should be on the lookout for a tendency to create your own financial stress due to extravagant spending habits. You may visit religious places and strong feelings towards religion are enhanced. You learn to look inside of yourself with a newfound clarity and realism, and gradually develop considerable strength from within. You avail of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities or structured exercise routine.

Sagittarius (November 23 - December 21) The planetary combination opens new horizons in your romantic and love life. You would pay attention to various ways to increase personal funds. You are bound to experience your fair share of fun, and good times. Creative projects are likely to fare well, and could possibly winbring some type of recognition. Love and romance may enter your life or is enhanced with good humor and warmth, and social engagements abound. For singles, meeting special person is highly likely. Health is likely to prosper and medical procedures or health programs, if necessary, are more apt to be successful.

Capricorn (December 22 - January 20) You would be more cooperative and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental about your commitments. Investments in stock and other speculative matters could seem tidy profits, although care should be exercised with any dealings that tie you to other people and others' money. Your creativity and social life are stimulated, and plenty of opportunities to express yourself uniquely and creatively will present themselves. Relationships with your children may be especially fulfilling now. The desire for some form of recognition is going to be strong.

Aquarius (January 21 - February 19) This is a fabulous period in which to take the vacation you've always wanted to take. Those who think of themselves as independent professionals and entrepreneurs will find great joy and reward in your creative projects and hobbies, and could discover a new hobby or activity that you never knew you had. Health is likely to pay off, but be careful of overconfidence in speculative investments. Pleasure-seeking activities, recreation, and amusement are increased. Health is likely to prosper.

Pisces (February 19 - March 20) This phase highlights friendship, love, romance and child-oriented life. You may visit and spend a lot of time in the company of your friends and loved ones. This is also a favorable time to go for higher learning and joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency. Your family would become supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. These positive relationships will not necessarily fall into your lap, and are unlikely to come all at once. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities in these areas of life.

Qualities for employability

By Ranjan K Baruah

As most of us are confused with our career and career planning so we have published information related to attributes required for vibrant career options. In today's edition we will give more information on this.

As board exams are over now, so most of our students would be worried about selection of streams and also institutes. Different streams, courses, institutes and our planning will determine our future career.

Communication: Effective communication is very important for any career, be it in government or private sector. Most of our students fail to get success in many fields due to poor communication. I have seen students knowing things but they can't express them properly which make them unemployable. All students must focus on effective communication when they are in schools or colleges or even universities. There are many ways to improve communication and we must focus on the same if we want a vibrant career in the future.

Language: Language is another important area for good career. We are familiar with our mother tongue but it is important to know many other languages if we want a good career in future. Knowing English and Hindi is always helpful. We may try other Indian languages or even foreign languages if we want to go abroad for work or for jobs. We may learn other language for communication purposes only as we don't have to be an expert. If we can communicate in more languages then that is always helpful for us. Apart from Indian languages our students may try and learn foreign languages like French, Spanish, German, Mandarin, Japanese, etc.

Technological skills: It is important for our students to be aware of technological skills. We need not become an expert like computer languages or programming but we must be comfortable with using internet or handling emails. Web browsing and using internet as digital library is helpful for students and job aspir-



ants. Knowing MS Excel is a so helpful for many entry level jobs.

Attitude: A positive attitude is must for success in life. For success in any career or any fields we must be positive and inspire others too. A positive person is always full of energy. They are inspired and motivated and also motivate others. Negative attitude is always dangerous and harm us and society.

There are many books available to know more about positive attitude and its connection with success. One of the books which tell well about attitude is Shri Khara's "You Can Win". Students may read this book which

would certainly help them in proper planning and getting success in life. We must be aware that government jobs are limited and we have to try in private sectors or we have to become self employed. In this regard to excel in self employment or in corporate or other private sectors we must have a positive attitude else it will be difficult for us to make progress in life.

As mentioned before there are many other attributes but I have picked few based on my experiences and which are really needed for our students studying or living in different parts of North East. Students and guardians may send queries as we are back with lot of career updates and other opportunities like before. Meanwhile students who have recently finished their board exams or are going to finish their board exams may utilize their time by getting enrolled in different courses to enhance their career. Students and parents or guardians are requested to be vigilant as many agents from different private colleges or universities will campaign for admissions. Be vigilant and critical so that no one may cheat you easily.

(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor, skill trainer, academic consultant and strategic planner and can be reached at bkrarjan@gmail.com or 9173943734 for any career related queries)

“Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.”

--- Oscar Wilde

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Dance of Democracy

A slap here and a slap there – the dance of Indian democracy is progressing even in unacceptable ways in the season of polls. Former patedar andolan leader Hardik Patel who ended up in the Congress camp got a public thrashing while addressing a campaign meet in Gujarat’s Surendranagar on Friday last. Political parties of all shades are expected to be the first to uphold the rule of law. More so when candidates they support are going to be law makers! But this election has become a no-holds barred one. The election season is also a season for political activists, caught in a war-like scenario, to break rules and tarnish the image of rivals. The more fierce the electoral fight, the fiercer the mood of the party activists. There have been violent attacks and much more in West Bengal in this round of elections even as the polls in the state are divided into multiple stages to provide maximum security cover. Even this didn’t help as the ruling Trinamool Congress is in no mood to concede ground to the BJP and the other rivals. The stakes are high for Trinamool as its leader is aiming for the PM’s post in Delhi. Yet, part of the blame should be shouldered by the Election Commission for its failure to avert violence – be it in West Bengal, or in Andhra Pradesh where too the race is tight between the ruling Telugu Desam and the Opposition YSRC.

In the war of words, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi himself has got caught, and might pay a price for his failure to guard his tongue. Fugitive Lalit Modi is taking on the Congress President for saying “all Modis are thieves” – the Lalits, the Niravs and the Narendras. Prime Minister Modi himself was exercised over the comment, part of election rhetoric of course, which put an entire (backward) community in Gujarat in the company of thieves. To this was engagingly added the saga of the PM having his “boxes” checked in Odisha by an IAS officer Mohammad Mohsin as part of his election duty. This after the Congress made an issue out of suspicious boxes being transported to Bengaluru in the PM’s chopper during a campaign visit. The explanation that the boxes were meant for security purposes didn’t help settle the matter. Overall, these are exciting times. The dance of democracy does have its funnier sides as well.

MDA: Is the Chief Minister in Control?

By H H Mohrmen

It has only been a few months since the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance Government celebrated (albeit in a subtle manner) its one year in office. However, it has only succeeded in making the people of the state more confused. The government has not been able to in still confidence or hope to people that some change is happening in the state. The Chief Minister too, through his statements is sending out mixed signals. It looks like the driver of the state in not in control of the government and neither is he in control of his own party in the state.

More than a year has lapsed, but the Government has not made any achievement worth mentioning. In fact the government does not seem to have any vision as to where it wants to take the state. In spite of the fact that the state by virtue of being led by the NPP which is a close ally of the BJP has no dearth of funds coming to its kitty, yet there are no visible signs of development happening in the state. The Government has not only failed to bring development and change to the state, but sadly it was even taken to task by important institutions in the country for failing in its duty.

On several occasions the State Government was reprimanded from all direction by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) and the Supreme Court on matters pertaining to mining. Both the NGT and top court came down heavily against illegal transportation of coal from the state and other coal related activities where the Chief Minister’s response was not convincing. With regards to illegal transportation of coal, the Chief Minister claimed that the Government did not have the required manpower to check the illegal activity. But the fact is that there are only two main routes through which the consignment can be transported. Hence the CM’s argument does not hold water because people who frequent these highways always see policemen diligently performing their duties even if they have to stand the whole night on the

highway.

For example, if one travels from Kliehriat to Guwahati the trucks first have to pass through the Kliehriat Police Station then the Lad Rymbai police out post and immediately after Riat Tuber there is another police check point followed by another check point at Phramer along the highway which is less than 30 kilometres until one reaches the Jowai bypass. After the Jowai bypass, there is a check point at Umwasoo near Puriang, which is not a regular police check point, but one can see a regular check point on the Shillong bypass just after the junction in Mawryngkneng which is understandably manned by the police beginning from Mawryngkneng. Then a little further down near the junction to Shillong via Tynring just before reaching the toll gate. After the toll gate there is another police check point and then the final police check point on the Shillong bypass is the one after the Bhoiryong junction. On the Shillong-Guwahati road there is another check point near Umiam at the junction to UCC road. So just on this small stretch of road there are already so many check points; how come the trucks can still illegally transport coal to Guwahati?

Coal is also transported on the other side of the highway on the Kliehriat-Silchar road where there are lines of police checkpoints too beginning from Kliehriat, to Mynkre, Lumchong dacoity camp, then Umkiang and Ratacherra. Yet trucks are able to pass through hassle-free until they reach Assam. These are check points that one can see no matter what time one travels on the highway. The question then is how can the Chief Minister say that the Government does not have the required man power to check the illegal transportation of coal from the state? And if these check points are not for checking trucks plying on this section of the highway, then what are they doing? Or are they stationed on the highway

to count the number of trucks or doing traffic enumeration?

In the Letters to the Editor section of the Shillong Times, recently the Police denied that there was illegal transportation of coal and even denies the allegations made by the pressure group from Ri Bhoi district which also filed a FIR against the trucks that are engaged in the act. Now the truth is that everyone who travels on this section of the highway sees the trucks parked by the side of the highway till the check point after the Bhoiryong junction. How can the police deny that illegal transportation of coal is happening when there are so many reports of coal-laden trucks overturning on the same highway? Does this not confirm the illegal business happening right in front of the Police? What will the Police say when trucks carrying coal are caught red-handed? Why are the Police trying to deny this fact when everyone knows and has seen how coal laden trucks are parked all along the Shillong bypass? But the most important question is: Who is the police trying to protect?

Illegal transportation is happening and the modus operandi was stated in the recent letter to the editor by Toki Blah. So obviously this is happening with the knowledge of the Government. Hence the present Government, particularly the home department cannot feign ignorance of what is happening on the highway. The question that people are asking is who is benefiting from the illegal act? When the trucks illegally transport coal, even the government is losing out on revenue which should go to the state treasury. So is that revenue diverted to the NPP’s kitty and is that is how the Party funds its organisation and campaign in the entire north east? The more important question is whether the MDA alliance will last beyond the general election? Will UDP continue to support the MDA after the results are

declared after May 23? Then the NPP as a party also has its own internal problems which came to light during the elections.

The allegation that in the MP elections some of the MLAs from the NPP openly supported the Congress candidate rather than the MDA common candidate is an open secret now. The allegation is that not only the MLAs but even MDCs and other party functionaries were surreptitiously supporting the Congress candidate, but the Chief Minister in his statement to the press denied the allegation. Anyway, the truth will come to light in a few weeks time. If the MDA and the NPP candidates fail to do well in the election, it is because of this back-stabbing. The other reason is also because of NPP’s stand vis-a-vis its relationship with the BJP which is not clear. People are confused about the NPP’s stand on the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB). The CM’s statement that the Government will oppose the Bill is ambiguous since the NPP is still part of the NDA which is led by the BJP. People are asking how the NPP can oppose CAB when the BJP is firm on its stand to pass the Bill. This was even mentioned in the BJP’s election manifesto.

The other problem with this Government is that the CM is spending more time outside the state organising and campaigning for his Party and leaving the Government to his subordinates. So in reality his hands are not on the wheels all the time. Of course as the national president of the Party, it is his duty to expand the influence of the so-called ‘national’ party, but he is doing this at the cost of the state of Meghalaya. It is understood that the goal is to expand the reach of the NPP at least in the north eastern region, but this could be biting more than it can chew. It could also be a case that the party is reaching out to the other areas and neglecting the State which has given it power.

Hence all these realities are enough to tell us that all is not well with governance in Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

Kudos to DTO personnel

Editor,
Most people do not associate government offices with even an iota of efficiency but, recently, I was pleasantly surprised when I went to the D.T.O.’s office here in Shillong to renew my driving licence armed with a fitness certificate from an approved doctor. The work was all done in a very acceptable time frame and I walked out a little dazed with the renewed licence in my hand and quite impressed with the efficiency that you rarely see in government offices. A member of the staff even refused to have his cup of tea as he had people to deal with. I wish to thank the D.T.O. and his staff who deserve a pat on the back for such good work.

Yours etc.,
D.M.Pariat,
Shillong - I

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

BJP may manage to retain hold in Assam Despite good fight, Congress is no match to Saffrons

By Sagarneel Sinha

Assam amounts the maximum number of Lok Sabha seats in the north-eastern region. Out of the total 25 Lok Sabha seats of the north-east, Assam alone accounts for 14 seats. In the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, BJP won 7 seats with Congress and AIUDF winning 3 seats each. The rest one was won by an independent.

Already, Assam had voted for the two phases and the last phase of voting would be held on 23rd April. This time the ruling BJP has been trying hard to increase its seats from the state. The saffron party, which contested the last 2014 general polls alone, has this time allied with the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) and Bodoland Peoples Front (BPF). AGP is contesting in three seats — Dhubri, Kaliabor and Barpeta — and BPF is contesting in Kokrajhar. The point to be noted is out of the three seats where AGP is contesting this time, AIUDF had won Dhubri and Barpeta while Congress won its traditional seat of Kaliabor in the last election.

Since the 2014 Lok Sabha elections and the 2016 state assembly elections, when BJP for the first time formed the government in the state, much water has flown through the Brahmaputra — the lifeline of Assam. The anger against the Citizenship Amendment Bill, which has died on its own, will undoubtedly be a factor in this election in Assam. But how much will it affect the outcome is a big question. Although, BJP has said that it will bring back the controversial bill if it comes back to power.

One of the most important factors would be the implementation of National Registers of Citizens, apart from the Citizenship Bill. The implementation of NRC is widely accepted by the majority Assamese and the tribal communities of the state. Nevertheless, NRC implementation, which is still in process, has been due to Supreme Court’s order but politically it has the backing of the BJP — which is the ruling party both at the centre and the state. The outcome was witnessed in the last Panchayat elections held in the month of December on the backdrop of the Citizenship Bill last year where BJP was ahead of the other parties. The saffron party won 42% seats of the Gram Panchayat level, the lowest layer while it won 51% of the seats in the Zilla Parishad level, the uppermost layer. At the village levels, issues are mostly localised. But as the layers move upwards, local issues start getting blurred with state level issues. That’s why there was a difference of 9% between the lowest and the uppermost layer. It means that the support of the BJP, which contested the rural polls alone, at the wake of the Citizenship Bill hasn’t withered. Obviously, the performance of the opposition Congress was better than the party had expected.

If one would see the reasons behind the victory of BJP in the rural body polls one would find the NRC factor responsible for it. The majority Assamese community and the indigenous tribal communities voted for the party as the BJP performed well in most of the areas inhabited by them. On the other hand, BJP also got the backing of the Hindu Bengalis which many had expected that the party won’t get due to the NRC factor. But the BJP got the backing of both the majority Assamese community and the Hindu Bengalis. Congress performance came

at the cost of the Muslim based AIUDF party — which indicates shifting of the Muslim votes towards the Congress. This time AIUDF is contesting only in three seats — Dhubri, Barpeta and Karimganj — which were won last time by the party. Thus preventing the split of the Muslim votes in rest of the seats.

If the last Lok Sabha elections are analysed, BJP alone is well ahead of the Congress+AIUDF in the five Lok Sabha seats — Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Tezpur, Guwahati and Lakhimpur. In the Nowgong Lok Sabha seat won by the BJP last time, Congress has the edge as there was no AIUDF candidate from this seat. Last time, the votes polled together by Congress and AIUDF was more than the BJP. In the Mangaldoi seat, votes polled by the BJP+AGP+BPF is more than the Congress+AIUDF combine.

In the Silchar Lok Sabha seat falling under the Barack valley where Congress women leader Sushmita Dev is the incumbent MP, votes polled by the Congress+AIUDF was more than the BJP+AGP combine. However, opposition to the Citizenship Bill by the Congress and AIUDF would make it difficult for the Congress where the Hindu Bengalis might have opted for the BJP — which has been rigorously batting for the citizenship of the Hindu Bengalis. The polarisation of the Hindu Bengalis was seen in the panchayat polls too. Karimganj seat which also falls in the Barack valley may also see the victory of BJP due to consolidation of the Hindu Bengalis plus the split of Muslim votes between Congress and the incumbent AIUDF.

In the Dubri seat, where the AIUDF supremo Badruddin Ajmal is contesting, the party seems to be ahead in the arithmetics. In the Barpeta Lok Sabha seat, BJP+AGP seems to be ahead in arithmetics as both AIUDF and Congress have their own candidates. However, the contest would be close because whether there would be a smooth transition of BJP voters towards the ally AGP, which is contesting in this seat, is a significant question. Kaliabor, where already voting had took place, Congress was ahead in the arithmetics. The seat has been a traditional bastion of the party where the party’s candidate was Gaurav Gogoi, son of Tarun Gogoi — former Chief Minister of the state. In the Kokrajhar seat, which was won by an independent last time, BJP’s ally BPF seems to be ahead. In the Autonomous District seat, Congress last time won by a 5% margin defeating the BJP. This time fight would be very close as BJP has been successful in getting the support of the Hindu tribal communities which was witnessed this year in the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council elections, where the saffron party emerged victorious.

So, if the ground situation is analysed BJP seems to be ahead, riding on the consolidation of a large section of the majority Assamese and the indigenous communities plus the Hindu Bengalis. However, Congress is also expected to give a good fight to the BJP riding on Muslim consolidation plus a section of Assamese community who has turned anti-BJP due to the saffron party’s support to the Citizenship Bill. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Meghalaya’s power crisis

Editor,

Today power crisis is being felt across the country but this adversity afflicts Meghalaya the most. Lack of vision and commitment and improper judgement of facts had led to this sad state of affairs. Had it not been for the visionaries like late Jawaharlal Nehru we can well imagine what would have happened to this tiny state of ours in the absence of the Umiam reservoir and its subsequent three stages. Let us also be thankful to the farmers of Umiam who had generously parted away with their paddy fields. Umtraw power project built under Colombo project would not suffice. Visionaries like late BC Roy had even tapped Beadon-Bishop Falls (Suna Pani) to help meet the demand with the efforts of the A.S.E.B. Hence villages all over the State were able to enjoy uninterrupted power supply. With the growing need of the expanding cities and with entrepreneurs in small scale industries requiring more power for their enterprises it was felt that

Umngot river should be utilized to meet this huge power supply gap. Unfortunately this hit a wall thanks to the intervention of the environmentalists.

The Government of the day was left with no option but to focus on the run of the water project at Leshka. This entirely depends on the monsoons, but with the monsoons today becoming so unpredictable the visionaries like late Leshka has proved to be a money guzzling project with little outcomes. Then cement plants emerged and a good number of them flourished among the villages of Lumshnong, Umsning and Thangskai. Besides being the main sources of pollution they are also power guzzlers. Purchase of power from NEEPCO cannot be a long term solution as the State’s exchequer is under strain. Thus with a big ‘NO’ to nuclear power and with Solar plants such as the ones practiced in China, a next to impossible reality - our only hope is that come monsoons and we are going to witness the disappearance of those many islands on our Umiam reservoir. Let us hope that between September to

January next year we are able to enjoy uninterrupted power supply so that our people and the entrepreneurs whose livelihoods depend on electricity can work day and night to compensate for the loss. As a losing cricket test match team prays for rains, we too should do likewise.

Yours etc,
M. Khyriem,
Shillong- 14

In the name of the cow

Editor,

This refers to Sushil Kutty’s article, “SC corrects election commission’s diabetic foot” (ST, April 18, 2019). Hate speeches kill harmony in a society. A few days ago, Prakash Lakra, a tribal man, was beaten to death. Why? Because he was cutting the flesh of a dead bull. This happened at Jurni village in Jharkhand’s Gumla district, 140 kilometre from Ranchi. A group of people attacked Prakash Lakra and three of his friends over suspicion of slaughtering a cattle. And the attackers were so “kind” to the dead bull that they killed Prakash and

thrashed his friends in the mute night on 10 April 2019. Deputy Inspector - General of police A. V. Homkar said that a group of people spotted the four persons cutting the flesh of a dead bull and started beating them.

“Maaro saalon ko’ was all we had heard when a mob of more than 25 ran up to us, armed with swords, sickle, iron rods” ~ said Janirush Minz (40) lying on a bed in surgical ward of Ranchi’s Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences. Peter Phuljan (50) and Belasus Tirkey (60) were on other beds near Minz. The fourth person ~ Prakash Lakra was declared dead on arrival at the hospital.

“The four of us were caught by the mob... they shouted slogans such as ‘Bajrangbali ki jai’, ‘Jai Shri Ram’. They were so angry, we just surrendered”, said Minz. Severely injured, Peter Phuljan could manage to say, “The mob beat us for two hours - until we reached Jairagi village, about one kilometre away (from the spot where the assault had begun). When we were unable to move any longer, they shoved us and we were forced to

walk. Then they beat us again, and the same cycle repeated.”

“The ox was already dead. How could we kill it again?” they asked. We need to reflect on what Phuljan observed. He said that he could not fathom out what changed the mentality of the villagers, who had lived with them for generations.

The answer is undoubtedly blowing in the hate speeches. To stop the menace, the Supreme Court of India has taken the right step. Reacting sharply on the Election Commission’s plea that it had limited powers to deal with “hate speeches” or politicians exploiting religious feelings for votes, the apex court directed that a “representative” of the Election Commission be present before it. Within hours of the court’s rebuke, the EC had on Monday banned some politicians from campaigning for certain hours for hate speeches. However, the Election Commission must follow a single standard for all the politicians irrespective of one’s position in the power hierarchy.

“The purpose of terrorism lies not just in the violent act itself. It is in producing terror. It sets out to inflame, to divide, to produce consequences which they then use to justify further terror.”

--- Tony Blair

The Shillong Times

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Sri Lanka blasts on Easter Sunday

THE serial bomb blast on Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka has claimed about 300 lives so far with about 500 people injured. The bomb blasts occurred in churches holding Easter services even while high-end hotels were targeted. This attack was clearly well-planned and intended to hit specific targets and it comes nearly a decade after the civil war that rocked Sri Lanka and had killed nearly 100,000 civilians and combatants. The bomb blasts were aimed at the Christian community who are a minority in Sri Lanka and who had been targeted in the past too. Sri Lankan authorities have arrested eight people so far. They believe that a local Islamist extremist group the National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ) was behind the deadly suicide bomb blasts. The Sri Lankan police had apparently issued a warning on April 11 that some foreign intelligence agency had claimed that the group was planning attacks on churches and the Indian High Commission. Despite such intelligence inputs the island nation was caught unawares. It is also not understood as to why the Indian High Commission should be the target of attack except that the radicals belong to a brotherhood that spans continents.

As is the usual case, social media access was quickly curbed in order to arrest the dissemination of news within the country of 21 million people and also across continents. A nationwide curfew was also imposed. The powerful blasts first occurred at six places; two more occurred two hours later. Preliminary investigations reveal that suicide bombers were responsible for the blasts. There is of course very little anyone can do to prevent suicide bombers from achieving their grand plans. In nearly all cases involving the highest human casualties such as the bombing of the twin towers in the US on September, 11, 2001 and several such terror attacks in India and elsewhere the perpetrators were suicide bombers. Former Prime Minister of India Rajiv Gandhi too was blown to smithereens by a woman suicide bomber. Every part of the world is today afflicted by radicals that believe in terror tactics to gain notoriety. The gunman who shot people inside the Al Noor mosque last month in Christchurch, New Zealand was a radicalized Christian. Those who shot the churchgoers in Sri Lanka are radicalized Muslims. It's time for nations to try and fathom the reasons behind this rapid radicalization of individuals belonging to different religions. No religion teaches its adherents to harm other humans, especially those offering prayers. It is ironic that places of worship have today become the most vulnerable.

The Judgement that made History

By Manraj Singh

It is not new that strong leaders have tried to bend institutions to their will in our country's history. There have been situations when democratic institutions have clashed. The pronouncement of Kesavananda Bharti judgment by Supreme Court on 24th April, 1973 was one such instance. It was unprecedented for a number of reasons: anxious political circumstances in which it was delivered, the shift in the balance of democratic power it caused, the unprecedented number of separate opinions delivered by the court and the sheer length of the judgment itself.

This case is considered to be the one which saved Indian democracy. The history of the case lies in the numerous land reform laws passed by various governments preceding the judgment, in which they were challenged. The question before the court was how much amending power was granted to the Parliament under Article 368 and whether that power was unbridled and without any constraints, or could the courts review amendments?

The case came to the SC when Kerala passed its land reform laws which affected the property of Kesavananda Bharti, head of Edneer Math in Kerala. The legendary lawyer Nani Palkhivala seized the opportunity to challenge the validity of the law and previous amendments of the Constitution. The petitioners in Kesavananda contended that the challenged amendments nullify some of the most cardinal principles of our Constitution and that Parliament could not draw authority from the Constitution to alter those very principles.

The court's most significant decision, made by a thin majority of 7:6, was that although Parliament had the powers to amend any part of the Constitution, it could not use this power to alter or destroy the 'basic structure' or framework of the Constitution. Basic structure is the soul and core identity of the Constitution which cannot be altered. It is the foundation on which our Constitution stands. It is a list of features which are immune from amendments. No law can be made which violates this basic structure. Although there is no direct mention of this in the Constitution yet it is deeply ingrained in the text and history. This was the judiciary's answer and shield in response to the attack of the Government's amending power for protecting the rights of the people. This strengthens our democracy by limiting the powers of a majoritarian government to undermine

the Constitution's central ideals. According to the SC, the basic structure comprises the supremacy of the Constitution, republican and democratic form of government, secularism, separation of powers between the legislature, executive and judiciary, and the federal character of the Constitution, dignity of the individual and free and fair elections.

Surith Parthasarthy opines that the thesis of basic structure doctrine was rooted in the writings of German scholar Dietrich Conrad. Conrad believed that even if a legislature were bestowed with the widest of powers to amend the Constitution, its authority was always subject to a set of inherent constraints. Parliament, he contended, was, after all, a creature of the Constitution. It cannot therefore, make changes that had the effect of overthrowing or obliterating the Constitution itself. As AG Noorani has pointed out, Conrad was affected by his own country's history. In Germany, the virulent end brought to the Weimar Republic by Nazism had meant that when the country adopted its Basic Law in 1949, it quite explicitly placed checks on the legislature's powers. This included a bar on lawmakers from amending those provisions of the Basic Law that concerned the country's federal structure, that made human rights inviolable and that established constitutional principles such as the state's democratic and social order.

Legally this judgment enhanced the scope of judicial review by courts by assuming the power to scrutinize all constitutional amendments. If Parliament had a free hand to amend the Constitution, the Supreme Court had a co-extensive power to review and invalidate any amendment that destroyed its basic structure. This made sure that politicians elected to make laws and represent the interest of people in legislature remain servants of the Constitution and not become its masters. Hence power was balanced.

Political Outcomes

Zia Mody in her book 'Ten Judgments that changed India's History' outlines the political outcomes of the judgment announced on 24 April, 1973. The then Chief Justice of India, SM Sikri was due to retire a day after the decision in Kesavananda - on 25 April 1973. The government was yet to announce his successor. As per convention, the senior-most judge of the Supreme Court is generally appointed as the Chief Justice of India. Were

this convention followed, the Chief Justiceship would have been accorded to Justice Shelat followed by Justices Grover and Hegde. However, angered with the Kesavananda decision, the Government superseded these three judges who had ruled against it in Kesavananda. Instead, it appointed Justice AN Ray, who had ruled in its favour, as the Chief Justice of India. This undermined the long-standing practice of appointing the senior-most judges of the Supreme Court. Justices Shelat, Grover and Hegde resigned in protest and the Indira Gandhi government's attempt at muzzling judicial independence in the lead-up to the Emergency began in earnest.

Soon after, Raj Narain, Indira Gandhi's political adversary, challenged her election to the Lok Sabha from the Rae Bareilly constituency in the Allahabad High Court. He alleged that Indira Gandhi had committed corrupt practices under the Representation of the People Act, 1951. Accepting this contention, the court voided Indira Gandhi's election. On appeal to the Supreme Court, the judgment of the Allahabad High Court was stayed, and it was held that Indira Gandhi could continue to function as the Prime Minister of India on the condition that she would not draw a salary and would not speak or vote in the Parliament. The fallout of this judgment was that a National Emergency was proclaimed in India.

During the pendency of the appeal, the Parliament hurriedly passed the Constitution (Thirty-ninth Amendment) Act, 1975, placing the election of the President, Vice-President, Prime Minister and Speaker of the Lok Sabha beyond the scrutiny of courts. This is eerily similar to anti-people and anti democratic laws passed by dictators across the world throughout history. The amendment was meant to nullify the judgment of the Allahabad High Court so as to shield Indira Gandhi's election from being challenged in the Supreme Court. As a result, in Indira Nehru Gandhi vrs. Raj Narain, that latter challenged the validity of the constitutional amendment itself - the first time a constitutional amendment was challenged not in respect of the right to property or social welfare, but with reference to an electoral law. By a majority of 4:1, the Supreme Court struck down the amendment, recognizing that it vitiated certain fundamental tenets forming part of the basic structure

of the Constitution, including free and fair elections and the rule of law.

Our Constitution has always been secular and this envisages a secular state. The protection given to minorities under the fundamental rights; no state religion; equal treatment to all religions by the state; equality of all people before the law are examples of that. This secularism also forms part of the basic structure. However we regularly see politicians whipping up emotions, especially during elections by saying that Constitution shall be amended to make India a Hindu Rashtra; that secularism has not originally part of our Constitution etc. This is a case of misleading and lying to the people for their own needs. It is a fraud on the people and Constitution.

Another example is of elections. Free and fair elections are also part of basic structure. Although elections and voting to choose our legislator to govern over us is just one part of democracy, it is an essential one. Every year we see examples of mass killings in African countries during elections. Dictators come to power and then never resign from their posts. It is disheartening to see how some people in order to get elected spew poison to create divisions in society and create a narrative of "us vs them." So they essentially win by cheating. This is why the role of the Election Commission becomes paramount. Our EC is also the envy of the world as we train and advise officials of other countries in election matters. But this rosy picture is distorted when we watch and read the news daily. Politicians flouting the model code of conduct; media taking sides with political parties, unfair censorship on some politicians while leaving out others etc., are all bad practices that needs to be checked by the EC. But the EC keeps forgetting that it has teeth with which it can bite and is not toothless.

It is because of enlightened citizens and progressive jurists like Palkhivala and astute judges that India still remains a democracy. Governments will come and go but the country will remain. People in most parts of the world do not enjoy the freedoms Indians enjoy and the right to vote or to approach a court to pull up a Govt department; express an opinion on any subject, cultural diversity and protection etc. It is our duty to make sure that we protect this sacred living document and live up to the expectations of the founding fathers of our Constitution and freedom fighters.

benefit from the illegality. Why single out only the NPP? The writer stated that the NPP is not clear on CAB. Yes, NPP made itself very clear with regards to CAB. It opposed it tooth and nail right from day one. Even its President, Conrad Sangma, lobbied very hard in the North East and in Delhi to ensure that CAB does not see the light of day. To say that the Chief Minister is spending too much time outside the state for canvassing elections is not a fact. Media persons meet him almost every other day either in Garo Hills or in Khasi Hills especially in the state capital. And to say that he has no control of the affairs of the state is not at all a fact. For the information of the writer the Chief Minister is very much in control of the affairs of the state. I know it and everyone who knows the Government knows it.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via-Email.

Tales of a shared taxi passenger

By Samhita Barooah

My work took me to Shillong from Guwahati but my family kept pulling me back to Guwahati. It is a two hour journey from Shillong to Guwahati one of the shortest distances amongst the North Eastern States in India if one can skip the traffic hours. I usually take late evening taxis after my classes on a Friday and rush back to Shillong on Monday early morning before the traffic gets really tough to crawl. In these journeys most of the co-passengers are from different parts of the country in Sumos, Swift Dzires, Innovas and also in Wagon-Rs. At times I speak to strangers but mostly overhear conversations. I have learnt from these journeys many different perspectives to life. There was one co passen-

also ask them about their business. One of them was very informative and shared about how different Christian denominations are there in Shillong and Presbyterians are the most prominent apart from the Catholics, Baptists and Protestants. When I asked him the difference then he said Presbyterians don't believe in Mother Mary while the rest believe. But very recently one local taxi driver asked me if I had a family. I said I have. Then he asked how many children I have. I said none. Then he asked if I had a husband or not? I said why is family limited to children and husbands? Why can't parents, siblings, anyone who we value become family? I kept wondering if he asked such questions to his male pas-

“He was from Delhi and shared his life about how he landed in Shillong with bare minimum resources and needed help to reach home back as his ATM card got blocked. His family was worried in Delhi and he came to taste the fresh quality of intoxicants in Shillong.”

ger who came to Shillong for the first time in his life to explore the best quality of Babaji's Prasad which happens to be a very high quality intoxicant. He was from Delhi and shared his life about how he landed in Shillong with bare minimum resources and needed help to reach home back as his ATM card got blocked. His family was worried in Delhi and he came to taste the fresh quality of intoxicants in Shillong. He was an alcoholic earlier but now he was more into marijuana. He said in Delhi the quality of Marijuana is not fresh it has a lot of chemicals but here in

sengers doesn't seem to exist in this context. He explained why he asked me such questions as Meghalaya is matrilineal. Everything is in the hands of the women. Then when I asked him about his hometown, he said he was from Hajo from his father's side. His mother was from Meghalaya. He also shared how he left his previous job where he had to report to a woman boss so now he has his own taxi and he was on his own feet. When I asked what his mother tongue was, he said very skilfully that in Shillong one has to speak all

“In another journey I heard an Assam Rifles Officer discuss about higher secondary science with a PhD scholar who came to Shillong to present his paper on some new software mobile technology. Such conversations are rare in North East from armed forces as they would hardly speak to people around them.”

Shillong one can get better ones.

In another journey I heard an Assam Rifles Officer discuss about higher secondary science with a PhD scholar who came to Shillong to present his paper on some new software mobile technology. Such conversations are rare in North East from armed forces as they would hardly speak to people around them. But it was very encouraging to find knowledge enthusiasts amongst the armed forces as well. Again in another journey I happened to meet a man who happened to be an engineer but taught maths and science to visually challenged students through Braille at a Shillong based NGO named Bethany Society. He also shared about some interesting initiative of an architect from outside the North East who built some innovative rural housing structures based on the traditional round huts of Meghalaya. That was a good learning for me.

Shared taxis are a common mode of transport even within Shillong. When I have to travel to different places across Shillong beyond the walking distance, I bump into many taxis. Some drivers ask me many questions about me and then my family and my profession. I

languages as per the passengers English, Khasi, Garo, Jaintia, Hindi, Bengali and Assamese.

Shared Taxis have very civilised rules about sharing space and sharing costs too. Both long and medium distances can be covered easily in a low budget of Rs.10-20 without worrying about the shortest routes, parking and bargaining headaches. In all this, woman's mobility is always a cause of concern for all, particularly men whose interest lies in both protection and predation. In either case, the women are at the receiving end. Most of the taxi drivers are supportive and helpful when I do not bargain the rates which fluctuate according to elections, festivals and availability of taxis. But for Shillong, shared taxis are the lifelines of both commuters and drivers. I remember one taxi driver sharing how happy he was that he was blessed with a daughter recently and his wife was a government employee at the state secretariat. If this was in a patriarchal society, the men would be looked down upon and women will never be so mobile but here it reflects upon the freedom of men in a matrilineal context.

(The writer teaches at Martin Luther Christian University)

TO THE EDITOR

Climate change a real danger

Editor,
Robert J Oppenheimer, born in 1904 was the greatest theoretical physicist of the 20th Century. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour (1941) finally dragged the reluctant Americans into the war. With the famous Einstein equation E=Mc², work had been pursued by the scientists to tap this immense power. In 1942, F.D. Roosevelt selected Oppenheimer to lead the Manhattan Project to make an atomic bomb. The war had not yet gained momentum by then. So what made the President resort to this dreadful weapon is not understandable. Anyway Oppenheimer with hosts of renowned scientists in Physics and Chemistry, assisted by engineers was finally successful in making the atomic bomb. Much before the bombs were deployed in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Oppenheimer was never a happy man again till his death in 1964.

The man, a Jew of left wing ideology of equality and justice to all, found himself at his prime, the destroyer of the world. Regrettably he lamented looking at the irreversibility of his project "We may be likened to two scorpions in a bottle each capable of killing the other, but only at the risk of his own life". I strongly believe that these statements had triggered caution in J.F. Kennedy and N. Gorbachov to abort the nuclear war in the Cuban crisis of the late 60's. In the midst of the Cold War, there was a great concern about this terrible weapon and the non-proliferation treaty was being signed by few players. If we remember the analogy of two scorpions in a bottle and so long as the finger on the button belongs to a sane mind and human heart, and never goes to war mongers, nuclear war is not going to happen. It would be proper therefore if we focus on climate change and terrorism a new deadlier weapon of destruction. Cli-

mate change had resulted in the abnormal behaviour of monsoon, which greatly affects agriculture. It is rather disappointing that no leader has ever shown their interest on this issue.

We are basking in excessive luxury and extravagant life styles that have undone whatever our mother earth has to offer. We tend to focus on trivial matters that simply add more and more woes to our environment. This is the reason why Lobo the famous lyricist and singer said, "When man landed on the moon, a five year old boy was enjoying the crumbs at Calcutta railway station". That was the case with U.S.A. a very rich country of the 69's. Here too we may sing the same song "When someone lands on the moon lakhs of people are enjoying the left-overs of railway passengers" and "lakhs of people are in deep slumber below flyovers". Any mission is to be encouraged so long as we have the resources to do so. This may be the reason why

USA has temporarily suspended its moon mission.

Coming to terrorism a weapon deadlier than any, we have to handle it with great care. It does not obey Geneva Convention; it hides among un mindful citizens and causes terrible deaths when it strikes. It spares no one irrespective of age and colour. It likes to create destruction at large gatherings and market places. It has no caste, creed or religion. Some leaders are locally vocal; very few are internationally vocal. It is sad that some of us look at terrorism from an angle that suits us. If we can overcome our shortcomings especially of our leaders, and if we stand united, one day all should hope that we would eliminate this new weapon which has sadly snatched away tens of thousands of precious lives from our midst.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Shillong -14

The CM is in control

Editor,
Kudos to H.H Mohrmen for the article, "MDA: IS THE CHIEF MINISTER IN CONTROL?" (ST April 22, 2019) I read this with great interest to find out its contents. Yes there are many interesting points raised by him which I tend to agree because of my first hand knowledge. Extraction and transportation of coal is still taking place every day, even today and there is no power in Meghalaya that can stop this, not even the NGT or the apex court. In fact banning of coal extraction and its transportation by the NGT and the court only encouraged illegal coal extraction and its illegal transportation. This will continue unabated. No one can stop this for obvious reasons. In fact the benefits from this illegality goes not only to NPP for elections purposes but it also goes to other parties as well in the ruling MDA and the opposition. All stand to

"The truth." Dumbledore sighed. "It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution."

--- J.K. Rowling

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24, 2019

Institutions under stress

The Indian judiciary is faced with major challenges. At its apex is a crisis, with Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi faced allegations of sexual harassment from a junior court staff, a lady who has sent her complaint letter to 22 judges. The CJI vehemently denies this, and says it is part of a larger conspiracy. It could be so, given the kind of intrigues that take place in top seats of power and authority in India today. It could also be that the complaint is genuine. What is necessary here is to follow due procedure so that the matter is set to rest whatever be the outcome. The woman's complaint is of a serious nature. She alleges sexual harassment after she refused to oblige the CJI who made "advances" towards her in his office room. He allegedly took in writing from her that what happened was at her prompting. She also stated that her husband and other family members lost their jobs after the incident. The CJI notes, in response, that the woman and her husband had a criminal past, and that they were facing police cases of such nature. Unless the matter is investigated by following the rules set forth in the Sexual Harassment Act, 2013 - a process followed in all other institutions the truth is unlikely to emerge.

In effect, the Indian judiciary as a whole is facing a major embarrassment, especially since a special hearing was called on Saturday last with the CJI presiding over it but not putting his signature to the proceedings. Coming at a time when the Supreme Court is hearing important cases related to the Rafale aircraft deal amongst others, the allegations have only muddied the waters further. Notably and appreciably, the Indian judiciary has maintained a high level of integrity for long years. At least this is our perception. In recent years, though there have also been serious allegations against some judges. One came to be known as the crores-for-bail scam in which some judges of the Hyderabad high court and a mining baron were involved. There were allegations against a former CJI having acquired wealth disproportionate to his known sources of income. Judges in the past were known for their high standards of behaviour. They conducted themselves with dignity. What happened now must be seen as an aberration. This is a wake-up call to the judiciary. Hope and expectation are that the judges will retain the high standards of judicial excellence and personal conduct in future too.

LOOKING BACK

June 18, 1989

6,000 hit by flood in Kamrup

About 6,000 people have been badly affected by flood waters in Kamrup district of Assam, official reports said today. Reports said thousands were rendered homeless and relief and rescue operations continue in the area when rain-feed Puthimari, a major tributary of the Brahmaputra breached its embankment at Decpara last night inundating 30 villages in Kamalpur circle.

The tributary crossed its danger mark in the area following heavy rain in its catchment in Bhutan for the past few days. A number of villages in Darrang district were also submerged by the swollen Digaj. The Brahmaputra and its several tributaries like the Pagladia, Manas and the Beki were rising above their red mark flooding low lying areas in different parts of the state.

A Tezpur report said the Jiaborali and the Gabharu which had already crossed their danger mark submerging

may areas, were expected to rise further in the next 12 hours.

ABSU has no links with ultras

All Bodo Students Union Vice President Mr Prodeep Daimary has strongly denied that the ABSU has any clandestine links with terrorist Sikh Organisations and that Christian Missionaries have a hand in the Bodoland movement.

In a statement released in Shillong on Saturday, Mr Daimary said that these allegations that appeared in the magazine "Surya", was a "self made" story by the writers. Condemning the ABSU vice president said that it was "anti-religion, anti-democracy, and anti secularism." He also denied having made certain statements in an interview carried by the magazine.

Is religion a lullaby for violence?

By Albert Thyriang

The Sri Lanka terrorist attacks consisting of eight serial blasts leaving more than 300 people dead and 500 injured on Easter Sunday has left the world shocked. Three churches which were probably filled with devotees during Easter celebration came under attack. Three posh hotels were also the targets of the deadly blasts.

The coordinated attacks were perpetrated on St Anthony's Shrine (a tourist landmark) in Colombo, on St Sebastian's Church (of gothic-architecture) in Negombo, 30 km from the national capital and the Zion Church in Batticaloa, 250 km east of Colombo. Two bombings were at a guest house. Three luxury hotels in the heart of Colombo, namely Cinnamon Grand, a stone's throw away from the official residence of the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, The Shangri La and Kingsbury Hotels were victims of the mindless and senseless acts that killed, among others, 35 foreigners including nationals from USA, Denmark, China, Japan, Pakistan, Morocco, India and Bangladesh.

The severity of the situation meant that an indefinite nation-wide curfew was declared immediately and a temporary ban on social media was imposed.

Sri Lanka, a rowboat away from the southeast tip of India in the Indian Ocean with only The Gulf of Mannar and Palk Straits separating it from India, was ravaged by decades of civil war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). During the separatists' hey days bomb blasts were common in the capital. After the tigers were neutralised in 2009 the nation of 21 million people was relatively peaceful. However, there were communal tensions between Buddhists, who comprise 70 percent of the population, Muslims 9.8 % and Christians 7.3%.

On Monday news came in that the Sri Lankan government has blamed the National Thowheed Jama'ath, a little-known radical Islamic terror organization, for the mayhem. Aiming to promote Islamic radical ideology, the group was involved in vandalizing Buddhist statues with its secretary, Abdul Razik arrested in 2016. So far 24 people are said to have been arrested in connection with the blasts. Authorities say the group's aim is to spread the

global jihadist movement in Sri Lanka and to create hatred, fear and divisions in society'. Officials also informed that intelligence warning was issued on possible attacks on churches by the group though the Prime Minister. Ranil Wickremesinghe denied receiving such information. If warning was indeed given, we await answers as to why no preventive action was taken. In the meanwhile the ghastly and barbaric explosions have been carried out.

The modern world today is a religion dominated world. Regions and countries are inevitably classified by religions. Europe and the Americas are associated with Christianity. In Africa Islam and Christianity share honours. Asia, from where all major religions originated, is naturally a home of all religions. Middle East is dominated by Islam, South East Asia is, by and large, a stronghold of Buddhism. For obvious reasons, we mention the Indian subcontinent here. India and Nepal are Hindu majority countries, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are Muslim nations while Myanmar and Sri Lanka are Buddhist majority countries.

In principle, adherents of all religions claim that their respective religion is peaceful. Their sacred Scriptures contain tenets of love, peace, brotherhood, unity, forgiveness, compassion, acceptance, besides offering guidelines for a meaningful life. None of these 'rule books' preach hatred, division, killing, violence and war. Christianity says love is the greatest virtue, Islam says it's very essence is peace, Buddhism's chief teaching is non-violence and Hinduism's strength is inclusiveness.

If these are the lofty doctrines of religions then where have we gone wrong? Why is the world still full of hatred, violence and killings? Why the bomb blasts, the terrorist attacks, the mass shooting, riots, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity? Ironically most of these cruel acts are religiously and scripturally inspired. They are committed in the name of religions, holy books and God himself. It is a fact that the main culprits of violence

anywhere in the world are followers of the mainstream religions. We don't hear of large scale violence perpetrated by adherents of traditional or indigenous religions. It is time to reflect hard otherwise the major religions might be judged unkindly.

The seeds of war, extremism, fanaticism, fundamentalism and radicalism are embedded in every religion. Without exception there are extremists, fanatics, fundamentalists and radicals in every religion. Intolerance and bigotry, chauvinism and jingoism exist in all religions. This is the ugly side of religion. If this is not seriously addressed atheism might be a better option. We have not come across an atheist committing crimes against believers. But there are many cases where atheists are killed by religious fanatics. Atheists are humane says one opinion. Are humane atheists or religious terrorists better?

While Islam is a 'religion of peace' it has bred jihadist galore like the ISIS, Boko Haram, the Al-Qaeda, the Taliban to name a few. These group pledge allegiance to Islam, commit crimes in the name of Allah and publicly justify their heinous acts by the Koran. It is not only terrorists groups but there are Mullahs who consider non-Muslims as infidels.

Fundamentalist attitude is present among Christians too. There is a strong view in the Church that unless you accept Christ as personal Lord and Saviour you are doomed for hell. It is not uncommon in the USA for mainstream and street preachers who articulate this 'conviction'. We have had examples of individuals who burned the Koran and insulted Prophet Mohammed and Islam as a religion. It is alleged that in the West 'Islamophobia' results in crimes and violence against the community. The recent mass shooting in two mosques in New Zealand is connected to Islamophobia, some opine.

In India fundamentalist organisations and right wing individuals are prevalent. The Bajrang Dal, RSS, the VHP and other outfits of the Sangh Parivar are intolerant to the likes of MF Hussain, Graham Staines and others. The Gujarat riots, Kamdhamal mayhem, demolition of Babri

Masjid are part of our history. There are living groups who are proud of these shameful anarchies. There are individuals and groups that commemorate Mahatma Gandhi's assassination and honour Nathuram Godse. In the last five years we have seen lynching of Muslims, Ghar Wapsi, Love Jihad, phrases like 'go to Pakistan' and 'anti-national' being loudly stated. Recently the nomination of Sadhvi Pragma Thakur, accused in the 2008 Malegaon blasts, is seen as a gift to right wing constituents.

Buddhism's strongest weapon is Ahimsa or non-violence. But not all practice this powerful teaching of its founder, Buddha. In Myanmar the political and security leadership are mainly Buddhists. However, the Rohingya Muslims in that country face discrimination and atrocities on a large scale at the hands of the government and the army. Last year thousands of them had to flee to Bangladesh and India. In Sri Lanka groups of Buddhist monks are accused of being intolerant towards Muslims and Christians.

No one has claimed responsibility for the bloodbath in Sri Lanka. Mayhem of such magnitude invites intense speculations. Revival of LTTE is ruled out because the former 'liberation army' had no history of attacking Churches. A possible Middle East connection is possible. Local groups with aid and support from international terror groups may well be the most likely suspects.

To be politically correct most will say these are terror attacks. However, religion does come in here because the attacks happened in churches. It is against a particular religion. If a group does come out to claim responsibility it will rant to justify this devilish act. It might even brag that it has executed the heinous act in the name of a religion, the Scripture and God himself. Any 'religious' group might be involved but others need not be judgemental, because extremism has shown its ugly face in all religions at some time and place in history. The present global analysis shows that extremism stares you in the face and it can explode anytime and anywhere. It is Sri Lanka today. It will be somewhere else tomorrow. Sad, but the reality is that religion is linked to violence.

Who's behind the Sri Lanka bombings? Many questions on security remain unanswered

By Phil Miller

The horrific wave of bombings that rocked Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday is a watershed moment in the island's troubled history. Hundreds have died and many of the victims are still unidentified. There is also a race to understand who was behind the slaughter - and how they were able to carry it out.

The choice of targets - simultaneous suicide bombs at churches and luxury hotels - is reminiscent of an al-Qaida or Isis attack. The idea that Islamist extremists are responsible is certainly a narrative that some Sri Lankan officials are pushing. Today a local Muslim group, National Thowheed Jama'ath, was being blamed - allegedly in cahoots with shadowy foreign backers. There are certainly some Muslims in Sri Lanka who may exhibit extremist tendencies. Not far from the bombing at Batticaloa on the island's east coast lies the town of Kattankudy, where many of the local Muslim community are influenced by Saudi-style Islam.

Much has been written about the "Wahhabi invasion" on the island's once moderate Sufi Muslims, and it would be easy to blame conservative Islam as the incubator for these atrocities. But there is also plenty of evidence that points in other directions, and at the time of writing some 24 hours after the explosions, no group has claimed responsibility. The confusion is evident just by watching the rolling news channels, which yesterday were struggling to put out a neat linear narrative.

Many British media platforms pulled their correspondents out of Sri Lanka when the civil war between the Tamil Tigers and government forces ended a decade ago, leaving news anchors struggling to understand the complex patchwork of Sri Lanka's ethnic and religious make-up. The well-trodden "war on terror" grand narrative, a clash of civilisations between Muslims and Christians in a 21st-century crusade, makes little sense in Sri Lanka where both these religious groups are minorities - and have often been persecuted by the majority Sinhala Buddhist community. In one case, the Sri Lankan air force bombed a Catholic church in Jaffna, St James, killing scores of civilians in 1993.

A British Tamil journalist, Thusiyan Nandakumar, bravely tried to make this point in a BBC interview yesterday - that historically Tamil Christians are more likely to have been massacred by the Sri Lankan military than Islamist extremists.

Such is the nature of Sri Lankan politics that Nandakumar, a Tamil, was then trolled by patriotic Sinhala keyboard warriors for making this historically accurate point. He received thousands of hate-filled messages that left him fearing for his safety.

The backlash rather underlines the point that Sinhalese Buddhist groups in Sri Lanka do have a history of religious intolerance, which can either be exercised through their presence in state structures or in street movements. Last March saw some of the worst anti-Muslim rioting in Sri Lanka, which was led by Sinhala Buddhist mobs, fuelled by Islamophobic rumours circulating on social media - and crucially given support by riot police who seemed to evaporate in several locations, allowing mobs to move in.

If the Muslim community in Sri Lanka was feeling vengeful, then an attack on

Buddhists would have been more predictable than this assault on Christians at Easter. When Muslims have resorted to political violence in Sri Lanka before, it has not taken on an anti-Christian dimension. Indeed, a "Christian identity" holds little political traction in Sri Lanka, where the larger communities tend to identify along ethnic lines.

The Tamil Tigers, a secular movement, were composed mainly of Tamil speakers who were Hindu or Christian. In their early years, their ranks also included Tamil-speaking Muslims. The Sri Lankan military recognised the threat posed by a pan-Tamil alliance, and from 1985 took deliberate steps to drive a wedge between Tamil Muslims and non-Muslim Tamils in the Eastern province. The security forces aided and abetted Muslim attacks on village of Karaitivu, which soured Tamil-Muslim relations for decades to come.

There is now a real risk that after Sunday bombing at the Zion Church in Batticaloa, those old tensions in the Eastern province could reignite into anti-Muslim riots. Such a scenario would benefit Sri Lanka's deep state Sinhala Buddhist structures, as it would see further division among the Tamil-speaking people in the east. It would also allow the security forces to intervene, unusually, on the side of the non-Muslim Tamils - at a time when military leaders are facing international sanction for war crimes they committed against this same group a decade ago.

Political figures like the country's former defence secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, who was recently served with a war crimes suit while travelling abroad, is running for president - and will cast himself as the anti-terror candidate.

He could also absolve himself internationally if the terror threat was now from Islamist extremists, rather than the Tamil Tigers, who never neatly fitted the "war on terror" mould as much as he tried.

There are already reports that warnings on the attacks were ignored, raising questions about why these attacks weren't stopped. Sri Lanka is such a heavily militarised society, it is hard to imagine how a plot like this went undetected. The attackers' ability to strike simultaneously at three of the country's most luxurious hotels, where security is tightest, is almost incomprehensible. As is the news that a pipe bomb was found, unexploded, outside the international airport, which is also a high-security military base.

But even this elaborate deep-state scenario ultimately does not add up. The bombing of hotels will have almost destroyed Sri Lanka's tourism industry for the foreseeable future, an industry in which the military has a large stake - its personnel run numerous resorts. And so we may never know who was really responsible. Sri Lankan police say dozens of suspects have been taken into custody, but this is a police force with a proclivity to torture - a tactic which will irrevocably tarnish the testimony of those they interrogate.

What will matter is the perception of who was responsible, and how those with power will be able to play this to their advantage. The careful inter-faith work that the clergy in Batticaloa have done over the years will now be more vital than ever to prevent a spiral of violence. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Kudos KSU

Editor,
I congratulate the KSU North Khasi Hills for taking up the educational issue of Law Byrwa Lower Primary School (LPS) with the Education Department as reported in *The Shillong Times* yesterday. It is really impossible for one teacher to look after the educational needs of 150 students of Law Byrwa LPS. It is also too much to expect the village authorities to pay the salaries of another two additional teachers because it has no source of income. It is only right and proper for the Education Department to come to the rescue of educational needs of the village school by extending urgent financial aid so that the students will benefit and the school will progress well. I also appeal to the DSEO of Ri Bhoi to immediately visit Law Byrwa LPS and immediately render whatever help is required.

Who knows there may be other LPS in Ri Bhoi District facing the same fate as that of Law Byrwa LPS. I urge the Education Department and those in charge of school education of this District to render all possible help. In this connection, I must remind the KSU NKHD and the KSU in general to give top priority to education and students' issues. This should be the number one agenda of the Union. It is very unfortunate that the Union has all along been giving more importance to other issues rather than education and students' welfare.

I must also congratulate the KSU of Smit and the Smit villagers for undertaking a cleaning drive of the polluted Umiew river which is the source of life for Smit and surrounding villages. This act is highly commendable and must be appreciated by one and all. I hope the KSU unit there and the

villagers of Smit and other villages will continue to clean this river regularly which is being polluted on a daily basis by the people of Smit and other surrounding villages. I urge the Union there to create extensive awareness programme for maintaining the cleanliness of the Umiew river. I am also told that polluted water of this river reaches the GSWSS main reservoir at Mawphlang from where water supply to Shillong town is supplied. If it is so, it is really a very serious matter. Let us all co-operate to keep our rivers and the whole environment clean for our own benefit.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via-Email

One-sided view

Editor,
An interesting write-up by Mr Mohren related to the affairs of the state and it's executive has its own

justifications that 'illegality' is the current flavour of the year. Like the writer stated, commuters who travel at night or during the day are not blind. The fact is the NGT does not have much legal authority to enforce a tight ban because it will equally depend upon the state law authorities to ensure such enforcement which is lacking. Secondly, the CM knows the flaws, however, even if he were to issue direct orders it is still difficult to actually monitor whether the rule is obeyed. Another final point is the NPP Party's ties with the BJP is of convenience rather than of mutual interest. They may not always be on the same page.

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*

“Anyone who supports terrorism, anyone who sees terrorism as a legitimate means, anyone who uses terrorism to cause the death of innocent people is a terrorist in my eyes.”

--- Milos Zeman

The Shillong Times

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ISIS on the prowl

NEW information emerging in the aftermath of the suicide bombings in Sri Lanka links the attacks to ISIS, the dreaded Islamic militant network based out of the Middle East. Though a local terror network is suspected to have carried out the attacks, killing over 350 people, the ISIS has claimed responsibility. Investigations in this direction are progressing. India has reasons to be wary if the ISIS has reached up to Sri Lanka. ISIS is already on the prowl in Afghanistan, and seeking to have a base in Pakistan.

Recent reports were that it was making serious bids to enter India via Kashmir. At the same time, latest information is that India had alerted Sri Lanka about what was in the coming, weeks before the suicide bombings happened. A minister who has told Parliament about the intelligence alert from India has also blamed senior-level official there of failure on their part to take the matter seriously. Initially, the island nation's government had only stated that a "foreign country" had alerted Colombo. First reports were also that India too was likely being targeted alongside Sri Lanka.

The ISIS, which originated in Iraq after the Americans overthrew Saddam Hussein and "insulted" the large Sunni population, was conceived to be a global terrorist outfit aimed at Islamic domination of the globe. Its immediate successes were in Syria, which was caught in a civil war, and the network played mayhem with life in Iraq too, targeting the Shia population. With the US fighting the ISIS on the one side and Russia on the other, its days there were supposed to be numbered. But, it is spreading out to further east. It is well-known that ISIS and other terrorist outfits are trying to have bases in Bangladesh too, though the Sheikh Hasina government keeps maintaining maximum alert, like India.

Aside of Pakistan-based outfits like Jaish e Lashkar e Taiba targeting India over the Kashmir issue, chances of ISIS making its presence in the Valley are high. India is already on the alert in this respect. That the Indian intelligence agencies got wind of the plot to attack Sri Lanka, weeks before it happened, means Indian agencies tracking terrorism are doing a good job. This is also despite the US denial that it had any knowledge of the ISIS plot to attack Sri Lanka. First and foremost, it is important that the Sri Lankan government rises to the occasion and strongly acts against the Islamic terror networks seeking to have a base there. The security alert there should match the present alert in India.

PM Modi's remarks on nuclear policy

By Shyam Saran

“Modi should know India's status as a nuclear weapon state demands responsible leadership”

Many norms have been transgressed and several thresholds crossed in the ongoing Lok Sabha election campaign, whether in communal and sectarian polarisation of Indians or the politicisation of the armed forces. Now another threshold has been crossed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his most recent remarks on India's nuclear weapons delivered in a threatening tone.

National security has become an overarching issue, but not in terms of pledges to plug the many and glaring gaps in our security architecture and defence preparedness, but to deflect attention from them through strident rhetoric against external and domestic enemies. India's security demands urgent and thoroughgoing reform of its armed forces, of its police and of its intelligence institutions and processes. Above all, the country needs a national security doctrine that contains a realistic assessment of current and emerging security challenges, the strategy which the country should adopt in addressing them and the institutional and governance reforms that the strategy will require for its implementation. National security cannot be "talked up".

In a hostile neighbourhood what will count are real capabilities and it is important to align one's rhetoric to these capabilities. Certainly, capabilities by themselves will not be enough. There must be leadership, which displays the willingness to use these capabilities when the need arises. But leadership also means prudence and sagacity especially when the fate of the 1.3 billion citizens of India is at stake.

The Chinese trap
India is right to condemn Pakistan's continuing use of cross-border terror as an instrument of state policy. There has been success in isolating Pakistan internationally on the issue of terror, but one must also acknowledge that China has become its more powerful patron. Pakistan is a threat to India because it is conjoined with China, not because of its own capabilities, nuclear or conventional.

It is this China-Pakistan nexus that India needs to confront and seek to neutralise.

Pakistan by itself is a side-show and must be treated as such. The level of nuclear and conventional capabilities that India needs to deter China are of a scale which, collaterally, would be more than sufficient to counter any Pakistani threat. China will be happy to keep India tethered in the sub-continent, be reduced to a sub-regional power, forever embroiled in managing Pakistan and, by default, leaving much of our proximate neighbourhood open for steady Chinese penetra-

consistently responsible posture on nuclear weapons that enabled it to successfully conclude the Indo-US nuclear deal and to obtain a waiver from the guidelines of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), enabling it to resume international cooperation in the nuclear domain and gain access to the international civil nuclear market.

This was achieved without India in any way constraining its nuclear weapons programme.

Subsequent Indian

“In a hostile neighbourhood what will count are real capabilities and it is important to align one's rhetoric to these capabilities. Certainly, capabilities by themselves will not be enough.”

tion, backed by resources we cannot match. We must not fall into this trap.

Unblemished nuclear non-proliferation record

The constant waving of the anti-Pakistan flag in these elections and reducing the national security argument to whether one is or can be tough on Pakistan, is likely to be damaging to India's regional and

progress in developing longer-range ballistic missiles and its submarine-based nuclear capabilities has taken place in an international environment of tacit acceptance because such progress is seen as welcome in countervailing rising Chinese power. This is very different from the time when each Indian missile test was greeted with sharp criticism and seen as

“The level of nuclear and conventional capabilities that India needs to deter China are of a scale which, collaterally, would be more than sufficient to counter any Pakistani threat.”

global interests. Although this is being contested, there is no doubt that in the past couple of years, India is increasingly re-hyphenated with Pakistan and rising tensions between India and Pakistan will invite international efforts at mediation, some well meaning, some not.

This has always been an anathema to India and rightly so since we are not in the same category as Pakistan. Both India and Pakistan are non-signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), but it is India's unblemished record on non-proliferation and its

upsetting the balance between India and Pakistan. Having achieved this major shift in how the world sees India why should we ourselves be complicit in narrowing the prism once again to an India-Pakistan equation?

PM Modi's remarks on nuclear policy

At an election rally on 21 April, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted that under his leadership, Pakistani threat to use its nuclear weapons did not deter him from retaliating against it militarily in response to the Pulwama terrorist attack. He went on to say that India's own nu-

clear weapons had not been saved for Diwali. This is the first time that an Indian prime minister has used such language on India's nuclear deterrent. Whatever electoral compulsions triggered such rhetoric, its fallout could be adverse for India's foreign policy and national security.

One, nuclear weapons are weapons of mass destruction and any contemplated use of such weapons will be catastrophic. India's nuclear posture treats its nuclear weapons only for deterring nuclear threat and use by a potential adversary and for that reason, its nuclear deterrent is structured for retaliation only in the case of a nuclear attack.

This explains the doctrine of no-first-use (NFU) and of minimum credible deterrent. This posture was adopted by the NDA government under Atal Bihari Vajpayee after India's nuclear tests in May 1998 when India became a declared nuclear weapon state. Prime Minister Modi himself had publicly dispelled reports in 2014 that the incoming BJP government was contemplating a review of the NFU doctrine by asserting that he would not change the line laid down by Vajpayee. Any statement at the highest level of government on nuclear weapons must be carefully thought through and articulated. Casual remarks in an election speech on a sensitive issue can be open to misinterpretation and misunderstanding among friends and adversaries alike.

Two, these remarks further tighten the hyphenation between India and Pakistan and will strengthen those who never lose an opportunity to describe the sub-continent as the "most dangerous place on earth". If India and Pakistan are both brandishing their nuclear weapons at each other, the rest of the world has the obligation, it will be argued, to intervene and restrain both. The reputation we have built up as a responsible and reliable nuclear weapon state, which will act with restraint and prudence in handling these dangerous weapons, will be severely dented.

India is better served if we remain focused on building our capabilities and let them speak for themselves.

(The author is a former Foreign Secretary and is currently Senior Fellow, CPR. Views are personal)

Accuses four units of “institutional disruption”

Super blogger, Arun Jaitley threatens media

By Aditya Aamir

Through the looking glass, Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley at times gives the impression he is like 'Alice in Wonderland!' You know Lewis Carroll's fantasy? Jaitley, of the incarcerated-during-Emergency-fame, is cross with media reporting on an allegation made against Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi by a junior assistant of the apex court.

Four media outlets - Scroll.in, The Wire, The Caravan and The Leaflet - ran stories on the sworn affidavit of the former junior assistant at the Supreme Court, alleging sexual harassment and abuse of power by the CJ. All four media organisations separately sent questions to the CJ seeking his response to the allegations. But an official statement was sent by the secretary general of the Supreme Court on the morning of April 20.

This was the first time such a charge of sexual harassment has ever been made against a Chief Justice of India. There's a mechanism to deal with such matters and it devolves on the CJ to assess whether the complaint should be heard. But what if the complaint is against the CJ?

That is when Jaitley's Facebook post of April 21 came, which the Scroll.in says "contains a thinly veiled threat of contempt of court proceedings against those who have reported the contents of the affidavit", meaning the Scroll.in, The Wire, The Caravan and the Leaflet.

Quite the abnormal - a cabinet minister interjecting himself into such a controversial and sensitive case. Even Alice in Wonderland would wonder, whether she was seeing all this through the looking glass, or in reality, happening in front of her!

Tuesday, the top court was hearing the matter after a lawyer shot an affidavit to it, stating that he has vital information to part regarding the case. CJ Ranjan Gogoi had before that asked Justice SA Bobde, next in line to become CJ, to look at the "matter of great public importance touching upon the independence of the judiciary".

A bench consisting of Justice Arun Mishra, Justice Rohinton Nariman and Justice Deepak Gupta heard the matter on Tuesday. But allegations of the "judiciary was

under threat" to "there are bigger forces behind these allegations" had started doing the rounds when Jaitley wrote his Facebook post.

The complainant junior assistant was said to have a "criminal background" and that the complaint against the CJ was an attempt to "deactivate the office of the CJ". The apex court, while issuing an order, says the Scroll.in, suggested that the media should "act responsibly before publishing such allegations", though it did not clarify what would happen if the media persisted.

The secretary-general of the SC, in his response to the four media organisations, called the allegations against the CJ, "completely and absolutely false and scurrilous," and said that there were "mischievous forces behind all this with an intention to malign the institution".

But it is Jaitley's post, titled "It's Time to Stand up With the Judiciary", which ought to be seen through the looking glass; a powerful lens. Jaitley starts his post by branding the four media portals with having "unparalleled track record of 'institutional disruption'", asking how can they send "similar questionnaires to the Chief Justice of India." His conclusion: "There is obviously something more than meets the eye."

Perhaps, Jaitley does not know that while lawyers pose questions in court, media ask questions in writing or ask them face to face during interviews and that there is nothing wrong or "disruptive" in media asking questions. And, like the Scroll.in says, "There is no conspiracy nor anything strange about media organisations sending questions. This is a routine that all respectable media platforms follow, of giving a person or persons against whom allegations have been made, an opportunity to respond."

And if the questions are "similar" that could be because the material on which they are based is the same. That the questions were sent the same day illustrates that these media organisations did due diligence and did not rush to publish.

Jaitley should do a crash course in journalism to understand the various media and the way they function in the age of new media. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Taxi woes

Editor,

My brother's father in law has been persistently urging me to write something about the taxis in Shillong. Well here I am finally yielding to the plea of a frustrated passenger and finally writing something about taxi drivers and their style of functioning. But if anyone expects this letter to be a letter bashing taxi drivers left right and centre, you will be disappointed. I would like to offer constructive criticism instead.

The complaint that my brother's father in law has against taxis drivers is their refusal to pick up passengers. He stays in one of the poshest localities in Shillong which is barely 2.5 kilometres from Police Bazaar but he says that on most days, he finds it difficult to get a taxi that plies back and forth from his locality to Police Bazaar. It baffles me as to why some taxi drivers choose to roam the streets of Shillong empty. Taxi drivers must understand that their job is a customer related service and if they do anything that upsets their customers, the latter will turn against them and this will seriously affect their business cum livelihood. I do understand that

taxi drivers have been going through a rough patch ever since red buses arrived out of the blue in the streets of Shillong. If anyone remembers, once upon a time in the not so distant past, taxi drivers monopolized the public transport market in Shillong. In fact in those days very few people owned cars and they mostly travelled by public transport. Those were the good old days for taxi drivers; they were the kings of the road in every sense of the term. Then as years went by, the number of private cars in Shillong started increasing exponentially; traffic jams also increased and the straw that broke the camel's back for taxi drivers was when those dreaded red buses finally set foot on the streets of Shillong. It was a black day for taxi drivers. One former taxi driver told me that he stopped driving a taxi when red buses started plying.

Competition always brings out the best or the worst in people. My advice to taxi drivers is to not take this situation lying down. In fact they should step up their game by improving their customer service and winning over the hearts of the public. Most

Shillongites fail to realise that outsiders marvel at the sight of the small maruti car taxis of Shillong. In fact they are an integral part of our city landscape just as those big yellow taxis are in Kolkata or the fiat taxis are in Mumbai. Where else in India will you find local taxis playing Def Leppard or Firehouse! In fact I've read a few articles where writers from mainland India wrote with a certain amount of awe about the uniqueness of local taxis in Shillong. That is something we should all be proud of. These days you hardly find taxi drivers playing any kind of music. Taxi drivers go about their business in a sombre mood. The plight of taxi drivers must be taken seriously by the government since thousands of our unemployed youths earn their livelihood by driving a taxi and secondly local taxis are an integral part of the tourism machinery in our state. On the other hand taxi drivers too must take their jobs seriously and must also behave cordially with the public. Most taxi drivers in Shillong will be surprised to know that even taxi drivers in New York are facing an existential crisis. In big cities like Delhi and Kolkata, efficiently run cab

businesses like Ola and Uber are rapidly capturing the market away from autorickshaws and taxis. When I was in Delhi last year, I was pleasantly surprised by how reasonable the fare was when we travelled around Delhi by a shared taxi on Uber. Had we travelled by autorickshaws, the fare would have been 200 percent or 300 percent more. Drivers must understand the economics of the Public Transport System. When things change from monopoly to a state of almost perfect competition, a paradigm shift is bound to occur and completely alter the existing scheme of things. Drivers must then realize that they also need to alter their style of functioning!

Yours etc.,
Gary Marbaniang,
Via email

Mamata's jungle raj & our silence

Editor,
What is happening in West Bengal under the rule of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) is beyond imagination. The Mamata govern-

ment has been openly flouting democratic values. Constitutional obligations have been undermined with impunity and with mercilessness towards the persecuted citizens who are mostly original Bengalis and others. The violence that killed about 18 people in the last Panchayat election in 2018, has so traumatized the natives that they now live in constant fear. They do not know what tomorrow holds for them. But such serious political crimes committed by TMC or such other parties have short longevity. They wither away too soon.

Truly speaking, Mamata's overpowering hunger for power and the chair has long disrobed her cover of sainthood. It has totally blinded and deafened her. She, in fact, cannot see the pain and sufferings of the indigenous people, nor can she listen to the grievances of the deprived and oppressed. Nevertheless, she is always extra compassionate towards a section of people. Thus, many have been cordially invited by her administration from across the border. Against that, hardly any media takes an earnest step to alert the citizens and

the government machinery.

Mamata's unhindered invitation to the infiltrators has definitely made her stronger, and finally more domineering and terribly brutal. That how many new immigrants have been granted citizenship during her tenure. Those lucky guests are now blessed with additional facilities. Besides a lot of largesse, they are allowed to take up arms and ammunition for their protection too. They can even pose threats and fire shots if anyone stands in their way. Here too such cases are under-reported. A number of terrors groups have direct connection with TMC MPs and MLAs. The police force cannot touch this favoured lot. The sorrowful plight of the natives is never a subject of discussion in the newsrooms either.

Is it a joke that about 600 citizens in Raiganj, West Bengal, were not allowed to cast their votes in the second phase of the elections on April 18? The voters who were openly intimidated by the TMC cadres not to vote were at the crossroad and distressed. Their votes were already cast by Mamata's people. Those who were deprived

of voting rights are Hindus. Left with no option they only staged a silent protest anticipating hard times in the near future. Even media persons were beaten up and their cameras smashed -- as reported by Times Now.

Is this not an unprecedented shocker? Why is there conspicuous absence of outrage and screams of condemnation now? Even if there are any they will just die down. Just a few days back a 22-year-old BJP worker was found hanging from a tree in Senabana village; the crime was allegedly committed by TMC hooligans. Such heinous killings of a particular community or party workers, other than TMC, are common occurrences that never raise the eyebrows of intellectuals. They never get the attention that 'Dadri' got. It seems that the Election Commission of India (ECI) is a toothless tiger.

Another irony is that a prolific writer from Kolkata who regularly writes letters to The Shillong Times is silent on Mamata's jungle raj. How could he remain a mere spectator when his own community in Bengal are outnumbered by the infiltrators from across the border in which many of the native

victims are his own Dalit brethren? If a monkey sitting on a tree cries that we are under threat of "goats" from nearby villages but says nothing about a ferocious pride of lions underneath then never trust that monkey. He is a big hypocrite!

Now Mamata has moved an extra mile in this election. She has invited a popular film star 'Ferdous Ahmed' from Bangladesh to campaign for her. Who will warn her that this is a step towards danger? Yes, she wants her voters well sweetened up before they ensure her landslide victory. So who will ring the alarm bells now that her victory is only going to worsen the plight of the indigenous citizens? Is all armchair intellectualism a farce? Alas, when the lips of the judiciary (and such others..) are sealed by the glue of hypocrisy, then the tragedy of humanity is at hand.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong -2

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.

"A thing is not necessarily true because a man dies for it."

--- Oscar Wilde

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 2019

Court-directed governance

THE Meghalaya High Court has had to take up several issues of public importance ranging from supply of potable drinking water to road repairs, owing to the failure of the Government. The PHED had since last year been supplying water that has an oily film. This had created an alarm amongst the consumers. Media reports of this phenomenon only resulted in the PHED giving a wishy-washy answer. Some public spirited citizens pointed out that water generally develops an oily sheen when there is excess of hydrogen sulphide or there is presence of iron beyond permissible limits. And considering that in Meghalaya vehicle owners are not restrained from washing their vehicles even in flowing rivers it is possible that the mobil oil and grease from such vehicles make their way into rivers that supply drinking water to people living downstream. A public interest litigation (PIL) on the water quality supplied by the PHED was disposed off on Tuesday last where the High Court has directed the court to ensure safe drinking water to the public. The Government has sought six months time to ensure that the suggestions given by the expert committee formed at the behest of the Court were implemented in letter and spirit. Earlier the Shillong-Guwahati road at Umsning which was in a deplorable condition, so much so that it took over one hour to traverse one kilometre, was repaired post haste after the High Court took up the matter. Increasingly therefore the failure of the executive to deliver and the general failure of governance has pushed citizens to take matters to court.

At the moment, Meghalaya is passing through a crucial phase as far as the supply of electricity is concerned. Apart from being erratic, there is power shutdown every night for three-four hours beginning at midnight. There is shut-down in the day time with different timings in different parts of the city. Citizens wonder why, when they are paying their dues on time, they should have to suffer power cuts. While this is a fit case for the Consumer Courts to take up suo-moto, that has not happened as yet. Meanwhile citizens suffer in disgust even while the Government owned Meghalaya Electricity Corporation struggles to maintain its bottom-lines and requires funds infusion regularly. Obviously there is a management problem that is not being addressed and Meghalaya is regularly buying power from the national grid during the lean season but is unable to pay its dues despite the fact that consumers regularly pay theirs. Is this not a fit case for a PIL?

LOOKING BACK

June 18, 1989

Assam Govt. trying to create suspicion: ABSU

All Bodo Student's Union has denied any link with the Congress(I) and accused the AGP Govt of trying to create "mistrust, suspicion and misunderstanding" between the ABSU and the West Bengal Govt. by spreading false propaganda that the ABSU's demand for Bodoland includes some areas of West Bengal bordering Assam. This was stated in a release issued in Shillong on Sunday.

Termining this as a conspiracy to win over the support of the Bengal Govt. ABSU Vice President Mr Pradeep Kr Diamary denied any such plan and urged upon all concerned to seek clarification from the "map and area of the proposed Bodoland."

Mr Pradeep Kumar Diamary said that the AGP Govt and some State Govt agencies were spreading false propaganda in the states of the North East that the ABSU were "followers of the Union Minister Mr P R Das Munshi and the Congress(I)". This, it said, was being done with a view to enlist the sympathy of non-Congress(I) political

parties in these states. The ABSU appealed to the people of these states "not to believe and be guided by such false propaganda of the AGP leaders."

The release, while condemning the "barbaric police atrocities" unleashed upon the Bodo in Assam, demanded immediate stoppage of such atrocities.

Curfew imposed on Rail Tracks

A dawn-to-dusk curfew within 40 metres on either side of the railway track was imposed in Kokrajhar district of Assam as a precautionary measure against sabotaging train movement by Bodo extremists. Official sources at Guwahati said the Additional District Commissioner issued the curfew order apprehending sabotage in the form of tampering with the tracks and large scale attack on railway property, attempt to kill crew members and staff by armed Bodo extremists.

Khasis Abroad: Of Longing and Belongingness

By Patricia Mukhim

Janet Hujon (Moore) is from Shillong but now lives in the UK. As a scholar of literature, Janet has a deep respect and fascination for Khasi poetry and literature. Her book, "Tales of Darkness and Light: Soso Tham's The Old Days of the Khasis" (Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniewtrep), published by Open Book Publishers, UK, gives the non-Khasi reader an insight into Khasi thought and philosophy as envisaged by one of the greatest Khasi poets, U Soso Tham. Recently Janet was in Shillong and did a reading of her translations of Soso Tham's poems at Martin Luther Christian University and at NEHU. In attendance were students and faculty of English Departments of the two universities. I was fortunate to have been privy to Janet's deep exploration of Tham's poems as an insider abroad. It was in many senses a personal journey for her as she tries to negotiate the cultural chasm between east and west; between an adopted land known for its poet-laureates and the land of her birth with its myths and fables; its poetry and songs; its conversation with itself as it tries to fathom its own origins and then of course the dichotomy of straddling between the indigenous Khasi way of life and Christianity - a religion brought by the white man from the west.

For Janet, the reading session was her way of paying homage to the 'Ri' (the land of her birth); a home she misses because here she touches base with her intrinsic being which is more than what culture can encompass. Here it is where a Khasi meets up with her 'Ki Kur and Ki Kha' (relatives from the mother's and father's clan line, respectively). This is her nest as it were; a land that gave her first sense of identity and belongingness. Hence it is with pathos and nostalgia that Janet read out her translated pieces almost as if she was giving meaning to her own moorings. There was stillness in that room and reverence for every word that Janet spoke. At no time have I experienced such a profound sense of longing for that idyllic age when life was untouched by the complexities of modernity - the age of Soso Tham. And yet the poet in him forewarned us of the dangers of an unexamined life.

April took me to Toronto, and Vaughan in Canada for a conference. In this web-connected world it does not take long to connect with Khasis there. We met on a rainy, windy and cold Sunday at the Niagara Falls. After savouring the beauty of that stupendous waterfall which was in my bucket list for as long as I can remember, and, capturing for posterity the Niagara from all angles, we went to Tim Horton, Canada's famous coffee place on a hilltop. There we started our 'adda' (tete-a-tete) and were joined by a Bengali couple from Shillong. The conversation flowed like the Niagara; it was unstoppable as each couple narrated their stories and what turn of fate brought them to Canada. Everyone in the group wanted to know what was happening back home. I could sense a deep longing for that place called 'home' where the heart resides, amidst these undulating hills. Canada, was, after all an adopted home. In the evening we had dinner at a couple's home. There the conversation veered around the western culture versus the Indian one. I could sense a longing for the human bond that's taken for granted here. Take for instance a death in a family and the rituals surrounding it. For three days there is a stream of visitors from far and near. There are the *kur* and *kha* and *ki lok ki jor* (friends and acquaintances). For the bereaved family this is a temporary escape from the pain of losing a loved one. Grieving can only happen after a week when visitors have dwindled.

For Indians used to living in a close-knit environment where parents continue to nurture their brood much beyond the 18 year top-line of the west, being thrown into a western environment and coping with it can be traumatic. At age 18, western kids are out in the world living life by their own rules. A psychiatrist from India who is part of that group I was with said, "One day a young man was brought to our ward in a very pathetic condition. He obviously was homeless and distraught and had probably not eaten for days. When we asked for his address he said he had

miss the bonhomie of the rituals of community cooking. You will miss this when you live abroad. The above may look like unnecessary rituals but they are comforting because they remind us we're not alone. Our ancestors have done this before as part of the timeless passages of life. Rituals are also comforting in that they help concretize our spiritual experiences. Doing things together does something for the human spirit. I have always been fascinated by the ritual of burying a dead person. When the coffin is lowered into the grave, so many people are involved. After the customary handful of earth is thrown three times into the grave where the coffin now rests, by relatives and friends and it's time to close up the grave, (jingtep) there will be many young men volunteering to do so with their implements even while family members of the deceased go around distributing *kwai* and *tympew* (betel nut and betel leaf) to everyone as a gesture of gratitude for accompanying dead person to the final resting place.

These rituals may be time consuming but they are an integral part of the Khasi culture. If we shed away these old rituals without replacing them with new ones we will as David Brooks in his article in the New York Times, "There Should Be more Rituals," says we will unwittingly rob ourselves of a social architecture that marks and defines life's phases. Above all, this is what our social capital is. Without social capital we will become lonely, individualistic and narcissistic like people in the west are. We don't want to go down that road, do we?

And for those friends who are compelled to leave their cozy homelands, it is possible to carry your values with you wherever you go. After all those values are embedded in your psyche. It's also important to find the time for storytelling and for those 'Shyllong' picnics in July where you can strum to the tune of "Ko Ri Khasi ko Ri Jongnga (Helen Giri and Chesterfield Khongwir) and U Sier Lapalang. These nostalgic tunes can revive what apparently seems lost in the humdrum of living life on the fast lane.

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TO THE EDITOR

Learn to respect the middle class

Editor,

Apropos the letter, "Taxi woes" by Gary Marbanian (ST, April 25, 2019), I would like to join issues with him in saying that this is another glaring example of harassment of the middle class segment of the population! I say this with conviction because many letters have appeared in this daily on the same subject over a substantial period of time, but since it is almost purely a middle class phenomenon, the Government seems to be in a 'who cares?' mode. This is a middle class concern because most of the people belonging to rich/poor class seldom use taxi for commuting. It would be worthwhile to say that it is a folly on the part of the political class to overlook the interests of the middle class. They don't realize the

fact that it is this class that has the capability to mould opinions of the people in a very effective way and over a period of time, mainly because the other two classes and the poor class in particular, listen to the views of the middle class with respect. There are many examples in the history of the world to substantiate my claim. Hence my earnest plea to the concerned Department of the Govt. of Meghalaya is that it should wake up from its slumber and do something fruitful and concrete in this regard.

Yours etc.,
PS Gupta,
Via email

Keeping our markets clean

Editor,

Apropos the news report, "Call for behavioural change to maintain cleanliness" (ST

April 24, 2019) I wish to congratulate the Managing Committee of Mawkyrwat Market led by L. Shangdiar and Y.G Lyngdoh for organising the two day awareness campaign for the cleanliness of the market and for proper management of the waste generated by there. This has come too late in the day, though, better late than never. In fact, Mawkyrwat Market is one of the major markets in the whole of West and South West Khasi Hills combined. The other major markets are at Nongstoin and Mairang but the filthiest among them is certainly Mawkyrwat Market. I also congratulate the Basin Development Unit of Mawkyrwat led by L.K Diengdoh, MCS and the SCSTE, Shillong for collaborating in the awareness campaign to ensure that the garbage emanating from Mawkyrwat Market is properly and hygienically

managed and that the whole market is properly organised and remains clean always. Again I find that this market is highly disorganised even in this present age. Therefore, it is imperative that the Manager of this market who is also the Manager of San Kur Ri Kynti Khain Nonglang & Mawkyrwat Hat to hygienically and systematically manage and organise the market according to the needs of the times so that the buyers, sellers and people in general will be pleased to frequent and to commute to the market. I hope the results of the awareness campaign will be long lasting and ensure that the market will at last be neat and clean.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via-Email.

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

Foreign Policy Remote to 2019 Elections

By Dr. D.K. Giri

We are mid-way in the elections to 17th Lok Sabha, yet there is hardly any sound on India's relations with the rest of the world. By many optimistic estimates, India is now a \$3 trillion economy, soon going to be the third largest in the world, may outpace China, and is expected to play a significant role in world affairs. With such a lofty ambition, why is there no sound and fury taking India to its preferred position in international community? Evidently the current election is very hard and bitterly fought between contenders, more than perhaps any in the past.

There is a plausible explanation for absence of foreign policy issues in Indian elections. That is, many common people are not directly exposed to foreign land or issues, so cannot develop any empathy or enthusiasm for things foreign to them. They get mobilised, and become reactive when such issues get internalised and begin to affect their daily lives. For instance, the migration and citizenship issue in the North-East, especially Assam.

At the same time, leaders are too engrossed in national politics, of the sub-continental size, to pay attention to foreign policy. It is left to the ruling party, mainly the PMO and MEA mandarins in the South Block. Thirdly, foreign policy does not make a decisive impact on the outcome of the elections. Again, for instance, in 1999, Vajpayee, the Prime Minister fought the Kargil war and won the General elections. Vajpayee was seen as tough and a determined leader. In 2008, there was no military response by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to the horrendous terrorist attack in Mumbai. He was perceived a weak and indecisive leader. Yet he got re-elected in 2009 with a bigger majority. So clearly, foreign policy was not the issue in the election.

However, to be sure, things seem to change. Narendra Modi government is consciously playing the nationalism card in Indian politics. It may be an electoral strategy or a matter of their conviction that, the country will progress cohesively as a nation and attain glory abroad as a strong and assertive country. The nature of nationalism formulated and advanced by BJP is debatable, but it has brought internationalism to the mainstream discourse.

Let us study the manifestoes of both the major parties, the BJP and INC vis-a-vis India's foreign policy in order to assess the 'claim' of India becoming a major player. As a matter of fact, there is not much of content in either manifesto to support this claim. Both parties talk of using the international forums to fight terrorism and to enhance trade etc.

The INC is more geared towards UN, and has a 'soft narrative on terrorism. It says we will reckon with the "importance of concrete steps at international forums to take actions against terrorism and organisations supporting terrorism". It adds, INC "will persuade other countries to compel Pakistan to desist from sponsoring terror".

BJP, as expected has a bit more pro-active stance, and says we will tackle the global evils such as terrorism and corruption at international institutions such as UN, G-20, BRICS, Sanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and the Commonwealth. It asserts "India's interest in ensuring an open, inclusive, prosperous and secure Indo-Pacific".

Both parties talk of a permanent seat for India at the UNSC and the membership of NSG, the nuclear supplier group. But, they do not spell out any strategy or road-map for

securing this objective. The parties have a divergent approach to the neighbourhood, mainly the SAARC.

INC talks of reviving "SAARC to reap the benefits of geographical proximity in terms of trade, investment, tourism, and cultural exchange. BJP does not mention SAARC, as it has concluded that SAARC cannot progress with Pakistan in it. Instead, it focuses on BIMSTEC, the Bay of Bengal initiative that was created in 1997 without Pakistan. BJP talks also of deepening contact with ASEAN. On SAARC, BJP may have the right approach as it is the least integrated regional body, with about 5 per cent intra regional trade within SAARC, and with a dodgy member like Pakistan, it has not much future.

ASEAN has the potential to boost India's regional profile in the region, as ASEAN considers India to be a counter-weight to China. Again India-ASEAN trade is quite low at 2.5 per cent of total ASEAN trade, compared to 14.1 per cent with China. Moreover, BJP is not talking about ASEAN-China collision in the region.

BJP and INC have different world view. INC will still like to retain the legacy of non-alignment, and to maintain strategic autonomy in foreign policy making. BJP, on the other hand, has a 'world is a family' approach, 'vasudhaiva kutumbakam', but instead of non-alignment, it prefers to make strategic alignment, like the trilateralism it is engaged in at present with Japan, America and India, which Modi acronymed as JAI - meaning victory, or with China and Russia in SCO etc.

On institutional front, INC wants to increase the diplomatic cadre as India seems to be heavily understaffed with less than 1000 diplomats. It seeks to build a National Council on foreign policy comprising members of the cabinet committee, national security experts and domain experts. BJP will promote a Committee of Nations against international terrorism. It will be a voluntary body to fight terrorism globally. INC will bring up a law on Asylum against the BJP's Citizenship Bill. Remember that India has not yet signed the 1951 UN Refugee Convention.

In addition to whatever little is written into their respective manifestoes, BJP is talking from the roof top their successful surgical strike at Balakot in response to the Pulwama terrorist attack on our CRPF convoy on 14 February 2019, killing 40 personnel. The Balakot strike may influence the middle-class voters.

There is constant reference to dealing with Pakistan, both parties accusing each other of complicity with Pakistani leadership. Both Chinese and Pakistani leaders have made statements in favour of Modi's victory, which may be a malafide wish. But this sounds strange when NAMO claims belligerence against Pakistan, not so much on China, both countries support his leadership. Congress has not taken advantage of this dichotomous position of Modi's leadership.

Finally, there is no mention of any other major player or partner, except the neighbourhood and ASEAN, confirming the premise that foreign policy is remote to Indian elections. As India's domestic determinants become more potent, India's external influences increase, there is greater exchange at business and civil society levels with the external world, foreign policy will figure prominently as election issues. It is a natural and logical progression 'despite the parties' in power. So let us watch it out. ---INFA

(The writer is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

"I am not pretty. I am not beautiful. I am as radiant as the sun."

--- Suzanne Collins

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Modi again in Varanasi

THE fanfare that marked PM Modi's filing of nominations in Varanasi was only to be expected; yet, there is reason for the Opposition to take special note of the mass frenzy that marked the road show the PM held in that city. The fact that the leaderships of the entire NDA allies were present to urge the PM on was a clear demonstration of unity in the ruling alliance. The show also reinforced the stature of the PM and swept aside the perceptions about a likely change of PM if the NDA got one more chance. Getting a few lakhs of people around for a road show is not necessarily a proof of a candidate's success. It rather demonstrates the money and muscle power of the party that organises it. Votes are different. At the same time, the mood of the people who milled around the PM's cavalcade showed that he retains his support in a constituency he cared very little about in the past five years. Notable is also the fact that the Congress chose not to field party general secretary Priyanka Vadra in Varanasi even as she had expressed a willingness to enter the fray. Instead, the choice fell on a weak candidate who had fetched no more than 75,000 votes in the 2014 polls; and that too under the Congress banner.

Varanasi is not India. The fight at the national level will be tight and it is unclear who will emerge victorious. No wave is in evidence across the country. Yet, the PM has gone on record to state, in Varanasi, that for the first time in the country there is a 'pro-incumbency' wave – against the normal anti-incumbency mood. Modi having reached up to almost every state in the course of the present campaign should know. What is clear to the trained eye now is that the Modi Magic of 2014 is missing. Balakot gave the PM a last-minute push in his approval ratings after a period of dullness. The pension schemes for farmers and the unorganised labour and such other welfare measures too might have had a positive impact as the nation headed for the polls. The negatives like Demonetisation and Rafale were there too to exercise public minds. The Congress party clearly is well-past the Congress-mukht Bharat days after having revived its fortunes by winning key Hindi-belt states in the five-state assembly polls and is putting up a good show led by Rahul Gandhi on the campaign front. The suspense thus continues.

Election Funding Transparency Critical

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

The Supreme Court recently directed all political parties to reveal donations they had received in electoral bonds and the identities of the donors to the Election Commission in a sealed cover by end of May. Obviously, this is a right step aimed at bringing transparency to the system of anonymous poll funding. It aptly pointed out that if the identity of the buyers of electoral bonds remained unknown, the government's efforts to curtail black money would be futile. An NGO, the Association of Democratic Reforms, had moved a petition challenging the validity of electoral bonds.

It is indeed surprising that the government, which had declared its intent to curb black money is unwilling to disclose the names of the donors. Black money operating in the system is well known and the nexus between business houses and political parties has been the cause of such money increasing day by day. It is indeed tragic that the judiciary has to intervene even in such matters to remind the government of the need for transparency.

Close on the heels of this order, it has come to light that as on December 13, 2018, regional political parties like the BSP, which scored a blank in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, had Rs 669 crore deposited in eight accounts of public sector banks in the National Capital Region. It was followed by the SP, which won very few seats, with Rs 471 crore in bank accounts. How can these parties marshal such huge amounts and from where does this money come from? Do the common people give them money or does it from corporate houses?

There is no reason to believe that the present elections are fought with clean money. While business houses fund election campaigns of major parties, mostly through unofficial sources, a very small amount is realised from party members. The rising cost of poll funding is a signal that, whichever party may come to power, costs would increase after the elections. This is

obviously because the interests of those business groups who funded the elections have to be recovered and/or they have to be helped financially.

According to political analysts, India's elections this time may cost anything between \$8 to \$10 billion or between Rs 60,000 to Rs 70,000 crore, much more than the spending in the US elections. The costs have been increasing as in some rural and semi-urban constituencies, votes are purchased in lieu of cash or other gifts like cycles, saris to women, watches etc. The poor villagers who are not educated enough to evaluate performances

Sabha members declared assets worth Rs 1 crore and above. Moreover out of this, more than 50 per cent's assets were well over Rs 6-7 crore. It can easily be stated that a person who declares his or her assets at Rs 5 crore should actually have various types of assets whose actual market value may be not less than Rs 12-15 crore.

The reason why unscrupulous people stand in elections is either because of their muscle power or financial power. Very few clean and educated stand in elections and just a handful may get elected by god's grace. Statistics reveal that a large section, may be over 50 per cent of the elected

been a barrier to their success in elections.

How can this state of things change? There has been a clamour and some political parties have given over 25-30 per cent Lok Sabha to women. But there is no demand to reserve seats for the rural poor – the small or marginal farmers, the tribals and the dalits. Why shouldn't there be reservation for the poor and the backward sections of society?

If there is no reservation for this vast majority – around 40 per cent of our population – how will their genuine demands fructify? How will development aimed at this section be identified and carried out judiciously? The reason for lopsided development with focus on cities and projects aimed at the rich and upper middle sections has been due to the neglect of this section and their demands not being heard and considered.

The composition of a Lok Sabha is vital for proper policies being formulated to take the country forward. The outlook of its members, their education and dedication for a cause can develop the country on the right lines. What we are witnessing during the campaigns are speeches by leaders dragging in religion, military or achievements of scientists, which do not qualify for rational behaviour. It is indeed distressing that the Election Commission had to bar four senior leaders, including one Chief Minister and one former Chief Minister from campaigning for a few days due to 'derogatory' or provocative remarks.

Thus the way campaigning is going on does not augur well for the country. There is very little talk of the problems and challenges being faced by the country and the right strategy to take the country out. Keeping in view the current developments, one is provoked to question whether the leaders, who may be elected, are at all capable to rule the country in a judicious and transparent manner? --- INFA

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and vote accordingly, prefer to give their votes to whoever gives them something in cash or kind.

State funding of elections has been an option but there has not been any progress so far as none of the major political parties have evinced interest in the matter. The reason for this is because the rich and powerful leaders spend far in excess of permissible limits and resort to unethical manner in garnering votes. The whole system is becoming more and more corrupt.

Political leaders talk about our democratic tradition but actually the elections are somewhat a farce. It has been found that those who contest elections under the banner of major political parties belong to the rich class and come from business backgrounds. This is authenticated by the fact that 80 per cent of this Lok

members, have criminal cases against them.

A not very recent trend is to nominate film actors or actresses to Parliament and even in Assemblies seats. The only reason to nominate them is because they have enough financial resources though they may not have any background of doing social and political work. Moreover, dramatics is resorted to by our political leaders for garnering votes as they have virtually no answer to economic problems facing the country. In today's world dedicated work for the community or society is no indicator of being selected as a candidate.

Only among the communist parties is there some sort of transparency. While their leaders mostly come from low middle class backgrounds, their lifestyles are simple. However, the money power that is ruling the elections in the last 2-3 decades has

spiritual, political and also thinkers, to one table to find the solution? But that will not happen, and innocent people will continue to die at the hands of such bloodthirsty people.

What an irony that the evils of intolerance, dogmatism and hatred explosively originate from the holy altar of religions! Now the world should fear religious fanatics than humane atheists -- as also pointed out by Albert Thyrniang in his article "Is religion a lullaby for violence". Moreover, if we dig deeper, we shall find that the causes of such bloody hostility lie in the misinterpretation of GOD and the holy books we are following. We have foolishly reduced the "inconceivable" GOD to our size. We have regarded others as "non-believers" if they worship HIM in a different way. We undermine them, we belittle their scriptures, we sniff at their culture and mock their tradition and rituals. Not just that, we even find our own ways to misinterpret their scriptures and thereby defame their whole culture and ethos. This has often become a sort of "hobby" among a certain class of people. They are no less than terror bombers and I say this with conviction. Their works insidiously

contribute to bringing "division and hatred" among people, communities and their faiths. Such people literally hurt the heart and soul of people, which is far worse than the "hurt" of those killed in the bomb blasts.

Indoctrination of one's exclusively practiced religion is doubtlessly one of the prime causes that have driven many to this blind extremism. So much so - they even dedicate the evil acts to the Supreme Almighty and their sacred scriptures!

Why can't we love our neighbour and follow others? Is it not the most COMMON and FUNDAMENTAL teaching of the holy scriptures of all religions? Let other notions and handed down beliefs that are potentially divisive and disruptive be just set aside. One believes, God will never punish us if we get together and work towards mutual love and brotherhood than being fanatics and hurting others and then hurt oneself. After all we are from one fountain source of His divinity.

Of course, the deeper we go and the more we "understand" His "CREATION", the more we "laugh" at ourselves. We regret our own stupidity too. For instance - in HIS limitless and infinite number of galaxies (just "one" galaxy spreading out

in a span of 150000-200000 light-years) there consists an infinite number of "earths" having their own religions as ours here. Is not their God and our God same? Should we call them heathens because they don't follow our religion? Our idea of religious "exclusivism" in the UNIVERSE is not just narrow but it is utterly "childish". It is exactly like a small kid crying and insisting that her doll is the most expensive and most beautiful on earth! So, the nonsense bickering, hatred and inhuman cruelty that originates from our "religious exclusivism" has only kept us away from the tenets of humanity. Our cruelty arising from extremism just chases away the divinity from within. So, let's learn first to make peace with other believers and their cultural values. Our paths may be different but the goal is the same. A c k n o w l e d g i n g , respecting other faiths, and mingling together in their celebrations doubtlessly awaken our dormant godliness. This will certainly help purify our minds and steady our devotion. No one's devotion to Him should ever end up in blasts and human degeneration.

Yours etc.
Salil Grewal,
Via email

Congress has lost some Mojo in Varanasi Ajai Rai is no candidate against Narendra Modi

By Sushil Kutty

Priyanka Gandhi will not contest from Varanasi. Some media-persons like in the Republic are signing in relief at the 'close shave' for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Others like in the Times of Here Now are disappointed; for them a juicy opportunity to pile on TRP has been lost; they are regretting the "fact" that it will be not be a "fun contest", meaning it will not be that much more money in the kitty.

The decision was that of Rahul Gandhi whether to field Priyanka Gandhi from

when taking the final decision; when the hype over Modi's nomination a second time is at an all-time high, when the media are there in extraordinary strength, and the Congress base was thinking "it'll be Priyanka for sure, nobody else". Now, after the clarification, it's like a deflated balloon and media are talking of "Congress surrender" and that this could have a "ripple effect" in constituencies across eastern Uttar Pradesh, which is where Priyanka Gandhi is

Priyanka Gandhi was sent to eastern Uttar Pradesh to help the Congress to lay the ground for a good showing in Yogi-land and pose to the BJP a credible challenge in the 2022 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections; she was not made Congress general-secretary to defeat Modi in Varanasi. Rahul Gandhi should have scotched all such talk in the bud, not leave it to the last minute, give the voluble Modi all the more fodder to brag about his 'invincibility'.

Varanasi or not. Talk about Priyanka pitting her 'Indira is Durga' charisma against 'Modi Hei toh Mumkin Hai' macho image have been swirling in the hot and dusty plains of Uttar Pradesh for weeks, hyped up further by television studio warriors representing both points of view: Priyanka will give Modi a fight that he will remember and the other, Modi will eat Priyanka for breakfast and then go on to feast on a sumptuous lunch.

What was real was that the Congress base in Varanasi got uncommonly enthused at the prospect of a Priyanka Gandhi face-off with Modi and it worried the BJP not a little. The BJP's plans for Modi's mega road-show and the publicity blitz surrounding his nomination exercise surely got affected

Congress general-secretary. Priyanka Gandhi was sent to eastern Uttar Pradesh to help the Congress to lay the ground for a good showing in Yogi-land and pose to the BJP a credible challenge in the 2022 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections; she was not made Congress general-secretary to defeat Modi in Varanasi. Rahul Gandhi should have scotched all such talk in the bud, not leave it to the last minute, give the voluble Modi all the more fodder to brag about his 'invincibility'.

Now with Priyanka Gandhi not at all the 'X-factor' in Varanasi, she's also not the X-factor in eastern Uttar Pradesh and if she goes to campaign for Ajay Rai, she will be dogged by questions on why she "surrendered" and why the

But, now it will be the same old Ajai Rai who lost to Modi in 2014, a "dabang neta" with a following of his own in Kashi but who, try as the Congress will, won't be able to make a dent in the Modi vote-bank. The feeling across the constituency was that Priyanka Gandhi Vadra would have given them an option to choose somebody else other than Modi. On the question of whether Modi was a good MP, the jury it still out.

by talk of Priyanka Gandhi contesting from Varanasi. Media sent their top "stars" to cover Varanasi days in advance and Modi did his Akshay Kumar interview in time for his Varanasi nomination.

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The Congress, meaning Rahul Gandhi, cut it too close

Congress "chickened out" at the last minute. The "replacement candidate this time" Ajay Rai was "original" candidate in 2014, a "local", and had then lost by 3 lakh plus votes. Nothing much is expected from him this time. The SP-BSP gathbandhan candidate is also a minnow, a man who had lost a Mayor's election.

Besides, the whole gathbandhan politics vis a vis the Congress had left the Congress in a very weak position in Varanasi. The gathbandhan had given only Amethi and Rai Bareilly to the Congress, not Varanasi. If anything, the gathbandhan would like to beard Modi in his den, why give that credit and distinction to the Congress and the Gandhi family? Obviously, talk and boasts like "will do anything to stop Modi-Shah duo" is nothing but election rhetoric. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Lesson from old movies

Editor,

Reading Mr Toki Blah's narration of 'The Wild Wild West', took me back fifty years. It was the days of the mighty and the fastest in either saloons or elsewhere. Another moving movie is "The last of the Mohicans", showing the final exit of Red Indians from the World map. If a movie "The last of Tripura Castle" could be made, it will not only be the block-buster, but a thriller to our nerves with the CAB still simmering to shoot into flame, depending on May 23, 2019. Another movie "Termites hit for a six into the Bay of Bengal" would be a movie worth its penny. And if actors like John Cena could help, nothing like it. It would do injustice to our beloved comedians of yesteryears if I fail to narrate their power of prophecy of today's world by their beautiful movies. Charlie Chaplin begging the prison magistrate to kindly let him stay for another year spoke volumes of the food quality and the cosiness of prison cells those good old days. Justice delayed is best described by Oliver Hardy (the man to be hanged) fuming at the hangman with lots of crowd and his weeping friend around (Laurel). He shouted, "Hey you hangman, throw away the cigar, do not waste

my time, I have lots of work up there." Is 'up there' heaven or hell, only the convict would know. Poverty-stricken Charlie had to enter the boxing arena to feed his family. His opponent in the ring was a London Boxer. Surprisingly the London boxer though well built with a longer reach and broad chest was dancing behind the referee, when on the sixth round a powerful left jab from the glove filled with pebbles and lead, knocked down his opponent. You can never hide behind someone and this is the drama in real life today. The last is when Terence Hill, the English man was rehearsing the song, "God save the King", but Spencer his American friend whispered "Why? Is he sick or what?" I like these Americans who have never been under any colonial rule. They debate and criticise the President of the single largest Democracy in the world (enjoying 72% of the Americans) sometime to the point of fisticuffs but at the end it proves a meaningful debate and everybody likes it. If we were more like the Americans, politics in India would be more fruitful and interesting. Let us, therefore shed off all those colonial laws which are no longer applicable in today's world.

Yours etc.,
M. Khyriem,
Shillong 14

Terror bombings on Easter Sunday

Editor,

The terror bombings that ripped through three churches and four luxury hotels on Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka have left 359 people dead and 500 others injured. World-wide condemnation has been expressed against the perpetrators. This is nothing more than the usual "ritual". Almost all such deadly explosions are followed by strong denunciation and the offering of condolences and prayers. But are mere hollow condemnations and condolences enough? How many such cold-blooded blasts have happened at places of worship like churches, mosques, temples, synagogue in the past three years? Could we not find out the core causes leading to the incidents? At least to allow the grand idea of "humanity" to survive? Amidst the technological advances and luxuries of modern life, we are fast getting away from basic realities of life! The frequent terror bombings have made us more worried and apprehensive than ever before. Should this not bring the world leaders -



FOLK CONNECT

Young artistes & professionals learn from each other through a heritage-themed exchange programme, discovers SPAN writer Michael Gallant, founder of Gallant Music in New York

The Learning Together Toward a Brighter Future project is a rich cultural exchange programme aimed at forging bonds through computers and cooking, arts and airplanes, as well as once-in-a-lifetime creative collaborations. It is the brainchild of Kolkata-based social enterprise Contact Base and Washington, DC's Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, two organisations devoted to promoting, protecting and sharing knowledge of cultures.

Since 2017, 31 Indians and 20 Americans have participated in a first-of-its-kind programme, supported by the US State Department Communities Connecting Heritage partnership. This initiative is spread around the world, all administered by the World Learning organisation.

"Both our organisations believe that culture can make a tremendous contribution toward peace, and that cultural sustainability leads to community empowerment," says Ananya Bhattacharya, director and vice president, projects, at 'banglanatak dot com', the umbrella brand which includes Contact Base. "We wanted to find ways to connect young people in India and the United States, so that they could learn about each other's heritage."

"We also wanted to focus on creative enterprises," she continues, "and how traditional skills, arts and knowledge can contribute to understanding and peace."

In practice, this meant selecting young participants from both countries who possess deep interest, experience or expertise in arts and culture. Participants from West Bengal included Patua scroll painters and singers, Dhokra metalworkers, Baul folk singers and more. American participants had academic backgrounds in fields like anthropology, sociology, linguistics and folklore.

The exchange began online, with two staff members and three participants from each country

sharing glimpses of their cultures and social backgrounds through photos, videos and more. In February 2018, the American team came to India to meet its Indian counterpart and experience the unforgettable 'Sur Jahan' world peace music festival in Kolkata. Four months later, the Indian contingent visited the US and participated in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, an annual exposition of living cultural heritage, held in Washington DC.

In between the trips, though, the exchange broadened to include virtual participants, in addition to those travelling in-person visits. The participants from both countries shared pictures and videos of their homes and daily lives via the programme's official blog and Facebook page. For example, CJ Guadarrama and Arpan Thakur Chakraborty bonded over a shared love of music, after Chakraborty wrote a post about enjoying listening to artistes and bands like John Denver, Bob

Marley, Pink Floyd and the Scorpions.

The virtual and in-person exchanges sparked not just mutual appreciation of cultures and arts, but also the creation of new works. For instance, young Indian artist Anwar Chitrakar crafted and posted online a replica of a traditional Mexican Retablo

Participants from both countries shared even more aspects of their lives and cultures

painting on Patachitra. The Retablo had been shared by American participant Ashley Martinez during her visit to India.

As the exchange progressed, participants from both countries

shared even more aspects of their lives and cultures, including traditional recipes that their new international friends experimented with in their own kitchens.

Betty Belanus, a curator and education specialist at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, took the lead on the US side of the exchange. She describes how, during the Indian contingent's visit to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, one of the most memorable manifestations of Learning Together Toward a Brighter Future's success was unveiled.

It began during the American team's visit to India, Belanus says, when they sat with a large group of Patua practitioners in West Bengal's Naya village, learning about the nuances and intricacies of their art form. The American group had been asked to bring its own story, which would be interpreted as both a scroll and a song.

"We came up with the idea of

sharing the historical story behind the National Mall, which is the site in capital Washington, where the Smithsonian Folklife Festival is held every year," says Belanus. "The Indian artists created three amazing scrolls based on that story. One of the artistes, Mamoni Chitrakar, came on the exchange to the United States." Her scroll was unveiled in late June at the Library of Congress, and she performed the accompanying song in person.

This visual and performative work of art, which started with the US group meeting the traditional Indian artistes, who then came to the National Mall, was amazing, describes Belanus. "Thinking about Mamoni visiting us in America and singing her song to a Washington DC audience still gives me chills," she says.

Given the breadth of the exchange programme, other participants found deep meaning in its varying aspects. For Baul singer Girish Mondal, who travelled to America with Mamoni Chitrakar, Rabi Das Baul and two young cultural professionals, the visit to the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture made a huge impression. "I never knew about these stories," says Mondal. "It was the most surprising thing I learned about the culture of the United States."

For Mamoni Chitrakar, it was the sharing of cultural traditions that made a lasting impact. "Through this exchange," she says, "I learned that sharing traditional art with people of other cultures is as important as practicing the art form."

Virtual exchange participants Kennedy Soden and Debraj Chakraborty summed up the lasting value of the exchange in a post on the programme's blog. "Sharing a common interest with someone [who] is 8,000 miles away from you," they wrote, "and being able to discuss that interest or compare that interest with them is a gift."

(SPAN/TWF)



(Top) Indian and American artistes bond over music at Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage; and (above) folk performance at the Library of Congress

Reflections of life

By Anjana Kannankara

Water, aptly called the elixir of life, is the most essential factor behind human survival and establishment of civilisations. Existence of life on earth hugely depends on the key reason, availability of water. No wonder, a major portion of the blue planet is covered with water. Human body consists of 70 per cent of water and it plays a vital role in almost all of our body functions.

Researches show that drinking water increases the rate of metabolism. Water that is naturally clean, pure and mineral-rich is very important to nourish the body and support health. But how many of us are efficient enough to distinguish between the different types in which it is available?

Artesian Water

Artesian water is underground between layers of rocks and confined under positive pressure. This type of water is mostly obtained by using a well. As artesian water does not flow through the soil and rock layers, it does not gather any contaminants on its journey. Artesian water is one of the best natural sources of calcium.

Demineralised Water

Demineralised water, also known as deionised water, is specially purified water that has had most or all of its mineral and salt ions removed but may still contain bacteria or pathogens. Demineralised water is made from otherwise clean water which passes through an ion exchange resin. This makes it ideally suited to a large range of uses, from pharmaceutical manufacturing to cosmetics, laser cutting, fire extinguishers the automotive industry.

Distilled Water

Distilled water is one that has undergone a purification process to remove any contaminants and natural minerals, through a process called distillation. It is considered the purest form of water but not recommended for drinking since it is devoid of minerals essential for the body. Distillation involves boiling the water and then condensing the steam into a clean container. One of the uses of distilled water is in a coolant system for automobiles.

Mineral Water

Mineral water originates from a spring yet contains high levels of dissolved minerals. These minerals may be naturally present in or artificially added to the water to provide health benefits to people. Nowadays, mineral water is usually bottled and transported around the world. It is considered ideal to drink since it is rich in minerals and pure.

Potable Water

Potable water is drinking water. Potable water has to be safe enough to be consumed by humans with a minimal risk of short-term or long-term harm. It has been either treated, cleaned or filtered and meets the local established drinking water standards. It is assumed to be reasonably free of harmful bacteria and contaminants and also considered safe to use in cooking.

Purified Water

Purified water can be from any source but is mechanically filtered or cleaned to be safe to drink. Therefore, purified water does not have any contaminants or chemicals in it. Purified water is usually obtained through reverse osmosis or filtering. The advantages of purified water are that harmful chemicals have been removed but the disadvantages are that minerals which are ben-

eficial to humans have also been taken out. It is said to be usually acidic after purification.

Raw Water

Raw water is one that comes straight from the environment and has not been treated or purified in any way. Hence, it may contain minerals, ions, particles or parasites. Lakes, rivers, rainwater or groundwater has raw water. It is highly helpful in water conservation where it is used for flushing toilets or watering garden plants.

Sparkling Water

Sparkling water, also known as carbonated water, contains dissolved carbon dioxide gas. When carbon dioxide is dissolved under pressure into water through a process called carbonation, the water becomes effervescent or bubbly. Carbonation may be naturally occurring, such as from the German mineral spring seltzers. It may be done artificially as in carbonated soft drinks or sodas we consume.

Spring Water

Spring water originates from an underground spring. Rainwater accumulated underground tends to flow out at the surface as a spring. It has many natural health benefits. However, contaminants such as coliform, arsenic and phthalates have been found in tests carried out on some spring water.



Tonic Water

It is described as carbonated water mixed with sugar, minerals and quinine which is a compound found in the bark of cinchona tree. It is mainly used to be mixed in cocktails and in alcoholic drinks. It has a distinct bitter taste hence typically not consumed in its own.

Infused Water

Also called detox water, infused water can generally be any combination of fruits, vegetables and herbs immersed in cold water and used after some time. While infused water has the benefit of being full of flavour, it also has no calories, making it very effective in losing weight and gain better health. Infused water derives flavour from the rind and tastes bright and tangy, even after infusing for just 15 minutes.

Flavoured Water

Flavoured water has become a big part of post-soda life for plenty of people. This is a category of beverage marketed as water which contains an array of additional ingredients, including natural and artificial flavours, sugar, sweeteners, vitamins, minerals and other enhancements. Most enhanced waters have fewer calories than similarly sized non-diet soft drinks hence termed as causing less damage.

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

Don't be lost after high school

By Ranjan K Baruah

One of the common queries in our minds after board examinations is what is next. Recently, many students finished their board exams and some are still appearing. Some have appeared for secondary and others for senior secondary examinations.

After Class X, choosing the next stream of education is a worry. Selecting a good career has been a challenge for many. But with proper planning and necessary information we could choose or select the best career options for us.

It's important to choose our career at an early age.

There are many career options after Class XII according to our interest and subject that we take in senior secondary school. For getting admission in different courses or professional we need to appear in some entrance examination. Some of the colleges also take admission on the basis of the marks. In today's edition, we are publishing some options after Class X. Some of the entrance examinations after Class XII are as follows:

Defence Entrance: Students can appear for National Defence Academy and Naval Academy Entrance examinations after passing Class XII. Students from any stream can appear for the NDA examination. For Air Force or Navy, students must have physics and maths in passing examination. This exam is conducted by Union Public Service Commission.

ITI/Polytechnic Courses: After Class X, students may choose different courses available at different Government's



Industrial Training Institute (ITI). Apart from it is there are Polytechnic colleges under government. Students may join these institutes through entrance and counseling process.

Law Entrance: Student can take admission in the integrated law course which are offered by reputed law schools/universities or different law colleges in the country. Students from any background passing Class XII can appear for law entrance test. Common Law Admission Test

(CLAT) is conducted for admission into reputed institute.

Fashion Entrance:

One of the lucrative careers of modern years is fashion designing or related fields. Fashion and technology has a wide scope for choosing a career. Topmost institutes like NIFT, NID etc conduct entrance

examination for admission to their various courses.

FTII Entrance: Film & Television Institute of India is a better option for ca-

reer into related to films. For admission to Animation and Computer Graphics the basic eligibility criterion is Class XII and preference is given to candidates with diploma from fine arts colleges.

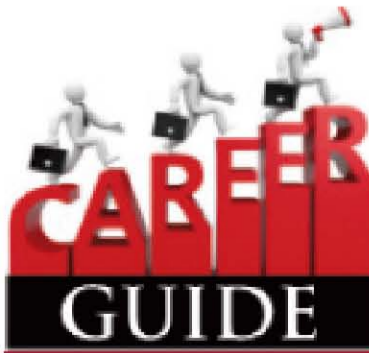
Hotel Management: Students from any stream can opt for courses in hotel management. For BSc courses one need to have science subjects in senior secondary level. Entrance examination is conducted for admissions. Students must be careful while selecting private institutes.

Films and Acting: Students who are interested in acting or films can look for various courses related to the field. Leading institutes in India are Film and Television Institute of India in Pune and National School of Drama in New Delhi. There are various courses which are short term and long term and student can apply according to their interest and qualification.

Updates:

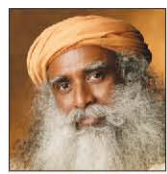
The Cyprus School of Molecular Medicine (CSMM), a school of Cyprus Institute of Neurology and Genetics, has announced scholarships for the citizens of the Republic of India for the academic year 2019-20. The scholarships are being offered for Masters and PhD in Neuroscience, Molecular Medicines, Medical Genetics, Biomedical Research, etc. Last date for applying is May 15.

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



Reduce sleep quota

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



The body needs rest, not sleep. In most people's experience, sleep is the deepest form of restfulness they know, so they talk about sleep. But essentially, the body is not asking for sleep, it is looking for restfulness. Your mornings would be pretty bad if your nights were not restful. So it is not sleep but restfulness that makes the difference.

If you keep your body relaxed throughout the day, if your work, exercise and every other activity is a form of relaxation for you, your sleep quota will go down naturally. The problem is that people have been taught to do everything hard — in tension. I see people walking very tense in the park. This sort of exercise will bring more harm than wellbeing. Don't go at everything like it is a war. Whether you are walking, jogging or exercising, why don't you do it easily, joyfully? Don't battle with life. Keeping yourself fit and well is not a battle. Play a game, swim, walk, whatever you like. You will only have a problem if all you want to do is eat cheesecake! Otherwise there is no problem about being relaxed with any activity.

Bring Natural Foods in Your Diet

If you are sleeping eight or nine hours a day, one thing to look at is the food you eat. Consuming at least a certain amount of vegetarian material, particularly foods that can be eaten in their natural, uncooked condition is very important for your general wellbeing. When you cook food, a large volume of prana or life energy is destroyed. This is one reason why lethargy can set into the body. If you eat a certain amount of fresh fruits and vegetables, there are many benefits, but one thing you will notice immediately is that your sleep quota will come down.

From Stove to Plate — Make it Quick

In Indian culture, traditionally it is said that any cooked food should always be eaten within 1.5 to 2 hours of being cooked. Keeping cooked food in a fridge for long periods of time and then eating it can raise your sleep quota in addition to causing

many other problems to the body. The same is true for canned food. There is something called "tamas" which literally means "inertia." Food that is kept like this will have a lot of tamas, which can bring down your mental agility and alertness.

Don't Sleep Right after You Eat

There are quite a few people who are in such a mental state that unless they load themselves with food and make the body dull, they cannot fall asleep. You must give sufficient time for digestion to happen before you sleep. I would say 80% of the food that you eat will go waste if you fall asleep within two hours of eating. If you are in a condition where you cannot sleep unless you have a full stomach, you need to address this issue. This is not about sleep, this is a certain mental state.

Right Position For Sleep

When the body is positioned horizontally, you can immediately make out that your pulse rate drops. The body makes this adjustment because if blood is pumped with the same force, too much will go into your head, causing damage. The blood vessels which go upward are a finer arrangement compared to those going down. As they go up into the brain, they become almost hair-like, to a point that they cannot take an extra drop.

When you sleep, if you place your head towards the north and stay that way for 5 to 6 hours, the magnetic pull of the Earth will cause pressure on your brain because iron is an important ingredient in your blood. It is not that if you sleep this way you will fall dead. But if you do this every day, you are asking for trouble. If you are beyond a certain age and your blood vessels are weak, it can result in hemorrhages and paralytic strokes. Even if your system is sturdy, you may not sleep very well because there is more circulation in the brain than there should be.

If you are in the northern hemisphere, East is the best direction to keep your head when you sleep. Northeast is okay. West is alright. South, if you must. North, no. In the southern hemisphere, don't put your head to the south.

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

Maggot therapy, anyone?

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi

As more people become resistant to antibiotics, their chances of survival, if they have chronic wounds, decrease. Surgeons have now gone back to a thousand-year-old technique of healing called maggot therapy or biosurgery, introducing live, germ-free maggots into non-healing skin and soft tissue wounds in order to clean out the dead skin, disinfect the wound and stimulate healing.

Flies sometimes lay their eggs on the festering wounds of living beings. Their eggs hatch, become larvae and start feeding on the tissue. The flies used most often for the purpose of maggot therapy are the Green Bottle fly (*Lucilia sericata*) and Northern Blowfly (*Protophormia terraenovae*).

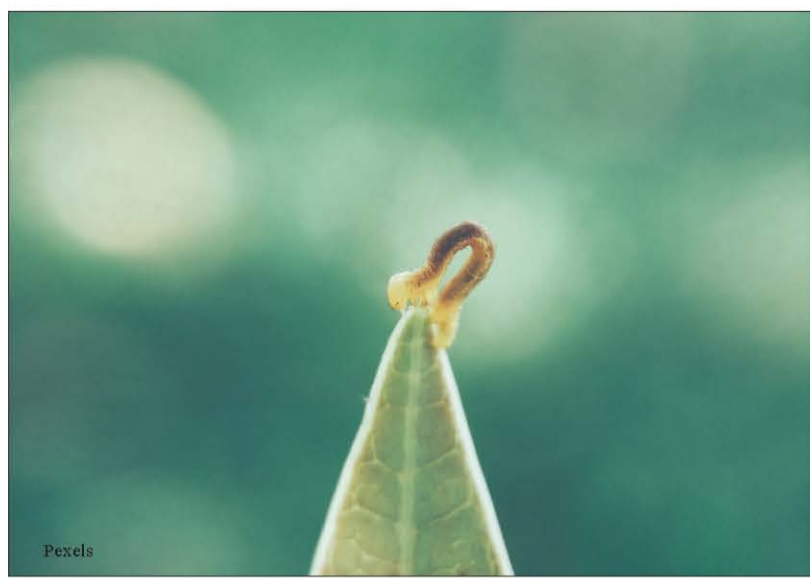
Maggots are applied to the wound at a dose of 5-10 larvae per square centimeter of wound surface area and are left within their dressing for 48-72 hours. (Since medicinal maggots cannot dissolve or feed on healthy tissue, their natural instinct is to crawl elsewhere as soon as the wounds are clean, or the larvae are satiated.)

Doctors have found that large numbers of small maggots consume necrotic tissue far more precisely than surgeons can operate and can remove foreign material and damaged tissue in a day or two. They secrete enzymes that liquefy the necrotic tissue which they eat. As they eat they increase in size and have to be removed in two days, leaving a clean wound.

Larvae kill bacteria in wounds by producing natural antibiotic-like agents and growth promoting agents which cause a wound to heal rapidly. There is evidence that they secrete chemicals with a broad-spectrum bactericidal effect. They also secrete ammonia, causing wounds to become more alkaline, which inhibits bacterial growth.

Studies have shown that maggots destroy a wide range of pathogenic bacteria, including methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), gram positive aerobic and anaerobic strains, *Streptococcus pyogenes* and *S pneumoniae*. Having removed the bacteria, the wound is stimulated to grow healthy tissue. They are particularly useful in chronic ulcers including diabetic foot ulcers, osteomyelitis, post-surgical wound infections and burns.

Life-threatening ear bone infections and gangrene have also been treated with maggot therapy after unsuccessful



Life-threatening ear bone infections and gangrene have been treated with maggot therapy after unsuccessful antibiotic and surgical treatments. Research is on to see whether maggots can be used to eat away tumours or cancerous lesions when surgical intervention is not possible

antibiotic and surgical treatments. Research is on to see whether maggots can be used to eat away tumours or cancerous lesions when surgical intervention is not possible.

Evidence exists that larvae have been used for thousands of years by ancient cultures such as the aboriginal Ngemba tribe of Australia, the Hill people of Myanmar and the Mayan healers of Central America. The Mayans soaked dressings in the blood of cattle, and exposed them to the sun before applying them to lesions, in order to attract flies.

The French surgeon, Ambrose Pare (1510-1590), was the first doctor to note the beneficial effect of fly larvae for wounds. Napoleon's surgeon, Baron Dominique-Jean Larrey (1766-1842), who treated the injured in Napoleon's army, observed that maggots of the "blue fly" only removed dead tissue and had a positive effect on the remaining healthy tissue.

The first officially documented application of maggots was done by John Fomey Zacharias (1837-1901), a surgeon from Maryland during the American civil war. He wrote "During my service in the hospital at Danville, Virginia, I first used maggots to remove the decayed tissue in hospital gangrene and with eminent satisfaction. In a single day, they would clean a wound much better than any agents we had at our command. I used them afterwards at various places. I am sure I saved many lives by their use, escaped septicaemia, and had rapid recoveries."

But the popular medical belief was that maggots were dirty and full of in-

fection. By the end of the 19th century, there were hardly any doctors who would support the use of fly larvae.

During World War I, mortality from open wounds increased to 70%. Antiseptic tools did not work. In 1917, William Baer, a military surgeon in France, reported his treatment of open fractures and stomach wounds with maggots. After the war he became Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery at the Johns Hopkins University. From 1929 to his death he continued his experiments with maggots on patients on whom all other treatment had failed. In 1931, he published the first scientific study of maggots' effectiveness in wound care.

In order to overcome the disgust of patients and staff, he created special bandages to hide the larvae, and he and his colleagues developed specific flies, and different methods, to sterilise the eggs.

In the 30s and 40s maggot therapy boomed. More than 1,000 American, Canadian and European hospitals introduced maggots into their programme of wound healing. Many had their own insectariums. Others bought from Lederle Pharmaceuticals, who bred and distributed "surgical maggots". More than 100 publications appeared.

Then penicillin and antibiotics came in and the medical world abandoned maggot therapy. By the 50s, it was over.

By the end of the 1980s, millions of people were resistant to penicillin and antibiotics, pressure ulcers and diabetic foot ulcers were on the rise, and conventional wound care was inadequate. Diabetic foot ulcers alone affect 15%

of the diabetes patient population and account for over 1.5 million foot ulcers and at least 70,000 amputations annually.

In 1989, University of California physicians Ronald Sherman and Edward Pechter reintroduced maggot therapy for use with patients whose wounds failed to respond to antibiotics and with victims of flesh-eating bacteria. Their results were every bit as spectacular as Baer's first experiments. They demonstrated that maggot-treated patients required fewer days of antibiotics and healed their wounds an average of 4 weeks faster than control patients. Studies have consistently shown that pre-amputation maggot therapy saves 40-50% of limbs, usually with complete wound healing.

In the UK, surgeons John Church and Stephen Thomas set up the Biosurgical Research Unit in South Wales. Since 1995, the unit has commercially distributed sterile larvae. Thomas has calculated that the use of maggot therapy for just 30% of non-healing diabetic ulcers could save the United Kingdom approximately £50 million annually.

Since 1996, an annual world meeting on larval therapy, called the International Conference on Biotherapy, is organised by the International Biotherapy Society.

In 2004, the FDA cleared maggots for use as a medical device in the United States for the purpose of treatment of non-healing necrotic skin and soft tissue wounds, ulcers and non-healing traumatic or post-surgical wounds.

Now it has become standard treatment all over the world. The revival in maggot therapy is due to technological advancements. The three most common objections to maggot therapy, during the 1930s, were the hassle of making dressings, the difficulty in obtaining live, germ-free maggots, and their high cost. Now, improved adhesives and synthetic fabrics allow doctors to make dressings to hold the maggots within the wound bed. The establishment of dozens of laboratories throughout the world, and overnight courier services, has made germ free medicinal maggots readily available. And treatment by maggots is less expensive than surgery.

The UK Government is spending \$250,000 (Pound 196,000) in 2019 to buy green bottle blowfly maggots to send to war zones in Syria, Yemen and South Sudan.

To roll out "project maggot," the U.K. will have field hospitals raise maggots on location. Once the fly eggs are laid, they will be sterilized and then incubated for a day or two. At that point, the maggots can be put directly into wounds, or placed in BioBags which are then wrapped around injuries. By 2021 doctors plan to create a do-it-yourself maggot starter kit, so that people in remote communities can raise them themselves.

Every creature in the world is useful — except the human.

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

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, APRIL 28, 2019

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

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Your career, reputation, and public life are influenced by the planetary combination. Increased public recognition and professional success characterizes this period. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. Reliability and creativity will take you places now. The more willing you are to put yourself in the limelight, the more positive the rewards. You are outgoing and your initiative is stronger than ever.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Friendship, love, romance and children are highlighted. You would have new attitudes towards family, finance, and social relationships. Home and family matters capture your attention and are a strong source of pride. It is a time when worldly matters are not as important to you. Use this energy to find ways to improve your interpersonal relations and your home and work environment. You might be a bit of a showman at this time. This is a favorable time to go for higher learning and for joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

With communication, creativity and judgment you gain money and influence in business ventures. Success brings status and respect as you dominate the professional scene. This is the right time to participate in community events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you. This phase brings rewards and recognition in your professional life. You would also work hard with an inclination towards more detailed work, and it can get to you at times. Personal projects are on an upswing. You feel on top of things and replete with good health and energy.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

A period of hard work and effort is in your forecast. You would be taking on new responsibilities and will enjoy the challenges. A new set-up in an existing home or a new home altogether may be part of the picture in the coming weeks. There will also be a sense of renewal and reinvigoration with regard to your domestic routines, comfort, and feeling of security. This is a phase when you have an increased awareness of your need for a solid foundation—a place to return to when the rest of the world gets to you. Do not isolate yourself when you are feeling down.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Communication, creativity and authority in professional matters are highlighted as an exciting job offer, reward, recognition, or promotion is possible. An opportunity to expand on a global level arrives now. You would have more energy for work and your daily routines tend to speed up now. Perhaps you have a larger workload than usual. You are ready to perform and express yourself and take charge and responsibilities on your shoulders. This is a very significant period when you are inspired creatively and emotionally. Romance could make you think along serious or practical. Practical matters come into strong focus and demand attention. An opportunity to expand on a global level arrives now. You would have more energy for work and your daily routine tend to speed up now. You are required to do a balancing act, and something big is in the pipeline. There may be some confusion about your dreams and ideas regarding your career. Give yourself time to digest everything before you make a move. You will also thoroughly enjoy artistic, musical, or cultural events and activities, especially in the company of a loved one. Increased energy for health routines and work is with you.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

There may be debates and discussions in family and you may face some opposition. You are likely to exert your energy and initiative into actively pursuing a rewarding love

life, social amusement, and pleasure in general. You have a likeable and competitive temperament. There is a stronger desire for creative endeavors, athletics and risk-taking pursuits. It might be hard for you to work with others in a harmonious manner and a few conflicts are possible. You especially enjoy games that involve competing with others on a mental level. You have a stronger need than usual for intellectual stimulation.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This phase brings good-luck for love and romance. Ego confrontations with family members are possible now, but the best way to handle this is to do your best to strengthen your relationship with your family and your home base. This is a time to do what you can to build trust in your family life and a strong foundation within yourself, so that regardless of what you meet in the outside world over the next weeks, you have a secure place to return to. Besides spending more time tending to domestic affairs, the focus can be on cultivating and nourishing your inner foundation that support you and your growth.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Associates at work might find you less sociable, as you are busier than ever and you focus on your activities and your needs. You might have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you status. You can improve your love life by bringing more understanding and sharing views with each other. You are more inclined to seek a broad understanding of people and of your immediate environment. Concentrating on listening, connecting, communicating, and learning is your best bet now. If health is affected, fevers or infections are more likely.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

This period brings new horizons in your romantic and love life. You explore and search, make new connections, and pay attention to your immediate environment. Give other people a little extra time and attention, notice their efforts on your behalf, and strengthen your connections. You are more curious and alert than usual, and you could be quite busy with work. Much energy is expended in understanding and adapting to your immediate environment. Siblings, neighbours, close relatives, friends, and co-workers may play a more important role than usual in your life. You are eager to investigate new things, whether scientific or technical.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

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

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Pay close attention to performance, it will be rewarded and continuity to perform work would be visible to senior colleagues and people in authority. You will have the ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and can expect good returns from overseas business. Your idealistic nature is stimulated, and you are likely to yearn for a connection to more spiritual or idealistic pursuits. A sense of belonging through connection to something larger than yourself is something that is entering your life now. There may be a development of romance at your work place. You turn your attention on fitness and diet programs.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

There would be happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening of your social circle, travel, and connections to people of a different cultural background. Your dreams and ideas about intimacy come into focus, but could also bring the flaws in this area of your life to light. An income boost is likely in this period. This is a phase when you have an increased awareness of the physical world of the senses, and this is a time to start fresh in terms of how you arrange your life in order to feel a sense of value and worthiness. It is also a wonderful time for taking moments to please yourself through earthy, tactile, and comforting endeavours.

She is the same little angel

I still recall spending time at kindergarten days of her pigtail hairstyle winging towards me. But time flies since her learning size, shape and colour.

It captures memories of our twinkle star. She is mummy's little angel. Raising daughter is still fresh in our mind. We saw her growing from toy-strewn nursery days. She cried for mummy each time her only friend 'Gunu' cried at Air Force School. There was always her mother with play and dream. But time flies. Now she appeared for board examination from St Mary's.

Last summer, I signed the consent form for a school trip. The activities were chalked out for that great occasion. The last few days were excited from buying trolley bag to final day shopping. Father adores his daughter a lot, who is the light of her parents' lives. Whoever she grows up to be, she is always for us a little angel forever. It was all strange for a few days' separation from us. Elapsed memories were still in my mind. She occupied a seat with her chosen friend. But I saw them happy and excited.

It was truly an exciting activity at Umran to remain independent. The site is on a hillock surrounded by lush greenery away from Shillong. We had been through anxiety. And a call from our daughter informed us about the unavailability of network. The communication was possible whenever they go for day out.

The day had dwindled down to a precious low. Daughters are parents' best friend. It was the first time that she stayed outside. The Missionaries of Charity took a very courageous step to teach them a different taste of learning. No matter what critics say, convent schools provided a great edu-



LIFE'S TIME

cation. They occupied the lines of bed inside a big hall. Self-discipline is the driving force behind achieving any goal. They queued up for food like a disciplined soldier.

They are taught to learn to lose gracefully while enjoy winning. There are wonders of the nature whilst hiking, they saw flowers, birds and wooded areas that made them to think ponder. Kids are very fussy about what they eat. The compulsory light off at 9 pm forced boarder to sleep. Beside St. Marians saw the stories of ghost and fun-frolic incidents at wintry night.

We love our children and everyone expects their toddlers to be the best in the world. We provide best schooling

to ease at home. Nowadays, children demand more gadgets but technology can cause their creativity unconsciously. We must endow with education for life that can carry a serene life. They had visited Don Bosco museum for faith in mankind. Girls were mesmerised by the huge waterfalls at Elephanta.

When the bus arrived we saw innocent flashing smiles flitting across their faces broadly, the outreach of joy was reflected. It is the most cherished and coveted thing for every parent.

Parents bestow gifts to bring the smile. But it was poles apart. She brought a surprise souvenir for us — a little moving mongoose from the craft shop. The best thing was that our daughter valued a hundred rupee in a weekend excursion.

(Contributed by Kamal Baruah)

“Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing ever happened.”

--- Winston S. Churchill

The Shillong Times

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Line-up of PM hopefuls

GREED for post and power is obviously making some seasoned leaders blind to the ground realities. Sharad Pawar, for one feels that, in the event of the NDA failing to get a majority, the nation is left with three choices for the PM's post – Mamata Banerjee, Chandrababu Naidu, and Mayawati. His rationale for this is that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had "already stated" he was not interested in the PM post. In the normal course, the party with the largest number of MPs in the Lok Sabha gets the first chance to attempt a government. A post-poll collective of parties can also stand as one and approach the President to stake claim to form the government. As of now, there are three principal possibilities. One, the NDA managing to form the next government with a reduced strength of MPs. Two, the Congress emerging as the contender for power by virtue of being the largest non-BJP party, or even the largest party, after the polls. Three, the SP-BSP combine sweeping the polls in UP with 80 seats, and emerging as the single largest block among the non-Congress, non-BJP segments. Even if Mamata Banerjee wins the whole of 42 seats in West Bengal, the Congress or the Mayawati-AKishlesh combine would be way up the graph. Chandrababu Naidu with 25 seats from Andhra Pradesh would still be a small fry.

Rahul Gandhi before the five-state assembly polls in November-December last year and Rahul Gandhi after that round of polls are two different entities. He's now the prince-in-waiting. The five-state polls proved the Congress party cannot be written off or sidelined. It has a pan-India presence, is a well-established network of functionaries and a never-say-die attitude; this even when it lay dormant. The Congress-mukht dream of BJP chief Amit Shah has crumbled like a pack of cards. The Congress party has its flaws. The corruption of the UPA periods and an anti-incumbency wave undid it in 2014. But, after its return to power in quite a few states, it is largely rejuvenated. So too Rahul Gandhi himself! But, the dream that the regional leaders weave is to somehow usurp power by projecting one or other regional leader as PM nominee – and by sidelining the principal opposition entity. Pawar and other regional leaders, like ostriches, refuse to see the new status of the Congress. Even if the NCP is contesting only 22 seats, Pawar himself would not be averse to be a consensus PM. Why, even a sleepy Deve Gowda would be game to being in the PM's chair again.

One Divided World We Live In

By H H Mohrmen

Just as the forces that seek to divide us on the basis of the colour of our skin, and on where and how we were born and the religion we follow, recent studies have found that we all have one origin or at least we all are related to one another. We are one not only because Earth is the only planet we can call home, but more importantly, despite all the hate campaign that seeks to tell us apart, scientific studies have proven that we are all one.

Since the day scientists were able to sequence human genome 15 years ago, genetics studies have reached out to areas of studies which no geneticist would have dreamt off a few years ago. One such area of study is that of human migration. One would think that the subject of human migration can only be studied by historians and archaeologists and to some extent linguists and indeed that was what happened until two years ago when the study of human DNA helped trace the origin or the migration of people since ancient times.

No doubt, the recent study about human migration using DNA research confirmed what was propounded by archaeologists. It is also known as the Out-of-Africa theory which was estimated to have happened in the last 100,000 years. The study of human DNA found in fossils and skeletons also provide more interesting information. We now know that the first human who started from Africa, migrated to the rest of the world, and it was found that they also interbred with Neanderthals and in Asia with Denisovans and even with others. There is therefore interbreeding amongst the Homo species and Homo sapiens are the only surviving member of the homo family today.

Tony Joseph in his book, 'Early Indians: The story of our ancestors and where we come from,' used the results from these researches conducted by geneticist from around the world to answer the most important question of where we come from. Using DNA evidence Joseph tells us in his book how India was peopled. While some scientists helped us understand the journey the

Homo species took to reach where we are now, a different set of scientists were successful in their effort to unravel the mystery of the Black Hole. The project which used many telescopes across the world were able to capture the first photograph of the Black Hole and to share with the world this one celestial mystery which has remained obscure for so long. The collaborative efforts of 200 scientists under the Event Horizon Telescope Observation helped them come up with the photograph of the Black Hole. Indeed many good things have happened and it goes on to prove that humans can achieve so much when they work together.

In August 2018 a 16 year old Greta Thunberg sat alone outside the Swedish Parliament protesting against her Government's inaction against climate change. In September every Friday she would go on strike and skip school. Then she started distributing handouts and flyers to politicians begging them to do something to help ameliorate climate change. After three months, in October 2018 a few friends joined her in the strikes and every Friday they refused to go to school. They called it #Friday for future. Come December and the strike spread to 270 cities around the world and in February 2019 scientists from across the world joined the movement. In February 2019 the Belgian Environment Minister resigned after calling the children truants and liars and ultimately, in March 15 2019, children across the world joined Greta's movement and skipped school for climate.

In Great Britain inspired by Greta Thunberg's speech to the politicians during her visit to Westminster in the UK, people started the Extinction Rebellion which is still on as we read this column. Humans can come together for a good cause and help bring change not only in the community they live in but even the world over. But there are also those who continue to exploit our differences and

even inflict pain and death on those they don't like.

When the world has only barely recovered from attack on a mosque in Christchurch, the forces that seek to divide us attacked churches and hotels in Sri Lanka. That the terrorists chose the holy day of Easter to bomb these places and killed and injured hundreds of innocent people only goes to demonstrate how far the merchants of hate can go. Incidents like these only prove that the only goal the perpetrators' of these crimes have, is to create fear and spread more hatred amongst people.

In spite of the fact that Islam and Christianity have the same origin and are commonly called Abrahamic religion, yet we are being divided on the basis of differences that we have and not on the things that unite us. Forces which seek to divide us will only look for elements that distinguish us from one another and exploit that to the maximum for their ulterior motives. They divide us into 'us and them' even where no division really exists. Even amongst Christian churches, there is this claim and counter claim that a certain church is truer than the others. Still the followers of other churches are claiming that theirs is an authentic church because it uses the Bible which has more books than the other. Others claim that since they do adult baptism and others do infant baptism, theirs is the true church. There a big attitudinal problem even among the churches and each one believes that it is holier than the other because it observes a holy day on a different day than the others or, because it follows a certain kind of tradition. Then there are others who because they consider the Bible the most important part of their worship hence they claim their church is more authentic than the others.

This holier than thou attitude has led to spiritual arrogance and this is prevalent not only amongst the followers of different Christian denominations but especially amongst the different faith groups. Our faith is older so it is more

authentic or the other religions were all brought from outside and ours is the only religion which is native to the place. These are small fissures which lead to schisms and divide people on the basis of the differences that they have which then leads to hatred and ultimately make people commit violence against one another.

Unfortunately, this division is more obvious now in India where we have politicians who openly use the differences that are there in the society for their own selfish interests. We have a situation in India where the schism is more apparent and is being exploited to the hilt by politicians just for the sake of winning elections.

As much as we rejoice in the scientific achievements which not only prove that we can accomplish many more milestones if we work together and concentrate on what we have in common or what unites us, there are these unscrupulous elements which cause road blocks in the human journey to peace and progress. Hate is raising its ugly head to divide us and this is happening almost everywhere.

The fight between good and evil is prevalent everywhere and more than before, it looks like the evil is triumphing over good. We can prevent the triumph of evil over good by not letting it win our hearts. A Cherokee Native American grandfather was telling a story to his grandson and said, 'Son I dreamt last night and saw two wolves fighting in your heart, one black and the other is white. And before the old man could continue, the young man asked 'which one won grand pop?' The grandfather replied, 'The one you feed my son.' The black wolf represents all that is evil - hatred jealousy, greed, arrogance, pride, ego; the white wolf stands for joy, peace, love, hope, kindness, sympathy, respect, truth etc.

The kind of world we have will depend on the kind of wolf we allow to reside in our hearts. Whether we going to end up with one united world or one divided world depends on the wolf we feed.

Religious extremism a curse to humanity

By Barnes Mawrie

R. Patient has rightly hit the nail on the head when he says: "The moment you pick up a weapon in the name of a religion is the precise moment that your god ceases to exist." The ghastly incident in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday has left the whole world dumbfounded. The only expression we hear in people is one of sadness, grief and anger at the perpetrators of these thoughtless homicides. Latest reports have said that the eight suicide bombers belonged to a local Muslim extremist group who were radicalized by the preaching of one called Zaharan Hashim founder of the National Towheeth Jamaath who blew himself up as well. The latest report shows that 359 persons have died and many are still critically injured. This is one of the worst terrorist attacks that have

they lead is a downward journey towards a cult of hatred and violence which only discredits their own religions. It is time that the good Muslims and Hindus who believe in the right teachings of their religions, come out courageously in order to condemn these extremists and rescue their religions from the hands of these violent people.

It is equally sad to think that much of the violence in the history of humanity has been caused in the name of religions. How many wars have been fought in Europe in the past in the name of religion? How many innocent lives have been lost in recent years especially in the Middle East on account of religious fanaticism? The incident of last Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka has shown that human beings have not learnt from the tragedies of

What is extremely sad about these attacks is because they are perpetrated in the name of religion. Radical Islam which the ISIS, the Taliban or the NTJ of Sri Lanka, are propagating is an aberration of religion. To think of what ISIS had done in the last few years, decapitating hundreds of persons, destroying churches and raping women etc, or to think of those suicide bombers killing many innocent children and peaceful worshippers on an auspicious day like Easter, makes us question the very foundation of a religion. Many people are asking the question: can a religion which teaches hatred and violence and which permits the murder of innocent people, be a good religion? I strongly believe that a true religion is a "religion of love" and any religion that teaches anything apart from this, cannot be a religion.

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the past. We only pity those wretched persons who think that by destroying the lives of others they would gain paradise and all the carnal pleasures with it. That is a very crude and fallacious idea of paradise. Heaven is a place of love and not of people who live by hatred. I am reminded of what Blaise Pascal had said "men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction." How true this is when we analyse the attitude of these suicide bombers. They seemed to take pleasure in blowing up innocent people. This is religious sadism in its extreme form. It seems like religion has become a dangerous commodity today which is easily manipulated by a few radicals. With the arrival of social media and mass media, religious as well as political extremist ideologies are becoming powerful and highly influential.

An ideology propagated by a religion gets a divine sanction and it is uncritically adhered to by the followers. This is the reason why religious extremists have more influence on people than political extremists. But this is a danger or call it a virus that any religion should root out if it does not want to be derailed or deformed or lose its credibility in the eyes of the world. Humanity has witnessed enough violence and cruelty in the name of extremism, let us wake up and clear our society of every form of extremism. Let us give love and peace a chance.

TO THE EDITOR

Power surplus to power deficit

Editor,
Till the other day Meghalaya was a power surplus state and the Economic Times still does not fail to mention it. Surprisingly, the state is now craving for electric power. Out of 24 hours MeECL or MePDCL or MEGH POWER deprives its customers of power for about six hours a day (including nights). Now this scenario has become a routine that goes on round the year. One may wonder if this is a chance given on understanding with the thieves and criminals to stimulate their dissolute activities. Out of those hours of power cuts, four hours are officially announced but another two hours or so are unscheduled. The MePDCL authorities get villainous pleasure in cutting the electric supply at their whims. The VIPs are always safe as they are always exempted from such plights. The sufferers are the poor consumers from whom the power supply company earns their total revenue to run the show. Secondly: MeECL/MPDCL/MEGHPower may kindly inform its consumers, as to what is the congenial weather for their constant supply of electricity. This is because

their supply gets disrupted during winds, rains, thunders, scorching sun and what not. Hope their fuel is not kerosene that gets doused in rains and winds. It is high time they either surrender, go home, sleep and snore peacefully or try a constant supply of electricity by whatever means possible.

Yours etc.,
Bibhash Dhar,
Via email

Sluggish Meghalaya Rural Bank

Editor
The way nationalised banks function in this 21st century is still sluggish. No wonder private banks are still favoured over nationalised banks. However, this fever of being run like a 'corporate' business is gradually catching up with nationalised banks in the way they function and relate with customers. But when it comes to regional rural banks their functioning is pathetic. This brings me to a case pertaining to the PMEGP schemes, under Meghalaya Rural Bank. There have

been a number of instances when this banking institution has failed miserably, apart from harassing applicants who have yet to receive their loan and subsidy, which is ironic. In an age when the Government is talking about self employment and building local enterprises such attitudes need to change in the interest of the society and especially of entrepreneurs.

Yours etc...
Dominic S. Wankhar,
Via email

Of positive messaging

Editor,
Your paper today on Page 4 depicted a massive uprooted tree to convey the message of a storm somewhere in Assam. This is one of many such pictures this year and over the past many years. Is it possible for your reporters and sub editors to find other innovative means to depict the destruction caused by strong winds other than fallen trees which have been made weak by concretization all around their roots and trunks. What such pictures tend to

do is exacerbate the deeply entrenched fear factor of the human psyche. The fallout being, more and more applications to the DFO (Territorial) for felling of urban trees as was ironically also reported on Page 3 the same day. About 150 trees have been officially felled in Shillong since the extremely unfortunate accident of August 12, 2017, which is unprecedented in the history of our city in such a short span of one and a half years. I therefore once again request that other innovative means be adapted by your esteemed daily to depict the "destruction" caused by storms other than fallen trees, so that we humans can lessen our fear of trees falling on ourselves our cars and our property.

Yours etc.,
Gagann Jain,
Via email

MHIS enrolment drive

Editor,
Under the aegis of the Ayushman Bharat PradhanMantri Yojna (ABPMY) in convergence with the MHIS phase IV, the Govt. of Meghalaya

has started the enrolment drive in the city. The enrolment centre in the city is witnessing huge rush of people for fresh enrolment. It has become virtually impossible especially for senior citizens, the sick and disabled persons to wait in the queue for hours. In a recent drive through outsourced agencies held in different localities in the city, many people for new enrolment were disappointed when informed that the drive was only for renewal of the old scheme and not for fresh or new enrolments. Since, the state Govt. is committed to enrolling every household, I would request the Govt. to set up enrolment drives for new entrants in different localities which will resolve the hardship faced by the people who need the benefits the most.

Yours etc.,
S. Prasad
Shillong-4

Are we prepared for the last days?

Editor,
As we anticipate the day of Judgement we will come across a certain figure the

Dajjal (in Islam) Antichrist (in Christianity) and Armilus (in Judaism). Now this in all Abrahamic religion is a beast and it will deceive the people and lie that he is the true Messiah before the day of Resurrection. But we all know who the true Messiah is. And if tomorrow happens to be the day of Judgement how many of us are prepared? I write this so that brothers and sisters we understand that our religion may be different; our culture our race different but we are all children of Adam. We have descended from this one man and we should all live in unity to save ourselves from the influence of the Dajjal. The world is going from bad to worse day by day and we can see it; we can feel it happening near us. People are deceiving each other; lies everywhere it is said, is the sign of the arrival of the Dajjal (Antichrist) So how many of us prepared?

Yours etc.,
Nissar Fazil
Ladrymbai (EJH)
Meghalaya

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.

“Abortion and racism are both symptoms of a fundamental human error. The error is thinking that when someone stands in the way of our wants, we can justify getting that person out of our lives. Abortion and racism stem from the same poisonous root, selfishness.”

--- Alveda King

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Poll violence escalates in Bengal

ON Monday as Bengal went into its fourth round of polling violence rocked the state yet again. Union Minister, Babul Supriyo of the BJP alleged that those who were unlikely to vote the Trinamool Congress (TMC) were not allowed inside the polling booths. In the absence of central forces most people who feared violence were unwilling to even come out and vote. At Asansol were Supriyo is contesting against Moon Moon Sen of the TMC his vehicle which was parked outside the polling station in Barabani was vandalised when a fight erupted between workers of the BJP and the TMC even as Mamata Banerjee the TMC chief fights to retain Bengal and also to assert her leadership on the national stage. But if the kind of violence that overshadows Bengal today on account of the elections, and which seem to have the stamp of the ruling government are any indicator then the country does not seem to be in safe hands. Politics in Bengal has always been marked by violence right from the time when the Left Front ruled Bengal. Mamata Banerjee the present CM was herself a victim of CPM violence. She survived the attacks but has only imbibed the same kind of violence which her cadres are unleashing on TMC rivals particularly the BJP. The 'do or die' kind of politics being played out in Bengal today between the TMC and the BJP has normalised violence. Attempts by the Election Commission to transfer senior police officials before polling resulted in their complaining against the Commission. But what we are witnessing in Bengal today is complete lawlessness and it is no secret that the state police are completely compromised. Elections in the state have had to be scheduled for seven phases, to enable the movement of central security forces so people could come out and vote without being intimidated.

Visuals of Babul Supriyo sitting in a car with the rear windows smashed have gone viral even as the rival candidate Moon Moon Sen feigns ignorance of the incident stating that she was busy visiting her constituency to ensure smooth polling. Meanwhile Babul Supriyo was on the road to visit every polling station to ensure that there are no disruptions by TMC supporters. There are eight constituencies voting in Bengal on Monday and they happen to be the most violence-prone belt of the state. The fact that voting for Asansol constituency is scheduled for all seven phases of the national election tells us how violent elections in Bengal are.

TO THE EDITOR

Is Shillong vulnerable to terror attacks?

Editor,
Having seen terror attacks in other parts of the world and even in India our fear is that Shillong may one day face the same fate. We do not know who will commit the act and when but the possibility is there. This possibility can be seen from the fact that all sorts of people come here from all parts of India and the world over and there is no mechanism whatsoever to monitor and keep a check on the movements and activities of the people coming here. We only rely on the police and their intelligence gathering. But police, being people as they are, cannot keep track of the movements and activities of every person. Even in advanced countries like the USA, UK and others, intelligence agencies have failed and frequent terror bombings and other

ghastly massacres take place regularly. Therefore it is imperative on all of us to be extra vigilant and alert wherever we are and to report to the police whenever we find suspicious objects or see suspicious movements and activities of people, especially those who are indoctrinated and radicalised.

Over the years we have seen heavy influx into Shillong and in other areas particularly from a particular community. We do not brand that all of them are terrorists or radicalised and indoctrinated and that they can be potential terrorists and suicide bombers but the possibilities are there because it is difficult to know who among them is indoctrinated and radicalised and we do not know when and where they will strike. Indeed radicalism and fanaticism perpetrated in the name of religion which leads to terrorism, decapitation, bloodshed, rape, bomb blasts, murder, and

other forms of violence are all crimes against humanity. No religion teaches all these. No religion preaches and promotes the cult of violence and if there is any religion that succumbs to such indoctrination and propagates crime and violence, then it is no religion at all but it is the act of the devil or a satanic cult. True religion teaches, preaches and propagates love and peace; love for oneself and love for neighbours and peace to oneself and to all men.

It is a great threat to world peace that there are religions today which succumb to the cult of violent groups and religious bigots or extremist religious ideologies. It seems as if the kingdom of God has fallen into the hands of Satan. It is indeed deadly and dangerous. Those religious teachers and their agents who teach, preach and propagate hatred, hate crimes, religious dogmatism, religious fanaticism,

radicalism and violence should know that they are the disciples and soldiers of Lucifer. I appeal to one and all to pray for and shun these ideologies and the people who propagate them.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Via-Email

Press freedom diminishing in India

Editor,
The fourth estate must play the role of the third umpire to help the umpires (voters) on the field in a political IPL match between the ruling and the opposition parties in a democratic country. It will be highly unfortunate if the media takes on the role of the cheerleaders of the batting side. Freedom of the Press is now in great danger. Our position has gone further down to 140 among 180 countries

Securing our seed sovereignty

By Gratia E. Dkhar, Naphishisha Nongsiej and Bhogtoram Mawroh

In an interview with the Hindu (April 6, 2012), Dr. Debal Deb, a rice conservationist, revealed that India had more than 100,000 varieties of Rice until as recently as 1970. However, as green revolution became an entrenched part of the agriculture policy of the State, this diversity came under tremendous attack due to emphasis on monoculture and hybrid crops. At present only 6000 varieties survive. This is very distressing especially considering that rice had its origins in India 14,000 years ago. Initially, it was only a single variety with farmers experimenting and gradually expanding the genetic diversity of the crops over time. There is a fear that if the assault continues this diversity which has taken more than 10,000 years to come into being could disappear entirely.

Dr Deb is trying to prevent that by creating a seed bank for more than 700 local rice varieties. Conserving these varieties is not only just a naive sentimental value, but many of these have high stress resilience in terms of pests and climate change. During the recent Biodiversity Festival organised by North East Network in Chizami, 7th-8th March 2019, Dr Deb shared that the nutritional content of many of these local varieties are incomparably higher than that of the hybrid varieties which are touted to have been developed for the same purpose.

At the same time, the process of developing newer varieties is ongoing with many new varieties being added to the list. These are seeds developed by agribusinesses by spending enormous sum of money. The monopoly power of these enterprises has reduced regional seed diversities. Their profit is maximised as the costs is recuperated (and much more) by ensuring that the farmers continually return to them for fresh supplies. A consequence of all this is engendering of dependency and heightened vulnerability of the farmers. However, there is another story which needs to be told: the effort of indigenous farmers in not just conserving traditional seeds but developing and propagating newer ones. These indigenous farmers, with no connection to the corporations or harbouring the ulterior motive of profiting from their discovery, are developing still newer varieties and sharing them with the community. Bah Kolishon Barim from Liarluid village is one

such farmer. The NESFAS team came across this story during the Rice Festival organised by NESFAS on the 13th March 2019 in Liarluid where Bah Kolishon was one of the main speakers.

Bah Kolishon Barim is a 57 year old farmer from Liarluid, a village associated with much local folklores. This particular village is under the Bhoirymbong CD Block of Ri Bhoi but within the traditional Khasi-Jaintia polity, it falls under the Raid lapnagr Khyrim Syiemship. Raid is a traditional political unit consisting of a collection of villages which together with other Raids constitute a Hima (tribal principality) under a Syiem (a Khasi King). Within the Raid, Bah Kolishon is recognised as the farmer who discovered the rice variety called "Khaw Jwain".

In 2008 while gathering the harvest that Bah Kolishon noticed two panicles of paddy with traits different from the rice variety, Kba Lakang that was cultivated. This new variety had longer stalks, broader leaves with shiny husk and bigger sized grains. Intrigued by this discovery, he showed his wife Kong Houstina Jalong, and decided to collect the seeds and keep them safely on the ryanas by the fireplace. In the following planting season, he sowed the new variety in a small plot of land. From the two panicles of paddy that he had saved, he harvested a can full of grains which is equivalent to a kilogram. Having noticed its immense potential, he decided to propagate it further.

The next year, i.e., 2010, Bah Kolishon was able to harvest one and half sacks (around 80 kilograms) of paddy. He saved four cans of paddy for sowing in the next season while the rest was cooked and served with meat and other dishes at "bam ja thymmai" (an annual feast of the first harvest). Many who attended the feast which included the church and village elders complimented on the taste and aroma of this variety. Apart from being consumed as a staple food, local snacks can also be made from this variety.

Word of this new rice variety spread across the Raid, and it was nicknamed "Kba u kpa u heh" (Heh' being the nickname of Kolishon's eldest son). People started visiting his home asking for the seeds. In 2011, he harvested 50 sacks of rice, a yield above the average of 42 sacks obtained from other varieties.

Almost half of the total produce was given as rent to the landlady (Bah Kolishon had leased the paddy field from her) hailing from Mawlang, East Jaintia Hills. The land owner was delighted with the taste, texture and aroma of this rice and requested him to continue cultivating this variety. He saved four cans for himself and gave some to his brother-in-law, residing in the neighbouring village of Thadnongjia (located within a travel distance of 20 minutes), for propagating the variety. In 2012, out of the 30 sacks, more than half was distributed to the other farmers from Liarluid. Khweng, Pynthor and distant regions like Nongstoin and Marmain. In 2013, Bah Kolishon named the variety as "Kba Jwain" on account of its unique appearance.

Through experience Bah Kolishon learnt that the variety should be sowed in the second week of May and transplanted in June with harvesting beginning in November. The variety has the ability to withstand strong winds, is resilient to blight and can grow in fields with poor irrigation. Unlike the 3-4 year period of rotation for other varieties Kba Jwain does not need rotation for seven years. This practise of rotation is explained as "u kba u thait ban shong ha juh ka jaka. Da ngi pynpher ka jakathung jong ka u kyndit noh" (the yield of a rice variety gets diminished when planted in the same plot. For it to be rejuvenated it has to be rotated with other varieties). The entire process does not use any external input and is completely organic. Interestingly, ten years after he discovered the Jwain variety, Bah Kolishon noticed yet another panicle different from the Kba Lakang, possibly another new variety. He has currently saved it for propagation in the next growing season.

Article 9 titled in the Farmers' Rights in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture mentions that there should be recognition of "the enormous contribution that the local and indigenous communities and farmers of all regions of the world, particularly those in the centres of origin and crop diversity, have made and will continue to make for the conservation and development of plant genetic resources which constitute

the basis of food and agriculture production throughout the world". But it is only the physical contribution to food production and agricultural which needs to be recognized. The values that underlie indigenous farming systems and the goals that it aspire to need to be promoted as well.

The values system followed by indigenous farmers is in complete opposition to those of modern industrial farming which is based on debt creation through its emphasis on external inputs (seeds, soil improvement and plant protection technologies) and rent extraction (emphasis on intellectual property rights). The result of such tendencies is increasing marginalisation of farmers and decimation of the agrobiodiversity developed by countless farmers over long periods of human history. In contrast to all this, indigenous farmers like Bah Kolishon use not only the methods of experience and learning to add to the existing knowledge but also follow the indigenous values of sharing and concern for the common good to stave off exploitation of those who are vulnerable. The goal that indigenous farmers like Bah Kolishon aspire for, not just for their community but the world at large, is not just food security but food sovereignty. An important step in achieving this is achieving seed sovereignty i.e., the farmer's rights to breed and exchange diverse seeds which can be saved and which are not patented, genetically modified, owned or controlled by emerging seed corporations and giants, something indigenous farmers like Bah Kolishon have been doing for generations.

"Seed Sovereignty reclaims seeds and Biodiversity as commons and public good" (Lexicon of Food).

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least six Indian journalists were killed in connection with their work in 2018."

The report found an alarming rate of "coordinated hate campaigns waged on social networks against journalists who dare to speak or write about subjects that annoy Hindutva."

Indeed, alarm bells are ringing for our democracy. Dissent, debate and dialogue are central to democracy. On the other hand, democracy is the lifeblood of our Constitution and nation. We need to remember that democracy cannot survive without free press.

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.

Racism in football! It's a problem here too

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

Edson Arantes do Nascimento (commonly known as 'Pele') famously epitomized football as 'the beautiful game'. Indeed, football is a very popular sport globally (both in terms of participation and viewership). This popularity gives rise to a fan/support base which is the 'heart and soul' of football. As such, in most circles the fans/supporters are considered as the most important stakeholders in 'the beautiful game'. They are responsible for creating an electrifying atmosphere in the stadia and performing as the 12th man. At times it seems as though national/international 'relationships' and/or 'rivalries' are defined in terms of football. Amidst this heated/animated realm there are cases of overflowing emotions percolating into irresponsible expressions of supremacy. Contemporarily in football, this is mostly expressed in terms of 'my race against your race'. Hence, the problem of racism in football! At the moment, this problem hangs like a 'Damocles Sword' thereby threatening to permanently tarnish and destroy what we all enjoy so wholeheartedly. Moreover, if we think that this is a western problem, then we are in for a rude shock. This is because it is a problem here in Shillong too. Accordingly, I place the following pointers -

Firstly, let us lay down what is racism and what are its specificities? The 'United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination' defines 'racial discrimination' (thereby implicitly implying 'racism') as 'any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise on an equal footing of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life'. The definition is exhaustive and it outrightly clubs together 'race' and 'ethnicity'. As a result this also impinges upon traits of heritage, culture and tribalism with one scoop (as these are closely associated with ethnicity). Amidst all these anthropological specifics, at the head of the pecking order in terms of global discrimination and antagonism is the phenomenon called 'racism'. To a lay person this is the only term that matters. All other terms and distinctions are purely academic. Racism is about appearance and physical features. It is defined by the shape of the face. It is looked at in terms of the colour of the skin. Racism is simply and literally 'black or white', 'dark or fair'.

In general, the 'white and fair' have the notion of unrivalled superiority thereby depicting their supremacy across 'all forms of public life'. It is this cognition that breeds problems and instigates retribution. It defines behaviour and perception towards everything.

Secondly, racism in football is not new. Now it has reached levels of criticality across many nations. Players and sometimes even match officials are abused based on the color of their skin. Apart from racist chants; there are even cases of racist banners being displayed in the stadia. No doubt, this has led to FIFA and UEFA to call for drastic steps to check on racism; however, over the years this has proven to be woefully short of any degree of effectiveness. As a case in point, in recent years high profile incidents involving racism include the racist abuse of Mario Balotelli (Marseille and Italy), Antonio Rudiger (Chelsea and Germany),

Raheem Sterling (Manchester City and England), Kalidou Koulibaly (Napoli and Senegal), Mesut Ozil (Arsenal and Germany), Adebawale Ogungbure (Vissai Ninh Binh and Nigeria), Moise Kean (Juventus and Italy), Kevin Prince Boateng (Barcelona and Ghana), Mohamed Salah (Liverpool and Egypt), Patrice Evra (West Ham United and France) and so forth. These players have been subjected to 'monkey chants' to 'monkey gesticulation' to 'banners displaying a banana(s)' and many more. Importantly, the point to be noted here is that racism is more extreme in the case of those players representing countries where the population is predominantly white (like in the case of Balotelli, Rudiger and Sterling).

Thirdly, over the years we see racism here in Shillong as well; particularly in the context of the I-League and the Shillong Premier League. In general, football has grown extensively in India. This is good for the sport. We have seen a revival of football clubs; most of which are driven through an investment of foreign players and foreign management. In this tryst with professionalism, the football clubs have been buying players of varied nationalities from across the globe to represent them on the field of play. In our local context, the football clubs based in Shillong have indeed led the way in this aspect. Well, one might think that all these developments would also result in the change of outlook of the fans/supporters and that they might be more open and progressive in their mindset. However, what is habitual nature is embedded in us all and indeed it never dies. Our inclinations of looking into things from the context of 'race' and 'racism' are a foregone conclusion.

What is even more disturbing is the grotesque show of such feeling of supremacy while watching the game from the stands. As in the case of the I-League matches, when the local football clubs play against other teams at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, Polo (and these other teams have in their roster players from Africa [or African origin]); at times you will be able to hear chants of 'Negro', 'Iong' (black), 'Shrieh' (monkey), 'Tngaw' (baboon) and so forth. In fact, sometimes even the African origin players of our very own local teams are not spared. This is a downright depiction of racism on our part. It is disturbing and highly condemnable and must be dealt with appropriately. Let us forget that we as a race are also looked on as being inferior by others!

Fourthly, what to do about it? Is there a solution? To start with, the I-League is run by the All India Football Federation (AIFF) and the Shillong Premier League by Shillong Sports Association. It is high time that these bodies take measures to deal with racism in football. These measures must be strict and penalizing. It must be noted that the number of people involved in racism at the stands are just a handful; but they bring shame to 'the beautiful game'. We need mechanisms to identify and catch hold of these people red-handed. Accordingly, they may be penalized and/or they may be barred from football stadia for life altogether. Yes, the problem of racism here in Shillong is not as much as in the European football leagues. Nonetheless, the problem is to be nipped in the bud. To this end, the football clubs can do their own part through the public address system at the stadia. (The Author teaches at NEHU)