

"Honest communication is built on truth and integrity and upon respect of the one for the other." — Benjamin E. Mays

The Shillong Times

Vol No LXV No. 291 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JUNE 2, 2023

Dahal in Delhi

TIES between India and Nepal are in sharp focus this week when Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is on a four-day official visit to New Delhi, marked by interactions with top leaders. Better known as Prachanda (the fierce), the Maoist Communist leader has been tamed considerably after he assumed political power — three times as Prime Minister -- the first two for less than a year each and he's currently in the seat for the past six months. This testifies to the instability that marks the initial years of democracy in what was a kingdom till 2008; a situation compounded undeniably by meddling from China with ulterior motives. Notably, Dahal, born to Hindu Brahmin parents, maintained reasonably good relations with India while his predecessor KP Sharma Oli often played into the Chinese hands. The politics in Nepal is guided understandably by local sentiments and caution against India with which it has an open border -- and more strongly against China too now.

The long rule of Nepal by King Birendra till his assassination in a palace coup in 2001 had been marked by excellent relations between India and Nepal. Strains developed later. The scenario worsened for a period when the Modi government objected to Nepal having re-designated itself from being a Hindu nation to a Secular entity through a constitution amendment in 2015. The Madhesi protests involving Indian settlers in the plains there added to the strain.

China is keen on getting Nepal into its fold in a strategic geopolitical push against India. However, many factors bind India and Nepal together, unlike China. Dahal has come to Delhi with a specific agenda to boost bilateral ties. Among the many subjects that he raised is Nepal's desire to market hydel energy to Bangladesh through India — which could fetch Nepal huge revenue. Nepal is already selling hydel power to India and using Indian ports for its trade with the outside world, including its shipments to and from China. Dahal is also seeking to broad-base the rail and aviation links between the two countries. In a significant step coinciding with Dahal's visit to India, Nepal amended its citizenship law that would hereafter give instant citizenship and political rights to foreigners who married Nepalese women. This is done by brushing aside the pressure from China to retain the curbs. China's warning to Nepal was that it could lead to more "involvement" of Indians and others in Nepal's political affairs. It would be in the best interests of both India and Nepal if the two nations strengthen their fraternal ties and are more helpful towards each other.

Adequate Representation vs. Proportionate Representation – Resolving the conflict

By Kitor H. Blah

The November 16, 1992 Supreme Court judgment in Indra Sawhney vs. Union of India held that, "Adequate representation cannot be read as proportionate representation" has been held to mean that there is a conflict between 'Adequate Representation' & 'Proportionate Representation'. But is this so? If yes, then where does the conflict lie? To get the answer, we must: 1. Examine Article 16(4) and how it has been applied to the date of this judgment. 2. Examine the Court Judgment dated 16th Nov., 1992 not only for what it says, but also for what it does not say. 3. Examine how Article 16(4) is applied in the above case, Indra Sawhney vs. Union of India.

The principle of Adequate Representation is found in Article 16(4) of the Constitution of India. It is the Constitutional Provision for Reservation for backward classes in public recruitments. How was this Article applied before the Supreme Court Judgment dated November 16, 1992? The Ministry of Home Affairs vide Resolution No. 42/21/49-NGS dated 13/9/1950 provided 12.5% & 5% reservation for SCs & STs. But after the 1961 census, when the population of SCs & STs was found to be 14.64% & 6.80% respectively, the Ministry of Home Affairs vide Resolution No. 27/25/68-EST. (SC/T) dated 25/03/1970 increased the reservation for SCs/STs 15% & 7.5% respectively. The concept of Adequate Representation was applied as Proportionate Representation So, in this precedent, there is no conflict between Adequate Representation & Proportionate Representation.

The DoPT's policy on reservation for SCs/STs says that in the case of direct recruitment on all India basis by open competition, reservation for SCs & STs is given at the rate of 15% & 7.5% respectively. In case of direct recruitment to Group C & D posts which normally attract candidates from a locality or region, percentage of reservation for SCs/STs is generally fixed in proportion to the population of SCs & STs in the respective State/Union Territory. So, when it comes to application, there is no conflict between Adequate Representation & Proportionate Representation, as that is the precedent by which Adequate Representation has been applied to SCs & STs.

So, what did the Supreme Court Judgment dated November 16, 1992 say? Let us not read the Supreme Court judgment only for what it says, but also for what it does not say. It only says that Adequate Representation cannot be read as Proportionate Representation, but it does not say that Adequate Representation should not be applied to Proportionate Representation. So, the conflict lies in meaning, not in application. Therefore, the Court judgment dated November 16, 1992 does not conflict with the precedent for STs, where Adequate Representation is applied as Proportionate Representation.

Meghalaya Reservation Policy: Footnote of two Significant Case Laws

By Kyrsothor Pyrtuh

The ongoing VPP led agitation to review the Reservation Policy in the State seems not to be ending anytime soon. Therefore, it is important to lay bare critical and financial materials pertaining to the subject matter. Fifty years ago, when the State framed and resolved to adopt the current formula of reservation policy, which is 40% in favour of G.Os, 40% for Khasi-Jaintia community, 5% for other STs/SCs who are indigenous in the State and 15% for the general category, it did not do so in a vacuum. Rather the State's political executive was informed by the provisions of the Constitution of India and the Constitution of Meghalaya and the provisions of the Constitution of India and the Constitution of Meghalaya which were in force at that time. In this article I will highlight on the two significant case laws in which the Government of Meghalaya had referred to and relied on during the formulation of Reservation Policy in 1972.

In India the concept of reservation is not only wide but it is complex and sensitive. In the current situation in Meghalaya, different people understand reservation differently and the matter is also sensitive as it involves two different major tribes with each making competing claims. The Constitution, which is the source of all reservation laws/policies in the country, provides for the establishment of a just and equal society which is free from injustices, discriminations, exploitations and that no one is left behind. The basis of reservation is to provide adequate representation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes or any other socially and educationally backward classes or economically weaker sections.

The Constitution of India allow reservation in admissions to educational institutions and reservations in posts and appointments in Government offices, as well as over-see the Constitution of India came into force on January 26, 1950, several laws/policies on reservation were framed by various State and Union Governments. At the same time many of these reservation laws or policies were scrutinized by different High Courts and the Supreme Court of India which had effect produced case laws. Perhaps, there are two important case laws on reservation which were discussed and referred to during the formulation of the Reservation Policy in Meghalaya. They are, (i) The General Manager Southern Railway versus K. Rangaiah 1962 and (ii) M.R. Balaji versus State of Mysore 1963.

In 1975, long before the Right to Information Act 2005 was passed, B.H.L. Gilbert Shullai, founder of the Shillong Records Collection Centre wrote to the Secretary to Government of Meghalaya, Personnel and Administrative Reforms and sought information on the Government's Resolution on Reservation and the subsequent amendments. In the letter dated November 3, 1979, he stated, "I am...to request you to kindly furnish a copy of Government Resolution No.PK.22/71/138 dated January 12, 1972 as amended up-to-date". Perusing the documents and information on the subject which were provided in response to the letter, it is evident that there are two important case laws, i.e. the General Manager Southern Railway and M.R. Balaji whereby the Supreme Court gave its rulings in the year 1962 and 1963 respectively, which guided the Government to formulate its Reservation Policy. The following are the footnotes of these case laws:

"Allowing an appeal by the General Manager Southern Railway, against the judgement of the Madras High Court (on a petition filed by the General Manager of the railway) that the court inspector employed in class III of Railway service which held that the circular issued by the Railway Board making reservation for selection posts in class III service contravened Article 16 of the Constitution, the

ponent demand is the silent role of the auditors. How can a mere chowkidar embezzle 3.26 crores for 6 long years? How come the auditors couldn't detect the fraud? Are the auditors Class 1 passed? Is the chowkidar a part time treasurer? If he is depositing weekly contributions then what is the appointed treasurer doing? Is he appointed only for foreign trips?

The fact that more than a crore were missing in 2017 was known after 2019, but when a member questioned the elders on November 23, 2019, the church committee blatantly denied the crime. On this day, churchgoers advised creating a financial committee, hiring an accountant, and starting an independent investigation. None of these proposals have been carried out to this day. In fact, a church that has annual expenses and collections running into crores of rupees needs a financial expert and not just a simple government accountant to manage its finances. Strangely, after 2017, the yearly church reports are financial returns annually. How can an institution ordained by God hideously avoid transparency? A more

instead of wasting money and complaining about the government all the time why don't we start rainwater harvesting? It will solve our problems in the blink of an eye. Rainwater harvesting started around 300 BC with little technology so why are we just sitting around? Why can't we start with the technology we have now in our modern age? we can actually solve water and electricity problems; all we need are people who understand how important this is. A few rainwater gutters and water tanks, planting more trees, and preserving the forest cover as much as we can, would address so much of our water shortage. Instead of depending on our so-called government which is actually the reason why there is deforestation and large scale sand mining, we should be taking action wherever we are. Let us start now!

Yours etc, Shailin J. Lyngdoh, Shillong-3

Water harvesting is imperative

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

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."
— Eleanor Roosevelt

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 141 No. 191 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JUNE 3, 2023

Climate Change Uproar
VISITORS to the State complained that two days ago Delhi experienced a temperature of 23° Celsius while Shillong was hot and humid. On Friday the day temperature of Shillong was 28° Celsius and gradually reduced to 20° Celsius by 8 pm. People come to Meghalaya to experience the cool summer breeze but that is not to be. However what's more worrying is that it's now June but the State has experienced very little rainfall. The Umiam Lake which generates electricity for large parts of the state has dipped to dangerous levels in the absence of rains. Whatever rains have come have lasted barely 30 minutes and then disappeared, leaving behind a hitherto unknown level of humidity.

Climate changes largely due to human activities and humans have been disdainfully ruthless in stripping nature of its green cover. Unregulated mining of coal and limestone and now of boulders and sand has left the earth wounded. Yet there is not a stir in those that have been elected to protect the environment and in those departments whose priority is to prevent environmental pollution. Rivers have all silted up and clogged with garbage; they no longer flow with the rippling sound of happiness. They are sluggish and toxic as they have become the receptacles for the latrines that empty themselves into most of the rivers flowing through Shillong, Jowai, Nongstoin, Mawsynram etc., and garbage dumps as well. This year the catchword for World Environment Day globally is, 'Stop Plastic Pollution.' Everyone knows the destructive nature of plastics, particularly those single-use plastics that are dumped at landfills and have no further use because they cannot be recycled. They are ultimately burnt at landfills and give out toxic smoke. The black plastic bag is known to be carcinogenic too but humans continue to do what is convenient and that is to rely on plastic bags to carry their wet purchases such as meat and fish, instead of carrying their own cloth/nylon bags or containers. The daily generation of plastic bottles by hotels/restaurants/institutions etc., make this earth unsustainable. Efforts have to be in place to reduce the use of plastics to the extent possible.

The tribes are so called because they had a symbiotic relationship with nature. They worshipped nature and all its elements. But conversion to a religion where people prayed inside buildings, quite detached from nature is perhaps what has alienated humans from the environment. What is even more appalling is that utility items produced by the first world and which are now embraced by third world countries such as disposable nappies (Huggies), disposable sanitary napkins et al have assaulted the rivers across the State and these if not trapped upstream all land up at the Umiam Lake which is now heavily silted. Climate Change is the wake-up call. Will humanity wake up or allow the destruction of the earth?

Letters to the Editor

Meghalaya's pathetic power scenario

Meghalaya is reeling under severe power project deficit and the public at large are at the receiving end as they are deprived of power for hours together in a day. Government states that they are waiting for the rains to come to their rescue so that the Umiam and other waterbodies are filled for power generation. This scenario has been continuing for more than a decade and successive governments have not yet found any other source of power generation, despite having lakhs and lakhs of coal reserve. Why not the Government find some alternative means of power generation like Thermal Power, Solar Power etc. The Govt is more inclined towards export of coal but without looking into the possibility of installing Thermal Plants.
May I once again urge upon the Power Minister and the MRCCL that if they are unable to run the plant then they should hand over to renowned corporate houses

who are running such plants with 100% success.
Yours etc.,
S.L. Singhania,
Via email

STEMS: a yeomen initiative

Editor,
Enough has been discussed on the perennial problem of traffic congestion in Shillong and there is nothing to write home about. However, these discussions remain on paper only and until now we did not see any tangible efforts to address this problem. But of late, the Government of Meghalaya seems to be serious about this problem and a slew of initiatives have been undertaken to address traffic congestion in the city. One such endeavor is called Sustainable Transport and Efficient Mobility Society (STEMS). Incorporated in the form of a society, the project aims to enhance mobility, reduce congestion and reduce harmful vehicular emissions. As a citizen of this peacefully congested yet beautiful city, I wholeheartedly

On Formal Education: What it is and what it should be

By Deepa Majumdar

Of late I have been reading about the many "toppers" in Meghalaya school exams. I have also read about young people dying of suicide upon receiving their high school exam results. This stark contrast spells a troubling portrait of Indian education. The British may have left India a draconian education system, but Indians have added to this by developing a results-oriented authoritarian system.

The Ivory Tower serves two opposite purposes. First, it trains us for professions that fetch a living. But second, it inculcates in us the many traits essential to be good citizens - objectivity, rationality, truthfulness, at least some high moral values, etc. Moreover, the Ivory Tower has a peak that is very different from its base. In America's best universities, an elect group of professors basically speak to each other internationally, through publications in their chosen fields, their elitism justified on grounds of excellence. Having earned their way to the top, they deserve this acclaim, which they have won through hard work - no nepotism, plagiarism, or favoritism. Given the specialized knowledge they create and the minds and times they influence, their elitism is necessary. While many who reach this pinnacle are humble, others are not. To lose one's temper over a malformed sentence, or a shoddy argument is a sign of egotism - not the self-discipline that should come with higher education.

But at the base of the Ivory Tower, we see the opposite. Here we enter a world where quality is often sacrificed at the altar of enrollment. Today in America, a major debate concerns the use of standardized testing in academic standards and "meeting students where they are." The former being harder to achieve, tends to be neglected. Slipping standards also have to do with contemporary student types. Whether traditional or non-traditional, students today lack resilience, zeal, thirst for knowledge, and the capacity for hard work. More importantly, they often lack an ethical compass. Young people today are hurt and justifiably angry - but also spoiled and entitled. As a result, they always blame others for their failures. The course was too hard, there were too few exams, the teacher was bad, the testing center staff members were incompetent, the audio tapes were imperfect - the list goes on and on. The mature student who takes responsibility

fully welcome this initiative and am sure everyone will do so. As part of this experiment, after an arduous series of discussions and policy decisions, schools buses have been introduced. As parent of school going children, I was curiously following the developments and had long made up my mind to enroll my daughter for the school bus service.

Today is my daughter's first day of school commute in a school bus, as I write this piece. I am yet to get her feedback regarding her experience but I am sure it would be a pleasurable one. The team at STEMS must be appreciated for their due diligence. They are updating the parents at every stage from enrolment, timings, bus arrival at an boarding and de-boarding at school over phone and SMS. The android app is also very user friendly and you can track the bus in real time. The sight of a sparkling new well-maintained and unfurrowed bus staff was ecstatic and I did not have a second thought while she boarded the bus for the first time. Possibly, we cannot expect more. I sincerely hope that their service remains up to that standard for all time to come.

Now, as I find there has not been much publicity about this project, it is my earnest request to the Government that wide publicity be given to this initiative through print and audio visual media. Parents should be encouraged to avail the school bus services. I am sure if even fifty percent of the parents opt for this service, there would be significant reduction in traffic congestion during the peak school hours. As we take part in the Mission LIFE (Lifestyle for Environment) initiated by Govt of India which also aims to make us Pro-Plant people, this could be a huge favour for Mother Earth. By opting out of dropping our wards in personal cars, we all can contribute significantly in reducing car borne emissions.

It is my fervent appeal to all conscious citizenry that we need to shed off the hesitation to school bus service. Your support can go a long way in making STEMS self sustaining which will have dual benefits of reducing pollution and traffic congestion.

Yours etc,
Dr Utam Saikia,
Zoological Survey of India, Shillong

due superiority to these vocational schools. This world is run more by those with basic life-skills than by intellectuals. India needs educational flexibility to accommodate a higher education geared towards working adults. The hairdresser, carpenter, and plumber should be able to return to college to read Shakespeare or Lagrange, when he or she is ready to.

Above all, India needs an education system that values the learning process more than grades. Young people should be told by parents and teachers alike that they are loved, regardless of their grades. In fact, the education system should focus on the cost of basic skills. Those who have had more than their fair share of roses, should be encouraged to serve those who can barely afford bread, leave alone roses. The exam system in India could be less rigid and stressful for the youth. Multiple exams through the whole year would help ease some of the pressure. Grades should not be the only measure of student success and capabilities. Employers should have multiple instruments (besides grades) to assess prospective employees.

While all toppers are to be congratulated for their excellent performance, as are their parents and mentors, those that do not perform as well, or even failed, should not feel like the world has shut down on them. No young person should feel pressured to commit suicide because of failing grades.

Like organized religion, formal education is not something to dismiss altogether. We may rebel and rage against it. But we should not do without it. Despite modernity, India remains fortunate enough to have a lingering contemplative culture that provides a rich general education to one and all, regardless of class, caste, or creed. One does not have to be literate to avail of this treasure-trove of spirituality, which imbues various aspects of culture - from the arts, music, literature, poetry, etc., to ancient traditions and customs - with a rich contemplative hue. But despite this enriching cultural womb, India also needs formal education to give students the tools they need to comprehend the world with objectivity. Increasingly utilitarian, higher education should be purified to bring back its contemplative luster. Education should be a journey - not a results-oriented degree faculty.

India has a dire need for skill-generating schools that inculcate the entrepreneurial spirit. Higher education learning should not feel un-

Why this bias against commercial passenger vehicles?

Editor,
I would like to refer to your paper's news item under the heading "Odd-even rule on all days and instead impose the odd-even rule on private vehicles, not only in Police Bazar and Mohpan in but the entire Shillong City. This surely will be a disaster for the people of the city. In this regard, I am of the view that to half of the commercial vehicles from plying towards the two main commercial centres of Shillong. In this regard, I am of the view that to half of the commercial vehicles from plying towards the two main commercial centres of Shillong. In this regard, I am of the view that to half of the commercial vehicles from plying towards the two main commercial centres of Shillong.

Yours etc,
Dr Utam Saikia,
Zoological Survey of India, Shillong

Is the MBOSE syllabus failing the students?

By Aiborlang Nongstoj

Every year after the declaration of the MBOSE results, few students who top the list will introduce themselves in the media and claim that their aim is to compete for competitive exams. Sadly, years have passed we have lost such students. The glory remains only for a few days since without anyone to guide them to fulfil their aims in life, they tend to lose their way. Our students are capable enough to compete with their counterparts in the mainland. Unfortunately, there is no one to follow up on them and hold their hands until they reach their goals.

Certainly, the state has few coaching centres for competitive exams, yet how many of those toppers are in these coaching centres? Many books of the MBOSE syllabus are replete with errors. It is unfortunate that the MBOSE just accepts any publisher without proper proof-reading and careful reflection by the Text Book Committee to see if the books are appropriate for the students. It is this which is the greatest barrier for our children to come out successful in competitive exams.

All those individuals who want to prepare themselves for various competitive exams in the country buy books of different standards of the CBSE or other central boards. No one would buy the MBOSE book! Why? It is unfortunate that the MBOSE syllabus has been very slow to update and keep

up with the times. The teachers have been teaching and students learning the same old thing for years together. One of the intellectuals who are in the Board wants to change the syllabus, the first to oppose this move are the teachers. If this is true, then it is very unfortunate. How many of the students need to update themselves and keep abreast of what is happening in the country and the world and also keep in touch with the CBSE/ICSE syllabus.

While living in the digital world. The age of the chalk and blackboard are gone. High ranking offices in the state are often taken up by individuals from other states and not by the locals. Why? Perhaps we are not able to prepare our own children for the tough competition from the beginning. How many local IAS and IPS officers do we have in the State? If not nominated by the Government, then we have only a handful of such officers. The only way to get back the State in the hands of the local officers is by competitive exams. We cannot blame the other non-locals for coming and occupying the vacancies in the state if we ourselves are incapable of passing the civil services exams.

Therefore, it is a big challenge and it takes a hard work and dedication to achieve this level of education. Perhaps, updating the syllabus might be one of the ways to empower our youth with the right skills to compete in a level playing field. Perhaps that would end the culture of the educated unemployed/unemployable youth. The Education Department can play a vital role in preparing the children for various competitive exams. If the state fails to produce successful candidates for UPSC, then it is the education system that is at fault. The above opinions are the result of conversation with a few intellectuals of the state. However, this writer has reduced it into writing out of concern for the upcoming generation. Since these aspiring for competitive exams are often using the CBSE books and not the MBOSE books, it is incumbent on MBOSE to update the syllabus and not to accept any publisher for any benefit. The Board must work for the benefit of the students and not vice versa. The brief of the MBOSE is to catch up the whole lesson part by part according to their standard. In other words, the lesson flows from one level to the other in a progressive manner. In the last few years,



Who do we blame here? Is it the failure of the state or the society or the parents to guide and support such students? In fact, the recent UPSC results show that yet again only one non-tribal young man qualified from the state of Meghalaya. So what happens to those civil services aspirants who top the Board exams year after year? Why have there been no tribals qualifying for the UPSC for the last several years - almost a decade in fact.

Certainly, it is difficult to crack the UPSC exams. However, we have so many successful candidates every year from across the country so why not at least 3-4 from Meghalaya? What is the educational gap that blocks the prospect of our students and prevents them from qualifying for the UPSC and other competitive exams? Personally believe that it is a collective responsibility that we follow up or such students and guide them to reach their aim especially those farflung to write their competitive exams. Primarily parents and the teachers are the main guides for the toppers who aspire for such exams. For instance, in other states, the parents themselves are able to identify the capability of their own child and start giving him/her the right kind of coaching so they can sit for competitive exams. They not only guide their children but also buy books, provide newspapers and other news for the failure of our students to crack the civil services exams in the MBOSE syllabus. According to these intellectuals, the first rank holder in the MBOSE syllabus may find it difficult to compete with students from other central boards like CBSE or ICSE. In my personal experience as a teacher, the subject matter in the MBOSE syllabus is not orderly arranged according to the student's level of understanding while in the CBSE or other central boards of education the subject matter is orderly arranged according to the students' ability to grasp. For instance, the lesson in the history book progresses from one level to the next higher level. This way the students are able to catch up the whole lesson part by part according to their standard. In other words, the lesson flows from one level to the other in a progressive manner.

Yours etc,
Said Sween,
Shillong-2

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

In the last few years,



By Saagar Panchal

When it comes to their priorities and preferences, millennials have undergone a discernible shift in recent years. Millennials, in contrast to earlier generations, are increasingly choosing luxurious vacation experiences over tangible belongings. The tourism business is being reshaped by this mentality shift, which places more value on memorable and experience journeys than on accumulating material possessions. The motivations behind this trend and how it is changing the travel industry will be discussed in this essay.

The Rise of Experiential Consumption

Millennials' propensity for experiential consumption is one important reason pushing them towards luxurious vacation experiences. Contrary to their elders, who frequently sought happiness through the acquisition of material goods, millennials place a higher value on experiences that foster personal development and long-lasting memories. They place a high importance on authenticity, exploration, and the chance to interact with various cultures. They can see the world, partake in unusual activities, and form significant connections through luxury travel experiences, all of which promote a sense of fulfillment and personal enrichment.

The Influence of Social Media

The growth of social media, especially among millennials, has had a significant impact on

the tourism sector. People can share their experiences with the world by showcasing them on websites like Instagram and Facebook. In order to attract the attention and admiration of their online networks, millennials, who are well renowned for their digital proficiency and desire for self-expression, are increasingly looking for visually appealing and enviable-inspiring trip experiences.

The rise of luxury vacation destinations and lodgings that are especially created to be aesthetically pleasing and shareable on social media is a result of this phenomena, which is also known as the "Instagrammability" factor. These experiences, which range from opulent overwater bungalows in the Maldives to magnificent hot air balloon rides over Cappadocia, not only offer a sense of exclusivity but also provide a setting for inciting envy in social media posts.

The Shift from Ownership to Access

The move from ownership to access is a crucial element in millennials' demand for premium vacation experiences. Millennials prefer the freedom and flexibility that come with experiences rather than belongings, in contrast to past generations who placed more value on possessing tangible assets like homes and cars. Luxury possessions may be viewed as a burden, holding a person down to one place and reducing their alternatives. Luxury travel experiences, on the other hand, give them the chance to see a variety of locations without

the long-term commitment and financial strain of ownership.

Due to this shift in perspective, a number of travel-related platforms and services have emerged to meet millennials' preference for access over ownership. Unique and upmarket lodgings are provided by businesses like Ilireavilla and Manzil, and for a set monthly cost, subscription-based services like Inspirato and BeRightBack offer hand-picked vacation experiences. With the help of these options, millennials may take advantage of luxurious travel experiences without having to spend a fortune or deal with ownership hassles.

Environmental and Social Consciousness

The social and environmental awareness of millennials is well known. When making travel plans, they are more inclined to use eco-friendly resorts, conservation-focused excursions, and community-based tourism programmes.

As a result, the demand for sustainable luxury travel solutions has increased significantly in the travel sector. Eco-friendly practices are being adopted by hotels and resorts, including the use of waste reduction techniques and renewable energy sources. In order to create projects for responsible tourism that benefit the local community as well as the environment, travel companies are collaborating with local communities. In ad-

dition to drawing millennials, this emphasis on sustainability also sets an example for future generations and has an impact on the business as a whole.

Personal Growth and Self-Discovery

Millennials have more than just the chance to unwind and enjoy when they travel in luxury. They also provide a space for development and self-discovery on a personal level. Millennials see travel as a life-changing event that gives them the chance to extend their horizons, push themselves beyond of their comfort zones, and develop a more comprehensive perspective of both themselves and the world they live in.

Luxury travel experiences frequently include activities that encourage people to go outside of their regular routines and embrace fresh viewpoints, such as wellness retreats, cultural immersion programmes, and adventure expeditions. Millennials have the ability to develop new skills, resilience, and personal qualities by participating in these unusual events. These experiences give millennials a sense of happiness and purpose that cannot be attained through worldly items alone, whether they involve learning to surf in Bali, practising meditation in a peaceful mountain retreat, or giving back to a remote town.

To address the needs of millennials' quest for personal development and self-discovery, the travel industry has reacted to this transition by providing a wide choice of transformative luxury experiences. In order to promote total wellbeing,

wellness resorts now provide holistic programmes that incorporate yoga, mindfulness, and spa services. Adventure travel agencies plan adventures that test participants' physical and mental stamina while also promoting a sense of achievement and self-confidence. Millennials are able to connect profoundly and meaningfully with themselves and the world through these experiences, which go beyond just tourism.

The Influence of Peer Recommendations and Online Reviews

The views and suggestions of their peers have a big impact on millennials. When making judgements about their travel experiences, they turn to online reviews, social media influencers, and travel forums for affirmation and direction. Luxury travel companies are increasingly utilising influencer marketing and user-generated content in order to appeal to millennial passengers.

Luxury travel firms may successfully reach and interact with millennials by working with influencers and encouraging visitors to post about their experiences on social media. This generation responds well to genuine, encouraging reviews and suggestions. From other visitors, frequently influencing their preferences and travel decisions. In addition to changing the way millennials plan their vacations, the focus placed on peer recommendations has had a big impact on the tactics used by the travel industry to win their interest and allegiance.

The Desire for Meaningful Connections

Meaningful relationships and genuine encounters are highly valued by millennials. They have opportunities to interact with like-minded people from all cultures and backgrounds thanks to their luxury travel experiences, which promote a sense of the world as one. Millennials look for experiences that let them engage authentically with other tourists, locals, and business people, from group tours to networking events in upscale locations.

The tourism industry has created numerous initiatives to promote networking and social relationships in response to this desire. Presently, upscale resorts host carefully organised events and workshops where

visitors can have deep discussions and create enduring connections. Travel firms provide group trips that are especially made to assemble people with comparable interests, fostering a sense of community and camaraderie during the voyage. By encouraging connections and social interaction, luxury travel is evolving from a solitary activity into a platform for creating connections and a sense of belonging.

In response to this demand, the travel industry has developed various initiatives to facilitate social connections and networking. Luxury resorts now organise networking events and workshops where guests can engage in meaningful conversations and forge lasting relationships. Travel agencies offer group tours specifically designed to bring like-minded individuals with shared interests, creating a sense of camaraderie and community throughout the journey. These efforts to promote connections and social engagement are transforming luxury travel from a solitary pursuit to a platform for building relationships and fostering a sense of belonging.

The millennial generation's preference for luxury travel experiences over material possessions has brought about a significant transformation in the travel industry. Their inclination towards experiential consumption, the influence of social media, the shift from ownership to access, environmental and social consciousness, the pursuit of personal growth, the importance of peer recommendations, and the desire for meaningful connections have all played a role in reshaping the industry.

Luxury travel providers are adapting to meet millennials' evolving preferences by offering unique, immersive, and socially responsible experiences. The industry is increasingly focused on sustainability, personal development, and creating opportunities for connections and networking. As this trend continues, it is clear that luxury travel experiences will remain a top priority for millennials, shaping the future of the industry and redefining what it means to indulge in the pursuit of fulfilment and happiness. (ANSI/IC)

(The Author is CEO and Founder of Ilireavilla & Manzil)

Is mental health support a key element of work culture?

A decade ago, conversations around mental health support at the workplace were simply swept under the corporate carpet. The stigma around depression, anxiety, and stress was so prevalent that these issues were not even acknowledged. But today, 81 per cent of workplaces have increased their focus on employee mental health.

As we peel back the layers of corporate norms, it becomes evident that mental health support stands as an irreplaceable pillar in creating an environment where every employee can thrive. Just as the human mind holds endless potential, embracing mental health support is the key to unlocking the untapped potential within each individual.

We are all a combination of our experiences, the expectations we have of ourselves, and those that people have of us, and sometimes it is natural to be overwhelmed. How each one of us reacts to these stimuli is different, and that is what makes us unique. Investing in employee well-being is the first and most important step in fostering such individuality and building a great organisation.

The World Health Organization estimates that depression and anxiety disorders cost the global economy approximately \$1 trillion per year in lost productivity. Investing in mental health support not only benefits individual employees but also yields significant economic returns, creating a win-win scenario for both employees and organisations.

BREAKING THE STIGMA AND FOSTERING ACCEPTANCE

Only 13 per cent of employees feel comfortable discussing their mental health in the workplace. According to a study by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), 9 out of 10 employees who experienced mental health challenges reported facing stigma in their workplace. This stigma often leads to employees hiding their mental health conditions and delaying seeking help, impacting their well-being and productivity. Picture a workplace where individuals feel seen, heard, and supported. A place where every em-

ployee is working towards growing the business, unhindered by the stigma associated with mental health challenges. Leading new-age businesses, our actions and values set the tone for the entire organization. Hence, the onus is on the leadership to actively break down the stigma surrounding mental health. This will further inspire a ripple effect, empowering others within an organization to do the same. We need to create an environment where employees can thrive, leading to enhanced productivity and optimal performance. This encourages diverse viewpoints, creativity, and collaboration, leading to breakthrough ideas and solutions. When employees feel safe to express themselves authentically, they can contribute their unique talents and experiences to the collective success of the organization.

ENABLING EQUAL ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Indian workplaces have come a long way when it comes to destigmatising conversations around mental health challenges. In the face of "the 2020 pandemic", mental well-being took centre stage, and workplaces started embracing mental health support policies. The industry has taken a step forward in not just acknowledging but also providing resources that are accessible, equitable, and culturally sensitive. As an ecosystem, we need to position ourselves as an ally in the mental health journey of our employees and remove barriers to access such as cost, stigma, and logistical challenges. Around 80 per cent of Indian companies have gone the EAP (Employee Assistance Program) way to of-

fer access to trained professionals. They help employees address personal and work-related challenges, reduce stress, and improve overall well-being. New-age companies are revisiting, rehauling, and restructuring their policies to incorporate mental health support as an integral part. This includes providing flexible working hours, paid mental health leave, and additional



ACING THE TALENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION GAME

The younger workforce of today is drawn in by an organisation's progressive and inclusive cultural code. They seek more than just a paycheck; they yearn for a workplace that values their holistic needs and provides a supportive environment. Today's generation appreciates di-

CREATING WORKPLACES WHERE THE MIND IS WITHOUT FEAR

A recent report by Indeed titled, "Where the mind is without fear", states that a psychologically safe environment is a key component of diversity, inclusion, and belonging (D&IB) efforts. While devising policies for an all-inclusive workplace environment, we need to remember that mental health is not one-size-fits-all. Right now, we are all operating in a piecemeal manner, providing Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), counselling sessions, and interventions aimed at alleviating stress and improving motivation and productivity. But due to the unconscious biases at play, we are collectively running behind to reach the desired outcome. The need of the hour is to devise a compelling policy and cultural framework for mental health support and to make it the core of every organisational structure. Employees who receive mental health support and engage in self-care activities are better equipped to manage stress, make effective decisions, and maintain focus on their work responsibilities.

Over the past decade, workplaces have made significant strides in addressing mental health challenges. The once prevalent stigma surrounding mental health is slowly being dismantled, creating an environment where every employee can thrive. Organisations now understand the economic and personal benefits of investing in mental health support. By taking proactive steps to provide mental health support, we can unlock the untapped potential within each individual. The focus should be on creating a future where mental health support is integrated into the fabric of every organisation, allowing employees to flourish and contribute their best. (ANSI/IC)

A historical trail of Pakistan's military enterprise

Pakistan's former military chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa declared at the end of his tenure the military would no longer meddle in politics.

However, the recent arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan—once seen as the "army's blue-eyed boy"—and the army's intention to prosecute civilian protesters under military laws proves the mer in uniform are still very much in politics.

The recent turmoil in Pakistan also serves as a poignant reminder of the considerable power wielded by the military.

Amid the ever-changing political landscape, the only permanent force is the military establishment, while the political parties only coexist to share power with it.

Khan, whose success in the 2018 general elections was engineered by the military itself before the two drifted apart, has more than 100 cases registered against him now. These range from corruption and sedition to terrorism and even blasphemy, which is punishable by death.

His arrest was followed by days of violent anti-army protests across the country. Protesters set fire to police vehicles, damaged public property and mobs stormed into the compounds of army commanders in Lahore and Rawalpindi.

However, days after the military's intention of using military laws on civilians became public, events changed course rapidly. Peaceful rallies expressing solidarity with the army took the centre stage.

How did a military of roughly 140,000 men at the time of partition in India in 1947 become the world's seventh most powerful army?

AN ARMY WITH A STATE

Since its creation in 1947, Pakistan has been under military dictatorship spanning a total of 34 years. Who not directly in power, the military elite have



discreetly engaged in hybrid regimes, exerting influence on civilian governments from behind the scenes.

The British colonial legacy has played a vital role in shaping Pakistan's military today. British generals continued to head the Pakistan's military until 1951, when the authority was transferred to General Ayub Khan. Just seven years later, Ayub became Pakistan's second president through a military coup.

This foundation led to the establishment in 1948 of the spy agency Inter Services Intelligence. It gained remarkable influence in the 1980s, when the US covertly waged a war in Afghanistan using Pakistan as a proxy against the declining Soviet Union.

This period also saw the execution of an elected prime

minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Then came the era of religious extremism under General Zia-ul-Haq. This consolidated Pakistan's obsession with the "strategic depth" for interference in Afghanistan.

In later years, Pakistan saw the assassination of an elected prime minister, Benazir Bhutto under the rule of General Pervez Musharraf. This was the time of enforced disappearances of civilian dissidents. Pakistan also became a safe haven for Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden while receiving funds from the US as a frontline ally in the war against terrorism.

Pakistan's army received substantial backing from the US during the Cold War. This bolstered its might domestically while allowing it to undertake adventures abroad for which it was unaccountable.

Traces of the Pakistani military's involvement could also be seen in the Arab conflicts and the Bangladesh "trap camps".

MILITARY IMMUNE TO HYPER INFLATION

IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan is on the verge of an economic meltdown, weighed down by harsh pay-back terms from international lenders. With only AS5.2 billion worth of state reserves and a debt of over AS13.5 billion owed to the International Monetary Fund, the army nonetheless received an increased payment of AS11.27 billion in last year's budget.

Between 2011 and 2015 alone, the army's assets grew by 78%. By 2016, the armed forces in Pakistan ran over 50 commercial entities, including public sector organisations and real estate ventures worth AS30 billion.

Today, their commercial assets are worth over AS39.8 billion.

Top military officers, including former army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa and army spokesman, General Asim Saleem Bajwa, have been revealed to have experienced significant financial gains within a relatively short time. Bajwa's immediate family amassed substantial wealth, transferring into billionaire status within six years.

General Asim Saleem Bajwa and his brother established a business empire that included 133 restaurants across four countries, operating under the Papa John's pizza franchise. An investigation was also launched into real estate corruption by the brothers of former army chief Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, who for many years was the most powerful figure in the country.

The Pandora Papers exposed a long list of Pakistan's former military officers who had accumulated immense wealth through tax evasions and corruption.

Over time, the military's economic interests have gained prominence. This includes military-owned businesses, significant onshore and offshore land and property holdings, influence over defence contracts, as well as alleged involvement in ventures linked to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The military's influence in Pakistan extends beyond politics and the economy. To control information dissemination, the military employs a combination of traditional and social media censorship. It also utilises vaguely worded draconian laws.

These laws effectively criminalise any form of "ridicule" directed at the army, carries severe penalties such as long prison sentences and hefty fines. Slain journalist Arshad Sharif was charged with "sedition" under the same laws for allegedly spreading hate against the military and disrespecting state institutions.

As a nuclear state, Pakistan's military is much more successful in description of Frederick II of Prussia: it is a state within itself, benefiting from its sheer size, a great deal of money, and an advantageous geopolitical positioning.

The military's rise to power in Pakistan is linked to cultivating a collective ethos that portrays politics as inherently corrupt, while positioning itself as the sole bastion of honesty, discipline and nationalism.

It is because of this approach that despite corruption in the military, it has successfully distanced itself from the prevalent political culture, which is characterised by kinship ties, factionalism, patronage networks, and most importantly, corruption. (The Conversation)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambi Sunday, June 4, 2023

Birthday Forecast!

Full moon on your birthday than and it is going to be a wonderful year for you. You will meet your true love in a spectacular way. You will do things that are most important for you and will give your whole attention to them. You will also get successful in what you have planned to do. You will meet new personalities who will help you to do what you wish to do in your business and will have major expansion plans. You will not let your personal and professional activities. You will get well served support from your friends. You will get a wonderful love life. There will be something so important relating to your life that will get success in exams, tests and interviews. Those who are planning to go abroad can do so. Your health will remain perfect.

'This week for you'

Aries (March 21 - April 20) This week will begin on a positive note for you. You will begin your tasks ahead. You will stay busy and will move with caution. Your time will be spent in discussions and meetings with your colleagues. You will be able to do that work which is of your liking. You will give time to your children's studies and career. You will get support of your friends and family members. You will have no shortage of funds. You will get success in love affairs. You will have wonderful bonding with your partner. Long distance travels will be fruitful. Your popularity will grow and you will be liked by one and all. You will plan to go on a vacation with family.

Taurus (April 21 - May 21) You will have less problems this week. Your time will be spent peacefully. You will be able to solve your problems. Your enemies and opponents will be unable to trouble you and will get defeated. You will find yourself surrounded by your well-wishers. You also receive work orders. You will plan to change your daily routine. Now you will be spiritually more active and will do some light exercises, running and walking. You will have fun moments and parties in your home. Your business or family travels will be successful. You will enjoy parties to your savings. Your cup of happiness is full. Time will be spent with your family.

Gemini (May 22 - June 21) This time is for progress and growth. You will feel peaceful and active. Your friends will be pleasant. You will meet lot of new persons, and will be happy in their company. You will also get lot of respect and appreciation both at. You will be confident and will give your words both in and out. You will also receive a good news from someone. You will be full of hopes for your future. You will find the time for family, entertainment, finance and fitness. You will be running around to get success in your work. Your health will be high. You will get fabulous success in finance. You will do work with full of maturity. Mothers and wife will have wonderful bonding.

Cancer (June 22 - July 22) You will welcome luck and good news this week. You will be most momentous, smart, thinking and graceful in your interests. There are exciting business, growth and money. There will be an increase in your business. The money circle will be successful. You will get success in related work and will speed up. You will get success in competitions and exams. You will also get a good news from someone. You will also spend your time well. You will also solve your business problems and get the expected support from friends and colleagues. You will also spend your all money related matters. You will spend most of your time with your family.

Leo (July 23 - August 23) It is going to be a great learning experience for you. You will be happy as you will get good news and some in business/work. Your friends will also give you some important responsibilities and you will come up to the expectations of one and all. Love affairs will move in the right direction. You will not waste your time on useless matters. You will also spend your time on your business. You will look after your family members well. You will meet an interesting person and will be inspired and motivated. You will also make your own memory of the person. You will also make your spouse trust. Health will be perfect.

Virgo (August 24 - September 24) To best leads for prosperity gains. You will see all round peace and honour. Your trials will be gone before you and will be fruitful. You will be able to expand your business. You will have no worries. You will remain peaceful and relaxed. There is no necessity of any unnecessary related matters. You can meet some influential person. You can start start some

important work. You can have beneficial opportunities in your hand. You will also get the support of your friends. Your inner self will expand you to work sincerely and be honest in your work. You will also get success in your work. You will get success in your work.

Libra (September 25 - October 25) Your work will get completed on time. You will get full support of your friends and colleagues. Your plans to start some new work will start smoothly. The atmosphere at your home will be pleasant and will have better cooperation. Students will have no arguments with anyone. You will make good progress in publications. Though there will be hurdles in your work, steady but in the end you will make great progress. You will feel peaceful and satisfied. Husband and wife will have better cooperation. Students will get success in examinations. Your money affairs will remain. You will also take full your health. You will do well in all.

Scorpio (October 26 - November 26) This week will begin on a positive note for you. You will get an important news or message from someone. You will meet someone meeting with an influential person. Some top officials will be helpful. You will avoid clash of interests with your colleagues. You will get success in your work. You will also get an important position in an organisation. You will also get lot of name and fame. You will complete your work in the specified time period given to you. You will have wonderful bonding with your life partner. Your plans will be successful. You will get success in competitions/exams.

Sagittarius (November 27 - December 27) It is a great week. You will have lot of work on your hand. In this time, you will have to do some negotiation and will analyse about how things should move in your life. You will attend new personalities in business/work. You can do an online meeting with your family. You will have still and still attend for your family members. Your partners will be satisfied with your performance. You will also have plans to go for a change of job. Your family members will support you fully. Be aware of flattery as some persons may try to deceive you. But you will get right opportunities for business. You will meet some of your friends. You will be more active and decorative. A time of new ideas and challenges.

Capricorn (December 28 - January 30) Exclusive activities and expenditure will trouble you. Your financial budget will remain a cause of concern. Hence you have to make a choice and will have some of your business. You will spend less than what you want. Your personal matters will get better momentous. But you will also start investing your money in real estate, deposits. Business will help you when you need it most. Don't take the things beyond a point. Concentration at the work will increase. You will have some of your business. You will be more active and decorative. A time of new ideas and challenges.

Aquarius (January 31 - February 18) It is going to be a wonderful week. You will have lot of respect and getting going things. You will have some of your business. You will be more active and decorative. A time of new ideas and challenges. You will have some of your business. You will be more active and decorative. A time of new ideas and challenges.

Pisces (February 19 - March 20) Just you need to trust your instincts and will have some of your business. You will be more active and decorative. A time of new ideas and challenges. You will have some of your business. You will be more active and decorative. A time of new ideas and challenges.

Are women the only flag-bearers of change for female empowerment?

By N. Lathangbeni Humiseo

Hip Hop as a genre is revolutionary art that arose from oppression. The storytelling aspect of it is what I fell in love with the most, says Deepa Unnikrishnan aka Dee MC, a prominent figure in the Indian hip hop community.

Dee MC is set to share her tale in a unique way with her crew of dancers at TED Talk for the second round. In this interview she discloses how her music is influenced by her personal life and surroundings, and why she chooses to address dark skin discrimination and social injustice.

Read Excerpt:

Can you give us a preview of the topic you intend to empathise at TEDxGateway?

Dee MC: I have something very special planned for my performance at TEDxGateway on the 4th of June at the NCPA in Mumbai. This is my second collaboration for a TED Talk and it will be quite different from my previous one which was a solo performance. This time I will be joined by my crew of dancers and we have created a theatrical performance piece which is a mix of spoken word poetry, hard-hitting rap as well as a choreography routine that ties it all together. Our message is one of unity and tolerance and the courage to speak the truth.

What does women empowerment mean to you?

Dee MC: I am privileged enough to know what my rights are and women empowerment for me is extending the same privileges to those who believe they have no choice. Just by believing in myself, I have defied many norms of family and society. You will feel proud in your business. Love and respect will be a great time. You will be busy in charitable and spiritual activities.

Aquarius (January 21 - February 18) It is going to be a wonderful week. You will have lot of respect and getting going things. You will have some of your business. You will be more active and decorative. A time of new ideas and challenges. You will have some of your business. You will be more active and decorative. A time of new ideas and challenges.

Why, of all the things you may portray through your music, do you choose to highlight dark skin prejudice and social injustice?

Dee MC: All my work has been inspired by my own life or the people surrounding me. Hip Hop as a genre has grown as a revolutionary art out of oppression. The storytelling aspect of it is what I fell in love with the most. Hence choosing to speak

about my own vulnerabilities through my music is something that comes naturally to me. Comparing it to what others are doing or aren't doing hasn't been my way of doing things. I believe you have to be the change you want to see, and I see my art as a tool of communication to bring forth the kind of change I wish to see in this world. Which is a world that is kinder, open to vulnerability, and tolerant of each other's differences.

Where do you get your musical inspiration?

Dee MC: My art is a culmination of the people and places I am surrounded by. My family originally hails from Kerala but moved to Mumbai in the 80s for a better life. A lot of who I am and my liberal ways of life, especially as a female in India is owed to my city. For a long time, the hip-hop community was my only inspiration. The aspirations of thousands of artists who were creating songs at a time when we barely had any audience. It is inspiring to see the 'never back down' attitude artists here have despite the lack of infrastructure and resources. Our resilience to make something out of nothing continues to inspire me.

The opportunities that led me out of India have also helped me grow as an artist and derive inspiration from my own environment.

Aside from music, what are your interests?

Dee MC: Multitasking has been a big part of my life since the beginning as I liked to think of myself as an all-rounder. Even as an artist, I take pride in my learning. From what I do, it seems to just my work. I have recently started directing my own music videos. I'm an avid watcher of films and TV shows and the experiences I have garnered in my own journey of being in front of the camera have come in handy. I was also the editor-in-chief of India's leading hip-hop news site named DesilHip.com where I have personally written over a hundred articles about the Indian Hip Hop scene.

What was life like before and after?

Dee MC: I truly believe in taking life one day at a time. Surely, I have a more comfortable life now after many years of hard work and sacrifices. But it was all worth it to achieve the one thing I craved since I was a child - total and unquestionable freedom of choice. Success is a very subjective thing and for me, it holds a deeper meaning than the generally accepted standards of what it means to be successful. For me, the heaps of progress I have made in improving my mental health is the biggest before and after comparison point to measure my success. (iANSI)fi



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

—Morihei Ueshiba

The Shillong Times

Vol No-LXX No. 291 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JUNE 5, 2023

**#WorldEnvironmentDay#
What's different?**

WORLD Environment Day comes and goes. Pledges are made to the earth that we will be better and more responsible citizens but it ends there. Between words and actions is a huge gap. This year's theme for observing World Environment Day is "Beat Plastic Pollution." Humans have short memories, else this is not the first time that the slogan Beat Plastic Pollution was coined. The same slogan was used by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) way back in 2018 but nothing has changed. Studies galore have pointed to the fact that plastic use has not reduced. In the past as many as 25 states had banned plastic with some form of state notification within their own jurisdictions. In Meghalaya, the first ban on plastics dates back to 1998. But all these bans had a very limited impact on the ground. The ban on plastics is defeated by relaxing norms of micron thickness used. Plastic producing mercenaries know how to get around these compliances. Currently in India only 10% or 20% of plastic items are banned and packaging material is still untouched. Every item bought whether food, clothes and other utilities are plastic wrapped.

The UNEP states that there are many small things that individuals can do on a day-to-day basis to stop plastic pollution and lists 8 of them. Among these 8 the UNEP points to rivers as being the direct pathways of plastic debris which ultimately lands up into the ocean. The UNEP urges people to help join a river clean-up group and benefit the ecosystem. But this too is easier said than done. Some groups in Shillong have been cleaning rivers since 2019 at least twice a month. Their concern is that people residing nearest to the rivers and in fact building on rivers are the biggest polluters but they never ever join river clean-ups. The bulk of garbage in rivers is inevitable plastics but they also include huge chunks of plastic bottles. Hotels and restaurants should take the lead by providing water dispensers and glasses instead of adding tons of plastic bottles which may be recycled but which leave behind micro plastic residues that are ingested by humans and animals.

India and the State of Meghalaya has invested a phenomenal sum in awareness campaigns but the results are abysmal. A time has come for the state to use its penal powers against polluters in the "Polluter pays principle." It is also important to ramp up the waste collection and management systems not just in the state capital and district headquarters but also in the rural hamlets where plastic pollution is gaining momentum. World Environment Day has to go beyond the June 5 symbolic observation. The school syllabus must include field work for students where they adopt a river and clear it regularly apart from also making all educational institutions plastic free zones. Children need to learn to care for the environment too.

Letters to the Editor

Change of name a fundamental right

The front page of the Shillong Times, June 3, 2023, carried a news item on the "KHAID" directive against change of clan, surname." According to the news report, a statement issued by the Executive Committee quizzed the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act 1997, which prohibits change of surname without the consent of the KHAID. On June 2, 2022, the Allahabad High Court ruled that the right to keep a name of choice or change it according to personal preference comes within the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution.

The court referred to Article 19(1)(a) (freedom of speech and expression), Article 21 (right to life and personal liberty) and Article 14 (right to equality) of the Constitution of India. In allowing the petition the High Court quashed an order passed by the Uttar Pradesh Board of High School and Intermediate Education that refused an application of the petitioner to change his name. The judge ordered the UP Board to re-issue fresh high school and intermediate certificates incorporating the name change.

In its judgement, the Court observed that the human name is an inalienable part of an individual's life. The court added that the importance of an individual name is experienced in all aspects of life, including social intercourse, and that the power and glory of the

human name transcends time and is not fenced by boundaries.

In the name change by the petitioner before the court, the old and new names are names generally connected with different religions. Applications in different disciplines and traditions do not in any way restrict the fundamental right to change one's name according to the individual's wish.

Hence any law or Act, such as the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act, which infringes on fundamental rights is untenable, and liable to be struck down by the courts, if challenged.

Yours etc.,
Gilen C. Kharlongor,
Via email

Why halt recruitment to government posts?

The Meghalaya Government has recently kept in abeyance all stages of recruitment and deferred the declaration of results of recruitment to various posts until further orders, thereby causing extreme anxiety for job aspirants as well as parents as no timeline has been indicated on the matter. I do not want to go into the circumstances that led to this move but the present situation could have been avoided had the government handled the reservation roster issue in a more pragmatic manner. Now the government has to address two issues namely the review of the job reservation policy and the Reservation Roster. Whereas diverse views have emerged in respect of the former, there

Solutions to Beat Plastic Pollution

By **Hil Mohrman**

The theme of last year's World Environment Day was "Only One Earth," with focus on "Living Sustainably in Harmony with Nature." This year the theme is "Beat Plastic Pollution." Looking back a year later, the question that the world can ask itself is - what have we done to live sustainably with nature? Or have we arrived at a more serious problem today - the problem of plastic, plastic everywhere. So much so that this year is just that Beat Plastic Pollution. Waste, which includes plastic, is one of the most harmful and challenging constituents to deal with.

Waste Matter
Currently, approximately 1.3 billion tons of solid municipal waste is generated each year and it is expected to grow to 2.4 billion tons in 2020 to nearly 3.8 billion tons by 2050. In 2019, municipal solid waste (MSW) was the third largest source of human-caused methane emissions in the US (EPA). Around the world, MSW contributes 11% of total methane emissions. The majority of that has to do with food waste, which releases 4% of global greenhouse emissions.

Meanwhile, an estimated 1.6 billion tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂-equivalent) greenhouse gas emissions were generated from solid waste management in 2016. This accounts for about 9% of global emissions. In the sector, solid waste-related emissions are anticipated to increase to 2.6 billion tons of CO₂-equivalent by 2050 (World Bank document "What a Waste 2.0").

Unsound waste management has serious economic, environmental, health, and social implications. Sadly, only 30% of our waste is recycled each year. Moreover, more than 90% of trash in low-income countries is dumped in the open and burned, posing a threat to the environment, exacerbating climate worries, and making it unappealing for countries to tackle the issue immediately (World Bank document "What a Waste 2.0").

There is no such thing as "Away"
The general mindset is that if there is waste, one has to throw it away or dump it.

It is not clear as to how long the present ban on recruitment process will continue. My suggestion is to only halt the Roster issue and review the job reservation policy separately. Once the Roster problem is resolved, the ban may be lifted and the present reservation policy may be followed until the time the new policy comes into force. This will be in the interest of the youth whose careers have already been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and in view of the age limit for government jobs.

Yours etc.,
J. Lyngdoh,
Via email

India is robust enough to scrap the Sedition Law

The judgement of the Allahabad High Court needs careful examination before any comment on the sedition law. The Court says, "India's unity is not made of bamboo sticks which bend in the raging winds of cyniclogues." These remarks were made by the Court while granting bail to three Kashmiri separatists who raved words and slogans and they were booked under section 124A. The Court quoted three lines from poet Alama Iqbal's song, "Saajan-e-achha Hindustani hamara," to stress the consistency of Indian values and the strength of the Indian polity.

IPC Sections 124 A (sedition), 153-A (promoting enmity between different groups) and 505(1)(b) (with intent to cause, or which is likely to cause, fear or alarm to the public, or any section of the public), and 66-F of the Information Technology Act have been arbitrarily used in recent times. The Supreme Court too had delivered its judgement on the unnecessary use of Section 124 A and had commented that it is not sedition to have views different from that of the government's. This was in respect to the former chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir expressing his views on Article 370 which were different from that of the government's.

Earlier the Supreme Court had held that only a violent revolution against the Government would attract the charge of sedition. This judgment was passed in 1962 in the case of Kedar Nath Singh which says, "Someone's statement criticizing the Government does not make an offence of sedition or defamation." The Supreme Court has recog-

plastics so useful, which give them durability and resistance to degradation also make them nearly impossible for nature to completely break down. Plastics, including microplastics, are now part of our natural environment and can be found everywhere.

The Way to Beat Plastic Pollution
The first step to beat plastic pollution is to move from single-use to reusable plastic products and increase the use of recycled plastics. As responsible citizens, individuals can stop using plastic straws and bring their own water bottles. One can also pressure their local authority to properly manage their city's waste. Take a pledge to adopt new habits to limit your plastic footprint. When shopping, choose food with no plastic packaging, carry a reusable bag, buy local produce, and refill containers to reduce plastic waste and its effect on the environment.

We all need to become zero-waste champions and live a more sustainable lifestyle to control single-use plastic intake and bring our own reusable drinking bottles. We must be able to change what we see by advocating for change and by campaigning against using plastic in local cases and events, schools, and local suppliers. We must begin by refuse plastic cutlery and straws, and explain why.

While plastic has many valuable uses, it has become a product we have all been addicted to, single-use plastic products have economic and health consequences. It is also ironic that the same properties that make

used dissent as a symbol of a citizen's identity. Individuals who assert causes which may be unpopular for those in power are yet entitled to the freedom of speech guaranteed by the Constitution. Voices in opposition cannot be muzzled by persecuting those who speak unpopular truths. Unfortunately, the colonial-era law which says that, "whenever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation or otherwise brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the Government shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or for any term not exceeding three years of the Indian Penal Code. It is expected that such a draconian provision should be removed from the statute books.

The Law Commission had given its views recently on sedition. It comes at a time when the Government is visiting several countries. Moreover, the G20 conference is being held in India and India is the world's largest democracy, hence there should be no place for such regressive laws. The law panel's stand contradicts the Supreme Court's ruling.

Favouring the retention of Section 124A (sedition) of the Indian Penal Code, the Law Commission argued that repealing this law can have serious adverse ramifications for the security and integrity of the country. The panel, however, has made recommendations regarding amendments in the provisions, such as mandatory preliminary investigation, procedural safeguards and revision in punishment, in order to curb misuse of Section 124A. The Commission's report comes almost a year after the Centre had told the Supreme Court that it would re-examine and reconsider the sedition law. Following this assurance, the apex court had asked all state governments to refrain from registering any FIR under Section 124A while suspending all ongoing cases. The law panel's stand on the regressive legislation goes against the spirit of the Supreme Court's rulings and observations when there are other laws to deal with such cases. Its continuance in the statute book is undermining India's democratic credentials and imposing unreasonable restrictions on freedom of speech and expression. It is a well-known fact that the sedition law is largely a tool used by the State to commit excesses. It should definitely be scrapped before it inflicts more damage on our constitutional framework.

In the recent past even the United Nations Human Rights Commission took up matters of violations of human rights by the Indian government particularly related to the various violations by security forces in Kashmir after removal of Section 370 in the state.

Yours etc.,
Yash Pal Ralhan,
Via email

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

Anthroclology the Science for Survival

By **Barnes Maurie**

Today is June 5 - World Environment Day. It is being observed all over the world. Of late this day has gained more significance and acquired a sense of greater urgency, in the face of climate change that is scourging humanity and threatening its survival. Recently, climatologists have predicted that the period between 2023 and 2030 will witness some of the hottest years in history. It is in this context that I think we need to reinvent our lost relationship with our natural environment. Probably it is time to speak of Anthroclology, the science for survival.

Anthroclology is the science that studies human beings, their origin, their evolution, ethnicity and culture. It comes from the Greek root "andro" meaning man and "logos" meaning knowledge or study. Ecology on the other hand is a science that studies the natural environment. It comes from another Greek root "oikos" meaning relationship between organisms and their environment and "logos" meaning study. In many universities this



discipline is under the name of Environmental Science. Anthropology and Ecology. These are already established sciences in their own rights. They exist as important disciplines in most universities. However, today humans should not content themselves with just studying Anthropology and Ecology, but we should perhaps invent another discipline, namely, Anthroclology. Let me explain the reasons for the need for such a different type of science. Here are some of them:

The science mentioned two sciences have a great lacuna because they study two realities (man and nature) separately without establishing a connection between them. Unfortunately, the development of different sciences in the West has given so little attention to the study of our natural environment. The study of Biology, Botany or Zoology are strictly connected with the physical aspects of these elements, basically the anatomy of plants and living organisms. As such, none of these sciences deals with the seemingly "less scientific" aspect of the organic relationship between these realities. The adverse outcome of this western scientific approach is the "indifference" towards the well-being of our natural environment.

Man has overstepped the responsibility given to him by the Creator to be "stewards" of creation. He has instead declared himself as the "master" of creation, thereby almost usurping God's authority. This has resulted in "refication" or "commodification" of our natural environment, considering Mother Nature no more as a living entity but as a non-living thing to be fully exploited at will. It is precisely this materialistic outlook on Mother Nature that has led to the destruction of our planet Earth by man and today we have in hand the adverse consequences of

it all. Global warming, rising temperature and climate change are all man-made calamities. Remember what Pope Francis said: "If you slap nature, nature will strike you back." Nature is not merciful but it pays us in the same coin. Therefore, when humans try to mess with her, this is what they are getting back, calamity after calamity and the worse is still to come.

Anthroclology strictly speaking could be considered a science practiced by the tribal people. Tribal communities are that section of humanity that is closely connected to Mother Nature. They are the ones who understand and are able to feel the pulse of nature. They possess the ability to communicate with every element in nature. The Khasi ancestors used to say that once upon a time "men and beasts spoke the same language" (ubriw a m'rad, khla u thlon, kawei ka khien ki dang ki dang jikren). One of the well-known Khasi myths speaks of the common market of humans and animals, known as few Lurium. Such beliefs are very common among tribal communities all over the world. It seems that humans, basically, are an organism with ability to communicate with nature. This is projected in today's animated films and cartoons.

Anthroclology has its basis on the cognitive, affective and link to our natural environment and the realization that the Earth is an organism and everything in it (living and nonliving) are closely interconnected. The fact that we humans and other living entities on this Earth are suffering the adverse impacts of climate change caused by our greed and ambition, is a clear proof of this organic character of our planet but which we humans have set off balance.

Primitive or tribal communities are the ones who understand this science because they have been living for centuries. No wonder the world today looks up again to these communities for inspiration. For example, the institution of sacred groves popular among tribal communities, is the practical manifestation of this science and it has proven by the wisdom of our ancestors. In the present situation when the existence of our very own planet is in great danger, perhaps it is time for humanity to return to our primitive lifestyle of being intimately connected to Mother Nature. In Biblical terms, it means a return to the "Eden existence," which has every characteristic of tribal life where there was a perfect communication and communion between the Creator, humans and Mother Nature. To retrieve this lost communion would be the goal of Anthroclology.

"Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything." —George Bernard Shaw

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 133 No. 781 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7, 2023

India in the US

CURIOSLY, the US is set to have a high-profile visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi later this month. It comes close on the heels of the current visit of India's principal opposition figure Rahul Gandhi to the US. While feelings are that Rahul Gandhi went overboard in his criticism of the Modi government all through his present foreign jaunt, what came in response from the White House was a virtual snub — with a stress that, unlike what Rahul Gandhi chose to point, India "is a vibrant democracy." White House coordinator for strategic communications John Kirby, in an interaction with the media, affirmed that India remains a free country and that the evidence of which can be seen and felt by all those who visited Delhi from abroad. Overall, it was perhaps inadvisable for Rahul Gandhi to have aired negative thoughts while on foreign soil. Arguments are that such tongue-lashes have tarnished the image of the nation.

Rahul Gandhi retains the right to criticise the Modi government and sharply too while in India. When he is in the US, he represents India and it is incumbent on him to present a good picture of his nation. The negatives can wait. Some of what he stated, like "Prime Minister Narendra Modi runs the nation by looking at the rear-view mirror" — meaning his obsession is more with the past, not the present or the future — may have grains of truth; as is likely evident from his Mann Ki Baat as well, which delves more into India's past with little reference to the present state of affairs of the nation. Modi could talk about today's India from a vantage point. Yet, that has not been the case in much of his talks.

The Prime Minister would be in the US from June 22 and this would be an occasion to strengthen ties between the two nations. To his credit, Modi maintained good relations with the US and therest of the world, though, his attempts to court the Pakistani leadership failed via the much-publicized Lahore visit to greet then prime minister Nawaz Sharif on his birthday. India's ties with the US have been strong ever since the time of Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh, two Congress prime ministers, who extricated India from the socialist mindset of Jawaharlal Nehru. The US has been of help to India in international forums like the UN, though the two sides hold different views vis-a-vis issues like Pakistan. It is time to take India's friendship with the US forward, also as its significance in the context of the Chinese machinations against this country cannot be under-estimated. Such threat potentials are for real.

When it did finally take shape, one was impressed by the core ideology of clean politics, the desire to bring about change in the old age creed that elections are fought and won via cash. The think tank of the party that includes academicians knows the level of corruption in the state, to the point of normalising it. Hence the challenge was put before the public not to sink in helplessness but to rise above the ashes. The choice of 'U Prabh' (winner) as the symbol was a masterstroke. The leadership strove to clean the system of all dirt just as a winnower separates the paddy or rice from the straw, chaff and other impurities. Besides taking on corruption, prior to the last elections, the party also made amply clear that it would work to put an end to political appointments (wasteful expenditure) and do away with the irritating status symbol of ministers and legislators.

These noble ideals are appealing. The VPP caused a split winning four seats. Its

A critique of the recent happenings

By Albert Thynnyang

The suprema of the Voice of the People's Party (VPP) and Nongkrem MLA, Arden Miller Basaiwmit has called off his indelicate hunger strike. The government which had just ten days earlier insisted otherwise had to agree on constituting an expert committee to review the state's job reservation policy. The 'Gandhian' protest and the complete 11-tum of the government need a critique.

The VPP was founded on the philosophy of clean politics. Basaiwmit might have spent the time accorded to him, courtesy the loss in Assembly election of 2018 in soul searching. Returning to the UDP on which ticket he won in 2008 only to be dented the same in 2013 following his suspension was not an option. That the UDP played a role in his defeat in 2018 might have been in Basaiwmit's mind. As for the ISPPDP, the possibility did not arise though the 'Sing' (lion) party made the UDP's rebel candidate for whom he became the party's president later. The no-turnback was definite when in 2018, having lost Nongkrem, the party defied his dictate not to join the NPP led government that included the BJP. The clear choice was to focus on political identity. A team of educated citizens came together to form the VPP.

When it did finally take shape, one was impressed by the core ideology of clean politics, the desire to bring about change in the old age creed that elections are fought and won via cash. The think tank of the party that includes academicians knows the level of corruption in the state, to the point of normalising it. Hence the challenge was put before the public not to sink in helplessness but to rise above the ashes. The choice of 'U Prabh' (winner) as the symbol was a masterstroke. The leadership strove to clean the system of all dirt just as a winnower separates the paddy or rice from the straw, chaff and other impurities. Besides taking on corruption, prior to the last elections, the party also made amply clear that it would work to put an end to political appointments (wasteful expenditure) and do away with the irritating status symbol of ministers and legislators.

These noble ideals are appealing. The VPP caused a split winning four seats. Its

election song, "Shndehg Bhabh ha u Prabh" was a tearing hit during the campaigning period and lingered on long after the elections were over. School children, colleges and university students jumped and danced to the catchy tune. The VPP did not rest on their laurels but continued the election mode through their membership drives in many parts of Khasi Jaintia Hills demanding the review of the 'on-dated' and 'unfair' Reservation Policy besides elucidating its ideology. Basaiwmit, with his fiery speeches, was applauded by his supporters.

When the government did not concede to their demand the VPP boss announced that he would go for an indefinite hunger strike at the marketing lot of the additional secretary until the government accepts the review ultimatum. A grand success, the ten day long fast pulled bigger and bigger crowds that swelled every day.

A fast is a powerful political tool. From MK Gandhi to Parkash Singh to Panti Srimulu to K Chandrasekhar Rao to Manmohan Singh to Anna Hazare, all used the weapon to achieve their goals. The VPP chief too 'triumphed' over the government thanks to the media.

However, when they may look like an effective solution resulting from fasts may not be the best because decisions are taken at ransom point. Gandhi's fasts might have driven the English out too fast leaving the country in a mess including the ugly partition that caused an estimate of a million deaths. We still grapple with the many problems in the North East because the British left without sorting them out. Panti Srimulu's 58 days fast and death created Andhra Pradesh but ironically K Chandrasekhar Rao had to return to the same track to carve out Telangana many years later. The Trinamool firebrand leader's fast might have banished the Left from his bastion but West Bengal lost the Tata's investment that would have boosted employment in the state. Anna Hazare's fast was a political ploy by Arvind Kejriwal to unseat the Congress. One but still holds that the reservation policy is unfair to the Khasis.

The VPP is still in election mode. Though Paul's views that people should remain unaffected after elections are unacceptable yet the VPP

should realise that they are no longer a pressure group but a political party that has members in the Legislative Assembly. They have to pay attention to the constituencies they represent. A voter from Mawli told this writer, "We elected our MLA to solve our problems but he is busy touring the whole state. We can't meet him. Next time he will lose."

A lot of prayers were said and hymns sung during the protest days. Basaiwmit himself proclaimed that he is a religious person. He openly declared that during the 'historic' fast. He himself prayed fervently. He credited God for keeping him in good health in spite of consuming nothing except water.

He thanked God for making the government comply with the VPP's demand. If protests took place in Garo Hills where people asked for God's intervention, the government agreed to maintain the status quo. On whose side is God then? Mixing religion and politics is undesirable. The VPP is anti-BJP for being a "Hindu party" but is the VPP turning out to be a Christian chauvinist party? Then there is no difference between VPP and BJP. For votes, the saffron party too vows to be a party with a difference with zero tolerance for corruption but in reality it is on majoritarianism and polarisation.

The supreme head of the VPP is certainly Arden Miller Basaiwmit. He resembles Arvind Kejriwal. As referred above the APP's boss does not tolerate personalities who threaten his leadership. Will Basaiwmit be able to absorb difference if and when they emerge? Has he the capacity to take everyone along? Earlier in his political career, he was a "non-partisan" with the UDP. Ego shades also led to his exit. He later quit and resigned from the party when the MLAs disowned him. He did not like being among equals. How would Basaiwmit deal with things when hard days for VPP come? The decisive and strong leadership in the party refers to the head. If it means the kind of leadership then Meghalaya does not need it.

The VPP has picked the thorny Reservation Policy to polarise itself. Freeing the state from corruption, abolishing the status symbol of ministers and saying no to rehabilitation of failed party candidates as political appointees are more important issues.

4th Man in the Fire... Good ole Kapil Dev!

By Robert Clements

Not only did he lead the team of 1983 to a World Cup victory, but he set hearts aflame a few days ago as he led the same team to announce their complete support to the protesting workers in Delhi. His whole World Cup team, except Roger Binny!

Hours after the announcement, Binny distanced himself from his team, mentioning he was not part of those who had left their support to the protesting girls. One doesn't have to look far to see why Roger did this: he's been made the chief of the cricket board, and owes many his position, and doesn't obviously want to ruffle any feathers.

Sometimes back in a WhatsApp of religious men and women, I made a statement that got the group a bit ruffled. After that many called me to see what I meant or to support what I said, but one English member in particular got my attention. "Bob," he said after he had heard me out, "I fully support you and what you've mentioned!"

"Then why don't you write that on the group?" I asked.

"No, I can't do that," he said quickly. "I'm trying to do some business with a few members in the group and don't want to antagonize them."

I chuckled to myself as I finished the call and thought of a chapter in my book, DARE. "Dare to stand alone."

Here, I'd mentioned different incidents of standing alone, but I'm not going to mention them here today. I'm going to go back in time when "Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them."

Three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, dared to stand up against the might of a powerful emperor.

The Emperor, thought no end of himself, and decided to build a tall golden idol and asked everybody to bow down and worship the statue. Here are the words direct from the Scriptures: "King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before it. Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

At this time some astrologers came forward. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "These are some Jews, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or

worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "We don't have to look far to see why Roger did this: he's been made the chief of the cricket board, and owes many his position, and doesn't obviously want to ruffle any feathers."

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire with you? They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty."

He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God."

That my dear readers is the story of the 4th man in the fire. A God who will stand with you who dares to stand alone...

The Author conducts an Online Writing Course. For more details send a thumbs-up to him on WhatsApp 9892572883. (bobsbanter@gmail.com)

Ministry of ordained lies

Editor,

Through this letter I want to express my views on the news item which appeared in your esteemed paper under the caption, "6 years on, Mawkkhar Church refuses to act against defalcation," Shillong Times dated 29 May 2023.

It is very painful to see that our Mawkkhar Church, Shillong which is also considered as the mother church and one of the oldest Presbyterian Churches in Meghalaya is under the cloud not because of the faults of its members, but God only knows who is at fault as no one dares to come forward to unveil the truth.

I beg to state that my letter is not to judge, but to seek answers as to what happened to our money, that we contributed throughout the years. I know that there are members or households of the Church who had to skip a meal in order to save some money to donate to the needs and requirements of the Church. So can we allow our money to just disappear into thin air?

The fault is not that of us members who religiously follow every rule of the Church and respond to ev-

ery call whenever the need arises. The fault lies in its administration and the reason being the concentration of power in a small circle of elected elders who act in concert manipulatively.

About 23 years ago when my children were small, I put them in a Christian Mission School which is located near the Secretariat of the Presbyterian Church. It was then that I witnessed the behaviour of a few Church Executives who behaved like those Government babus, who would let the driver or peon carry their briefcase and follow behind like a chaperone in Government offices. The scene that I witnessed in those years was unbefitting of Pastors who are called to be servants, not CEOs.

But this is not a solitary case of the Presbyterian Church of Mawkkhar which is now in the public eye for the unorthodox fund defalcation. Recently in 2019 it was written in the Report of the Presbyterian Assembly of Khasi Jaintia Region that around Rs. 1,70,000.00 was reported to be missing from the account books. Subsequently an internal special audit team was constituted to look into the matter and in its report the Special audit team made several observations that there was tampering of

the account book and also observed that these matters should be handed over to specialised agencies like CID or CBI.

Now, coming back to the Mawkkhar Church, until today, why is there no one to admit or take responsibility for what had happened? Why has the Church not constituted any proper and independent committee to study the case? Or is there more to it than the sheer amount of Rs. 4.5 crores?

As reported, the Church has been receiving income tax notices. Of course this is normal and every Church organization across the State is now subjected to filing of returns as per Income Tax laws. But why did the Income Tax Department skip issuing routine notices to Mawkkhar Church? Perhaps the Income Tax Department should have followed up and taken immediate action as and when the news of alleged fund embezzlement was made public.

The Police Department is requested not to get busy with the case and urge upon the police personnel who are handling the case not to succumb to any pressure tactics from any quarter be it political or otherwise.

Besides the Rs. 4.5 crores embezzlement there was the

report about the Sohmlyong Mission and apparently there is something fishy in this mission field too. Sohmlyong village now falls under the Eastern West District and it is quite a distance from Mawkkhar. Why would Mawkkhar Church invest there in the first place? Of course, I am not saying that the villagers of Sohmlyong and its adjacent villages do not need good schools which I believe big Churches from Shillong can easily provide. But the fact is that the schemes of Mawkkhar Church should have looked at their own front yard or backyard first. There are scores of people around the area of Kilih Leih Leih, law Mawlong, Punjabi Line, etc. who are in need of the hearing touch of Christ. They need informal education, drug de-addiction and drop in centres. They are in need of proper house, sanitation and health care facilities. Working people and especially women traders or shopkeepers or those who work in shops need an extension to keep their children near their workplace. Mawkkhar Church which is located within the vicinity, is the best organ/zen to engage in such Good Samaritan acts.

Also wonder if any of the pastors or elders of Mawkkhar Church pass by the Khyndi

Lad at night. Don't they see those sex workers, both frum and straight, who are strolling by the sidewalk of the English Presbyterian Church and behind the State Legislative Assembly? These lost souls are in dire need of the hearing and helping hands of the Church. Why doesn't the Church invest its money on urban mission and train the youth of the Church to help liberate the drug addicts and sex workers from enslavement and provide them with an alternative by providing them skills training for jobs or by giving them proper education to help them earn their own money? Rs. 4.5 crores been spent wisely Shillong would have been a better place.

Finally, the reason for Pastor K. R. P. being suspended? We all know his pro-poor stance and his indomitable campaign against injustice and corruption. But the Church authorities acted against him on the grounds that he publicly take in the Campaign against Aadhaar alongside the Rev. PBM Basaiwmit which the Synod felt went against its decision by refusing to withdraw from the campaign.

But the reason for Pastor Pyruoh's suspension just because he is a victim of dirty Church politics? I believe that there is more

than meets the eye. Or is it because if he is still around and active in the Church more skeletons would tumble out from the closets or that he will not allow any cover up? It is an open secret that another Pastor Rev. M. Pyngrape of Mawkkhar Church will soon face the axe of the Church Authority for refusing to sign a doctrinal Church bond.

Since the day when the above news item appeared, the Mawkkhar Church has been the talking point in every household including mine. Initially I was trying to downplay it down when the Christian spirit of forgiveness or jingmapet in Khasi. It was reported by this shop reply "ka jingmapet" or forgiveness can't be more over or at all. It is not healthy for Church and society.

Through this letter I humbly appeal to our beloved Pastors and Church elders (I believe there are still good souls remaining) to kindly take this matter seriously and resolve it once and for all.

Yours etc., Name withheld on request Via email

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

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

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

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

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

The law is reason, free from passion.

— Aristotle

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 131, No. 296 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 2023

War of Words on State

Reservation Policy

IN terms of word count the noise from the Khasi-Jaintia side of the state has been prolific. With several articles, arguments and counter arguments put forth on the contentious Roster System vis-a-vis the State Reservation Policy. The word 'contentious' here is used to denote the conundrum that has arisen out of the State's own oversight (intentional or through ignorance) of not having a Roster System in the application of the State Reservation Policy. The leader of the Voice of Peoples' Party (VPP), Ardent Basaiawmotti went through a weeklong fast to put pressure on the Government to revisit the 50-year old Reservation Policy which reserves 40% seats for Khasi-Jaintia people, 40% for Garos, leaving 5% reserved for minor tribes and 15% remaining unreserved. There is no doubt at all that if the Roster System were to be applied with retrospective effect it would reveal that a good chunk of appointments have gone to the Khasi-Jaintia community because the Garos were not found to have scored the qualifying marks needed to occupy a certain post despite the relaxations. As a result the posts were ceded to candidates from the Khasi-Jaintia community. In fact a tabulation of the posts appropriated by the Khasi-Jaintia candidates from the 40% allocated to the Garo people in the last 50 years would reveal the quantum that passed over to their Khasi-Jaintia counterparts.

The Garo people have not been vocal about their views as to whether the Reservation Policy should be revisited and redesigned based on the population structure. Barring one article, no Garo intellectual has held forth on this issue. Some have voiced their concerns on social media but that is a completely different space. A post recently put up showed that 72 contractual appointments to different posts in the MeECL in June 2020 were from amongst the Khasi-Jaintia community. Of those posts 8 were for Khalasis, 2 for poros, etc. Most of the appointments were for the Bymnat Sub-Division. Unless the MeECL has a policy of appointing all Khasi-Jaintia candidates closer to their homes and there is a different list for the Sub-Divisions in Garo Hills it has to be concluded that no Garo qualified for any of the 72 vacancies.

The UDP's Paul Lyngdoh who has remained a silent observer of the political games being played over the State Reservation Policy has now decided to break the silence and to attribute greater wisdom to the Garo people for remaining silent on this matter even while the Khasi and Jaintia people who have benefited from the policy as it was applied in the last 50 years have been most vociferous about the need to revisit the Policy. An important reminder here is that it was someone from the Garo community that approached the Meghalaya High Court over the Reservation Policy being applied without a Roster System. The Court was appalled that a Reservation Policy could be applied without a Roster System thereby leaving room for nepotism and favouritism. It is not improbable that someone would not approach the Supreme Court should there be any attempt at tinkering with the Reservation Policy for the sake of political appeasement.

Letters to the Editor

CM's statement creates confusion on Roster System

Meghalaya & Ors. on '1972' as the year of applicability of the roster without going into the merit of the case and left it to the legislature and the executive, particularly to the new Assembly for thorough discussion since it is a policy matter.

As per the existing SRP, there is no illegality in the filling up of vacancies by other class in absence of suitable candidates from a particular class till date. Can we ask the Chief Minister, was the 'Clause 2 of the State Reservation Policy' amended by the MDA-2 government surreptitiously or had there been any discussion on the same in the new Legislative Assembly? OM of 10th May 2022 (Clause B-point #6) and 'Clause 2 of the State Reservation Policy' cannot co-exist since they contradict each other.

The CM's statement on plotting the roster numbers from 1972 is equivalent to its retrospective implementation and 'knowing where the State stands in the roster today' is a futile exercise since it did not exist in 1972 till May 2022 and hence 'Clause 2' of the State Reservation Policy remains valid till date, without any scope of remedial compensation to any class, if any, with retrospective effect. Firstly, the Government Legislative Assembly has to amend 'Clause 2 of the State Reservation Policy' in light of the OM of May 2022. (pending the Review of the State Reservation Policy as decided recently), and then prepare a fresh roster for roster of vacancies w.e.f. May 10, 2022 with serial no. 1 in a 100-200-500-etc. point roster, starting with a

The pushes and minuses from VPP's hunger strike

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The hunger strike of Ardent Basaiawmotti (VPP president and MLA) on the Meghalaya job reservation policy remains a topic of hot debate. While there were many who supported it, there were also those who were indifferent and questioned the entire exercise. Many others were fence sitters and did not come out openly to state whether they supported the hunger strike or not. This in itself is an indication of the divisions prevailing within the Khasi community.

Halt in recruitment? It was only natural that with the review of the job reservation policy all immediate and future recruitments would come to a standstill. This is a minus point. This was also one of the main reasons why many did not support or openly support the hunger strike. To some, it was like VPP was playing

question needs answering. **Halt in recruitment?** It was only natural that with the review of the job reservation policy all immediate and future recruitments would come to a standstill. This is a minus point. This was also one of the main reasons why many did not support or openly support the hunger strike. To some, it was like VPP was playing

question needs answering.

Halt in recruitment? It was only natural that with the review of the job reservation policy all immediate and future recruitments would come to a standstill. This is a minus point. This was also one of the main reasons why many did not support or openly support the hunger strike. To some, it was like VPP was playing



with fire. Now with a halt in recruitment there are those who feel that VPP has slipped over the reservation hamas. Talks of a gradual demise of VPP are also starting to gain ground. This is the solution to halt all recruitment lies in an extension to the age limit of the job-seeking youth according to the time taken by the experts to study the issue. This is a technicality that can be handled one way or the other. The larger concern is the mental impact-stress of the recruitment halt. Here, the argument put forth by some that state government jobs are a harmful only and mostly insignificant, does not hold water. This is because the impact is psychological. When even the prospects of seeing job advertisements and applying for them do not exist, the morale of the population living below the poverty line, this intervention might be much needed. Further, a specific share for the differently-abled in job reservation needs to be deliberated at this juncture.

Political lip service? As the hunger strike of Ardent Basaiawmotti en-

tered its second week, what became blatant was political lip service. There were a lot of political voices spreading discord and confusion. This is again a minus point. VPP was involved in fear mongering by citing earlier court rulings and judgements and how this would impact the existing Meghalaya job reservation. A common statement was that the people would lose all job benefits as currently ensured. Fear is a poison. The human psyche is mostly driven by this. This explains the indecision of many to support the hunger strike. From AITC and Congress, almost everything said was a personal opinion of the speaker and nothing official came out. UDP and HSDF were the major proponents of lip service and misdirection. While stating support for the review of the policy, they were also undecided and tried to shut the issue altogether. It was only when it seemed that the tide was turning against them that the UDP visited the hunger strike site with assurances of support for the cause. In the process, VPP was left with no option but to defend its stand through a series of clarifications and counter-points.

It can be fairly argued that amidst all the lip service, Ardent's hunger strike would have been untenable after the second week. The crowd would have become more confused and disheartened. This political lip service killed the hunger strike.

In the end, the desire of many is for the review exercise to conclude soon. Further, the people will have to be mentally prepared for a prolonged deliberation on the issue. One can expect to see representations and counter-representations from all the stakeholders. Addressing all of these will entail time and effort. There is also a high probability of the review process being shelved in a court of law. The VPP's hunger strike might just have opened a Pandora's Box of complications. These can only be solved if there is only if the communities come together with understanding and cooperation; else, the future looks bleak!

The writer teaches at NEHU. Email - benjamin@nehu.ac.in

MBOSE SSLC results: drastic times call for drastic measures

By Rahul Chatterjee

Every year after the SSLC results of MBOSE are declared, there is a sudden spurt in the concern for the state of affairs in schools of Meghalaya and particularly those in the Garo Hills region. While I agree there is cause for concern, my dismay is about the pace at which the concern dies out and business returns to normal. Time and again the lack of basic infrastructure in schools in Garo Hills and the state in general has been highlighted as one of the major causes behind the dismal results in Garo Hills particularly. It is true that if a child does not feel the motivation to go to school diligently every day, then nothing else will work.

Among several measures that need to be taken to motivate a child to attend school in preference to anything else, one measure certainly is a good happy-looking spacious school building, with enough space not only for conducting classes comfortably but also for sports, the arts, creative pursuits in science and basically an environment where dreams can take shape and be nurtured. The special place that school life has in each of our hearts can never be overemphasized. The years spent in school upto age 18 - the formative years of any child where the seeds for the future are sowed. A botched up schooling life has a long-term effect, and in many cases a permanent negative impact on the future success of the children passing out of such schools. Of course, there are more ways than a school building to boot up school education. But let's look at basic infrastructure first.

Through the Asian Development Bank (ADB) project 'Supporting Human Capital Development', a little more than a hundred schools in Meghalaya got a modern, spacious building along with classroom furniture, smart-class equipment, science laboratory, library facilities and the most important drinking water and toilets particularly for girls, with access for CWDs. There are close to a thousand secondary schools in Meghalaya, more than half of which are government-aided private schools where 71 per cent of the state's students are enrolled. Most are from poor families. So, attending to just over one hundred schools through the ADB project is like a drop in the ocean, but certainly a much appreciated effort. This project needs to be replicated across the state on a war footing with utmost urgency. There is nothing new in this suggestion.

My concern is also about the administration and the faculty who are meant to run these schools. Many of these schools are in places where children can learn with fun, without fear; places which attract the children more than wide open spaces and the myriad sounds of forests or angling or simply whiling away one's time. It is extremely unfortunate that COVID came just after a large number of teachers of Meghalaya were trained in the best practices from across the world, and at a time when they were all ready to implement their new skills in their respective classrooms. The lockdown for two consecutive years and the lack of opportunity to implement the learnings has certainly resulted in the training getting a low jaded.

While crises were spent on training teachers, the desired output from the same could not be derived. Of course, there were those exceptional teachers who adapted themselves to the new situation and continued to be as effective as possible. A short quick recapitulation of the training and standardization of practices across schools, I feel, would go some way in improving the scenario in Meghalaya.

Is that all? No, certainly not! The all-important 'School Climate' and 'Classroom Climate' are two facets of the same coin that play a huge role in enticing students to attend school. If children don't want to come to school because studies happen in schools, which are boring in their eyes, then we should bring them to school through the lure of games and sports, art, music, anything. Just make them come to school. Unless they come to school, teachers don't get the opportunity to influence them. It is an established fact and there are several studies that have found learning to be more effective when it is fun for children. This is where the skill of the teacher comes in. While some are naturally gifted and inclined towards making every class special, it is a skill that can be learnt, and has to be learnt. There are also those situations where children are afraid to go to school. The climate of a school is in this place where the problem lies?

It certainly is a sticky topic to talk about. I feel the easy way out of this is to provide a school handbook to remove those teachers who no longer find the spark in teaching. Unless the system is cleaned and unless fresh life is breathed into our institutions, no amount of training or infrastructure will help. We need an army of dedicated, motivated, skilled teachers who will look after the interests of education in the state and who in turn will be looked after by the government. If a dignified exit is provided to all those school teachers who do not wish to continue in their profession anymore or are physically incapable to take on the rigours, then both politically and socially there will be no regret. A large number of teachers can become an opportunity to revamp the entire education system. But care must be taken to ensure a good deal to those who opt for the provision of retirement benefits. This is certainly a profitable for the cause of education and for the government, financially and politically.

While this sounds like only the faculty were to be blamed, the school administration cannot be exonerated. In some cases, bad decisions, inflated costs, high-handedness, rampant nepotism to existing rules of Government of Meghalaya have resulted in demoralising large sections of the dedicated faculty, many of whom are old to start with. Some Streamlining administrations of schools to make them effective, while adhering to existing rules will go a long way in boosting the morale of a large section of teachers. While giving approval to names of members of SMCs, care must be taken to ensure that each member can bring value to the school. In light of the impending implementation of the New Education Policy, the role and structure of SMCs is well defined.

Another area of concern is the regular non-payment of salary to teachers. This has a very profound negative impact on the performance of teachers. When teachers don't get paid for as far as three months at a stretch, the despondency that one goes through can only be felt by one who goes through it. If results are expected from teachers, there must be accountability from the other side as well.

There is plenty of room for improvement as far as education in Meghalaya is concerned. The need of the hour is pragmatism, practicality and a burning desire by one who goes through it. Every life that is touched by quality education, is a life lost from the elite workforce of the future and what is going to be seen for the future, for which we as the adult population will be held accountable by posterity.

Rights for Persons with Disabilities Act 2016, persons with disabilities have a strong and aspirational Government and other jobs, qualifying themselves through hard work, support of parents and families, schools and colleges, support of the Government and NGOs. They are now on the threshold of stepping into the world of work with graduate, postgraduate, technical and vocational qualifications. The Government has been identifying jobs in various categories, since the Supreme Court has also passed an order in this regard. However, the lack of awareness and understanding of the provisions of the law, is often a road block to the timely implementation of the law.

The Meghalaya State Policy on the matter states: "Government will undertake identification of posts for respective categories of Benchmark Disabilities (BMD) by an Expert Committee with representation of Persons with Benchmark Disabilities and Central agencies such identified posts will be after every 3 years.

Meghalaya State Policy for Empowerment of PWDs

Intense and passionate debates regarding the State Reservation Policy for Employment have been hogging the media and other spaces for the past few weeks. The future of all sections of our society in Meghalaya, it is at stake! The introduction of another thread, in this whole web is pertinent. The 'Job Reservation Policy' for persons of the most neglected categories in our society - 'Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)'. With the Disabilities of the

particular reserved category. The government is duty bound to follow the existing SRP in toto and bring necessary amendments in relevant clauses to be in sync with the current position.

The MDA-2 Government cannot have its cake and eat it too. If these conflicting clauses are not sorted out, any fresh advertisement and recruitment will have serious ramifications on job aspirants from different categories. Since the State cannot afford to halt the recruitment process for a long time, this issue should be dealt with an urgent basis. The public would also like to know what were the amendments brought into the OM of May 2022 by the Cabinet in its meeting held on June 6, 2023.

Prof. Lakshon Koiri, Shillong-4

Post-based Roster aligns with Supreme Court Judgment and DoPT O.M.

The Meghalaya High Court Order dated 05.04.2022 on the implementation of Roster says: "In view of such deplorable state of affairs, where the absence of any roster system leaves open possibilities of nepotism and arbitrariness among the terms of submission, the further recruitment processes for all posts in the State will remain stayed in the sense that no further appointments will be made until the roster system is put in place and the rosters are prepared in respect of all posts whereupon, after applying the reservation policy, future recruitment can be conducted by adhering to the ratio of reservation."

Moreover, the Order also says: "Learned Advocate-General, who is present in

Court, acknowledges that reservation cannot be implemented without a roster and also refers to the relevant Constitution Bench judgment reported at (1995) 2 SCC 745 (R.K. Sabharwal v. State of Punjab).

But in the above referenced case 'R. K. Sabharwal vs. State of Punjab' the Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court held that reservation of jobs should apply to posts and not to vacancies. In view of this Supreme Court judgment, the DoPT issued O.M. No. 36012-2/96. Estt. (Res) dated 02.07.1997 whereby it directed that vacancy-based posts shall be replaced by post-based rosters. Moreover, the Order in the quoted para above, speaks of the implementation of a roster for 'future recruitment'.

Therefore, it is pertinent that the Committee on Reservation Policy and Roster System look into the above-mentioned details, and the above case which the High Court order referred to, and see the implementation of the DoPT order following the Judgment, and does away with the 100 or 200 point roster. In its place should be put a post-based roster, in line with the judgment of the Court. The Committee must rectify the errors and get it right this time.

Yours etc.,
Kandar II Biah,
Shillong

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

"Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey toward it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us." —Samuel Smiles

The Shillong Times SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JUNE 9, 2023

Separatists in Canada

THE Khalistan movement is again on the radar of the Indian intelligence as separatist Sikh militants flushed with cash in foreign Suk are attempting to target India from the UK, Canada etc. The "celebration" of Indira Gandhi's assassination in Canada on June 4, two days before her death anniversary, has led to the filing of a formal protest by the Indian diplomatic mission there and external affairs minister S Jaishankar has cautioned the Canadian leadership against encouragement to provocative actions. Too much need not however be read into such actions as the mood among the Sikhs in Punjab is firmly set against such adventurism as was already proven in the context of the arrest and taming of a high-profile gun-wielding Khalistan protagonist, who styled himself in the "Bhindranwale" mode there recently.

India is a mosaic of different regions, cultures, races and religions. A nation of 140 billion, it is the world's largest-populated and is by now on equal terms with neighbouring China on this count. The huge size of the population and the variety and conflict of interests that these spawn on multiple parameters are huge challenges to its governance as a single, unified and cohesive entity. Problems could keep arising, as is also seen in Manipur of late. These need to be tackled with patience and without hurt to regional or community sentiments. The people should be taken into confidence as a matter of first priority. Ulcers that surface by way of separatist movements, terrorism etc are handled with firmness and they are more or less under effective control. While separatists in Kashmir are effectively neutralized, the Khalistan movement in Punjab that raised national concern in the 1980s was tackled with sustained efforts over a period of time. In the past, the Khalistan got encouragement from Pakistan's military through its notorious ISI intelligence agency. That possibility is still there.

Sikhs are a community of valiant people. They are a pride of the Indian military for generations. Major Sikh migrations to Canada started in the 1960s and over a period of time lots of Sikhs have reached there. More so after the Delhi riots that followed Indira Gandhi's assassination, in which many Sikhs were killed by pro-Congress mobs for the unacceptable reason that some Sikh bodyguards shot the then PM down. Today, Sikhs number eight lakh in Canada, forming two per cent of the population. Sikhs are ministers in Canada while the community has built a lot of clout there and it has more MPs there than in India. Separatist pushes by some elements there should not, ideally, disturb the peace of the Sikhs there.

Letters to the Editor

Is there a dearth of experienced educationists?

Editor, The Shillong Times has been awash with articles on education these past few weeks and I wish your reporter queried him on this! In closing I put this question to all. Is the state so bankrupt that we cannot choose results-driven people from the education field; people with a proven track record in education system, to take the state forward? Kevin Phillips Shillong - 19

\$10 bn economy & equitable distribution of property

Editor, The vision of Chief Minister Shri Conrad K. Sangma to make Meghalaya aspire to emerge as a robust \$10 billion economy by the year 2028 is achievable and worth encouraging, provided certain corrective steps are put in place by initiating other revenue generating investments and more importantly, economically empowering all children of the family, to ensure a faster growth of the State's economy to achieve the above target.

With government jobs reaching a near saturation point the State Government's policy to guide the youth to inculcate an enterprising spirit of entrepreneurship, of risk taking and profit making and exploring their potentials with new and sometimes radical ideas is part of the process to reach that goal. However to take this path it is important for the government to take some bold decisions to break with certain traditional practices

No Scams in Meghalaya, only Scamsters galore

By Patricia Mukhim

The MDA-1 Government is not the first to have been involved in a scam, except that there were too many scams during its first tenure. We the people of Meghalaya who either are either sleep-walking or are in a political slumber for the most part of our lives, hardly care if public funds are diverted to private pockets which is what corruption does. In fact, the recent elections have proved beyond any shadow of doubt that corruption does not matter. The NPP came back with a resounding victory because the issue during elections was no longer about corruption but about whether a Garo or a Khasi-Jaintia would be the next Chief Minister. The Garos who are known to be astute voters even if they are not educated enough to qualify for many of the reserved jobs on offer in the last 50 years, decided they were going to show the world who will be the next Chief Minister of Meghalaya and voted accordingly. The Khasi-Jaintia people known for their split personalities as far as politics is concerned were shown their proper place. The elections also prove beyond any doubt that voting does not require brains nor intelligence nor reason. Emotions are enough!

Let me now come to the scams one by one. At this point, if any of us suspect malfeasance it is better we approach the Lok Ayukta, not because the institution is robust but because the person heading it, a former bureaucrat, is known to have an unflinching moral spine which he amply demonstrated during his career. During the MDA-1 regime the scams that shocked us were (1) The rice scam (2) The Saubhagya scam (3) The Meghalaya Assembly building scam (4) The police vehicle procurement and procurement scam amongst others. The rice scam was a public outcry against any foul play by those in Government. The Chief Minister is quick to put up his hands and he would institute an enquiry into the matter. We, the people of Meghalaya are

then lulled back to our political slumber. We don't think it is important to question as to who are the people in Government who are tasked to hand-pick the luminaries that will come into the improprieties committed. For instance, for the Saubhagya scam some retired High Court Judge from distant Uttar Pradesh was hand-picked. With him were other former officials of the power sector. What were the terms of reference of the enquiry? Did the Government put it up for public viewing? No, it didn't and neither did we the slovenly public ask for it. So finally, the enquiry ended and the result as expected was that there was no scam. Satnam Ghobal the firm that was paid an excess of Rs 149 crore as per the preliminary audit done by the CAG in 2021 came out clean as a whistle. Satnam Ghobal had the last laugh and in the end it became a case of just some restless citizens crying foul and the TMC which poked at the government during the Assembly session having to eat humble pie.

For the rice scam we wished for yet another retired High Court judge from distant Madhya Pradesh. How convenient! In the rice scam, fortified rice meant for the poor was diverted into some private godowns in Assam for further transportation into the open market. This is the rice that Prime Minister Modi said would be fortified with micronutrients to eradicate anaemia. A whistle blowing group - The Reporters' Collective accessed documents from the Union Finance Ministry had flagged this scheme because it had not been adequately tested for its impact on human health. India's leading medical research body had conducted wider consultations following "serious concerns". On the adverse effects of fortified rice on children. But the Prime Minister ignored this warning and the Government announced that it was going to supply fortified rice to

over 80 crore poor Indians. Experts aver that artificial injection of micronutrients by fortification is not a long term solution. They propose instead a diversified diet and food that could be accessed by the poor at affordable prices. Fortified rice is made by pounding normal rice into a dough and mixing it with micronutrients. The dough is then put through machines to churn out grains that resembles rice known as fortified rice kernels. One kernel is mixed with 100 grams of rice and supplied through the public distribution system (PDS). Women using this fortified rice complained of it tasting insipid while take more time to boil. They called it plastic rice. This scheme was discontinued in March 22. If this rice was coming to the Social Welfare Department then it can be concluded that the minister concerned had made a lot of money by diverting this rice to the open market.

I had begun to believe that Paul Lyngdoh, Tourism and Social Welfare Minister had graduated into a scamman from the manner he commented on the revised version of the State Resource Policy and on hearing his views on the State Women's Commission. Many are in agreement with Paul Lyngdoh when he stated upfront that the Commission for Women should not be a political acolyte of the ruling party but one who understands the working of the Commission and its mandate and can deliver justice to women across the board when they approach the Commission for help. It was disappointing that Paul's propensity to defend the Department heads (Social Welfare) vis-a-vis the rice scam and to say that the allegations were baseless. Granted that the former Minister for Social Welfare was a UJFP man and that Paul is compelled to defend a colleague in the Party, but, in matters relating to distribution of food grains

at subsidised rates which are diverted to the open market, he should be with the people, not the Party. It cannot be a case of the Party right or wrong. Mr Lyngdoh should realise that the UDP as a Party is peripheral to the voters. They voted Paul Lyngdoh the man with the hope that he would provide leadership in governance; not that he would defend a scam. The Assembly dome collapse case was quickly given to IIT Guwahati to investigate. No one knows what exactly the findings are and if responsibility has been fixed. All the three enquiries into three major scams that rocked Meghalaya during the MDA-1 regime have been given a quiet burial. This in itself is a scam. The public of Meghalaya has the right to know the findings of each of the enquiry committees. The reports should be put up in the public domain. Not doing so means that Government is hiding these findings from the public because there are things that it would rather that the public not see. Where then is the transparency in governance? If these enquiry reports had been put up in the public domain perhaps the public would have been different.

Here I am reminded of a quote from Aldous Huxley, "Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored." A scam ignored will lead to a bigger scam. The rice scam is real; so too is the Saubhagya scam relating to smart meters. The Assembly dome collapse must be explained. Thankfully a private citizen filed a PIL on the police vehicle and construction scam and the investigation on this is ongoing. To tell the informed public that there has been no scam and that all allegations were figments of our hyper-active imagination is to evade in all ways the questions that are murky and toxic that it verges on the sin of bearing false witness against reality. The public must get to read all the enquiry reports as each of the scams involves public funds.

Sense or No Sense - Economics of Meghalaya

By Rudi Warri

A very compelling last three weeks. I had to go water hunting. The two sources of water supply from the Shnong and from PHE had both failed. I will not bore the readers with the reasons. Mercifully, the rain Gods were kind enough to send a brief spell of downpour plus the purchased water that somehow sustained me and my family. Nonetheless had to do away with some part of my daily ablutions. Having lived in underdeveloped parts of the world across continents, now in my own hometown I have to water hunt. On World Water Day March 21, the Meghalayan would contribute 6% of its water to India. Where will that come from?

The other is the perennial power outage or load shedding. The reports should be put up in the public domain. Not doing so means that Government is hiding these findings from the public because there are things that it would rather that the public not see. Where then is the transparency in governance? If these enquiry reports had been put up in the public domain perhaps the public would have been different. Here I am reminded of a quote from Aldous Huxley, "Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored." A scam ignored will lead to a bigger scam. The rice scam is real; so too is the Saubhagya scam relating to smart meters. The Assembly dome collapse must be explained. Thankfully a private citizen filed a PIL on the police vehicle and construction scam and the investigation on this is ongoing. To tell the informed public that there has been no scam and that all allegations were figments of our hyper-active imagination is to evade in all ways the questions that are murky and toxic that it verges on the sin of bearing false witness against reality. The public must get to read all the enquiry reports as each of the scams involves public funds.

obtained from NITI Aayog otherwise one can only extrapolate about other data for Meghalaya from what is available about India. The book, "The Crooked Timber of New India," by Parag Mehta has a chapter on India's unemployed, unemployable and unskilled. It says, "although we enjoy a massive demographic advantage for the rest of the world, our labour force hopelessly lags behind in skills and training. Only about 35% of our labour force has undergone any formal skill training. Compare that with 68% in the UK, 75% in Germany, 52% in the US, 40% in Japan and 96% in South Korea." Does the concept of reskilling even exist in Meghalaya if it has to be reskilled under IIT hub to absorb the expanding Gen Z as one of the slogans claim!

Historical analogy notwithstanding, the appointments of Chairman, Co-Chairmen, Advisors, etc. in all kinds of vacuous high profile bodies. At last count there were 22 of them. In 1765 the British appointed the East India Company as Diwan for the purpose of collecting revenue. The British exacerbated the system further by granting the rights to own land to zamindars whose authority was to collect revenue from the farmers and peasants; yield or no yield from cultivation. In Meghalaya political rally republics. Who cares about rationality or moral rectitude? So the treasury defers an approximate Rs 4-5 lakhs per month. The government on honorarium, P.O.L, house rent, electricity, hospital, medical allowance, conveyance, furnishings, maintenance, etc. for all its office staff, newspapers and magazines. Paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln, I characterize the government by the politicians and the politicians and for the politicians. For someone like me who as a fledgling economist participated in the September 10, 1968 in the Non-Violent Direct Action picketing at the then Assam Secretariat with the risk of being shot, I can't help but feel bitter at the callous disposition of public funds. 1968 was when most of the current rulers were still in the realm of the unknown universe.

World Bank to Meghalaya to achieve \$ 10 billion economy goal, read the headlines. Ambassador to Meghalaya that the Space Economy Leaders Meeting (SELM) of G 20 was held in Shillong, He-vides Shillong. Ambassadors and delegations from Japan, Korea, Germany, US, the European Union visiting to look for investment and cooperation in infrastructure and several other sectors. Coincidentally, the Korean delegation happened to be in Shillong and feel about the water scarcity and load-shedding, so they offered their assistance. All this is aimed at growth which is imperative for development in sectors like health and education. And it shouldn't be like in India where the wealth of Adani grew from \$ 8 billion in 2014 to \$ 140 billion in 2022 whereas the hunger index of India is 107 out of 121 countries and the human development index is 132 out of 191 countries.

The National Multi-dimensional Poverty Index Baseline Report 2020-21 placed Meghalaya at 32.75% poverty while Mizoram is only 9.8%. Why not spend some money for authentic economic advice on Amartya Sen or Abhijit Banerjee and Duflo? They were awarded the Nobel prize for their work on development, welfare economics and the poorness in society. Observe the scenario makes many people like me feel we are being taken for a creek and end up about making sense or no sense. The writer is former diplomat

Climate crisis in Garo Hills

Editor,

Climate change is an issue that requires urgent attention because it has a range of adverse effects on the environment and people's well-being. The Garo Hills

region of Meghalaya in India is no exception. In this area, several factors contribute to climate change, including deforestation, slash and burn cultivation, illegal timber logging, illegal stone quarrying, mining and the burning of fossil fuels. One of the significant impacts of climate change in the Garo Hills region is the increase in temperature, which leads to heat waves, hotness, and high humidity. These extreme weather events can cause dehydration, heat exhaustion, and even heat stroke, particularly among vulnerable groups such as the elderly, children, and people with pre-existing health conditions.

Another impact of climate change is the drying of natural water bodies, springs, streams, and tributaries of major rivers. The reduction in water resources can affect agriculture and livestock rearing, which are major sources of livelihoods in the region. Additionally, the reduced availability of water can lead to conflicts between communities over access to water resources. As a result, climate change exacerbates poverty, particularly in rural areas.

Moreover, climate change has made rainfall patterns and intensity unpredictable, leading to waterlogging and landslides. The reduced rainfall during monsoons affects agriculture, which is the backbone of the rural economy. The productivity of the rural economy is heavily dependent on water, and with less water, the farmers' productivity is at risk, causing food insecurity.

Monsoons are a crucial source of rain in many regions of the world, and they play a crucial role in supporting agriculture, recharging water reservoirs, and supplying drinking water to communities. However, climate change is making monsoons increasingly unpredictable, leading to several significant impacts on the environment and communities in Meghalaya, North East India. The shortfall of monsoons due to climate change has reduced the availability of water for irrigation and drinking. This deficit in rainfall is leading to crop failures and food shortages, resulting in increased poverty and malnutrition. The agricultural sector is being adversely affected as crops like paddy solely depend on rainwater, leading to cracks on the soil surface or flooding during heavy rains.

The variability of rainwater due to climate change can also affect human health, especially in areas where water scarcity is a recurrent problem. During drought seasons, people may have to walk long distances to find water, leading to dehydration and waterborne diseases. Additionally, the decrease in rainfall can lead to the depletion of water in the soil, leading to the drying up of vegetation and forests, threatening biodiversity, and reducing habitats for wildlife.

Moreover, the excess or shortage of rain can also lead to flooding and landslides, causing damage to infrastructure, crops, and loss of human lives. The shortage of monsoons due to climate change is causing several problems in the Garo Hills region, affecting the water availability, food security, agricultural sector, and human health. Tackling these

issues through long-term and effective measures like agricultural adaptation, afforestation, and sustainable water management can mitigate the impact of this human-induced climate crisis and help the region become more resilient to the impacts of climate change. Lastly, the increase in temperature and reduced rainfall leads to the drying up of the soil, causing cracks on the soil surface, fundamentally affecting crop yields. The cracking paddy fields can result in crop failures, leading to food shortage in the region.

To address these issues, it is crucial to adopt measures that mitigate climate change. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and committing the use of renewable energy sources can mitigate climate change. Additionally, enhancing water conservation measures, such as rainwater harvesting, can ensure that communities have access to water even during droughts. Adopting climate-smart agricultural practices can help farmers improve their yields and reduce their vulnerability to climate change.

In conclusion, the adverse impact of climate change on Garo Hills is a reality that requires broad-based support from all stakeholders. Immediate and targeted action can mitigate its adverse effects and support the region's transition to a more sustainable economy. Yours etc, Sangar R Sangma Program Head, CEPARD Garo Hills

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers/authors and not that of the Shillong Times. The 17 goals of SDG: 2030 about Meghalaya can only be

"Success is the sum of small efforts - repeated day in and day out." -Robert Collier

The Shillong Times

Vol No: 155 No. 291 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JUNE 10, 2023

Manipur continues to burn

THE visit of Union Home Minister Amit Shah to the troubled state of Manipur and his meeting with different communities there has hardly quelled the violence which continues unabated. The HM is not one who can understand the underlying and deeply entrenched ethno-centric pulls that define the present state of violence. If politics was not the driving factor and if any other government, other than a BJP-led one was in place, President's Rule would have been the most logical step for the central government to take. Manipur has been in the grip of central rule on ten occasions in the past. This speaks a lot about the political instability that is the hallmark of Manipur. At this point it would be fair to say that governance has completely failed because anyone can be shot at any time and armed gangs are moving around in army uniforms and are fully armed.

The interview given by Pramot Singh, leader of the Meitei Leepan a militant outfit that swears unabashed loyalty to Chief Minister Biren Singh, to Karan Thapar of The Wire, was a direct call to arms to all Meiteis who he said would soon converge, overcoming all differences and that the Kuki-Chin tribes whom he termed as illegal migrants in Manipur would be dealt a 'blow,' much fiercer than the May 3 violence. In any other country with a rule of law, Pramot Singh would have been apprehended for directly and indirectly threatening to wipe out the Kuki-Chin-Zo tribes from their habitat. Singh even termed the Anglo-Kuki war of 1917-1919 where the Kukis staged an uprising against the British but finally lost the battle, as a myth. The spark for the May 3 violence was the torching of the memorial gate of the Anglo-Kuki war in Churachandpur. In this atmosphere of unending hostility by the leaders of Meitei outfits (known to have undergone arms training) on national television, any talk of peace seems sarcastic. From reading the mind of Pramot Singh it would appear that the Meiteis are in readiness for a fight to the finish. The Meiteis are unwilling to see Manipur visected although what the Kuki-Chin-Zo MLAs are demanding is a separate administration that is not reliant on the Imphal valley-based government which is seen as partisan and anti-tribal.

It is true that the Kukis have been levelled as puppy growers with a vested interest in the drug trade which has afflicted the young across the North Eastern Region and the rest of India - heroin being the drug of choice at parties. This according to Intelligence Bureau sources is a Rs 50,000 crore annual trade. According to Manipur special anti-drugs unit, Narcotics and Affairs of Barde (NAB) the Biren Singh Government has destroyed 18,664 acres of poppy cultivation from 2017 to 2023. Those benefiting from the trade would naturally resent the Government's intrusion into what they consider their part of the territory. Perhaps a better handling of this situation taking the Kuki MLAs into confidence might have yielded better results with less acrimony and violence.

Will HM's visit quench the thirst of Sanamahism spirit in Manipur?

By Dr. Thangzakup Tombing

The epochal mayhem that was unleashed in the state of Manipur on May 3, 2023 continues to ravage the residents of Manipur with the loss of lives and properties. If this mindless violence continues there is likelihood that Manipur might turn into mass graveyards, as there is fear that it will spill over to all the other communities in Manipur as well. Even during the visit of the Hon'ble Union Home Minister, Amit Shah, villages were burnt and lives continued to be lost. It seems as if some kind of an unquenchable thirst for hate and bloodshed had engulfed the mind and soul of people who are executing this mayhem.

Those who follow the history of Manipur in post independent India will all agree that it has always been one of the most volatile and most dangerous States in India. Since its annexation to the Union of India in 1949, Manipur had witnessed the formation of numerous secessionist armed groups, insurgency and counter insurgency operations reached its peak in early 1980s and continued till the late 1990s. With the signing of the SACA in 2008, a tripartite agreement led to the unleashing of an unquenchable thirst for violence in the valley. The Kangleik Sanamahism Traditions and its Imaged Supremacy Meitei historians and academicians would propagate that the Meitei community gradually migrated to the current Imphal valley area about 3000 years ago. According to them, the initial stages of Meitei Kingdom and the evolution of the Sanamahism religion were shrouded in mystery and mysticism. The royal bloodline of the Ningthouba clan was descended from the deity Pukhbangla. The deities Leimorai Salsibi or Einouma are the blessed deities for a Meitei household and worship. They also have deities for tutelary, clan, village etc. All these well-evolved institutions were documented in their puyas written in their indigenous manuscript. The notion of Sanamahism is the embodiment of a deep and sacred spirit of the animist, polytheistic, and unidivided identity of being an indigenous Meitei.

"Those who follow the history of Manipur in post independent India will all agree that it has always been one of the most volatile and most dangerous States in India. Since its annexation to the Union of India in 1949, Manipur had witnessed the formation of numerous secessionist armed groups."

Subjects to convert them to Vaishnavism. During this time many of the Meitei traditional manuscripts and puyas were burnt. Eventually, with the conversion of the larger section of Meitei society to Christianity, Kangleik was renamed as Manipur. Despite their conversion they continued the worship of their traditional deities like *emang pukhbangla* etc. Vaishnavism among the Meitei, therefore, is a synthetic form of both Vaishnavism and the *Sanamahism*.

After their conversion, nuances of casteism also started to take root within the Meitei social life. Gradually caste-based discrimination also affected the interaction of Meiteis with the hill tribes. They started treating the hill tribes as impure and also distanced them. Due to the change in the attitude of the Hinduised Meitei community towards the hill tribes, the hill tribes which was earlier used to address the hill tribes gradually metamorphosed into something which was construed as 'untouchable' and unidivided. For almost 200 years this became the prevalent and crystallized attitude of the Meitei

community towards the hill tribes. However, in the 1930s there was a call for revival of the sanamahism religion. The call for revival was triggered by the bitter experiences of Meiteis faced by the Meitei Hindus from the larger Bengal Hindu community for initiating the Bengali Hindu ways of life. The revival reached its peak in the 1990s.

The Unleashing of Mayhem on May 3, 2023

The Kangleik *Sanamahism* revival agenda seems to have found a conducive political environment in the present political dispensation. It is alleged by the Kuki-Zo researchers and scholars that almost all the political leaders in Manipur including an MP from the Meitei community are either directly or indirectly associated with Meitei organizations like Arambai Jangal and Meitei Leepun. These two organisations are alleged to be the resurgence of the military storm-trooper wing of the erstwhile Kangleik kingdom. Their objective is to carry out orders and execute caste-based discrimination against the titular king who patronises them.

Unlike the *Matichow* or learned priests of the ancient Kangleik, the Meitei *Sanamahism* revivalists are not, as they claim, Meitei supremacists who have no knowledge, wisdom, or expertise about the potential power of the *Sanamahism* spirit, might have ended up arrogantly unleashing ravishing and annihilating spirits merely for the revival of their *Sanamahism* revival agenda. This observation is pertinent because the very notion, nature, and character of the *Sanamahism* runs counter to the very essence of Hinduism, and it is also anomalous to the democratic and Constitutional values and spirit of India. The nascent at this stage, the logic advanced might be the most plausible explanation to the cause of violence of such an unprecedented brutal scale was unleashed by the Meiteis against Kukis in the Imphal valley from May 3 onwards with abject and appalling disregard for the rule of law. Reported sporadic incidents of communal violence during the visit of Union Home Minister suggest that the thirst for violence still persists.

The writer is Assistant Professor of Law, National Law University and Judicial Academy, Assam.

Round The States

By Insaaf

Balavore Train Tragedy Politics goes off track

Politics over human tragedy is sadly a given. The devastating train accident in Balavore, Odisha turns out to be yet another unfortunate example confirming it. The CBI investigation into the crash, which led to over 288 deaths and over a 1000 injured is far from being questioned by the Opposition. Demanding accountability, transparency and of course Rail Minister Vasanta's 'sacred' trials Congress and TMC are among other tarring the probe as an attempt to suppress the truth. Three times Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee said: "I also gave the Gyareshwari Express case (148 lives were lost) to CBI but no result came. 12 years over but we see no result. CBI had no criminal and no political leaders." Interestingly, Congress was on the same page. Party President Kharge has in a letter to Prime Minister Modi said the CBI is meant to investigate crimes, not railway accidents, or any other law enforcement agency, can fix its accountability for technical, institutional and political failures. They lack technical expertise in railway safety signaling, and maintenance practices. The people in charge don't want to admit there are problems.

The train tragedy indeed is an eye-opener for all. The Opposition charge that all the empty safety claims of the Railway Minister 'stand exposed' may not be off the mark. There is and should be serious concern among common passengers and safe travel.

And while the mystery surrounding the devastating crash will take time to be solved, the Ministry must prioritise installation of mandatory safety standards and equipment across railway routes to ensure safety of passengers. How will the CBI probe bring any clarity? Besides the need for serious introspection and there can be no two questions that there is need for a massive infrastructure upgrade across the rail network, including tracks, and train safety. Modernisation and bullet trains is all very good, but safety of passengers must be top priority. Governments sadly have shown little interest to address the systemic safety malaise. A Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture had criticised the complete apathy and negligence of the Railway Board towards recommendations of the Commission of Railway Safety and pulled up the latter. Does the ruling dispensation ever learn from mistakes, is a question which begs an honest response. Making enquiries with other major accidents and counting the dead still end? Remember, a stitch in time saves nine.

The writer is Assistant Professor of Law, National Law University and Judicial Academy, Assam.

This message by Deputy Chief Minister Fadnavis after violent protests and stone pelting broke out in Kullu city on Wednesday last snarls of straight talk and no mincing of words, as the Shinde government completes one year. The protests erupted after a ban on call by pro-Hindutva outfits seeking action against objectionable social media posts by a few locals reportedly glorifying Mughal emperor Aurangzeb and Bibi Jahan. Mysore ruler Tipu Sultan, a day before. The police had to use teargas after stones were hurled and subways and vehicles damaged. So far 36 people have been arrested, and multiple cases registered. While the police claim the situation is gradually returning to normal, internet services had to be suspended and protesters' orders were issued on June 9 banning assembly of five or more persons. Politics as usual was played out, with a letter to Prime Minister Modi between a statement of an Opposition leader about likely riots and subsequent 'clarification' of Aurangzeb and Tipu Sultan. The Shinde government is conducting a probe into the incident and the government has decided to set up separate peace committees comprising members of all communities. The government has decided to celebrate all festivals in Kullu. However, NCP chief Sharad Pawar claimed that the government has given to some parties and "the ruling parties are encouraging such things."

'Bonhomie' Over

It's back to square one in West Bengal! The Writers Building and Ra. Bhavan are at loggerheads, again. "Unilateral, illegal... we won't recognise them" is Mamata Banerjee government's reaction to Governor Ananda Bose appointing interim VC's to 11 state-owned universities. The VC's appointments completed their extended tenures. Bose, as Chancellor of all universities, is appointing them without consulting the department, said the Education Minister, prompting the formation of a committee to recommend mean concurrence. "The bonhomie between the two sides is short lived, as was the case with Bose at first. After he put his feet down in May for another 6-month extension, knives were brought. Bose also became accused of delaying appointing the new State Election Commissioner. Mamata had to propose a new VC, but the first was rejected. She awaits patiently, for how long is the big question."

Pro-Khalistan Momen-tum

Denial may not be a good remedy for both the Centre and Punjab government. Pro-Khalistan slogans being raised on the Golden Temple premises on Tuesday last should not be taken lightly. Many could pass it off as supporters and radical Sikh outfit Dal Khalsa's activists abusing the 50th anniversary of Operation Bluestar, but there must be caution. Placards bearing portraits of slain militant leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranvalle were seen and so also Khalistan flags, slogans of 'Khalistan Zindabad' were also raised by MP Simranjit Singh Mann and a former associate at the Akal Takhi. It was reported that the entire market periphery of Golden Temple near Akal Takhi, the supreme temporal seat of Sikhs, echoed with pro-Khalistan slogans. And while the event passed off peacefully, it is not secret that Sikh radicals are trying to rattle up the movement. Recall that the militant separatist leader Amritpal Singh and the incident at Indian High Commission in London was also a brew of this. This thinking needs to be altered. Sooner the better. -INFA

Whither reproductive rights?

Idina May I narrate an incident about a 19-year old girl (pseudonym Idina) that throws light on the plight of young women in our state. Idina is a child of a single-mother, working as a domestic help taking care of herself, and supporting her mother and step-siblings. Despite the adverse social challenges, she realised the importance of education and enrolled herself in school in search of a little companionship, she started going out with a boy in the city. I do not want to get into the details but long-story short, she was coerced to initiate a sexual relationship, which resulted in pregnancy.

New come the more horrifying part of the saga. As soon as she missed her period (menstruation), she approached one of the prominent hospitals to avail a medical termination of pregnancy (MTP). She was told that they conduct MTP only for disabled or for me victims! They asked her to go to a tertiary referral hospital where apparently she was told that "They need to inform the school." Stigmatised and traumatized, she became fearful of the health system. She felt compelled to return to her maternal home, where the father and visited her to go ahead with the pregnancy. Please note that she is unhappy, not prepared to be a mother, and definitely does not see a future with the unemployed father of the unborn, who has

already started misbehaving through acts of intimate partner violence. As a public health professional it pains me to see a young teenage girl slipping into the vicious cycle of poverty, thanks to the attitude of health personnel who could try to see that treating doctors in Meghalaya are among teenage pregnancies. I hope she will not become another statistic. If so, will it not be true to say that the treating doctors, who are supposed to save lives, failed her?

Yours etc, Dr Eliza Datta, Shillong

What VPP has forgotten to demand

The VPP in its show of strength had demanded only the revision of the Reservation Policy, 1972 and had not demanded for prospective implementation of the Roster System. The CM, Conrad Sangma, had, in an issue of The Shillong Times of June 7, 2023, stated, "The roster is a continuous process and the continuous starts with August 1972. We have been insisting that for the past many years." What he had been maintaining for the past many years, only he can answer. Of course, it was not the roster. The roster started only from May 10, 2022, the date of issue of the Order pertaining to the matter. Had the VPP demanded for the prospective implementation of the roster, the CM would not have said as such.

Retrospective implementation of the roster is bad for the Khasi-Jaintia Other Minor Tribes and Unreserved categories. Without maintaining a roster for the past 50 years, the MDA-2 is searching for a blue cat in a dark room where it is not. When the Central Government, under the order of the Supreme Court, implemented the past-based roster from July 2, 1997, we were advised to enter in the new roster only the incumbent SCs, STs, OBCs who are still in service, not those who had retired, resigned or deceased. They were placed in the roster against the prints reserved for them. The reservation started only from the points after the existing SCs, STs, OBCs were incorporated. Backlog reserved vacancies were assigned to limbo. Yours etc, A Pyrbu, Shillong-793014

Dark humour that is Meghalaya

I began with a chuckle. Then I repeated it loudly to myself. And I couldn't hold back. I laughed with laughter. No Scams in Meghalaya, only Scammers galore! by Patricia Mulhim (Friday, June 9, 2023) was just too hilarious a heading! I'm still giggling as I write this response!

What has intrigued me over the years is that many social organisations have been vociferous over political appointments of retired bureaucrats in various departments, but the practice continues! Will it be incorrect to assume that the civil servant while in office was 'difficult' to the personal acquaintances of politicians? Also party hopping politicians who have been rejected

Inadequate rainfall --- a grave concern

In the face of the global climate crisis, it is always worthwhile for governments to support and recognize individuals who actively engaged in environmental conservation. On this Environment Day, the Government took a commendable step by honouring Patricia Mukhim, a senior journalist, for her and her team's relentless initiative in cleaning the rivers that pass through Shillong town. The Chief Minister also awarded several Durbat Shingm and NGOs.

Leading the dedicated members of OCU Operation Clean-Up, Ms. Mukhim and her team have been working sincerely to combat the growing waste and pollution in the city waterways. Despite the many 'challenges' they face, their unflinching determination has become an "inspiration" for many. It is worth noting that the recurring threats of garbage that "soil" the city waterways and their clean-up activities are really disheartening. However, the OCU team remains resilient and has continued the work for the past 10 years. Their commitment is a testament to their dedication to restoring the ecological balance in the state. It is not less discouraging that there is still a lack of "strict prohibition orders" from the authorities against the dumping of garbage near these water bodies and drainage though the Government made the promise in the last meeting. The absence of, "concrete action" reveals a laddakast attitude on the part of the authorities concerned. This lax approach not only "undermines" the efforts of the concerned citizens but also perpetuates the cycle of pollution and environmental degradation.

It is high time for the Government to take decisive action by implementing strict prohibition orders against "garbage dumping." Installing CCTV cameras points to a must. This also goes a long way in winning the hearts of environment-conscious citizens/NGOs.

It is also urge the Government to sincerely find out the underlying factors responsible for the inadequate rainfall in our town and the entire state. What is "blowing away" our share of rain clouds? It is, in fact, a more serious concern than any other.

Yours etc, Sajib Gellwi, Shillong

How India's 'slum-free' revamp fails residents



By Kati Marnane

In Ahmedabad, India, standing where families once built their homes under the shade of large trees. Today, those houses are a flattened dust bowl at the edge of a construction site. Apartment buildings are replacing the low-rise, high-density settlement called Ramapur No Tekro, the city's biggest informal settlement.

I'm feeling the inevitability of political forces intent on shaping the city in a new image. Walking through the community, I see shops closed and homes reduced to rubble. It's hard to reconcile these images with the once-vibrant streets I remember.

The 8,500 homes that housed 150,000 people in Ramapur No Tekro are being redeveloped as the government aims to achieve a "slum-free" India.

Although the stated aim of providing affordable housing to bring people out of poverty gives me hope, I feel heartbreak and frustration as residents continue to be short-changed. They receive poor compensation, the underlying reasons people build informal housing are not addressed, and authorities refuse to see value in the informal architecture that the residents created. Apartment designs lack key features of the settlement that our recent study identified as improving residents' lives.

One size does not fit all

Residents will receive a new apartment if they can prove they have lived here since 2010. To do this, they must have original documents such as electricity bills, government survey, or birth certificates. Those who qualify for an apartment will get compensation to cover rent while construction

is completed but they must dismantle their home before relocating.

Renters, more recent arrivals and those who lack the required paperwork are ineligible. They must relocate permanently at their own expense, often far from community support networks, livelihoods and schools.

Even for those who do qualify for new housing, nearby rental accommodation is hard to find due to high rents and/or caste discrimination. When residents return, their new apartment will consist of one room with a small entry space, kitchen and bathroom – regardless of the size of their family or of their previous house.

As an incentive for developers, height and setback restrictions have been eased. This allows more apartments to be sold for profit.

How suitable design improves lives

In a recent study, Kelly Greenop and I examined the design of the "slum" I now stand in, before it was demolished. We identify four features that help improve living conditions:

- Houses are located near work, schools, healthcare and family
- Residents have control over design and construction, upgrading only when affordable, which creates a sense of ownership that means residents are more likely to invest in and maintain common areas, and also can give priority to spending on children's education
- Houses are clustered in groups that connect neighbours, and designs typically feature an entry porch, which allows activities from small dwellings to spill into common areas and fosters social connection
- Neighbourhoods have a clear hierarchy and scale of shared spaces: from private house

to semi-private porch, to semi-public common area, to public street. Spending time in shared spaces directly outside the home helps to build strong community bonds.

What makes a house adequate?

To understand what aspects of informal housing design work (or not), we compared the information we gained from interviews with women residents and detailed house and neighbourhood drawings against the United Nations' Adequate Housing Criteria. The criteria state that housing must:

- Provide secure tenure
- Provide essential infrastructure, such as water and electricity
- Be affordable
- Be habitable, providing adequate space, structural stability and protection from the elements
- Be accessible
- Be located close to services, such as health, employment and education, and support networks, including extended family
- Enable the expression of cultural identity.

By definition, informal houses do not meet the first criterion. However, houses in Ramapur No Tekro often met three to six of the other criteria, with some exceptions performing poorly.

Are slum redevelopments adequate?

Research by Uchita Vaid on housing quality before and after redevelopment reports that new apartments provide security of tenure (meeting criterion 1) and essential infrastructure (meeting

criterion 2). But the new buildings fail to meet either criteria. They suffer from substandard structural quality and lack of maintenance (failing criterion 4). They lack shared space for neighbourly interaction, resulting in more social isolation (failing criterion 6). And more time spent inside leads to higher electricity bills (failing criterion 3).

Apartments are inaccessible to household goats and chickens, and are too small for multi-generational living or common employment types (failing criterion 5). They do not reflect household identity or allow for cultural expression (failing criterion 7).

It's difficult and expensive to correct such faults in apartments after they're built. Ramit Debnath and colleagues have shown that discomfort from poor redevelopment design causes some residents to move back into informal settlements.

Community-based design matters

Housing design alone cannot change the persistent structural inequality facing low-caste and low-income residents of "slums". But good design can improve wellbeing, opportunities for social connection and residents' daily lives in general.

In Ramapur No Tekro, residents could and did create solutions adapted to their challenging circumstances. Instead of starting from scratch – risking the introduction of new problems – housing interventions should engage with and learn from residents by enhancing what already works, even in so-called "slums". (*The Conversation*)

(The author is Honorary Associate Lecturer in Architecture and Urban Design, The University of Queensland)

Indian children's books can bridge the gender gap in STEM

By Monika Sharma and Sreemee Bhattacharyya

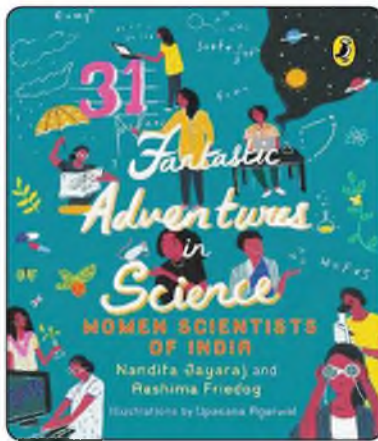
While there have been a good number of Indian women scientists changing the world with their radical work, all the names we hear in everyday conversations about science are a bandwagon of male scientists, Ramanujan, Jagdish Chandra Bose, etc. We do not hear about the first Indian woman doctor, Dr Anandibai Joshi, or even the extraordinary female botanist Janaki Ammal.

We believe children's books by representing women scientists can foster an early introduction to women scientists and by changing the public perception of who a scientist can be, increase the motivation in young girls to become one, bridging the gnawing gender gap.

There have been some phenomenal children's books from Indian authors that tackle this gender divide in groundbreaking creative ways. An introduction to these books can help inspire young girls to feel confident to pursue the sciences. Youki Terada in her opinion piece writes that children's science books represent male scientists three times as much as female scientists. By making a conscious inentional change in these gender-biased representations, children's book authors can revolutionise the way young girls think about their potential to be STEM leaders.

A children's book titled *31 Fantastic Adventures in Science: Women Scientists of India*, with the word "adventure" in its title, makes science seem like a fun challenge instead of a daunting inhibition.

The book, written by Nandita Jayaraj and Aashmia Friedeg, unravels stories about Indian women scientists who brought

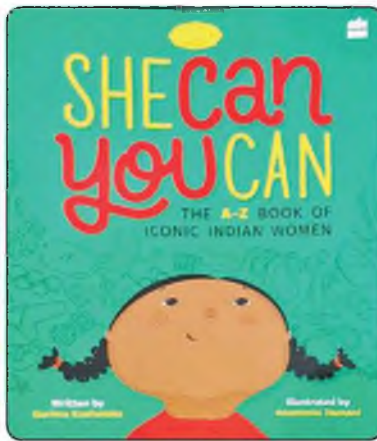


about radical progress in the field of science and technology, such as environmental biotechnology, particle physics, palaeobiology, astrophysics, and oncology. With her colourful illustrations, the illustrator of the book, Upsana Agarwal, tries to convey these scientists' personalities through the motifs and colour palettes she uses to depict them. Nandita Jayaraj, one of the book's authors, says they would like "to use this book as an opportunity to undertake more interactive sessions with children. It is as much about the science as it is about the people in it."

It is exactly this idea of capturing stories as much as the

experiments that humanizes the sciences. The human stories inspire the girl children to write their own stories without following any societal conventions.

This book aptly captures the science, and the stories of these scientists, thus encouraging young minds to realize the efforts behind these scientific endeavours and inspiring them to see how these could be their stories too. Aashmia, the other author of the book, says the book is essentially a feminist project, and undoubtedly so, considering its aim of removing the stigma in a girl child's mind – that they are not capable enough to pursue the sciences.



Another stellar book, *She Can You Can: A-Z Book of Iconic Indian Women*, is a timeless series of biographies, where a summary with an illustrative sketch represents each character A-Z. It highlights the achievements of pioneering women scientists, doctors, astronauts, and other stalwarts.

Pratham Books, a non-profit children's book publication house, has released the delightful book titled, *Anna's Extraordinary Adventures with Weather*, with lovely illustrations, about the Indian weather scientist Anna Mann who invented the Ozone-sonde. For the unfamiliar, it is a balloon-borne instrument that measures ozone

concentration at various altitudes and broadcasts the data by radio. The story, written by Nandita Jayaraj and illustrated by Priya Kuriyan, vibrantly depicts a little girl who wants to read about and study diamonds instead of wearing them, shattering conventional gender stereotypes. Holding the book in her hands, the girl child feels inspired to do the same while reading it. The illustrations portray a time-lapse with a little girl bent over books and tools transforming into a xari-elad scientist who would go on to study the weather and invent the Ozone-sonde.

A research study on the meta-analysis of five decades of U.S.

children drawing scientists was published in 2018. It was observed that in 1966-77, only 1 percent of girls portrayed scientists as women when asked to draw a scientist. However, in 2016, this figure had increased significantly, with 58 percent of girls drawing women scientists. This radical improvement in the percentage reveals a significant shift in public perception of who a scientist can be, an image that isn't necessarily male and busts gender-related stereotypes.

From many of the earliest NASA scientists who were women and people of colour, whose stories could lead to inter-sectional feminist conversations, women scientists in India drastically challenged the idea of women being in the inner-private realms of society and men working in the public domains. Women can definitely do science, and in her feminist satire, *Sultana's Dream*, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain turns the tables of society, where the men are locked in the inner realms of society while the women are outside building revolutionary technology.

Children's books, we believe, can pave the way for more gender equity in the field of science as they would change the mindsets of young minds early on in the enculturation process. When girls see women as trailblazers in STEM fields at a young age, there is a high likelihood that they will become pioneers in STEM themselves as they grow up. (*ANSHife*)

(Dr Monika Sharma is an Assistant Professor at Plaksha University, and Sreemee Bhattacharyya is a fellow at the Centre for Thinking, Language and Communication Plaksha University. M.Phil. in Children's Literature, Trinity College Dublin)

CLOSE-K: India needed to play a few practice games before WTC Final

By Vijayvindra Singh

The final of the World Test Championship between Australia and India is presently being played at the Kennington Oval in London. The two top teams of World cricket are battling for The Mace, a specially crafted trophy, for the biggest prize in cricket.

It has been two long years of playing Test series against several rivals that have culminated in an India versus Australia summit clash.

The World Test Championship (WTC) is a very good initiative by the ICC to revive and recognize the true cricket champion.

In the past, one did various permutations and combinations to unearth the leading side. The mighty West Indies ruled the roost in the late 70s and early 80s, whereas, the fighting Australians brought in their rights to be called a champion side at the turn and early years of the century.

Thereafter, the claim to be the best, oscillated between a handful of cricket-playing nations, most performing exceptionally well only at home.

The WTC, however good it may be, needs to be structured better. The cramped international calendar has made it difficult for teams to play each other in Test-playing nations. This itself leaves a huge question mark and thoughts to ponder over.

A good example of it is that India, having reached the final, has not been able to play in both the editions of the Test Championships, have never played Pakistan in a Test series. For both these sides, one does not need to have a home and away series, but, one at a neutral venue.

A championship becomes authentic only if all the top Test-playing sides come into play



and have an equal opportunity to prove their worth. A good way to solve this would be to have a three-year cycle rather than a two-year one. The idea is not to complete a tournament for the sake of it, but, for it to be more conclusive and convincing.

A one-match final, especially in England, leaves a lot up to the weather gods. The inaugural championship final, due to an extra day, managed a New Zealand victory in the earlier final.

However, fortunately, the WTC'23 final has got underway without a heavenly intrusion until now. Apparently, rain has

been predicted to play a part during the weekend and India, in the position that they see in at present, would be praying to "Indira", the God of rain to save them from a possible defeat.

This brings one to a few points to think about. One is that the championship should be played to the hilt. The other is that the team that gets the Test innings lead wins in an eventuality of a draw.

However, the most prudent way would be to have a three-match final and the team that heads the league table should be the winner in the event of a drawn series.

Sharing a World champion-

ship trophy on account of a draw is definitely not an exciting conclusion, either for the cricketers or the followers.

A championship needs a victor. The penalty kicks in World Cup football and the penalty shoot-out in hockey are two good examples in sports of a good way to conclude if there is no result.

The ongoing WTC Final has shown how exciting and demanding Test cricket is. India, on a cloudy day, like many sides in the past in England, opted to field, especially as they had four seamers to exploit the conditions. The battle that ensued between the Australian batters and

the Indian pacers was thrilling. Patience, determination, concentration and an element of luck were what kept the top-order Australian batsmen in the fray. One forgot the strike and run rate as survival was the name of the game.

Finally, hard work pays and Australia came through brilliantly with centuries scored by Steve Smith and Travis Head. Both of them combined to put the Indian bowlers at bay, who had to bowl more than they had ever bargained on practised for.

The Indian Premier League (IPL) may be a good indicator to recognize talent, however, a five-day Test match is entirely a

different ball game. India, have still got three more days to get back into the game. In cricket, a game is not won or lost till the last ball is bowled.

The Indian players needed to get acclimatized to the conditions in England. India made this very mistake when they played the inaugural WTC Final against New Zealand and seemed to have blundered again because of their commercially beneficial IPL commitments.

India, needed to play a few practice games before being subjected to a one-match decider. The length to bowl or adjustment required to bat against the best, are areas where a player needs time to master. Unfortunately, the Indian bowlers looked less prepared, although each one of them have the skill to exploit the conditions.

A cloudy sky overhead in England is one that a batter is always worried about. Rohit Sharma, as the captain and an opener must have thought quite seriously about whether to expose his batters to conditions which have been the reason for India's downfall in the past. His decision was quite understandable, however, with sunshine soon after, his morning bloom turned to gloom.

Steve Smith is a player one admires. He has proved that Test cricket is not about fancy strokes but one which requires a system and planning to be effective. He has structured his game accordingly and shown that he is one of the best in the trade.

Travis Head has done exceedingly well recently, however, he has a definite weakness to the short bouncing deliveries to his body. India found this out later in the day and even after crossing a century, he looked uncomfortable against the pace of Md. Siraj. The future for Head will be a barrage of short deliveries henceforth, one that he will need to conquer in the future.

India, have an uphill task at present. A bit of assistance from the weather and some resolute batting can still keep them in the hunt to uphold the "Mace" jointly.

(Vijayvindra Singh is a former India cricketer. The views expressed are personal)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Aja' Bhambi

Sunday, JUNE 11, 2023

'Birth Day Forecast'

Moon sign: Aquarius. Jupiter in your solar return chart and give excellent results. Something big is on the cards. You will make a lasting impact in your work and get promotion you had desired for long. Your business will also not go on right track and you will make high profits. You will get endless opportunities to rise in your job/business. A check on the money with an interest rate will open the doors of success for you. You will be popular among your colleagues. You will overcome all the difficulties with your intelligence and discretion. Your requests, claims and issues will be resolved. New contracts will be made. You will enjoy your life fully. It is right time to propose a person of your liking. You will plan to get married. Your family members will support you fully. Students will do well. There will be a change in the planetary position and quick change will happen.

'This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) You are going to be an auspicious week. You will do some parking job. You will have no shortage of money. You will support your family members very well. You will get a pleasant news from some persons. There will be sweet news in marital relation. You will enjoy small gifts and exchange of words with your partner. It will appeal you. It is a single and easy going in many ways. It is a relationship which matters most. You will spend a few things with your partner. You will not let your problems be visible to others. You will be serious in your job. You will get success in some interviews. Those who are single will get a partner.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) You will get work related to property and construction business. It is a long list of plans for you. You will also read all the documents carefully before signing them. You will have a sign of relief. There will be an excess of work, you will try to manage it well. Your income will also keep on rising. Your lower opponents will get defeated. You will get victory in the court. You will have a lot of money and you will use it for your work. Your colleagues will support you and you will get blessings of your elders. You will also cooperate with one and all. Your health will remain perfect.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) The week will bring you many benefits. Your relationships will give you excellent results. Your efforts will move in the right direction and you will get great news. You will be emotionally close to your spouse, lover or friend. You will be working towards progress in your life. You will be devoted to your work. You will be working hard to spend your money wisely. You will also help others selflessly and without any ego or motive attached to it. Your reputation will also enhance. You will have excellent relations with your partner. You will also take as per the decisions related to your career.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) This week you will have a profitable time period. Despite your schedule, you will find a support of your colleagues. They will also cooperate fully with you. Students will devote their time to studies and get success in exams etc. You will not be confused about what you want in your life. You will get a good output in your work in business also, you will take up new projects. You will know how to be the best of your partner. He/she has got a lot of importance in your life. You will help many persons. You will show kindness and compassion for others. You will get some financial help from some persons which will give you lot of relief.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) Luck is written for you the week as all matters you pursue. You will come out as your wish. You will unexpectedly finish all of your work where you had made a commitment. You will be willing to help people as you go. You will not be any more suffering as a result of your problems. A ray of light of care will be found. You will make a progress in your job/business. Your full concentration will be on your goal. You will also focus on other aspects. The atmosphere will be peaceful in your family. You will have loving relations with your spouse. You will complete all the work in your hand with the help of others.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23) This week you will have good prospects. You will be a lot of success. Even you will become more and more prosperous in your life. You will be full of energy and you will have excellent relations with your partner. You will be very caring towards your life partner.

You will stop up with the ups and downs in your life very well. This week is not calling victory in your work. You will surprise people with your attitude and ability to perform even in the most difficult tasks with ease. You will contact your friends living in foreign countries. There is a misreading. You will also think about your future. Family and finances are important for you.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) It will be a progressive week. You will spend your time in the best possible manner. You will finish your work with total enthusiasm and energy. You will be stronger financially each month now. You will be in demand and your values will get enhanced. There will be success. You will fulfill your wishes. Decisions will be normal at the home front. The contacts and relations with different persons will open the doors of success for you. You will be happy with your achievements and it will give you a feeling of security. Love birds will have a great time. You will not spoil your work in a haste. You will also not have any more misreading. There will be an improvement in all departments. You will get a good news from someone. You will perform well at your workplace. You will get attention of one and all. You will have a game in short-term funds. You will also concentrate on your work properly. Your business will prosper well. You will be busy in preparing for auspicious gatherings or festivals at your home. You will increase in sales and gain a lot of home. Students will have favourable time period. You will celebrate your happiness with your family as you get success in many activities. You will be an excellent example for others to follow. You will get an auspicious time to be a relative of yours.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 23) This is a significant week. You will perform well at your workplace. You will get attention of one and all. You will have a game in short-term funds. You will also concentrate on your work properly. Your business will prosper well. You will be busy in preparing for auspicious gatherings or festivals at your home. You will increase in sales and gain a lot of home. Students will have favourable time period. You will celebrate your happiness with your family as you get success in many activities. You will be an excellent example for others to follow. You will get an auspicious time to be a relative of yours.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) This will be an amazing week. There are chances of some unexpected work. You will do well. You will make progress in your job/business. You will make a good presentation on your projects before other persons. You will help your relatives who will be obliged. There is a lot of gain in property. You will get more and more profits in your business. You will be a finish long pending work. You will think about moving ahead in your life. Despite about property division and partnership dispute with siblings will get resolved. You will thoroughly enjoy your life. Students will get success in exams and interviews.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) The week will be spiritually. You will be full of motivation and excitement. Your partners will love you. They will get success with your best efforts. You will not be in tolerance. You will take good progress in your work/business. Your friends will support you. A lot of support will give it to you. You will be a good person of the time. You will always be of person. You will be creative and artistic in nature.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 19) You will attract lot of luck and prosperity this week. You will have monetary gain. You will plan to buy new cars for your home. You will also think of increasing your income and expanding your business. You will be logical and logical in your thinking and will explain things properly to others. You will have wonderful bonding with your spouse. You will have your own house and you will have plans to change your job in mind. You will pay attention to your office, shop or house. You will do your work with dedication and sincerity. Love birds will have a great time.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) This week you will get an odd returns in your business. You will have a social activities. You will have a good gain. You will get help from your partner. You will try to improve your work in different ways. You will do everything you dreamed of with your hard work. Situation is favorable for you. You will have the chance to improve your services. They will look out for your performance. At the moment, your pride and honor will be normal and you will not compare with your principles. You will look for a compromise in court cases. You will also get promoted in your job. You will finish all the business tasks early.

Top beauty ingredients that have made K-Beauty viral worldwide

While beauty trends may come and go, there's one thing that never goes out of style - taking care of your skin. Part of taking good care of your skin is finding out which natural ingredients benefit you and help improve your skin health. The ingredients that will work best for you depend mainly on what skin type you have. If you have dry skin, you'll want to choose skincare products that are moisturising and hydrating on the other hand if you have oily skin, you might need skincare ingredients that unclog pores, refine skin texture and control excess oil. To get glowing skin naturally and to live up to dull, uneven complexion what you need is natural ingredients as a part of your skincare products.



That takes care of your skin and provide myriad nourishing, anti-aging, and skin brightening benefits. To make your skincare regime easier, Queeneh Botanics takes you through some skincare ingredients and list their benefits and properties.

Vitamin C: A powerful antioxidant and ideal for strong immunity and healthy skin and eyes. Vitamin C is works wonders for your skin and hair. It lightens spots and prevents acne. This brightening vitamin aids in treating uneven skin, and pigmentation and leaves skin glowing.

Tea Tree Oil: Packed with anti-inflammatory and antiseptic properties, tea tree oil is a medicinal essential oil derived from the leaves of a small tree native to some areas of Australia. Tea tree oil has numerous skin benefits and is known to treat acne, blemishes, and irritation and help improve skin conditions. Suitable for all skin types except sensitive skin, tea tree oil is known for its versatility and can be used to treat hair and scalp problems like dandruff, flakes, and itching and also helps get rid of nail fungus.

Birch Juice: Packed with the healing properties of vitamin B5 and vitamin B3, 17 amino acids, minerals, enzymes, proteins, and antioxidants, birch juice is the answer to healthy, glowing skin. Birch juice has very high amounts of purifying and healing properties. It contains natural forms of niacinamide and vitamin C that visibly brighten and stimulate cell turnover. It also evens out skin tone, improves skin texture, and protects against free radicals.

Yuzu: Apart from being a gastronomic delight, Yuzu's benefits for skin care are responsible for making it the buzziest skincare ingredient that the beauty world cannot get enough of. Given the fact that this awesome citrus fruit has three times the vitamin C of its fellow citrus friends, it easily tops the antioxidant list. It restores your skin's moisture barrier and keeps it looking supple all the time! Yuzu really helps with collagen production, which in turn blurs the fine lines, and wrinkles, and improves the skin's elasticity. It hinders the formation of advanced glycation end products (AGEs), which considerably slows down the skin's aging process.

Ginseng: Packed with anti-inflammatory and antioxidant benefits, ginseng is known for brightening skin, boosting collagen, and calming down irritated, stressed-out skin. Popular in Korean skincare and long known for its usage as a medicine in China, ginseng firms and enhances skin texture, reduces the appearance of dark circles, and helps prevent signs of aging.

Rice water: Rice water is rich in antioxidants and is an excellent skin-brightening ingredient. It not only brightens but also fades dark spots and pigmentation when used regularly. Korean women since ages have been using rice water for skin whitening and brightening. Rice water has 'time-turning' properties that blur away premature signs of aging like fine lines and wrinkles and even delay their appearance by a substantial amount of years.

Pomegranate: One of the top pomegranate benefits is that it contains about 48 per cent of the daily vitamin C, making it the ultimate blocker of free radicals. It also contains three types of antioxidants - anthocyanins, ellagic acid, and tannins, that work to detox as well as repair the skin from the damage caused due to environmental factors. Pomegranates help reduce the signs of skin aging like age spots, fine lines, and wrinkles. Studies have shown that this superfood can stimulate Keratinocyte skin cells which help with cellular regeneration, making it a fantastic anti-aging ingredient. (LANSLife)

"We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak."
—Epictetus

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXV No. 301 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JUNE 12, 2023

Mood of the nation

WITH less than a year to go for the Parliament Polls, the countdown would soon begin for a verdict on the nation's fate for the next five years. With Narendra Modi leading the BJP-led NDA government through two consecutive five-year terms, there is no evidence yet of an anti-incumbency mood. This is significant in terms of the poll outcome, granted that no fresh issue crops up now. At the same time, the positives are there for all to see, principally on the economic front — where GDP growth stands at 7.2 per cent, more than the government's own projected growth figure. If the national economy is in good health, half the electoral game is won, but this with a caveat that the "India Shining" slogan of the BJP failed to click in the 2004 general elections. The feel-good factor could be all pervasive but a multiplicity of other factors count too, to pull the mat from under the feet of incumbent governments. Social upheavals, for instance. Except for isolated instances as in Manipur now or for the farmer's agitation in some north-Indian states a while ago, the overall scenario is perceived to be quiet now.

Clearly, a strategy adopted by Narendra Modi as prime minister was to tread a careful course and avoid confrontations. In situations like the farmer's agitation, he simply cut and ran. Modi had faced serious odds as chief minister in 2002 when the Gujarat riots took place. The unprecedented level of bloodletting in the streets under his direct watch turned Modi into a villain. Yet, situations conspired to facilitate a political windfall for him. For sure, Modi learned his ropes through thick and thin. However, his careful approach now means no tough decisions during his two terms in Delhi. He avoided reforms on multiple fronts that should have strengthened the nation. Even the market reform by implemented — the GST — was a leftover baby of the UPA period.

The Modi dispensation however made major marks in infrastructure, exports and welfare. There is considerable momentum on the building of highways and reshaping of the down-in-the-jumps railways sector. Modi's Jan Oshadhi and several other welfare steps are of immense benefit to the poor. His initiatives like Make In India and Aatmanirbhar Bharat also made significant strides. The defence exports are at an all-time high of Rs 16,000 crore; a 10-time increase since 2016. This is in matching with the overall growth in exports of goods and services to the tune of \$770 billion, registering a growth of 14 per cent over the previous year. Overall, feelings are that the Opposition is groping in the dark for issues to raise against the government.

Letters to the Editor

Flames of violence still burning in Manipur

Editor,
It is with great concern that we tribal communities of Northeast India view the pathetic situation in Manipur. Never have we witnessed such a degree of violence and the degree of destruction as this one. Some have even called the present situation in Manipur a mini-Khmer. The scenes that we are presented in the media with thousands of charred vehicles along the roads, charred homes and properties is nothing less than a war scene.

The trouble began with the Meiteis demanding ST status in the state to which the tribal communities resented vehemently. The former has no reason to claim ST status as they are from being an underprivileged group. The latter who are the actual underprivileged, have every reason to oppose the move as it would lead to a process of losing their land and a spurning of their current privileges. Although the Meiteis control only 10% of the land yet, they possess the most strategic, the most usable, most fertile and prime land in the state. The

tribal communities although they own 90% of the land yet more than 60% of their terrain is inhabitable and unutilisable as it consists of steep mountains and deep gorges.

In terms of quality of land, the tribals are the ones who ought to envy the Meiteis and not vice versa. In terms of development, the Meiteis have the lion's share in every field — in education they have the best educational institutions in Imphal, in sports and games they have all the necessary infrastructure in Imphal, they have an international airport, and a railway connectivity etc. They are therefore economically far better off than the tribals. Politically and administratively the Meiteis dominate in the state as most ministers and bureaucrats come from this community. They are always at the helm of affairs. Development in the state has always been one-sided with Imphal plain taking all the advantages while the hill areas are poorly developed. This is the case where a rich man tries to forcibly grab away even the little possession that a poor man has. It is preposterous and extremely immoral and unacceptable. The incident in Manipur reveals another ugly face, namely, a planned attack on the Christians. Many

Driving Resolutions: The Urgency for New Directions in Shillong City

By **Royaldeen Shadap**

The Motor Vehicle Act of 1988 governs all elements of road transport vehicles and covers the Act's provisions such as traffic laws, insurance, registration, insuring permits and penalties. The Act came into effect on July 1, 1989 and the Government of India made amendments to the Act to further ensure that roads are safe. The same was passed by the Lok Sabha on April 10, 2017.

In line with these provisions, which combines all motor vehicle legislations and the concerns that come with it in relation to accidents that can perhaps be avoided, the amended Act will only achieve success when it is strictly followed by the public and the concerned departments. The traffic division, too, which plays a formidable role, can seal a deal on this.

Shillong is a city with several developments in progress alongside the formation of the New Shillong Township with improved infrastructure and other developmental projects. The city, often considered an educational hub and centre for trade and commerce is supplemented with other good profiles but is, however, behind certain protocols in ensuring road safety. Though the efforts of the traffic division to address the current traffic congestion in the city is commendable, the look-out on other matters including illegal tinted glasses, removal of signal lights and rear view mirrors from two-wheeler vehicles, non-installation of indicators in attachable trailer vehicles and installation of external loud exhaust systems are however disregarded even though several notifications of law and order have been issued vis-a-vis these issues.

At the outset, the issue related to illegal tinted glasses has been, over the years, a major concern in Shillong city. The Supreme Court in its order dated April 28, 2013 stated that black films on the front and rear windcreens that blocks light by more than 30% and tinted side windcreens by more than 50% is in contempt of court and liable to be prosecuted as per the regulations provided in the Motor Vehicles Act. A bench including Chief Justice S.H. Kapadia was by the prescribed limits with an additional 40% on front and rear windcreens and anything beyond it would be punishable. It is a serious concern as to why vehicles would require such unreasonably high percentages of tinted glasses which would unquestionably

pave way for various crimes and illegal activities. In Shillong city, cars with tinted glasses beyond the prescribed limits or beyond the 'decent requirement' are a common sight. A major section of private vehicle owners have abided by this law but some are enjoying the privileges of the unsupervised matter. Who is to be blamed when the exorbitant price and quality of the tinted glasses, the percentage of the tinted glasses? The concerned law enforcers seem to have their eyes closed on this matter because these vehicles carry an executive perspective or rather an administrative and authoritative image. In addition to this, the mere installation of a miniature Indian flag on the dashboard defines the profile of the car. Regulations have only been made on who can display the Indian flag on their cars, and Section IX of the flag code enlists that Constitutional Dignity can display the same. However, lawful orders on the installation of this simple decorative piece inside the car (on the dashboard) by vehicles bearing private registrations have been overlooked; since this representation of the tricolour is not merely an act of patriotism but a utility as a personal privilege by many.

Another issue that results in frequent accidents is the removal of signal lights in two-wheeler vehicles. These selfish acts of some two-wheeler vehicle owners and riders blatantly ignores public safety and results in frequent accidents and at times, loss of life and property. The purpose of the signal light is to indicate the direction to be taken by the vehicle. However, the definition of 'indicator' perhaps has a different meaning for these ignorant riders as they consider it as an act simply for themselves but not as an actual indication for the vehicles behind and ahead of them. These individuals would rather choose to remove their hands from the steering and make signs with their hands, which is a risk to the rider, the pillion rider and is also an inconvenience way of indicating to the surrounding drivers and motorists. Is it a stop sign? An overtake sign? A green light? Only they know what it is.

Above all, the removal of rear-view mirrors from two-wheelers in particular amplifies the risk of accidents. However, the purpose of this simple yet effective device is to prevent the rider from turning one's good sense prevail again among the people and may peace and harmony return to Manipur.

Yours etc,
Barnes Mawrie Sdib
Via email

Broken cables everywhere

Editor,
Across the city, especially at the junctions and busy market places, (eg from All India Radio to Laclure point), electrical wires, cables, sagging, swaying, intertwining and hanging from the poles are a familiar sight and a serious cause of concern for pedestrians. The beauty of the city is being nibbled by such wires and cables. Once these cables are on the streets or footpaths, it will take weeks and months to be cleared. Who is to blame?

I want to convey through this letter that the Urban Affairs Department, the District Administration or Municipal Board should come forward and do something to regulate the hanging of cables by any parties whether mobile phones companies or cable TV providers across the city. There should be strict guidelines for the hanging of cables or wires so that the City will have a better picture and look cleaner.

Further, strict guidelines should be given to hanging of banners or boardings before and after use. It is seen that when these banners/boardings of different sizes are torn and swaying in the breeze the parties involved do not bother to either remove or repair the same. I hope the administration will give a serious and urgent thought to this matter so that our city remains beautiful and livable.

Yours etc,
Reward Rymbai,
Via email

Shillong's deadly speed breakers

Editor,
It would've been accepted truth that Shillong's speed breakers are magical. The way they pop up out of nowhere is queer. Like all magical things, they are even only if one pays close enough attention. They are simply too small or too unmarked to be visible to the naked eye. No matter how well-equipped and compliant one is to road safety protocols, one can never truly escape those brief moments of shock brought about by the magical Shillong speed bumps. They come in all shapes and sizes. Some of them are as tall as high as our hills and some, tiny but sharp, the effect of which is almost like the

usage even in the city and its local areas interferes with the vision of drivers and motorists to approaching vehicles. Yet the same vehicles will not consider taking up measures to install these much-needed indicators and would consider it as a complication due to the removable or attachable feature of their trailers. An Act should be introduced for the possible installation of indicators on these imperative wheels of utility which will further ensure the safety of roads in Shillong city and everywhere else.

Load after-market exhaust systems have become a trend and an egoistic drive for many motorists who desire the feel and reverberation of the thrum. Even though these systems which are sold by auto-makers as an authorized accessory are not illegal as long as they meet the noise emission standards set by the government under the Motor Vehicle Act, they should however be illegal to be used on public roads since the noise emission (though in accordance with the MVA) of most systems are beyond the auditory range which is a great inconvenience to the general public. This is very common in Shillong city even though orders have been issued several times in the past to immortalize this issue. Late hour thrum of these systems is a disturbance to the local community and these culprits could not care less about it. These statements should not be confused with some stock exhaust systems which are decently and suitably sound as per standards of the concerned company, but the racket of other after-market systems require an urgent solution.

All of these issues in Shillong city require urgent and strict supervisory because they play a crucial role in promoting road safety and in ensuring the standard development of the city in line with motor vehicle regulations, protocols and adherence to them. Education and awareness programmes to promote responsible driving behaviour can partly address this matter in addition to other provisions that have been laid down. The Shillong Traffic Police must be pro-active in implementing a strict code of conduct and a follow-up strategy regarding these matters. Drivers and motorists on the other hand can help in prompting the safety of roads by following the already existing codes of conduct that are beneficial to them and are aimed at the well-being of each citizen.

It is ironic too that some of these vehicles and some other private and commercial vehicles install additional lighting devices on their vehicles that are, yet again, beyond the decent requirement and its inappropriate

should be given to hanging of banners or boardings before and after use. It is seen that when these banners/boardings of different sizes are torn and swaying in the breeze the parties involved do not bother to either remove or repair the same. I hope the administration will give a serious and urgent thought to this matter so that our city remains beautiful and livable.

Yours etc,
Reward Rymbai,
Via email

It is in our nature to forget things and often act only when the damage has been done. Let us seek to remedy this as best as we can, as soon as we can.

Yours etc,
S.Laloo
Shillong

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

Ardent, bursting the flood-gates!

By **Jerome K Diengdob**

From the very inception of Meghalaya as a State in 1972 with the earmarking of job Reservation policy some far-sighted citizens had harbored a foreboding that the same could in the ultimate analysis end up in convulsions. Incidentally, from the mid-1970s several Hymnietrep youth job applicants have been disheartened and none too happy with the formulated policy in question as it stands as a bottleneck for the pursuit of profession and academic developments notwithstanding matching respectable marks in their scholastic fields given that Khasi-Jaintia communities are stuck up to only 20% apiece in the Reservation policy whereas the Garos are Messee with 40% alone. This has become a faultline amongs these ethnic tribes! For around fifty years the

vanced a viable suggestion on Reservation policy had been given a severe dressing down by his co-tribes. Hence, several discerning citizens have opined that perhaps there are two remedial options to bring the ongoing Reservation imbroglio to a maintainable solution. First is to approach the Apex court for a biding conformance for good! However, the Supreme Court (SC) is bound to be guided by the premise of the Indra Sawhney Vs Union Of India case in 1992, where the former has duly ordered that any state's job Reservation policy earmarked for indigenous populace ought not to cross a 50% ceiling. In a word, if an appeal is made to the SC an identical injunction will be passed; some of my Garo and Hymnietrep friends have surmised that the sum

However, some sections of intellectuals had nursed an apprehension that since it has been endorsed as a policy its fresh makeover may be as challenging as seeing a light at the end of the longish dim tunnel. It can be arguably stated that virtually all the MLAs of Garo Hills will never hudge an inch from the extant percentage share of the existing Reservation policy as any suggestion thereof is bound to hit the rock; every viable option will be explored to run down the ongoing agitation spear headed by the VPP.

Khasi-Jaintia tribes have been the further scented the disenfranchisement of the flawed Reservation policy. The grievances had been bonked up in them and the wounds allowed to fester. Years later some State governments driven by populist agenda have attempted to circumvent the SC order by applying for Reservation quota for the locals. Now, perhaps the SC has grasped the Machiavellian strategy, and it may be sooner than later that the Indian court may effectively cope with such maneuvers!

The second viable option

Hence, several discerning citizens have opined that perhaps there are two remedial options to bring the ongoing Reservation imbroglio to a maintainable solution. First is to approach the Apex court for a biding conformance for good! However, the Supreme Court (SC) is bound to be guided by the premise of the Indra Sawhney Vs Union Of India case in 1992, where the former has duly ordered that any state's job Reservation policy earmarked for indigenous populace ought not to cross a 50% ceiling.

may perhaps be to bifurcate Meghalaya into two different states one for Hymnietrep state and the other for the Garo land. Incidentally, in one of my letters, captioned 'Sam Shyllong Bhandar' that appeared in this esteemed daily (ST May 12, 2022), I recalled the Hymnietrep founding fathers of 'Meghalaya' the likes of GG Swell, HH Lyngdoh, Hoosier Hymnietra, SIDD Nidoles Roy etc, who had machaniacally accented the said constitutional Reservation policy without a forethought, only to leave behind a legacy of despair of their future burgeoning jobless youths.

Hence, I have pondered that such a bifurcation can be a win-win situation for both the communities. No wonder, the ongoing agitation spearheaded by VPP on job Reservation policy may have created an antagonism of sorts between the Hymnietrep and Garo tribes, hence, it may not be an outlandish suggestion if the foregoing contention are taken into reckoning by the public of Meghalaya.

Hence, I have pondered that such a bifurcation can be a win-win situation for both the communities. No wonder, the ongoing agitation spearheaded by VPP on job Reservation policy may have created an antagonism of sorts between the Hymnietrep and Garo tribes, hence, it may not be an outlandish suggestion if the foregoing contention are taken into reckoning by the public of Meghalaya.

"The law is reason, free from passion." — Aristotle

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 57, No. 301 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JUNE 13, 2023

G20: What's in it for Meghalaya

THE G20 is a forum of top developed and developing nations in the world. Formed in 1999 with 19 countries, Spain remains a permanent invitee the G20 seeks to address the world's economic and financial problems and to ensure that the financial crises that rocked South East Asian nations in the late 1990's does not wreck economies again. The 2008 global financial crisis was managed better because of lessons learnt from the past. Fortunately, India's economy was relatively homegrown and was not as exposed to the economic fluctuations that hit the other countries. Since its formation the G20 has broadened its mandate to cover additional objectives such as trade, climate change, sustainable development, energy transition, the environment, anti-corruption, development infrastructure, disaster risk resilience, health, tourism, culture and agriculture.

G20 countries include Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, UK, and US. It now includes other nations and international organisations like the World Bank, United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation, ASEAN among others. G20 nations generate over 80% of the global GDP, contribute 75% of global trade, and house 60% of the world's population. India's G20 Presidency started in December last year and since then over a hundred meetings have been held in different states. Meghalaya hosted the first G20 group on Space Economy Leaders Meeting (SELM) organised by the North East Space Application Centre (NESAC). Following that discourse the South Korean Ambassador held another meeting with a civil society organisation to explore possibilities for cooperation with Meghalaya. The Ambassador laid out a list of areas of cooperation among which was food processing and waste management. On June 1-2 recently another group from the European Union - the Global Gateway met again at Shillong to again explore areas of foreign investments in Meghalaya for infrastructure projects, energy transition, waste management etc. These meetings are important and the State Government ought to have created a special cell that will follow up diligently on the discussions and deliberations so that they do not remain in the realm of discussions only but are translated into action on the ground.

India will be handing over its G20 Presidency to Brazil in November this year. But that does not mean that the business proposals, financial and intellectual support from think tanks would end. These discussions have to be concretised into action and result in better roads, railways and airways for Meghalaya. Educational exchange between our universities and those of the G20 countries should be firm up for cross-learning. This is a great opportunity that cannot be lost sight of. The Government of Meghalaya would do well to firm up discussions held with the visiting dignitaries of the G20.

Since the past few years, Kukis has been targeted and presented as the reason behind all failures the state could ever witness, as Nazi Germany does to the Jews before the Second World War. Name calling such as 'illegal immigrants' and 'foreigners' are occasionally used to discredit Kukis indigenity to further accentuate with N Biren Singh taking the position of state chief minister in 2017. While complaints are registered at police stations and in cyber crime branch, no concrete measures are taken up to deter any slanderous or libellous attacks on the Kukis. Instead of taking serious issues over the matter, N Biren Singh on several occasions has involved himself in leading the bandwagon. Nevertheless, the allegations that Kukis are illegal immigrants are largely presumptuous and not back by credible evidence. In fact, Kukis were very much part of India's freedom struggle. Of the total of 193 freedom fighters of Manipur, there are 159 Kukis listed in the INA Museum at Moirang, Manipur[2]. In Bande Mataram, Freedom Fighters of Manipur published by Congress Party in 1986, there are a total of 79 Kukis out of the total of 112 freedom fighters[3]. After seven decades of India's independence, they are yet to be recognised and accepted as a citizen deserving special

Narratives of hate behind Manipur violence

By Haoginlen Chongloi

Despite their contribution towards independent India, Kukis are the least understood and most discriminated community in the country. For 70 years they have endured this. Time to acknowledge their sufferings. Manipur is synonymous with ethnic conflict. The last 40 years of its statehood saw some violent conflict between communities but the one witnessed since May 3 has certainly been the most destructive one. It has led to the death of hundreds of civilians and innumerable loss of properties to both sides. The more interesting part is that it is a conflict between Tribal Kuki and the majority Meiteis who are known to have a long shared political history. Since pre-colonial days, Kukis have been with the Meiteis. However, the best of alliances that has shielded Manipur from its long-due disintegration has come to an end. So, how does communities that maintain so much of a shared history engaged in an open violence is a matter of concern. In an interview with Karan Thapar at The Wine, Meitei legislator, Vivikant Sapam disclosed that the whole issue of the conflict is based on 'land [1]'. He argues that everyone should be allowed to settle in the Hills which otherwise is reserved for Schedule Tribes. This in fact is the reason behind Meitei community demand for ST status. In the process, Kukis became the victim of majoritarian oppression.

Prudent to conflict Since the past few years, Kukis has been targeted and presented as the reason behind all failures the state could ever witness, as Nazi Germany does to the Jews before the Second World War. Name calling such as 'illegal immigrants' and 'foreigners' are occasionally used to discredit Kukis indigenity to further accentuate with N Biren Singh taking the position of state chief minister in 2017. While complaints are registered at police stations and in cyber crime branch, no concrete measures are taken up to deter any slanderous or libellous attacks on the Kukis. Instead of taking serious issues over the matter, N Biren Singh on several occasions has involved himself in leading the bandwagon. Nevertheless, the allegations that Kukis are illegal immigrants are largely presumptuous and not back by credible evidence. In fact, Kukis were very much part of India's freedom struggle. Of the total of 193 freedom fighters of Manipur, there are 159 Kukis listed in the INA Museum at Moirang, Manipur[2]. In Bande Mataram, Freedom Fighters of Manipur published by Congress Party in 1986, there are a total of 79 Kukis out of the total of 112 freedom fighters[3]. After seven decades of India's independence, they are yet to be recognised and accepted as a citizen deserving special

place for their contribution toward a larger national cause. More recently, the Manipur government has come up with numerous forest policies, declaring vast portion of hill areas as reserved forest and protected forests. As such the department concerned issued notices over the possession of such lands. The forest officials even went to the extent of issuing eviction notices to villages which were strongly resisted by the tribal settlers. In doing so, forcible eviction of K. Sangjiam, a village happened in February. However, tribal legislators such as K. Leishyo and Paolienal Hlakip have argued that the state government policies run contrary to provisions of the Hill Areas Committee (HAC) whereby any laws relating to Hill areas shall be approved by the members of the HAC. BJP legislator Paolienal Hlakip is reported

to have questioned forest officials if it followed proper guidelines before declaring any forest as such[4]. Until now, the state government seems to be clueless over the matter. Yet, the attack of Kukis as illegal settlers or encroachers of reserved forest continues. Even the right against drug menace, the Kukis are made to be the scapegoat while it is clearly evident that people involved in the business are no community specific. An official report of Narcotics and Borders Affairs (2017-2022) indicate that there are a total of 2438 arrests, Kuki (824), Meitei (367), Meitei-Pangal (1067) and 189 belonging to other different communities. Singling out a community where it should be collective, indicates malfeasance. The high profile arrest of a drug-lord by a decorated lady police officer in 2018 and his release thereafter due to CM Biren Singh's intervention tells its own story. Thounsojiam Brinda, the Additional Superintendent of Police, disclosed that she was under pressure to release the drug lord. Another instance was the arrest of Dr Reza Borhani, an Australian

national, with drugs worth crores of rupees in 2019. Was it pure coincidence that CM Biren Singh is said to have secured licence to Borhani for transport of cannabis leaves, seeds and flowers all in the name of a non-existing medical company. However, the narrative of people in power and influence will reign over the poor and petty predators.

With these narratives that Kukis are behind the drug business; that they are foreigners or illegal immigrants appears to have taken a role in the mobilisation of extremist organisations like Arambai Tenggal and Meitei Leupun in the Imphal Valley.

Total breakdown of order Now, the month-long violence has left hundreds dead and thousands homeless in Manipur. For the first time, chief minister N Biren Singh held a press conference on May 15, twelve days after

at Fangei. The Indian Express reportedly mentioned that over 1000 assault rifles with over 10,000 rounds are being looted during the first few days of the violence. One interesting and yet alarming case is that there is almost no resistance from security forces manning the stations. All appears to be handed over willingly. After about two weeks, The Sentinel reported that some arms are recovered whereas hundreds are still missing. This has posed a huge security challenge in containing further violence against the minority Kukis. Chief minister N Biren Singh called a second press conference on May 28, 13 days after his first. However, this time he no longer called for peace but an 'all out war against terrorists'. Singh blames the Kuki militants squarely for the continuing violence in the state and instructed all security forces to cooperate in the fight against what he called 'Kuki terrorists'. In the press conference he is said to have shown the pictures of arrested Kuki village volunteers with one barrel licence guns but with the caption "with AK 47 and M16". Earlier, as reported by the Hindustan Times, Singh himself made it clear that weapons of Kuki underground are intact. Till date there is little evidence to suggest the involvement of Kuki militants under the Suspension of Operations (SOO). KNO spokesperson Dr Sellen Hlakip denies Singh's accusations of his cadre's involvement but opines that it might be the militants not under the SOO. Well, when the state police force meant to protect its citizens went to the extent of attacking one in connivance with the other volunteers, what limits Kuki militants not under SOO to carry out retaliatory strikes, is the question of the masses.

If N Biren Singh represents the collective masses, why does he selectively maintain a hostile attitude towards the Kukis? Why the silent mob violence organisation such as the Arambai Tenggal and Meitei Leupun? Why is he silent on daylight arms loot in Imphal? Why is he silent when there are evidences that the police force led the mobs in torching and killings? His complete apathy towards the sufferings of the Kukis is beyond one's comprehension. The whole violence appears premeditated and narratives against Kukis seem to act as a catalyst in the mobilisation of violent mobs. This is the reason why the 10 Kuki MLAs, Kuki civil societies and its armed organisations knocked on the doors of the office for Separate Administration. It is in this line of chief minister's whipsaws them and a police force that protects its citizens.

(The writer teaches Journalism at Royal College University, Gauhati. He can be reached at: hichongloi@gmail.com)

"It is surprising that the state chief minister who also holds the 'Home' portfolio took so long to appeal for peace and normalcy. Houses within a kilometre of his bungalow were attacked and torched. The first three days from May 3, Imphal was literally burning, reducing a once beautiful city into a ghost town. Companies of Rapid Action Force (RAF) were airlifted the following day. However, violence continues unabated till the concluding day of the month."

to have questioned forest officials if it followed proper guidelines before declaring any forest as such[4]. Until now, the state government seems to be clueless over the matter. Yet, the attack of Kukis as illegal settlers or encroachers of reserved forest continues. Even the right against drug menace, the Kukis are made to be the scapegoat while it is clearly evident that people involved in the business are no community specific. An official report of Narcotics and Borders Affairs (2017-2022) indicate that there are a total of 2438 arrests, Kuki (824), Meitei (367), Meitei-Pangal (1067) and 189 belonging to other different communities. Singling out a community where it should be collective, indicates malfeasance. The high profile arrest of a drug-lord by a decorated lady police officer in 2018 and his release thereafter due to CM Biren Singh's intervention tells its own story. Thounsojiam Brinda, the Additional Superintendent of Police, disclosed that she was under pressure to release the drug lord. Another instance was the arrest of Dr Reza Borhani, an Australian

at Fangei. The Indian Express reportedly mentioned that over 1000 assault rifles with over 10,000 rounds are being looted during the first few days of the violence. One interesting and yet alarming case is that there is almost no resistance from security forces manning the stations. All appears to be handed over willingly. After about two weeks, The Sentinel reported that some arms are recovered whereas hundreds are still missing. This has posed a huge security challenge in containing further violence against the minority Kukis. Chief minister N Biren Singh called a second press conference on May 28, 13 days after his first. However, this time he no longer called for peace but an 'all out war against terrorists'. Singh blames the Kuki militants squarely for the continuing violence in the state and instructed all security forces to cooperate in the fight against what he called 'Kuki terrorists'. In the press conference he is said to have shown the pictures of arrested Kuki village volunteers with one barrel licence guns but with the caption "with AK 47 and M16". Earlier, as reported by the Hindustan Times, Singh himself made it clear that weapons of Kuki underground are intact. Till date there is little evidence to suggest the involvement of Kuki militants under the Suspension of Operations (SOO). KNO spokesperson Dr Sellen Hlakip denies Singh's accusations of his cadre's involvement but opines that it might be the militants not under the SOO. Well, when the state police force meant to protect its citizens went to the extent of attacking one in connivance with the other volunteers, what limits Kuki militants not under SOO to carry out retaliatory strikes, is the question of the masses.

If N Biren Singh represents the collective masses, why does he selectively maintain a hostile attitude towards the Kukis? Why the silent mob violence organisation such as the Arambai Tenggal and Meitei Leupun? Why is he silent on daylight arms loot in Imphal? Why is he silent when there are evidences that the police force led the mobs in torching and killings? His complete apathy towards the sufferings of the Kukis is beyond one's comprehension. The whole violence appears premeditated and narratives against Kukis seem to act as a catalyst in the mobilisation of violent mobs. This is the reason why the 10 Kuki MLAs, Kuki civil societies and its armed organisations knocked on the doors of the office for Separate Administration. It is in this line of chief minister's whipsaws them and a police force that protects its citizens.

(The writer teaches Journalism at Royal College University, Gauhati. He can be reached at: hichongloi@gmail.com)

to have questioned forest officials if it followed proper guidelines before declaring any forest as such[4]. Until now, the state government seems to be clueless over the matter. Yet, the attack of Kukis as illegal settlers or encroachers of reserved forest continues. Even the right against drug menace, the Kukis are made to be the scapegoat while it is clearly evident that people involved in the business are no community specific. An official report of Narcotics and Borders Affairs (2017-2022) indicate that there are a total of 2438 arrests, Kuki (824), Meitei (367), Meitei-Pangal (1067) and 189 belonging to other different communities. Singling out a community where it should be collective, indicates malfeasance. The high profile arrest of a drug-lord by a decorated lady police officer in 2018 and his release thereafter due to CM Biren Singh's intervention tells its own story. Thounsojiam Brinda, the Additional Superintendent of Police, disclosed that she was under pressure to release the drug lord. Another instance was the arrest of Dr Reza Borhani, an Australian

to have questioned forest officials if it followed proper guidelines before declaring any forest as such[4]. Until now, the state government seems to be clueless over the matter. Yet, the attack of Kukis as illegal settlers or encroachers of reserved forest continues. Even the right against drug menace, the Kukis are made to be the scapegoat while it is clearly evident that people involved in the business are no community specific. An official report of Narcotics and Borders Affairs (2017-2022) indicate that there are a total of 2438 arrests, Kuki (824), Meitei (367), Meitei-Pangal (1067) and 189 belonging to other different communities. Singling out a community where it should be collective, indicates malfeasance. The high profile arrest of a drug-lord by a decorated lady police officer in 2018 and his release thereafter due to CM Biren Singh's intervention tells its own story. Thounsojiam Brinda, the Additional Superintendent of Police, disclosed that she was under pressure to release the drug lord. Another instance was the arrest of Dr Reza Borhani, an Australian

(The writer teaches Journalism at Royal College University, Gauhati. He can be reached at: hichongloi@gmail.com)

Political situation turns dicey for BJP leadership in Maharashtra

Mistrust between Shinde and Fadnis growing to the detriment of alliance

By Sushil Kutty

If after 9 years of BJP domination, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is looking for his most vulnerable and Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis is being called out for 'railing against citizens he calls Aurangzeb ki Aulad', then Fadnis must have a reason and the people gunning for Fadnis either aren't on the ball or have their own biases to not look at political developments dispassionately. Even the average Hindutva voter couldn't have been more stark; especially when "sabbakshiskas" and "sabbakparyas" were added.

Hardcore BJP voters are asking "whose prayers" was Modi alluding to, and "whose vishwas" was he banking on? Narendra Modi's "vidyaguru" ambitions no longer cut ice with the average Hindutva voter. There are the hardcore "Modi bhaktis", who are blind followers, but even these people are peeping away. If TINA is a factor, there's also the NOTA!

The long and short of it is BJP leaders are under pressure. They have been set targets of Lok Sabha seats in their respective states, which they have to deliver and which entails a deliberate course correction. Nobody in the BJP has the guts to read out the riot act to those responsible for the Karnataka debacle — Prime



Minister Narendra Modi and the other two sorry heavyweights, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP President JP Nadda. The latter's arrogant "Bhagwa is not BJP" had come back to bite the party in the rear. Not even Modi's "Jai Bhagwan Bai" helped the BJP in Karnataka.

The biggest problem: Nobody will dare bell the cat if the feline happens to be Prime Minister? Who in the BJP has the mojo to gently nudge and lead Modi's "Pasmanda outreach" was the biggest flop show put up by BJP politician in decades? What and where does that cave party leader like Deputy Chief Minister

and Muslims alone". To top it, the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government has suddenly discovered a government-aided school "imposing the hijab" on Hindu students and "converting Hindu teachers into the 'jihad'". The school has been shut down for good, but the general Hindutva reaction is, "things will be back to square one" if the BJP returns to power in the assembly elections later this year. Nobody, not even the BJP cadre, will dare bell the cat if the feline happens to be Prime Minister? Who in the BJP has the mojo to gently nudge and lead Modi's "Pasmanda outreach" was the biggest flop show put up by BJP politician in decades? What and where does that cave party leader like Deputy Chief Minister

and Muslims alone". To top it, the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government has suddenly discovered a government-aided school "imposing the hijab" on Hindu students and "converting Hindu teachers into the 'jihad'". The school has been shut down for good, but the general Hindutva reaction is, "things will be back to square one" if the BJP returns to power in the assembly elections later this year. Nobody, not even the BJP cadre, will dare bell the cat if the feline happens to be Prime Minister? Who in the BJP has the mojo to gently nudge and lead Modi's "Pasmanda outreach" was the biggest flop show put up by BJP politician in decades? What and where does that cave party leader like Deputy Chief Minister

"Devendra Fadnis's dog-whistle was his compulsion. For him, not reacting to the social media posts at the root of the Kolhapur trouble was not an option. Especially, when the Hindutva vote-bank believed the Modi government is bending over backwards to 'satisfy the necessities of the underserving Pasmanda'. The course correction was on Fadnis's head."

Devendra Fadnis when given the task to ensure Modi get a third term at the Prime Minister's post? Devendra Fadnis's dog-whistle was his compulsion. For him, not reacting to the social media posts at the root of the Kolhapur trouble was not an option. Especially, when the Hindutva vote-bank believed the Modi government is bending over backwards to "satisfy the necessities of the underserving Pasmanda". The course correction was on Fadnis's head.

Therefore, the "blatantly prejudiced" Aurangzeb ki Aulad's current charm in Maharashtra politics, the BJP — even with the government's own — feels under the weather in a state like Maharashtra, with a metropolis like Mumbai to flaunt, economic and development parameters matter. But the BJP cannot take on the Maha Vishva Agghadi without its Hindutva calling card, which was its winning card in 2014 — and in 2019, along with Bakale. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah misread the mood of their own vote-bank and

Letters to the Editor

Politicians should stop paying lip-service to education

The front page headline, "State secondary-level dropout rate highest in India at 21.7 %" (ST June 12, 2023) has prompted me to respond with a twist! Surprisingly it did not shock me! But what shocks me is that your reporter continues to report the Education Advisor's words like a stuck gramophone player! What is different, say original, in what has been said over the years? Did the reporter feel the emotions of what was said? Couldn't he have reviewed just a tiny brief about the opportunities and avenues? He quotes that the

Government has for school dropout? However, unless the hearts and minds of politicians, including political advisors, et al of the Government genuinely feel the tearful pain of failure of our school dropouts, the malaise will continue. No tangible progress will ever be made. Lip service, cosmetic measures and intellectual sounding amirchi planning that benefits the people will thrive. The disgrace and shame of being placed at the bottom will continue. Yes, I'm a nobody, but I'll continue, through Letters to the Editor of The Shillong Times, to pound heavily at those in power who fail to bring about a progressive change in our education system! Accountability must now be the ethos of our education department!

On page four of the same day we read, "AP forms group to elevate the learning levels of kids." Note the working group; to be headed by Principal Secretary and IT Secretary, School Education and School Education Commissioner. Now compare that to the Meghalaya working group, where are the professionals of Meghalaya? Need I say more? Yours etc., Kevin Phillips, Shillong - 19

Reservations in the 21st century

An overdose of virtual and open space debates on the subject of reservation has occupied the mind of the public, be it in funeral homes, banquets, meetings or even in public transports. If reservations have to be relooked and reviewed through a prospective mechanism it should first start by dismissing the inclusion of separate reservation based on tribe or ethnicity and bring in an overall plan of including 80% reservations for all the three Scheduled Tribes and exclusively for residents of the state. As it is we have seen that for every vacancy we find reservations under ST for Khasi, Garo and Jaintia. When these tribes have already been recognised as ST by the state, why should the ST tag be on, while in other states the ST status is based on one uniform reservation irrespective of the applicant's sub-tribe, as long as he or she is a tribal and a permanent resident of that state. Reservation has been allowed to be misused by affluent sections of the State. If a tribal are offered to attend highly paid coaching classes or afford expensive education that person should

Even a train tragedy blamed on Muslims

be deterred from taking the reservation quota and instead compete with others in the general category. Let the deserving and underprivileged sections of society who cannot afford expensive education and coaching be the recipients of that quota. In fact, I feel that reservations would not take more than 48 hours to quell. However, it continues for a month now and there is no end in sight. While many blamed the state government's attitude and approach towards the continuing violence, the scarier one is the looting of arms and ammunition by Arambai Tenggal and Meitei Leupun from various police stations and Manipur Police Training Academy (MPTA)

spreading fake news in TN" (ST Dated June 9, 2023). If we thought that the worst train tragedy possibly since Independence would mimic us all as Indians in a moment of stunned grief, we have to think again. The hate ecosystem on social media by right wing hoodlums found even their way to spin the tales and spew venom and they are having a field day. Their success, over the past nine years, is owed in part to their adept poisoning of the public discourse. Politicians, indoctrinated media outlets and squadrons of social media trolls, lie, and demoralise Muslims all day long. Yours etc, M Haque, New Delhi

Articles and letters appearing on this page are those of its writers and authors and not that of The Shillong Times

"Competition brings out the best in products and the worst in people."
— David Sarnoff

The Shillong Times
VOL. LXIX, No. 11 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14, 2023

Tricolour travails

WITH a stunning electoral victory in Karnataka, India's prime political position party has regained some confidence and yet there are miles to go before it can hope to retake power from BJP, the saffron giant. What's certain as of now is that the rest of the Opposition bandwagon comprising regional parties can no more dismiss the Congress lightly or pin the tag of irrelevance on it as they tended to do in the recent past. The assembly elections in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh are crucial for the grand old party. These will set the trend for the general elections 2024. This is time for the tricolour party to play its cards well and reclaim its relevance as a national party.

The Congress Working Committee is set to be reconstituted with new faces. Those among the old guard have their relevance but the party should be able to catch the fancy of the new generation by supplementing its leadership structure with new blood over and above the youthful faces of Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Vadra. Significantly, Priyanka as general secretary of the party started her rounds of the assembly poll campaigns with a foray in Madhya Pradesh. She might lead the party campaign for the 2024 parliament polls in case Rahul Gandhi is constrained by court orders to remain out of such activities, leave alone contesting the elections. Her stewardship of the Uttar Pradesh elections in the past did not help the Congress reinvent itself in a state that sends the largest number of MPs, state-wise, to the Lok Sabha. The Vadra baggage perhaps hangs heavy on her. But, the people are the ultimate authority to decide who their leader should be; not the media.

There are many impediments for the Congress in the run-up to the polls. The Rajasthan scenario remains fluid as Sachin Pilot upped the ante and threatened to form a new party. He's still in a mood to bargain, and less keen on forming another party for the reason that he knows his limitations. The BJP is not here to offer him the CM's post either. The party's problem would be more on another front, namely to try and position itself at the head of an anti-BJP coalition comprising the regional parties too. A 'deadwood' like Nitish Kumar is attempting to act as the fulcrum around which such a coalition should shape up; in the hope that he would fish in troubled waters and be the next PM. West Bengal's Mamata Banerjee has in her the potential to upstage the Bihar Babu if such an eventuality arises. Ultimately, it all depends on how many seats the Congress can get in the parliament polls.

Letters to the Editor

Rise in theft cases in city

Editor,
I am writing to you to inform you about the rise of theft cases in Shillong. On the morning of Saturday June 10, 2023, between 5: 54 AM a thief had entered a house at Upper New Colony, Shillong (1) through available on CCTV). The thief ransacked the house and got away with a few items from the house. (FIR has been filed). Amazingly, he also came the following day and the day after to the same property. We managed to nab the thief on the third day and handed him over to the police.

What is shocking about this incident is the audacity of the thief to revisit the crime scene repeatedly. How is this possible? And how can a city like Shillong be so unsafe? Despite the fact that many robberies are occurring in the city, the police have not sent any patrolling team to the affected localities. A small patrol team in the locality would have created confidence in the residents. Patrolling between 12 am to 6 am would be very helpful and make the residents feel much safer and we can all sleep without having to worry about who is going to break into our houses.

Yours etc.,
D. Basuvarao,
Via email

Government should implement the plastic ban

Editor,
Only last week all the countries of the world celebrated World Environment Day. In Meghalaya it was observed with great enthusiasm and pledges were made by all who celebrated this auspicious day. But what is the net result so far after now that 10 days have passed. The use of plastics (single use bags) and water bottles carries on as usual and no action by the administration is forthcoming. The Hon. the Chief Minister said that he on plastic ban will be taken up in letter and spirit and the source of supply will be closed. But this is to take effect as the use of plastics is carrying on unabated. We are grateful to the Operation Clean-up team along with other groups that are consistently cleaning up rivers. Their efforts are praiseworthy. But those residing on the banks are polluting the river by directly discharging their waste tanks and all the garbage into the river. Even

people from other areas find it convenient to throw their garbage in the nearby rivers. There has to be some stringent measures to be taken up by the Government such as imposing heavy fines on the persons who commit these polluting acts. Now the World Bank is granting funds to the KIAADC for undertaking river clean up and also to address other areas of concern. But it will be an exercise in futility as previously quite a good amount was given by the Government to the KIAADC for the same purpose but no concrete results have been noted and the money was a sheer waste. Let us see how the grant of a substantial amount which is being allotted by the World Bank is going to be used. Apart from being accountable for the funds the District Councils will also have to show positive results this time.

We understand that the Government is burdened with a lot of projects which require attention according to priorities and pollution control is something that needs immediate action and redressal. In the past a number of articles and letters have been written on this issue and they have appeared in the local dailies. I don't know how much weight this letter of mine will carry but

No illusionary expectation from the Reservation Review

All eyes are on the search committee to declare the expert committee on Reservation Policy review. It is wiser, perhaps, to be circumspect rather than be euphoric.

The decision to re-look at the 52 year old Office Memorandum was primarily taken due to the indefinite hunger strike by Arund Miller Basuvarao, the VPP president.

The VPP's demand is based solely on disproportionate allocation of jobs to the Khasis (including Jaintia) community. Sections of the public, pressure groups and political parties to support this position. To them the 40-40 distribution for the Khasis and Garos is unfair since the Khasis are a big group. Hence the VPP wants a higher share for the Khasis. To expect the expert committee to make recommendation in this direction would be sheer shock. Political parties, pressure groups and civil society in Garo Hills will reject it outright. Nothing less than status quo would be acceptable. The argument put forward is that, even today Garos have not been able to maximise their quota of 40%. Their rightful share has been taken by Khasi Hills, by default. It is estimated that the Garos have been able to avail only about 10% of the jobs due to them. If their quota is further reduced to less than 40% then their representation in the government services will also be diminished accordingly. The Garo Graduate Union (GGU) has already shot off a letter to chief minister strongly opposing the review of reservation policy. The review itself could even be a non-starter.

Now coming to another point: Paul Lyngdoh's outburst against tax drivers and calling them Class 7-8-9 pass is highly objectionable. Everyone has the right to protest. Even the 7/8/9 pass have a voice. If the minister says that only university graduates can lecture then the MLAs and ministers with class 9/10-12 certificates should resign. There are some in the UDDP too. During elections their vigorous campaigns are heard by university students. Their speech in the Assembly is for the whole state, including those more qualified than them. They take decisions on behalf of the illiterate as well. Now, the Social Welfare minister even contemplates legal actions against journalists who question the government's clean exit to itself on the 'rice scam'.

However, the former KSU president has a point. His opposition to the those who

By Albert Thyrning

"wake him up" from his slumber with the beating of drums cannot necessarily be restrained from their right to protest. A point is being made and an illusion created in the public mind that what is preventing youths from getting government jobs is the current reservation policy. If changed, the policy will provide employment to their children and the future generations as well. A frenzy was created on this pretext. Volunteers of a pressure group went to MLAs in Khasi-Jaintia Hills to force them to speak favourably on this matter of 'life and death'. But will any reservation policy that caters for the unemployed, joblessness and job scarcity? Even if the quota is 'improved' by 10% only a small percentage of people will benefit. The VPP is footing the ordinary people by making it a 'Jaitibynriev' prestige issue. The people at large will not profit a great deal from the review. Realistically will not make much of a difference to the 'Jaitibynriev'. The gullible masses are given a false hope.

There is a suggestion that in the new reservation policy the socio-economically weaker sections should be given priority. This is, in fact, the core of reservation. But this finds few takers. The proposal is shot down arguing that the Supreme Court gives guidelines only for general/ST/SC/ OBC reservations. It is also reasoned that it is difficult to determine the socio-economically weaker sections in Meghalaya. Hence the idea of ALHick that families who have remained poor for ages will not be considered for reservation.

The hype on the reservation review is thus unwarranted. It could turn out to be a damp squib. Only the privileged few will continue to enjoy reservation. Favoritism and nepotism will remain. People of Nongstong said this writer that in the last five years there was no advertisement for jobs. Yet many relatives and friends of the former MLA were appointed in different departments. Whatever form the new reservation policy takes shape, the large sections of Meghalayans will have to fend for themselves. The mentioned will continue to be disgruntled. Placing an illusionary hope on the review of the policy will only lead to disillusionment. The KSU political party. Like others, it also promises the impossible. Fighting corruption and end-

ing political appointments are founding ideologies. Fill date the VPP has remained silent on corruption and said nothing on the excessive political appointments.

Instead of listing those who fall under the reservation umbrella let us name those who should be excluded. First, the creamy layer of socially, economically and educationally highly advanced members of a backward class. Through judgements the Supreme Court has held that the reservation benefits should not be extended to these affluent individuals. ST individuals belonging to the 'creamy layer' should not be eligible for reservations. The review committee should identify this creamy layer in Meghalaya. They may be barred from reservation benefits. This group that has reaped much of the fruits of reservation. They prevent those who really need reserves from coming up in life. Salang Sangma bats for non-inclusion of these 'privileged' families so that others get a better opportunity to come up. Political families should also be barred. If we look at families of MPs/MLAs/MDCs and former MPS/MLAs/MDCs we will find that many of them are government employees. They perpetuate this privilege for generations.

Additionally, families with annual income exceeding Rs 8 lakhs are recommended to be exempted from reservation. In Meghalaya there are families galore with this level of income. There are also many enterprisers families that continue to avail reservation. Is this fair and just? Why should they be treated equally with those who can't afford a square meal a day? Next are families who own at least 5 acres; families who have a house of 1000 square feet and more families with 100 square yards of residential plot etc., no longer belong to the 'Economically Backward section' and hence are not eligible for reservation in certain areas. Of course the centre has approached the court not to apply the creamy layer concept to the ST/SC categories. However, should the job review committee not look at this aspect? Merely assigning quotas based on the population of mainly the two major tribes, the Khasis and Garos, without identifying who really deserves reservation is a cosmetic exercise. Even allowing the creamy layer exemption will be putting old wine in new wine skins as the truly deserving will not benefit.

People have to adjust their daily routine in a manner where they have to spend several hours to dispose of their garbage, as the collectors in the trucks take their own sweet time to collect each bag and sort the garbage in each bag before they collect the next. As a result there are long queues all over the main road, thereby displaying a pathetic picture to tourists and members of the public passing by, just how carelessly the government handles the entire garbage management system.

Garbage sorting has to be carried out in the composting plant after or before the smaller vehicles such as autos can be sent to each locality to collect garbage and the autos can take the garbage to the nearest allocated truck in the area while the trucks take the waste to the compost plant rather than people carrying all the garbage from a particular area and standing in the main road behind the trucks. As if the city is some sort of refuge camp.

The irony is that many people pass through such queues and they include government officials and department heads and yet they fail to notice how garbage collection is managed in other states and so fix the problem here. But they just remain incompetent and don't care about managing anything in their own state.

Since every small problem in the state ends up as a huge problem later because there is no 3-year or 10-year plan taking into account the population increase. The whole purpose of planning is to anticipate problems before they occur and have a plan on how to manage that problem. But here the public have to waste their time only because of the ignorance and carelessness of the government. No wonder the State of Meghalaya is not progressing as it should and its economic growth is sluggish.

Garbage management system should first try to solve the city's garbage management and traffic management by putting their privileged to actually work and take responsibility and to ensure that they show outcomes for the salary they take home every month. Government employees and public representatives should be competent persons. They cannot reach the offices at 11 am, gossip all day and move insignificant files just to show they have done something.

The government should send out a strong message to all its employees, that if they don't produce outcomes and are not responsible handling their work they should be terminated and other more deserving people must be given the opportunity for public service, otherwise if Government is filled with ignorant and careless people then in the next 10-15 years our children and the grandchildren will suffer on account of the state being a laggard because their ancestors did not do their bit or give their best.

Yours etc.,
Nithin R Krishnan,
Via email

We may like to cling on to reservation; we may be ashamed for doing so even after 50 years of statehood in a tribal dominated state, but a world without reservation will come. It may be through legislation or judicial intervention, but sooner or later the world of equal competition will make its advent. Manipur is heading towards this direction. Vote bank politics or majoritarian policies that appease the Meitei community may well be the latest advanced group to be added in the ST list thus effectively reserving the ST quota meaningless. In Meghalaya the TMC legislator from Rajabala, Mizanur Rahman Kazir has already demanded for 50% reservation for the untouchable category, which is equal to turning the state quota-less. His statement is ridiculous, but is a warning for the centrality.

But the government is not preparing the youths to face the challenge. Our education has failed. It has not been able to produce an IAS in a long time. Meghalaya is infamous again. The record of the highest percentage of secondary school dropouts in 2021-22 is ours. At 17% we are almost double the national average of 12.6%. Everyone knows the pathetic results in Garo Hills but no one dares to tell the truth. The reasons are government schools, deficit, ad hoc schools and RMSA schools runs by committees that are soft targets for political intervention. Biting, infrastructure, teachers' irregularity and absenteeism, absence of supervision and monitoring of these schools are the norms. There is no accountability. The only performing schools are the 'missionary' and private schools.

When something goes wrong in Pine Mountain School in Shillong, protests are held and immediate action taken but not in rural schools even after 50 years.

Was back in 2015 when a top MBOSE official job at 'lazy' students for the then dismal results in Garo Hills, this author pointed to the prolonged and excessive religious festivals, namely, Christmas, New Year and the various types of 'sobhas' as one of the reasons for the annual gloomy results. Students are distracted by these 'untending' festivities. Religion is preventing students from excelling in studies.

OH record, some pastors, priests and nuns reached out to me agreeing with my assessment. But no one dares to change the system. In fine, the Reservation Policy is a political tool. This is clearly evident to the discerning.

ment and traffic management by putting their privileged to actually work and take responsibility and to ensure that they show outcomes for the salary they take home every month. Government employees and public representatives should be competent persons. They cannot reach the offices at 11 am, gossip all day and move insignificant files just to show they have done something.

The government should send out a strong message to all its employees, that if they don't produce outcomes and are not responsible handling their work they should be terminated and other more deserving people must be given the opportunity for public service, otherwise if Government is filled with ignorant and careless people then in the next 10-15 years our children and the grandchildren will suffer on account of the state being a laggard because their ancestors did not do their bit or give their best.

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

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Rape, Anger, and Restraint!

As I heard with horror about the rape and strangling of an eighteen-year old girl in a hostel in South Hamlet, I thought about the word, 'restraint'. The watchman who allegedly committed the dastardly crime, then went to the railway line that ran behind the hostel and committed suicide. Why had he not run away? Why did he kill himself? It seems obvious that after the act, he must have understood the enormity of his crime, that what he had done was obviously an impulsive act, and sadly, two young lives were lost when restraint could have been the savior!

It seems, that during his watchman duties he had been noticing the young girl for many months, made small advances to her, which were rebuffed, while lusting for her. According to others, in the hostel, they 'noticed he quite often harassed her in different attention seeking ways. Now, when you look at that, you will realize that many of us, whether married or unmarried do not seek the attention of the opposite sex. I know of many YouTube videos which tell girls how to gain the attention of a young man who they are attracted to, and likewise such videos are available for young men too. But restraint is needed when older men or women, married and who do not need to attract the opposite sex, also try their hand at such clever tricks.

The watchman, who was married and had young chil-

agree, it's not easy. No, it isn't. However, remember the Buffet, and you'll find it highly rewarding.

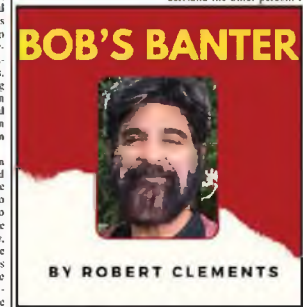
But along comes another thought, and that is that just keeping ourselves under check can also be the death of us, as in supporting ourselves from talking back to our superiors when they are wrong or other such situations, can build simmering anger inside, that could finally manifest in a heart attack and death.

How do we then deploy 'restraint'?

I believe two factors come into play, understanding ourselves, and understanding others!

Suppose we admit to our selves we have a tendency of acting spontaneously. We can go back in our own history of relationships and find we have wrecked good friendships and partnerships, by letting loose either our tongue or fists. "We are made like that," say later, definitely, even as the world either starts insulting us, or leaving us alone or considers us immature. Even as boxers learn patience and wrestlers learn to give in to a grip, and relax their muscles so that they can then exercise a better hold, we need to learn to curb that impulsive part of ourselves towards achieving a greater gain, either in the form of a continued friendship, or in being able to bring wisdom into a situation.

"A soft answer turneth away wrath," say the wise scriptures. In doing so, we give ourselves time to understand the other person. I



BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

BOB'S BANTER

den, had he showed restraint on his lust had would still been the family provider, which with his suicide, he is no more. Not just losing his own life, but losing the future of his two young children and a widowed wife!

For many years as honorary secretary of a prison ministry, we were given permission by the government to visit prisons all over the state and counsel those jailed inside. Quite often, tough looking men and women would burst into tears and continue weeping as they recounted some crime they committed on impulse. "If only..." they would whisper and weep.

"If only we had showed restraint!"

Everyday, we face choices of either giving in to our impulses or exercising restraint. The dictionary meaning of 'restraint' is, 'keep under control or within limits'.

I loved motorbikes and one bike I loved to ride, was the Royal Indian Bullet. It was once the bike with the most powerful engine on the road, but the time it looked dignified and elegant was not when it was rushing around at a hundred miles per hour, but when it was cruising at around fifty or so.

There is something majestic about power being restrained.

The whole world looking at the bike, knew it could spring into action and give the others a ride for their money, but watching the beast was a different kind of power in action.

The same should happen in our everyday actions. Not just in cases of lust, not just in anger or jealousy, but in managing souls which take place at every moment. I

see you looking at me with a puzzled expression, wondering how understanding comes into a picture when all you want to do, is to let fly a couple of punches or give back a singing reply. Indulge me as my mind turns to the one vivid picture I have of a Man on the cross, writhing in agony, and turning to God and murmuring, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

As the stone and whip came crashing down on Him, He who could have unleashed ten thousand angels, but restrained Himself through understanding that those who were crucifying Him, did not understand the reason why they were doing so.

Use these two methods of 'understanding', one understanding ourselves and the other of understanding our adversaries and then even as we read in horror about the rape and death of a young teen, even as we hear of other brutal killings, or read of female warriors who were touched and motivated by men who couldn't stop their lustful feelings, realise that even we need to use restraint many times in a day, both at home and outside!

Can you hear the thud, thud, thud of the mighty Buffet, cruising down the road? That should remind you of ourselves, men and women who have passion, vigour and strength, but decide instead to crush, and restrain that power, and in so doing, reveal ourselves, the muscle and power of restraint!

The Author conducts an Online Writers Course. For more details send a short message to him on WhatsApp 0982572883. bobsbanter@gmail.com

"Life without liberty is like a body without spirit."

— Khalil Gibran

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 57, No. 101 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JUNE 15, 2023

Public Accounts Committee (PAC) underrated

CONGRESS MIA Saleng Sangma has rued the apathetic attitude of the bureaucracy manning different departments in responding to queries on revenue leakages. The primary function of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is to scrutinise the audit report of the Comptroller and Auditor General after it has been laid before the legislature. After diligently going through the adverse audit comments the PAC calls for explanation from the relevant departments; compiles its report and presents it before the Assembly. The PAC is therefore an important body under the legislature because it acts as the watchdog of the public purse by examining in detail the audit report and the financial anomalies pointed out in the report. The PAC also scrutinises the appropriation accounts to verify if the funds were legally available and which competent authority sanctioned its use and if the rules and laid down procedures were followed.

As a body holding the Government to account for its use of public money, the PAC also keeps a tab on project execution and whether those are completed on schedule. If not, the PAC has to ask the executing authority as to why and how there were time and cost overruns. What has been regularly pointed out by the CAG in Meghalaya is the non-submission of utilisation certificates after the amount allocated for a particular programme or project has been put to use. A reading of the annual CAG reports point to the repeated non-compliance of departments to rules governing the use of public funds and lack of accountability of the departments concerned, especially short-realisation or non-realisation of taxes from various entities such as mineral exporters, excise taxes from liquor companies and bonded warehouses etc.

The PAC also examines public expenditure not only from the legal and formal perspectives to detect technical irregularities but also from the point of view of the economy, prudent deployment of funds, judicious maintenance of accounts, essentially to detect wasteful expenditure, loss, corruption, extravagance, inefficiency and petty expenses. In the past the PAC has perhaps not exercised its authority as it should and hence never captured the public imagination. If it did play its assigned role then the revenue leakage would have been plugged in due time. The corruption cases that have assailed the MDA-01 Government and previous governments too would have been detected at the preliminary stages and nipped in the bud. When those in Government know that a Committee mandated by the Legislature to keep a check on the public purse is actually performing its duty diligently they will think many times before lowering their guard to allow corruption and malfeasance to carry on unchecked.

Letters to the Editor

St Edmund's no longer 'Facta non Verba'

Editor, "Facta non verba" translates into deeds, not words. Deeds refer to a conscious and moral decision that is legally binding. But after my recent experience with St. Edmund's school, I would suggest a new motto 'verba non facta' or 'words but not deeds'. Let me elaborate on why I have arrived at this decision. In 2022, I had applied for my son's admission with St. Edmund's School for class 4 for the academic session 2023-2024 on a simple form and submitted the same with no supporting documents for further scrutiny for these were not asked for.

As a parent I kept my fingers crossed hoping that the best applicant gets selected via a just and fair process. But contrary to the principle of fairness and justice for which St. Edmund's School is known for, I received a call at around mid-day to inform me that my son would have to attend an interview at the school premises a day later. I was elated because my son has a strong foundation having studied in a Central Government School. I immediately arranged for teachers to coach and prepare him for the interview and was hopeful that he would succeed in the interview and would have been able to study in his

father's alma mater - a fact that my husband is very proud of. In fact, he credits his success to his alma mater which has inculcated in him the best value system.

But an hour later I received a call from the same staff of St. Edmund's School apologizing that there was a miscommunication and the admission was actually open only for Class 3 and not class 4. (Call records available). Needless to say, we were deeply pained but silently accepted that it was an honest mistake on the part of the school. Our hopes were shattered, our spirits dented. As an ex-student my husband was particularly upset. I am not saying that ex-Edmundians are automatically get admission. All I am asking for is a fair and just system where admissions can be made and admitted based on merit.

A few months later when the school reopened, I learnt that the son of a prominent professional leader of a regional party who is also a cabinet minister was admitted in class 4 of St. Edmund's school in the academic year 2023-2024, the very year we had sought admission for our son. I was appalled, furious but also devastated that whatever my husband had believed in was a sham. This was a nefarious, manipulative and corrupt act on the part of the institution. In doing this the school had compromised some of the most intrinsic value systems for which it is respected and

honoured for decades.

The perception created of the present Principal as a strong, disciplined, goal-oriented, go-getter and a man with a vision to restore St. Edmund's to its glorious days is a sham. This was the school where a teacher was applauded by none less than super star Shah Rukh Khan for training him to become a good actor because of that very teacher's guidance during his days at St. Edmund's. That event was broadcast on national television! Such is the legacy of the teachers of St. Edmund's. I strongly believe that this could only happen because the school attracted the best teachers through a fair and just process because during those days everything was transparent. Unfortunately the school has come down to a level beyond my comprehension. Its activities are beyond any moral justification. The Principal should take moral responsibility and conduct a thorough inquiry to find out who is responsible for this misconduct. Strict action should be against those involved in this scam. My last wish is that those who had applied for class 4 for the year 2023-2024, please come up and speak on the matter if they faced a similar predicament. I would also request all the alumni to come together to pressure the Institution that has evaded them to be, "Leaders In Every Field."

Nepotism and favouritism is not expected from a Christian school. It is time

Dilemma of women wrestlers

By Rajdeep Sardesai

answer was sobering: "Do you know how tough this has been for us? If we had spoken of sexual harassment, our parents would have stopped our training and got us married off straight away. Truth is, we were scared because our careers would have been finished."

Which is why our wrestlers need to be applauded and not demonized. The



likes of the Phogat sisters and Sakshi Malik, an Olympic bronze medalist, are not just any other athlete: they are path-breaking sporting revolutionaries whose impact goes well beyond just their athletes. These are trail-blazing women who redefined a sport that was seen as an exclusive male bastion. A woman in the wrestling ring was not just breaking a stereotype but also challenging centuries of prejudice and starkly unequal gender relations. Their incredible life struggle represented a coming of age moment for women in rural Haryana and went far beyond what any catchy 'Beti bachao, Beti padhao' slogan could ever have achieved.

And yet, while the wrestlers became symbols of national pride and gender empowerment, what they could never really change is the asymmetrical balance of power between those who run the sport and those who play it. The man whose arrest they are calling for, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, is a six-time MP, a political 'bahubali' (strongman) for whom the Wrestling Federation of India is a personal

feud, a chance to assert his supremacy as the 'maiblaap' of the wrestlers. The athletes may have won glory and brought medals for the country, but it is the BPS who has remained the dominant figure in the sport.

Moreover, Brij Bhushan is not just another BJP MP: he is someone who for more than two decades now has been an influential figure in the field, a chance to assert his supremacy as the 'maiblaap' of the wrestlers. The athletes may have won glory and brought medals for the country, but it is the BPS who has remained the dominant figure in the sport.

Moreover, Brij Bhushan is not just another BJP MP: he is someone who for more than two decades now has been an influential figure in the field, a chance to assert his supremacy as the 'maiblaap' of the wrestlers. The athletes may have won glory and brought medals for the country, but it is the BPS who has remained the dominant figure in the sport.

Moreover, Brij Bhushan is not just another BJP MP: he is someone who for more than two decades now has been an influential figure in the field, a chance to assert his supremacy as the 'maiblaap' of the wrestlers. The athletes may have won glory and brought medals for the country, but it is the BPS who has remained the dominant figure in the sport.

Charcoal industry a threat to the Ecology

By Barnes Mawrie

A news report on Uganda shows that charcoal industry in that country has ripped off a large portion of its forest reserves. Many local people are lamenting that the age-old respect and reverence for nature has diminished rapidly. Charcoal seems to be a principal cheap energy source for people in Uganda and that has increased the demand for it and consequently production has gone up thereby leading to large scale deforestation. Many local people have taken drastic measures to put an end to this destructive economic practice.

Coming closer home to our state, we all know that charcoal consumption is still very high especially during the winter months. Charcoal is also being supplied to other states of the country. This industry is being largely cleared and timber industry in West Khasi Hills of the government does not offer the poor people an alternative means of earning.

This industry has been responsible for the massive

all the rich alluvium from our hills. The same is happening in West Khasi Hills due to the indiscriminate deforestation brought about by charcoal industry.

What will happen to the poor people if charcoal industry is halted? How will they ever survive? These are legitimate questions. However, we all know that this is not a sustainable economic activity since the forests are limited natural resources. So the question we should ask is: what sustainable industry should replace this ecologically harmful industry? West Khasi Hills is endowed with exquisite natural beauty which should be fully exploited by the ministry of tourism. Tourism would definitely be an ecologically sustainable industry to replace charcoal-based economy. It would be unfair to ban charcoal and timber industry in West Khasi Hills if the government does not offer the poor people an alternative means of earning.

If people in Sohra are able to earn their living,



deforestation in many parts of West Khasi Hills. Anyone who has visited Nongkhnum Island, which has visited Nongkhnum Island, will have noticed that the forest cover in the island has literally disappeared due to charcoal burning.

A though charcoal industry is being practiced in other districts of the state, yet the most affected area is undoubtedly West Khasi Hills. In fact, many parts of this area wear a bald appearance due to absence of trees. We all know how important

they may even become well-off, it is due to the growth of tourism in this area. Recent statistics show that the flow of tourists to Sohra has shot up beyond expectations. The tourists stays are full to capacity and reservations are waitlisted. The same could happen to West Khasi Hills where people could easily become economically well-off through tourism. For this to happen, the government should invest heavily in infrastructure and in publicity

"If Sohra experiences shortage of water in spite of the heaviest rainfall on earth (an irony in itself), it is precisely because the rain water is not retained due to the absence of forests. Apart from this, Sohra is known to be rocky because it has lost all of its alluvium (rich top soil) due to erosion during the summer rains, once again due to the absence of trees."

trees are to every living being. Trees and plants give us oxygen to breathe in and absorb much of the CO2 that living beings produce. From this perspective, trees are the lifeline for humans. Trees and plants perform another important function - they help to retain water derived from rainfall and also protect the rich soil from being eroded. It is enough to see the adverse impact of tree deficit in Sohra region in order to convince us of this fact. If Sohra experiences shortage of water in spite of the heaviest rainfall on earth (an irony in itself), it is precisely because the rain water is not retained due to the absence of forests. Apart from this, Sohra is known to be rocky because it has lost all of its alluvium (rich top soil) due to erosion during the summer rains, once again due to the absence of trees. Bangladesh is the gainer in all of this, as it gets all the water supply as well as

Most tourists from outside the state remain ignorant about the tourists spots in West Khasi Hills. Many states in India invest heavily in publicizing their tourist spots on national TV channels, but our state has not made adequate investments in advertising the tourist destinations.

Nongkhnum Island is one tourist spot that has been underutilized due to poor investment and publicity. If residents of this island were to be fully engaged in tourist activities, they would definitely give up charcoal burning. Deforestation should be stopped at all costs because it is a threat to our own survival. We would love to see one day that West Khasi Hills becomes a tourists' haven and the local people fully engaged in this industry and enjoying once and for all the ecologically destructive charcoal industry.

(The writer is author of 'Environment and their Natural Environment')

we parents stand up for our rights and start questioning such malpractices. If we choose to keep quiet and not to dissent such incidents just because they didn't happen to us, we are choosing the path of destruction of the state as a whole and I believe that is the very reason that most of our brightest students from IIT's, IIM's, Medical Colleges etc. and so many brilliant professionals are no longer here in Meghalaya to help build a strong, dynamic and a sustainable state.

Politicians are public servants, which is to take decisions which are for the greater good of the public at large. Instead, in this case we are allowing politicians to rob us of our rights!

Yours etc., Denny H Majaw (Advocate)

Via email

Irony of our system: Common man caught in crossfire

Editor, In our society where alcohol is seen as a social ill, the common man often finds himself in ironic and unintended trouble. Compromising this issue, certain areas openly engage in the illegal sale of alcohol, a well-known fact among the local population, including the authorities. This article delves into the irony of how

the common man finds himself in trouble with the law because the cops keep looking the other way. Moreover, the influence of politicians in power adds another layer to this complex situation.

In the common man, alcohol-related troubles often arise inadvertently. Society's negative perception of alcohol places individuals at risk of facing social scorn, judgment, and consequences. Unfortunately, these troubles can escalate in places where the animal in man comes to life at night.

As far as alcohol trade is concerned, in our community, it is an open secret that certain areas engage in the illegal sale of alcohol. This clandestine trade thrives despite being known to the local police and authorities. The irony lies in the fact that while the illegal sellers operate in the shadows, the common man becomes the primary target for enforcement agencies.

Law enforcers and officials, entrusted with maintaining law and order, often turn a blind eye to the root of the problem—the illicit alcohol trade. Instead, they prioritize cracking down on individuals who buy or sell, often finding themselves inadvertently caught in such places. This selective targeting exacerbates the irony and raises questions about the effectiveness and fairness of law enforcement.

Political influence by politicians in power further complicates the situation. When politicians dictate the actions of law keepers, their

focus may shift away from addressing the underlying issues to political considerations, leaving the common man trapped in a cycle of unintended consequences.

To break this cycle, it is crucial for law enforcement and authorities to address the root problem—the illegal alcohol trade. A comprehensive approach involving increased surveillance, stricter penalties for illegal sellers, and community collaboration is necessary. Additionally, separating law enforcement from political influence can help restore faith in the system and ensure a fairer society for all.

To conclude, the irony here is that the common man faces unintended troubles related to alcohol consumption while the illegal alcohol trade thrives. This systemic issue warrants attention. By acknowledging and addressing the root problem, improving law enforcement effectiveness, and limiting political influence, societies can work toward a fairer and more just approach to alcohol-related issues. (HBBB Bah Jay.) Only then can the common man be spared from the unintended consequences of an inherently flawed system.

Yours etc., Bahajand Andrew, Via email

Articles and letters appearing on this page are the views of the writers. The editors do not take of The Shillong Times

"None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free."

The Shillong Times

Vol No 51 No 241 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JUNE 16, 2023

Shame as 'Blushian'

FEELINGS that politicians can get away with their wrong acts has been reinforced yet again as the central government started pussy-footing over the sensational accusations against BJP MP from Uttar Pradesh, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. He was cornered by a set of ace women wrestlers over alleged sexual harassment. But, their months-long agitation in New Delhi seeking punitive action against him fell on deaf ears. However, a promise came from Home Minister Amit Shah a week ago that cases shall be filed against Brij Bhushan, who was already stripped of the post. While this led to the suspension of the protests, the charge-sheet filed in the Delhi court on Thursday was so banal that the MP can escape arrest. The watered-down version of the allegations might even allow the accused to have the last laugh. This is the tragedy of our times.

The MP, who as president of the Wrestling Federation of India had direct control over teams that represented the nation at global events, allegedly pounced on several of these women while abroad too. Singh vehemently denies the allegations and says these were politically motivated. His script was a standard excuse. True, what these women perhaps lacked was solid evidence. This seemed to be providing him a window of opportunity to wriggle out of the charges even in a court of law. Notably, in a very similar situation in the past, veteran journalist MJ Akbar quit his post of Union Minister and fought the cases.

The bane of the Indian sports and games field is the overlordship of athletics and others by politicians from the ruling party, who are appointed to head such bodies at the national level. They have no business to be there. Brij Bhushan is just another character. Indian politicians, many of them drop-outs from schools and colleges, cannot be expected to have any sense of discipline. They often mess up with situations. The large-scale corruption among them is only one side of their indulgences. The case of a senior Congress politician Suresh Kalmadi in relation to the Commonwealth Games scam and his arrest in 2014 are well-documented. Expectations were that the BJP dispensation under Narendra Modi would not just rein in corruption but bring about a culture of accountability but this was wishful thinking. India, carrying with it the world's largest population of over 1.40 billion, has been having a pathetic show, in iterations, at the Olympics or the Asian Games or the other such global events. After every such glittering event, our teams return with their heads down in deep shame. The nation keeps cutting a sorry figure. Those like Brij Bhushan further sully the image of the nation.

Letters to the Editor

Stop beguiling the public!

Editor, Now I'm beginning to doubt the veracity of your report, Govt to study reasons behind high dropout rate. (ST June 15, 2023). Just wonder whether the reporter is surreptitiously giving tactical support to an individual politician. The reportage, to me, is a very shallow and weak attempt to give undue focus to 'Shangplang said... Shangplang said...'. repeated so often that it has nauseated me enough to stop reading the papers and write his caustic response!

The same points of utterances and action to be initiated have been repeated three times in your daily in a span of one week! What conclusions do I draw? A pat on the back reporting? Favoured reporting? Lime-light reporting? Square peg in a round hole reporting? Sec, I'm supporting you, reporting?

All focus on just one point of repetition on what he said, (for) it will be too lengthy if I commented on all. The NEP would be customised to favour conditions of the state... I'm assuming he's caught up in post semantics! However, the NEP cannot be customised. It can be modified to adapt or to adapt

It's not a cricket but that we customise for a tall or short statured person! For if this analogy is what the Advisor has in mind, then we're heading for a disaster.

How does one give clarity, to favour the conditions of the state? What favour? What conditions? Do I detect a negativity in favour or a myopic interpretation? The Advisor must be coaxed into enlightening the public on the matter. Whatever the case might be, it is my fervent prayer (for I am a God fearing person), that an educated and well-informed decision is taken by all at the helm of affairs, to lead school education out of the quagmire and to arrest the school dropout rate. No one-man show, self-back-patting persons with capital 'T' and massive egos can ever carry a team of dedicated, passion driven workers!

Yours etc., Kevin Phillips Shillong - 19

Another way of seeking votes

Editor, There are different ways of seeking votes in this day and age but the manner in which Union Home Minister, Amit Shah has been trying to win votes in Tamil Nadu is beyond all norms of ethics. On Sunday last,

Corruption and the bureaucracy/ technocracy in Meghalaya

By Patricia Mukhim

Corruption is almost normalised in Meghalaya. The elections held this year have prevented this without a shadow of doubt. But more than that this election has also seen the return of the impudent, loud-mouthed politicians who won despite their haughty speeches and couldn't care less demeanour. To expect voters here or elsewhere in this country to use their sense of reasoning is to expect the impossible. Poverty reduces people to nothing less than beggars. There are stories of politicians fighting the recent elections who distributed dinner sets and pressure cookers. When the electorate is reduced to that level of poverty where they no longer have self-respect, then the government we get will also be one that further pushes people into abject poverty. But this is about politics. Let's spend some time to understand the bureaucracy and their role in complicity. And why is that politicians alone have to carry the burden of guilt when the paper work to facilitate corruption has to be done by the babus with apologies to those who find this term repulsive.

In the case, how is it possible that the officers in the Social Welfare Department just put their signatures blindly on something they know sinks of a scam. Why could they not blow the whistle? One of the reasons why the Meghalaya House Kolkata scam was nipped in the bud was because we had Ministers like A.H. Scott Lyngdoh and Herbert Suching who could not tolerate an outright sale of Meghalaya's prime property at Russell Street Kolkata by signing a 99 year deal with Asian Housing Corporation Ltd, a real estate company that was going to get the entire frontage of the building at Russell Street for commercial purposes and where the Meghalaya Government would only be given a few rooms for VPs in the backyard. At the time, the People's Rally Against Corruption (PRAC) comprising nearly all the main pressure groups and a few individuals blew the whistle on this scam and filed a PIL at the Gauhati High Court. The day the PIL was filed the Government of Meghalaya rescinded the deal. So the State of Meghalaya has effectively come out of Russell Street property even today. At the time the late A.H. Scott Lyngdoh was Finance Minister. He also was a former bureaucrat and retired as Chief Secretary of Mizoram.

We don't get people with that level of uprightness today. Looks like morality and ethics have been flushed down the drain of impunity. It is important that the Finance Department not be concentrated with the Chief Minister's office for consolidation of powers happens at a cost. In the MDA-01 regime, Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma had defended all the scams from the Saubhagya to the Rice Seam to the Police Construction scam, to the Assembly dome scam amongst others that perhaps did not surface because there's no one in the Government today that has the moral fibre to call out corruption. And why? Because every minister has his fingers in the pie. A supine bureaucracy today to please the capbaggers today will not upset the applicant because they are all looking at an appointment and some financial gain too.

Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma in the MDA-01 regime did away with the powers of the CBI here perhaps because the S. Subhagya scam was threatening to sink his government. So he did the next best thing and quickly appointed an Inquiry Committee. These Committees are smokecreens and in any other state where the Opposition is strong it would have said 'no' to inquiry committees, and instead mandated an independent inquiry by a sitting judge of a High Court. The Opposition should have demanded that they would select the sitting judge. Instead what has happened is the sun of the mill rigmole of the Government choosing a retired judge and other assailing officials who would all be paid from the state exchequer. (Do we actually expect such an Inquiry Committee to come out of these Inquiry Committees?) As for the credibility of such inquiry commissions, no less a person than a retired Judge of the Madras High Court, Justice K. Chandru writing for IIT Next says, "Under the Next system of Inquiry Act, 1952, the Union government can order for an inquiry in respect of all items provided in List I and II of Schedule VII of the Constitution. The State governments are empowered to order a Commission of

inquiry in respect of items in List II and List III of Schedule VII. Many a time, Commissions are appointed simultaneously by both the Centre and the State so as to frustrate the effort of one or the other. Though it has the powers of the Civil Court, a Commission's report, to be submitted merely to the Legislature, is not binding. Under the Act, it will be placed before a House with an action taken report within six months - which is often breached. The time limit under the Act has no meaning because there's no Commission's have become self-perpetuating bodies. An inquiry ordered under the Act is an eye-wash. The Commission is a toothless tiger, which is most often appointed to ward off public protest. The presiding officers - either retired judge or retired civil servant of High Court - are often either anxious to give a report in favour of the State or they perpetuate their tenure by frequent adjournments, thus frustrating the effort to find out the truth regarding a matter of public importance. A classic example is the Liberhan Commission, which continued for more than 18 years. Many reports are gathering dust in the corridors of Secretariats of Central and State governments."

This gives us enough idea of why inquiry commissions in Meghalaya have never yielded any results. It's not as if we have not had them in the past. The first corruption case in Meghalaya dates back to 1974. It was the case of Marak was PHE Minister (cabinet rank) and Nihon Kish was the Minister of State. At the time Mr Marak admitted that he was taken by surprise because a racket had occurred in the PHE Jowai Division. He only came to know of the scam when it was raised in the Assembly. The then Chief Minister, William Sangma set up an Inquiry Committee. The Committee was headed by the Managing Director of the Meghalaya Gas Consumption Corporation (MGCC), Mr N. Ryngh. Finally, the terms of reference of the inquiry was such that it did not specifically require a probe into the role of the two ministers, despite Chief Minister Captain William Sangma's assurance that he would not shield anybody found guilty in the affair, even if they were ministers.

But this particular case was so simple it didn't even require a special inquiry to pin down the culprit then RB firm an executive engineer in the PHED, Jowai division. Against a total allocation of Rs 40 lakh for the purchase of materials during the financial year 1983-84, RB firm had placed orders for materials worth Rs 13.27 crore and had managed to pay the contractors Rs 4.63 crore before he was restrained. Apparently the contractors/suppliers were supporters of the junior minister Nihon Kish. The executive engineer had clearly overstepped his bounds, because normally, an executive engineer cannot make payments beyond Rs 20,000 per month without prior sanction from the department. But he must have done so at the behest of the minister.

This is shocking even by today's standards. Even at that time there was complete absence of any checks and balances and the fact that the amount paid was not insignificant, considering that the department's entire capital budget for the year was a little less than Rs 10 crore and the state's annual plan size was about Rs 64 crore, is unbelievable.

The Opposition then headed by Brij Lyngdoh was left nonplussed. Lyngdoh said the Committee has obviously chosen not to probe beneath the superficial facts of the case or the specific role of the two ministers. The Opposition had asked for a high-powered independent commission to probe the case but Capt. Sangma chose a serving bureaucrat to prepare an official report. The total amount involved in this scam was a whopping Rs 13 crore which was a huge sum at the time. Scams therefore are a treasured legacy of Meghalaya and if there was no scam it would be unnatural. And in such scams, technocrats and bureaucrats have been involved as they are today.

The 'India Today' had at the time covered this PHED racket extensively and people across India read it with shock and awe. The word 'scam' had not been in vogue then. But clearly Meghalaya has a healthy legacy of burying scam rackets via inquiry committees. Yet ministers then and now speak as if they are angels descended from heaven while defending these scams. What is troubling is the silence of the bureaucracy for to be silent is to be complicit.

Such offenders. 3. Khyaidalad and Maphran area are the busiest as well as the dirtiest areas of Shillong. If you are an officer from the concerned departments visit the above places in the early hours (6-9 am) and late at night, the sight is unbelievable. How SMARI is Shillong considering we boast of the SMARI city project. The other day I had written on broken cables and wires strewn across the city but who cares?

I hope this letter is read and given a sane thought by all, Shillongites. Please take care of your own city just as you care for your own homes. Stop throwing trash in the streets. Stop littering garbage on roadsides or drains. Thanks for maintaining cleanliness.

A word of deep appreciation for Operation Clean up team along with Team Jiva who have been cleaning rivers and other public spaces for several years now. Let's make our city clean again. We can do it if each one of us lives and behaves as responsible citizens.

Yours etc, Rewald Byambok Shillong - 19

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

Disinformation as a Tool in Manipur Conflict

By Labmin Kipgen

The ongoing conflict between the majority Meitei community and the minority Kuki-Zo tribes in Manipur has been continuing for over a month now. While there was a temporary cessation in hostilities after the Home Minister called for a 15-day period of peace, sporadic violence still occurs. However, it is clear that this conflict is highly unbalanced. The Meitei community, which holds the majority of seats in the assembly (40 out of 60), wields significant power while the Kuki-Zo tribes represent less than 16% of the population. The power imbalance is especially evident in the media landscape, where the Meitei community, with their strong control over the state's top positions, enjoy an unparalleled platform to project their preferred narratives.

The Kuki have been subjected to extremely derogatory language in the realm of politics. Recently, they have been accused of terrorism and narcoterrorism, which are highly stigmatizing allegations. This situation originated from Chief Minister N. Biren Singh's statement on May 29, where he claimed that 40 Kuki militants were killed and referred to them as "Kuki terrorists." By using this narrative, the Chief Minister tried to portray the conflict as solely between Kuki terrorists and security forces, denying the presence of any inter-community tensions.

However, the Chief of Defence Staff, General Anil Chauhan, strongly disagreed with this view and emphasized that the violence in Manipur was not related to counter-insurgency operations but rather stemmed from ethnic clashes. In response, on May 31, a self-proclaimed NGO called the "People's Alliance for Peace and Progress, Manipur," contested the Chief of Defence Staff's position and filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court. They demanded that the government should take steps to curb Kuki militants allegedly involved in narco-terrorism in Manipur. Unfortunately, the legal action led to an unfair association of the terms terrorism and narco-terrorism with the Kuki community.

However, the basis of these allegations, namely the Chief Minister's assertion of eliminating 40 Kuki militants, was strongly refuted as "disinformation" by Lieutenant General HS Panag (Retd). He accused the Chief Minister of promoting "ethnically-driven disinformation." It is clear that the Chief Minister is actively involved in fabricating and spreading disinformation to defame and undermine the Kuki community, with the support of certain self-proclaimed NGOs. This is disheartening to witness the state of politics and discourse in Manipur, where even the highest echelons of the government are being exploited to advance their propaganda.

However, the deliberate actions of the Chief Minister have successfully yielded the desired outcome. Major newspapers in Manipur are filled with attention-grabbing headlines, focusing on the alleged attacks carried out by Kuki militants or a multi-page report, labelling them as "Kuki terrorists." This well-orchestrated effort, even with the support of opposition political parties as well, aims to attribute all acts of violence and ongoing conflicts solely to the "Kuki militants." To fully understand this coordinated campaign, it is crucial to consider the context of the existing ceasefire agreement between the central government and Kuki outfits. The Kuki-Zo insurgents, consisting of 24 groups under the collective banner of the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and United People's Front (UPF), have been observing a Suspension of Operation (SOO) agreement with both the central and state governments since August 2018. These groups have been actively engaged in multiple rounds of negotiations with the central authorities. In fact, "The Hindu" even reported that they were close to reaching an agreement on granting "local self-governance" to Kuki tribal areas in Manipur, until the recent outbreak of violence on May 3, disrupted the progress. The persistent campaign demanding the suspension of the SOO pact reflects the opposition of the Meitei community towards the very concept of self-governance for the Kuki tribals.

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), all eight (terrorist or unlawful) groups operating in Manipur belong to the Meitei community. These groups include the People's Liberation Army (PLA), United National Liberation Front (UNLF), Manipur People's Army (MPA), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PRPK), Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), Kangleipak Kamba Lup (KYKL), Coordinated Platform for Peace (CoP), Alliance for Socialist Unity Kangleipak (ASUK), and Manipur People's Liberation Front (MPLF). It is important to note that the PLA and KYKL were part of an informal alliance with the state government to combat the People's Defence Forces, a resistance group. Despite the Chief Minister's attempt to label the Kuki groups as "terrorists," the true security threat to Manipur and India lies elsewhere.

The dissemination of disinformation targeting the Kuki community in Manipur is not a new phenomenon. One particular instance involves around the wide-spread perception of a significant influx of refugees from neighbouring states into a country currently undergoing political turmoil. About one month before the eruption of counter-insurgency operations, the state government allegedly launched a "War-On-Illegal-Migrants" campaign, as reported by "The Hindu." The state government of the RSS (Kashyapa Swamy-sankh Sangha), contested the Chief of Defence Staff's position and filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Supreme Court. They demanded that the government should take steps to curb Kuki militants allegedly involved in narco-terrorism in Manipur. Unfortunately, the legal action led to an unfair association of the terms terrorism and narco-terrorism with the Kuki community.

Moreover, the Kuki-Zo tribes have been subjected to various derogatory labels such as "Kuki terrorists," "poppy cultivators," and "protected forest encroachers." The continuous dissemination of false information and the smear campaign orchestrated by the Meitei majority community, spearheaded by the Chief Minister himself, raises serious concerns about the potential for peaceful coexistence between these two communities. Such actions can be seen as intentional efforts to degrade, dehumanize, and oppose political parties fundamental human rights. The deep-rooted mistrust that exists makes it increasingly challenging to envision a future of harmony for both communities. Given these circumstances, it may be necessary for the central government to officially recognize the existing communal and geographical divide between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities. Meitei scholars and JNU faculty Dr. Bimal Akojiam, has likened this division to the partition of India in 1947. This would entail granting a separate administration for the Kuki-Zo tribes, allowing them to manage their affairs autonomously. (Author Bio: Labmin Kipgen, PhD Associate Lecturer, Assam University, Guwahati. kipgen@anukn.ac.uk)

Persistent rain worsens flood situation in Assam



GUWAHATI, June 17: The flood situation in Assam became worse amid persistent rain in several parts of the state and nearby territories.

According to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), the floods have affected 37,535 people in at least 10 districts of the state.

Large portions of Bhiswanah, Darrang, Dhemajee, Dibragam, Hojai, Lakhimpur, Nagaon, Sonitpur, Tinsukia, and Udalguri have been hit by the first wave of floods while three other districts - Kamrup Metro, Cachar, and Nalbari - have reported urban flooding.

Thousands of the affected people are shifting to shelter camps that are being built by the state administration.

According to experts, about 1,409 hectares of crop land is underwater, which will cause farmers to suffer a great deal of loss.

Meanwhile, in Guwahati, one person lost life after the side walls of a factory collapsed due to a landslide. The incident took place at Sonali Path in the Bhatnagar neighbourhood of Guwahati on Saturday morning.

The deceased has been identified as

Mukhtar Ali. He was found unconscious after being buried alive by a State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) squad. He was sent to a nearby hospital, where the doctors pronounced him dead. Continuous rain, according to the SDRF, was the reason for the landslide.

Numerous districts have reported erosion, and nine districts have seen infrastructure damage, including bridges and homes.

Brahmaputra river is flowing above the danger threshold at Ncamatighat, while Kopili is doing the same near Kamrup. According to reports from the Water Resource Department, the second main river, Barak, is inching to touch the danger mark.

Numerous farmlands have been submerged as a result of the rising river levels and constant rain, which has also stranded hundreds of animals.

11,980 animals have been impacted by the floods so far, according to ASDMA.

Two major cities in Assam, Guwahati and Sibschar, are suffering from urban flooding, and they attribute their misery to faulty drainage systems and a lack of upkeep. (IANS)

Mandaviya reviews public health preparedness for Assam flood

GUWAHATI, June 17: Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Saturday chaired a virtual meeting with central and state agencies to review public health preparedness as part of the flood management in Assam.

He also directed the officials concerned to prepare a flood public health response and action plan with a perspective of health emergencies. Also, highlighted the importance of Central-State collaboration for effective disaster management, the minister said on the micro-blogging site. He urged the officials concerned to work on a flood management model to deal with the situation in Assam, which is a recurring phenomenon.

The minister directed them to prepare an online database, listing all the important information like the availability of beds, oxygen and other health facilities to ensure efficient management of any health emergency.

"A Flood Management Model with coordinated efforts of both the central and state governments can bring about the best results," he said.

Assam has been hit by the first wave of flood early this week with over 34,000 people affected in 11 districts, following incessant rainfall.

as well as the availability of clean drinking water in flood-affected regions.

"Directed to prepare Flood Public Health Response & Action Plan with perspective of health emergencies. Also, highlighted the importance of Central-State collaboration for effective disaster management," the minister said on the micro-blogging site. He urged the officials concerned to work on a flood management model to deal with the situation in Assam, which is a recurring phenomenon.

The minister directed them to prepare an online database, listing all the important information like the availability of beds, oxygen and other health facilities to ensure efficient management of any health emergency.

"A Flood Management Model with coordinated efforts of both the central and state governments can bring about the best results," he said.

Assam has been hit by the first wave of flood early this week with over 34,000 people affected in 11 districts, following incessant rainfall.

The union minister also urged the officials to ensure that health and wellness centres are well equipped with required medicines, equipment and other amenities.

He directed all health workers to remain trained so that they can provide requisite healthcare services during emergencies.

"Accredited social health activists, auxiliary nurses and midwives, community health officers should know their roles and responsibilities for any emergency. Advance training will ensure that they are effective in providing healthcare services during emergency flood management," he said.

Mandaviya also assured the state agencies of all support from the Centre for flood management in the state.

During the meeting, Assam health department's principal secretary Avinash Joshi presented a comprehensive overview of the preparedness and measures taken by the state towards emergency public health response to deal with possible waterborne diseases in flood-affected areas. (PTI)



A fruit vendor wades through a waterlogged road after rainfall, in Guwahati, on Saturday. (PTI)

Manipur: Two people injured as security forces, mobs clash in Imphal

Attempts also made at torching houses of BJP leaders

IMPHAL, June 17: Two civilians were injured as mobs clashed with security forces overnight in Imphal town and attempts were made to torch the houses of BJP leaders, officials said on Saturday.

In separate incidents, automatic gunfire was reported from Kwakia in Bishnupur district of Manipur and Kargyai in Churachandpur district through the night.

An attempt was also made to loot weapons from Iringbam police station in Imphal West. However, no weapons were stolen.

Army, Assam Rifles and Manipur Rapid Action Force held joint marches till midnight through the state capital to halt rioters from congregating.

A mob of approximately 1,000 people came together to try and burn down buildings near the palace compound.

RAF fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the crowd.

Another mob tried to set the house of Biswajet, MLA on fire. RAF column, however, dispersed the crowd.

Another mob surrounded the BJP office post midnight at Singjamat, but could not do any harm as an Army column dispersed it.

Similarly, a crowd tried to vandalise the home of Sharda Devi, BJP (women's wing) president near Porompat in Imphal around midnight. Security forces managed to disperse the youth.

Earlier in the day, crowds set up roadblocks and torched properties in the heart of Imphal town on Friday, officials said.

Among others, a house belonging to Union Minister RK Ranjan Singh was attacked and attempts were made to burn it down on Thursday night.

A warehouse near the royal palace belonging to a retired tribal IAS officer was burnt down completely on Friday.

Security guards and fire-fighters managed to control arson attempts by the mob and save the house of the minister of state for External Affairs here from being gutted on Thursday night.

A mob clashed with RAF personnel on Friday evening after it had set the warehouse afire.

The group also burnt tyres, logs and waste in the middle of roads in Wangkhei, Porompat and Thangparat areas affecting the flow of traffic in Manipur's capital town, officials said.

More than 100 people have lost their lives in the ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki community people in Manipur that broke out a month ago.

The state government has imposed a curfew on 11 districts and banned internet services in a bid to stop the spread of rumours in the state.

Clashes first broke out on May 3 after a Tribal Solidarity March was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley. Tribals - Nagas and Kukis - constitute another 40 per cent of the population and reside in the hill districts. (PTI)

Law & order in Manipur needs urgent attention: Ex-Army Chief

IMPHAL, June 17: Former Army Chief Vaj Prakash Malik said on Friday that the law and order situation in Manipur needs "urgent attention at highest level".

Gen Malik (ret), referring to a tweet by Lt Gen L. Nishikanta Singh (ret), tweeted, "An extraordinarily sad call from a retired Lt Gen from Manipur. Law & order situation in Manipur needs urgent attention at the highest level."

Gen Malik, who served as the 19th Chief of Army Staff from September 30, 1997 to September 30, 2000, tagged Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Home Minister Amit Shah in his tweet.

Earlier, Lt Gen Singh (ret) tweeted, "I'm just an ordinary Indian from Manipur living a retired life. The state is now 'stateless'. Life and property can be destroyed anytime by anyone just like in Libya, Lebanon, Nigeria, Syria, etc. It appears Manipur has been left to stew in its own juice. Is anyone listening?"

Referring to the tweet of Lt Gen Singh (ret), former Union Minister and Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh tweeted, "The PM is certainly not. He has time for all other things except reaching out to the distressed people of Manipur in thought, word and deed."

The devastating ethnic violence, which so far killed over 120 people and injured more than 400, began in Manipur on May 3 after a Tribal Solidarity March was organised by a tribal student body in the hill districts of the state to protest against the Meitei community's Scheduled Tribe (ST) status demand.

Meanwhile senior CPI leader D Raja on Saturday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi wondering why he is keeping a "soulless silence" on Manipur where over 100 people have lost their lives in ethnic violence since early last month. The prime minister has also not uttered a single word on the 'wrestlers' protest, the CPI general secretary said. (Agencies)

Assam MLA surrenders before court in rape case, gets bail

HAILAKANDI (ASSAM), June 17: Assam MLA Nijam Uddin Choudhury surrendered before a court in Hailakandi district on Saturday in a rape case and was granted bail.

Choudhury surrendered before the Hailakandi district and session's judge after the court issued an arrest warrant against him on Friday.

A rape case was filed in 2018 by a woman, in which Choudhury, the AIUDF legislator of Algaipur, is a co-accused.

The court granted his bail application. Public Prosecutor Manika Roy said.

The legislation had failed to appear before the court despite repeated summons, leading to the issuance of the arrest warrant.

Choudhury was first elected from Algaipur in 2016 and retained the seat in the 2021 Assembly poll. (PTI)

Tourists stranded in Sikkim due to heavy rainfall, 2K rescued by Army

GANGTOK, June 17: More than 2,400 tourists, including 60 college students, were stranded in Lachen and Leh-Chang area of North Sikkim district due to road blockades following incessant rainfall since the last three days, officials said on Saturday.

The district administration has pressed into service 19 buses and 70 smaller vehicles to evacuate the 2,464 stranded tourists, officials said.

As of now, three buses and two other vehicles carrying 123 tourists have left for the state capital Gangtok, they said.

Personnel from Quick Reaction Team of the District Disaster Management Authority, Sikkim Police, GRRF, BRO, TBP, Army, Travel Agency Association Sikkim are working together to carry out evacuation of stranded tourists, they said.

Meanwhile, the road to Chungthang has been blocked at numerous points. The restoration works will start only after the rains stop.

The North Sikkim district administration has set up helpline numbers - 8509822997



Tyres and construction materials set on fire by miscreants amid ongoing ethnic violence in Manipur, in Imphal East district, on Friday. (PTI)



Indian Army personnel during a rescue operation after a chunk of road washed away due to heavy rains and landslides in Chungthang, Sikkim, on Saturday. (PTI)

116464265 - for the public to contact in case of any query about stranded tourists, officials added. (PTI)

Modi has changed country's fortune in nine years: Nadda

SANTIRBAZAR (TRIPURA), June 17: BJP national president JP Nadda on Saturday said the country has witnessed unprecedented development under Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has "changed the fortune of India" in the past nine years.

He cited infrastructure building, good governance and all-round development as the benchmarks of the Modi government.

"Earlier, India was known for corruption, policy paralysis and bad governance. Now, the whole world respects the country for all-round development and good governance," the BJP chief said at a rally in South

Tripura's Santirbazar school ground to mark the completion of nine years of the Modi government. Highlighting the Centre's achievements in infrastructure building, Nadda said 13,125 km of border roads have been built to safeguard the international border.

Claiming that Modi had introduced report card-based politics, Nadda said he is the man who has changed vote bank politics by bringing growth-centric politics.

"BJP leaders seek people's blessings by presenting report cards before the electors which was missing earlier," he said.

"Rs 18 lakh crore has been spent for infrastructure building from 2014 to 2022 while 29 km of national highways are being constructed daily compared to just 12 km during UPA rule," he said, adding 74 airports have also been built in the past nine years.

Nadda said Tripura has got 300 km of national highway in the past six years and the proposed Indo-Bangla rail connectivity will reduce travel time from Agartala to Kolkata from 31 hours to 10 hours.

"This is the new story of development of the Modi government," he said. Asserting that the country's fiscal position is strong, Nadda said India

GDP growth has remained firm despite adverse conditions such as global recession, the war in Ukraine and Covid.

He said India's inflation is much lower than that of developed countries such as the US, the UK, Australia and Italy. Branding the Congress and CPI(M) as "illiterate" for questioning inflation, Nadda said the country's inflation stands at 4.2 per cent compared to 4.9 per cent in the US and 8.7 per cent in the United Kingdom.

Nadda, who arrived here on Friday night, also highlighted the Modi government's welfare measures.

"The government has constructed 4 crore dwelling units under Prime Minister Awas Yojana (PMAY) and introduced Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana," he said.

He appealed to people to strengthen the hands of Modi to build a better India in the days to come.

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha also highlighted the Modi government's achievements over the past nine years.

"Farmers' incomes have doubled in the Northeastern state from Rs 6,580 in 2018 to Rs 12,580 now. Around 1 lakh women are engaged in SHGs for which the government has pumped Rs 1,100 crore as revolving fund," he said. (PTI)

A trip with dad across India's five most formidable palaces

Father's Day is an extraordinary moment, a time to honour the remarkable fathers who have graced our lives with their love and guidance. On this auspicious occasion, let us transcend the realm of ordinary celebrations and embark on a magnificent sojourn that will transport your father to a world of unparalleled opulence and regal grandeur. Prepare to indulge him in a retreat where he can walk in the footsteps of kings, immerse himself in the tapestry of history, and be showered with the utmost appreciation and adoration.

These architectural marvels stand as testaments to the bygone era, where every brick and stone holds the weight of captivating stories and legendary tales. Prepare to be mesmerised as you step into a realm where time stands still, and the very air whispers secrets of the past.

Each palace boasts an exquisite fusion of architectural brilliance, awe-inspiring opulence, and captivating aesthetics that will leave you breathless. Honour his unwavering presence and unwavering support with a gesture that will forever be etched in his heart. Choose one of these regal havens and embark on a journey that will transcend time, creating an indelible mark on your father's soul. Prepare to embark on a grand adventure where every moment is adorned with extravagance and every experience is bathed in luxury.

Umaid Bhawan, Jodhpur

The Umaid Bhawan Palace in Jodhpur is one of the largest private residences in the world. Built in 1943, this magnificent palace is now a luxury hotel that offers an unforgettable experience to its guests. The palace features 347 rooms and suites that are decorated with a blend of Art Deco and Rajasthani styles. Indulge in a luxurious spa treatment or take a dip in the palace's indoor swimming pool. In addition to its luxurious accommodations, the Umaid Bhawan Palace offers a variety of dining options that cater to all tastes and preferences. Your father can enjoy a sumptuous meal at Risala, the palace's signature restaurant, which serves authentic Rajasthani cuisine as well as international dishes. Treat your father to an unforgettable experience by witnessing the grandeur of Umaid Bhawan, and you'll create cherished memories together.



Noormahal Palace, Karnal

An iconic heritage landmark with an untold story of a family legacy, the Noormahal Palace has stepped gracefully through many regal transitions.

The owners are from the Sikh misti (Clan) of Sukerchakia's royal family lineage of Maharaja Ranjit Singh Ji, the great warrior and Maharaja of Great Punjab who ruled from 1780-1839. Restoring the royal heritage grandeur and recreating the majestic past of the legendary Maharaja, this jewel in the crown of Delhi NCR offers 125 stunningly luxurious rooms and royal suites. Legendary for its striking architecture, iconic location, and vibrant past, Noormahal Palace Hotel in Karnal-The Land of Raja Karna, a character of the epic Mahabharata has its own extraordinary stories to tell.

It is perfectly blended with every authentic experience to make any guest feel like a modern king or queen. With marvellous palace architecture, intricate decor, hand-painted walls and ceilings, spacious lawns, and beautiful sights, this place should definitely be on your Gram. Discover the secret recipes of the pre-independence era at Frontier Mail, the Train designed Restaurant recreating the legendary Frontier Mail that operated between Mumbai and Pe-



Six Senses Fort Barwara, located about two and a half hours' drive from Jaipur and just 30 minutes by car from Ramnagar National Park, is a remarkable fort-hotel constructed in the 14th century by the Chauhans. The extensive restoration process of this 700-year-old fort took over a decade, resulting in the creation of two palaces and multiple temples within its premises. With a collection of 48 suites, this hotel offers an exquisite and historical immersive experience for those seeking luxury. In addition to enjoying thrilling jungle safaris, guests can indulge in relaxation at the expansive 30,000 sq. ft. spa and fitness centre at Fort Barwara or partake in a guided village tour.

Ram Bagh Palace, Jaipur

The historic Ramnagar Palace, a magnificent property dating back to 1835. Situated in the captivating city of Jaipur, known for its royal heritage and stunning forts, this palace offers a truly extraordinary experience. Acquired by the prestigious Taj Hotel group, Ramnagar Palace was once the residence of Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II, adding an extra layer of authenticity and charm to your stay. As you wander through the property, you'll be captivated by the sprawling Mughal gardens, extravagant chambers, and spellbinding decor that evoke the glorious times of Rajasthan's royal past.

This Father's Day, go above and beyond the ordinary by gifting your father an experience that combines luxury, history, and grandeur. These royal palaces not only serve as reminders of the grandeur and legacy of the past but also offer an opportunity for introspection, gratitude, and the celebration of family bonds. These palaces are not mere structures; they are repositories of culture, art, and stories that have shaped the world we inhabit today. Father's Day is a time to honour the men who have guided us, nurtured us, and shaped our lives. By embarking on this extraordinary journey, you not only offer your father a gift beyond material possessions but also create an opportunity to deepen your bond, share incredible experiences, and create cherished memories that will endure for a lifetime. (IANS)

shawar during pre-independence days with elements taken from the actual train. Enjoy the outdoors, the spa table, and lounging in your room, equally. For the restless, and obsessed with productivity, there are indoor games as well as sports, which include lawn tennis, basketball, cricket, and more.

Nemrana Fort, Alwar

With a history spanning over 500 years, this enchanting destination offers a perfect blend of captivating beauty and rich heritage. Nestled in the picturesque Aravalli hills of Rajasthan, Nemrana Fort beckons you for a peaceful holiday getaway, just a stone's throw away from the bustling capital city.

As you traverse the Delhi-Jaipur expressway, you can even make a quick visit to the pink city, adding a touch of adventure to your retreat. While you'll be staying in a luxurious hotel, the fort ensures that you still get a taste of the royal lifestyle that once thrived within its walls.

The fort's restoration has preserved its essence, creating an atmosphere that transports you back to medieval times. As you explore the fort, you'll be captivated by the magnificent view of a Baori, a traditional stepwell that stands as a testament to the architectural marvels of the past.

Six Senses Fort Barwara, Rajasthan

Of mice and matriarchs: the female-led societies of the animal kingdom

Queen Elizabeth II's record-breaking long reign was exceptional in many ways - not least because England has been ruled by men for most of the last thousand years. Until recently, the crown was passed to the monarch's eldest son and daughters were married off to royals in other countries.

But in most other social mammals, females commonly remain and breed in their birth groups, inheriting the status and territory of their mothers while sons leave to find unrelated partners elsewhere.

Social relationships between resident females vary but are often supportive. For example in African elephants, females assemble in family groups and older females are usually dominant over younger ones. Overt competition is rare and relationships between matriarchs and younger females are relaxed and supportive.

Elephant matriarchs act as reservoirs of information about where to find food and water and their presence is particularly important in times of famine or drought.

Where species live in larger groups that include members of several families, as in yellow baboons and spotted hyenas competition for status and resources can be more common and females often support close relatives in clashes with other families.

Daughters frequently inherit their mother's social rank. All members of some families may be consistently dominant to others, often enjoying higher breeding success and survival as a result.

Murderous mothers

But females aren't always tolerant or supportive. In the meerkats that I have studied in the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa for the last 30 years, one



dominant female monopolises breeding in each group, producing up to three litters a year for up to ten years. Their daughters and sons initially remain in their mother's group and help to feed and protect their younger siblings.

Queens go out of their way to prevent their daughters from breeding successfully. Early in my career, I was astonished to see one of my favourite meerkat queens emerge with blood on her muzzle from her group's sleeping burrow, where her eldest daughter had just given birth.

This meerkat queen was pregnant at the time. She went back down and soon emerged with a dead pup that was cold warm - then returned and brought up three more pups that she had just killed.

My team's later work showed

that one of the most common causes of pup death was infanticide by pregnant females and studies of several other social mammals have revealed similar trends.

Killing your own grandchildren may not sound like a recipe for evolutionary success, but it often makes sense for pregnant female meerkats. If groups can only rear a small number of pups, queens will increase their genetic contributions to future generations if they suppress pups that will compete with their own offspring.

Daughters share 50% of their mother's genes while grandchildren only share 25%, so it is in the queen's best interests to make sure that their groups raise their daughters rather than their granddaughters.



When the daughters of meerkat queens are three to four years old, they become potential rivals to the queen and she evicts them from her group.

As members of other meerkat groups don't often emigrate, females either found new groups with wandering males or (commonly) die in the attempt.

When a queen eventually dies, the other females in her group fight to inherit her position. The oldest and heaviest female usually wins, taking over the queen's status, breeding role and territory before starting to evict her sisters.

Walkabout sons

And what about the queen's sons? In most mammals, mating with a close relative cre-

ates weaker and less healthy babies and reduces the breeding success of females. So female meerkats avoid mating with their sons, brothers and other relatives.

Males are usually less particular about who they mate with because they do not pay the same costs of raising young.

However, where the females in their group are relatives and won't mate with them, they need to leave their birth groups to find willing partners.

Unlike females, male meerkats voluntarily go walkabout, either replacing males in other groups or shacking up with evicted females and attempting to found new groups.

A similar tendency for females to avoid breeding with close relatives and for males to leave their birth groups to find

willing partners elsewhere is common in many other mammals - including many species where males are substantially larger and stronger than females, like lions and baboons.

Contrasts in succession

But females don't always stay at home - and males don't always wander.

There are some mammals where the situation is reversed. These include a number of bats, horses, monkeys - and all three African apes.

For example, female gorillas often leave their birth groups to breed in other groups while males may stay and breed there, inheriting the breeding position from their fathers.

A feature of many these species is that resident breeding males or groups of related males hold their positions for relatively long periods - longer than the age at which most females reach sexual maturity.

So one explanation is that females need to leave their birth groups to find unrelated breeding partners. Males in these species don't need to leave as immigrant females willingly mate with them.

A preference for male succession is widespread in many human societies. An is often attributed to the need for monarchs to be battle leaders and the greater strength and fighting ability of males.

However, African apes are our closest living relatives and they all form groups where females leave but males remain.

This suggests dispersing females and resident males may have been the ancestral norm in hominin societies too.

If so, it may be because females dispersed to avoid inbreeding, rather than because of differences in strength and fighting prowess between the sexes. (The Conversation)

"Over every mountain there is a path, although it may not be seen from the valley."
—Theodore Roethke

The Shillong Times
Vol No: 1111 No. 367 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JUNE 19, 2023

Currency and safety

SILENCE can at times be deafening — as when Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman demonstrated when a sensational disclosure in the form of an RTI reply said a huge chunk of Rs 500 currency notes printed by presses in India between April 2015 and December 2016 were "missing" — or that these notes sent by the press had not reached RBI as per records. RBI came up with a clarification on Saturday, after a pause, saying that there was no such miss — and that the RTI reply was based on an "erroneous interpretation." A report based on an RTI reply has, prima facie, an authenticity to it. A simple press release from the RBI by way of a denial or clarification is fine, but it should have been the duty of the Finance Minister herself to open her mouth, deny it and settle the nation's concern for once and for all.

It's quite possible that there was a gap in the way the information was collected or released by way of an RTI reply. Likely, there were inconsistencies. But, a specific RTI query would not normally arise from a blank space. The rights activist might have got wind of some murmurs somewhere in the system. Transparency is not a virtue with the governance system here. Silence is a weapon often to cover up matters or to hide one's guilt. Once an issue hogs the headlines for a few days, it meets with a natural death. Those who committed errors get away with their act.

At a time when systems are weakening and those running the governments are mostly engaged in fire-fighting to ward off issues of the day, long-term interests of the nation might suffer. Those in governments sit through their chairs for a maximum of five years and another set would step in and wield power for the next term. During the first term of Narendra Modi as PM, the Finance Minister fell ill and there was also a time when Arun Jaitley handled Defence and Finance together. RBI itself went through a tumult as Raghuram Rajan left without an extension of his term. Urjit Patel took charge until 2018 and he was replaced by the present incumbent Shaktikanta Das. Even granted that the RTI reply and the interpretations thereof were erroneous and it is safe to assume that the necessary checks and balances are in place, closer scrutiny is advised. This should be done not just by those in authority but also by the principal opposition, the Congress, that has in its ranks a seasoned FM like P Chidambaram in Parliament. The nation needs reassurance that all is well.

Letters to the Editor

Job Reservation Policy & Other Policies- Need for convergence

Many views have emerged with regards to the contentious State Job Reservation Policy. There are some who opine that this issue is irrelevant considering the death of government jobs and others who feel that priority ought to be given to creation of jobs. As regards the vacancies, it may be stated that RTI queries have revealed that the number of vacant posts in various government departments is quite significant considering the size of the state. Moreover, it cannot be denied that at present, many posts under the State Government and Government undertakings are being manned by contractual employees with low job security and poor remuneration. Therefore, I feel that the state needs a good job reservation policy along with concerted effort by the government to fill up the existing vacancies and also create job avenues. An equally important subject that merits consideration in this context is the dire need for an Employment Policy in order to streamline the recruitment of staff to various departments through MPSC, DSC and other agencies. This may be done in line with the system adopted by Central

Government and Banks in the interest of fairness and transparency which include measures like uploading of the answer keys to the questions on the website and making available the scores and progressive policies in all sectors which encourage healthy competition. This will enable it to fulfill the ambitious target of the Meghalaya government of becoming a 10 billion dollar economy by 2027-28 and become one of the leading states in India.

Yours etc,
J. Lyngdoh
Via email

Establishing a Standardized Payment System for Election-related Work

Editor,
I am writing to draw attention to a pressing issue that deserves public awareness and the government's immediate attention. The recently concluded Legislative Assembly Election was undoubtedly a significant event for our State, and I would like to express my gratitude to all the employees engaged in election work who worked tirelessly to ensure its success. Working during the election period was an incredibly demanding and hectic experience for government employees engaged in election work. The working hours were often doubled, with employees being re-

quired to be present from 10 a.m. until 9 p.m. or 10 p.m. or even later. Moreover, there were instances when employees had to arrive before 10 a.m. and leave the office after midnight. Additionally, they were expected to work on weekends, including Saturdays and Sundays. The toll on their physical and mental health was substantial, as they had to work for long hours and also had to cope with significantly reduced sleep for nearly a month. As dedicated government employees, they wholeheartedly supported the Government's endeavor to conduct a successful election. However, it was also their hope that their dedication and commitment would be recognized through an honorarium for their tireless efforts and extended working hours.

Regrettably, it is sad to learn that some Election Office paid generous honorariums to their employees and others assigned to them for election work while other Election Offices paid considerably smaller amounts and some others did not pay any honorarium at all. This inconsistency has caused widespread disappointment and frustration among those who worked diligently to support the electoral process. In light of these disparities, I urge the Government to establish a fair and standardized system for honorarium payments. It is crucial that all employees engaged in election work within our State receive equal compensation,

regardless of the office to which they were assigned. Implementing a consistent payment structure would not only acknowledge the collective efforts and sacrifices made by all employees, but it would also promote fairness and motivate future election workers. By fostering an environment of unity and appreciation, such a step would uplift the morale of government employees and encourage their continued dedication.

I sincerely request the Government to take prompt action in regulating honorarium payments for all employees engaged in election work. It is essential to ensure that everyone receives the same amount of honorarium, thereby recognizing their invaluable contributions to the successful execution of the election process. I believe that addressing this issue will not only demonstrate the Government's commitment to equitable treatment but also bolster public confidence in the administration. The hard work and dedication of government employees should be duly acknowledged and rewarded, fostering a stronger bond between the Government and its workforce.

Yours etc.,
H. Passah,
Jowai

Dark Movies.

Editor,
In the past one or two years, we have witnessed the release of many controversial commercial movies in India. The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the Meghalaya court system, with many hearings and trials being postponed or moved online. State distancing measures have also led to reduced capacity in courtrooms, leading to longer waiting times for trials to be heard. The backlog has also been exacerbated by the increased use of digital evidence, which requires additional time and resources to process.

The impact of the backlog is felt most acutely by victims of crime and their families, who may have to wait months or even years for justice to be served. Defendants are also affected, as delays can result in lengthy periods of remand, which can have a detrimental impact on their mental health and well-being. The Meghalaya Government is yet to come up with steps to address the backlog, including to provide additional funding and recruiting more staff to support the court system.

Even though the use of technology as a solution to the backlog such as virtual hearings and video conferencing has helped to reduce waiting times and increase the efficiency of the court system, however, concerns have been raised about the potential impact on the quality of justice, particularly in cases where a defendant's liberty is at stake.

For victims, delays in the courts can mean a prolonged

Re-living death twice over

By H.H. Mohrmen

Different cultures have their tradition of how they perform the last rites of the deceased member of the community. In the Hiyalek Trip society, too, different sub-tribes have their rites of passage and these could vary from one place to another. People have their way of disposing of the body of the dead: some cremate their dead while others bury them, but when it comes to the culture related to the dead, especially in the Khasi Jaintia hills follow a tradition that is unique to the area.

An opportunity to strengthen the family bond

Amongst the people in the Khasi and Jaintia region, the demise of a person is not only considered a very unfortunate incident, but it is also an opportunity for the near and dear ones and the community to extend their moral and physical support to the bereaved family. Bereavement is an occasion for family and friends to show solidarity with the family and most importantly it demonstrates the continuation of the underlying value system of the community good well-being of all. Perhaps our society is the only one where when a person dies, the body is kept lying in state for two days and the reason is to enable family members and friends to pay their last respects to the departed soul.

"The last rites of a person also comprise of rituals 'ka siang ka pha' or the siang ka phur' which is an offering of food to the departed members of the family who dwell in the realm of the spirit. In Jaintia Hills in some cases, the last rites of the deceased do not end with the person being cremated. The final rites are complete and the departed soul can finally rest in peace only when all the rituals are completed."

unity to introduce relatives to one another. In the Khasi Pnar tradition, the last rites of a person are more than just an occasion for sending off the dead person to the next life. The last rites of a person also comprise of rituals 'ka siang ka pha' or the siang ka phur' which is an offering of food to the departed members of the family who dwell in the realm of the spirit. In Jaintia Hills in some cases, the last rites of the deceased do not end with the person being cremated. The final rites are complete and the departed soul can finally rest in peace only when all the rituals are completed.

Cremation is not the end of a person's last rites.

Traditionally cremation is done in a special way that ensures that the charred bones of the deceased person remain and the same are to be collected for 'scoping' in the clan's ossuary. In the Pnar and War creation practices, care is taken that not every thing turns to ashes since the charred bones are to be kept

also territorial deities. The 'ryngkaw' and the best kept and look after their domain and care for those who live within their domain. A person or a family is always connected to their respective 'ryngkaw' or the deity whose realm is the place from where the clan originated.

People also avoid carrying the dead bodies from one place to another or crossing the realm of one deity to another because this amounts to defiling the sanctity of the 'ryngkaw'. If defiling the sanctity of the 'ryngkaw' is unavoidable and the body has to be carried across, the 'ryngkaw' has to be appeased later. Hence people always carry the charred bones instead which is not the same as carrying a dead body. Families prefer to cremate their relatives at the place where they died and instead carry the charred bones later to the clan's ossuary which is located within the domain of their respective 'ryngkaw'.

Therefore, when a person dies in far off places or in the

ossuary located within the realm of their 'ryngkaw' of origin. The charred bones have to be taken to the realm of their deities or the 'ryngkaw' they belong to. The final rest of the person has to be under the realm of the deities to which they originally belong.

When cremation is performed twice

The traditional practice in the War Jaintia area which is different even from the rites practiced in the other places is the practice of cremating the dead twice over. The last rites of a person are completed and the cremation is performed again after the real cremation was done a year ago. In the case of a female person, although it is only the charred bones that are being carried and kept lying in state at the respective family's 'Jung Blair', the customs and modes are somewhat similar to when the dead body is present.

'Rah chyei' or lum shyang' is always performed a year after the real cremation happened, but unlike the 'rah chyei' of the Pnar in the tradition followed by residents of Nongtalang the entire cremation ceremony is carried out. As always real cremation is conducted immediately after the demise of the person but because it was done in the domain of the foreign 'ryngkaw para' it was conducted without proper rituals. A year later even in the absence of the dead body, a 'Krong' (a bamboo stretcher for carrying the dead body) is made and the same is carried to the cremation ground and friends and family march in a procession similar to when the real cremation happens. At the cremation ground even if there is no dead body, all the rituals due for a dead person are performed and after all the rituals are performed the charred bones are kept in the ossuary and a standing is erected in the case of a male and a flat stone is laid in the case of a female person. Although there is no dead body because the deceased was cremated a year ago, or even if the cremation is performed a year or more after the person's demise, the cremation is conducted as if it is a real cremation.

Perhaps it is the only place where the cremation ceremony of a person is performed twice; one immediately after the person dies and another a year later in a tradition called 'rah chyei'.

Justice for baby Sainpyin Jr.

By A. D. Gashnga

Five years on from the horrific murder of a three-week old baby boy, family members, friends and campaigners still wait on justice as backlog has led to delays in trials...

Who can forget the horrific incident which shook the entire North East on 19 June 2018? As residents of Mission Compound were sound asleep, notorious crook Clarence Jason Rajee, jealous and in rage after his wife had left him for another man, barged into the house of his ex-wife at about 2.30 am, and brutally assaulted her. The diabolical ex-husband then snatched the baby boy from her, broke his limbs, and later choked an drowned him in a bucket of cold water.

Clarence or Joey Charso Baez (Joey 420) has been infamously known in jail for snatching people in a series of crimes in Meghalaya as well as outside the state. He was arrested in 2017 in a kidnapping case and was out on bail at the time of the murder and re-arrested for the first time in a fraud case in 2021 whereby he sold a stolen Audi car for Rs. 17 lakh. Some people have also alleged that Rajee was involved in several job scams

period of uncertainty and anxiety. They may not have to relive their experiences by giving evidence in court, and delays can make this experience even more difficult. Victims may feel like justice is being delayed or denied, and this can have a negative impact on their mental health and well-being. Delays can also affect victims' ability to move on with their lives. They may be unable to access support services or seek closure until the case is resolved. This can impact their ability to work, maintain relationships, and take care of their families. Furthermore, delays in the courts can also impact the criminal justice system as a whole. It can cause backlogs in the court system, which can lead to longer waiting times for trials and a higher risk of cases being dropped due to lack of resources or witnesses.

So what needs to be done? Swift justice can only be achieved by streamlining the legal process, investing in Courts and reducing unnecessary delays by increasing recruitment and retention. The only way to deal with the backlog is to build more courts. There are dozens and

dozens of cases each week that do not get heard due to lack of court space. The only way to reduce this is to invest in new court centers.

"As a law student, I understand that the District Courts backlog in the state of Meghalaya has been a significant issue for many years, with the number of outstanding cases increasing to unprecedented levels. The backlog has led to delays in trials and justice being served, and it has placed a significant burden on the criminal justice system."

promising them government jobs and dubbing them of lakhs of rupees.

So why the delay in conviction of criminals such as Clarence Jason Rajee? As a law student, I understand that the District Courts backlog in the state of Meghalaya has been a significant issue for many years, with the number of outstanding cases increasing to unprecedented levels. The backlog has led to delays in trials and justice being served, and it has placed a significant burden on the criminal justice system. District Courts in the state hears several types of cases, from petty to serious criminal cases such as murder, rape, and robbery. The backlog in courts means that cases are taking longer to be heard, and trials are being delayed.

The 2020 Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the Meghalaya court system, with many hearings and trials being postponed or moved online. State distancing measures have also led to reduced capacity in courtrooms, leading to longer waiting times for trials to be heard. The backlog has also been exacerbated by the increased use of digital evidence, which requires additional time and resources to process.

Additionally, victims feel that their cases have been heard and resolved quickly, providing them with a sense of closure, satisfaction and reassurance. And most importantly swift justice is an essential element of the rule of law, ensuring that justice is served and that individuals are held accountable for their actions without spending many months on bail or on remand. It cannot be said the current state of the justice system is one that is delivering justice to society. It is hoped the MHA 2.0 government will consider this when devising its priorities in government as it is clear, investment in the system is needed to put Meghalaya on par with other states who do not seem to have a huge backlog of cases.

(A.D. Gashnga is a law student and blogger. She is originally from Jowai, Meghalaya and writes on various topics including women and child rights.)

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

"The best thinking has been done in solitude. The worst has been done in turmoil."
— Thomas A. Edison

The Shillong Times

Vol. No. 57 No. 100 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JUNE 20, 2023

Environment versus livelihoods

IT is ironic that Cyclone Biparjoy that struck Gujarat and the adjoining states recently did not claim a single life despite the fury with which it hit these states. This is because of the preparedness of the cyclone prone states. Compare this to Meghalaya where the heavy rains are not a new phenomenon. Here in the past one week a few lives are lost to landslides and drowning. The state is totally unprepared to deal with natural disasters despite these being annual events. Early warning messages to warn the population residing in vulnerable areas could have prevented these deaths. Is it not the brief of the North East Space Application Centre (NESAC) with its myriad capabilities to focus on scientific data that warns of cyclones which are likely to hit the region: undue heavy rains that could result in landslides and other calamities? NESAC is located within the region to assist the eight states to cope better with unprecedented weather conditions and also how weather and climate will impact on agriculture etc. Even without much scientific knowledge, the monsoons and sudden cloudbursts have always resulted in rivers being in spate and carrying off homes, humans and animals thereby causing huge preventable losses.

An early warning telling people to avoid fishing trips and expeditions close to rivers and areas that are landslide prone should have been sent out loud and clear. Last year too, the cloudburst resulted in several deaths and homes being destroyed. This should not have happened in the 21st century when technology can assist in several ways and disasters can be managed better. Much has been spoken about disaster preparedness and many disaster drills have been conducted from time to time but the lessons learnt are not imbibed.

Another tragedy waiting to happen in Meghalaya is the collapse of hills that have been over-exploited for limestone and boulders. This loosening of the soil over large areas in the West Jaintia Hills and East Khasi Hills along Shella-Bholaganj are frightening portents of what could happen if the hills come falling down and the loss of lives that could occur. Meghalaya as a state is indulging in unsustainable quarrying and mining. There appears to be no regulations in place. Most rivers are heavily silted due to sand mining. In the winters these rivers almost run dry. These are already warning signs of impending climate disasters but other than the judiciary which has intervened in this man versus nature clash the State Government has done precious little to halt the destruction to aquifers that are sources of water due to mindless quarrying. World Environment Day is an empty rhetoric if destructive forces are not reined in before it's too late.

Letters to the Editor

Switching to CBSE not the solution

Editor,
Aster Parjat in his featured article, 'We urgently Need Liberal Education (ST June 17, 2023) has made me contemplate more on the half-baked rather than the suggestions because, personally, I feel nothing will come of it no matter what is suggested to the Government.

Pardon me then if I, through letters to the Editor, respond to Aster Parjat's article and not through the email given. Perhaps some time later I'll get in touch with the author, 'establishing what Liberal Education truly is, sets the tone to his write-up and the background to what I have to say vis-à-vis CBSE & ISC affiliated schools.

Right up to the early 1970s, ISC was a School Education Board to be reckoned with and CBSE passed off as a pale third option with state boards taking the second place. ISC was commonly known as Senior Cambridge in my time because it was affiliated to the University of Cambridge, UK and our certificates were issued under The Council for the Indian Schools Certificate

Examination Syndicate, UK. Even such schools carried the eliest and snobbish tag in 'mainland' India, (for lack of an appropriate word). Let's not be in denial. We did have an air about ourselves as products of ISC. But look at the large number of the IAS, IFS, Armed forces, police, and all Indian Administrative appointments! They were all products of ISC schools!

And I honestly believe that was what the Liberal Education system brought about or rather produced! I'm certainly amenable to other opinions!

Currently the CBSE has overruled all school boards. Over the years the Indian government has tuned and fine-tuned the curriculum and system. They had to break the stranglehold of ISC brand of alumni that were well positioned in all fields of employment and were powerful.

What Meghalaya can learn from Manipur

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

It has been more than a month now, and the crisis in Manipur does not appear to be showing any signs of abating. Reconciliation will eventually have to happen, but it is going to be very difficult when innocent lives have already been lost, and thousands of people have been displaced from areas they previously considered their home. There has already been a lot of discussion on what might have sparked the crisis and its antecedents by examining the history of the tribal-non-tribal divide in the state. Although I have some knowledge of the historical and socio-political factors at play in this conflict, I will refrain from commenting on it. I believe that during a calamity such as this, where miseries and dangers of misinformation are so widespread, dissecting the crisis can happen later. Right now, helping those affected by the conflict and doing all that we can to bring peace to the state is more important.

I have been to Manipur only once, but I do have a lot of friends from the state, both from among the Meitei and the Kuki-Zomi communities. In fact, they were some of my closest friends during my days in the university when I was pursuing my PhD. When the clashes first started, there were reports of an IBS officer, a Kuki-Zomi, being dragged out of his office and killed by a mob. The news was already upsetting, but the fact that the name sounded similar to the name of a Kuki-Zomi friend I knew made me very distressed. It was only when I saw the picture of the deceased that I was relieved to find out that he was not the one I knew.

Though I had a few Kuki-Zomi friends, I was much closer to the Meitei community. Among them, there were three friends who stayed in the same hostel with me, and we became very good friends. Only one of them completed his PhD, while the other two returned to Manipur. One is now an officer in the Manipur Government, while the other has started his own resort. We have tried to keep in touch with one another but not as much as we would have liked to. A lot of my fault since I can be a little aloof. Recently, I was able to talk to one of them, and it was good to know that he was alright. I am trying to get in touch with the other two as well. My ardent hope is that the crisis ends soon so that I can visit Manipur to meet them, reminisce about the old days in the university, and inquire

about their families. The crisis in Manipur, especially the visuals of burning houses and dead bodies, reminded me of my memories from the turbulent 90s. It was during this decade that Shillong, including my hometown of Nongmesong, experienced a high level of disturbance, with at least two riots taking place. I vividly recall the Jay the rating started. It was in the evening and I was at a friend's house when we heard the news that trouble had broken out in the market place. I was quickly asked to return home. When I reached home all my family members were already there. We were deeply concerned about our safety since our house was not very far from the main road. Around 8:30 pm, we collectively decided to leave our house and cross

"Had Meghalaya faced a similar scenario where both the Meitei and Kuki-Zomi communities are heavily armed, it is quite possible that I would not be alive today. As a 12-year-old armed only with a wait, what could I have done against automatic weapons? Therefore, it is crucial that Meghalaya does not follow that path."

the river to go to the other side where it might be safer. We all stepped out of the house and found our location. We could see a long engulfed in flames on the other side of the road. Our family gathered, prepared to leave the house and find a safer location. I held a wait (Khasi machete) in my hand, ready to protect myself and my family in case of an attack. Despite the night not being cold, I remember my body shivering intensely due to fear and excitement. I was only 12 years old at that time, and I didn't know what would have happened if we were attacked. Would I have been able to save my family or would I have perished alongside them? Fortunately, I didn't have to find out the answer to that question. The commotion eventually died down, and we returned to our house. The following day, a curfew was announced.

During such tense situations, rumours tend to spread rapidly. One particular rumour that persisted was about the police arresting men from their homes. One day, we heard that the police were coming to our locality. My mom asked me to hide under the bed so that the police wouldn't be able to find me.

I stayed there for a while, but restlessness overtook me, and I decided to make a run for it. Once I was confident that there were no police officers nearby, I ran out of my house and crossed the river. It was then that I witnessed the police chasing some men on the side of the river, near the waterfall. Throughout this time, I was unaware that it was only 12 years old and that the authorities were targeting adults, not someone of my age. Eventually, I returned to my house, where my mother was relieved to see me.

Soon, the situation calmed down, and the curfew was lifted, but normalcy had not yet returned. This was a time when militancy was prevalent and at its height. I witnessed the sight of dead bodies, individuals who had

arrived at the market, we went to a shop to have some tea. As we were sipping our tea, we suddenly heard the sounds of tear gas being fired. The entire market panicked, and the shop owner rushed into the shop, urging us to leave so she could close down. We stepped outside and witnessed people running in our direction. Our initial thought was that either the police were chasing the crowd or that the mob from Jaiw-Langching (the epicentre of the violence) had reached Khyndiaid.

However, it soon became apparent that most of those scenarios had occurred. The people had simply panicked upon hearing the shots fired by the police. After some time, the situation gradually calmed down, although the potential for another eruption remained, as a wrong move could reignite tensions. Subsequently, this was the Chervierfield Thangjiew encounter incident, which once again heightened tension in the city. Some youths managed to seize a police vehicle and attacked vendors, brandishing them while driving through Mawli.

Meghalaya has experienced its share of violent situations, but fortunately, they did not escalate to the extent seen in Manipur, where a situation akin to civil war has developed. Had Meghalaya faced a similar scenario where both the Meitei and Kuki-Zomi communities are heavily armed, it is quite possible that I would not be alive today. As a 12-year-old armed only with a wait, what could I have done against automatic weapons? Therefore, it is crucial that Meghalaya does not follow that path.

To prevent such a situation, peace must be pursued at any costs, and all stakeholders in society must exchange divisive ideologies before they engulf it. It is this fear. This responsibility becomes doubly important for those of us who have lived through the challenging times of the past, will once look back and see the horrors that unfolded. I can only hope that the violence in Manipur is not repeated, and that the people of Meghalaya, specifically, and for the region as a whole, I sincerely hope that such a scenario does not come to pass.

(The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organization or institution)

for the hour's many refuse to do so and refuse to have a pay cut. It's just for a day, employers will try to manage things but at times they tend to stay away for four days to a week. As employers, they will have to look for alternative temporary help for which money will have to be paid for the work done. Again, one also wishes to state that in times of sickness, one is certain that employers have been understanding and will bear no grudges against their helpers.

Another difficulty that employers face is when the domestic helpers do not give any prior notice before leaving their job. At times they would simply say that they will no longer come to work from the next day. Isn't this lack of responsibility and reliability on their part? There are also those who do not like being corrected for work not done satisfactorily. In case one corrects them there is a good chance that you will not see them the next day.

Employers are placed in such a position that they are made to endure all their misdeeds because the helpers know that they are very much needed.

With live-in domestic helpers, besides being paid their wages they also ask for rest and weekly day-off. Well, no employer must be

so inhuman as to not allow them to take a break but in spite of this what is irksome again these helpers do not stick to the verbal contract and leave after few weeks or even months. Is this fair?

Hence if domestic help are to be registered and the government is to fix their wages then the government should also chalk out certain rules and regulations in order to maintain fairness in the dealings among the two parties. One is not being critical or even demanding to the domestic helpers because our needs are mutual but experience makes one speak about the one-sided arrangement. Just as the All Meghalaya Domestic Workers' Union (AMDWU) is working towards safeguarding the rights of their fellow workers, employers are equally anxious to see that the AMDWU also safeguard the interests of the employers and address the erratic behaviour of their fellow workers and not turn a blind eye in the shortcomings of their members.

Yours etc,
Jennifer Dikhar,
Via email

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

Top BJP leadership including PM & Amit Shah are on trial in Manipur
The BJP's standing in NE region gets big jolt after ethnic riots in the state

By Ashis Biswas

During the past few weeks, Narendra Modi Government's decisions and peace-promoting initiatives relating to the Manipur ethnic riots have only reinforced old controversies, instead of helping to defuse the volatile situation. Worse, some commentators whether tribal or non-tribal, now seem sceptical of the centre's intentions and long term objectives in the troubled region.

An increasing sense of frustration among the region's people living beyond BJP's borders, especially in Nagaland and Mizoram over the centre's failure to restore law and order even 47 days after the initial eruption of violence on May 3, is apparent. In normal times, the situation would also provide for better security and opportunities for the tribals as well, it was reiterated.

Mr Shah made a two-day visit after more deaths and violence had occurred with tribals now hitting back against non-tribal Meitei majority in some places. He set up a committee to monitor the situation and make recommendations, while ruling out the tribal demand for a separate Union. In normal times, the situation would also provide for better security and opportunities for the tribals as well, it was reiterated.

While Mr Shah acted in the manner expected of him before quitting Manipur, the arrangements he had announced did not work too well. Some members of the so-called monitoring committee resigned, for one reason or another, to give only one example. While not exactly making a public and successful, GOI central BJP leadership, left it to Mr Sarma to carry on the much-needed political dialogue with all concerned parties in Nagaland, to make sure that armed Kuki tribals in Manipur did not get fresh supplies of weapons or other help from their relatives settled mostly in Myanmar areas bordering India. Back channel diplomatic methods had been used.

While the response was reportedly positive, people familiar with NE politics were not particularly impressed. They pointed out that even during Myanmar's better times, successive ruling Governments had hardly notable administrative control over the activities of various armed autonomous tribal groups that lived close to India's borders.

However, on a more positive note the West-backed rebel National Unity Government (NUG) in Myanmar, which has been engaged in a long-armed battle against the ruling Army Junta headed by Gen Min Hlaing, backed by Kuki and related tribal groups not to get involved in India's politics in any way, let alone participate actively to help one of the warring groups against another. They also called upon tribals not to engage in drugs and human trafficking trade so prevalent in the region.

It remains to be seen how effective such appeals are in helping the return of normalcy in Manipur. As of now, even as the death toll keeps rising, simmering tensions continue among tribals and non-tribals, along with occasional ambushes. This, despite the recent additional deployments of army, Assam Rifles and other units, silence of the Prime Minister about Manipur incidents even after the Karnataka Assembly elections were held, and no mention of Manipur in the Mann-ki-baat sessions, angry correspondents have asked Modi and Mr Shah, for understandable reasons.

It can be judged clearly from the views and bitter tone of many articles appearing in the NE-based media, whether published from Guwahati, Imphal or Nagaland. Strongly attacking the silence of the Prime Minister about Manipur incidents even after the Karnataka Assembly elections were held, and no mention of Manipur in the Mann-ki-baat sessions, angry correspondents have asked Modi and Mr Shah, for understandable reasons.

It remains for the BJP leadership to retrieve some of the loss of its general credibility in the NE region, swelling from an ugly combination of differences in policy and arguably inefficient administration (IB Service)

their bitter beginning on May 3, only after the Karnataka Assembly elections results. This had been made clear to the delegation of Kuki BJP MLAs and other tribal leaders who desperately called for protection against what they alleged were non-tribal group attacks occurring in the state with the state administration remaining indifferent.

An increasing sense of frustration among the region's people living beyond BJP's borders, especially in Nagaland and Mizoram over the centre's failure to restore law and order even 47 days after the initial eruption of violence on May 3, is apparent. In normal times, the situation would also provide for better security and opportunities for the tribals as well, it was reiterated.

While Mr Shah acted in the manner expected of him before quitting Manipur, the arrangements he had announced did not work too well. Some members of the so-called monitoring committee resigned, for one reason or another, to give only one example. While not exactly making a public and successful, GOI central BJP leadership, left it to Mr Sarma to carry on the much-needed political dialogue with all concerned parties in Nagaland, to make sure that armed Kuki tribals in Manipur did not get fresh supplies of weapons or other help from their relatives settled mostly in Myanmar areas bordering India. Back channel diplomatic methods had been used.

While the response was reportedly positive, people familiar with NE politics were not particularly impressed. They pointed out that even during Myanmar's better times, successive ruling Governments had hardly notable administrative control over the activities of various armed autonomous tribal groups that lived close to India's borders.

However, on a more positive note the West-backed rebel National Unity Government (NUG) in Myanmar, which has been engaged in a long-armed battle against the ruling Army Junta headed by Gen Min Hlaing, backed by Kuki and related tribal groups not to get involved in India's politics in any way, let alone participate actively to help one of the warring groups against another. They also called upon tribals not to engage in drugs and human trafficking trade so prevalent in the region.

It remains to be seen how effective such appeals are in helping the return of normalcy in Manipur. As of now, even as the death toll keeps rising, simmering tensions continue among tribals and non-tribals, along with occasional ambushes. This, despite the recent additional deployments of army, Assam Rifles and other units, silence of the Prime Minister about Manipur incidents even after the Karnataka Assembly elections were held, and no mention of Manipur in the Mann-ki-baat sessions, angry correspondents have asked Modi and Mr Shah, for understandable reasons.

It can be judged clearly from the views and bitter tone of many articles appearing in the NE-based media, whether published from Guwahati, Imphal or Nagaland. Strongly attacking the silence of the Prime Minister about Manipur incidents even after the Karnataka Assembly elections were held, and no mention of Manipur in the Mann-ki-baat sessions, angry correspondents have asked Modi and Mr Shah, for understandable reasons.

It remains for the BJP leadership to retrieve some of the loss of its general credibility in the NE region, swelling from an ugly combination of differences in policy and arguably inefficient administration (IB Service)

It remains for the BJP leadership to retrieve some of the loss of its general credibility in the NE region, swelling from an ugly combination of differences in policy and arguably inefficient administration (IB Service)

"Ideologies separate us. Dreams and anguish bring us together."

— Eugene Ionesco

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 111 No. 101 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21, 2023

Eye on Bengal

WEST Bengal breathes politics and all else is of secondary importance there. This was so under the decades-long rule of the Left and the scenario remains unchanged under the TMC dispensation too. The state is currently facing intense heat over the panchayat polls on July 8, with the ruling Trinamool and the principal opposition, the BJP engaged in extensive campaigning for over 75,000 seats. Chances of massive violence cannot be discounted in view of the aggressive nature of politics there. In this context, the Supreme Court's nod on Tuesday to allow deployment of central forces is there in addition to the local police force is a wise decision.

It was natural for the TMC government led by Mamata Banerjee to move the Supreme Court and challenge a high court order in favour of central force deployment during the ongoing campaign and the polling. While the plea for central force deployment was made by Opposition BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari, this could put the central forces in a tricky situation. Whichever way they act, accusations and counter-accusations could follow. But, what's of urgency is to ensure peaceful polling. The BJP has its concerns as the goons-brigade of the TMC had in the past demonstrated a proclivity to browbeat voters and 'capture' booths. Notably, the popularity of the chief minister remains high. To her credit, Banerjee did not concede much space to the opposition - be it the BJP or the Congress or the down-and-out Left as successive elections in recent years have shown. The state did give a substantial number of MP seats to the BJP in the 2019 polls, but stood steadfastly behind Banerjee in the assembly polls later. The panchayat polls too might be a cakewalk for the ruling Trinamool, considering the hold the CM has on the masses. But election results are unpredictable.

The results of the panchayat polls could prove to be a foretaste of the upcoming parliament polls 10 months hence, though both these polls are materially different. The voters know as much. Yet, the civic polls could test the extent of growth the BJP achieved in the state after the last assembly polls. There already is a polarization of political forces in the state. The steady growth for the BJP there is at the cost of the Congress and the Left. The goons of the Left are now with the TMC, giving it too much muscle-power. If the BJP gives a sizable number of panchayats, Banerjee will have a serious problem at hand. She will have to remain rooted in the state to defend her fort rather than flying around and fancying the PM's post.

Letters to the Editor

Success story of Trinity Saioo in Lakadong Farming

Trinity Saioo is from Mullich Village, West Jaintia Hills, District, Meghalaya. She initially started farming to support her family. In addition to being part time farmer, she is also a teacher at a village school in her district. Initially it was a Lakadong variety of turmeric that was grown in Mullich Village. However,

when Saioo came to know of a much superior quality of turmeric i.e. Lakadong turmeric, she started putting more effort in creating awareness among the farmers of the importance of cultivating this particular variety. And in 2001, this Lakadong turmeric variety got a boost through the subsidies received under the Spice Board. The Spice Board of India made a major contribution in helping her to educate, preserve and promote the growth and cultivation of turmeric in the region through the provision of training programs, seminars, study tours etc. Presently, she is also a member of the Trinity Saioo trust which she started in 2013. Trinity Saioo realized that to attain a profitable income from turmeric, she had to engage the women of the village in the grinding, processing of turmeric and eventually through the subsidies received under the Spice Board it led to better marketing of Lakadong turmeric. And today because of her there are about 100 self-help groups associated with the life spice federations led by Saioo. She also holds the post of Assistant General Secretary for the Spice Federation and she was honoured with the excellence in Horticulture award by

Is Father's Day a significant occasion?

Editor, On every third Sunday of June the whole world commemorates 'Father's Day'. To have a perfect father is impossible but having a caring and loving one is a blessing. For all these years, I've keenly observed how we solemnise this day. To my dismay I've likely found the same thing being repeated over and over, again. The result is that the face of our fathers in the family is always put behind the curtain. Our fathers or perhaps men lose their respect from their own kids and their kids and kids. We tend to neglect their sacrifices and hard-work. Does it happen because of our materialistic customs and practices? How sad and pathetic it is when Women's Day or Mother's Day comes the en-

Shreekar Gupta of the The Print revealed that his episodes (videos and print) on Manipur had a low level of reach and viewership. This is a clear indication of a general apathy of what is going in the 'Jewelled land'. For the mainland India Manipur is just one of the states in the distant northeast, a region of little significance.

Not even the horrifying images of red flames, smoke, burned homes, churches and vehicles, attract attention. Not the stories of 'day and night' riots that killed innocents, left many widowed and orphaned, forced women and children to flee, evoke emotion. Not the reports of the number of deaths and mangled thousands, prick consciences. Not the cramped, under-stress relief and refugee camps that lack acute food, water and medicines, draw empathy. Not the visit of the home minister, Amit Shah was important enough. Not the fresh cycles of violence where armed groups of the majority community attack villages of the others, not the sight of women blocking or confronting security forces, not the arson that torched the house of state and union ministers are worth bothering enough. Not the sound of guns and bullets, shakes one's conscience. Not the description of conflict as 'ethnic cleansing', 'civil war', 'genocide' and 'pogrom' is of concern.

Over and above this worrisome indifference is the total silence of the prime minister, Narendra Modi. Silence is complicity to violence. For the BJP electoral wins PM found time in February 2017 and 2022 but spares no schedule for a violence-ridden state that has seen 140 or more deaths, displaced 50,000 residents, turned 4,500 homes to ashes and the destroyed 249 churches. The 'collapse of the Constitutional Machinery', the demand for President's Rule, the failure of the security forces under article 355, the actual separation of Jai people (Kuki) and the Meiteis are not sufficient reasons to utter a word. Even post the Karnataka elections and the preempt visit to the Odisha train tragedy to show empathy there, Modi found no space in his schedule for the Manipur human disaster. In his latest 'Mam ki Baat' he talked of the cyclone in Gujarat but was mum on the 'unending' wave of violence. A section of the Manipur citizens broke their traditions publicly to disgust even the moving appeal from children like 9-year old Debarah to intervene has fallen on deaf

ears. When the prime minister himself feels nothing for the sufferings why should the rest care? When he turns his back Manipur will continue to burn. After all, the location is in a corner of the country. Initially the national press and television channels had no time for the movement of the state between Assam and Myanmar. The elections in Karnataka were covered comprehensively dedicating much of the space for the prime minister being showered with rose petals in the Bangalore rally. The media focussed on 'The Kerala Story' but ignored the Churachandpur and Imphal ethnic clash. The PM's speech in election bond Rajasthan was telecast live but the violence in the BJP ruled state was overlooked. The international media's reporting of the Meitei-Kuki clash is quite sketchy. Prominent television channels picked up the May 3, ethnic violence three to four days later but have gone almost silent now. The print and digital segments do give a little more attention to the new wave of mass killings and swamping of villages by mobs aided by armed 'private armies'. It is also noted that the international media depend on their correspondents in Delhi. No reporter is present in Imphal. The government may have declined their entry permit. The reason for the muted mode of the PM is not to be seen as an endorsement of the BJP government both at the centre and the state. But it is also a strategy to keep the Manipur bloodshed under wraps as much as possible. If the PM tweets more attention will be on the Myanmar border state. The scrutiny will be more intense. Modi's scheduled visit to the US from 20 June. His first state visit was set much before the outbreak of the Manipur violence. If there is an international summit on the Manipur turmoil, the image of the PM will take a hit. So to keep up his international image, silence is a deliberate choice. It does not matter if Manipur continues to bail provided his image is intact abroad. The new spell of violence are basically attacks on the Kuki villages situated on the foothills. Mobs by the hundreds from the Manipur valley along with armed groups would attack the villages late night or at dawn. The villagers only try to defend themselves. Gunfire

Indifference to human suffering

By Albert Thyrnang

It would break out between the rival groups. The volunteers defending the villages are outnumbered. Their only option is to flee but many die fighting. Women and children usually abandon their houses for safer places much before the fall of their villages. In the meantime a racist, sexist is employed. Meitei women would block the security forces to give time to the attackers to accomplish their target. It is said that women who could play a key role for peace are being used as human shields. It is feared these are planned assaults to drive the minority tribes as far as possible from the valley. The violence is also now on the BJP as well. A union and state minister's homes have come under attack. Exchange of fire also takes place when the security forces prevent armed groups from proceeding to attack villages. Casualties have occurred.

Why is the violence going on unabated for more than six weeks? Who is hell-bent on continuing with the 'private armies' usually on 'mobs'. But who is mobilising the mobs? Ground sources point fingers at two groups dubbed as 'private armies', the Arambh Tenglo and the Meitei Leupun. Members of these radical Meitei groups are suspected to be unleashing violence up to this point. Allegedly linked to the RSS these Arambh Dal like black T-shirted men, spread hate and terror. Sources reveal that it is an open secret that these groups are supported by BJP leader and chief minister, N. The Singu, former chief of the Meitei Leupun, in an interview, even threatened to execute a 'bigger blow' that would wipe out a 15 km Auki dominated area. The 'Meitei Pride' outfit warned of 'Civil War' against the 'outsiders and tenants' (not indigenous to Manipur), the Meitei. The one-time union leader also confessed that the 'worshipers' the chief minister. The solution to Manipur is to ban these radical groups or at least disarm them. A large number of sophisticated arms were looted from state police commands and remove N. Biren Singh. He is the problem and not a solution.

One of the points stressed over and over again is that the Manipur madness has no religious, ethnic or caste divisions. The 249 churches targeted systematically in the valley, including Meitei churches? A

church official has strongly indicated the attacks were pre-planned otherwise how did mobs know the exact locations? Church officials are also being told not to rebuild the places of worship. Even now churches are being burnt down. A narrative is also on that the church destruction was a reaction to Hindu temples being destroyed. This is not true. The media has no doubts and standardised temple. Local sources say a roadside altar was destroyed near Imphal but the unfortunate incident took place after the destruction of the churches, sometime towards May end. Meitei Christians are coming out denying any religious motive. At this juncture when emotions and ethnic attachments are high this is expected. They may be under pressure. There may be no hatred and during anyone but how does a group that believes in 'love your enemies' commit atrocities against fellow human? How do believers in ahimsa (non-violence) perpetuate such a sustained violent act? Religion is practised only in name. Meitei, and during peaceful times, how does the 'Kangleipak nation', a civilisation dating back to 2,500 years ago or even prehistoric times, whose own civilisation was developed in the early 12th century, come to such a sorry state?

Most of the media outlets talk about one ethnic fault lines, namely the ethnic and religious compositions and the plain and hill divide besides issues like the ST demand for Meitei, illegal grants, forests reserves and puppy cultivation. But few have dared to ask the right questions. Rajdeep Saraks has asked whether both the centre and state governments have blood on their hands; whether the failure of the 'two engines' should lead to the only option, President's rule. Karan Tharp has questioned PM's deafening silence and whether the Kuki should get a separate administration since the actual separation has effectively taken place in Imphal valley and other Meitei dominated areas not a single Kuki is left behind. The same applies to Churachandpur and other Kuki dominated districts where no Meitei remains. At the moment the return looks impossible. Why not live as good neighbours?

This paper has published a number of articles on Manipur but even among us who are in the same region the apathy is as real as those behind the 'chicken's neck'.

Editor, We widely celebrate the occasion of Mother's Day on the 2nd Sunday of the month of May every year. This day denotes the importance of being a mother and the supreme love, sacrifice and contribution she makes for her children, to firstly bring them into this world and then for their upbringing and well-being. But as we blindly celebrate Mother's Day so fondly with photographs, selfies, day outs, parties, etc. we forget the social media posts and so on, should we also not introspect and question the very concept of 'Mother's Day'?

How can we as children have the audacity to observe just one day in 365 days as Mother's Day, while we have always been at the receiving end of her divine love for each and every moment of our lives? A mother becomes a mother the day she is told that she is pregnant. Immediately there is a paradigm shift in her life as she happily sacrifices all her personal aspirations which she dreamt to become right from her early childhood as she now embraces the era of motherhood in the large

interest of her family. Some mothers are not even able to pursue and resume their professional careers with the same intensity as their primary responsibility is the best upbringing for their kids. She might get a lot of appreciation from her family for that sacrifice but can any amount of appreciation in this world buy her those golden years which she has unilaterally dedicated to motherhood? Despite all of this, she continues to dedicate every bit of her life for her children through their lifetime and I believe even after that.

Hence if we are blessed with a mother figure whom we call as our Mother whether or not she lives with us, do we have the courage to wish her 'Happy Mother's Day' on just one particular day of the year? If there is no Universal God's Day in this world, there cannot be a Mother's Day too.

Yours etc., Raghav Hajji, Via email

Mother's Day?

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

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Selling Joy Sir? Was reading with interest that our Prime Minister's present visit to the US is to boost India-US defence industrial ties, and felt good we as a nation under the PM were slowly becoming self-reliant in our defense production. Then what quickened interest I read that the PM would also lead the Yogo Day celebrations at the UN.

I'm glad yoga is being exported from India, and that slowly the whole world is realizing that attaining peace and joy are more important than even attaining nuclear muscle. That peace within can change the world and make it more habitable, but again on the taste of the pudding in the eating? Shouldn't we as the yoga capital of the world be showing the world that we Indians through meditation are the most peace loving people in the world?

Am reading a delightful book, called, 'The Book of Joy' which is a New York Times Bestseller. The book speaks about a wonderful week which his holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu spent together. Desmond Tutu became the first black Bishop of a predominantly white Anglican diocese in the denomination. It was a time when the majority African

and asked, "Do you believe I could carry you across the Niagara on my back?"

Blodin said, "Hop on."

The man replied, "Not on your life!"

Today as I look at violent scenes all over my beloved country is that what we are saying, "Yes, we believe in Yoga?"

"Then bring peace to your country."

"Not on my life!" Let us start practicing exactly what we are selling to the world. We are not just selling yoga, oh no, we are selling peace and joy to the world through yoga, and unless people the world over see that in our country, they are not going to believe in what we sell.

Today I hear about the violence in many parts of our country, especially Manipur, the brutal killings, the involvement of the state and the silence of national leaders, as I hear about families hiding in the forests, women and children murdered, and fear enveloping the whole state. I realize that to have the world believe in our inward peace they need to see the outward effort.

I remember many years ago, an editor of a religious magazine, brought out a book, called, 'Triumphphant' It was a compilation



blacks had taken over their country, but between Nelson Mandela, and Tutu who he appointed as head of the Truth and Reconciliation committee, they managed to bring unity between the majority blacks and the minority whites who had previously been their rulers and harsh administrators. Archbishop Tutu won the Nobel Peace Prize for his great efforts.

We all know what the Dalai Lama has gone through. Thrown out of his homeland Tibet by the Chinese, where he reigned as the spiritual leader, he was exiled to India, but all that the world sees through him, is a man who beams no hatred or anger towards China but continues to win people through his messages of peace and his spontaneous joy.

If there are two gigantic leaders who had the right to be called as the spiritual leaders to a joyless world it was these two. They had earned their stripes by showing through their lives that peace and joy could be achieved even in the most trying circumstances!

Thus, when they talk of joy, the world listens. The world listens when we practice what we preach!

Charles Blondin was a famous pioneer of tightrope walking, which is properly called "funambulism" and which could mean the intricate balance between fun and ambivalence. In 1859 Blondin crossed the Niagara Falls on a 3-inch tightrope, walking about 400 yards across the water at a height of 160 feet. Thousands of spectators gazed at his boldness and skill.

In subsequent shows, he repeated his performance with various twists: walking blindfolded, prancing on stilts, or sitting down on the rope in the middle of the Niagara Falls to cook himself an omelet. Once he even carried his manager across on his back.

After legging his manager across the Falls, Blondin went up to a spectator

of all the editorials he'd written in the magazine. At a meeting of the trust, he was told by a member that since he had reached the age of seventy-five it was time he retired as the editor. He retired at the same meeting. When he reached home, he heard a piece of news about who would replace him, something that annoyed him, and when his staff asked him, if he had resigned, he replied, "Of course not!"

"Sir," said a member of his staff, "I've just got a call that the whole meeting was recorded, and they have you on record, saying you are giving your resignation!"

"Recorded?" asked the man. "Ah, then in that case I did resign!"

Imagine writing a book about truth being triumphant and then lying? I know what his case if I've just got a call that the whole meeting was recorded, and they have you on record, saying you are giving your resignation!"

"Recorded?" asked the man. "Ah, then in that case I did resign!"

Imagine writing a book about truth being triumphant and then lying? I know what his case if I've just got a call that the whole meeting was recorded, and they have you on record, saying you are giving your resignation!"

If we are selling joy to the world, they need to see the effects of both in the salesman and in the people, only then will they believe our product is beneficial. What's preventing us from showing this to the world? Is it so difficult to bring peace? Is it so hard to move out thinking away from only capturing votes to areas where justice and fairness is required?

Just like Blondin the tight-rope walker spoke with his spectator, do you see Yoga walking over to our leaders and asking, "Do you believe using the carping joy and peace is good for our nation?"

"Yes!" they all shout. "Hop on the peace hand-wagon, bring joy to the nation!"

Do they shout, "Not on my life!" or do they whisper, "Yes!" joyously. That is the way to sell joy sir!

The Author conducts an Online Writing Course. For more details send a thumbs-up to him on WhatsApp 9892572883. bobbanter@gmail.com

"Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago." —Warren Buffett

The Shillong Times

Vol No 514 No. 311 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JUNE 22, 2023

Meghalaya's mercenary politics POLITICS is about money; nothing more, nothing less. You can't win elections on goodwill because the reality is that demands from constituents are on the rise. These demands are not flimsy. They represent a laundry list of needs that the middle class take for granted but which to the vulnerable 32% of Meghalaya's poorest are an existential crisis. To be able to pay school fees, buy school books and uniforms and sometimes meet the uncertain adversities such as crop failure is a big deal for the poor. Just thinking of providing two square meals is in itself a tall task. Even paying hospital bills often means dipping into life's savings, mortgaging house and land and borrowing from money lenders. This, despite the Meghalaya Health Insurance Scheme (MHIS) which pays partially but not for repeated hospitalisation and medicines and diet of the sick person etc. If the only breadwinner in the family falls ill that is fatal. It means the family sinks into deeper poverty. The fact that the family size in rural Meghalaya is still between 7-9 persons per household also poses its own set of problems.

The above are problems of governance deficits. Instead of addressing that deficit politicians prefer to keep their constituents dependent. So the MLA becomes the saviour by meeting all or part of the expenses of such families just so that he/she does not lose their goodwill. How does an MLA from the Opposition meet such unwinding demands from the constituents? The MLA has to have a little nest to draw from. The MLA cannot send back a check (voter) only with words of comfort. The person needs cash and cash is what the MLA has to be able to give. This goes for the MDCs too.

It is in this light that we have to see the sudden turnaround in the Khasi Hills District Council where the UDR, Chief Executive Member (CEM) Titos Chyne was suddenly ousted by the NPP which then appointed their own person, Pnyind Syiem as the new CEM. In politics, it is wrong to even think of permanency. All political alliances are subject to the vagaries of the political winds. As a stronger partner the NPP will look for allies that are less fastidious than the UDR. The District Council elections are just about 7 months away and the NPP would certainly need funds aplenty to win as many seats as possible. The District Council can be used to generate funds for different schemes/projects under a creative, innovative CEM. And just as funds from schemes are regularly diverted into private pockets or political party coffers, the same modus operandi will be followed to get a majority in the KIAADC. The NPP-Congress marriage however, seems to have larger pretends in state politics. The reticence of the Congress on the MDA-01 seems tells its own story and is indication enough that something is brewing in the political pot.

Letters to the Editor

Meghalaya's backstabbing politics

Editor, Seeing that an Executive Committee of the Khasi Hills District Council has been toppled yet again, I am reminded of a saying by Otto von Bismarck, the founder of modern Germany who said this about politics, "Politics is the art of the possible, the attainable — the art of the next best." However, since Meghalaya is very far from being modern Germany a slight change in the above quote would perhaps be appropriate in the context of Meghalaya. Hence, the saying should read like this, "Politics is the art of the next worst, the attainable — the art of the next worse." Why? It is because governments in Meghalaya, at any level, tend to become worse than the previous ones. We the common folks have nothing to gain but only things to lose by the political shenanigans of our so-called leaders although topping games are played in the name of, "we the people".

The coming together of the Congress and the National People's Party to form the next Executive Committee also reminds me of another saying, "Politics makes strange bedfellows." But, this saying too does not seem to apply to Meghalaya because most of the present members from all political parties are no strangers to each other when it comes to sharing political beds. At one point of time or another, most of these members have

found themselves sharing political beds with each other while wearing one type of political uniform or another. Having said this, I think that the most suitable quote in the context of Meghalaya's Politics is, "Politics is the art of knowing when to backstab your friends and partners and inventing another name for it." (Note: This quote is from my repertoire of quotable quotes).

More seriously, I think that contrary to what the United Democratic Party is hoping, the alignment of forces between the Congress and the NPP will probably have a bearing on the state government level, the MIC and even the parliamentary elections next year. There is a possibility that the Congress will merge with the NPP and our present Member of Parliament may even contest from the NPP ticket because what has just happened in the Congress is almost a spent force in Meghalaya and the NPP at present does not have a winnable Khasi-Jaintia face to contest for the Lok Sabha. But, things in this regard will crystallize only after the high-stakes assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh etc., slated for the last part of the year, where the Congress is hoping to make a big come back. As for the UDF's fate and considering what has just happened in the District Council, the most questions that come to mind are: Will the UDF be kicked out of the government? Will the UDF split? I think that in the backstabbing politics of Meghalaya anything and everything is possible.

Colonialism and mission

By Rev. Lyndan Syiem

Today is Thomas Jones Day, which is being observed in the seven districts of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Much has been written in this newspaper about this pioneer Welsh missionary who arrived at Sohra on 22 June, 1841. He was followed by five generations of missionaries, 152 on record: pastors, teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, as well as missionary wives, whose efforts resulted in the present day Presbyterian Church in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, with its almost eight lakh members. This article is a brief discussion on the last India Company's expansion into North East India and the vexed question of colonialism and mission.

One result of the famous Battle of Plassey in 1757 was the Company acquiring exclusive trading rights in Bengal and control of Sylhet, on the Surma river. Before the arrival of the British, the Khasi-Jaintia tribe had been politically independent and generally isolated in their 4000-5000 foot highlands. The foothills were covered with thick impenetrable jungles and malarial swamps. The plateau above possessed temperate forests and lush grasslands. The Company coveted this plateau for its climate, its mineral resources and its strategic location between the Brahmaputra valley in the North and the Surma plains in the South.

The people in the Jaintia, Sohra and Ri War regions already had trade and cultural relations with Bengal in the South; contact with Assam in the North was then minimal. In 1765, the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II granted the Khasi-Jaintia tribe had been politically independent and generally isolated in their 4000-5000 foot highlands. The foothills were covered with thick impenetrable jungles and malarial swamps. The plateau above possessed temperate forests and lush grasslands. The Company coveted this plateau for its climate, its mineral resources and its strategic location between the Brahmaputra valley in the North and the Surma plains in the South.

The Khasis used to come down to the Pandua trading post on the plains to barter their fruits, coal, iron, ivory, wax and honey in exchange for rice, salt, fresh fish, dried fish, cotton and silk from Bengal. Limestone mined at Sohra yielded slaked lime

for mineral-deficient Bengal and provided mortar for the majestic buildings in colonial Calcutta. Very soon, Company officials began their private trade in limestone and other lucrative goods. All these commercial, administrative and strategic interests would eventually culminate in the British occupation of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Meanwhile in Western Bengal, the Baptist Mission was established in 1799, at Serampore, on the banks of the Hooghly river, upstream of Calcutta. Serampore was encouraged by Pal's work.

The Company's eastward expansion collided with a resurgent British westward expansion into Manipur and Cachar. War broke out in 1824 and ended in a decisive British victory over Burma in 1826. The result was the Treaty of Yandabo on 24 February, 1826, resulted in Assam's annexation into the British Presidency. The Khasi-Jaintia Hills were now sandwiched between two British territories: the Brahmaputra valley in the North and the plains of Sylhet in the South. Conquest and loss of independence was imminent for the Khasis.

On 1 November, 1826, the newly David Scott, Governor General's Agent and Commissioner of Assam, entered the Khasi Hills to 'request' the Syiem of Nongkhal, U Tirot Singh, to allow construction of a road between Gauhati and Sylhet, with a large section through his Kingdom. On 3 November, 1826, Tirot Singh assented to an agreement whereby:

- 1. Nongkhal voluntarily submitted to the 'protection' of the Company.
2. Free passage of British troops between Gauhati and Sylhet through Nongkhal.
3. Assistance, with due payment, in providing construction materials for the road and for its maintenance and repair.
David Scott subsequently visited and similar one-sided treaties with all the Khasi rulers. The Khasi-Jaintia Hills were therefore insidiously occupied in the period 1826-1830, with David Scott as a sort of 'Rajah' of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Sohra became the capital because of its strategic location, its rich mineral deposits, its commercial importance, and its King, Dewan Singh's compliance. It was at Sohra that the 7-year old Alexander H. Lich arrived in 1832. This second missionary to the Khasis was an Anglo-Indian from Calcutta, sent by the Baptist Mission. Lich (1814-1852) quickly learned Khasi and established three schools at Sohra, Mawmai and Mawmluh. He went to Calcutta in 1833, taking several Khasis to visit that great city. Lich returned in 1834 with two associates and was making steady progress when the fledgling mission inexplicably left Sohra in 1838. The result of Krishna Chandra Pal and Alexander H. Lich's premature departure is that the majority of Khasis today are not Baptists but Presbyterians.

Presbyterianism arrived with Thomas Jones (1810-1849); whose life and career may be perused in a 2018 Shillong Times article, "Why Celebrate Thomas Jones Day?" My post-script to that article is that while British colonialism brought Jones to the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, it was the same colonialism that killed him at 39 years of age. After leaving the Welsh mission in 1847, Jones supported himself by trading in opium. The Sohra-Sylhet trade was monopolized by Harry Inglis and his father in law and Political Agent, Captain Lister. Thomas Jones challenged this monopoly and pursued the price. He was harassed, persecuted and placed to hard labour in the jail and died at Calcutta on 16 September, 1849.

As a concerned citizen, I want the following answers and again as a citizen, I am entitled to get the answers. First: What are those "good" farming practices that the farmers from Meghalaya who probably all this time were engaged in "bad" farming practices learnt. Second: How much money was expended from the public exchequer for this foreign jaunt? Third: How were the farmers selected to be the pickers? Fourth: What were the criteria to qualify as a farmer to make it to this high profile trip? Fifth: Provide the list of names of those farmers so that those of us doing farmer on a large and small scale can actually ask them from farming tips. I also want to address the silent participants of democracy in this state to speak up and speak loudly because the ghosts of the MDA-01 government which were temporarily buried will be resurrected to loot the state for the second time and now an even bigger scale. If we remain silent now it means we are participating in the corruption even as the state sinks into a morass and goes from bad to worse in terms of governance.

Yours etc, Primrose Nonglang, Via email

Manipur! Let's Give Peace a Chance

By Rosy Yumnam

"Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world..." WB Yeats The current turmoil in Manipur can be wofully felt through these lines from William Butler Yeats's poem, "The Second Coming." The lawlessness in the present situation is inconceivably beyond human imagination. The unfortunate tension between the two ethnic groups, the Meiteis and the Kukis started on May 3 when a tribal solidarity march organised by the All Tribal Students Union, Manipur (ATSUM) in Charachandpur turned violent. The march was to protest against the Meitei demand for Scheduled Tribe status under the Constitution of India. The havoc that succeeded afterwards created a deep chasm that will be difficult to mend in the history of Manipur.

The loss of innocent lives in both communities is gargantuan in proportion and has immensely impacted the state psychologically, physically, socially, politically and economically. More than 1200 people have lost their lives while the rest affected, they may have to live with life-long mental and physical trauma. Properties and houses of innocent people in both communities have been looted and gutted down and is still continuing at a rapid writing this article. Many religious places, churches and temples belonging to both communities have been destroyed and vandalised in the current crisis. The heart-wrenching stories about the need of the hour is the physical and the displaced Meiteis from Charuchandpur, Moreh and other bill areas haunt every sane human at this moment. The physical and psychological wounds inflicted on the victims and the two communities, in general, have given birth to a deep 'cultural trauma' in the larger context.

The collective sense of the two warring communities is subjected to an ingrained and irreversible mark upon their existence marking their memories forever. The narratives surrounding the tragedy are varied and unimaginably hard to fathom. But, one truth remains the same, the truth of loss. The notion of 'Belongingness' attached to the so-called 'Home' for every individual is an identity etched with their being. This turmoil has snatched this 'Belongingness' from the victims - both Meiteis and Kukis. With this in the background, the chasm of hatred and distrust engineered between the two communities is deeply woven. The trauma now, is inflicted collectively. These "constructed" cultural traumas induced a cognitive, identifiable existence and became a source of human suffering to carry forward some significant responsibility for the entire episode. Then comes the dynamics of moral responsibility and solidarity relationships which by far have detrimentally impacted the social fabric of the two communities. The divide is deep.

The turmoil is over a month now. And, still, the mayhem continues. The sounds of guns and bombs are the new normal at the moment. The fight continues, relentlessly. Lawlessness prevails everywhere. The venom of hatred has been successfully sown between the two communities. What we need to understand here is that there are many more communities in Manipur whose existence also matters. The need of the hour is to strive for peaceful coexistence. So far, the size and the central government are persisting in maintaining an awe-like gracelessness. There have been endless speculations about a peaceful company visit to the meaning civil unrest and open mind, the rebuilding can begin. Let's hope. Let's pray. Humanity is still alive. Let's strive for it. Let's renewed this violence for the personal gains at the cost of many innocent lives.

The attack on innocent civilians is highly condemnable. If there is any displeasure with the working of the government, there is a way to voice the concerns

democratically. Violence is not the solution to put forth demands. Violence will not lead to any peaceful solution. Violence will only lead to anarchy and lawlessness. Violence has destroyed the harmonious existence of both communities. And, 'Violence' has done it craftily, methodically and swiftly. We are visibly living these hellish experiences at present. We fail to see the humane fabric lost in this complex labyrinth. At the end of the day, what matters is the loss of precious lives, what matters is the loss of trust and what matters is the loss of humanity. We need to realise that the Meiteis and the Kukis have incurred losses. The crisis deepens. The sooner we realise, the better it is. At the moment, the turmoil deepens. Even so, the government has initiated the so-called peace committee. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) constituted a peace committee on June 10, 2023, led by the Governor, Anusuya UIkey and leader of various political parties. The question now is, 'How far will this peace committee take us?' Already, many members of the peace committee have shown their displeasure with the inclusion of some controversial members. The need of the hour is a practical pragmatic approach to close the burning flames. A reconstruction of the peace committee consisting more political members must be at the earliest. Proportional numbers of representatives comprising academicians, former ministers, artists, litterateurs and social workers from both the Meiteis and the Kukis are in urgent need. The inclusion of women members from both communities will assist in dispensing the much-needed initiatives of a formal dialogue. Members from the Naga, the Meitei Pangal and other communities who are also inhabitants of Manipur will play a crucial role in bridging the gap between the two communities and also has to be significant in working out a credible plan for the entire state. At the same time, to rebuild trust, we have to re-examine the backdrop by both communities during the riots. There are touching stories of how both communities have been reaching out to their neighbours. Many people belonging to both communities are witnesses to this. We encourage individuals cannot faint and paint this testimony for their vested interests. His high time to come out and shout out loud for the betterment of the state. The blame game from both sides will be as buried so that a possible peace talk can be chalked out. The Meiteis and Kukis have to assure each other that they belong together that Manipur is home to both as it is to the rest of the other communities of the state, and that misunderstanding happens as every group of people struggle for survival. It is only 'Forgiveness' which will act as a saviour at this crucial juncture. No external forces can deliver this 'desire' peace. The sooner this realisation dawns upon the Meiteis and the Kukis, the sooner a possible reconciliation and a practical reconstruction can happen. So, a profound prayer to both the communities, a prayer to 'Lay down arms'. Both communities have gone through an inefable trauma of unnamable losses and sufferings. With an open mind, the rebuilding can begin. Let's hope. Let's pray. Humanity is still alive. Let's strive for it. Let's renewed this violence for the personal gains at the cost of many innocent lives.

Dr. Rosy Yumnam is Assam's highly commendable. If there is any displeasure with the working of the government, there is a way to voice the concerns

What are the Good Farming Practices in France?

Editor, As I read the report on the Agriculture Minister leading a group of farmer-entrepreneurs and their jaunt to a foreign country to learn good farming practices, I was also expecting to hear of those good farming practices in France that the visitors from Meghalaya learned. But I was disappointed. Nothing was even mentioned. Why? I do not want to make assumptions or give a critical response which is why I asked the big question WHY. Please enlighten the readers of your esteemed paper and also the 'elite' set of farmers who exactly they learnt from that country that they are proud here and that they didn't know before.

Yours etc, Darilyn Syiem, Via email

What agriculture does France do, pray?

Editor, For a government with a huge loan burden its seeking to hear of the Agriculture Minister boasting to a media that she took a team of farmers and entrepreneurs to France to learn good farming practices from them. Since the money has been spent from the public exche-

Increasing pickpocketing in lewdudh

Editor, The bustling legendary market - lewdudh (Hata Bazar), has serried the destiny of countless people. While many struggled and succeeded in making enormous fortunes, others have been badly misled, cheated, and left impoverished. However, this market always holds a semblance of hope for everyone. The most disturbing aspect of this congested market in recent times is the "increasing" number of pickpockets it has attracted. These crooked thieves prey on unsuspecting poor people and steal their hard-earned money like stealthy shadows in the crowd.

With great precision, these crafty thieves snatch wallets, purses, mobiles, and other valuables, leaving the victim in a state of complete hopelessness. It is a heartbreaking sight to see individuals, particularly those hailing from remote villages, quickly fall victim to this menace, and they have no one to turn to for help. Some people from the crowd tried their level best to console her. She was from West Khasi Hills, around Nongsoin. She had probably saved that amount over many months, bit by bit. Upon inquiry, I was informed about the "increasing incidents,"

of pickpocketing in the criss-crossing lanes of the bazaar, which has become a cause for serious concern. As a concerned citizen, I wish to draw the urgent attention of the police department, including the Myllem administration and government authorities, to take this menace with utmost seriousness. It is time to adopt stringent measures to deal with merciless pickpockets and also burglar who are active late at night. Protecting the vulnerable poor should be the top priority of the government. We need to restore a sense of security for those who are entirely "dependent" on this legendary market. This commercial center is their only means of livelihood. The government must be compassionate and wipe away their tears. Let us offer hope to those who have long suffered in silence.

Yours etc, Sald Gwalin, Shillong

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

"You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus."

— Mark Twain

The Shillong Times

Vol. No. 57, No. 111 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JUNE 23, 2023

Modified America

WHILE the big announcements marking Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the United States were still awaited, what's significant now is the overall 'feel-good' factor that marked the three-day visit. India has come a long way from the skepticism that marked the American mindset in relation to the largest democracy's engagements with the wider world. India is today a prominent partner with the United States in multiple fields after it bid goodbye to an era of Nehruvian Socialism that had its good sides but nevertheless throttled the nation's economic advancement. The era of liberalization and globalization since the early 1990s created the right conditions for India to build bridges with the US. The disintegration of the USSR and end of the Cold War also helped. India could break away from the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) mould, where the pro-Russian, anti-US sentiments were all too palpable. The US chose to alternatively support Pakistan and kept India at a distance. Getting a US visa is still a difficult proposition for Indians other than in the IT Sector, while even the Chinese are more welcome there.

The iterations of visits of Prime Minister Narendra Modi or Manmohan Singh in the past have also not majorly helped India to benefit much from the US - and this is evident even at global forums like the UN where Pakistan gets strong protection from China while India fails to get a matching endorsement from the US. Overall, in diplomacy, India has been in a sort of tazeeta act, being close to all and true friend of none. Yet, beyond the Yoga show, the vegetarian treat at White House and other impressive events that marked PM Modi's present US visit, what he brings back home is worth a close watch.

The US, despite the past alienation, wants India most importantly in having this nation's support to counter China's territorial ambitions as in the South China Sea, the Indo-Pacific etc. The Quad arrangement involving the US, India, Australia and Japan is a military prop against China but with a limited agenda. While China keeps browbeating India and annexing more of its land, we are on the defensive. China is somewhat tamed off late by the adverse impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, principally slowing its economic hyperactivity, but it has a tendency to bare its fangs at will. Antagonising China is not an option for India as several ifs and buts remain in its engagements with the West as well with Russia. The US is mindful of this. India's present policy of emphasizing on its economic growth by balancing the geopolitical equations has its merits.

Letters to the Editor

Shillong deserves good roads

Editor, Thanks for allowing me to write again. The current double-laning of Mawoh - Mawkyroh-Umparin road leading up to ISBT which is long awaited is nearing completion. Thanks to the PWD Roads and the contractors for making it happen although it has taken almost 3 long years for this to happen. However, I would once again point out as a lay person that the quality of work is not up to the standard laid down for road construction. I have travelled or good and solid roads of other states and neighbouring Assam etc. All I can say is that road is of poor quality. Roads constructed by renowned firms goes as per specifications are always good and will last for years.

This much awaited road is only a few months old and we can see the unevenness, especially at night when the lights are on. Smoothness is a concern because the thickness of the bitumen is very poor. The uppermost layer should have been 6 inches or more to make it last longer, smoother and bear the load of heavy vehicles. Moreover, some turning or bending needs widening in safety in driving.

Currently we do not know who the contractors under-

taking this important task are. This road is already busy and traffic will be huge once it is fully completed. I do not know how long the road will last. Finally it is the public will be the losers and sufferers in future. I would request the PWD Roads to please conduct a proper spot inspection and supervision to examine the quality of work before giving the completion certificate. I would request the engineers and subordinate officers of PWD to act immediately as this road is under construction and nearing completion pending the drainage system. Please, do not leave the work to the "contractors" alone. All we want to see are good quality roads in our district and Shillong City and not substandard roads now and in future.

Across Shillong, roads are in a very bad shape. Whether you drive in a new or old car, the roads will shake and jolt your car. Thanks to the G20 meeting in recent months, it has been helped to repair the broken roads. But sadly, in selected destination only. Constant repairs and patch work annually or biannually has damaged the smoothness and quality of the roads. It is requested in public interest that good roads be constructed to make our city proud. I hope our respected leaders under MDA 2.0 will deliver the work with commitment and make Shillong proud. This is written in public interest and not to criticise or offend anyone.

Yours, etc. Reward Rymbai, Shillong

Winter capital vs MBOSE!

Editor, Of late several Garo welfare associations have been holding demonstrations in some focal parts of Garo Hills to pressure the Government to initiate plans to make Tura the winter capital of Meghalaya. Certainly, and in a matter of fact, surprising that in the pre- bifurcation of Meghalaya from composite Assam, Shillong has earned the sobriquet 'Scotland of the East' besides addressing itself as one of the premier capitals of the North-East. It may also be pertinent to recall that the then Gauhati City was much more favourably convenient to be chosen for any winter capital in the then Gauhati.

Paradoxically, the current unrest in Garo Hills to move the winter capital from Shillong is euphemistically to snatch its handed down legacy to some extent. In my individual inquisitive survey to feel the genuine reactions of the conscious citizens of Khasi-Jaintia communities on the said ongoing demand of the Garo

people, it transpires that the former have availed their firm reservations against such unprecedented demand of a so-called winter capital. In view of such critical discourse, "in being reminded that the entire Garo populations rose to a man in preventing the shifting of MBOSE Office from Tura to Shillong and some laid down their lives several years ago; hence, they reiterated that now it's, ipso facto, for the Hymenopter people to muster courage it, ensuring that no move is effected in transferring any part of the capital from Shillong. Nevertheless, they are in complete consent that an agreement could be hammered out if the Garo community allows the transfer of MBOSE lock stock and barrel from Tura to Shillong! Im at a loss to imagine how such perverse narratives of the agitators would lead our state of Meghalaya to hennepier.

Yours etc., Jenme K. Dimgdoh, Shillong-2

On Lumpy Skin Disease infecting cattle in Meghalaya

Editor, Lumpy skin disease has resurfaced in Meghalaya and the disease is suspected to have spread due to movement of animals from

Education today: Challenges before Meghalaya

By Patricia Mukhim

One of the first things our education system does is to discipline kids to the point where they become human automatons. In most education, the students are not encouraged to ask questions. Teaching is a top-down process where the teacher is always right; hence kids accept the teachers' words as Gospel. Any child that dares ask questions would be put in his/her place and be called an impudent brat. This is the education system that most of us survived. Have things changed today? Maybe in the elite schools hopefully but not in the rural outbreak where school continues to be a boring, non-creative space and where kids are put through an unimaginative learning regime. No wonder most kids find school so boring and the world outside is so excitingly engaging and interactive.

To develop social skills, the classroom must be interactive so that even the most shy and introverted child can come out of her shell. All that the teacher needs to do is to kickstart a conversation on an issue and let the class play around with their own ideas and come up with several different answers. We know by now that the method of rewarding only one correct answer may not be the best thing in learning. Kids thrive when the classroom can be divided into a story corner with different corners telling their own short stories and if there is anything they ought to do to help the child. But in our schools, parents hardly interact with the teachers. In rural areas, teachers are not by parents, "if the child doesn't behave, beat him/her into obedience." Perhaps parents actually lack parenting skills. How would a woman becoming a mother at 15 years of age and then having another child at 18 years, another at 20 years and so on have the time and inclination to bring up the children as they should, in a climate of acceptance and a surrounding that exudes love. In most households, parents fight in front of their kids and talk to each other violently. Think of the fear

where our eyes are most likely to fall day in and day out so that those dates stuck to our memories and those dates were what fetched us marks. How important are those dates today in our day to day lives?

The problem with education today and in the past too is that of teachers as much as it is of students and parents. Once a teacher is employed she (she here is gender inclusive) is never assessed as to whether she is really able to communicate and has the grace to work with the weak in the class; to work with a slow learner without losing her cool. It takes a lot to do that and the problem really is that there are so few who have the passion to be with children and guide them such that they learn to live their lives well and not just score good marks. But schools who join the teaching profession do so as a last resort when they are unable to get any other job. The results are there for us to see each time the SSLC results are out. Schools in rural Meghalaya,

particularly in Garo Hills continue to perform abysmally with zero percentage pass in the SSLC exams. Why should this be so? What sort of remedial teaching is being given to students? Why are parents of these students not able to hold the schools accountable? What's the point of sending a child to school for 12 or more years when they don't learn anything at the end of it all and can't even score pass marks in their SSLC and that when the standards have been lowered such that failing in Mathematics allows a child to pass? In the first place lowering standards to enable a child pass is a bad idea. Improving teaching methods should have been the remedy.

In Meghalaya today the literacy rate is 74.4% which means that a substantial 25% of people are still illiterate. But literacy means nothing. Education is everything because it is assumed that an educated person has a reasonably good chance of being able to reason out and be critical of the governance system, of institutions, of lapses in society etc. Also an educated person is expected to be more aware of issues that afflict society and to be part of the problem-solving brigade rather than the problem-creating squad.

The joint survey conducted by the Unified District Information for Education and the Education Ministry in 2022 found that the drop-out rate was highest in Meghalaya and Meghalaya in Meghalaya the drop-out rate was 9.8% from Classes 1-5. I am unsure when this data was mined but having visited rural Meghalaya extensively and questioned parents and students themselves who now happily work as cowherds and shepherds or in the farms, the number could be much higher. The state of education in Meghalaya is in a shambles. Government should now make it a priority to correct the anomalies in rural schools and leave the urban elite schools to themselves. Government has to make monthly inspections a priority and correct teacher and student absenteeism. It is imperative to work in tandem with parents and, if possible, Government should activate those adult education centers that used to work well at one time. An aware parent is essential to the academic growth of the child.

supportive care, including antibiotics as necessary for secondary bacterial infections, can be helpful. Wound dressings have been used to reduce fly strike and secondary infections.

The best pan is we now have a vaccine to control the disease. In addition to the treatment, vaccination and any other information related to control of LSD. The Director, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary said vaccination drive has begun in the state to keep the disease at bay. The disease is under control and no big numbers of deaths of cattle have been reported.

Yours etc., Laramen Shylla, (PG Student, 1st year, College of Veterinary Science, Khanapara) Via email

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

Not just Modi, media barons & journalists must share blame for curbs on press freedom

By Sushil Katty

This column has called Prime Minister Narendra Modi all possible names including those bordering on the 'libel'. So far, Al-Hamdulillah, Modi hasn't let the wolves on the column. But it is a fact that wringing Modi in the Press Freedom grandeur wouldn't make a difference to Press Freedom in nine years of Modi's India. Yet the International Press Institute (IPI) has asked US President Joe Biden to read the riot act to Prime Minister Modi for curtailing Press Freedom during Modi's State visit.

The IPI says Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "warping" of the law against critical journalists has also become increasingly common "under Modi's regime. IPI was joined in the attempt to subpoena the Biden ad-

ministration against Modi by several rights groups even as the Biden-Modi bonhomie in New York and Washington.

Clearly, the government of the United States does not agree with the IPI, nor with the view of rights groups and US lawmakers who too have asked Biden to put up Modi for alleged rights transgressions. Contrary to observations, India's democracy isn't on the slide. The very fact that opposition parties

worse. Press freedom, if it has suffered under Modi, could mean that a whole nation of celebrated television anchors has become Modi's guests. How can free spirits like Anjana Om Kashyap, and Arnab Goswami, be compelled to forever give clean chit to Narendra Modi? If they cannot or would not stop giving cover fire to Nar-

endra Modi, it does not mean Modi is suppressing freedom of Press.

It is not that news organizations don't have the leeway to say, now, write what they want. Where there's will, there is also way. NDTV never stopped questioning Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Modi government did not censor NDTV.

Pressure, if there was any, did not force NDTV to tow the government line. The point is if NDTV could do it, the so-called 'Godi Media' could have also. The fact is, news organizations willingly bartered their Press Freedom for post-As long as there are journalists with a yen for money, Press Freedom will be hostage to paymasters.

Imagine a NDTV journalist today owns the Republic. How does that work? The Modi government did not put a gun to his head. But he wouldn't like the Tucker Carlson, question the government, and the "wannabe dictator". To reiterate, it is not the Modi regime which has become dictatorial, it is the sold-out journalist and media barons who have bartered Press Freedom for existence. Narendra Modi is only taking advantage of the media's pusillanimity. (IPI Service)

investigates and nails Narendra Modi with facts. It is a fact that those alleging deterioration of Press Freedom never back their assertions with evidence. Does Press Freedom mean a news channel can carry something like "wannabe dictator" speaks at the White House after having his political rival arrested? and not punished? The news channel receded to criticism by cacking the television producer. Did something of the sort happen in India courtesy the Modi government?

Come to think of it, Sid-dique Kappan after his release from jail went all out ballistic against the Modi regime in India courtesy the Modi government?

The IPI says Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "warping" of the law against critical journalists has also become increasingly common "under Modi's regime. IPI was joined in the attempt to subpoena the Biden ad-

ministration against Modi by several rights groups even as the Biden-Modi bonhomie in New York and Washington.

Clearly, the government of the United States does not agree with the IPI, nor with the view of rights groups and US lawmakers who too have asked Biden to put up Modi for alleged rights transgressions. Contrary to observations, India's democracy isn't on the slide. The very fact that opposition parties

worse. Press freedom, if it has suffered under Modi, could mean that a whole nation of celebrated television anchors has become Modi's guests. How can free spirits like Anjana Om Kashyap, and Arnab Goswami, be compelled to forever give clean chit to Narendra Modi? If they cannot or would not stop giving cover fire to Nar-

endra Modi, it does not mean Modi is suppressing freedom of Press.

It is not that news organizations don't have the leeway to say, now, write what they want. Where there's will, there is also way. NDTV never stopped questioning Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Modi government did not censor NDTV.

Pressure, if there was any, did not force NDTV to tow the government line. The point is if NDTV could do it, the so-called 'Godi Media' could have also. The fact is, news organizations willingly bartered their Press Freedom for post-As long as there are journalists with a yen for money, Press Freedom will be hostage to paymasters.

Imagine a NDTV journalist today owns the Republic. How does that work? The Modi government did not put a gun to his head. But he wouldn't like the Tucker Carlson, question the government, and the "wannabe dictator". To reiterate, it is not the Modi regime which has become dictatorial, it is the sold-out journalist and media barons who have bartered Press Freedom for existence. Narendra Modi is only taking advantage of the media's pusillanimity. (IPI Service)



A photograph of a man in a suit, likely a journalist or official mentioned in the article.

"Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is probably the reason why so few engage in it."
—Henry Ford

The Shillong Times
Vol No LXV No. 312 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JUNE 24, 2023

Normalising bad governance

IN MAY 2022, the dome atop the new Meghalaya Assembly building crashed almost as if it signified the collapse of a moral code that guided the tribals of yore. Now to speak of tribal values is to be disrespectful to the ancestors who had set such strong standards of behaviour. On June 22, parts of the much-touted PA Sangma stadium in Tura suffered a landslide obviously because the foundation around the stadium was not strong enough. It's another case of cutting corners to cut costs and make profit out of any and all government constructions. This year power cuts for several hours during the day time and post-midnight have been accepted as normal. It's as if we the people have brought it on ourselves. The fact that the MeCEIL is and has been badly run like a mini government without any checks and controls for several years is a forgotten saga. On the contrary the narrative today is such that it is made to look as if it is not governance failure but the fault of citizens that power is now being rationed. This despite regular payment of bills! The major defaulters—the industries are getting away with non-payment.

Without power, mobile connectivity is also unstable. Virtual meetings are almost impossible to hold. Companies and start-ups reliant on a steady power supply are paying a heavy price for power cuts. But hospitals and nursing homes are the worst affected because they have to use powerful generators that are powered by diesel engines. Yet there is no protest from any quarters. Citizens of Meghalaya seem to have taken this in their stride. In other states this annual power cut would have resulted in public protests and the Government would have been put on the mat. But not in Meghalaya! With an Opposition that's reduced in strength in the Assembly and too few to call out the Government, the MDA-02 Government is sitting pretty. Now with even the Congress on a bridge building exercise with the NPP, a time will come when there will only be only 10 Opposition members left from the VPP and TMC.

The quest for power and pelf and with no concern for the people who elected them has turned the politicians of Meghalaya apathetic. They have learnt that once elected and in the seat of power, no power on earth can dislodge them. It does not matter how badly the State is governed and how deep the corruption is, politicians will continue to ride their high horses for they are never held accountable. This is what happens when civil society decides to sit and watch the power play silently while things degenerate. It has been well established that the so-called pressure groups have no time for taking up issues of bad governance. They only take up populist issues that will gain them points for the next elections. Meghalaya is a state that is destined to fail and fail badly.

Letters to the Editor

Tura as capital is inevitable

The protest and rallies on the Reservation Policy also brought out the de-facto reasons that Garo-Achik are very backward, very undeveloped, etc. but there must still be a cut in a reservation quota while the forward tribes need more reservation because they are highly intelligent, very developed, having high literacy etc. This is a very basic theory of justice. If not for all, but in the media of the state where the newspaper that they had laid down a picture whereby a Hindu worship has been victimised by the Garos for 51 years of statehood, which is only 8th Grade while one can find more than thousands of engineers of Garo community lining up for a show-licker job in a college. The statistics available in the government show that the Garo-Achik community has been able to fill up only 34-36% of the 40% reservation allocated for them. Perhaps for a 12th grade

like me, a careful observation of the scenario reveals that the definition of reservation has become dynamic in this day and age and it relates to various provisions of the rich, elite and the highly intelligent people rather than the poor, deprived and the backward class only. Fortunately or unfortunately the amended Office Memorandum which won't show display has come up with absence of any policy for the backlog that is inevitable in the coming decades, as any student of geopolitics will agree. Yours etc. Kathan Sanjan R. Marak, St. XII, Little Blossom Higher Secondary School, Tura

Examinations, results and our Obsessions

By M.N. Bhattacharjee

immense categories like male, female, urban and rural, SC, ST, General, OBC, community, fluctuating barriers of poverty lines and more. Figures also emerge on nature and diversity of the institutions: government, semi-government, government-aided, private, missionary etc. Students are not uniform learners but tools of administrative, financial and social divisions. Consequently students also come up with organisations with community aspirations, the fall-out of which is evident to everyone. Opinions in the mind are private but become public once words are used to express them. Often it is forgotten that the public discourse requires imbedding of values and rational deliberations.

Few instances of the effects of results reverberate in the mind. There are moments of deep satisfaction as well as extreme outrage. Two incidents of similar nature pertaining to Secondary examinations are worth mentioning. The first dates back to about a decade ago while the other is recent. In both cases, the students performed excellently and even ranked among the first few though not the foremost, flattered with the news. I contacted the parents to congratulate them and the students. Amazingly, the responses were cool and rational as if a big mishap had occurred. The conversations became sessions of consolation for the utmost most elated the students. It may be interesting to divulge that the parents, in both cases, were highly educated. It appears intriguing why even the educated class cannot accept that there is a host amongst a large number who are very good. What a tale! The agony and stress in the minds of the bright youngsters are unimaginable. How justified is it to announce the performance of students in the media and grill the students so that they share their secrets of success? Is not my marksheet my personal property, if not totally confidential, at least one's private life and triggering discomfort? That reminds one of a scene of the blockbuster movie '247' where the student 'Rancho' asked the Director of the institute, he was studying, about the efficacy of the ranking system and announcing the results publicly much to the indignity of poor performers. Can't we be a little more compassionate? But how to come out of this rut? Now there is a ranking system for institutions also where marks are largely subject to factors of placements and corporate life. Do we appreciate the anguish of students of low-rankers in institutions taking very good results compared to students with poor results from top-ranking institutions? What about the knowledge base of either category?

There is a new game in the horizon called 'lessen the burden'. There is a curriculum contracting the curriculum by content. What a mess! The world is moving ahead with knowledge expansion and young learners are coping very well, some elites think 'it is too much'. So instead of lessening the weight volume of the syllabus, there is a shrinking of the syllabus and deleting essential topics. This is not rationalisation but short rationing of basic knowledge undermining the capability of the learners. Likewise, there is a campaign in some states, mostly tribal states, that the students are weak in science and mathematics, and syllabus must be made easier. Another interesting and embarrassing incident for the students! This populist policy to satisfy the crowd shows a death in the category of the young and the young informed students. The cumulative harm of such an infamous theory is being inflicted on a rational person. The weak students are discarded while forcing the better ones to join this group of mere certificate holders.

Can there be any uniform pattern of curriculum and examination system to standardise all states and decide what can proceed for the next level of learning? Given the socio-economic and geographical backgrounds of our students, this sounds rather impractical and self-defeating. Subject like Science, Mathematics and English cannot be subjected like the crowd. Social science topics invite considerations of local culture and conditions, and hence liberal approach in framing the syllabus is essential. Environment education has rightly been included in the part of the curriculum yet the menace of Climate Change and Global Warming continue unabated. Is there any gap in the knowledge delivery and practices followed? Central and State Governments ban use of plastics, periodically with much fanfare. Plastics disappear from the market for few days just to reappear with renewed vigour.

Whatever be the curriculum design, the mode of assessment of the students always remains an unpalatable mechanism. Big variations exist between state and central boards where central boards are seen as inflating the marks. Again, some enlightened citizens feel that central boards students are well equipped than the state boards; the debate remains inconclusive. To standardise the results, think-tank prescribed JEE, NEET, etc. Thus, students are in the grid system of examinations, the tyranny continues. As the pressure of Board examinations eases out there are more in the line-up. And mind, these are done to 'lessen the burden'. Hold your breath! There is National Testing Agency for conducting examinations in almost all fields of entry to academics and jobs but only to post-grads? 'Holy cow'.

Of late, there are increasing cases of students dying of suicide. At times, these cases show that most suicides are among the aspirants of professional courses—either during the final year of preparation for the ordeal or as a burn-out syndrome. The tormentors like MEE and JEE, former being more lethal, have already made impacts as stories emanated from coaching hubs of our country. We are obsessed to sit par with international standards. Do other countries also report similar suicidal behaviour? Psychiatric counselling is available but there's more to it, hopefully some enlightened members of the society will analyse the stress of the students who are to climb the range of the ladder to be successful.

Not all students score brilliantly and come to the limelight. Some score moderately well but are not successful in their career-driven brilliant ones. It is these weak dropout failed students who remain in the limelight. The failure of the students is a cumulative way following unequal access to digital infrastructure. Further, reports of suicides conducted by some universities suggest that remote learning has hampered students' concentration levels, writing speed, handwriting and mental health. Basically, quality education can be a facilitator but never substitute for classroom learning.

But the future is bright. With NEP 2020 around, Class X examinations are on their way out; at least, few states have declined. No more worries, it is commendable that many public schools, who opposed NEP till some day, have started finding immense opportunity with the same. After dramatically changing political colour Realisations are related, not absolute as we often think. Academic conversations are highly volatile and sublines in the heat of politics, career, last for power, and also setting the line of discussion. Systems are quite intriguing. News flows that few state governments have decided to re-examine the education system and constituted committees. Each committee in its first meeting decided to constitute another committee which in turn acted likewise; hence committee after committee and series of meetings. Some decisions will emerge someday which may be come irrevocable, despite flaws in them. Since these have been obtained democratically, Nature is omnipotent. Let us not disturb the natural quality of young minds but teach them fundamentals of nature. As our children grow up they encounter endless possibilities but we should not force them to state defeat in the face of the challenge of their rights. Only will be real losers alongside the land we live in.

(The author is retired lecturer Shillong College and examiner, MBOSE)

known Mr Purno Sangma as a man who cared for this state and during his first tenure had very pure intentions of putting Meghalaya in the development map, it is sad to see that a stadium in his name has been so badly constructed that the area around it has collapsed. In Meghalaya there is not a single government contract that has been awarded to a private contractor. There are always shortcuts adopted by engineers in a bid to save the state. In fact, the money is also shared by those in government. If one looks at the roads one finds the water logs in the cities and there are no drains at the sides. What sort of engineering work is this? Why are contractors allowed to get away with this kind of sub-standard work? Engineers who sign the completion report of such projects should be penalised heavily. In fact, a time has now come to approach the High Court to pull up such avaricious contractors and engineers. There is not a single structure that we can claim to be an engineering marvel in this state. If even the State Assembly building which is the sanctum sanctorum of democracy is constructed so shabbily and by bending all the rules so that someone makes money then how will this state ever progress? Looking around one is filled with a sense of dejection at how this state has been run. The country is not even a single step ridged with corruption even while those indulging in it know very well that an equity commission will examine them should they be caught. Is this why we fought for our own state, just so that some people become millionaires and billionaires while others continue to remain poor throughout their lives and even their next generation?

Yours etc, AR Marak, Tura

Modi in America Breaking new grounds!

By Dr D.K. Giri

The much-awaited state visit of Prime Minister Modi to the United States has happened. Not only in India but across the world, perhaps for the first time, world attention is focussed on it. Modi was accorded the singular honour of addressing the US Congress. Modi becomes the only major world leader to do so. This is not a small recognition which United States of America, Britain and the American government is not an admirer of Modi. It is a honour signifying the American intent of embracing India as a partner.

Many observers are wondering, where America is rolling the red carpet for Modi, who was once denied a visit by the Chief Minister of Gujarat for his controversial role in the communal pogrom in 2002. During this visit US Congressmen and women from the Democratic Party have written to President Biden to raise the issues of human rights, shrinking democratic space, and insecurity of religious minorities etc. There were also protests by human rights activists. This is a landmark event. Why is America so warming up to Modi despite his bleak record on human rights? My answer was as follows:

America is not cuddling Modi as a person. They are warming up to the most populous country in the world and potentially the biggest market for American goods and services. India will have a working population of 1 billion which is more than the US and China combined. Americans have noticed how people in India's remote areas can access sophisticated healthcare with digital help. American economists have predicted that the steady growth of the Indian economy as that of China peaks whenever the Western countries decide to pull the plug under a fact. Second, inter-governmental transactions, the national interests, a capitalism for realpolitik, prompt the countries not necessarily human rights. Many developed democracies have expressed the difficulty of the governments in balancing human rights and trade.

Third, to be fair to both Biden and Modi, both societies, American and Indian face their respective challenges in upholding democracy and human rights etc. Biden has to deal with the post-Covid world which is a global village. India and the US on 22nd June, declared a number of agreements on defence cooperation, technology, health, environment, issuance of visas and so forth. The last one could pave the way for an unprecedented transfer of Indian technology to India. The General Electric and Hindustan Aero-Space Limited announced the signing of a MoU to jointly produce GE-414 jet engines in India for the Tejas Mk2 light combat aircraft. The Defence Ministers of the two countries also launched the inaugural session of an innovation platform 'INEX' in Washington DC on 21 June hosted by the US-India Business Council. This will foster defence industrial collaboration.

All these agreements were characterised by Biden as 'next generation partnership'. He added, 'The decisions we make today are going to determine our future for decades to come'. Some critics point out that Modi did not get much in return for his visit. In fact, this visit has taken the next big step in India-America relationship—INIA. Secretary General, Asian for Democracy (Society)

In fact, there has been greater reluctance on India's part and inconsistency shown by Americans as I have repeatedly said in this column. Both leaderships will do well to remember the axiomatic advice proffered by Cato, Elizabeth Mosley Braun, a former US Senator and diplomat. In politics, there are no permanent friends, just permanent enemies, just permanent interests. India will have to shed the sentiments about the history of relationship with USSR/Russia and America will have to stop its

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

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

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

"Make measurable progress in reasonable time."
—Jim Rohn

The Shillong Times

Vol No: 155 No. 311 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JUNE 26, 2023

Chaos in Russia

RUSSIA has exposed its underbelly yet again. The centrepiece of the Communist empire, which stood on its own after the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, is today a picture of absolute chaos. President Vladimir Putin narrowly averted a situation of capture of capital Moscow by his one-time protégé and chef-turned businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin. Prigozhin's private military labelled Wagner reached less than 200km close to Moscow when the president of Belarus republic — which was formerly a part of the USSR — intervened and persuaded him to abandon the march to the seats of power.

The exit of Prigozhin from Russia as per a temporary truce with President Putin is by no means an end to the chaos. Prigozhin was trying to exploit a situation of the people's growing anger against Putin, the dictator who started as a spy and then ruled Russia for about 25 years with brute force and absolute control. As a former Putin aide said, this could be as well be the "beginning of the end" for the President. Putin was all-powerful until 16 months ago. His infamous undoing being that he set his sights on Ukraine — a former USSR province, like Belarus — where his president Zelensky, with generous Western military aid, effectively countered Putin. Now, with the private military that Putin majorly used to wage the (losing) war in Ukraine having turned against the "corrupt" Russian military and against Putin himself, the Russian dictator is set to suffer more reverses on the Ukrainian warfront as also domestically. Prigozhin's main charges against the Russian military that its "wrong" policies, pushes and actions were making his private army sitting ducks on the Ukrainian war front. Large numbers of casualties were inflicted on the Wagner private army too by reckless bombings in Ukraine by Russian fighter jets. The private army is said to be more efficient in enemy combat compared to the Russian military's ground forces. It comprised hard-core criminals, militia, released from Russian jails, as also army deserters from nations like Syria.

The private military's brutality is more compared to the normal army that can do fighting only in forms approved under international laws of warfare. This gave Wagner, equipped with military weapons, the extra edge. While Wagner's chief has exited from Russia to Belarus, the fate of his private army of mercenaries is not clear yet. They can be trusted to add to the present chaos inside Russia. Putin himself is ailing, sometimes "not in his senses" and the military generals are said to be guiding him the wrong way. Prima facie, the conditions are tailor-made for further disaster for Russia.

Letters to the Editor

Stop beating the war drum against drug users

Editor,

I am providing excerpts from reports that are in the public domain. It is surprising to see that our state is still beating their chests about a WAR on DRUGS. In June 2011, the Global Commission on Drug Policy had declared the global war on drugs a failure.

On June 24, 2022 the UN human rights experts have called on the international community to bring an end to the so-called "war on drugs" and promote drug policies that are firmly anchored in human rights.

"Data and experience accumulated by UN experts have shown that the "war on drugs" undermines health and social wellbeing and wastes public resources while failing to eradicate the demand for illegal drugs and the illegal drug market. Worse, this "war" has engendered neo-economic at the local, national and regional levels in several instances to the detriment of national development. Such policies have far-reaching negative implications for the widest range of human rights, including the right to personal liberty, freedom from forced labour, and torture, fair trial rights, the right to health, including palliative treatment and care, right to adequate housing, freedom from discrimination, right to clean and healthy environment, right to culture

and freedoms of expression, religion, assembly and association and the right to equal treatment before the law."

"As the UN System Common Position on drug policy has emphasised, drug use and dependency should not be treated as a criminal matter, but rather as a health issue to be addressed through rights-based measures, including public health education, the provision of mental hygiene treatment, care and support, rehabilitation and transition/reintegration programmes.

The UN system, the international community and individual Member States have a historical responsibility to reverse the devastation brought about by decades of a global "war on drugs."

The HDAAFT 2023 theme is "People first: stop stigma and discrimination, strengthen prevention" — aims to raise awareness about the importance of treating people who use drugs with respect and empathy; providing evidence-based, voluntary services for all; offering alternatives to punishment; and leading with compassion. As someone who has been caring for dependent individuals for over 30 years I want to highlight the fact that these are people we are talking about — who could even be someone from your own family who has the disease of addiction. Let our state lead in understanding the theme for this year and living it — not beating the drum for a WAR.

Yours etc,
Dr Sandi Syiem,
Via email

Fresh New Look at Indigenous Food and Beverages

By H.H. Mohrmen

The Jadoh stall or the tea shops are popular eateries in the Khasi and Jaintia hills region, where one can find them everywhere. For any food aficionado who wants to try local food, the Jadoh stalls are the only places to visit. These shops have existed for ages and serve the sole purpose of providing food to travellers passing through the area.

These shops in the region serve local food and have attracted both local and non-local clients. However, what is lacking is ensuring that the food is nutritious and that the plating or presentation of the food is appealing.

Jadoh, with its yellowish color, is a must-have item at any feast in the Khasi and Jaintia region of the state. It is called Jadoh a combination of two words: 'ja' rice and 'doh' meat because rice is cooked in chicken or pork broth, and the yellowish color is due to the turmeric powder in the food. The food in these shops is served in an old and traditional manner, without any attempt to improve the appearance or serve the food in a way that is appealing to the clients' eyes.

Food must have a visually appealing look. Improving the appearance and working on the presentation of local indigenous food is now attracting many young chefs and tribal food aficionados. Tribal foods are no longer limited to items found only in neighbourhood Jadoh stalls; working on aesthetically plating local indigenous food is becoming popular even among young people. I heard the phrase "eat your rainbow" for the first time when I attended a dinner hosted by Bah Phrang Roy and his wife, Anita. Kong Anita reminded us that the colors of the dishes represent the diversity of food offered on the plate, which is also nutritious. The dinner made me realize that the more colorful the food is, the more nutritious it is. What is the lesson learned from this episode? The incident made me realize that what is lacking in our food is appearance.

There are now many cafes specializing in and running traditional eateries, and one such example is the "You and I Cafe", which is very popular. These cafes or restaurants cater to clientele interested in the indigenous food system only. There are also organizations like NESFAS, SSC, and SURE that have not only worked on

improving the presentation of indigenous foods in the state but, more importantly, have worked hard to ensure that the food is nutritious and healthy. The uniqueness of the intervention is that the food served should not only appeal to the eater's taste but it should also assure that the food is nutritious and healthy. The ten food groups' concept was introduced by a United Nations agency, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Foods are classified



into all starchy staple food in one group, beans and peas in another, nuts and seeds in one group, dairy products in another, and fresh fruits in another. Eggs are classified in one group, vitamin A-rich dark green leafy vegetables in another, and other vitamins A-rich vegetables and fruits in another. Other vegetables and fruits are kept under two separate groups. Of the ten food groups, for an optimum diet, a person must consume at least five food groups in a day. Foods in these categories ensure that the food served contains at least five food groups.

Recently, a local chef from Shillong was hired by NESFAS as part of a program to improve school meals in the region. The chef came up with a menu of creative dishes made from local food items available in the area. The dishes include rymbaija (soya bean) soup, a rice and bean Japanese-style sweet soup, bean stew with vegetables made of jhur phan and rymbaija, and krajangrup, a chutney made of millet and

fermented fish. There is an item made of shrewd bud umphing somlyngkon and kraji, which is an item made of yam with millet and chili oil, as well as pylling khich with jhur im, or egg salad with a variety of assorted herbs. The chef introduced another creative approach to cooking lentils with pumpkin. Additionally, there are fritters made from various herbs, or pakwari jhur im, and to top it all off, there is phan karo (sweet potato) halwa. The diversity of food items in the region serves from families, and the age of food items available in the area to create any kind

of food to cater to the eater's fancy. The point is that young people nowadays are not afraid of trying to improve local indigenous foods and drinks. Catching up with the popular cafe culture. The Melarow or Heirawm cafes are becoming popular now, and these food joints not only serve traditional and nutritious food but also take care of sourcing the food they serve. To ensure that the food is fresh and benefits the local people, care is taken to source all the food served from farmers, and local producers only. The cafes not only serve local food, but they also take care to serve food that is unique to the region. Popularizing unique local dishes ensures that only special dishes that are unique to that particular region are served. For instance, in the Bhoi area, "ja yndong," or rice cooked in a bamboo tube, is served, and in the War Jaintia area, fish curry and some fish, which are delicacies of the local people, are served. The cafes, while following the popular cafe

trend, also popularize wild edibles available in the area. Wine, but not local spirits. In an attempt to make the best use of the fruits grown in the state, which are both popular and exotic, the government has recently legalized winemaking using local fruits. With the state producing many kinds of fruits, the making of fruit wine is also becoming popular.

It was a pleasant surprise that during one's maiden visit to the CounYard hotel by Marrion, on the beverage menu of the hotel bar, there is an item named "kynraw u pa". I was unable to decipher the drink's name after just one reading. But it wasn't until I read the item on the menu for a second time that I realized it was a Pnar slang. "Kynraw" is the Pnar for local ale, and "kynraw u pa" meant "my father's drink." In the local Pnar parlance, the more polite and respectful name for the local ale or 'I klad' is 'I kynraw', which literally means a thing. I'm sure the local brew is used in the cocktail, which is being promoted by the curator, who is unquestionably a Pnar. Local Pnar drink is mostly beer and ka kiad, and sometimes millet. The only traditional process of alcohol-making among the Pnars is by fermenting 'ynden' and 'I saphar'. Rice beer, also called 'pyrah pyrah', is the most important drink. It is also an important item in performing different rites and rituals in traditional religious practices. There is a difference in the process of making rice beer and ka kiad. Ka kiad, or local alcohol, is made by distilling, while rice beer is made by fermenting rice or millet, but the case may be. In fermenting rice beer, a much more rudimentary product is called 'ynden', and a refined product is called 'sadhur'. In Pnar ka kiad is a typical alcohol and the tradition of making ka kiad is not native, but an influence from outside culture.

Local rice beer not receiving due recognition

Rice beer, which is a traditional drink of the Pnars since time immemorial, is now being locked down upon and neglected. The effort to promote fruit wine is praiseworthy, but local rice beer also needs to be promoted. Catching up with the trend that helps popularize indigenous foods, it is only fitting and correct that the government should promote local beverages, especially the popular rice beer.

I'm constrained to believe that the present Government of Meghalaya is considering bringing more public utility services under the Aadhaar parameters, but I may be a bit late to note that when Aadhaar was first implemented, it was declared that Meghalaya, Assam and the rest of the North-Eastern states were exempted, but our government seems to have kicked that notification under the carpet. Additionally, on March 27, 2023, the Apex court ordered that the central government cannot make Aadhaar card mandatory for any welfare schemes offered by it. Hence, in short, with this stringent measure promulgated by the MDA-02 government the axe will definitely fall on the gullible villagers and the less educated masses. Perhaps all this has come to passing over to the rock-bottom position occupied by Meghalaya amongst the states of India in terms of Aadhaar registration and for which the saffron government in Delhi must have taken to the 'Comed Sangma-led MDA 2.0 Government for its soft peddling on Aadhaar enrollment.

This lambasting recipe must have propelled Sangma to go on an overdrive in this context. I'm also bewildered that despite the presence of innumerable NGOs in the Khasi-Jaintia hill districts like KSU, IYIC, HHTO, FKJGP, they still have to date maintained a studied silence over this critical social issue. A notable point here is that Aadhaar inscription is fraught with the dangers of data breach pertaining to

Climate change and consumerism

By Barnes Mawrie

The former US President Barack Obama has rightly pointed out that "we are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it."

The impact of climate change is being felt worldwide. Erratic weather conditions are being witnessed from time to time. In India we are seeing the erratic behaviour of the monsoons. When we were children many years ago, we used to feel the arrival of the monsoons right from the beginning of June and they would last even till August or early September. They were of endless rain and cloudy weather. Today we are witnessing a drastic climatic change. The monsoons are short and unpredictable. Flash rains are becoming more frequent and the sudden heavy downpours cause a lot of havoc.

This summer in some parts of India like UP, Rajasthan etc., due to the delay of the monsoons people are experiencing an unbearable scorching heat which has claimed the

lives of many. Besides this, there is drought and shortage of water. In Maharashtra for example, the wells have run dry and the water supply has reached a critical stage. It is already season for the monsoons but it seems that the monsoons are playing hide and seek. Climatologists are predicting a wet scenario in the coming years. We are all aware that climate change is playing havoc on our planet and the process is irreversible.



imported which results in the increase of garbage which in turn pollutes the land, air and water.

It is evident therefore that consumerism is the primary culprit of the vicious cycle of climate change. Take for example, a few decades ago, there were very few automobiles in Shillong. First of all, there was lesser demand for such goods on account of their high prices and moreover there was also a limitation of choice. This people who owned cars in those days would run them for years, repairing them from time to time. There was no such "use and throw" culture but people would maximize the utility of goods. Those were the days when we could walk freely along the streets and breathe fresh air. There was neither traffic jam nor pollution nor garbage issue as well as we face them today. Today however, consumerism has caught up with the people of our state. There are many brands of vehicles at affordable prices, and so even a poor family owns at least a two-wheeler today. Rich people change their vehicles from time to time. The result is that pollution and traffic jams have increased in our cities. Other kinds of goods are being purchased, used and then disposed of. This is adding to the amount of garbage in every city. Thus the consumerist culture has caught up with every one and the poor victim is our Mother Earth who has to bear the brunt of our human greed and luxurious lifestyle.

It is evident that the problem of climate change can never be reversed until and unless humans begin to change their wasteful behaviour and lifestyle. Our generation is notably characterized by a "shopping culture," a "technology hungry culture" and a "use and throw culture." All these are the outcome of consumerism. Therefore, if we want to save our planet from the imminent disaster, we need to modify our behaviour and end to the present culture of consumerism and learn to live simpler lives. We have to follow the principle of "reducing needs, maximizing utility, saving energy, living economically and acting responsibly."

Consumerism is a per-

Where's our humanity?

Editor,

I read the report in a section of the media (Scroll.in) about refugees from Manipur in Shillong. I am startled away in many localities, I am pained to see what appears to be a reluctance to help. I hope my impression is wrong. Precautions are necessary. We need to ensure that the city is kept safe. However, a blanket ban on all refugees from Manipur is inhuman to say the least. These are people whose houses may have been burnt and several may have lost their loved ones to the violence. We could place ourselves in their shoes.

What has to be done is to keep good records of the tenants. Ask them to get a certificate from the respective organisation in Shillong that of community. Let an undertaking also be given that they have to abide by a set of rules, the wrong may be, with a penalty for infringement. The district administration may arrange for records to be sent to the respective police station for quick reference in case of any emergency and for unforeseen difficulties which may arise. Other requirements may be prescribed.

The requirements should be with the purpose to ensure security and not to make it too difficult for people who are in great need. May I request the Dohar Shingon to rethink their blanket ban on refugees?

"For I was hungry and you gave me no food. I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger and you did not welcome me. naked and you did not clothe me. sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Let these not be the words that Christ will confront us with some day.

Yours etc,
Barko, Warjap,
Via email

Dangers of Aadhaar!

Editor,

All of a sudden our State government has gone the whole hog to enforce the Aadhaar enrollment for all citizens who have not yet done so. Against such a sweeping imposition some discerning citizens have opined that there is something fishy in the process. It's widely known that Meghalaya fares abysmally low in Aadhaar registration vis-a-vis all the other states in India with around 40% of citizens still not registered under Aadhaar. In my mind-boggling that just a few months ago the state government has asked even students to register themselves under Aadhaar and also told the people included in MHHS health cards to mandatorily link with it with the Aadhaar number. Naturally most rural beneficiaries, poor as they are, are likely to suffer bitter deprivation since hospitals have flatly refused to accept the MHHS card linked to Aadhaar. Of late I have been given to understand that even for replacement of exhausted LPG cylinders the Aadhaar card has become compulsory without which the supplier will not deliver the filled cylinder.

It is embarrassing recipe must have propelled Sangma to go on an overdrive in this context. I'm also bewildered that despite the presence of innumerable NGOs in the Khasi-Jaintia hill districts like KSU, IYIC, HHTO, FKJGP, they still have to date maintained a studied silence over this critical social issue. A notable point here is that Aadhaar inscription is fraught with the dangers of data breach pertaining to

one's privacy - a fundamental right. A case in point is that on May 1st, 2017, the details of 130 million bank account holders were leaked from the government website. To put it all, on June 12, there was a massive data leak caused by the Co-win portal where personal data on Aadhaar were freely accessible to any inquisitive tech-savvy person. Leaked were also personal gender, passport numbers, date of birth, date of receiving first Covid vaccines, thereby offering a large playing field for the spongelike character as they are accessible on social media platforms!

Prominent personalities in the field of politics, bureaucracy etc., are inevitably under the scrutiny of the public. However, when the demand grows there has to be greater production which implies that more natural resources are required. This means more pressure on Mother Nature - more extensive mining of minerals, more deforestation, more factories built, more energy required, more pollution produced and so on. Demand on the other hand is the result of a consumerist society. Globalization has only augmented consumerism since there is availability of commodities of all brands from various countries of the world. Today when we go to a shopping mall, there is no longer the problem of scarcity of goods but only the problem of choice. Consumers are easily lured into purchasing more and more and the culture of consumerism gets more entrenched in our society.

Yours etc,
Jerome K. Diengdoh,
Shillong-2

"Thinking will not overcome fear but action will."

— W. Clement Stone

The Shillong Times

Vol No 134, No. 315 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JUNE 27, 2023

Need for institutional engagement
MANY questions have been raised as to what central institutions have done to add value to the state they are located in. Often the only limited ambition of any state or people where a central institution is created is 'employment' for the local people. But what normally happens is that the state where a central institution comes up does not have the academic expertise and experiential requirements that the institution demands at higher levels. The only jobs available are the clerical or fourth grade varieties. Hence the top paying jobs go to people who are brought in from outside the state. The reverse is also true. The best brains from the state are compelled to look for jobs and placements outside the state because it does not have the capacity to absorb those brilliant minds. Those who have found better paying jobs outside the state or the country would think twice before returning to their home state. A few do come back to add value to the home institution they join in because they bring their expertise and experience with them.

Meghalaya has a number of premier central institutions from the Institute for Hospitality Management (IHM), to the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIIFT), to the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) to the National Institute of Technology (NIT) among others. These Institutes have been functioning for over a decade and it is time to evaluate as to what value they have added to Meghalaya and their level of engagement with the local communities. What level of trust have these institutions been able to build in the societies surrounding them. Have they been able to help address some of the challenges faced by the local communities or have they remained ivory towers inside their gated institutions.

Trust is integral to the functioning of any society. Trust in public institutions are all essential ingredients for social and economic progress. The institutions that have come up, particularly the IIM and NIIFT have a major role to play in training local communities in short term management courses such as in tourism management, training of tour guides and operators and training in selling destinations and determining the costing of such destinations so that they become sustainable. IIM Shillong can train local traditional institutions on policy planning and execution and service delivery. Actually, the success in achieving each of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—from eliminating poverty (SDG1), to combatting climate change (SDG13), to building peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG16)—will depend on how much the citizens and businesses trust public institutions. Hence public institutions of national importance have a crucial role to play but the local communities too must find ways to engage with these institutions. In this endeavor perhaps the State Government has to play a bridge-building role.

Letters to the Editor

Where's the transparency in recruitment?

Editor,
I would like to refer to your paper's news item dated June 24, 2023 under the heading "Will act against non-tribal transcrans sans license," wherein it was reported that the brand new Chief Executive Member after speaking on his above topic also announced that the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council has decided to extend the upper age limit to various jobs in the Council by five years in line with the state government rules. This reminds us that the KHADC during the past 16 years or even more has never invited applications to fill up any vacancies through advertisements. It seems that no vacancies ever occur in this institution during this period which is not possible.

As per newspaper reports, there are about 800 odd employees serving under the KHADC. Even presuming that the KHADC has stopped creating any new posts due to financial constraints, surely there are employees who retire every year? How are vacancies due to this reason filled up? We the public are left in the dark on this. The same can be said about the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Secretariat. As far as I can remember, no job advertisement has ever come out of this office during the past decade or more but anyone who visits this office will see that there are a few hundred employees working under this Secretariat. What the concerned authorities explain?

In conclusion, I would like to say that these anomalies cannot escape scrutiny because the public focus has always been on recruitment at the state government and district administration levels. I hope the new incumbents holding posts in the Council Executive and the Legislative Assembly Speaker's posts will kindly look into this in the interest of the public.

Yours etc.,
Samuel Swett,
Shillong-2.

Challenges of Digital Economy in Meghalaya

By Dilip Singh

The digital revolution has proven to be a catalyst for improving human efficiency over the past two decades. With its ability to enhance livelihood opportunities and preserve cultural heritage, this technological advancement has become an invaluable asset. In the unique state of Meghalaya, renowned for its geographical and socio-cultural dimensions, digital connectivity offers a plethora of opportunities, particularly due to its official language being English, a key factor in harnessing the maximum benefit of this revolution.

Known as the "Abode of Clouds," Meghalaya boasts breathtaking landscapes and a rich cultural heritage. However, embracing the digital economy presents significant challenges for the state. These challenges can be grouped into two categories: readiness and operational challenges. Readiness challenges pertain to the preparedness of state agencies in facilitating the development of digital and telecom infrastructure, ensuring a speedy and timely rollout of digital connectivity throughout the state.

Meghalaya's undulating terrain poses a major obstacle to road, electricity, and telecom connectivity. Furthermore, the fear among the populace regarding mobile tower radiation and the potential destruction of social fabric in hill societies adds to the complexity. It is important to note that India has implemented stringent policies and regulations on mobile tower radiation, limiting it to one-tenth of the prescribed limit set by the World Health Organization (WHO). Any violation of these norms may result in action from the Indian government.

Contrary to fears of societal erosion, technology actually serves to preserve culture through digital archives for future generations. Additionally, the promotion of culture and heritage on social platforms provides wider access to these invaluable aspects of Meghalaya's identity. Digital connectivity transcends political and geographical boundaries, offering tremendous potential for growth and development.

The Indian telecom sector shines as a beacon of progress, having experienced exponential growth that has fueled the country's economy. Technology, as an enabler, has made the urban workforce more productive and is now poised to contribute to an inclusive economy, ensuring that all segments of society participate in the country's journey towards

economic prosperity.

While the government plays a vital role in this endeavor, ensuring every household is connected through the Department of Telecom's (DoT) Universal Service Obligation (USO) Fund, the responsibility does not solely lie on the shoulders of the DoT. The government of Meghalaya must facilitate timely right-of-way permissions to telecom service providers and digital connectivity providers. Additionally, the Skill Development Corporation must prioritize digital literacy initiatives, while Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) and License Service Areas (LSAs) play essential roles in building confidence in terms of privacy and safety.

The digital landscape in Meghalaya is witnessing significant progress as broadband coverage expands and digital transactions surge across the state. A recent State Level Banker's Committee report of Meghalaya reveals the status of digital transactions during the fiscal year 2022-23 (up to 31st March, 2023) while latest LSA report on the extent of broadband coverage in various districts is given below in the table:

Table presents key data

District	Population (2011)	Number of Broadband Connections (2023)
West Garo Hills	1,20,000	15,000
North Garo Hills	1,10,000	12,000
South Garo Hills	1,30,000	18,000
West Jaintia Hills	1,40,000	20,000
North Jaintia Hills	1,25,000	16,000
South Jaintia Hills	1,35,000	17,000
West Khasi Hills	1,50,000	22,000
North Khasi Hills	1,45,000	21,000
South Khasi Hills	1,55,000	23,000
West Jaintia Panchajanya	1,15,000	14,000
North Jaintia Panchajanya	1,20,000	15,000
South Jaintia Panchajanya	1,25,000	16,000

on broadband coverage, the number of Bham UPI accounts, and the amount of transactions in lakhs for each district. The data reveals that South West Garo Hills district boasts the highest broadband coverage at an impressive 95.19%, followed closely by West Garo Hills with 95.58%. These districts have significantly embraced digital connectivity, enabling seamless access to online services and transactions. East Khasi Hills, the most populous district in Meghalaya, ranks sixth in terms of broadband coverage at 82.23%. However, it outshines other districts in terms of the number of Bham UPI

accounts, boasting a staggering 8,213,099 accounts. The district also leads in the amount of transactions conducted, totaling a remarkable 282,021.73 lakhs.

The digital transactions in the last financial year 2022-23 (up to 31.03.2023) shows that on an average rupee 3360 per Bham UPI account transaction during the year. As on date, total 6459 census villages (Census-2011) in Meghalaya 772 villages have no mobile coverage that is 12% of total villages are uncovered which constitute 179228 population only, which is about 6.04% of the total population (Census-2011). Based on the above figures, it can be said that in today's digital age, mere connectivity is no longer sufficient; it is meaningful connectivity that holds the key to economic growth and prosperity. Universal and meaningful connectivity, defined as the ability for everyone to access a safe, satisfying, enriching, productive, and affordable on-line experience, has emerged as a critical imperative for the decade of Action spanning from 2020 to 2030. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has identified three key challenges that must be addressed:

Thus, it becomes a collective responsibility to work towards eliminating these divides and ensuring equal access and opportunities for all. Unlocking the transformative potential of the digital economy demands a concerted effort from various stakeholders, including the government, private sector, regulatory bodies, and law enforcement agencies. By investing in meaningful connectivity and bridging the gaps in infrastructure, devices, affordability, skills, and safety & security, the state can pave the way for inclusive and sustainable economic growth. It is through the power of connectivity that individuals and communities can access new markets, educational resources, employment opportunities, and vital services. As we strive to build a more prosperous future, let us embrace the collective responsibility of unleashing the full potential of the digital revolution and ensure that no one is left behind.

The author is an ITS officer working as Director (Rural) in NIELSA, DoT, Shillong. The view expressed here are personal and based on firsthand experience in the state.

The Epochal Manipur Mayhem

By Dr. Thangzakup Tombing

Manipur state witnessed one of the worst kinds of mayhem in independent India on the ensuing evening of May 3rd and 4th, 2023. One renowned scholar from Manipur working in JNU even caustically observed that the humanitarian crisis in Manipur is akin to the experience of partition of India and Pakistan. The scale of brutality, murder, burning of homes, churches, and the subsequent looting as reported from ground and in videos trending in social media and other platforms connotes and substantiate the gravity of the mayhem.

Witnesses accounts from both sides of the communities reflect the epochal loss of lives and properties. Survivors testimonies from the Meitei side reflect dismay, anger and mistrust towards the Kuki communities who they think should be blamed for the ltrking corruption, mismanagement and unrest in the State. The collective sentiments of the Meitei community feels that Kuki communities are contemptuous toward the dominant rights of the Meitei community.

On the other hand, the Kuki communities contest that the Meitei community always had deep-rooted age-old hatred and bias against their communities about their ancestral occupation of land, customs and traditions. According to the Kuki communities, the plain Meiteis have always treated them with disdain by calling them "hao" or "mitai" which loosely means "outcaste or impure slaves". The way the Kuki communities were targeted, their churches burnt, and their properties were burnt and they were brutally assaulted neck of nothing but an attempt to annihilate their religion, their properties, and their communities in collusion with state machination. According to the Kukis, the mayhem is the unleashing of all the pent-up frustration, anger and ill feelings the Meitei community has been helplessly harbouring against them for decades till the revival of their imagined past Kangleipak kingdom glory.

The claim of Kangleipak revival process, according to relevant references had been subtly debated and connote to idea of building "Meitei bhon". Among the Meitei scholars, intellectuals and elders of the society who are well versed with the history of kingdom of Kangleipak, the narrative of Meitei bhon needs to be advanced from perspective of access to land and ownership of land in the entire territory of Manipur. It is therefore, imperative that historical narrative of their exploration to the hills of Manipur must be established. But since there are social and political impediments due to the constitutional protection of the hill areas, it was steered towards being recognized as an ST first. The demand for recognition of Meitei as ST is being advocated by Meitei scholars on the basis of topographic arguments, British historical records and the other features of being a tribe. The High Court of Manipur creation to start the ST recognition by the State was thus treated as certification for course correction of what they always believed in recent past as their birth right.

Being more advance in education, culture and language than all the other tribes of the State of Manipur with the territory of Manipur, they believe that they have the right to admonish, educate and punish the hill tribes of Manipur in some kind of crime signaling. This attitude may have got reflected in the way the State government had enacted and imposed rules and regulations against the alleged degrading forests, wet lands and the mushrooming poppy cultivation in the hill tracts. The State had even threatened to bring war on the hill tracts to curtail the plantation and cultivation of poppy. Thus, in pursuit to those goals the Manipur state initiated arbitrary exercise of villagers and villages.

It is to be noted that the popularity of the 11on ble CM used to transcend beyond the valley Meitei community. He enjoyed the support of all the hill tribal communities including the tribal MLAs, community leaders, church leaders and civil society organizations. Tribal communities endorsed the state government's war on drugs 2.0, the State's drive against poppy plantation, the govt campaign regarding wetland, protected forest etc. But when the arbitrariness of the policy started to be manifest with demolition of churches in Imphal and the erosion of villages and villagers, the hill tribes felt the urgent need to express their dissent and wanted to resolve the matter by peaceful protest.

The mayhem unleashed by the Meiteis in the month of May by the Kuki communities living in the dominated valley area of Imphal, according to the Kuki scholars is akin to a deliberate attempt to annihilate the Kuki communities principally orchestrated by the resurgence of radicalized military wing akin to the age old Kangleipak military wing of the Arambai Tengol and Meitei Leupom who are subservient to a titular modern king. Therefore, the Kuki communities' narrative surmise that whenever voices of dissent were raised by them it was taken by the Meitei supremacists as a personal attack and provocation on the titular king and the very being of a glorious Meitei monarchy. They felt that the Meitei supremacists treat them as pathogen which needs to be weeded out by instigating the Meitei migrants, drug traffickers or poppy planters etc.

Though there has been reported cases of kindness from both sides but as per herring suggests that the politics in Manipur, both in valley and the southern hills, have been irrevocably damaged. The common man from both the sides feel that the fault lines chasm is too deep and wide to cross over. The ten tribal MLAs who represent the shattered aspirations of the Kukis still firmly stand by their demand for separate administration.

Though the peculiar demand of both sides has not been debated against by the Meitei, the Centre, anyway, will have to soon take a final call to ascertain the status and sufferings of the people of Manipur. The epochal mayhem in Manipur requires attention of the following:

(i) Establishment of hill district councils with direct supervision and funding from the Centre government, something akin to the existing Miramor District Council.

(ii) Establishment of Central University in the Southern Hill District of Manipur.

(iii) Immediate revamp of legal education and legal accountability in the hill areas of Manipur.

(iv) Establishment of Population and Statistics Analysis Institute in the southern hill state of Manipur.

(v) To initiate or overhaul the ethnic problems in the hill states of the North East from an inclusive and diverse discourse of race and language diversity, through initiate a process to replace affirmative action for tribes of North East from the perspective of indigenous race and language diversity.

Dr. Thangzakup Tombing is presently working as Assistant Professor of Law at National Law University and Judicial Academy, Assam. His core area of research is Legal Pluralism, Private International Law and Customary Laws and Institutions. His research particularly focuses on tribal customary laws and institutions, whereby he critically examines and compares the significance and relevance of customary laws and institutions from the narrative of contemporary legal studies.

Is Jio short - selling its customers?

Editor,
What if a bus conductor collects the fare up to Guwahati but drops off a passenger at Unising? That passenger will come down heavily on the conductor for cheating him. But why are we customers not shouting at the JIO mobile service provider that charges money for 1.5 GB per day through its plan of Rs 666 when it is unable to send a minuscule 20 kb of data to our cell-phones? The reason behind this is that the company has not been able to expand the necessary infrastructure for seamless data streaming, but keeps on "overburdening" itself with more and more new connections.

Yes, it should be borne in mind that earlier JIO had a special Rs 395 plan for phone calls that did not include data except for 6 GB spread over 84 days. Those

US has no right to preach human rights

Editor,
It is amusing that 75 US Congress men and women from the Democratic Party have written to President Joe Biden to raise the issue of human rights, shrinking democratic space and freedom of the press in India during Prime Minister Modi's State Visit to the US. In India, the religious rights of the minorities are well protected and this can be gauged from the fact that the majority Hindu community had never tried to impose their religion or ever tried to convert followers of any sect into their fold. Instead, preachers from the far west backed by colonial rulers easily converted many ethnic groups practicing traditional indigenous faith without any resistance or opposition from the majority community in the last two centuries and this practice is still continuing in many States especially in the North East and other tribal areas of India. Is conversion not a violation of the

US has no right to preach human rights

religious rights of the followers of any particular faith? Conversion pre-supposes inferiority of the religious tradition followed by any group. Does it not demean the followers of that faith who are being counselled to leave their traditional faith and embrace an alien faith? This basic question needs to be answered honestly before pointing any finger towards India.

The United States has no moral right to lecture on or judge the human rights conditions in other countries because they are the only country that has used nuclear weapon killing millions of unarmed civilians just 75 years back. Did those people have no human rights? Moreover, near extinction of original inhabitants of America is testimony to the fact that they had no human rights practiced by US people.

Yours etc.,
N.K. Kehar,
Shillong-3

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

"Hate is too great a burden to bear. It injures the hater more than it injures the hated." — Coretta Scott King

The Shillong Times

VOL. LXI No. 136 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 28, 2023

UCC — Biting the bullet

ELECTIONS are fought on two counts — namely the personalities involved and the issues at stake. Popular leaders win elections on the strength of their mass appeal. Elections can also be won by raising issues or holding out promises. India is set for Parliament polls in a matter of months. The political temperature is rising; the right time to set the tone for the high-stakes battle is now. Little wonder, then, that Prime Minister Modi has revived the push for the Uniform Civil Code. This could likely be the central issue on which the BJP faces the 2024 polls. Modi will bite the bullet.

The prime minister's question to a large gathering of BJP activists in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, was this: "Can a family or nation be run with different laws for different members? By definition, UCC involves a set of laws that are applicable to all in a uniform manner. It tends to replace personal laws of religions, including the rules of marriage, divorce, inheritance, adoption, wealth sharing and succession. However, Article 25 to 28 of the Indian Constitution guarantees religious freedom to its citizens and allows each such group to maintain its own distinct identity and affairs. Yet, Article 44 of the Constitution allows the state to apply a common law for all citizens. A constitutional change would likely mean uniform controls on several existing practices; a reason why the Muslim community is wary of UCC. As the Prime Minister noted, even staunch Muslim nations do not allow practices like Triple Talaq or instant divorce. It is logical to conclude that the religious practices that do not exist even in Pakistan, Bangladesh or Syria should be allowed to be practised here unhindered. The die is cast.

The BJP's calculations are simple. This could polarize the electorate at this precise moment. There is no BJP if there's no polarization. The Muslims and the Left would raise an outcry over UCC and the Congress too would. Those like Mamata Banerjee and Nitish Kumar too can be depended on to "fight" for the Muslims. The net result could be a polarization of the Hindu votes in BJP's favour mainly in the Hindi belt. The BJP could get what it wants — and on a platter. The South as also the Muslims, set mostly against the B.P, can keep cribbing. It was despite their spirited resistance that Modi won the past polls. The B.P knows full well that the way to win the next polls is to give both shock and awe — concentrate on its strong points and hit its rivals where it hurts most.

Letters to the Editor

What's with the Trade Licenses?

Editor, All that the KIAADC is engaged with is the issue of trade licenses on non-tribal business owners and also vis-a-vis labourers brought in from outside the state. Those of us who have applied for trade licenses know what it takes to get one. Even after all the conditions are fulfilled, one must keep doing the rounds of the KIAADC and some of us have had to wait for over three years. We are told that our applications are under consideration but how long does it take to deal with the application when there are several people at the clerical desk working in the Council. Those of us who are born and brought up here know that the District Councils are a law unto themselves. The sixth schedule is meant

to protect the customs and traditions of the tribes and also to empower the tribals to carry on businesses without unfair competition. The perception is that the non-tribal is more astute in running businesses while the tribal is more behind in terms of understanding the intricacies of doing business. In this day and age this is ridiculous. The tribals has the added advantage of not paying income tax and therefore saving on that while we non-tribals have to pay income tax for the quantum of trade we conduct.

But as non-tribals in a country that discriminates on sexual grounds we are ready to pay income tax and also the stated amount for the trade license. But why do we also have to bribe people in the KIAADC to speed up the process? Is it justified on the part of the KIAADC to make us wait for three or five years for a legitimate piece of paper which the law mandates. Is it to be given if

"Contradiction. Conflict of Interests, Hidden Agenda and Mercenary" would have been a lengthy but an appropriate title to this essay. Be that as it may let this be the gist, the description, the subject and nature of this piece.

On June 21, the 9th International Day of Yoga, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi led a "historic yoga session" at the United Nations in New York where world leaders and celebrities joined enthusiasts from more than 180 countries. While the Indian premier was the focus at the UN, the institution founded to maintain international peace, understanding and security, Manipur raged on with fire, guns and weapons. At the headquarters of the 193 Member States, Modi proudly proclaimed, "The power of yoga is not only to be healthy, happy but also to be kind to ourselves and to each other. Let us use the power of yoga to build bridges of friendship, a peaceful world..." but for two months he said nothing to bridge the gulf and ease the tension between two warring communities in a state in his own country.

Prior to the commencement of the much publicised event, the PM paid respects to Mahatma Gandhi in the North Law of the UN. The Father of the Nation's unique contribution to the world is non-violence, yet under the BJP regime hate and intolerance against minorities has been allowed to flourish. Hate speeches and vigilantism have resulted in violence, lynching and other forms of taking law into one's hand. The Manipur bloodshed is a consequence of a hateful narrative against the Kukis-Zomis tribes. Yet the PM has not taken Gandhian values to heart.

The UN itself has inherent contradictions. Established to maintain world peace after the failure of its predecessor, the League of Nations to prevent World War II, the UN's relevance came under question when Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Kuwait, etc were wrongly attacked. The dubious and strange use of power of the five permanent member states, namely China, France, Russia, England and the United States is responsible. Imagine even if all 192 members vote against bombing a country, any of the five members can defy by vetoing the vote casted on them by the UN itself. This self-contradiction has made the UN unsuccessful in upholding international peace.

The stoic silence of the PM and the central government's late and ineffective response to the crisis in Manipur is driven by a "hidden agenda" — Former state chief minister, O Ibobi Singh suspects so.

The North East Students' Organization (NESO) while informing their candlelight vigil plan in all state capitals of the region on June

Much more than Conflict of interests

By Albert Thyrning

28 for peace in the riot-hit state asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to break his silence if there is no hidden agenda. What is the hidden agenda? One suspicion is to "divide and rule". The state is already reeling under, among others, the de-clawed plants and the backward hills, the minority tribes, and majority non-tribes divide. It is suspected that the violence was permitted to be unleashed to create further divisions in the already volatile state. Secondly, it is not ruled out that the BJP objective is to consolidate their vote bank in the Manipur valley whose majority inhabitants happen to be mainly Hindu Meiteis who numbered 40 seats in the 60 member Assembly. Thirdly, the driving out of Kukis from Meitei dominated areas could be used as the pretext to grant BANT status to the Meites to 'safeguard their land and identity'. Lastly, violence could be an excuse to hit down Kuki "militants", "terrorists" and "foreigners". The government could come down hard on Kuki groups but might be soft against 'natives' like the Meitei Leupam Arambai Tengkol who arms away with a cache of weapons from

the Tiostarwell (Chyne administration) in the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHAADC) followed by the formation of new Executive Committee called the Meitei Leupam Arambai Tengkol (KHOED) in Council. The contradiction in state politics is mind-boggling. The Congress is the main opposition against the NPP led MDA-II government in the state while in KHAADC the grand old party is a partner of the NPP. The UDP is now in power in KHAADC against the NPP while in the state it is in alliance with the

The stoic silence of the PM and the central government's late and ineffective response to the crisis in Manipur is driven by a "hidden agenda". Former state chief minister, O Ibobi Singh suspects so. The North East Students' Organization (NESO) while informing their candlelight vigil plan in all state capitals of the region on June 28 for peace in the riot-hit state asked

Prime Minister Narendra Modi to break his silence if there is no hidden agenda. What is the hidden agenda? One suspicion is to "divide and rule."

police stations. Members of these radical outfits who enjoy political patronage were reportedly used by the state police to evict forest encroachers (Kukis) from reserves. To achieve this "hidden agenda" the state allegedly perpetrated the worst mayhem against minorities. The ruling BJP is squarely responsible for the escalating violence. For almost two months the "saffron party" seems unwilling to end the state of violence. President's Rule is the natural corollary when there is a complete breakdown in governance but the Centre won't do so because Manipur is a BJP ruled state.

With the 1-day visit of the Union Home Minister Amit Shah in the last week of May yielding no result, the all party meeting was called last Saturday. Shockingly, it is learned that the Meghalaya chief minister, Conrad

NPP Ronnie Lyngdoh is the Leader of Opposition in the Assembly but he, as MDC member, was not in the disposition in KHAADC. Charles Mangar is supposed to be a combative opposition MLA but was not in the disposition in KHAADC. When the new Assembly was constituted, though only five, the Congress legislators were expected to provide a robust opposition. Now the LO will only lamely oppose the state government. Much less will be anticipated from his other four colleagues!

The same applies to the UDP in KHAADC. The Chief Executive who is now LO and the rest of the UDP MDC's will not rattle the KHAADC with any intensity, else the Party will be kicked out of MDA-II. There is no point in blaming Prestone Tynsong. For self-respect the UDP should quit. But it will not because the ministers

have to keep their chairs. Paul Lyngdoh's favourable statements so far are to please the NPP bosses so that if one minister faces the axe he might not be the one. He is a leading minister in the state government. How will he please the NPP in KHAADC? So no stiff opposition from the UDP for sure.

There is clear conflict of interests both in the state and KHAADC. People are being fooled. We think that there is a government and an opposition, but not really. The NPP has secured the support of both the Congress and the UDP. The Congress is warming up to the NPP in hopes of the vote to join the government, who knows even with the BJP in! The UDP can't afford to annoy the NPP for obvious reasons. Should the publicly state the kind of pretence? Should we not speak up against such political nexus aimed at one objective only — to make money for the AIC elections in 2024?

The only solution to this theatre of the absurd is to make the Office of Profits rule apply to the AICs. Let the principle of one person one rule without exception. Not a person be an MLA and MDC simultaneously. MDC is certainly an Office of Profit. Members draw salaries and allowances from public money. The second is to bring in the anti-defection law to the AICs. In its absence MDC's act at their whims and fancies. In the beginning of the term Congress had 10 MDCs. Four just called it quits at their own pleasure. If the coup was not executed, probably the other non-MLA MDC's would have already donned the NPP uniform by now. Reform the AIC's otherwise they will never be credible and independent. They will remain puppets in hand of the state government.

A lot of puppets are seen inside the KHAADC on taking charge of the new CEM and deputy CEM. Unlike in the Assembly no prelate or pastor was invited. The members assumed the role capably. God was thanked after the act of 'betrayal'. God was praised for mercenary politics. God was credited for rendering the institution devoid of credibility. God was made to be involved in this conflict of interests. God was acknowledged for the contradictions in the state. This is taking the name of God in vain.

The turn of events in KHAADC was as set of demons. Don't invoke God for decisions like these. Surely Jesus was nowhere near the KHAADC premises. God was far away from the scene. Definitely, God distanced himself from the claims and counter claims in the House. He did not lend his ears to their gratitude and supplications. Certainly, God must have said, "I am not a party to your political plots."

One has to add at this stage that focus in this national debate on the UCC is on the personal laws of religion-based communities. These laws have been codified and promulgated by the Government of India. But in this debate are ignored the tribal customary laws that have not been codified and promulgated by the Government of India. But they have evolved over centuries as intrinsic to the cultural, livelihood, social and political systems and identity of each tribe. A UCC is a threat to all of them and is totally invisible in the demand for an RSS-backed organisation that tribal Christians be deleted from the schedule. That demand to deprive tribal Christians of their tribal status is only the first step in the effort to fracture their land from all protection under the law. Tribal Christians happen to be the majority in the Northeast where the Act East Policy needs plenty of land. Once they are deleted and their land is freed from legal protection the next step

Uniform Civil Code, Women, Class and the Tribes

By Walter Fernandes

In one of its 15 reports the 21st Law Commission had said in 2018 that a uniform civil code (UCC) is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage. Instead it suggested reforming the existing family laws from a gender justice perspective. It is a just solution because the personal laws, formulated in the feudal colonial age, are essentially patriarchal and ignore gender, class and caste. Reforming them is a step towards gender and class justice while respecting diversity which is basic to unity in the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious land that is India.

However, the 22nd Law Commission seems to think that unity should be based on uniformity. It has asked for responses within a month to its proposal on a draft of the proposed law, so the nature of UCC it suggests is unknown. At this stage the only proposal available is from the BJP-RSS committee which wants the Hindu Personal Law or one based on Manusmriti to be the UCC. This thinking forms part of its own nation, one culture, one language, one religion, one law Hindu nationalism. There is no talk in this suggestion, of gender and caste-class justice. In reality even the Hindu Personal Law is not gender or class just so that too has to be reformed. But the 22nd Law Commission seems to be tilting towards uniformity without spaking justice. That tendency goes totally against the justice based reforms suggested by the 21st Law Commission which to some extent reproduces the Supreme Court interpreta-

"A sign of class differentiation is land alienation which was, till a few decades ago, from tribal to non-tribal owners. That continues to some extent but studies as well as experience of people active in the tribal areas show that today, much of it is within the tribe."

One can give many more examples but let me stop at these few and add that the customary laws should be studied and reformed in favour of gender equality as well as class equality. Tribal societies have traditionally been egalitarian but individualism and class have entered their system during the last few decades. A sign of class differentiation is land alienation which was, till a few decades ago, from tribal to non-tribal owners. That continues to some extent but studies as well as experience of people active in the tribal areas show that today much of it is within the tribe. Rich tribal individuals take over land from their poorer brethren who need money for health emergencies, children's education and similar purposes. After buying that land not infrequently the rich buyers sell it to outsiders. For example, the Meitei tribal conflict in Manipur is centred on land. The tribes living in the hill areas want land to be owned by their communities. But there is much land alienation to non-tribal persons and businesses. For example, while travelling from Imphal to Moreh one can see acres and acres of tribal land alienated to outsiders on both sides of the road, much of it sold to outsiders by their poorer brethren.

A few other instances show that one has to go beyond opposing the UCC to look at the laws that govern us from a justice perspective. All the laws have to be reformed and re-interpreted from a gender and class justice perspective so they become tools of Article 21 on right to life that the Supreme Court has interpreted as every person's right to a life with dignity.

Dr. Walter Fernandes is Director, North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati (walter.fernandes@gmail.com)

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

Jio's false promises

Editor, I wish to thank Salil Grewal for drawing attention to a very serious issue with regards to the poor network of Reliance Jio at this point of time. At the time when it started the services were so good that many people

migrated to Jio. The business idea of Jio was to kill all competitors and when the other competitors are forced to shut shop then it will show its true colours. This is exactly what is happening now. Jio network connectivity is at its lowest. The moment there is a power shutdown, Jio too refuses to work. Hence many of us are relying on an alternative source for internet connectivity really have to suffer a lot especially if there is an online meeting or one is working online.

Yours etc., R. Sinha Via email

Editor, I wish to thank Salil Grewal for drawing attention to a very serious issue with regards to the poor network of Reliance Jio at this point of time. At the time when it started the services were so good that many people

"There are some ideas so wrong that only a very intelligent person could believe in them."

— George Orwell

The Shillong Times

Vol. 56, Iss. 56, 217 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JUNE 29, 2023

Getting away with skullduggery

THE Meghalaya High Court is presently the only institution providing light at the end of the dark tunnel that is the State of Meghalaya. The judicious and deft handling of the illegal coal mining and transportation saga that has been carrying on in the state for the last 9 years since the NGT ban on coal mining in April 2014 gives hope that those with a propensity to treat the law as dispensable rubbish will ultimately be hauled up and face the consequences of their actions. While police officials at the districts must be held accountable for closing their eyes to the daylight crime, this entire gamut of illegal mining, transportation and re-transportation in the form of coal brought from outside the state is a well-oiled machinery involving many other departments such as Mining and Geology, Transport, Police and the district administrations as well. The verbal orders for this coal business which funds the state elections in the same way that drug money funds elections in Manipur all come from the top rungs of the government. Hence if punishment for these gross illegalities is to be meted out then the lower rung officials alone cannot be held guilty. A police official in Ri Bhoi District who decided to carry out his duties and check the illegal transportation of coal paid with his life. The case is still hanging fire after several years. Justice takes so long to be served. Meanwhile, the other police officials reason that they don't want to put their lives on the line but rather earn from the transactions instead.

The wealth ranking and affluent lifestyles of some of the local police officers is indication enough that not all their acquisitions are from their salaries alone. This is almost taken as a fact of life and par for the course. Corruption runs deep in Meghalaya. It begins at the lowest rungs of the administration. There are allegations galore that officials in the Office of the Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills who man the land registration desk take their pick as to whose property they will immediately register and whose will be held up. This transactional malpractice is known to all but with so few whistleblowers, crime is normalised.

In Assam, the media regularly reports of officials taking bribes and being caught red handed and jailed - be they in the police or administration. Can this ever happen in Meghalaya when corruption begins at the very top? Besides, elections in India today are impossible without freebies and cash distribution. The Election Commission of India despite its best efforts is unable to check this. Hopefully this time around those guilty of the illegal coal business transactions will be hauled up. Justice must be served so that people don't lose faith in the judicial system.

Letters to the Editor

Police Tech Menace: Open letter

Editor, Does the Meghalaya Police's quest for crime solving infringe on the common man's civil liberties? That's the question I'm asking today as modern technology continues to make it easier for law enforcement agencies to illegally monitor us innocent citizens. In a recent incident, cyber sleuths from the SP's Office, Laitumkhrah PS and Nongthymmai Police Beat House were left red-faced and embarrassed after they were exposed by a hacker for stealing personal photos from the Twitter account of a man from Cambodia (possibly of Khmer descent) and using them to create fake Telegram accounts @cardpoly and @didi, applying on to track 'suspects' as part of their CCTNS program. Even though the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885 and the Information Technology Act, 2008 has under certain circumstances permitted the government to

conduct surveillance such as interception of calls and data, however, planting of bugs in innocent civilians' phones disguised as mobile applications and games like Dailyhunt, NewsPop, Snapchar and Solitaire to spy on their activities is highly unethical and a criminal act punishable by law. Has the Meghalaya Police forgotten that stealing personal photos of people without their consent is expressly prohibited under the IT Act? Have they forgotten that violating these rights laws could land them in jail? It is evident that technology has become part and parcel of our lives and the world has transformed into a global community where our lives have become more connected than ever before. And while many of us agree that modern age AI gadgets and software should definitely be used in fighting crime in the state, however, when concerns in the general public is the blatant use of modern technology to invade our privacy without a warrant, and it is also hard to ignore that the technology itself might have permitted and invasive side effects.

The Indubitable Social Backwardness of the Scheduled Tribes

By Kitor H. Blah

It would not be wrong to say that the subject of Reservation has been 'adequately represented' in the public discourse in the state in recent times. It is also true that this is not a new discourse. Thirty years ago even twenty years ago, this has been the subject of articles and public debates in the state. And perhaps, it would also not be untrue to say that the present participants are at the tail end of the discourse. I use the words tail end, because the Government has taken steps towards implementing the demand for reviewing the State Reservation Policy. Hence I congratulate the nascent political party that has made use of legitimate democratic means to put pressure on the Government to give the issue a serious look. I also congratulate the Government for respecting the will of the people and accepting the proposal put forth by that party. In anticipation of the recommendations of the yet to be formed Expert Committee, the present discourse is of utmost importance because the long pending demand is about to come to fruition, but the nature of that fruit is of critical importance. Will it reflect the long public discourse that has brought us here, or will it take on an unfamiliar form? The consistent demand from organisations has been to review the policy in order that the quantum of quota is determined according to the proportion of the population of the Scheduled Tribes in the State. Their demand is based on the principle that the existing quota has caused a dis-equity to the Khasis, in public recruitment and academic courses, owing to their larger population. This has been the historical demand and aspiration from many sections of the Khasi community, and the recent discourse has hinged on this aspect of proportional reservation with various case laws and judgments being brought to the fore. But at this present juncture, between the decades-long historical discourse and the anticipated Expert Committee, what is critical is the amplification of novel voices that would look to reshape the dialogue at this juncture and steer the discourse away from the historical demands that have actually brought us to this point. These novel voices can be grouped together as one, because they have the same underlying principle. This writer intends to show that their principle is wrong, and not according to the principle of the constitutional provision for Reservation, which is Article 16(4). This is necessary in order to empower the public to give a principled measure of the anticipated recommendations of the Expert Committee.

These novel voices have taken the form of new and unfamiliar demands that look to reshape the very principles of the demand to review the Reservation Policy and steer it away from the historical aspirations that have led us to this juncture. First, questions have emerged from some writers as to who deserves Reservation more. The point of their question is that if we measure the economic and educational status of the Khasis and the Gars, we would find that the Garo community is 'more backward' and hence, if the policy is to be reviewed at all, it must be to give more Reservation to the Gars. Second, since there are districts in Jaintia Hills that have lower literacy rate than some districts in Garo Hills, there is a demand to determine the Reservation quota according to the relative educational and economic status of districts. Third, there has arisen a demand from an organisation called Anti-Corruption League, to give 4% reservation to Muslims in the state. Fourth, there is a demand to exclude a section of the tribal communities in the state from Reservation, owing to their high economic status, by defining them as 'creamy layer'. Fifth, is the demand to give special Reservation to a section of the tribal communities in the state, owing to their low economic status, by defining them as 'economically weaker section'. Sixth, is the demand from some tribal communities in the state, namely, the Ijaling, Rabha, Koshi, Bodo, Kachari, Mni Tai, under the new organisation 'Meghalaya Indigenous Minority Tribes', to give 15% Reservation for these communities. All these novel voices are one voice, and all these unfamiliar demands have a core at the same underlying principle, and that is to question the 'backwardness' of that tribal community or those tribal districts that have a relatively higher economic and educational status, and to therefore question their privilege to enjoy equal Reservation.

This writer intends to establish the indubitable social backwardness of the Scheduled Tribes, and the indubitable constitutional privilege of every Scheduled Tribe to enjoy equal Reservation as other Scheduled Tribes, which of course can only be achieved by determining the Reservation quota in terms of their population, which is the basic principle of the State Reservation Policy. The Constitutional Provision for Reservation, Article 16(4) is met in social backwardness. The historical and social backwardness of castes in India that beckoned Reservation is due to the social stratification that is present in the Caste System, which has resulted in generational economic and educational backwardness. What the Scheduled Castes historically could not afford, due to the discriminatory Caste System, was social mobility. It is the opportunity to improve their social status. Thus, in the Indian context, and in the context of Reservation, economic and educational backwardness cannot be divorced from social backwardness. In the

case of the Scheduled Tribes, there are no criteria that define a Scheduled Tribe, and the Government has not laid down any such criteria when it listed the Scheduled Tribes. But there has historically been certain inherent features that characterised Scheduled Tribes, such as the hill areas and/or forests that they inhabited that was isolated from the mainland, the social life that they lived that was secluded from other communities, and the distinct customs that they practiced that made them peculiar and excluded from the main body of people. In other words, the social backwardness of the Scheduled Tribes was rooted in their geographical and social isolation. While these are not the criteria that define Scheduled Tribes, they are what has historically characterised them.

The history of the Scheduled Tribes in North East India is that the areas they inhabited were defined as 'backward areas' by the British in the Government of India Act, 1919. They were later redefined as 'excluded areas' and 'partially excluded areas' in the Government of India Act, 1935 for the purpose of administration. The history of the Scheduled Tribes in North East India is that the areas they inhabited were defined as 'backward areas' by the British in the Government of India Act, 1919. They were later redefined as 'excluded areas' and 'partially excluded areas' in the Government of India Act, 1935 for the purpose of administration. The history of the Scheduled Tribes in North East India is that the areas they inhabited were defined as 'backward areas' by the British in the Government of India Act, 1919. They were later redefined as 'excluded areas' and 'partially excluded areas' in the Government of India Act, 1935 for the purpose of administration. The history of the Scheduled Tribes in North East India is that the areas they inhabited were defined as 'backward areas' by the British in the Government of India Act, 1919. They were later redefined as 'excluded areas' and 'partially excluded areas' in the Government of India Act, 1935 for the purpose of administration.

Thus, in anticipation of the recommendations of the Expert Committee, the proposed reservation based on population, which is the principle of the State Reservation Policy in the Constitution, is wrong. Moreover, the reasons for the low educational and economic status in some districts is not due to social discrimination or exclusion. This also great social mobility. A mechanic's son can become a legislator, and a farmer's son can become a professor. Hence what these districts need is good governance and clean politics.

No education, no health and doomed to poverty

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The book 'Poor Economics' by Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo (winners of 2019 Nobel Prize in Economics) is extremely insightful and backed by extensive data on how to understand poverty and the possible ways to mitigate it. Its narration on poverty and poorness is primarily based on 18 developing countries, data set mainly from Africa and Asia with India included. The writings, analyses, findings and arguments of the book resonate closely with Meghalaya. This is because much of the narrations about schools, higher education, skills, being productive as a human, health impacts on account of poor nutrition, being stunted, diarrhoea, malaria, etc makes it easily relatable with the current scenario of Meghalaya. In the overall opinion of citizens, this writer, Poor Economics is best suited as a knowledge base for understanding Meghalaya's poorness and thereby may be a source of direction in its development policy and planning.

Education is a necessity to break the chains of poorness and move out of the poverty trap. It is observed globally that if one is poorly educated then the chance of declining into poverty is more. It is important to note the distinction between literacy and education as the latter's connotation implies the ability and capability to engage in gainful employment. For example, a literate person may not be able to land employment that an educated person on some train (say graphics, special effects, food production, catering, etc) will be able to sustain and come up in life. This exemplifies the value of education - it is not just a degree, rather, an enabler for livelihood. Meghalaya's education scenario needs to gradually shift focus towards making students capable of trying out new things. Simply making questions of a kilogram of potatoes cost Rs. 100 - has been the cost for 250 grams has less value. It has to shift towards what can be made from a kilogram of potatoes and when sold how much would be the revenue and if it be profitable? Poor education results in incapable citizens and this ultimately reflects on the status of Meghalaya in the national picture. The NEP, 2020 aims to address some of these nagging developmental bottlenecks but the policy is a non-starter. The state government has been showing inability to implement the policy. One of the reasons for this is the lack of a special fund specifically meant for the implementation of NEP. Time to act on it!

It is useless for a person to be educated but not be healthy and vice versa. This is because he/she will be less valuable to society. This is precisely the reason why human resource development focuses upon both education and health equally. Banerjee and Duflo make a case for poor health due to lack of food and the necessary calories per head to get the body going and be productive. Living below the poverty line directly implies that the people eat lesser and poorer quality food which in turn adversely impacts their health. This in turn makes one unable to be able to work and earn a living for self and the household. This makes the family incapable of moving out of poorness. This phenomenon is described as a food-poverty trap. Further, eating less would mean that the children and family would be more vulnerable to ailments, thereby making the whole situation get to a new cycle. The demands of education require for the body and mind to be adequately nourished and healthy. In the absence of health, a student is supposed to be capable and climb up the

ladder? For example, people living below the poverty line have the same aspirations for their children as any middle-income family would. When poor health weakens have on learning capability, all dreams are shattered and then comes the claim that the rural students cannot compete with the urbanites. In general, this is still true (even if the recent class X and XII results have shown some exceptions). The Meghalaya numbers on education and health leave a lot to be desired. According to CEIC data the gross enrolment ratio for tertiary education (higher education at colleges, universities, etc) in 2020 was 25.8% (a decline from 26% in 2019). The average from 2010 to 2020 stood at 20.4%. India's gross enrolment ratio for higher education in 2020 was already around 27%. These figures only show the lack of penetration of education in Meghalaya. There are many factors for this. At the forefront are poorness and the unfavourable impact of covid-19 pandemic. The figures also tell us that with a sizable chunk of the population outside the ambit of education, the future does not look good. It is also to be noted that the majority of these children from poor families. This means that they will continue to be victims of the vicious cycle of poorness and most likely even their children. Further, the 2021 National Health Systems Research Centre Report on Meghalaya shows that 45% of children below the age of 5 years suffer from anaemia. Around 36% of the children in the state are stunted and the figure is whopping 59% for the Khasi hills. The proportion of communicable and nutritional deficiencies contributes to 36% of total disease burden. Further, lower respiratory tract infection, malaria, diarrhoea, etc are the leading causes of deaths. These numbers are a blot on the prospect of human resource development in Meghalaya. The Meghalaya numbers are significant as Banerjee and Duflo make a compelling argument with regards to education and health. Their basic premise is that education is a must to break the chains of poorness and health is critical to grow into productive and resourceful adults. In the absence of schooling and skilling an entire future would be wasted and lost. If children are more prone to stay diarrhoea, malaria and anaemia when the reasons for this is psychological development is stunted. This is basically a simple presentation and understanding of development. If education and health are not addressed appropriately then such people will never be able to break the chains of poverty and would forever be doomed into poverty. More concerning is the established fact that the poorness would continue into generations. This can be summed up as a 'poorness of generations'. Today, Meghalaya is talking a lot in terms of collective development efforts at the rural levels, entrepreneurship and building of capacities. Although that is fine, the real problem lies in education and health of the children. Then only will the next generation be really productive and contribute towards a better Meghalaya.

In conclusion, to quote Banerjee and Duflo (page 65), 'the good news is that if something like this is what is going on (proper interventions in education and health), we may only need one push, one generation, and it gets to a new cycle. The demands of education require for the body and mind to be adequately nourished and healthy. In the absence of health, a student is supposed to be capable and climb up the

Yours etc, V K Lyngdoh, Via email

UCC a double-edged sword

Editor, The editorial 'UCC - Bringing the balance' (ST June 29, 2023) made interesting reading. The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India proposes to

replace the personal laws based on the scriptures and customs of each significant religious community in the country with a standard set governing every citizen. The demand for a uniform civil code was first raised by some women activists in the early twentieth century to empower women and bring gender equity and parity. The demand for Uniform Civil Code was also made by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India along with some women activists. Still, due to the opposition from the Muslim members, it was included in the Directive Principles of State Policy. Given India's diversity there might be practical hurdles in implementing the Uniform Civil Code. There is a larger perception that UCC is not a uniform code but a religious freedom. Religious communities will not easily accept changes in the way of their practices. Secondly, the imposition of UCC will also be seen as State's interference in the personal matters of its citizens who are already granted the right to religious freedom by the Constitution. As such, UCC is going to be a susceptible and tough task. There are many address and janglisms who have their own traditions and customs. Some of them have expressed concern that their pooja path (form of prayer) will be affected. Some of these communities also follow their own norms for marriage and divorce, which they feel will be subsumed in the larger law. Last week, the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council has passed a resolution to oppose the implementation of UCC in areas within its jurisdiction. A coalition of 10 tribal bodies in Jharkhand on Sunday threatened to protest against the proposed law. India is home to an amazing 700 languages with a population of 104 million as per Census 2011 and its tribal population is the largest in the world. Despite centuries of urbanisation, habitat loss and dwindling livelihoods, many tribal communities continue to practice their traditions and to conserve the ancient wisdom handed down by their ancestors. The BJP is aware of the potential implications and is seeking a share in tribal-dominated areas and is wooing tribal communities in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan and in the Northeast. States such as Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have set up committees to examine UCC. Knowing the sensitivity of the issue, the Singh Parivar has pushed for holding a narrative, encouraging debate and discussion and creating consensus rather than just bringing legislation. 'Constitutional moment' member's bill to implement UCC was introduced in the Rajya Sabha by a BJP lawmaker. Several states have been asked to or have proposed their draft bills and suggestions solicited from people shows that the government believes in taking an amicable route that will benefit all sections of society. However, the utterances of the Prime Minister in Bhupal area an indication of an election plank for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls that election will be fought on the basis of mandir and UCC. If UCC is implemented the concept of Hindu Undivided Family will have to be given a go-by. Will the Hindus accept it? Yours etc, V K Lyngdoh, Via email

"In order to carry a positive action we must develop here a positive vision"

- Dalai Lama

The Shillong Times

Vol No 47, No 318 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JUNE 30, 2023

Another reshuffle

IDEALLY and for the sake of continuity in terms of policies, programmes and their implementation, a council of ministers should remain unchanged for a full term of five years. This also presupposes that serious thought goes into the formation of a ministry. But the actual scenario is quite different. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is believed to be toying with the idea of a cabinet revamp and hints are that it could happen in the first week of July. As less than a year is left for Parliament polls, this is rather the time to start winding up the performance of the five-year term and completing implementation of major programmes. In a few months' time, the present dispensation will shift gear to a lame-duck mode. However, the Prime Minister may have his own reasons to effect a revamp. It is likely that this is done with an eye on the upcoming assembly polls in states like MP, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Mizoram and Telangana before the end of this year. Thereafter, in another four months, the general elections or parliament polls will take place. The PM's plan to club maximum assembly polls along with parliament polls was a welcome move but this has not materialised, just as several other reforms have been in the pipeline for long.

It must be admitted that the present cabinet has strong and experienced ministers manning key portfolios like home, defence, finance and external affairs. While Nirmala Sitharaman is not a seasoned politician, she too has acquitted herself well by not landing the national economy into a critical phase. Even as the common man is not benefited as such, India is today a steadily rising economic power, to which the man credit should go to its large army of power-packed young population. Mention must also be made of the roads and highways sector that is showing exemplary growth under the stewardship of Nitin Gadkari. This, rather, is the main credit for the "functional" Modi government in the public eye. The PM should best know who performs better and who doesn't. But, more than this, the yardstick for inclusion or exclusion from the cabinet or other considerations is political or driven by other considerations, like representations to states, communities etc. The last cabinet reshuffle was done in July 2021, when 12 ministers were removed and 17 new faces inducted. A change in the law ministry too took place later. A cabinet reshuffle midway through the five-year-term, as Modi did, might be required from the performance point of view. But, a reshuffle at this late hour might not serve much purpose in terms of service delivery.

Letters to the Editor

BJP's divisive politics

It's so wonderful to read the genuinely honest and lucid essay: Much more than Conflict of Interests, by Albert Thyming and he educated with clarity on the politics behind "The City of Jewels," an Abode of Clouds. (ST June 28, 2023). The phrase, "the theatre of the absurd," drew a pursed-lipped smile to my face. The Manipal 'inferno', (staying clear of words and phrases attached to the bloody mayhem though privately I believe otherwise), educates me on the deeper, sinister and obvious politics of the BJP. Modi's obsession with himself and his populist image and never mind the orchestrated political carnage, not just shocks, but disgusts me.

Anything is acceptable as long as BJP comes out winner. In my observations, the politics of BJP is playing out across the country, even where they are not in power. And Meghalaya is a classic example. Tearing the line of disruptive politics, divide politics and bloody mayhem politics is the order of the day! When will our state politicians and electorate wake up to the writings on the wall? Do articulate, not very far off, turbulence in the state given the flippancy attitudes of politicians, the cover-ups and the contradictions as highlighted. Upright and strong leaders must carry the public with them by putting an end to institutionalised corruption? Remember, we all need to make it right with ourselves first for good is not mocked!

Construction failures

Taking into account the construction failures in Meghalaya, from the Assembly dome crash, ISBT, bridges, football grounds, which have proven to be construction failures causing loss to the state economy and risk to human lives, the question arises as to why Government is giving projects to such contractors who do shoddy work? They don't seem to be professional but seem to have got the contracts more as a favour done to hand-picked contractors. Why is the Government not sincere about giving such work to the very best in the field of construction and stop doing favours? This is a complete misuse of public funds. Sully, it seems more such projects have been given to the same contractors. What if a building collapses in the future and leads to casualties? Then the explanation will be that there will be an inquiry as always which ultimately leads to nothing.

My repeated question is why is the work not given to genuine contractors of this country who are professional? Why are favours given to the same firm? Who benefits out of this public loss? As a taxpayer I demand cancellation of all projects to such dubious contractors, and also demand that the government not treat public money like

The Uniform Civil Code & ADCs

By Patricia Mukhim

Attempts by the BJP government at the Centre to impose a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) at this juncture can only be seen as a political ploy. Perhaps the BJP is testing the waters to check if Hindus who are largely its vote bank will take this bait. This presupposes that Muslims and other minority religious groups will oppose the UCC and that the electorate will be sharply polarised. It is easy to make people believe that certain sections of people in India claim special rights by virtue of being minorities either because they follow a particular religion or by virtue of their being tribal and backward because they were deprived of facilities that have been enjoyed by the majority community. Each time the UCC is raked up, the BJP is showing up its true colours. The UCC play out in direct contravention of the Directive Principles. No wonder that in Nagaland, a water ruled by a

"A nation is usually defined as a large body of people united by common descent, history, culture, language and inhabiting a particular country or territory. To the discerning eye India is several nations, races, cultures and languages. The link language across the nation is English. Hindi is spoken only in Northern and Western India."

government in alliance with the BJP, the end and other civil societies have already publicly declared that they will not accept the UCC. The BJP is whether the UCC will do away with the caste system and treat the Dalits as equals? Can that ever happen in a country marked by outrageous discrimination even now in the 21st century when India claims to be a world power and the Prime Minister travels to different countries of the world ostensibly as a peace emissary. In fact the question that should have been asked by the US media other than the cliched one about the diminishing tenets of democracy is why there still exists in this country a group of people who by virtue of their birth remain the outcasts of Hindu society? I might have asked the PM some time to answer that. But perhaps people in the rest of the world too

have internalised the fact that Dalits ought to be treated as lesser humans. So much for the UCC. Let me now come to the newly constituted Executive Council of the KHIADC which has defied all norms of political ethics and turned the council into a sort of stable where the name of the game is crass opportunism. Albert Thyming in his article in this paper has rightly pointed out the unprecedented conflict of interests where the Opposition in the State Assembly is a coalition partner of the Congress MDCs have not even a silver of love for their party. One wonders if the Congress Executive Council Pala has given itself the seal of authority to the Congress MDCs to join the NPP led Executive Council. If he has

then it's the beginning of the end for the Congress in Meghalaya. The ADCs have anyway been the playground of aspiring politicians who are merchants of thirst where water is equal to liquid gold. That the District Councils would even pretend to do anything for the people is absurd. We have seen so many BCs come and go. Has anyone of them done anything remarkable or memorable for the people? The ADCs are also not a coincidence that they were formed as a landmark other than of course stalling the mining of uranium. But that's because there is public opposition to the mining of uranium. The ADC would have conceded to UCIL if it dangled an attractive enough bait.

It is also not a coincidence that the first statement given by the new CEM, Pnintai Syiem is about being strict with the issuance of trading licenses to non-tribal business aspirants. Well, that's

The Contentious Uniform Civil Code

By B M Lanong

It was indeed a remarkable start for the new Executive Committee (EC) of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHIADC), headed by the first-time Chief Executive Member (CEM), Pnintai Syiem. MDC of the National Peoples' Party from Sohryghlam, who in the first formal Business Session on Saturday, June 24, came up with an official Resolution on the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), where the members of the House had an opportunity to deliberate on the said issue and unanimously, the House resolved to oppose the intention of the Government of India to introduce the Code within the jurisdiction of the Council. "In order to safeguard and protect our interests as provided under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India," quoting Verma, the reason for rejecting the code.

As a matter of fact, nobody got wind of any such move from the Centre to introduce the said law, however, the leaders of the National People's Party in the State, could perhaps intercept some signals from Delhi, obviously from regular contacts between the State and the Central officials and leaders on various subjects of administration. The House also took note of what a noted local English Daily reported in its recent issue, that Manipur violence seems 'pre-planned', quoting a source of a political party leader of Manipur, who made the allegations. The House expressed its solidarity with the victims who had to suffer a noted English Daily reported in its recent issue, that Manipur violence seems 'pre-planned', quoting a source of a political party leader of Manipur, who made the allegations. The House expressed its solidarity with the victims who had to suffer a noted English Daily reported in its recent issue, that Manipur violence seems 'pre-planned', quoting a source of a political party leader of Manipur, who made the allegations.

"Going by the nature of violations of ethics and legal precedents in Manipur, unlike what the Meghalaya High Court did recently, in refusing to take up the Roster issue in the Education Department. The Court left the area of conflict to the State government to decide on merit."

Whatever be the case, it is obvious for the new EC in the Khasi Hills to feel the pulse, going by what goes around in the north-east, the serious ethnic violence in Manipur, causing widespread tension and burden to other neighbouring States too, in general. Going by the nature of violations of ethics and legal precedents in Manipur, unlike what the Meghalaya High Court did recently, in refusing to take up the Roster issue in the Education Department. The Court left the area of conflict to the State government to decide on merit. In Vanapur, however, the State High Court conversely took up the matter outside its jurisdiction, in according recognition to the majority Meiteis as Scheduled Tribes, commanding about 53% population in the State, the controversial status they never deserved before.

Similarly, on the issue of according Uniform Civil Code in the country for the last seventy six years as of now, this issue which finds its place in paragraph 44 of the Constitution, no High Court either in the State, nor in the corridor of the Supreme Court, had ever passed any order in favour of the UCC. Any decision passed per incuriam, that is in total ignorance of the terms of relevant statute, such decision cannot stand in the eye of law. The Manipur High Court order above has no legs to stand, hence it is referred, whenever it is referred to the higher Court.

On the issue of Uniform Civil Code however, it may be a subject of public interest to know, that many individuals, preferred the course of Uniform Civil Code, more for their personal interest, like the case of many Hindu husbands, who got converted to Muslim faith to enable themselves to marry several wives, where no polygamy strictures apply. These common cases have been taken note of and remarked by many High Courts too in the country.

As indicated above, it will provide a clearer picture in the Maharaji Aswathi Srivastava of India (1994) 387 713, where the Supreme

Government intervention needed against hopeless JIO service

Editor, Apropos of the letter, "Is Jio short-staffed is customer-lets" by Sallit Gwalii highlighting the disappointing services of Reliance Jio, I am also compelled to share my own viewpoints. As a concerned parent, I have encountered numerous challenges when attempting to fulfill account-related work. The service has been so poor that even basic page downloads is not possible, with speeds lingering less than 1 kbps. This poses a tremendous hurdle when trying to assist our children with their school projects and other important work. I am confident that countless parents are facing the same frustrating situation that I have been experiencing. It is evident that Jio has amassed substantial revenue from its millions of subscribers while failing to deliver on its promised service levels. Sallit Gwalii has rightly questioned the discontinuation of the Rs 345 plan, leaving subscribers forced into recharging the Rs 666 plan—an act that cannot be described as blatant money-grabbing like thieves in the streets. Such actions amount to a grave offence, in my opinion. I sincerely hope that others will unite with Sallit Gwalii and Lary Kharkon to expose the deceitful tactics employed by this company, which has blatantly victimized its poor subscribers and stern action against this Company in the larger interests of the public.

Yours etc, Chandra P Swami, Shillong - 2

Lack of decorum

Editor, I wish to bring to the attention of the authorities the erratic habits of Shillong residents who recklessly stop buses or taxis so that they can embark for their next destination. I find it upsetting to have to see this practically daily as a commuter. I would like to know why people lack the civility to stop cabs and buses at a convenient location or at the very least at specified stopping zones without bothering other people and creating a traffic jam. However, it is also important to take note that unknown burglars are stealing even the steel and iron chairs that are placed in bus stops. Everything that should be available for public use in Shillong seems to be taken even before they are even used.

Yours etc, Gracefulness Rymmai, Via mail

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

formed by Meghalaya Government to review State Reservation Policy does not include a single non-tribal although there are one of the stakeholders on the issue. Government's Reservation with the non-tribals is restricted to all faith forums and not in any other domain of governance or issues. Despite having a decade long judgement of Hon'ble Supreme Court for conducting Municipal Election for electing Ward Commissioners no serious efforts have ever been taken by successive State Governments to hold the poll ostensibly due to opposition from local pressure groups who think that few non-tribal Ward Commissioners if elected, would be detrimental to tribal interests.

These kinds of issues in our state are not only anti-democratic but also unconstitutional. If one considers the plight of non-tribals here since the birth of Meghalaya, it will not be an exaggeration to say that the very presence of non-tribal appears to be a 'crime' in itself in our state. In Meghalaya the democratic and constitutional rights of minority non-tribals are constantly being trampled upon, whereas the tribal community is enjoying special privileges and protection guaranteed under the Constitution from a minority in India) but does not even allow basic democratic and constitutional rights to the minorities of the state. What an irony!

Yours etc, N.K. Kehar, Shillong-3

Non-tribals in continued distress

Editor, The issues highlighted by A R Sinha regarding the plight of non-tribal residents of Meghalaya (ST, letter to the Editor, 28th June, 2023) deserve special attention by the Government for mitigating their sufferings. Meghalaya is a state where the minority community is constantly being subjugated on various pretexts be it in the name of Trade License, Labour Licence, influx, appointment in Government jobs etc particularly by the so-called pressure groups with the tacit support of the Government and administration. The committee recently

the personal funds of some ministers, I hereby request all other political parties who are in the Opposition to kindly stop such practices of giving public contracts to personal favourites. Government should remember that public money that is being lavishly spent comes from the taxpayers of this country. I also request all pressure groups to show more interest on such matters of public interest and stop doing politics in the name of development. We don't see development happening in Meghalaya at the desired pace. The Government should follow the Assam model of development.

Yours etc, Rohit Shah, Shillong - 2