

*"You cannot protect yourself from sadness without protecting yourself from happiness."*

— Jonathan Safran Foer

## The Shillong Times

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### Ration for migrants

AS the Covid pandemic is not going away any time soon and a third wave is imminent, attention gets diverted to the migrant workers who form nearly a third of India's population. Their sweat and toil is what keeps the nation in form and yet they are an unrecognized lot. The Supreme Court has rightly come to their help by asking states and Union Territories to put in place a scheme to feed them via free rations till the pandemic situation eases. The apex court has asked governments to implement the 'one nation, one ration card' scheme before July end to help the migrants.

Migrants mostly form the labour force for both agriculture and industries as also for urban upkeep. The affluent parts of some western and northern states draw this workforce from other regions. Those from under-developed and majorly populated states like Bengal, Odisha, Assam, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh are drawn hugely to the affluent states where labour charges are high and work opportunities more. Based on the 2011 Census report, the migrant workforce constituted 50 crore people or more than 40 per cent of the population if the step-up in the last ten-years also is to be taken into account. Since they live in homes away from their native homes and hearths, they rarely get any government favour. They are simply left to the elements. They moved from area to area depending on work opportunities and mostly lived without the ration facility. The pandemic season from March last year hit this segment of the society hard as was well-documented from their plight to get back to their native places in the absence of work and wages due to the lockdowns.

A big question is, where was the need for a public interest litigation or Supreme Court intervention to address the basic requirements of the citizens, namely to have access to ration irrespective of where they lived and worked. Those running the central government were awakened to the sweep of this large segment of the population only when media highlighted their plight and foot-marches back to their native places; some even dying on the way. Yet, it failed to act in a decisive manner until the Congress caught on it with greater fervour with an eye on political gains. Half-hearted responses came from the central government while state governments couldn't care less. This is the state of India today. The political class and the bureaucracy live in glass houses and are not responsive to even grim situations of the ordinary masses. Political sermons from the pulpit are no longer helping. People need food to eat.

# We are how we teach!

By TFL Mawlong

We live in a culture that shuns critical thinking. This has always been the case, even within the four walls of our classrooms. Though no teacher denies this, students are becoming smarter. Ironically, every teacher consciously assumes it is the students' fault for the bad academic performance. And then, time passes. As the economy advances, priorities shift. Teachers unconsciously recognize that the teaching method that once seemed reasonable has become archaic. But the flawed method is too convenient to abandon.

Years ago, our teacher asked a friend of mine why he didn't write down notes while they were being dictated. "What is the point, sir?"

ASER, Oxfam, and NIRF) and of course the society's overall backwardness.

There are far too many bright and motivated students who are underserved. Too many students are having their confidence and creativity shattered by a poor educational experience; even many successful students admit to receiving high scores despite not learning much. Ours is a society that dashes the dreams of many talented students' and lavishly rewards rote-learners both during and after their studies. So, as a society, how do we accept the loss of talent being squandered?

ing truth and challenging lies, we teach "lying" and "downgrade integrity." We inflate internal marks to ensure a higher pass percentage, and we manipulate the institution's report to highlight our "on-paper-only" or "perfunctory" programmes. Do you think this is healthy?

What are the consequences of this "educational disorder"? Despite infrastructure improvements, the misalignment between what education is and what we deliver worsens. And it is this that actively sustains Meghalaya's "backwardness and poverty."

To address this tragedy, perhaps we can do some-

aggressive implementation of in-service capacity-building programs (such as the NISHTHA program) should be given more importance.

Third, we need to rethink how we teach in the classroom. In this age of information revolution, rote-learning is obsolete and critical thinking is no longer optional. We must educate all teachers and principals on the fact that simply depositing knowledge like money in the banking system is not how we nurture the mental abilities of students. The problem of poor educational experience will not arise if every teacher makes a genuine effort to help students gain an intuitive understanding. Every student, regardless of which school



Every equation, every line is exactly as it is in this book," my friend responded. Our teacher immediately escorted him out of the classroom. Then, two years ago, one brilliant student said to me, "Sir, we skip classes because he [teacher] only tells us fairy tales more than half the time." I later learned that, daily, this college teacher derives job satisfaction from boasting about his sons' and daughters' academic achievements. As for teaching, he would only superficially and bookishly discuss the lessons before handing out the Xeroxed notes. In a decade, nothing appears to have changed!

The change has been so insignificant, except, of course, in the infrastructure. Tuition fees as well have universally risen by over 500 percent on average in the last 20 years, despite inflation rising by only 267.23 percent. Is there a corresponding improvement in education? No! On the contrary, the quality of education has deteriorated! So, while education in mainstream India is constantly developing, looking at Meghalaya feels like entering a "Parallel Universe," where education is notoriously slow to progress and adapt, as evidenced by every report (PGI,

Perhaps we don't think it's important to be concerned about other people's abilities. But, comrade, each of us has a stake in our collective education. That has always been the case since prehistoric times. Who knows when or where brilliance will strike? There could be a young boy in your neighbourhood who has the potential to solve the Universe's mystery. Perhaps a cobbler's daughter in the outskirts of Shillong's might have the potential to discover a cancer cure. Perhaps there is a farmer's son in Smit Village who might have incredible insights into the farming technology. Unfortunately, as you may have noticed, by depriving them of opportunity, we squander their abilities before they even finish school. By "opportunity" here it doesn't just mean the chance to attend schools or colleges. It also means enjoying a good educational experience. As a society, how do we justify not offering those children a world-class education?

Worse, besides providing very little learning, we actively teach "passivity" and "discourage critical thinking" by having students simply sit while only the teachers speak. And, rather than valu-

thing. First and foremost, it is prudent to evaluate and re-evaluate ourselves regularly before national agencies evaluate us. There are some non-profit government-supported educational institutions that, despite the support they receive, are doing a great disservice to Meghalaya. There should be a policy to review the performance of deficit schools and colleges every 2 or 3 years. And to incentivize quality teaching, the policy should provide for the unequivocal withdrawal of financial support from the constantly underperforming deficit schools or colleges.

Second, we must do away with the policy of making B. Ed certificate a universal requirement for recruitment. I am not anti-B.Ed. However, because of this ill-conceived and politically motivated policy, we are losing world-class individuals who do not want to waste time and money on certificates but who could otherwise be world-class teachers. The requirement of a B.Ed certificate to apply for a teaching job accentuates the anxiety to get a certificate, and then a job. The certificate takes precedence over who you are, and your talent (or lack thereof) becomes irrelevant. That being said,

or college they attend, would have a fulfilling educational experience.

Fourth, Meghalaya should re-imagine the examination system. The flawed examination system is a silent factor that catalyzes the entire decrepit educational system. For example, during the pandemic, this rote-learning system rendered the NEHU's open-book-online exam pointless. Students consequently feel it is pointless to study. If it's a test of critical thinking, an open-book-online exam will suffice because students can't just copy answers from the book or notes - they'd need a certain level of understanding to write the answer. The best in the world always have an open-book section of their exam. A student can bring as many books as he wants to the exam hall, but the questions are analytical, application, or problem types, and the answers are not in textbooks.

To conclude, nothing significant can be accomplished in Meghalaya until we reconsider the flawed policies, re-imagine the examination system, and, most importantly, reform classroom teachings.

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The author's views are personal.

## New Hope in Assam-Meghalaya Boundary Dispute

By BM Lanong

Many have thought, some have tried and all have failed to solve the recklessly-protracted Assam-Meghalaya boundary issue, for the last 49 and a half years. Going by the toll of disasters since then and till now, only those who wear the worn-out shoes, know where and how they suffer the pinch.

In the year 2010, four Khasi males were shot down in cold blood by Assam police at Langpih, a hilly village in West Khasi Hills within the vicinity of Nongstoin, where there is no Assamese settlement anywhere in and around the area. But Assam, to grab the green hills it covets most, forcibly erected its police camp, brought and dumped stateless, people to make their permanent settlement, only to claim a

target for a permanent solution of all the pending boundary disputes as also desired by the Centre. This initiative on his part should be welcomed by all those who share the same mind and vision, keeping at least the issues of political differences aside.

Things will ease and progress better and faster, if such dialogues comprise common desideratas and conducive parameters right from the start, keeping also in mind the need to avoid the principles and factors of the by-gone dialogues which frustrated solution of the issue.

**Chandrachud Committee**  
During the Congress regime in 1985, both the Congress ruled States of Assam and Meghalaya, led by Chief



foreign land whose proper name they did not even know. They still call and spell it as 'Lampi-Sampi', a misnomer for Langpih.

The fresh incursions by Assam, using its big-brother attitude by using police forces everywhere in the northeast and with everybody, including Nagaland, Mizoram and others, is a matter of concern, especially since we all belong to the same country.

**Jaintia Hills Chapter**

During 1951 under undivided Assam, more than 350 villages under 15 Doloiship of Block I and II of Jaintia Hills, were tagged to Mikir and North Cachar Hills for administrative convenience and in course of time, the

Minister Hiteshwar Saikia and Capt. W.A. Sangma respectively and with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi then at the Centre, the official Boundary Committee to resolve the issue between the two States was constituted, under the former Chief Justice Y.V. Chandrachud of the Supreme Court, assisted by former Chief Justice V.S. Deshpande of Delhi High Court.

After two years of study, examination of documents and hearing of parties, the Committee submitted its report in 1987, that Meghalaya and Assam "...are unable to find a solution to their differences on a political plane. We do not blame the Khasis

**After the recent change of leadership in Assam and with the new dynamic Chief Minister, Mr. Himanta Biswa Sarma at the helm of affairs, some new tidings have also come about that Mr. Himanta intends to revive the dialogues afresh, with a target for a permanent solution of all the pending boundary disputes as also desired by the Centre.**

areas were conveniently and illegally claimed by Assam. In those areas, up until now the Khasi-Jaintia people live and cultivate, though to a great extent, large tracts of cultivable land have been forcibly encroached upon by people of Assam. Only recently there have been fresh spate of incursions by Assam in Khanduli, Sabah, Mukroh and other areas, with the intention of taking up health, education and other developmental projects. Such motivated agenda will aggravate the relationship.

**New CM-Fresh Incursions**  
After the recent change of leadership in Assam and with the new dynamic Chief Minister, Mr. Himanta Biswa Sarma at the helm of affairs, some new tidings have also come about that Mr. Himanta intends to revive the dialogues afresh, with

for the intensity of their sentiments. Their sentiments are sincere too. But nor, can we blame Assam, for they asked for what the Constitution has given them..." What can be inferred from the above is that, Meghalaya based its case on the original boundary of Khasi States and those within the Doloiship of the District Councils, whereas Assam stood on areas determined by the Constitution.

Thereafter, no serious follow up of the issue was resumed, resulting in what all can see and witness today, a remote solution.

Yet, there is no harm in pinning new hopes in the new Assam BJP dispensation. In the event of resumption of a dialogue on this long pending vexed issue, it is advisable to get the concerned Autonomous District Councils along, for logistics and any other cooperation.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Drone attack cause of concern

Editor,  
The drone strikes at the IAF base in Jammu and subsequent sightings of drones close to military stations has set alarm bells ringing. Several army stations in this area have been targeted by Pakistan-sponsored terror in the past. In each case evidence corroborated Pakistan's involvement in the terror. Drone strikes indicate that terrorists have changed their modus operandi and that advanced technology has been incorporated into their terror activities. By adopting drone assisted terror attacks terrorists have dispensed with suicide attacks. This advanced strategy empowers the terrorists to carry out repeated attacks. These attacks show that terrorists may exploit chinks in the armour to carry out attacks successfully. An advantage of drone attacks is that it enables Pakistan to deny its involvement as there is lack of concrete evidence.

Terrorist attacks show that it is very difficult to protect each and every asset and vital installation. On

the other hand, India cannot afford to come under sustained terror attacks. Instead of being defensive like in the past, India must be on the offensive and bring prompt retaliation to the attacks. Once the enemy is identified counter-attacks must be carried out. Billions of dollars are spent to buy protection. This has proved to be unnecessary. Instead, India must adopt retaliatory measures that will make the enemy remain under threat.

Carrying out of terror attacks using drones poses a new threat to India. Drones could be used not just to attack airbases and military stations but also carry out attacks on military convoys and public gatherings. Attacks of this kind have serious consequences. India must realize the seriousness of the situation and must be prepared for counter attacks. Drone attacks show a paradigm shift in terror attacks. To counter it, India must have the military resources like anti-drone systems. There must be facilities for detecting, tracking and destroying drones.

There have been a lot of developments in the region lately. As the US troops are leaving Afghanistan, the Taliban may take over that coun-

try. This will allow Pakistan to get India out of that country. As the region is overrun with radical extremists, Pakistan will instigate more terrorist activities against India as it will boost the morale of terrorists. Terrorism continues to be Pakistan's state policy. The attack in Jammu is only a beginning. In such a situation, establishing peace with Pakistan is impossible.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS  
Kollam

#### Population control

Editor  
Of late there is lot of discussion among the public, at the behest of politicians, regarding population control, and apparently directed at a particular minority community. This is quite amusing and interesting too. Studies and research have repeatedly shown that population growth is not influenced by religion (Iran or even Bangladesh are examples), or for that matter, large families are not confined to a few religious communities. Rather, growth in population is influenced by ignorance (or lack of education), economic and societal positions, specially of

women. It is well known that even today, an average family size in rural areas is larger than that of urban areas.

In fact, rate of decadal population growth in India, overall, is continuously showing a declining trend in recent decades.

The recent publication by the Lancet, the reputed peer reviewed medical journal, analyses that the population of India would decline to around 130 crores by the end of the century. In fact, the replacement rate of population would be lower than the mortality rate. Of course, the study reveals, the population of the country is likely to increase and peak to around 160 crores, in a couple of decades, from the current level of around 135 crores. This may have severe impact on the society, especially if old-aged population, by far, outnumber the young ones.

We would do well do also to note that China, the country having population larger than India, started allowing couples to have a third child from a stricter control, earlier.

The average age of Indians is getting older, with more people in the higher age groups. With better medical facilities, the longevity of

people would also increase. With more people in the higher age groups (with low or nil economic productivity or income), more people, with economic productivity would be required, additionally to support those who are aging.

In the days of modern science, when education and awareness holds the key to progress, the society must be alert so that it would not be doomed in future for its actions today, and fall prey to selfish themes aroused by politicians, of different hues.

Yours etc.,  
D Bhutia,  
Via email

#### Good gesture by SC

Editor,  
It is a good and highly appreciable gesture of the Supreme Court asking all state governments and Union Territories to implement by July 31 the 'One Nation, One Ration Card' scheme. According to a report, passing a slew of directions on June 29, 2021 to the Centre and States for the benefit of migrant workers, a bench of the Supreme Court also ordered the Centre to develop

a national portal by July 31 to register the unorganized and migrant workers. Going to details the SC also asked the state government to frame schemes for distribution of food grains to those not having ration cards.

The Centre is told to allocate food grains as per the demands of the state governments. This One Nation One Ration Card scheme is really the need of hour because with this scheme all the migrant workers and labour will be able to avail the ration benefits in any part of the country.

We know many workers and poor labourers migrate to other states to earn their keep. They are not able to utilize the benefits of the ration card just because they don't have the ration cards of the state where they work. I am certain that this scheme will work to the advantage of migrant workers and ease their burdens.

Yours etc.,  
Muaz Qasmi,  
Via email

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

"We draw our strength from the very despair in which we have been forced to live. We shall endure."

— Cesar Chavez

## The Shillong Times

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### China's growth mantra

CHINESE Communist Party and its government led by Xi Jinping are at the height of glory — and shame too — as the nation celebrated 100 years of existence and growth of the ruling party. Growth continues to be the 'mantra' for China as the red leadership is taking the nation forward in a highly organised manner. Its ill effects are also situations like the Covid-19 pandemic that devastated the world. Yet, at a time when Communists elsewhere and around the world are a laughing stock and seen as an anachronism, China scripts a different story. Through successive leaderships since the time of founder Mao Zedong, China has been reinventing itself and changing course even by making compromises with the ideology itself as in the adoption of a market economy as the main prop to economic growth. Elsewhere, dungeon heads who swore by ideology, failed to effect course corrections and ended up as failures. Even the erstwhile Soviet Union, to which Communists across the globe looked for inspiration, disintegrated like a pack of cards.

China emerged as the world's second most-powerful economic and military super power by wedding salient points of Capitalism to its Communist ethos since the late 1980s — a lesson that Socialist India learned from it a decade later in a small way through steps like economic liberalization. Since 2012, President Xi Jinping is powering the growth of China — and in questionable ways too as was the case with his predecessors. His assertiveness is reflected also in the way he got the party to do away with the two-term limit for president.

Marking the present occasion, Xi's address from the balcony of the Tiananmen Square was noted for its major affirmations — that China can no more be bullied by external forces; that it does not aim to do so to other nations in future too as part of a long-held state policy; and that it is "determined" to reunite breakaway Taiwan into its fold. Yet, in reality, China is bent on emerging as a hegemon as Xi's actions showed along the Line of Actual Control and also Doklam and in the South China Sea. It is targeting the main shipping route in the Indian Ocean as well for control. China is suppressing human rights in Hong Kong, from the time it regained control of the former British colony from the UK in 1997. China is also suppressing religious freedom. Its brutality was most evident in actions like the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. Yet, China holds its head high by virtue of its 'mantra' of growth.

# The pain of physical distancing

By Patricia Mukhim

Adults are forced to adapt to "social distancing" because there is no option. But these two words which entered our daily vocabulary in March 2020 by implication mean physically distancing ourselves from others. It is unnatural phenomenon brought about by the pandemic. Our worlds have turned upside down and one wonders how we are surviving this upside-down part of life. The impacts of physical distancing are manifold. We have discussed loss of jobs and closure of small businesses. Taxi drivers have been cooling their heels at home; those running small little shops have had to temporarily abandon their trade. Just when they were starting to believe that things are back to normal from December last year up until March this year, lo and behold here comes the second wave claiming many lives and affecting hundreds every day. Our hopes are sunk. Children are back to home schooling and that's the part that this article will discuss.

I was having a conversation with a friend the other day. She told me that her 13-year-old daughter suddenly started howling and crying at the dining table. She told her parents, "I want to go back to school. You people have no time to sit and talk to me. I miss my friends," and with that she started yelling out even louder. That adolescent was at least able to let out her frustrations on her parents both of who are working from home. The younger sister was aghast and looked at her elder sibling with consternation. That sort of breakdown was something she had never seen before. Her elder sister was a gregarious young lady who had a large circle of friends. And that's the ticking point.

Experts who have been studying child and adolescent behaviour during this pandemic says that social distancing may be particularly difficult for some children and teens. As parents we have seen how important teenage friendships are. As children get older and are more socially skilled their peer group become an important hub of their social development and sometimes even more important than their immediate family.

Experts maintain that while parents worry about

the impact of social isolation on their child's social development, they are more likely to bounce back quickly if isolation only lasts a few months. But we are already in the 15th month of lockdown and it looks like schools will not be able to reopen any time soon. For kids who love to be the centre of attention of their friends, this is a lonely period. In fact, kids really need additional attention and support from parents during this time but with both parents working or with one parent (generally the mother) not having the skill to engage her children in a conversation without talking down to them, this becomes a tough call.

In tribal societies, while we were growing up, we could never have a one-on-one conversation with parents. We could never confide our secrets to them. Those were for friends and deep friendships were struck during those crucial years. Hence adolescents need to touch base with their own circle of friends. It's like medicine for their souls. It's the adrenalin they need to energise their lives. But this whole virtual thing is smothering their souls. The inability to touch which is an important human need is what is causing all the heartburn. Not every parent, unfortunately understands this. Child psychology is a much-neglected topic in this country. And many of us had no parenting skills. We learnt as we went along. At that time there was no such thing as counselling for parents or children. Today, we are better placed and can get help from counselling psychologists if we choose to.

Developmental Psychologist, Amy Learmonth explains that in late childhood and adolescence, children start to strike out on their own. Friendships become more complex and more about shared interests. This is where children test out the things that will make their adult friendships work, or not. Among those relationship skills, Learmonth says kids in late childhood and adolescence are learning how to find and provide support to their friends and also developing the skills for building trust and dealing with betrayal. This is also the time when they're usu-

ally figuring out how to form friendships with deeper roots than just proximity and play. Learmonth says they are in the process of figuring out who they are and what they want from their friends. This is why those friendships in middle school particularly can be fragile and most kids experience some isolation and heartbreak. But while those years and friendships can often be hard to navigate, they're also crucial stepping stones to healthy adult relationships later in life. Learmonth says this type of friendship is not possible over the virtual world or by maintaining a distance of six feet or more.

While Learmonth and other development psychologists agree that a few months of lockdown will not cause any major disruptions or lasting impacts, although kids may sometimes feel lonely and need additional attention and support. But what if this social isolation stretches on for years? Experts across the board agree that a longer period of social distancing will begin to take a toll and that is when negative effects on social development would begin to develop.

Now more than ever we realise the wisdom of Aristotle, the Greek philosopher who said, "Man is by nature a social animal. Society is something that precedes the individual." Humans have a natural craving for personal interaction, touch, novelty, and excitement. Prolonged isolation wears us all down but that impact will be felt more substantially by teenagers.

Developmental psychologist and family coach Cameron Caswell says the reason for this increased negative impact comes down to brain development. She says our brains go through their two biggest growth spurts during infancy and adolescence. These are the two periods where our brains are the most malleable and primed for learning. Caswell adds that adolescence is one of the most formative life stages, explaining that the skills developed, the beliefs formed, and the ways we perceive ourselves and how we interact with the world during this stage play a major role in defining who we become as adults.

"If our teens' experiences are stunted during this time, if they're short-changed on opportunities to grow, learn, and develop, I believe the impact from prolonged isolation will be greater on them," she said. Caswell also strengthens our own understanding formed by observing our kids that while virtual interactions can be beneficial in the short term, they're not a satisfactory substitute for real-life interactions.

We don't need reiteration from psychologists to understand that the quality of connection and level of intimacy is not the same on the virtual world. That the energy of eye contact, of bodily gestures, the lift of an eyebrow, a half-smile, a quizzical look is all lost on the virtual screen. Half the time you can't even hear the other person speaking because of poor network and even zoom meetings can be taxing with the internet behaving like the evening tide. The joyous moments brought by subtle interactions and spontaneous responses are all lost on the screen world we live in today.

And in case we assume that teenage friendships are smooth sailing, they are not. In fact, they are as tumultuous as the raging hormones of that period. Teens have their moments of disputes and conflicts, yet they always manage to resolve them because of the intervention of other friends. While there are cases of some teens being selfish, by and large it is when they are with their peers that they learn to share, to take turns and even to resolve conflicts. Here too psychologists concur that much of a child's social development occurs outside their family and within friend groups. All this is impossible on screen.

Hence, we cannot even begin to comprehend the toll that social isolation is taking on our kids. They are deprived of opportunities for new experiences. The home begins to feel like a prison and their scope for self-discovery is drastically reduced.

Let's also admit that we live in a state where very little attention is paid to children and teenagers and their special needs especially during these trying times. Some schools are trying to address these issues which go beyond the educational curriculum. But such schools are too few and far between. A sad plight indeed!

## SC makes another decisive intervention

By K Raveendran

The Supreme Court has once again taken a proactive step to bring succour to the disadvantaged people by declaring that the dependents of those who lost their lives due to Covid pandemic are entitled to receive compensation from the government just like victims of other natural calamities.

The court has directed the National Disaster Management Authority to work out guidelines within the next six weeks for payment of

'shall' in the section 12 of the Disaster Management Act to escape from the mandatory nature of the provision. But the court stood its ground and rejected the government's contentions.

We have seen how the Supreme Court in recent times has brought in a paradigm shift in its approach towards larger issues facing people, especially when the government responsible for ameliorating those conditions was running away from

*We have seen how the Supreme Court in recent times has brought in a paradigm shift in its approach towards larger issues facing people, especially when the government responsible for ameliorating those conditions was running away from its responsibilities.*

ex-gratia relief to the victim families.

In passing a landmark verdict, the Supreme Court bench, constituted by Justices Ashok Bhushan and M R Shah, rejected the Union government's contention that Covid was not a natural disaster of the type of one-time

its responsibilities. There have been landmark rulings to bring relief to migrant workers, who received a raw deal at the hands of an insensitive government, which even refused to accept the existence of such a massive problem. It was only due to the intervention of the Su-



events such as earthquakes or floods and, therefore, the provisions of the Disaster Management Act. The court also refused to accept the government argument that the financial burden of such relief would be beyond the capacity of the government to bear, but stopped short of recommending any specific figure.

The latest judgment comes after a series of decisive interventions by the apex court to bring an insensitive administration to line and address the serious issues of Covid

preme Court that the central and state governments were forced to provide relief to the suffering 'reverse' migrants, thousands of whom perished while undertaking the long march towards an uncertain and insecure future.

The court's bold moves came even at the risk of being criticised for over-reach, inviting the wrath of the so-called constitutional puritans, who could not reconcile to the idea of the court crossing the contours of legislative and executive powers. But the court

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management, particularly, the right of all people to get vaccinated against the dreaded pandemic, the supply of oxygen and medical equipment etc., when the Modi government preferred to look the other way, although Covid patients were dropping dead on the middle of the road as they struggled to breathe.

The government argued that there is no precedent of giving ex-gratia for an ongoing disease or for any disaster event of long duration, extending for several months or years, and granting ex-gratia for one disease, while denying the same for those accounting for larger share of mortality, would not be fair and would create unfairness and invidious discrimination.

But there was clear dichotomy in the government stand. The government was seeking selective application of the Disaster Management Act in using the law to impose restrictions in movement and other curbs on the people, but refusing to honour the provisions of the same law when it came to providing relief to the affected families. In fact, there have been hair-splitting arguments about the use of

took up the challenge and came out with flying colours, intervening effectively when without such intervention there would be no delivery of justice and fairness.

The change of approach was all the more remarkable, as this was followed by a phase during which the highest court of the land was criticised by conscientious people, including retired judges and legal luminaries, for maintaining studied silence and indifference to pressing problems faced by the people, particularly in the wake of the national lockdown to deal with the outbreak of Covid pandemic. But then on, the court took the form of a new avatar that sympathised with the subjects rather than the rulers.

The court also took to the suo moto route to take up many of these causes, leading to the pronouncement of landmark decisions. Even as this raised eyebrows in terms of procedural implications, it has strengthened people's faith and confidence in the judiciary as the dispenser of justice and fairness against all odds. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Time to evaluate teachers

Editor,  
I draw your kind attention to the letter to the editor by one Roben Chyrmang captioned "Students & parents under stress" (ST June 31, 2021) The letter is full of erroneous statements, misleading the public and aimed at tarnishing the best online initiative seen in the entire North East, if not the whole country. And this online initiative acronym'd HIKAI is being provided absolutely free of cost to any student under the MBOSE. Please note that <https://rkmbhikai.com> online is being used by 8,892 students belonging to more than 128 schools who have used 5.25 lakhs of learning hours and wherein 2.2 lakh assignments have been uploaded, goes to show the success of the online portal. And all this is provided totally free of charges even to students not studying in the Ramakrishna Mission Schools. Show me one such program with its range and flexibility in the entire country whether under the government or private sector before passing judgment on such a noble initiative.

Neither I or the management ever promised free "electronic tablet to each student" as claimed by Mr Roben. When the portal was launched, the Mission also appealed to its well-wishers to contribute so that they can provide at least one poor student a free tablet. But you are well aware how people like Mr Roben will

never contribute a penny for helping poor students but demand that apart from providing free online portal, the Mission should also provide free electronic tablet! But Mr Roben should also know that there are other kindred souls who did contribute and Mission provided 360 poor students free tablets. These students belong to 36 different schools mainly located in interior parts of Meghalaya and are really poor and deserving students.

Moreover, Mr Roben makes his real intention clear only in the last paragraph wherein he questions my appointment as the Head Teacher (i/c). So he is a sort of a front to uphold the cause of our ex-head teacher (i/c) who lost his post because of his inability to implement the free HIKAI online initiative. And now that the teacher's performance is being linked to the success of the HIKAI initiative not many are able to digest the fact. Many inefficient teachers draw their salaries but do not work for betterment of students. For example, a cursory glance at the HIKAI statistics will show that this ex-HT (i/c) was handling Social Studies (SS) for class VII. But he never worked hard to motivate his students and only 14.58 % of students in his subject uploaded the assignments. Now Mr Roben has made this to appear as if parents and students have been put under stress as they do not have mobile phones, etc. and hence the performance of these insincere teachers can be justified. It would be better to compare the performance of different

teachers in the same class handling different subjects to make impartial statements. Now the above performance of our ex-HT (i/c) should be seen against the performance of the same class in the Science subject wherein 95% of the students have been able to upload their assignments in Science subject. Then how come it is 14.58% in SS subject?

Hence if students are suffering, it is because of the insincerity and lack of commitment of such teachers. In fact, the government should look into the performance of such teachers and withhold their salaries because they not only spoil the future of our students but hide this fact by presenting a distorted picture through Mr Roben and company and in the process do not hesitate to tarnish the best free online system that we should have been proud of, a bad name.

Yours etc.,  
Amaresh Chakraborty  
Head Teacher (i/c)  
RKM LP/UP School,  
Umsohsun  
Via email

#### Gender inequality in vaccination too

Editor,  
Gender inequality shows up everywhere. As of June 29, 2021, 54% of persons vaccinated in India were men. In Meghalaya men account for 53% of those vaccinated. Actually it is worse in our state because the female:male ratio is 986:1000 in Meghalaya compared to 943 for all India, with more women in our

state in proportion to men. Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal and Chhattisgarh are the only states in which more women have been vaccinated. In the USA, 58% of vaccinees are women. An article in India Today dated June 17, 2021, had a telling headline, "Indian men grab lion's share of Covid-19 jabs".

There may be some hesitancy among women because of fear about vaccine effects on fertility and menstruation, and pregnant women were not given the vaccine till recently. But such hesitancy is very low. A study in 19 high-COVID-19 burden countries published in the Journal of Health Communication in March 2021, showed hesitancy in India to be almost the same between men and women.

Like in many other social indices, the lower vaccination of women is due to deprivation, caused by entrenched gender bias, patriarchy and marginalization of women in India and Meghalaya. Women have less access to information, income, transportation and the internet, and find it difficult to leave home because of domestic responsibilities.

Julie Thekkudan, a gender specialist with Oxfam says, "Most men do not consider it important to register their wives on the CoWin app. Their health is not considered a priority and if they do not work outside the home, then they are not considered at risk." A housewife in Rajasthan has been quoted as saying, "My husband thought that it was right for him to get vaccinated first.

Due to the possible side-effects of Covishield, he needed me to take care of him while he was sick. And if I got ill along with him, who will cook and look after the house and our son?"

Women make up 80% of school teachers in India and 70% of the health workforce. They predominate in the informal work sector. At home they are the main caretakers for children and the elderly. Even those who remain largely at home are at risk from family members who go in and out, given that new variants of the virus are highly contagious. Perhaps all women should be declared as frontline workers by the government and given priority for Covid vaccination.

Yours etc.,  
Glenn C. Kharkongor,  
Via email  
**Shillong-Dawki Highway**

Editor,  
As an avid reader of The Shillong Times I wish to assert that the importance of the Shillong-Dawki-Tamabil National Highway cannot be over-emphasized. The few trees that were cut to make way for the JICA funded NH Road Project are inconsequential when compared to the importance of the road connectivity when completed. Even the British saw the importance of this communication, hence this road was first constructed by them through this strategic route. It was very important then and more important today and in the future. Meghalaya's future lies in opening

up more strategic road-links with neighbouring countries to operationalize the Act East policy. Expansion of road network is beneficial in many ways. The unfortunate part is that there is not enough land and resources to construct the required road networks. In countries where there are excellent roads and road transport networks there is also faster development.

It is therefore not in public interest to put obstacles in the development of areas beyond Shillong. In this case to compensate for the loss of few Cryptomeria trees planting more species of a similar kind elsewhere or in plots in the neighbourhood will restore the environmental loss in double or triple measure.

I agree with those who have expressed support for the 72 odd km JICA funded road project. This entire stretch is not a four-lane highway as mentioned by someone. The four-laning is only for the stretch between Umsyryy Bridge to 7th mile Upper Shillong. The rest of the distance is a two-laned highway. Many from the Government and even ordinary citizens have supported the road project; only a few individuals are against it for trifling reasons that are unconvincing.

Yours etc...  
Philip Marwein,  
Editor, Youth Today,  
Shillong

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"Most doctors are prisoners of their education and shackled by their profession."

— Richard Diaz

The Shillong Times

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Of patient-doctor relationship

THE nation has just observed Doctors' Day on July 1. Perhaps many are not aware that this day commemorates a great physician and institution builder, Dr BC Roy whose birth and death occurred on the same date 80 years apart. Dr BC Roy was Chief Minister of West Bengal between 1948 to 1962. He played a stellar role in establishing medical institutions like Jadavpur TB Hospital, Victoria Institution (college), Chittaranjan Cancer Hospital and the Chittaranjan Seva Sadan for women and children. He was referred to as the first medical consultant in the Indian sub-continent. The British Medical Journal credits Dr Roy of being more successful and dedicated than his contemporaries in several fields. He was awarded the Bharat Ratna, on February 4, 1961.

The placing of the words patient-doctor and not doctor-patient in this editorial is calculated. For a doctor, the patient is the most important person, just as for the teacher, the student is more important than the subject. Patients visit a doctor with the hope of being healed. The least they ask is to be treated with respect and dignity, irrespective of their economic status. A patient desires that the doctor listen with patience before writing a prescription. After all, about 90% of a patient's complaints are psychosomatic, meaning it's more psychological than physical, hence the need to use Behavioral Science as a starting point to understand why a patient behaves a certain way and to then understand what the underlying causes of the patient's ailments are.

Behavioural Science is related to human behaviour. In the past 70 years, scientists have developed and reframed a number of theories to explain the diverse patterns of human behavior, in different contexts and scenarios. Some of these theories can be combined and applied to daily clinical practice. Many a patient has walked out of the doctor's clinic with a smile and feel they have experienced a healing touch. Others are not so fortunate. They encounter doctor behaviour that is downright rude or lacking empathy. Such patients leave the hospital/clinic with low self esteem and would not wish to return to the same doctor. At the root of this misunderstanding is the doctor's inability to communicate in lay person's language and of the patient to explain herself/himself clearly. It is possible that a doctor's behaviour is affected because of family or professional problems. After all, they too are humans. And lest we forget they might be under stress and need counseling and a listening ear. Since March 2020, doctors have been on a 24x7 treadmill and overly burdened by the pandemic. They deserve public applause and gratitude.

Letters to the Editor

Creation of districts a populist move

Editor, The Shillong Times June 29, 2021 headline 'Govt. announces Mairang as new district' reminds me of a chance encounter with late Mr L.G.Shullai sometime in 1992 when on my way to Polo Ground to witness a football match. He had just come out from the residence of Mr DD Lapang who was then the Chief Minister. He told me he went specially to request Mr Lapang not to name the new district as Ri Bhoi District but as Nongpoh District. He confessed that he was concerned about the air of division hovering among the Khasi-Jaintia people at that point of time which could percolate down to the church, the united KJP Synod then. He argued that the British used to name the district with the name

of the district headquarter like Nowgong, Dibrugarh, Tezpur etc. Fortunately or unfortunately the name Ri Bhoi was chosen and history confirmed what Mr Shullai foresaw. The Ri Bhoi Synod was sown into existence much to the discomfort and reluctance of the parent KJP Synod which we reap till this day the overlapping of areas of jurisdiction.

On the naming of districts one is confused with the present naming based on the 8 compass cardinal points of North, South, East, West, NE, SE, SW, NW etc. One may wonder what name Mairang district will be given considering it is in West Khasi Hills. Next will be Sohra (SEKH?). The original naming of districts by the white rulers seems more practical. The trend to create more districts seems to be more ornamental than pragmatic. Considering our limited resources we wish our legislators would debate on the efficacy of creating new districts and of building

up community assets like roads, hospitals, technical schools etc. which will benefit more people.

Yours etc  
Torist Mark,  
Via email

Pragmatic solutions for educational outcomes

Editor, The personal views and suggestions given by Mr TFL Mawlong (ST July 1, 2021) are highly thought provoking. The policy makers and process designers will do a great favour to the State of Meghalaya and for that matter, all the present day institutions imparting education and knowledge to the learners, if they are sincerely be guided by these views and suggestions. The service providers that are the products of rote learn-

ing mostly go for stereotype solutions; they do not go out of the way to look for better solutions. Of course, they are hardly encouraged to think differently. It is high time to reform the system of education so as to have more sensitive and efficient administrators and workers.

Yours etc.,  
B C Biswas,  
Via email

Ignoble behaviour of Dean

Editor, On June 25, last an FIR was filed in the Women's Police Station, Tura, against the present Dean of the College of Community Science (formerly Home Science), Central Agricultural University, Tura, for exploiting two female employees by making them do forced domestic work and body massage. As ex-students of

the college, we condemn the incident and we stand in solidarity with the victims. We demand from the police and the Government to take strict action against this present Dean, who even during our student days, was prejudiced particularly against the students and staff of the local community.

We are not surprised that this issue has come out in the open because the Dean lacks basic manners and etiquette. When we were studying in the college we noticed that during class hours with students who opted for her subject as an elective course, she would sit with her legs raised on top of her table. We also witnessed some staff members massaging her legs inside her office chamber during office hours. Many times they also gave her pedicures. So judging from her past behavior, the accusations that she forced a female security guard to massage her body including her private parts is probably true. But what surprises us is

the delay in suspending the Dean. Why is CAU, Imphal still supporting an accused person? Why isn't she suspended until the police inquiry is over? Their inaction is different from the incident of sexual exploitation in the College of Post Graduate Studies, Umiam in February this year, where the Dean was removed within two days of the filing of an FIR because of the involvement of strong Khasi NGOs and pressure groups.

We appeal to the NGOs of Garo Hills to demand the suspension of the accused Dean, so that CAU, Imphal can act with alacrity.

Yours etc.,  
Francesca Sangma & other  
Alumnae of College of  
Community Science, Tura  
Via email

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Violence against doctors

Treating the symptom or the disease?

Dr Amit Malviya & Jurysa Nongdhar

"Violence against doctors is nothing but a superficial sign of deeper systemic failure."

At the time when the whole world is gripped by a deadly pandemic and the entire medical fraternity in India is struggling with the second wave, we hear of heinous acts of violence against doctors. Violence against doctors is not unique to India and it is reported from both developing and developed countries. But, the unique and disturbing part is the frequency and severity of attacks which sometimes have fatal outcomes. Unique is the brutality and inhuman behaviour which is not seen elsewhere in the world. In a recent survey by IMA more than half of the doctors in this country reported stress due to fear of violence and around two thirds admitted to having faced some sort of violence in their practice.

I choose to write this article at a time when IMA is planning nationwide protests against these attacks. Does the treatment of a symptom cure the disease? Is it ok to bring down the fever caused by malaria with paracetamol without prescribing anti-malarial medicines? Would wearing black bands around the arms bring down the incidences of violence against doctors? Is it enough to demand higher security in hospitals? The point is, violence against doctors is a social evil and we need to learn the root causes for it before we plan to cure it. So let us explore the causes which are responsible for violence against health professionals in our country. Why have we reached such a stage where national protests are needed to protect doctors? Why is the human form of god on earth in so much danger in our country?

**The proximate cause:** Readers would agree, that whenever a complication or death happens, the first thing which comes to mind of people (not all!) is that the doctor must be negligent or must have done given some wrong treatment. Why so? It's because of lack of trust. The reasons may be many but we as citizens lack trust in our own medical system and healthcare delivery. Whenever the patient party decides to take the law in their own hands it's because they feel cheated, dissatisfied and have a belief that something was left out. I am not justifying the act by any stretch of imagination but trying to reason with facts. If we look at the profile of these incidences, there are few things which are common to all. Small or peripherally located hospitals, poorly staffed, young doctors on duty, very sick patients or a small child and a mob with instigators. In India, perpetrators of violence are mainly patient's relatives, unknown sympathizers and criminal offenders. There is a pre-set milieu in the society

and sometimes with just the wrong situations it precipitates the ugly incidents. In the following paragraphs I discuss how these common factors are related to violence against doctors.

The root causes:

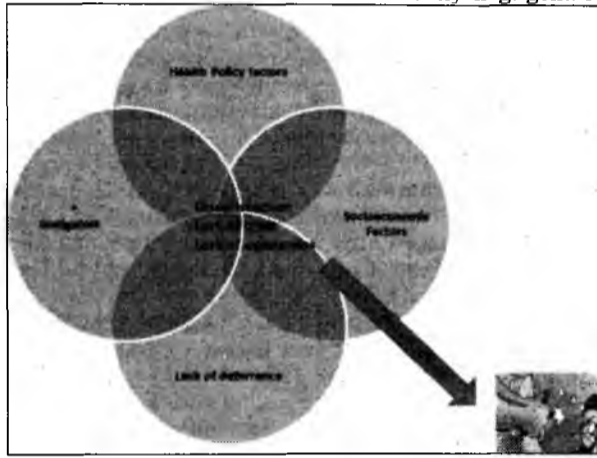
**Policy matters**  
First and foremost causes of dissatisfaction among the

*In India the cost of health care has risen tremendously (and Meghalaya is no exception) but peculiarly due to low literacy rates people expect better outcomes, thinking that paying more money would save one's life.*

community delivering healthcare in our country are the factors related to health policies, which over a period of time have resulted in overtly stressed health system, poor quality of healthcare and less equipped healthcare infrastructure. India spends around 3% of GDP on health which is very less, even when compared to other developing countries. More over healthcare delivery in India is uneven and only one-third

doctors, absence of a congenial environment, multiple visits, sharing beds and poor hygiene and sanitation lead to anxiety and discontent amongst patients. In India the cost of health care has risen tremendously (and Meghalaya is no exception) but peculiarly due to low literacy rates people expect better

outcomes, thinking that paying more money would save one's life. Poor knowledge towards healthcare can also affect the perception of the community. There is a hidden and unspoken impression of profiteering by the doctors which has crippled the profession as well as doctors and this along with sensational media coverage of such incidences has led to a common belief that all doctors overcharge and all of them are inherently negligent. A



of healthcare delivery is done by the government, the rest 70% is by private healthcare setups and dominant among those are small private hospitals with limited capabilities of treating sick patients. In India, there are 0.7 govt beds per 1000 population so majority of the patients have to seek care in private set-ups. The negative image of doctors and the role played by media, poor socio-economic

*A person with a grievance does not trust the mechanisms of redressal provided by law. There is a perception in society that doctors being well connected will get away and hence there is a tendency to take the law into their own hands by resorting to violence.*

status of the patient and the ever-rising cost of treatment make the small medical establishments particularly susceptible to violence and aggression at the time of billing or death of patient.

**Social factor:** Secondly, the conditions faced by patients attending hospitals for seeking treatment are quiet challenging. Overcrowding, long waiting time to meet

person with a grievance does not trust the mechanisms of redressal provided by law.

There is a perception in society that doctors being well connected will get away and hence there is a tendency to take the law into their own hands by resorting to violence.

not have health budgets or health insurance cover and any excessive expenditure incurred for health reasons leads to deep resentment. In private hospitals, the whole expenditure is often wrongly attributed to doctors' fees. This unfairly leads to widespread antipathy in the minds of patients and their relatives, and in case of untoward outcomes of treatment, it finally

culminates in violence against health-care providers.

**Communication Gap:** The third factor is lack of communication between the doctor and patient or attendants. Due to reasons such as being overworked, lack of time to explain matters, patient load etc., whatever little prognosis happens ends up in being ineffective. Because of this lack of rapport between doctors and patients/attendants and the communication gap in understanding all aspects of the illness and treatment including chances of complications, if anything untoward happens there is a sense that the doctor failed in his/her duty thereby leading to violence. Being a doctor and from the perspective of the medical fraternity I can assure one thing; no doctor ever wants to hurt his patient or to lose a patient. This is not only on moral and ethical grounds but professionally as well. After all it's their livelihood.

The instigators

Fourthly, the political milieu of a particular place is a determinant in inflaming violence in the hospitals. Local strong men or politicians incite the crowd, either as a display of their power or to score brownie points amongst communities, on issues as sensitive as death of a loved one. Lack of health care infrastructure at the small PHCs raises serious issues. Patients needing critical care cannot be treated at such health centres which lack the basic facilities. Hence PHCs usually refer the patient to a CHC or Civil Hospital and this exposes the doctor to threats and intimidation by the relatives of the patient. Mob instigators take advantage of such situations. I am not denying that medical negligence does not exist but it's very rare and for all practical purposes it does not gain enough priority to be in the list of root causes for inciting violence.

**Lack of deterrence**  
Finally, in addition to above there are no strict laws to punish the perpetrators of such crimes and people take matters in their own hands as and when they feel that they are cheated. There is need of stricter laws than the current ones to deter people from indulging in such acts.

Good medical care cannot be achieved under conditions of fear, uncertainty, and suspicion. We need to have mandatory organizational and policy changes and stricter laws need to be enforced in our country along with widespread social elimination of this method of "instant justice" to ensure safe work place for doctors as well as for all health care professionals. A spirited effort from the government, media, social organizations and public at large is needed to uproot this social evil from our country.

(Dr Amit Malviya, DM Cardiology, NEIGRIHMS, Shillong & Jurysa Nongdhar, MPH)

CAA again: Another central notification violates constitution

By Rashmi Singh

The doctrine of colourable legislation, also known as a fraud on the Constitution, is based on the Latin maxim, "Quando aliquid prohibetur ex directo, prohibetur et per obliquum," which means you cannot do indirectly what you cannot do directly. The notification issued by the Government on 28th May, 2021, has brought this doctrine to the forefront for many.

It purports to be an innocent executive order, but this notification has worried those who had opposed and protested against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019 on the ground of religion-based classification. To bring matters into perspective, people were protesting against the CAA over the main grievance that sections 2, 3, 5 and 6 provided for citizenship to be granted based on religion and region. Both are arbitrary criteria, that are not recognised by the Constitution as conditions to grant citizenship.

To recap, here are the key amendments in the CAA, 2019:

► It allows any Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian migrant from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan, who arrived in India on or before 31 December 2014 to apply for Indian citizenship, even if they arrived without valid travel documents or entered with a valid travel document but stayed beyond the permitted period.

► It grants migrants from these three countries immunity against legal action concerning their immigration status.

► Indian citizenship from "not less than eleven years" to "not less than five years" for Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Therefore, two kinds of classification are built into the CAA. One, classification based on religion by excluding Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from the ambit of illegal migrants; and two, classification based on country, by restricting the benefit to persecuted religious minorities only from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The Constitution of India expressly bars discrimination based on religion. It has been settled by the Supreme Court through a catena of judgments that secularism is a basic feature of the Constitution. After the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution, no doubts were left as to the fact that India is a secular country.

The 42nd Amendment introduced a declaration in the Preamble that India is secular, which is to say, the Government of India shall have an equal, neutral and objective approach to all religions and shall belong to no religion whatsoever.

Landmark judgements of the apex court have laid the foundation of secularism. In Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala, the Supreme Court categorically held that the state "shall not discriminate against any citizen on the ground of religion only."

It is now apposite to deal with the notification dated 28 May 2021, through which the Centre has delegated to the Collector or Secretary the power it exercises under sections 5 and 6 of the Citizenship Act, 1955. These sections deal with registration as a citizen of India and grant of certificate of naturalisation, respectively.

The power to grant citizenship is applicable in the case of any person who belongs to the minority community in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, namely, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians.

The notification further provides that after examining the application and being satisfied with the "suitability of the applicant", they will be granted citizenship by registration or naturalisation, by issuing a certificate.

The benefit of the notification has been made available to concerned persons residing in: (i) Morbi, Rajkot, Patan and Vadodara in Gujarat; (ii) Durg and Balodabazar in Chhattisgarh; (iii) Jalore, Udaipur, Pali, Barmer and Sirohi in Rajasthan; (iv) Faridabad in Haryana; and

(v) Jalandhar in Punjab.

A similar notification was issued by the central government on 23 October 2018, wherein the powers under sections 5 and 6 of the Citizenship Act, 1955, were delegated to the Collector or Secretary to grant citizenship to Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Parsis, Buddhists and Christians, and exclude the Muslim community.

There are three problems with the notifications.

One, the Citizenship Act, 1955 does not recognise religion or region-based classification. The notification has been issued by the government under the Citizenship Act, 1955. It is settled law that any notification, by-law, or order issued by the government, in the exercise of its power under a statute has to necessarily further the object and purpose of the statute.

The notification, being a delegated legislation, can be challenged if it violates the Constitution or the enabling Act or if it is made in bad faith. All three scenarios seem to apply to the May notification because nowhere in the scheme of the Citizenship Act, 1955, can one find the religion or region-based classification that the notification seeks to achieve.

The CAA, 2019, however, intends to achieve precisely this, i.e., grant citizenship to people of six particular religions from three countries. In simple terms, the notification is not aligned with the object of the Citizenship Act, 1955, as has been purported.

A perusal of the notifications clearly shows they seek to provide the benefit of online application for citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. However, no reason whatsoever is provided for the express exclusion of Muslims from what is purportedly a mere delegation of power by the central government to local authorities.

It is crucial to remember that the government is bound by the Constitution to refrain from arbitrary and unreasonable classification, even in its executive orders.

Much has been said about the unconstitutionality of the CAA, 2019. Writ petitions challenging its validity are still pending before the Supreme Court. The primary contention in them is that the CAA violates Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution, as it grants citizenship based on region and religion and has completely excluded the Muslim community.

If the government, through this innocent-looking notification, proceeds to grant citizenship to persons from certain religions while excluding others, it is in a way accomplishing precisely what it intended to accomplish through the CAA. Once this benefit is unleashed upon thousands of people in this unconstitutional manner, the same would become irreversible and render the pending matters futile.

The consequences of the May notification should worry us, particularly when petitions challenging the CAA, 2019, are pending. The notification is patently unconstitutional as it violates Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution directly by unreasonably and arbitrarily excluding Muslims.

It also goes against the spirit of the Constitution. The government is duty-bound by the Constitution to not discriminate based on religion. The patent unfairness in the present notification must necessarily result in it failing the test of constitutionality. And where subordinate legislation violates the Constitution, it must be set aside.

The sole, arbitrary and mala fide aim sought to be achieved through such notifications is to provide a haven to all minorities to the express exclusion of Muslims. In other words, the only criteria that need to be fulfilled by a member belonging to a minority, to benefit from the so-called haven the government is providing, is to not be Muslim. This logic is in itself deeply perverse and discriminatory and can go to the extent of causing communal disharmony. (IPA Service)

# The Wonder Grass

Single-use plastic is one of the biggest headaches for environmentalists as they take decades to disintegrate and meanwhile pollute the earth. Sustainable bamboo fibre products created by Bio Craft Innovation, a start-up, help reduce the use of this plastic, reports Jason Chiang

One million plastic drinking bottles are purchased every minute, while five trillion single-use plastic bags are used worldwide every year, according to the United Nations Environment Programme. Additionally, half of all plastic produced is designed to be used only once. This proliferation of single-use plastic, which contributes to greenhouse gas emissions at every stage of its life cycle, is a significant threat to the Earth's climate.

"Emissions from plastic emerge not only from the production and manufacture of plastic itself, but from every stage in the plastic life cycle — from the extraction and transport of the fossil fuels that are the primary feedstocks for plastic, to refining and manufacturing, to waste management, to the plastic that enters the environment," says the "Plastic and Climate: The Hidden Costs of a Plastic Planet" report by the Washington, D.C.-based Center for International Environmental Law.

Bio Craft Innovation has pioneered a potential solution for this crisis: sustainable products made from bamboo. Since 2019, Bio Craft Innovation has experimented with bamboo fibre as a possible alternative to plastic.

After converting bamboo and other agricultural waste to pulp, some ingredients are added to give the material strength and durability. The result is a proprietary bamboo-based granule that the company has worked to convert into textiles and non-woven fibres, which Bio Craft Innovation calls IBANSS granules.

"Our IBANSS granules are made from cellulose derived from non-wood-based sources like agricultural waste and bamboo," says Anubhav Mittal, Bio Craft Innovation's founder and chief executive officer. "We pick up agricultural waste, post-harvest, and convert it into cellulose fibres. These fibres are then converted into thermo-plastic granules using starch and additives, which can be processed on standard plastic machines, like injection moulding or film blowing machines."



Bio Craft Innovation was part of the Nexus Start-up Hub at American Center, New Delhi. Nexus, a collaboration between U.S. Embassy New Delhi and the non-profit organisation Alliance for Commercialization and Innovation Research, serves as a hub to promote Indian start-ups and the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

India has extensive forest biomass resources and abundance of bamboo plantations in its North Eastern states. There are 136 types of bamboo cultivated on more than 15 million hectares throughout the

country. One of Bio Craft Innovation's objectives is to leverage the abundance of bamboo in these areas, while also helping the regional communities prosper.

"We have plans to procure our raw material from farmers directly, at above-market prices. We also engage rural youth and women in this process to train them and generate local livelihood," says Mittal.

With its breakthrough IBANSS bamboo granules, Bio Craft Innovation has launched its first eco-friendly collection of organic bamboo products under the brand

name Biomize. The collection, which includes plates, bowls, containers and cutlery, is completely biodegradable at the end of its life cycle and can be used to make compost without any expensive recycling process. Prices range from Rs. 345 for a tikka platter set to Rs. 2290 for a full dinner set.

As the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted supply chains, Mittal's team has responded by emphasizing self-reliance and strategically utilising local resources. With the increase in global demand for plastic textiles to make medical protec-

tion items, Bio Craft Innovation saw an opportunity in developing biopolymer-based textiles with IBANSS bamboo granules.

Mittal says his company will launch face masks certified for 95 percent and 99 percent protection, made entirely from biopolymers. Additionally, the team is also developing bamboo charcoal-based filters for face masks for anti-bacterial protection.

Looking to the future, there are many exciting projects on the horizon for Bio Craft Innovation. Mittal's team is setting up a pilot

project in Uttarakhand, with the assistance of India's National Bamboo Mission.

The company is developing a micro-entrepreneurship model to enable local communities to produce compostable polybags, dustbin liners and planter bags. "The pandemic has made us evolve to changing market dynamics and innovate to offer new products that are in demand," says Mittal.

"For villages in the Himalayas, this will be a source of livelihood and reduce plastic waste in the mountains." (SPAN-TWF)



(Left) Crockery sets made of bamboo. (Above) Bamboo cutlery.

# The Untrodden Ways

By N. Lothungbeni Humtsoe

India is renowned for its diversity as it is home to not only a mix of cultures and cuisine, but also varied landscapes. While the country houses a plethora of well-known tourist attractions, it also has a myriad of such lesser-known jewels that make even the most intrepid traveller swoon in awe struck delight.

With travel restrictions easing and Covid cases consistently dropping across the country, domestic travel is booming. In fact, visiting smaller, unknown destinations, far from the city, away from the crowds and stress helps to satiate your travel appetite.

Avoid the crowd with EaseMyTrip.com shares list of India's most enchanting and lesser-known destinations:

## JAWAI, RAJASTHAN

A hidden gem in India for tranquillity seekers is Jawai, named after the river with mesmerising views. The experience offers a one-of-a-kind opportunity to engage with nature and wildlife. The granite landscape and highlands that surround Jawai are a sight to behold. As leopards dwell wild and free, Jawai symbolizes human-nature coexistence. The leopard safari is one of its kind in this wildlife haven, the city is home to wild animals, including nilgai, bears,

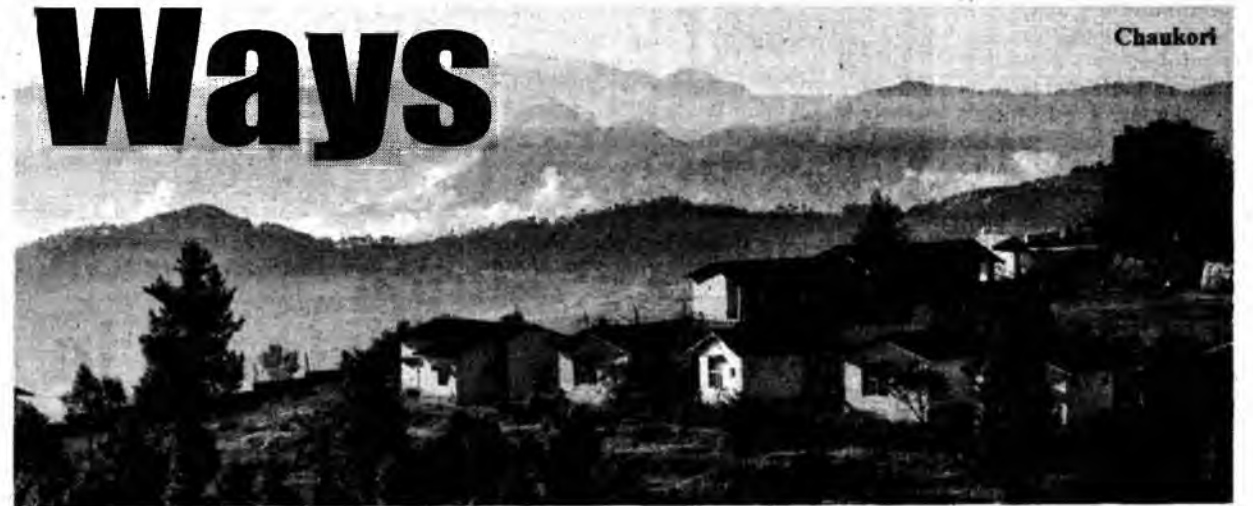
wolves, hyenas, and chinkaras. In addition, Jawai is a well-known winter haven for migrating birds.

## ZIRO VALLEY, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

While rolling over Scotland's lush green pastures may appear to be a distant travel goal on your bucket list, you can get all of this in India for half the price and twice the joy. With abundant reserves of untapped natural beauty, Ziro is a modest picturesque town, nestled away in the enchanting mountain-scape of Arunachal Pradesh. In addition to its unrivalled scenery and wildlife splendour, the tranquil town is known for its distinctive Apatani tribe. Verdant greenery and breathtaking paddy fields, a fascinating tribal culture unlike any other, and a pleasant weather all year round makes it a must-visit travel destination. Since the past few years, there has been a growth in airline routes to the region resulting in swifter travelling options.

## MORACHI CHINCHOLI, MAHARASHTRA

Located 50 km away from Pune, this quaint village is the unofficial peacock sanctuary of Maharashtra. As the name suggests, Morachi Chincholi is a village of tamarind trees and dancing peacocks. Legend has it that the tamarind trees were planted during the Peshwa dynasty, which attracted peacocks to the village. A visit to this picturesque village will provide travellers a unique Maharashtrian village life experience as the



villagers here offer visitors a bullock cart ride to the farm and help them get a practical experience of irrigation and farming life. One can also enjoy a simple meal of organic vegetables against the backdrop of lustrous ruby-green farms and dancing peacocks, which is a perfect escape into tranquillity.

## VARKALA, KERALA

Varkala, located in the southern part of Kerala, is known for its calm ambience and vibrant, serene beaches. The red sandstone cliffs and lush greenery around is a sight to behold. The coastal area is home to a black sand beach which is a hidden gem within the area. It is also a hub for the adventure enthusiasts as it is known for its water sports and adventure activities such as paragliding, rafting and parasailing. The destination is home to several fisheries, freshwater springs, hills and forts. Apart from holding the charms of a quiet beach, the coastal area is also home to pilgrimage sites such as the 2000-year-old Janardhana Swamy Temple and the Sivagiri Mutt, which can be spiritually rewarding as you travel to

explore the unexplored.

## CHAUKORI, UTTARAKHAND

With majestic Himalayan peaks and verdant woods surrounding it, Chaukori is a lesser-known hamlet with jaw-dropping splendour. It is one of India's finest and most distinctive hill stations, with breathtaking views of Nanda Devi, the Panchachuli peaks, and Nanda Kot. It is noted for its numerous Hindu temples, picturesque scenery, and tranquil ambience, and should be in the travel wishlist for a peaceful getaway. In Chaukori, one may engage in leisurely walks and high-intensity treks, both of which provide a magnificent perspective of the landscape.

Right from the scenic hill stations to gorgeous beaches to peaceful getaways among nature and culture, there is an interesting melange of landscapes across the country which are perfect alternatives for curious travellers looking for something different from the hustle and bustle of big, crowded cities. While travel resumes in the country, it is important to ensure that safety remains paramount. (IANSLife)

# History and Legacy: The House of Scindias

By Vishnu Makhijani

What exactly is the extent of the wealth amassed by the Scindias, the erstwhile ruling family of Gwalior? How was it generated and how is it to be distributed among its four claimants?

Other questions are perhaps best hidden away or kept out of sight for diplomatic reasons — such as the Gwalior monarchs' controversial role during the events of 1857, the alleged and under-probed role of the palace in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi (enunciated by Tushar Gandhi in a magazine interview in May 2019), and Rajmata Vijaya Raje Scindia's excessive dependence on her 'Rasputin' that led to a bitter split from her son Madhavrao Scindia.

These are some of the questions raised in political analyst, columnist, author and journalist Rasheed Kidwai's biography, "The House of Scindias: A Saga of Politics, Power and Intrigue" (Roli Books), that provides a wealth of information on the family from the turn of the century and is sure to rekindle interest in a clan that has seen a member serve in parliament or a state assembly for over 60 years.

"The history of the Scindias is best told through their lawsuits over property," Kidwai writes, and poses the question: "How about a 400-billion-rupee property dispute? Or is the figure higher?"

"The answer is no, if one goes by the affidavits the Scindias have filed for parliamentary and assembly elections from 1957 (when the Rajmata first entered the fray) till date. Their wealth appears to be far less than popular perceptions about what is being fought over in protracted legal battles across the country. According to some estimates — it is impossible to arrive at a definitive figure — these disputes are over properties worth around Rs 40,000 crore. Some of

these disputes have been dragging on for over thirty years among the former royals of the erstwhile Gwalior state, Jyotiraditya Scindia and his three aunts, amid speculation that the legal battle may be settled out of court," Kidwai writes.

"Neither side has denied or confirmed anything related to their legal battles, let alone reveal any details," he adds.



The roots of the dispute lie in the fact that when Jyotiraditya's grandfather, Jiwajirao Scindia, the erstwhile Maharaja of Gwalior, died in 1961, he had not left instructions about how his immovable and movable properties were to be divided among his descendants.

"The properties were initially divided equally between his widow, Vijaya Raje and his only son, Madhavrao, after she filed a suit in the Bombay High Court, back in 1984. Mother and son both had 50 per cent share in the large number of immovable properties spread across India.

"In his case, Jyotiraditya had invoked the Scindia custom of

primogeniture," Kidwai writes. He claimed that the provisions of the Hindu Succession Act that normally divide property equally among the descendants do not apply to the princely line as these were excluded by Section 5 (2) of the Act relating to the inheritance of a family. His aunts, Usha Raje (settled in Nepal), Vasundhara and Yashodhara contested the claim, citing their mother's will of September 20, 1985.

Sardar Sambhajirao Rao Angre, "a master of intrigue and former private secretary to Vijaya Raje, who had a factious relationship with Madhavrao" stepped in, Kidwai writes, "to explain that the custom of the firstborn enjoying 'jyeshthbadhikar' (primogeniture) could not be established beyond doubt as almost everyone who had ascended the throne of Gwalior before Jyotiraditya's great-grandfather, Madhav Maharaj, did had been adopted. That was how the Scindias had managed to avoid the Doctrine of Lapse that eventually led to the 1857 rebellion by the Rani of Jhansi, Lakshmbai".

Then, immediately after Vijaya Raje's death in 2001, Angre produced her handwritten will drafted in 1985 that had disinherited her son and grandson while bequeathing two-third of the assets to her daughters and one-third to a charity through a trust that would, in turn, cover the 15 trusts she had formed in 1975, just before the Emergency, to manage the properties.

"While the legal feasibility of an umbrella trust is questionable, this will is being examined in a probate case by Delhi High Court and is currently in the stage of evidence," Kidwai writes.

Vijaya Raje's solicitors in Mumbai had produced another will in 2001 that excluded not only her son and grandson but the charities as well, leaving the entire block of properties that was under her control to her daughters. This will is also being examined in a probate case, this time by the Bombay High Court, and is in the evidence state.

The two wills "are important because of an agreement in 1971 when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had scrapped the system of privy purses. At that point, the Scindias were getting Rs 25 lakh annually, apart from incomes from various trusts", Kidwai writes.

Immediately after that, the Scindias had divided their assets through a verbal agreement: the immovable properties had gone to the mother and the cash, shares and debentures to the son. A Mumbai court formalised this in 1975.

In his suit, Jyotiraditya challenged the verbal agreement of 1971 and the subsequent court division of 1975 between his grandmother and father.

In October 2017, Jyotiraditya expressed a desire for an out-of-court settlement and for this agreed to the appointment of a commissioner, who, however, died during the process.

In June 2019, "the prospects of a compromise suffered a setback when the Bombay High Court refused a request by Jyotiraditya to strike off a fresh written statement by his aunts, claiming that they had retracted from their earlier stance in the family's property dispute", Kidwai writes.

"With Jyotiraditya joining the BJP in March 2020, many in Gwalior and Bhopal feel that the growing cordiality among the nephew and his aunts Vasundhara and Yashodhara (Usha Raje doesn't take any interest in the case) will help resolve the property disputes," Kidwai adds.

This, then is the lead-up to a tale that Kidwai relates in eight chapters, beginning from "Scindias: A Brief History" and weaving through "The Rajmata of Gwalior", "Madhavrao Scindia: In Retrospection", "Vasundhara Raje Scindia: Princess in Public Life", "Yashodhara Raje Scindia: Princess Crusader of Many Causes", "Jyotiraditya Scindia: The Ambitious Gwalior Royal", "Next Generation: Royals and their Political Future", and "Various Shades of Fortune and the Ugly Property Wars".

How will this saga end?

"Following an injunction from the Supreme Court, no property can be given to anyone in the Scindia family till the primogeniture case is settled.

"While the extent of the Scindias' wealth defies speculation, (by itself) the 1,240,771 sq ft Jai Vilas Palace's opulent interiors may give an idea. It leaves no doubt in our minds of the vast fortune at stake for the members of the erstwhile royal family," Kidwai concludes.

Come to think of it, here's a readymade scenario for an OTT magnum opus. (IANS)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambi Sunday, JULY 4, 2021

Moon sextile Venus on your solar return chart and it will give excellent results. You will have monetary gains but need to keep your expenses under control. You will also be offered a good job from a reputed organization. Those appearing for competitive exams will be getting success. Do not sign any legal document without reading it. You need not trust unknown persons in the matters of finances, money etc. You will also fall in love with a very special person, marriage is indicated. You will also bring change in your life style for good. The solution to the will/legacy dispute between family members that had been going for some time will favor you.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**  
It is an exceptional week from all angles. You will get benefits from many sources. You will be able to realize your dreams. New job/business offers will come. It is a period in which you will realize that you had found something from your hard work or even more than you were entitled to. Your financial position will get better. You will find many opportunities to display your good qualities and strength of character. Your peers and bosses will support you. You will get imaginative and creative in your job. Your love life is going to be wonderful. You will understand the thoughts of your partner and will have amazing bonding. It could turn out to be a life time experience.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**  
Your views will get lot of acceptance and your family will respect you very much. You will become a role model for others to follow. Those who are in politics and media will enjoy unprecedented success. Your supporters and well wishers will rise. Your financial part will be stronger. You will also develop contacts with people living far away from you. Your business trips will prove beneficial. You will also enhance your personality and will have a desire to work inside you. You will also make successful efforts to earn more. Your love life will be wonderful. Love mates will come closer to each other. You will be a great parent and become part of your children's school, college or work field meetings and issues. You should look after your health and consult the doctor in time.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**  
You will be getting wonderful results this week. You will behave well with others. You will also support your family members, social work, colleagues and subordinates. They will be impressed by your behavior and attitude. Your monetary position will keep getting better. You will get the pleasure of great wealth. You will also make plans to buy a new property or vehicle. You also need not trust others blindly and should protect your own interests. There is also great possibility of meeting your wishes. Your dreams will get fulfilled. You will continue to enjoy happiness and satisfaction. You will have a wonderful love life. Your partner will support you fully. You will make progress in your work and personal relationship. You will discharge your obligations and responsibilities well.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**  
It is going to be a good week. It is ideal time for introspection and thinking. You will perform a great deal of skill and understanding and you will get the results that gives pleasure to you. Your financial position will get better. Your colleagues will obey your orders. New job/business opportunities will come to you. Your children, family and relatives will be closer to you. Money inflow will be very fast. You will have good bonding with your spouse/partner. You will get the benefit of your professional contacts. You will also plan to undertake renovation at your home. Some new tasks will be planned.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**  
You are heading for success this week. New job/business offers will come. You will have all the qualities to prove your work well. Excellent results will come. Your financial conditions will get better. Additional sources of income will be tapped. Love birds will have an amazing time. You will meet an important personality too. You will work hard and will be busy working on your own. You will not be scared of criticism, as you have to reach greater heights in your life. You need not worry about your health. At the end of the week, happiness, relaxation and comfort will be found. From friends to life partner, there will be more openness in your behavior. Your work efficiency will increase. You will also feel good changes in yourself.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**  
It is going to be a mentally satisfying week. With the help of friends you will complete your incomprehensible work. Friends and family will be helpful to you. Your siblings will listen to your views and give you the respect that you deserve. Even your spouse/partner will remain loyal to you and keep inspiring you. You will have a sense of satisfaction. There will be beneficial opportunities, which will make you happy. You will also receive a good news from somewhere. The work you were doing will be completed. Success will be achieved in the desired works. You will get support from your friends. Your boss will encourage you. You will complete the work of your home and office with great intensity.

**Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)**  
You will be having good earnings this week. You will also be interested in doing new tasks. You will also do some new work as per planning. You will receive awards for this too. You will also make plans to buy property or vehicle. Your financial position is quite satisfactory. Your investments too will give good results. You will recover money given to some person. You will have issues with your colleagues. So you need to keep your anger under control. Matter may blow out of proportion. You will share good relations with your partner and will spend some quality time together. Your mood will remain good. And you will discuss something important with your family members. You will continue having good conversation with them.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**  
Your life is turning for good. You will move forward after making a balance between your work life and family. You will also carry your duty towards the society nicely. During this time you will also make a courageous decision. The conditions of your work will not be so easy. You will work very hard and put in a lot of efforts to expand a job. You will also be successful in it. Lovebirds will have a nice time. You can go to a romantic place for holidays. Success will be in your reach in competition or contest. You will be interested in your work and hobbies.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)**  
You will feel more energetic than usual. New job/business offer will come. You will maintain a time table for your daily activities. You will also feel mental peace. Troubles that had been worrying you for sometime will come to an end. Despite efforts by your opponents they will not get success. The time is fruitful for you. You will receive positive results. Your financial status will be better than before. Matters for property division will be solved with the help of a third person. You will put your best efforts for the achievements of your targets. You will have good time with your spouse. You will also be interested in matters related to spirituality. Your noble needs will bring name and fame.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**  
You will make good progress in your work. Your potential and capabilities will be highlighted in front of everyone. People will be impressed by your skills. You could get promoted too. A feud among brothers will get resolved with the help of a third person. The loved ones will come closer. The brother, sister, spouse and family members will pour emotion of love for each other. Your romantic life is going to be good. You will meet old acquaintances, new friends and loved ones, and happiness will enter your life. You will utilize your free time to improve yourself or in reading literature. You can also be active or social media. The situation in your family will be better. Due to your good nature and kindness your opponents will become your friends.

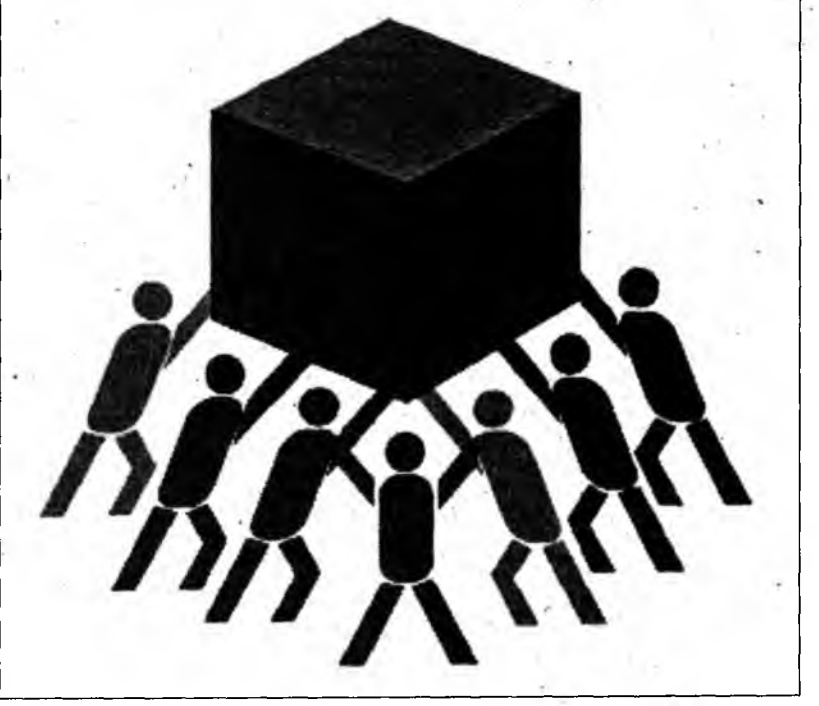
**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**  
You will be welcomed with brilliant success in financial matters. You will take strong and important decision in your business whose effects and results will benefit you for a long time. You will receive money that had been lent some time ago or some struck money. Talk of marriage for unmarried people will be going on. It will make you happy. The work for which you were excited for a long time will get stuck because of obstacles due to which you will become upset. Maximum time will be spent in fun and enjoyment. Students will work hard. Mutual relations between husband and wife will remain cordial. You will have monetary gains.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**  
You will work very hard at your job and get satisfactory results. You will have monetary gains. You will gain profit on your work. In trying to expand your social contacts, you may have to spend a lot. You will have gains in matters related to land, property, assets etc. You will be very diligent to achieve your targets. Your financial struggle will get over. From financial point of view you will be strong and stable. You will also receive good news from somewhere. The talks for marriage will move further, for people eligible for marriage. Your activities will continue in many fields. You will feel better than before.

## Careers with Cooperatives

By Ranjan K Baruah

The first Saturday of July is observed as International Cooperatives Day around the world. Being a democratic process and business with values, cooperatives have been able to bring positive changes around the world. We should be aware that more than 12% of humanity is part of any of the 3 million cooperatives in the world and the largest 300 cooperatives and mutuals report a total turnover of 2,034.98 billion USD. Cooperatives employ 280 million people across the globe (10% of the world's employed population). The earliest record of a co-operative comes from Scotland on March 14 1761. In 1844 a group of 28 artisans working in the cotton mills in north of England established the first modern co-operative business. The Cooperative Movement in India was formally introduced with the promulgation of Cooperative Societies Act in 1904.



Cooperatives are people-centred enterprises owned, controlled and run by and for their members to realise their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations. It brings people together in a democratic and equal way. Cooperatives are found in the fields of health, agriculture, production, retail, finance, housing, employment, education, social services and many other spheres. As various spheres are included, it brings career opportunities for the deserving candidates.

We have to understand cooperatives if we want to make our career in this field. Anyone may start cooperatives but trained and qualified people are always needed to manage and administer the system and process. This brings career opportunities and there are many institutions that offer courses and special training programme related to cooperative management. Courses includes Higher Diploma in Cooperative Management (HDCM), Post graduation courses MBA and graduation courses like BBA and other short term and advance diploma and certificate courses.

National Council for Cooperative Training is a registered autonomous society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 promoted

by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare, Department of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare, Government of India. The Council is responsible for organizing, directing, monitoring and evaluating the arrangements for cooperative training for the personnel working in the cooperative sector in the country. The main objective of the Council is to organize need based training programmes and facilitate the process of human resource development for cooperatives for the country. It also envisages conducting research in critical areas of cooperative movement.

The Council has established its own training structure comprising of the VAMNICOM, Pune at National Level, Five Regional Institutes of Cooperative Management at Chandigarh, Bangalore, Kalyani, Gandhinagar, Patna and 14 Institutes of Cooperative Management located at Bhopal, Bhubaneswa, Chennai, Dehradun, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Imphal, Jaipur, Kanpur, Lucknow, Madurai, Nagpur, Pune and Thiruvananthapuram.

The National Centre for Cooperative Education which was set up in 1958 organises cooperative education programmes for all sections showing its wide reach. While the Diploma Programme in Cooperative Education and

Development provides general inputs, the Leadership Development Programmes for the Chairmen/Directors of cooperative movement aims to sharpen the competence of the leaders by imparting modern management skills. Orientation courses in cooperative management for university/college lecturers and faculty members of Junior Cooperative Training Centres are designed to provide them with the latest knowledge in cooperatives.

Assam Rajiv Gandhi University of Cooperative Management (ARGUCOM) is the first cooperative management university in the country established under the recognition of UGC vide No. F.9-21/2011 (CPP-1/PU) dated Feb 27, 2012. It has five Schools that function which includes — School of Entrepreneurship and Management, School of Innovation and Technology, School of Public Policy and Law, School of Culture and Media, School of Ecology and Sustenance offering both graduation and post graduation level courses.

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*"Ignorance is the curse of God, knowledge  
the wing wherewith we fly to heaven"*

—William Shakespeare

## The Shillong Times

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### US exit from Afghanistan

WITH the departure of the Americans from its Bagram Air Base from July 1, the final phase of complete withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan has begun. The last of the US and NATO soldiers would leave the landlocked nation by September, leaving the troubled region virtually at the mercy of the Taliban. The militant Islamic group that indulged in massive bloodletting for three decades may now have the last laugh and the fall of the Afghan government led by President Ashraf Ghani in Kabul is a strong possibility. Notably, Americans landed there and toppled the Taliban regime soon after the Al Qaeda attacks on WTC Twin Towers and Pentagon 20 years ago, which changed the course of global history and set the US firmly against Islamic fundamentalists. The US military presence helped usher in a minimal idea of democracy there. India, a close Afghan ally gave this process eminent backing. The first such government led by Hamid Karzai could not rein in the Taliban as also the warlords, and they continued to call the shots over much of the mountainous nation known for its poppy cultivation and sway of drug cartels.

The withdrawal of a substantial part of the US forces by then President George Bush Junior within a matter of two years only complicated matters. This was for reaching the US forces to Iraq to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Donald Trump as president engaged in talks with the Taliban and in 2020 signed a full withdrawal plan for this year, which was later endorsed by President Joe Biden. As the Taliban is split into two strong groups, one drawing support from Pakistan, how things will shape up there after full withdrawal of the US-NATO troops is unclear. India has not formally entered into talks with Taliban, but back channel discussions are currently under way. India has major investments in the economic sphere in Afghanistan by way of helping it emerge as a progressive nation. It had also built and donated the Parliament House. Protecting Indian interests there from militant offensives is by itself a herculean task. Pakistan, on the other hand, is working hard to subdue India and get more involved in Afghan affairs. President Ashraf Ghani who took a stand favourable to Pakistan at the start of his first term later effected a course correction. It is important for India to re-strategize its positioning vis-à-vis Taliban. Else, worse, the Kashmiri militants could try and gain backing from sections of the Afghan militants with encouragement from Pakistan.

Months and years from now, when the ordeal that people are facing is over, writers will start writing about the year 2020 and 2021. The years no doubt are the most happening years in the history of the world. When the trials and tribulations are over, with the benefit of hindsight, writers will look back and put their thoughts on papers. Some of the write-ups will showcase how best people have reacted to the situation and others will illustrate how people have failed as humans.

Any which way we look at it, misfortune will definitely bring to light the truth of how people reacted to one of the greatest challenges that humans have ever faced in recent history. And irrespective of what the outcome is, there will be both the positive and negative side of the story. There will always be two or more ways of how people react to the pandemic. The reason is because not all the people are the same and without any doubt, different people will react differently and that of course must be respected.

No doubt there are people who think that they are more important than others. They expect to be treated differently and believe that the virus will not be able to attack them. These people violate government orders and throw the SOPs out of the window because they think they are important. Yet still there are people who may not think that they are as important as the others, but are in the habit of sneaking. They believe that they will not be caught and they violate the government's orders with impunity.

Then when the vaccination is available as expected there is a section of the population who have hesitancy in taking the jab. In the state of Meghalaya religion cannot be blamed for the vaccination hesitancy, as almost all the leaders of prominent faith groups have come out to encourage their followers to take the injection. It is now obvious that vaccination hesitancy has nothing to do with religion or any belief system but it is due to people's own prejudices.

There are people who are scared of giving vaccination because they are not aware of the consequences of not taking the vaccine. There are also those who have never had any injection in their whole life or never had a needle piercing their body. These are rare cases, but it is hoped that ultimately good sense will prevail and

# Adversity brings out the best in people

By HH Mohrmen

the majority of population, even those who initially have hesitation will get themselves vaccinated.

Humanity has indeed progressed in leaps and bounds on almost every spheres of life, but there is also something that has not changed. Certain human behaviour remains the same and jealousy, hate and distrust will always be there.

A man, who complained so much about the villages where he used to live, decided to move out of the village and find a better place to live in. He wanted to move to a village where there is no enmity, no jealousy, no hate amongst the villagers; a place where people live in peace

There is no peace in the place and that is the reason why he decided to leave the village. The man then responded by saying, "Well, there is not much difference then. The people who live in this village too are no different from them. Any village will consist of all kinds of people."

But when writers look back at the months gone by, they will only look at how people in the state behaved in general. The focus will be on the attitude of the majority of the population and not of few exceptions. That is why in spite of so much fear and pain during this short span of time, people still have so much hope. There were many instances during

groups in the state too have all come out to lend their helping hands to those in need in these trying times. This has only confirmed what sages and seers have been saying for ages, that there is always good in the human soul. There is a spark of light in the human soul which makes humans take care of each other. It is what gives many the reasons to believe that humanity is still alive.

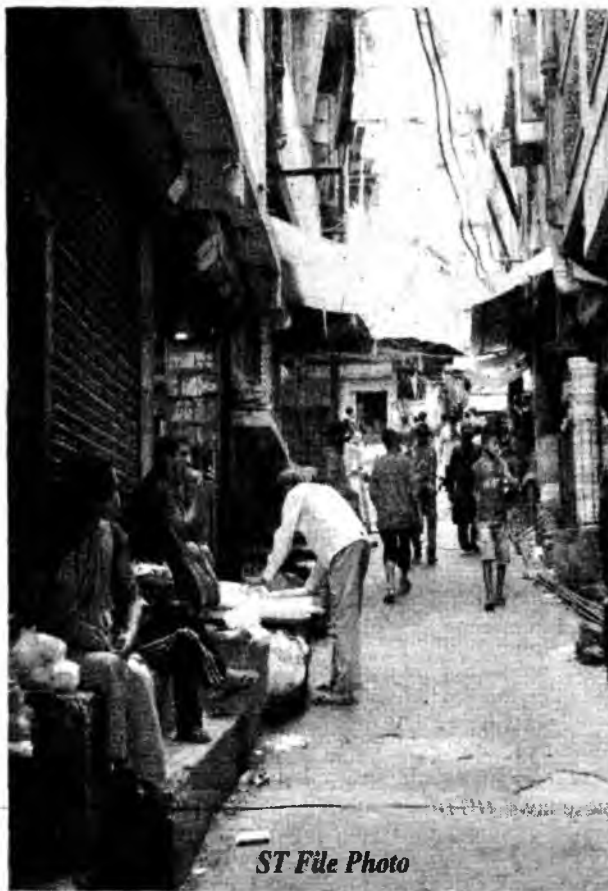
Many years ago, Margaret Mead, a famous anthropologist, was once asked by her student a very important question. The question was what in her opinion was the first sign of civilization in human culture? The story has it that the students were expecting her to talk about clay pots, tools for hunting, grinding stones or even religious artefacts.

But to their surprise Mead told them that the first evidence of civilization occurred about 15,000 years ago. The evidence of the beginning of civilization was found in the ancient fracture femur bone located in an archaeological site. Femur is the longest bone in the human body; it is a bone which links the hip to the knee. During the time when the benefit of modern medicine like we have now was not available, it would take about six weeks for the fractured femur bone to heal. The femur bone that was found in the site was broken but had healed.

She further said that in the animal's way of life, anyone that happens to break one leg will not survive. The reason is that the animal cannot run from danger, it cannot drink or hunt for food. It becomes meat for the predators. It is impossible for any creature to survive with a broken leg. Animals got eaten first before the bone healed. What the broken femur that has healed tells us is that somebody has taken the injured to a safer place. Somebody took time to take care of the victim till the wounded person recovered. A healed femur points to the fact that somebody has taken the risk to help rather than abandon the fallen person.

Human beings have since then known how to take care of one another. That was the lesson that was learned many thousand years ago. It is heartening that humans continue to take care of each other. And the pandemic due to the coronavirus has only demonstrated that the lesson that people learned thousands of years ago is still alive with us. Adversity has indeed brought out the best that is there in people.

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ST File Photo

and harmony. As he walked he reached the top of a hill and saw on the foothills a valley with beautiful houses. He was fascinated by what he saw and thought to himself that that place looks like the kind of village that he was looking for. After he had walked for some time, he saw a man sitting with a load laying near him. He moved close to him and asked the man the name of the village and also if the people in the village were good. The man, who was resting from his tiredness, instead answered him with a question. He asked him what kind of people live in the village that he had left. The man said that people are very bad; they are jealous of each other and there is too much hate.

the pandemic which made people believe that humanity is still alive. There is so much good that happens around which validates that not everything in this world is in peril. People reach out to help one another even in this small state of ours.

As one would expect people may disagree on how they help and support each other. Some may not like to take photographs of their good deeds, yet some may feel it is necessary but the point is people are extending their helping hands to help those in need. From an individual who had to shell out something from one's own pocket to help others, to NGOs, Church and Faith organisations they have all extended their support. Even pressure

# The car pass culture

By Jo Lyngdoh

A car pass culture has emerged as a new form of elitism in Shillong. Today, businesses and shops are allowed to operate and a number of essential and non-essential movements are consequently allowed. After all, how can businesses operate if the general public is not free to arrive at the business premises. However, a crucial lack of clarity is observed in the movement of private vehicles. There is no strong need for restricting private vehicular movement since it carries almost zero risk of covid exposure as compared to public transport, shopping, working in offices or walking! Despite this, the ambiguous orders from the DC's office indicate that car passes are still needed for private vehicular movement. This has led to rampant abuse of the so-called car passes by anyone with a government job/connection themselves or within their families - allowing them free movement at any time of day or night with no restrictions. This is an elitist trait since it means that common citizens with

under a dictatorship, or a democracy.

With the new reopening phase running for a week and having no impact on daily Covid trends, allowing freedom of movement in private vehicles is unlikely to cause undue rise in Covid cases. The government can even allow this for 2-3 weeks and check the impact on the Covid spread. The public are not sheep to be herded, but equal citizens who have the right to demand intelligent and effective governance - paid for with taxpayer's money towards payment of salaries for government staff. The government should carefully evaluate any restriction of an activity rationally based on the degree of interactions amongst people involved in that activity. Only specific entities such as mass tourist spots, pools, concerts, rallies, dance clubs etc may be restricted - but for all other activities that involve little to no interaction with a large group of people (especially unknown people) - there should be no restrictions.



no government connection will now have to walk or risk travelling in public vehicles despite having access to their own private vehicles. It is a confusing and discriminatory state of affairs.

Why should the police have to spend time checking for passes instead of other necessary police work? Is it not more effective to deploy police manpower to check for mask-wearing violations and other Covid protocols in markets rather than checking vehicles? Is there any proof that restrictions on private vehicles reduces Covid spread, if people can anyway move around via car passes, public vehicles or walking? How can high-contact activities like shops and public vehicles be allowed to operate while private movement in private vehicles is restricted? A private vehicle is effectively an extension of one's private space and does not lead to any mass interpersonal interaction that may spread Covid.

The government continues with a slew of such restrictions with no rational underpinnings, following a scorched earth policy to stop everything/anything in sight and suspend all freedoms in the hope of containing Covid. All this after having made gross negligent mistakes with the state's entry point checks in March-April; the only factor leading to this new wave in the city/state. Who is accountable for the mistakes? Nobody? Who now suffers due to the restrictions - everyone except the "car-pass class"! There is a fine line between partially suspending our fundamental rights to freedom of movement for reducing Covid spread versus the totalitarian restrictions that makes common citizens question whether we are

Every restriction must be evaluated on its effectiveness, enforceability and equality.

The government is also urged to observe Covid restrictions applied on similar population/case trends in other parts of the country instead of unilaterally applying highly restrictive measures only in our city/state. If 4000 active cases and 323 occupied beds (Source: Government's online Covid dashboard) is justified for severely restricting a city of 9 lakh and a state of ~30 lakh people, then perhaps it should ban alcohol and cigarettes as well, which impacts health and lives at multiple orders of magnitude, higher than the current Covid numbers.

Yes, Covid is still a menace to the population, but people have lives to live and livelihoods to earn. We have also learnt ample lessons since March 2020 about handling Covid - and most people do take their own precautions such as following protocols and getting vaccinated. Despite this, there is no reward for such behaviour and all must continue living under more restrictions than one can manage to keep count of.

The government is humbly requested to focus all its resources on mass vaccination instead of the maintenance of restrictions on private movement of individuals or vehicles. Once this is allowed, all the traffic police personnel currently engaged in asking drivers about where they are going and why - can instead be efficiently engaged towards vaccination awareness measures, protocol checks at markets and the normal regulation of traffic.

Email: joelyn-gdoh199@gmail.com

### Letters to the Editor

#### Unconvincing riposte

Editor,

Apropos of the rejoinder issued by Amaresh Chakraborty of Ramkrishna LP/UP School, Umsohsun (ST July 2, 2021) it appears that Chakraborty instead of addressing the issues highlighted in the letter dated June 30, 2021 tried to hide behind the gibberish of statistics and made an effort to self certify the efficacy of HIKAI App although this writer never tried to evaluate the merits/demerits of the said App. This writer is primarily concerned with the plight of the students of this particular school and highlighted the difficulties faced by them in accessing the App in the absence of requisite wherewithal due to their poor economic conditions. Chakraborty has admitted that no tab has been given to the students of this particular school and at the same time asserted that the school authority is waiting for philanthropy from the general public to provide the App to poor students for their actual

benefit. This clearly proves the ineptitude of the school authority so far as providing tangible facilities to the students is concerned. Does mere availability of an online free portal in itself benefit the students if they cannot access and utilize it for their studies? Had the students been in a position to have seamless access to online portals, they might not have to depend on this particular App only since there are many learning apps available in the internet designed by well known professionals in the field of education.

Mr Chakraborty, however, conveniently sidestepped the issue of his ascendancy (legitimate (?) or otherwise) to the post of Head Teacher in the absence of a valid and approved Managing Committee of the school. Instead, he tried to evaluate the performance of other teachers without having any moral or administrative authority to pass such comments or judgment. He is at the same time acting as the complainant, prosecution and jury that too with distorted logic and statistics. I fully agree that there is an urgent

need for proper evaluation of the performance of all the teachers (including him) of the school by a proper and duly approved Managing Committee and not by the whims and caprices of one individual.

Yours etc.,  
Roben Chyrmang  
Shillong-4

#### Lawlessness in police force

Editor,

Of late, we hear and read in the media that a few people accused of crimes like rape, etc. allegedly tried to flee from the custody of Assam Police, and then either got killed or injured when police fired on them. This is an extremely pathetic commentary on the Assam Police. Repeated incidents of these types cannot be normal or natural. This was not the case until the recent past. It also puts a question mark on the efficiency of the Assam Police. First, if fleeing from Police custody is happening regularly, then obviously the Police personnel are ill-trained or are incapable of

handling people in custody. Secondly, if the police are using brute force, and trying to get rid of accused persons by using firearms, then these are heinous acts. In Mumbai, policemen like Pradeep Sharma, Sachin Vaze, etc. are bad examples of policemen becoming the law unto themselves. Whether we like it or not, the rule of law has to prevail and established procedures must be followed in letter and spirit by the Police. It is the judicial courts that pronounce whether an accused is guilty or not. The whole world, including us in India, were shaken when a black man George Floyd was suffocated to death by Minneapolis policemen on May 25, 2020. The four officers involved in the manslaughter were fired immediately, and Derek Chauvin, the prime accused was recently sent to prison for 22.5 years. Meanwhile, Pradeep Sharma and Sachin Vaze, who were in privileged positions earlier, within and outside the Mumbai police, were arrested recently and are being investigated for various acts of omissions and commissions.

It is high time that the civil administration, human rights organizations, and of course, the judiciary took sensitive note of these incidents in Assam, and ensured that the due process of law is followed specially by the Police. Otherwise, matters may spiral out of hand and people would start taking the law in their own hands. That would lead to complete erosion of democratic tenets.

Yours etc.,  
D Bhutia,  
Guwahati

#### Uttarkhand get's 3rd CM in 4 months

Editor,

Ahead of the Uttarakhand Assembly elections early next year along with that in Uttar Pradesh RSS pracharak and BJP MLA Pushkar Singh Dami was sworn in as the 11th chief minister of the state on Sunday July 4. Two days ago Tirath Singh Rawat tendered his resignation as he was not able to continue because of constitutional crisis and there was difficulty

in him getting elected through a by-poll. The selection of Dami as CM is considered by political analysts as a BJP gambit since he is the first person from Kumaon to hold the post, while the last two chief ministers were from Garhwal region. There may be other factors for the exit of Rawat from the post. The BJP might not have wanted to take the risk of going into elections under his leadership, as he was inept at handling the bureaucracy and party cadres. Just after taking over he made a few controversial remarks including equating Modi with god which did not go down well with many. This is also believed to be a plan to try and needle Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee as she has to be elected through a by-poll within a few weeks; else she has to vacate her post if the by-poll is delayed.

Yours etc.,  
Muaz Qasmi  
Via email

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

"The dead cannot cry out for justice. It is a duty of the living to do so for them."

— Lois McMaster Bujold

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIII No. 319 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 6, 2021

### Death of justice

ACTIVISM has a price that few are willing to pay. Fr Stan Swamy was willing to pay that price even as he sought justice for the voiceless tribals of this country whose lands and resource were appropriated by powerful corporate forces in an India that is increasingly tending towards crony capitalism. Fr Stan Swamy was an accused in the Bhima Koregaon violence case and arrested from Ranchi on October 9, 2020, although he repeatedly maintained that he never visited the place. Fr Stan was arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and his health had been deteriorating since. Congress MP, Jairam Ramesh has correctly questioned as to who in the apparatus of the Indian state, will be held responsible for the death of Fr Swamy. Ramesh goes on to say that it is the Indian State that killed the Jesuit priest who was a passionate crusader for social justice.

The irony in the country today is that those working to secure justice and land rights for tribals are seen as impediments to the mining lobby and their corporate interests. It is also an irony of nature that the bulk of mineral resources from coal, to aluminium, copper and bauxite etc., are all located in tribal areas. Even the forest cover of this country continues to be maintained by tribals themselves who have co-existed with forests for centuries until the state decided that they were to be evicted from their habitat. It is against these pernicious state laws that Fr Stan Swamy and other human rights activists fought. Unfortunately, they have all been booked for unlawful activities. The question today is what is lawful then. Is it lawful to deprive tribals of their constitutional rights? Is it unlawful to fight for social justice?

Fr Stan Swamy who suffered from Parkinsons and could hardly eat or hold his cup of tea asked for a sipper but even that was denied him by the judiciary. This level of cruelty by a country that calls itself a democracy is unimaginable. This was what a colonial power had done to Indians in the pre-independence era but to think that a country would punish its own citizens in such a cruel manner is a slur on the democratic ethos of India. Clearly there is something fundamentally wrong with a state whose justice system cannot differentiate a social activist from an anarchist. This country proudly showcases the words "Satyameva Jayate," meaning "Truth will prevail." Will that truth matter now, after a person, who by all accounts, has been wrongly incarcerated in prison, dies while still awaiting justice?

No prophet is recognised by the powerful. Prophets are killed because they are a threat to the powerful. That was the message of the Gospel read at masses in Catholic churches on Sunday, July 4, last. Stan Swamy was bearing witness to it on the same day by being critical and he left us today, 5th July, a martyr of the powerful for the cause of justice to the tribal communities.

I have worked with Stan for forty years and have witnessed his commitment to an India of equality, a land in which the tribals, Dalits and women could claim equality. That is the India that the Constitution demands but not the India that the powerful seekers of corporate profit want. So the State that is supposed to uphold the constitutional values but gives priority to the interests of this sector called him anti-national and arrested him. He is one of many persons who paid this price in different ways. Sixteen human rights activists, journalists, intellectuals and social activists are accused of being organisers of the violence at Bhima Koregaon though they have never visited the place and most of them have never met each other. But a conspiracy theory had to be created to push them out of the way. They included committed human rights activists like Sudha Bhardwaj who could have become a rich lawyer but chose to put her legal expertise at the service of the working class. They include journalists like Gautam Navlakha, intellectuals like Varavara Rao and Prof. Sai Baba and a host of others. Common to them is not a conspiracy hatched against the State as the powerful would like us to believe, but work for an inclusive India in which every citizen is equal.

That was the crime of Stan Swamy and he paid for it with his life. During the four decades I have worked with him I have seen him sticking his neck out on behalf of people in the periphery. He was in the middle of the struggle of bonded agricultural labourers in Bangalore in the mid-1970s. In 1978 and many times after it we saw him joining the Dalits at Villupuram and Tanjore and elsewhere demanding their right to be human. In many of these cases the fight was within the church and many of its leaders thought that he was a divisive influence in the Church. But Stan's struggle was for justice to the poor and for an inclusive India in which all people are equal. So he was often disliked even in the Church. But many others

### A prophet is a threat to the powerful

Dr Walter Fernandes

That was not acceptable to the powerful and he was accused of being anti-national. He certainly was anti-national if we want India to be a land

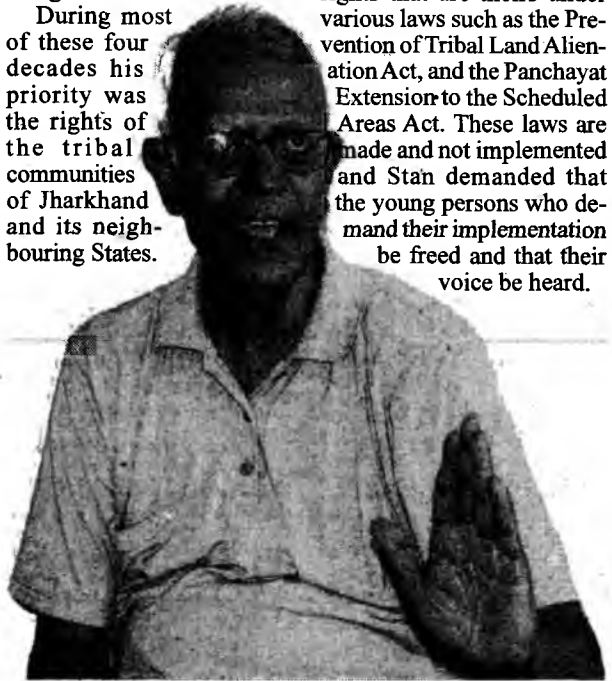
in an inclusive India. Stan is not the first to be punished for joining their peaceful struggle. In October 1995 A. T. Thomas was killed by the dominant farmers in Jharkhand because he joined the struggle of the Dalits for land rights. Some years later Sr Sunita Mary was killed near Indore because she was working for the freedom of the bonded labourers. One can mention many more such persons in India and abroad. In every case they are a threat to people whose riches and power depend on the poverty and cheap labour of the weak. All those who are in jail as urban Naxalites supporting violence in Bhima Koregaon belong to the category of people who stood for the rights of people who are deprived of their liberty in order to ensure the freedom of the powerful to exploit the weak.

"He is one of many persons who paid this price in different ways. Sixteen human rights activists, journalists, intellectuals and social activists are accused of being organisers of the violence at Bhima Koregaon though they have never visited the place and most of them have never met each other."

supported the causes he took up even when they disagreed with him on details. In all these instances Stan insisted on non-violence when many victims of injustice were demanding a violent reaction. Such a person is accused of being a Naxalite.

During most of these four decades his priority was the rights of the tribal communities of Jharkhand and its neighbouring States.

for the profit of a few and the bondage of the majority. He fought for tribal land. He went to the high court seeking the freedom of more than 3,000 tribal young persons of Jharkhand who are jailed because they demanded the rights that are theirs under various laws such as the Prevention of Tribal Land Alienation Act, and the Panchayat Extension to the Scheduled Areas Act. These laws are made and not implemented and Stan demanded that the young persons who demand their implementation be freed and that their voice be heard.



The corporate sector wanted their land and the tribals as cheap bonded labour.

He was arrested a few days before this case came up for hearing in the high

"They include journalists like Gautam Navlakha, intellectuals like Varavara Rao and Prof. Sai Baba and a host of others. Common to them is not a conspiracy hatched against the State as the powerful would like us to believe, but work for an inclusive India in which every citizen is equal."

But Stan wanted them to be citizens of an inclusive India in which they too got the benefits of development and enjoyed democratic rights.

That is the fate of people who fight for the rights of people in the periphery. The powerful cannot accept their demands to be equal citizens

## Cocktail of bungling, arrogance & ignorance

By Maitshaphrang Khongwir

Waste management is a major problem for many urban local municipal bodies in India, where urbanization is taking a toll. Across the country, existing systems for the collection, transportation, and disposal of solid waste are mired in chaos. The problem seems to be higher in urban areas where the rapidly increasing population generates larger quantities of solid waste.

I don't know how many of us in Meghalaya are aware, but the Municipal Solid Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2000 came into force on Sep-

tively handling the disposal of waste which was posing a threat to the people and livelihoods around. What is however alarming is that the Jowai Municipal Board and the Urban Affairs Department both, instead of trying to find effective solutions are doing nothing but taking the easy way out by bringing the waste all the way from Jowai and dumping it at an already exhausted site at the Marten. The dumping of more additional waste by the JMB will only make matters worse for the people living in this area.

While a prominent face,



tember 25, 2000. Subject to various suggestions from the public, various sets of rules were updated in many areas such as proper disposal of plastic, e-waste, biomedical, hazardous, and construction demolition waste management rules. The Government of India later notified and revised the rules in 2016 to the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016.

In Meghalaya, we have different Municipal Boards in various districts whose one of many responsibilities is to look into effective waste disposal and management in the State which is handled by the Urban Affairs Department and Municipal Administration Department, presently under the watch of the cabinet minister, Sniawb-

the MLA of Mawlai Constituency, Process Sawkmie is vocal on this issue, it seems his voice is not being paid heed to. In all of this, it is interesting to see that the Minister in charge of the Urban Affairs Department and Municipal Administration Department, Sniawbhalang Dhar seems to be the least bothered by whatever is happening. It seems he is rather interested in his family business and is waiting for the situation to get critical so that he can compel the Urban Affairs Department to come up with a multi-crore project as an alternative to the current problem at Marten which he then will ultimately award to his kith and kin. This is not the first time that evidence

A famous waste dumping site in Shillong that we all know of is Marten, located at Mawlai-Mawiong. This place is infamously famous for the strong stench that emanates out of this dumping site, a smell that welcomes all who pass by the highway on their way to Shillong and back. I can only wonder what would be the state of those living around this place to have to breathe and take in the toxic waste emanating from Marten.

halang Dhar.

In Shillong, the Shillong Municipal Board caters to the many needs of the citizens, one of which is effective waste management. A famous waste dumping site in Shillong that we all know of is Marten, located at Mawlai-Mawiong. This place is infamously famous for the strong stench that emanates out of this dumping site, a smell that welcomes all who pass by the highway on their way to Shillong and back. I can only wonder what would be the state of those living around this place to have to breathe and take in the toxic waste emanating from Marten. It seems several pleas and requests were made to the Urban Affairs Department to look into the matter, but sadly it has fallen on deaf ears. Everyone knows that the odour and fumes are affecting the health conditions of the people, while the toxic wastes also flow into the Umiam river during rainy seasons. Sadly, the Urban Affairs Minister seems to be the least concerned by whatever is happening around.

What is making headlines at the moment is the recent act of the Jowai Municipal Board (JMB) dumping all of the wastes from Jowai also in Marten. The reason for this seems to be that the KSU and various other localities had protested against dumping of waste in the waste disposal site at Mynkjai which is under the watch of the JHADC, the reason being that the JHADC and staff of the JMB were not effective

of favouritism has emerged against Sniawbhalang as it is alleged that in the year 2015, he had awarded his brother, Rocky Dhar, a Rs 3 crore project while he was still a Congress legislator. Reports are still evident of favouritism towards M/s Dhar Construction Company, a firm for which he influences officials to hand over various projects. He has always been known to have influenced awarding various PWD road projects, and toll-gates to his family members. Maybe this could also be one of the strategies through which another project can be bagged to benefit the Dhars.

As citizens, we elect a representative to look into the issues that concern the public and try to come up with solutions, but it seems for some people the warmth of excessive money blinds them to the plight of their people who are crying out for help. What is the Urban Affairs Minister waiting for? A time for when the Marten has to shut down? But that will happen when its too late and people start to fall ill at the expense of the mismanagement of this Department under his watchful eyes? Or is it waiting for someone to hand them another extra ton of money for them to effect a turnaround that will lead to effectively manage this situation, something that I highly doubt will happen? The incompetence of ministers is not a new thing in our State, but such high-handed incompetence and ignorance is a rare sighting.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Plight of the ordinary citizen

Editor,  
Aren't we the trai shnong (indigenous residents) of Meghalaya, tired of writing endless exams to qualify for a government job? Mostly because clearing the exams and qualifying for the interviews has become a formality one has to adhere to? The limited seats are reserved for those who can shell out bribes or for those with influential connections. Those who can afford to pay have a chance at a secure job. What about those who can't afford the money or those not willing to sell themselves to the influencer? Are these people making a backside entry not robbing those who actually work hard and sacrifice their time to excel in their academics for the promise of a good future?

Such revelations came to light when the CBI probed the 2020 education scam in the state. A handful of MLAs accepted that they did recommend names but refused to accept that these recommendations were wrong. What makes these MLAs think they can rightly add grace points to these special candidates? On what basis were these recommendations made? Does recommending candidates come under the purview of the job descrip-

tion of an MLA? Were the members of the selection committee of such recruitments not competent enough to conclude their own unbiased results? If so, should they not be fired from their posts, all benefits withdrawn and slapped with fines? Why were we not taught about such corrupt behaviours in school? There are always those rare exceptions. No wonder various departments (MeECL for eg.) of the State Govt. under-perform.

Aren't we tired of being bound by laws which apply to everyone else but the higher ups in society? We are fined when we fail to follow the Covid protocols (wearing masks during the pandemic), which is understandable but when the Chief Minister is shown posing for pictures without following protocols would the magistrate dare impose a fine on CM, like she has been doing so on everyone else?

Aren't we tired of hearing about illegal coal mining in Meghalaya? It's impossible for these rat hole mine owners to exploit the environment and people without the Government's blessings. It is more humiliating when the Government blatantly denies about such ongoing activities. Where do the police stand on the matter? Unfortunately, within the framework of the Indian system, the Heads of Police are answerable to the Govern-

ment. Aren't we tired of pressure groups rallying the people only for issues that fit their own political agenda? Lately none of them have come out in opposition of the coal mining issue. I'm sure with their numbers; conducting checks on the illegal transportation of coal from within the State is a doable task. Are they scared of the nexus behind the mining and transport of illegal coal? We rarely hear them advocating for better health, better education or better services from the Government, something we could all benefit from.

Aren't we tired of hearing complaints from the residents of Nongmynsong about the illegal sale of alcohol and the problems that accompany it? Isn't the local MLA of that constituency aware of his people's problems? Are the police in charge of the area blind to the illegal sale of alcohol? Everyone is aware that you alcohol is available in the black market from the stretch where the MeECL's transformer is located right up to the junction that leads to Nongmynsong after the wine stores are closed, till late into the night.

People need livelihoods but should this come at the costs of others' lives? Can't the concerned authorities provide alternative livelihoods for those involved in all such activities? And if the authorities are aware of such illegal activities, why are they not acting? Are

they also benefiting from such activities? I pose these questions to the current MLA of Pynthorumkhrah, who has been in the seat since 1998, not as an attack, but because he is the leader and as such is responsible for the plight of his people.

Rivers and the land are polluted, but why bother when money lines up your pockets? Coal mines could benefit the entire state if executed scientifically. It could generate substantial taxes and employ a big chunk of the population. Alas! the work force is subjected to extreme working conditions. And since it is illegal, the state is losing taxes. Coal extracted in an unscientific way is lethal for the environment and for people who draw sustenance from the land and the rivers. Even coke factories are allowed to go about their business as freely as their money allows. With all this in the background we see the Minister in-charge Forests and Environment Department, Govt. of Meghalaya, smirk on the front page of this daily, extending his (sarcastic?) greetings to the people of the state on World Environment Day. All this while the Govt could so easily renew its pledge to protect the environment. Bro code!

We are in the age of capitalism but this should not come at the expense of the environment and the people. Mother Nature

is called as such because it provides us our basic needs. It is especially sad since we belong to a tribe that once worshipped Nature. Our ancestors so wisely made sacred forests and their efforts gave us these magnificent hills. Now we rape it without a second thought. My older generation has witnessed Wah Umkhrah and other rivers where they once fished from and swam in turn to filthy drains. Should we not do more? Or do we wait till the fog that so majestically blankets these hills we call home, turn to smog?

Just as our inaction before the second Covid wave took loved ones away from many, why wait till people start to lose precious lives due to pollution or heat waves? Why wait till forest fires burn through? We have already lost the once magnificent rains that blessed these hills, why wait till we lose before we act? Let's not forget that we are one with nature. Where will we go if we burn, our own home? Elon Musk might say, "To Mars." Will we all be able to afford such a trip? Mars is still a dream.

I am ashamed of the adult members of my tribe. Not all but those who have taken the easy way out and continue to do so and not only corrupt themselves but corrupt future generations as well. Have you no shame? Most continue to blame the outsider for the plight of the people.

It is you who have sold them our lands and our people. I urge the younger generation to learn from people of different cultures and languages instead of harbouring hate. They have much to teach us if we are open-minded. We should be thankful also to those (so called outsiders) who have contributed much to our people and still do despite being treated as 2nd class citizens of the state.

I write not to judge or ridicule, for I also am human like everyone else and with that come countless flaws. As humans though, being blessed with so many virtues that make us quite different from all other life forms, should we not yearn to leave this world a better place than how we found it?

As the common citizens it is our fault too. We are the ones who empower those who have looted us. Do we continue as we have and let the few dig our graves for us or do we stand our ground and say enough is enough? I wonder though, how we as the people vested with power can actually do something that makes a difference. Can we?

Yours etc.,  
B.A. Jana  
Via email

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

"What colonialism does is cause an identity crisis about one's own culture."

— Lupita Nyong'o

## The Shillong Times

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### Season of change

WITH the second wave of Covid-19 pandemic on the wane. Prime Minister Modi feels it is time to take national interests forward even though the possibility of a third wave is staring at the nation. The reshuffling of governors and some new appointments are seen as a prelude to a bigger step forward by the Modi-led dispensation – namely the long-awaited cabinet expansion. Union minister Thawarchand Gehlot has been shifted to the post of Karnataka governor while the Prime Minister continued his discussions with top BJP leadership to finalize the names of new ministers. The cabinet expansion should take place well before the start of the Monsoon session of Parliament from July 19 so that the new ministers will have time to get acquainted with their ministries should questions be raised.

The Modi government has drawn flak for its failure to catch up with the Covid situation when the previously predicted second wave came calling. This ran parallel with perceptions that the central government has been paralysed by a sense of complacency after the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic. As is well-known, some 30 departments ran without heads for the past two years in the absence of a cabinet expansion. The drift was all too clear, evident also from the way Pakistan came back calling on Jammu with a drone attack in the guise of terrorism. Now, the Modi government is scurrying around to acquire a set of anti-drone laser-guided equipment that could be assembled within the country. The nation's stock would have gone up had it been well-prepared before the first drone attack took place.

While a reshuffle of governors has been executed, the Centre did not warm up to a call from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for recall of Governor Jagdeep Dhankar. This would mean the Modi government would continue with its game of causing friction in West Bengal and the BJP would continue with its Mamata-baiting. All eyes are now on the cabinet reshuffle as those with whom the Prime Minister is interacting on this matter are all characteristically tight-lipped while no word comes out of the horse's own mouth. That has been the style of the PM. On the performance front, the present cabinet as a whole has not risen to people's expectations. While those like Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah and Nitin Gadkari are stalwarts, the same might not be true of several others of the Modi team. What new energy and drive the reshuffle can bring about is worth a wait and watch.

# Why the relic of colonialism persists?

By Albert Thyriani

Last Thursday the NIA court acquitted activist and Jorhat MLA Akhil Gogoi and three others in a sedition case and other charges, thereby setting the peasant leader free. Accused of instigating violence during the anti-CAA protests and of being a 'Maoist' the prominent anti-CAA face in Assam was charged under the 'draconian' Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, (UAPA). The MLA, the first Assamese to get elected to the Assembly while in jail and also the first to take oath while in custody, was cleared of all charges, hugely embarrassing the premier investigating agency.

Speaking to a national television Gogoi termed the NIA a 'joke' while accusing it of being a 'recruiting' agency for the BJP and the RSS. In March last also the then jailed leader 'revealed' that the NIA asked him to join RSS/BJP while insisting he takes home ₹20 crores as a precondition for bail. His refusal led to alleged physical and mental torture in custody. Gogoi's revelations are dynamite.

Gogoi's acquittal is a reiteration that NIA and the sedition law are misused against activists to quell protests and to quieten criticism against the government. Gogoi was arrested in December 2019 only as a "preventive measure" against the background of the deteriorating law and order situation in Assam arising out of the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA). However, his case was handed over to the NIA which charged him with sedition.

Sedition has been used so liberally that the law under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code has lost its sting. Many times the cases look ridiculous. Amulya Leona for example! The 19-year-old student-activist was arrested and booked for sedition in February 2020 for raising 'Pakistan zindabad' slogan on stage while protesting against CAA-NRC in Bengaluru. In July the same year the Manipur activist Erendro Leichombam was charged with sedition merely for posting on Facebook the picture of an acquiescent BJP Rajya Sabha MP and titular king of Manipur, Sarajoba Leishemba's meeting with Union Home Minister, Amit Shah with the caption 'Minai macha' or "son of a servant" in Meitei. In February this year the 22-year-old climate change activist, Disha Ravi was arrested and charged with sedition for a 'toolkit' post supporting the farmer protests in Delhi. At the most the above actions can be termed as inappropriate but certainly do not amount to sedition. Many youths in Jammu and Kashmir are summarily arrested under the remnants of British colonialism.

Sedition cases flared up considerably with the advent of CAB/CAA. Random examples are cited. CAA protests led to 50, 3007 and 60 unnamed persons charged with sedition in FIRs in Mumbai, Jharkhand and Lucknow, respectively. Such was the eagerness of the authorities to brand everyone 'anti-national' thanks to the relic of the British era.

Akhil Gogoi's acquittal is significant. While dismissing the cases against the government adversary, the judge

Maoist activists but they had spent 14 years in prison after they were wrongly sentenced to life imprisonment on sedition charges by a trial court. Just when this piece was about to be mailed, news trickled in that Stan Swamy had passed away. The elderly and ailing Jesuit priest and a tribal activist has to be remembered as an undertrial prisoner jailed for sedition. Those at the helm of affairs know that even if a sedition accused would be declared innocent they would have been

*"In Meghalaya too there were instances where the freedom of speech was attempted to be curtailed. The Supreme Court had to quash the FIR against the editor of this daily for her Facebook post that allegedly had communal content."*

expressed disappointment with the NIA saying much more was expected of the investigation agency. The cases are not even fit to enter the trial stage. It shows that the charges were all trumped up for political reasons, obviously with insufficient evidence. This will have a repercussion on the central government, state governments, the police and the law enforcing agencies. They will be less enthusiastic about charging political rivals and activists who are critical of government's decisions and policies. In these challenging times the right of protests and the freedom of expression gets a fillip. With many beginning to be shattered, the faith in the judiciary is enhanced. The citizens of this great country can still count on the courts to preserve their well cherished fundamental rights. Laws can't be used to intimidate and bring citizens into submission.

Elsewhere too the Indian courts have questioned the use of sedition laws. While granting bail to Disha Ravi the Delhi court had very strong words against the sedition law which it said cannot be invoked to "minister to wounded vanity of the government" while observing that that there was "not even an iota of evidence" against the green activist.

The wrong application of sedition is an intimidatory tactic. A lawyer even dares to state, "The state is terrorising young people by using the law and putting them behind bars" seeing the process itself as a punishment, rather than a trial or a conviction. Akhil Gogoi might have got justice but he had to spend 19 months in jail. Disha Ravi did secure bail but the young activist had to face the ignominy of being arrested. In June 2019 the Calcutta High Court acquitted three alleged

'punished' for the 'crime' of raising their voices.

Way back in 1962 the Supreme Court ruled that sedition means "incitement to violence" or "overthrowing a democratically elected government through violent means." The next year the Apex Court delivered, "Someone's statement criticising the government does not invoke an offence of sedition or defamation." Last week, taking note of the misuse of India's sedition law, the Supreme Court observed, "Everything cannot be seditious" while promising to define "what is sedition and what is not."

Criticism of and disagreeing with the government is not treason. That is why official data show that the conviction rate for sedition is negligible. While the number of cases has increased, conviction rates have dropped drastically. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), between 2016 and 2019 cases under Section 124A (sedition) of IPC increased by a massive 160% while the rate of conviction dropped to a meagre 3.3% in 2019 from 33.3% in 2016.

There is a strong case for abolition of the Sedition law. Violence can be dealt with by other available laws. Enacted in 1860 and introduced in India in 1870 by the British, the law was used to suppress national independence activists including Mahatma Gandhi himself who was found guilty and imprisoned. Post-independence the law was almost dropped from the Constitution in 1948. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru proposed to "get rid of it [Section 124A]" during the debate for the first Amendment of the Constitution in 1951 as the law was singled out in curbing free speech. It is another matter that his daughter, Indira

Gandhi made sedition a cognizable offence for first time in 1973 when arrest without a warrant was legalised.

We boast of India as being the largest democracy in the world. How does democracy survive when free speech and expression is being stifled? How can we claim to be the number one democracy when dissent against government policies is seditious? How can we be so fragile that slogans like 'Pakistan zindabad' or 'Azadi' threaten this mighty nation? How can so many be charged with 'waging war against the nation' just because activists protest against the highly controversial CAA? Common sense does not betray when we say that some of the those charged with sedition like Simranjit Singh Mann, Binavak Sen, author Arundhati Roy, cartoonist Aseem Trivedi, climate activist Disha Ravi, Stan Swamy is unlikely to endanger the unity and integrity of this powerful country. It is surprising that the Modi government, some of whose ministers fought against Emergency of 1975-77, is so zealous in applying the British legacy law. We still hang on to the colonial era law while its originator, the UK abolished the out-dated act twelve years ago (2009) for primarily suppressing the voice of freedom.

In Meghalaya too there were instances where the freedom of speech was attempted to be curtailed. The Supreme Court had to quash the FIR against the editor of this daily for her Facebook post that allegedly had communal content. Surprisingly, even the Meghalaya High Court refused to stand up for free speech in that particular case. This paper was also 'banned' in West Khasi Hills by a pressure group that found a particular report not to its liking.

The Akhil Gogoi verdict may impact Meghalaya too. To add to the frustration of the West Bengal results Gogoi's freedom might have upset the second in command in the NDA government. Developments in the neighbouring state may further delay the ILP resolution. The minister may now employ more procrastination tactics to avoid dealing with the ILP demand. The promises to return to the state capital will continue to be broken thus evading dealing with the question head on.

Given that the present government is pro-sedition, it is unlikely that Section 124A will be scrapped any time soon. However, the law should be used sparingly. Hope the Supreme Court soon defines sedition in clear terms leaving no room for any abuse or misuse.

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## A lot else died with Fr Stan Swamy

By Jagdish Rattanani

Fr Stan Swamy has died. He has found peace and eternal rest and has at last been freed of the tyranny unleashed on him by a hate-filled power machinery that thinks the only way to silence resistance is to lock up people, to browbeat them with the might of the State and to try and break them into submission. The nation can never forget that an octogenarian, peace-loving activist, who devoted years working for tribals in Jharkhand, who lived a simple life and stood up for what he thought was right, has died after spending nine months in jail as an undertrial, with poor medical attention that led him to suffer from Covid-19 and brought on a deterioration in his health. He was later shifted to the Holy Family Hospital in Mumbai from the Taloja Central jail and died on a ventilator at the hospital on July 5, only hours before another hearing on his bail application was scheduled to come up in the Bombay High Court.

This is a case that will remain a blot on the police team that investigated it,

press and space for diverse and dissenting voices.

In other ways, Fr Stan Swamy by going through the suffering he did may have even served us in his last days. For one, his case will never be forgotten. It must be and will be studied, recounted and discussed again and again across schools and colleges, civil society institutions, in our courses on law and politics, in our training manuals for the police and the judiciary. It must stand out as the case that lowered India like never before. It will keep telling us that 'Emergency' was not a one-off – that this danger and the danger of it getting worse is ever present, only on the edge, waiting to snatch away a young nation and its aspirations to standing tall for its values and its constitutional guarantees in the comity of nations.

The case also highlights the tyranny of the Unlawful (Activities) Prevention Act, the UAPA, and the way the law is being applied in cases that are related to anything but terrorism. As has been well reported, Swamy's ar-



rest was based on seizure of electronic records from his computer. Fr Swamy himself asked many questions on the material so seized. He never received any replies to those simple questions. He was never present at the site that led to what has come to be called the Elgar Parishad case. Yet, he became the 16th activist to be arrested in the case, and was accused by the NIA of being involved in the activities of the banned CPI (Maoist) organization, and had allegedly received funds through an associate for furthering Maoist agenda.

But for so many who knew the person and his work, Fr Swamy stood out as a picture of service. Even if we take the extreme prosecution case and assume that the charges carried any merit, there was no justification for keeping an ailing grandfatherly figure behind bars for so long; there was nowhere he would run or escape. There was nothing he could keep or hide. Fr Swamy could not walk well; he could not hear; he reportedly fell in jail. His condition deteriorated while he was behind bars.

A case as shameful as this may yet become a lightning rod and allow the nation to see where we have landed. There are many who will still not be able to see this fall. In an India divided, every attempt is being made to break the nation, to divide between "them" and "us". More such attempts may follow the passing of Fr Stan Swamy. It is becoming easier to see these attempts. Yet, these divisions will continue to take their toll before they halt. Till these prejudices are not seen and called out, and brought to a halt and the guilty brought to book, India will continue to bleed.

In many ways, Fr Stan Swamy's suffering reflected the suffering of the people of India. His case represents the crossing of all boundaries of sanity and sense, and signals that India is in territory it has not seen before. A hate filled dagger has been drawn deep into the heart of India and all that the nation stood for – democracy, secularism, a free

### Letters to the Editor

#### Kudos Health Department!

Editor,  
Through your esteemed paper, I would like to express my gratitude to the Health Department for their endless efforts especially during this pandemic. Calls had been coming in from them just a few hours after I was tested positive for Covid 19. Symptoms were mild so I was in home isolation. It was on the second day that they visited me and provided me with an Isolation Kit which consisted of an Oximeter which costs Rs 3999, a thermometer which costs Rs 355, masks and a sanitizer - all for free! They never failed to call me every day, sometimes thrice a day till the end of my quarantine period closely monitoring my health. The concerned people were very cordial and never failed to wish me a speedy recovery. Strange that under such circumstances, one of the callers on the last day turned out to be an acquaintance from college who I had not met in more than a decade. It felt wonderful but most of all, I would like to say THANK

YOU to all of you for the encouraging words and for keeping all of us afloat.

Yours etc.  
D. Lyngdoh,  
Vie email

#### No bureaucrat is an island

Editor,  
I take this opportunity to write here regarding my experiences in working with a particular official within the Meghalaya Government. As I am under their immediate supervision I must speak as an anonymous source. In addition, rules of service won't allow me to speak out openly. With this in mind, I will begin.

When it comes to the current crop of IAS officers there is no one who has been given more importance and favour than Dr Vijay Kumar Damara. A little while ago his name made the rounds because of some allegations levied against him and his wife. Frankly those allegations as they appeared in your esteemed newspaper were not warranted and were easily dismissed by the officials. Its accusations of

favouritism by Dr Vijay towards his own wife's firm Dalberg did not match with the actual sequence of events as they played out. However we must raise some objections regarding the manner in which Dr Vijay works. All of us in his staff have a very clear idea about how many responsibilities he has on his shoulders. However it is a disservice to the government and state to heap so much power onto one mere mortal. Oftentimes his subordinates have to wait for hours before he can see us. On top of that he might not remember the work which we were assigned to carry out. This is disheartening to say the very least. The person is too busy that he needs to refresh all the time. It is not smart to heap so much work onto this one person. Why can't other IAS officers be trusted with their departments? There is a very clear indication that Dr Vijay is the favoured ally of the CM.

The other worrying thing which we must raise is how Dr Vijay manages his departments. In effect he is the department. Because of his positive position in the eyes of the political masters he has taken tremendous liber-

ties in consolidating power in his hands. Case in point Planning and Finance departments are both headed by Dr Vijay and since this is the case he has channelled vital resources into projects which he has felt most strongly about – Tourism for instance – which might not be in the best interests of the majority of the population. He has also mostly directed funding away from the Finance department and they receive second hand knowledge after the needs of Meghalaya Basin Development Agency (MBDA) – which he heads – have been tended to first.

MBDA might I remind the reader is an exclusively bureaucratic agency with no political interference. While this makes it an attractive prospect it must be remembered that it is opaque and without any known levers of accountability, a fact which numerous MLAs have highlighted during Assembly sessions. MBDA and its subsidiaries today function as a parallel government oftentimes surpassing its democratically appointed counterpart in significance. However the main point here is how successful it has been in its work and how

beneficial it has been to the population of the state. In this last instance, we would have to say that the jury is still out on that.

Dr Vijay is energetic, youthful and highly competent. He is also a likable person on occasions. While it is true that most bureaucrats are lackadaisical, it would be a dangerous mistake to entrust complete control onto one person. His recent attempts at creating a private Tourism company, namely Meghalayan Age Limited (MAL) is a bold move but it is fast becoming a parallel PWD but with no real mechanisms for transparency again. Positions are created on the fly and appointments are just done on the spot with no known criteria. MBDA is also overstretching itself dangerously into the fields of other departments, trying to do their work as well. This has led to a situation whereby the agency no sooner starts one project than it immediately seeks funding for another new one. The result has been numerous incomplete projects with no real substantial success with any of them.

Dr Vijay seems set on re-inventing the idea of what it

means to be a bureaucrat. He is trying to initiate a number of glamorous projects in Tourism and Entrepreneurship but the truth is that being an official should not be glamorous at all. It is a boring and oftentimes thankless job but many good bureaucrats work in their quiet and nondescript ways within various departments. Recently Dr Vijay was given the Agriculture portfolio which will be a real test of his abilities. Will the department thrive or will it flounder under his watch? And if it does fail, what will happen to the thousands who depend on it directly? The thought is nerve wracking. We hope that by stating these facts it would serve as a positive criticism for Dr Vijay to introspect and we hope he takes it in stride as he does course correction.

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*

*"Confidence isn't optimism or pessimism, and it's not a character attribute. It's the expectation of a positive outcome."*

— Rosabeth Moss Kanter

## The Shillong Times

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### New faces, new expectations

PRIME Minister Modi effected a major cabinet reshuffle on Wednesday. Prominent faces that have been dropped included Health Minister, Harsh Vardhan, Environment and I&PR Minister Prakash Javadekar and Ravishankar Prasad, Minister for Information Technology etc. In all 12 senior ministers are out. In a major social engineering exercise Modi has brought in 27 ministers from the OBC, 12 each from SC and ST. The average age of the present ministry has come down to 58. Hence this is also a major overhaul with an eye on 2024. As a commentator correctly stated this new ministry is more about politics and less about governance. It also is an attempt at perception management wherein non-performers have been dropped to make way for new faces who Modi expects will perform better than their predecessors.

The new Government will have 15 new cabinet ministers and 28 ministers of state with seven more women added to the Ministry. Health Minister Harsh Vardhan was removed for his inept handling of Covid-2.0 what with the crisis in oxygen management and cremation among others. The new Ministry with 43 new faces is a mega makeover. This is also Modi's big leap as it's not easy to remove senior ministers but Modi has done it keeping in view the need to repair the crisis of credibility his Government has suffered in the past year since Covid struck. What will matter is also the allocation of portfolios. Who gets what and how the person handles his/her portfolio is crucial for the image of the Government. What is also important is the agenda setting of the new Ministry. Delivery on healthcare services, education and economic relief are crucial during and after the pandemic and these need careful handling. Indeed, these will be addressed by changing the current way of doing things and will require an annual review so that they lend themselves to course correction. For instance, Health and Chemicals will now be held by a single minister. This is to address the lacunae experienced during the pandemic when the crisis to procure oxygen led to unnecessary deaths.

Whether the new government is simply a makeover of politics or a governance makeover remains to be seen. But there is certainly an influx of talent and more intellectual heft in this new dispensation and better regional representation as well. In the last Ministry, Urban Development and Civil Aviation could not make much headway. A change of faces in these ministries will boost productivity and get the Modi Government election ready in 2024. This after all is the ultimate goal.

# Pawan Kishor: In search of a game plan

By Rajdeep Sardesai

Chanakya may have lived in the fourth century BC but he keeps getting re-discovered in the twenty-first century. This relentless search for a modern-day Chanakya has seen union home minister Amit Shah being projected as his contemporary avatar when the BJP leader was helming the party to a series of election successes even though there is much more to the Arthashastra than a 'power at all costs' mantra. Now, post his Bengal triumph, Prashant Kishor, the Trinamool Congress's prime election strategist has been portrayed as a political Chanakya. Which might partly explain the buzz around the three meetings Kishor has held with Maharashtra leader Sharad Pawar. Is there a plan to craft a new political alternative that could challenge a Narendra Modi-led BJP in 2024?

a strange political animal that keeps getting exhumed just when it appears on the verge of extinction. In the mid-1990s, when a non-BJP, non-Congress United Front government was created, former prime minister VP Singh who was an architect of this model, remarked, "The third front may seem undesirable but it is inevitable."

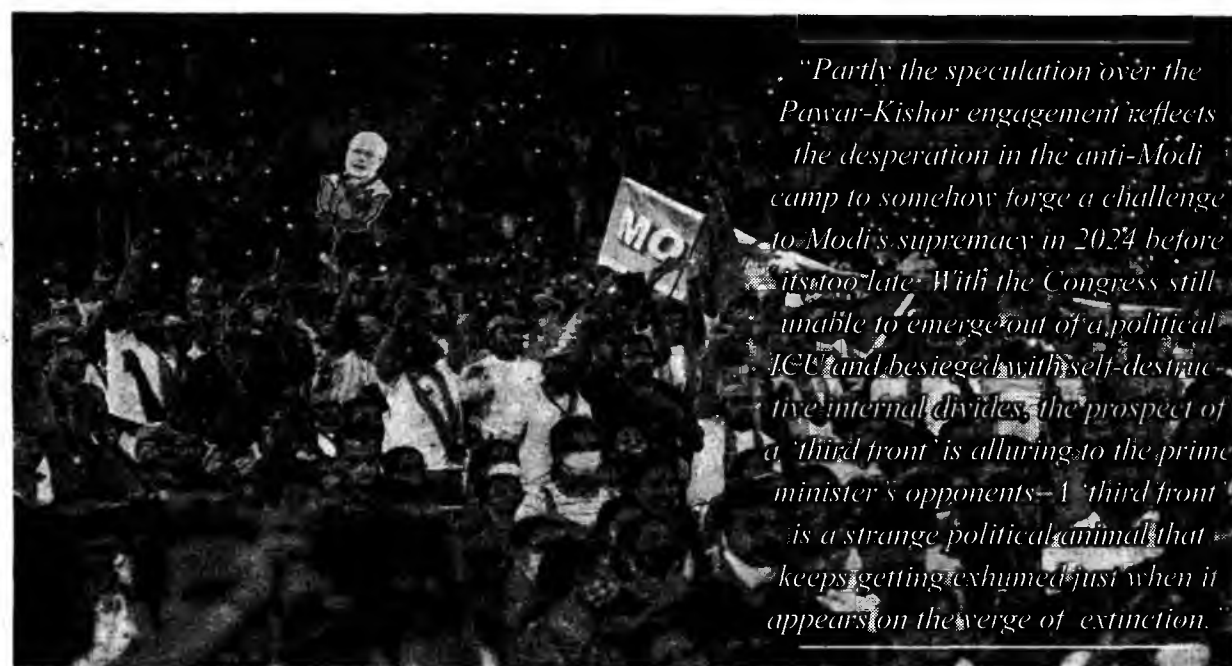
Singh's one-liner was a reflection of the turbulent decade of the 1990s when India saw half a dozen prime ministers and eight governments in office. This was a period when the BJP was slowly rising as a national party of significance and the Congress was gradually retreating. The vacuum was filled by a range of ambitious leaders and their jelly-like political alliances that were

regional political forces that exemplify cultural-linguistic pride and refuse to be drawn into the BJP's homogenised Hindutva nationalism embrace. It is bringing together these forces on a platform of regional assertiveness that remains an attractive option for the proponents of a political alternative to Modi Raj, not necessarily as a pan-India federal front but more as a 'localised' option to the BJP.

This is however easier said than done. In the first instance, the regional parties often have sharply conflicting interests with their home turf rivals. A Jagan Reddy and a Chandrababu Naidu won't break bread, the Trinamool and the left will not share a common dais, Akhilesh Yadav and Mayawati have zero

Maharashtra but would the party be similarly accommodative and share space with an Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi party in Delhi, Goa or Punjab? Or is AAP still viewed with suspicion and hostility as a fierce competitor for the Congress vote? Would the Congress dare choose between a Kejriwal and a BJP as to who is their enemy number one?

Moreover, there remains the vexed question of who will lead an opposition front in a 'national' election. As elections in a media saturated universe acquire a presidential character, leadership becomes central to making credible political choices. In 2019 for example, a last minute attempt to stitch together a united opposition ran into a roadblock with the Congress pitching Rahul Gandhi as its prime ministerial face. The choice at the time before the



*"Partly the speculation over the Pawar-Kishor engagement reflects the desperation in the anti-Modi camp to somehow forge a challenge to Modi's supremacy in 2024 before it's too late. With the Congress still unable to emerge out of a political ICU and besieged with self-destructive internal divides, the prospect of a 'third front' is alluring to the prime minister's opponents— a 'third front' is a strange political animal that keeps getting exhumed just when it appears on the verge of extinction."*

Pawar and Kishor make a rather odd couple. The veteran Maratha strongman is a well-networked mass connect politician, far more comfortable in engaging with the widest possible cross-section of people, from agriculturists to industrialists. Kishor, on the other hand, is a tech-savvy backroom operator who talks surveys and numbers. If there is one thing that unites the 80 year old politician and the 44 year old tactician, it is the scent of power. Pawar has smelt it for decades, Kishor has had a whiff of it for the last few years. So is there more to this emerging partnership than meets the eye?

Partly the speculation over the Pawar-Kishor engagement reflects the desperation in the anti-Modi camp to somehow forge a challenge to Modi's supremacy in 2024 before it's too late. With the Congress still unable to emerge out of a political ICU and besieged with self-destructive internal divides, the prospect of a 'third front' is alluring to the prime minister's opponents. A 'third front' is

forged out of a mix of anti-BJPism or anti-Congress sentiment or just rank opportunism. Today's India is vastly different, and has less of an appetite for short-lived governments, racked by chaos and instability. Under Modi's leadership, the BJP is now a dominant party that has won two successive national majorities while the Congress has shrunk even further. There is only one principle pole in Indian politics that has the cadre, the resources and the machine to monopolise the electoral system. Political alignments in the foreseeable future will therefore be shaped by either pro or anti Modi-BJP politics.

This is why the idea of a cohesive third front is a non-starter in today's saffron-hued political milieu. What is still a possibility, however, is a wider coalition of political interests who are terrified at the prospect of the country becoming a single party, one person democracy. As the recent assembly election results showed, the BJP can still be challenged by

chemistry. Regional satraps often seek their worst enemies in their own backyard. Other regional parties like Naveen Patnaik's Biju Janata Dal or K Chandrashekar Rao's Telangana Rashtra Samiti would also prefer a working relationship with a strong Centre than get tied into an ideological war with the Modi government.

More crucially, no such wider alliance can work at a national level without the Congress being an integral pivot of it. In the 2019 elections, when the Congress had its worst ever Lok Sabha performance, it still won 19.5 percent vote share; the next highest opposition party was the DMK with four per cent vote share. As the pragmatic Pawar has acknowledged, there can be no new opposition 'front' without Congress involvement. In effect, he is calling on the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi experiment to be scaled up nationally, a difficult if not impossible task given the ground realities. The Congress is in government with the Shiv Sena in

opposition was stark: was the aim to try and defeat Narendra Modi or accept Rahul Gandhi as their leader? In a sense, the dilemma persists: does the opposition wish to challenge Modi in a presidential-style race by projecting an individual leader as his alternate or else build state-wise coalitions across 543 constituencies. Until this key question is resolved, opposition unity will remain elusive.

Post-script: While the opposition struggles to come up with a concerted strategy to challenge Modi in 2024, there is a more intriguing contest ahead that may offer pointers to the future. The Presidential elections are scheduled for July 2022 and here the numbers game could be tighter depending on the outcome of next year's Uttar Pradesh polls. While Pawar may have given up on his prime ministerial ambitions, Rashtrapati Bhavan could be a tantalizing goal with Kishor as his advisor. Watch this space.

*(The writer is a senior journalist and author. Mail: rajdeepsardesai52@gmail.com)*

## Village institutions lead in Covid-19 response

By Gratia E Dkhar & Naphishisha Nongsiej

Meghalaya has managed to avert high casualties in the first Covid wave. But the state that maintained low positivity rate soon saw a rapid surge in cases and by April 29, 2021 the state had registered a caseload of 16,617. The steep rise in infection and deaths revealed that the second Covid wave would be more severe than the first. This time around, the disease began spreading into the hinterland where medical infrastructure is scarce. Of the many villages that had to bear the brunt of the second wave was Khweng, in Bhoirybong block, Ri Bhoi District.

The residents of Khweng were coming to terms with the loss of two of their elderly knowledge holders, when on April 29 they received news of an attendee at one of the funerals having tested Covid positive. In about 14 days over 130 active cases were registered, an alarming surge for a village that has only about 114 households, indicating community transmission. The Deputy Commissioner, Ri Bhoi had then declared Khweng and the adjacent village of Liarsluid as a containment zone. With many of the members of the village Covid Committee also testing positive, the two villages immediately formed a 10-member Joint Committee to tackle the virus.

With the high possibility of community transmission, the Committee working closely with the Community Health Centre (CHC) in Bhoirybong requested all households to self-isolate themselves for a period as determined by the health department. The Committee made sure that correct information related to the virus, signs and symptoms, precautions and management were disseminated to people. To avoid any panic, the Committee urged its residents to dispel myths and rumours received from unvalidated sources. Daily public announcements and making regular rounds of the village also came handy in treating those showing Covid symptoms.

Since widespread testing was essential to monitor and reduce viral transmission the Covid Committee, together with the CHC, organised a point-of-care testing in an open field in Liarsluid. The high turn-out of villagers from Khweng and Liarsluid for the voluntary screening helped in early identification of the infected households. Over 1000 community members including adolescents and children were part of the screening. With frequent testing and contact tracing, identification of infected individuals, secondary contacts and isolation was made possible. Secondary exposed individuals were quarantined before they could infect others, thereby preventing further onward transmission of the virus.

The Covid infected individuals were advised home quarantine due to lack of designated care centres and quarantine centre in Bhoirybong cluster. The community hall was used as a quarantine centre during the first wave but was discontinued as it lacked basic facilities and inadequate financial support to maintain the centres. In some cases, individual homes were turned into quarantine rooms and the unaffected members were shifted to homes of close relatives who had tested negative. Home quarantine proved to be the biggest challenge as most families lived in shared accommodation with limited rooms, using a common kitchen, bathroom and toilet, making it impossible to maintain social distance. Though home quarantine has helped in halting the spread to other households in the community, it also saw rapid spread within households, where in some cases all family members of primary contacts contracted the virus within days.

To contain the spread, a review meeting of North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society (NES-FAS) was held with the Covid Committee where it was agreed that setting up a quarantine facility was imperative. NESFAS-REC (Rural Electrification Corporation) Foundation with CHC supported the setting up of quarantine centres at the Khweng Community Hall, Khweng Lower and Primary School and the Liarsluid LP School with a total capacity of 40 beds. Basic facilities like lighting, beds, mosquito nets, water, sanitation and food were arranged for the facility. NESFAS provided the Committee with Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs). Four portable oxygen concentrators were donated to the CHC to address medical emergencies. Random testing was conducted where 18 new cases were reported and were subsequently shifted to the quarantine facility in the presence Dr. T. Sutnga, Medical and Health Officer, CHC, Bhoirybong. The rate of positivity drastically dropped once the patients were isolated in the quarantine centre.

Declaring the area as a containment zone coincided with the sowing month, leaving the residents anxious as they were dependent on farming. Livelihood activities were hampered and food security was at risk. Villagers were worried about making ends meet. To tackle this problem, the Committee identified families likely to be deeply affected by the pandemic. Households in the community came forward to support those vulnerable families who have lost their sources of income. The MLA, Mr George B Lyngdoh (Umroi Constituency), the MDC, neighbouring villages, well wishers and organisations like World Vision also extended support to the communities with essential commodities that helped households tide over the period of confinement. The MLA was part of several meetings of the Covid team and the Health Department that took key decisions for managing the spread of the pandemic.

All these efforts bore fruit and the village was restored to a green zone with zero active case by June 8, 2021. The village recorded a total of 137 cases and a single casualty. Mr Anestor Diengdoh, secretary of Khweng and member of the Covid Committee said that the initial rise in number of cases overwhelmed them but the Covid Committee was determined to win over the virus and some of the key decisions and measures taken proved effective.

Recognising that the third wave is looming the Covid Committee whose efforts were widely acknowledged by the Deputy Commissioner has recommended aggressive awareness campaigns on vaccination to dispel misinformation and rumours which are the main cause of vaccine hesitancy among rural communities. Half of the elderly population (above 45 years) in Khweng had received the vaccination prior to the incident. It was found that those who had received the dose recovered faster and displayed milder symptoms. The Committee also urged that every village should be supported to maintain a quarantine centre as home isolation in many households would be challenging and would contribute to uncontrollable surge in COVID-19 cases.

Apart from efforts to ramp up infrastructure at the grassroots level the experiences have demonstrated the vulnerabilities of communities to access adequate food. This calls for households and communities to reflect and rethink measures to strengthen their food security. This can begin with inculcating the age old habit of saving resources for emergencies and to strengthen the indigenous food system for increased productivity.

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*(Naphishisha Nongsiej is Field Coordinator, NESFAS and can be reached at naphi.nesfas@gmail.com)*

### Letters to the Editor

#### Stop the frivolous charges

Editor,  
With reference to another effort by Mr Roben Chyrmang vide his letter "Unconvincing riposte" (ST July 6, 2021), it is better he stops pretending to be the saviour of the poor and also stops making derogatory comments about our online portals like HIKAI. Anyone can see through the game he is up to. Chyrmang writes that he is "primarily concerned with the plight of poor students," and feels that as "no tab has been given to students" this clearly "proves the ineptitude of the school authorities." "Mere availability of an online free portal" is inconsequential to him. But he cannot refrain from passing uncharitable remarks on a good initiative like HIKAI. Hence a few clarifications are in place.

Chyrmang tries to belittle our online efforts as he feels, "there are many learning apps available on the internet". How much does it cost Chyrmang to access these so-called well-designed apps by "well-known professionals"? Also, do show us one app where the teaching-learning is structured as per the MBOSE pattern, suitable to our State syllabus? Internet, at best is an overload of information enough to confuse even mature persons and loaded with commercial ads waiting to prey on innocent minds. But that does not concern this person. And is there internet connectivity in the interior parts of our State to espouse these net-based solutions to our children?

As far as the issue of appointment of head teacher is concerned we have parent bodies and parents' representatives in our Managing Committee to take up their grievances. Chyrmang is neither a parent nor a member of our Managing Committee, so he should refrain from

trying to be the knight in shining armour for the poor. As far as my appointment is concerned, please note that it was endorsed by the Managing Committee vide its meeting held on September 12, 2020 under Agenda 06.

It appears that Chyrmang is a front for people who are drumming up support by raising frivolous issues to bring a bad name to the RK Mission and to gain control of its MC. Such people have also moved court by forwarding their version of the Managing Committee for the School. As the matter is now sub-judice, wisdom demands that the matter be left to be considered by the court of law. We request this esteemed paper to allow the law to take its own course and not to publish letters that are aimed at creating confusion on various pretexts.

Yours etc.,  
Amaresh Chakraborty HT  
(i/c), RKM LP/UP  
School, Umsosun,  
Via email

#### Victim of a perverse system

Editor,  
Fr Stan Swamy's demise has left a vacuum in the lives of the downtrodden and the oppressed. Fr Stan fought all his life for the marginalised and the underprivileged. He died in the most inhuman conditions that expose travesty of justice and an insensitive system. He was put on a horrific trial. It is agonising to learn that a very old man suffering from Parkinson's disease was denied even a straw to drink water. It is shocking to know that the system did not pay heed to the fact that Fr Stan had severe hearing problem, had been operated on for hernia and was suffering from frequent abdominal pain. It is ironic that courts which are supposed to be the custodians

of justice, failed to understand the plight of an old man. Even though his health deteriorated day by day, he was denied bail or any sympathy.

He had to spend several months in jail under unproven charges. He was robbed of his basic rights of living. It exposes the vengeful attitude of the system. It is shocking to know that even when his end was near, he was still on trial for medical bail. It is a fact that Fr Stan's demise has brought disgrace to a failed system. It has left an indelible blot on an insensitive and unsympathetic system. The fact that he boldly denied all the imaginary charges levelled against him brings a ray of hope to the marginalised and those deprived of their rights.

The sufferings that Fr Stan endured and his tragic death expose the ugly side of our laws. Fr Stan's detention and death

has brought disgrace to the entire nation and humanity. Those who are responsible for his sufferings and death must be identified and accountability must be fixed. His death calls for introspection. He could not have imagined that he would have to sacrifice his life in the fight against injustice. In Fr Stan's death a martyr has emerged. Let's hope the tragic death of Fr Stan changes the unsympathetic and insensitive system. We need a system that will never deny basic human rights to common citizens, a system that will never threaten their existence by trapping them with laws.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS  
Kollam

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

*"We draw our strength from the very despair in which we have been forced to live. We shall endure."*

— Cesar Chavez

**The Shillong Times**

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**NDA focus on Covid, farms**

TWO principal pushes have been announced at the first meeting of the revamped Union Council of Ministers on Thursday, namely to form a Rs 23,123 crore package to address serious inadequacies in the health care sector and, two, a promise to farmers that a budgeted Rs 1 lakh crore infrastructure fund could be used via the Agriculture Produce Market Committees (APMCs) by way of loans and interest waivers. Both are major commitments. The package for the health care sector would take care of requirements regarding additional creation of ICU beds, medicines and manpower at a time when a third wave of the pandemic is looming large. The plans must be framed fast and implementation done in right earnest. Else, the purpose of earmarking such a huge fund could remain on paper and damage would already have been inflicted on lives across the nation.

A lot of money has been injected into the various sectors of the economy since March last by way of multiple packages announced by the Union Finance Ministry. Whether this has helped the ordinary folks at the ground level needs to be ascertained. The usual practice here is that the high and mighty with direct links with the ruling establishment would pocket such funds. Play of vested interests is such that the common man will continue to groan under the impact of seasonal tragedies that befall the nation. It is important that the government introduces proper mechanisms to check and monitor how the valuable funds and packages announced for various sectors are being utilized and to what extent the purposes are served.

The offer to farmers is with a view to helping end the present farmers' agitation at the border regions of Delhi. If farmers are provided with more funds and facilities, they will be fine. After all, they produce our food with their sweat. Some 80 per cent of those who are engaged in agricultural production are small and medium farmers. Care must principally go to them. However, the affluent farmers from Punjab and Haryana, the main beneficiaries of the Green Revolution, are in the forefront of the ongoing agitation demanding that the Modi government fully withdraw the farm reform legislations brought out last year in the form of the much-awaited agricultural reforms. Farmers in other states are not involved in the agitation in any significant way. Some leftist outfits too are fishing in the troubled waters. It is important that funds from the Centre to the agriculture sector should principally benefit the small and medium farmers.

**Government, MLA, ADCs, Dorbar Shnong & Community**  
**Where's the connection?**

By Patricia Mukhim

On Thursday the UNICEF organised a meeting where the Joint Secretary Health, Government of India, Lav Agarwal, briefed media personnel of India's North East on Covid 19 and its implication for the region. Agarwal did not hide the reason for the interface. Government of India is worried and rightly so that while cases in the rest of India have come down, in the North East infection rates are high in most states and so too the death rates. The question is why this? Amongst other reasons for the rise in infection, which is carelessness about adopting Covid Appropriate Behavior (CAB), Agarwal also explained to media personnel the reasons for vaccine hesitancy - a topic we are well aware of and dealing with on a daily basis. Reasons for vaccine hesitancy can be attributed to WhatsApp which has become the source of all information during the lockdown when people have time on their hands.

From stories about the vaccine causing high magnetic flow to other social and religious reasons people have been fed with myths galore. Those entrusted with countering this misinformation, are, however not equipped with social communication skills. People are more inclined to listen to a volunteer or social communicator from the village/locality that they look up to and trust. With due apologies to doctors, when they communicate they do so from a position of one having superior knowledge and can rarely come down to the level of the common person. That's also because doctors are not trained in social communication which isn't so simple. Behavioral change requires training in behavioural science. Only then can we understand what triggers people's mistrust of a certain government policy or government promoted action such as vaccination. Researchers will admit that people will believe what they want to believe and will argue for that belief till they are blue in the face. This is confirmation bias. There is also fear of the vaccine reaction and messages that in vaccine would cause infertility or cause death within two years.

It would have been easier to dispel myths and fears if the Dorbar Shnong - the institution closest to the people - were to take it upon themselves to convince people to be vaccinated. But this is only happening in some villages and localities and not in others. The Dorbar Shnong have always touted that they work voluntarily (trei mon sngewbha) and are not paid

for their work. Yet they spend quality time from the early morning hours to announce to their residents all the notifications released by the respective Deputy Commissioner each day. They announce the locations where vaccines are to be given and also exhort people to get vaccinated. They remind residents about Covid protocols and urge them to maintain physical distancing.

The only responsibility that the Dorbar Shnong did not take up this time when the second wave hit the State was to set up institutional quarantine centres within the Shnong for those testing positive but are asymptomatic and those returning

are the sources of revenue of the Dorbar Shnong? Other than what the residents pay for services such as water supply and garbage collection, residents don't pay any taxes in the areas beyond the Shillong municipality. The taxes paid by residents within a Municipality go to the Government coffers and are used to sustain the Municipal boards.

The Dorbar Shnong cannot access government funds because they do not tick the boxes that the PRIs do. The PRIs are formally elected, constitutional bodies; the Dorbar Shnong do not fall under any formal constitutional framework. In the Sixth Schedule of

*"From stories about the vaccine causing high magnetic flow to other social and religious reasons people have been fed with myths galore. Those entrusted with countering this misinformation, are, however not equipped with social communication skills. People are more inclined to listen to a volunteer or social communicator from the village/locality that they look up to and trust."*

from Covid zones across the country. Every returnee should have been treated as a potential carrier of the Covid virus even if tested negative at Umling. Considering it takes about 48 hours for the RT-PCR test results to arrive, those testing Covid positive would have already spread the virus to their family members and the friends they meet. Ideally every returnee should have been told to go to a Corona Care Centre to await the results and to remain in that Centre for at least 10 days. But this did not happen because the edifice of trust and cooperation between the Dorbar Shnong and the District Administration had eroded and there was no one to repair that fracture by the time the second wave hit us. And this is the point of contention here!

In the rest of the country where the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are in place and elections to these local bodies are regularly conducted, they are empowered to administer and manage the health centres at the grass roots level amongst other governance responsibilities assigned to them. The PRIs are also provided with adequate funding for development and administrative responsibilities. That is not the case with the Dorbar Shnong although the office bearers are also elected, albeit by voice vote. So what

the Constitution, the roles and functions of the Dorbar Shnong are not spelt out. Hence each Dorbar is guided by its own Constitution and no two Dorbar Shnong have a similar Constitution. It is to bring uniformity in the functioning of the Dorbar Shnong that the Village Administration Bill (VAB) was framed by the District Councils. But whereas the VAB of the Jaintia Hills District Council was passed by the Governor, that of the Khasi Hills and Garo Hills District Councils are still hanging fire for reasons best known to successive Governors. This leaves the Dorbars in a limbo and poses huge governance bottlenecks.

The Dorbar Shnong being the go-to institution that people rely on for most of their needs and the only link between the Government and the people, a time has come for the Centre to grant them the same stature as PRIs. It has to be noted that the District Councils do not fulfill the role of a peoples' institution because they have never been able to mobilize isolation/quarantine centres under respective Dorbar Shnong. The pandemic has revealed the chinks in the armour. The Dorbar Shnong must realise that they are dealing with modern problems and drop that "traditional" word before institution. The Dor-

bar Shnong is a governance mechanism which can work well if it coordinates with the Block Development Officer (BDO), but as an equal and not as subordinate of the BDO. The BDO's office could be the connecting link between the Dorbars and the respective Deputy Commissioner's office.

The fact is also that the Dorbar Shnong do not know where exactly they figure in the hierarchy of governance. On the one hand they are averse to being under the government; on the other hand they are already implementing the MNREGA scheme. The Dorbar Shnong are also not accountable to any authority. Although they derive their mandate (sanad) from the respective Syiems one has never heard the Syiem calling out a Dorbar Shnong for any act of omission and commission. It has been the judiciary that has pulled the reins on the arbitrary acts of some Dorbar Shnong. So where exactly do the Dorbar Shnong figure in this governance hierarchy because they also do not want to be part of the District Councils?

I am raising this topic because we will be facing the third Covid wave sooner than later. If we don't have an approach to handling this wave by providing institutional quarantine centres under each Dorbar Shnong which will also create a system whereby those under quarantine are supervised, then we may have high infection rates yet again. The meals and the meal times as also the ambience have to be such that the inmates will not want to escape from and run home.

Let's admit that the very idea of 'home quarantine' was a fatal flaw that cannot be repeated. Institutional quarantine which is partly payable by the inmates is the way forward. During the first wave some of the inmates at Corona Care Centres called to say that their lunch was served at 4 pm and their dinner close to midnight. These faultlines have to be addressed.

And what about the role of the MLA as one of the connecting pillars between the people, the Dorbar and the Government. Why didn't the MLAs come forward to facilitate a system where all those vested with authority by the people sit across the table and discuss strategies to meet the pandemic exigencies. How the MLAs have dealt with pandemic will determine whether they are re-elected in 2023. So they better get busy not just providing rations and meals to their constituents but also in ensuring that the institutions of governance at all levels are better connected.

**Land of indigenous tribes converted to reserved forests in Manipur**

By TS Haokip

Amidst the calamitous onslaught of the second wave of Covid-19 in the state, where hundreds have died, thousands have been affected by the disease and tens of thousands are struggling to make ends meet due to loss of livelihood, the Manipur state government has considered planting trees and landmarking the so-called "Kanglatongbi to Kangpokpi Forests reserved" as an urgency above all things.

Earlier, in 2020, the state government had released an order to declare the Koubru range as a reserved area. In May 2021, Manipur Forest, Environment, and Climate Change Minister, Awangbou Newmai asserted that Mount Koubru falls under the Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi Reserved Forest which was declared as Reserved Forest in 1968 under the Indian Forest Act, 1927. Interestingly, the tribes inhabiting the forest have no knowledge of the said statute which was formulated before Manipur attained its statehood and before the Hill Area Committee came into existence.

**All land belongs to state?**  
While attending the first mass tree plantation at Mangjoi village, Kangpokpi District, the Manipur CM N Biren Singh has been quoted as saying, 'All lands belong to the state government.' The remark was made to justify the boundary pillar installation of Kanglatongbi to Kangpokpi reserved forest. Going by the simple logic that the Government belongs

*"Earlier, the Government of Manipur is reported to have mullied evicting more than 700 places located within KK Reserved and many other places in different reserved areas, taking the year 1980 as a baseline. The move, if it materializes anytime in the future, will be a perilous step that is ignorant of the presence of unregistered villages before the areas were declared as reserved forests."*

to the people, his remarks only strengthen the view that land belongs to people. What the Manipur Government failed to acknowledge is the land ownership rights of the Kuki tribes. It is worthwhile to ask, 'Who owned the land before Manipur was formed; before India gained independence, and before the British came?'

**Whose land is it anyway?**  
The Kukis have a clear history of them living freely in their ancestral lands. That they have fought the British in the Anglo-Kuki war 1917-1919 in defense of their ancestral land and freedom is well documented and acknowledged worldwide. Ironically, the state government had declared a restricted state holiday in acknowledgement of the centennial commemoration of the Anglo Kuki war, also known as the Kuki Rising/Kuki Rebellion.

Till today, there is no formal agreement between the Kukis and the government after the British left India, with regards to their ancestral land. It is however understandable that since the ancestral lands of the Kukis politically fall under India and Myanmar, they will be subjected to the laws of the respective countries. But to disregard their interests and proclaim their ancestral lands without any consideration and consultations whatsoever is highly authoritarian and does not augur well for a state government in a democratic country which should adopt people-centric approach of governance.

**The hidden agenda**  
The Government had earlier stated environmental concerns as the reason for the need to declare Reserved forests in Koubru and Thangjing ranges. Local CSOs have more than once solicited the kind attention of the government to discuss and chalk out an amicable solution to the highly delicate issue. It is not understood as to how the government

refused an opportunity such as the co-operation of the local people if its real intention is to resolve environmental issues. Notably, the state government had earlier in November 2020, through its Art and Culture Department attempted to declare Mt. Koubru and Mt. Thangjing as sacred sites of the Hindus, ignoring the sentiments of other religions, especially the local populace who practiced different religions.

**Local Resistance**  
Ever since the Government made its intention clear of declaring Koubru range as reserved forest in 2020, the local populace has voiced their displeasure. The committee on protection and preservation of Mt. Koubru (COPPK) and Sadar Hills Chief Association (SAHILCA) have fervently appealed to the Government to respect the rights and privileges of the forest dwellers. "Despite our efforts to meet on the issue for the past months, the Chief Minister has turned a blind-eye till today and, considering all the above matters and to show our strong resentment, we unanimously declare to boycott the mass tree plantation and landmarking at Mount Koubru range", a statement of COPPK said.

**Eviction of forest dwellers**  
Earlier, the Government of Manipur is reported to have mullied evicting more than 700 places located within KK Reserved and many other places in different reserved areas, taking the year 1980 as a baseline.

The move, if it materializes anytime in the future, will be a perilous step that is ignorant of the presence of unregistered villages before the areas were declared as reserved forests. It will be a misadventure on the part of the government to not acknowledge the fact that the tribesmen did not feel the need to register themselves or their lands. They were unaware of the land registration process then and have been moving freely in their ancestral land. Prohibiting their occupations and ordering them to vacate their lands by citing the chronology of the registration of their habitat will be a clear violation of the 'The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers' (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.'

**The Road Ahead**  
It is time, the Government of Manipur is reminded that they represent both the hills and valley. It must respect the constitutional safeguards of the hill tribes enshrined by the Constitution and the various acts. The continued attempts to demarcate the lands of indigenous tribes into reserve land/forest will only alienate the already deprived and marginalised tribes in the state.

To ensure inclusive development, Government of Manipur should also review its policy of instituting all infrastructure of importance in the valley and reserving the hills to cater to its environmental concerns and obligations. While India is contemplating an inclusive idea that is considerate to the concerns of SC/STs, the recent move of the Manipur government has deeply affected the faith and trust of the Hill tribes in the system.

The Government will have to rethink its policies and approach to prove people wrong about the infamous notion it enjoys - of being biased, harsh, and inconsiderate towards the hill tribes.

Letters to the Editor

**Vax in Meghalaya lowest in the Northeast**

Editor,  
A front-page story in the Shillong Times, July 8, 2021, quoted a TV channel as reporting that Meghalaya has the poorest vaccination record in the Northeast, but that the figures were not verified.

The table below takes data from the CoWIN dashboard of the Government of India, updated as of July 8, 2021. It shows that the percentage of fully vaccinated persons in our state is indeed the lowest among the

Northeast states. The table shows the percentage of first and second doses in the eligible population, whereas the TV channel based some of their percentages on the entire population including children.

If the percentage of vaccinated persons is calculated for the entire population the percentage figures in the table will be about one-third lower, as the percentage of children in India is about 35%. The entire population is used as the base figure if one wishes to make an assessment of herd immunity, which is not the purpose of the table provided here.

Some assumptions have been made. The eligible population (18 years and older) is based on the population

pyramid of India, divided along age ranges. The age range in the standard pyramid (ie 0-19 years), slightly overlaps the eligibility age for vaccination. The same pyramid is assumed for all states. Most available statistics for the adult population in India refer to the age range 15-64 years, as planners and economists use this to indicate 'working' adults.

Once again, Meghalaya is last. But this time the government is not to blame. Vaccine refusal seems to be a factor. The low figure for full vaccination pertains to the older population, indicating that hesitancy is higher among the older age groups.

Yours etc.,  
Glenn Kharkongor,  
Via email

**Behdeinkhlam festival amidst Covid?**

Editor,  
Even while Covid 19 cases in Jaintia Hills are on the rise, the Deputy Commissioner, West Jaintia Hills still granted permission to the Seif Raij Jowai to conduct Behdeinkhlam festival when all the religious places, weddings, etc are still restricted or closed. For reasons best known to him he even released an order to close all the shops in lawmusiang Jowai from July 9, 2021 so as to enable them to conduct the festival smoothly. Shops selling essential commodities are open once a week for people to buy essential commodities but this week they have to remain closed because of the festival. I am not against the Seifraj or anyone but if all other public, religious and social functions are still not allowed mainly to avoid overcrowding and to limit the spread of Covid 19 why not Behdeinkhlam? The idea of allowing 40 people from each locality to participate does not mean there will not be overcrowding because there are around 6 to 10 localities so 40x10=400 people. Hence what's the point

of ordering a lockdown and allowing essential shops to open just once a week when the Deputy Commissioner is still granting permission to the Seif Raij to organise this Behdeinkhlam festival.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request  
Via email

**End red-tapism for quick service delivery**

Editor  
Even with the advent of internet age, the government public schemes are delayed in reaching the beneficiaries in urban and rural areas. Sometimes the schemes reach after many years. The main reasons are the traditional age old infamous procedural red-tapism, the irresponsibility, laziness, sluggishness, procrastination of duty and chronic absence from duty by government employees responsible for pushing files in the secretariat, directorate, district and the block levels. Because of similar stumbling blocks the Chief Minister of our neighbouring state, Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma, has specifically asked the top officers of his state from the rank of Secretary

level to the Chief Secretary to jointly meet and devise ways and means to remove the impediments so that the government can deliver the various schemes to the masses expeditiously and at the shortest time possible, so that the beneficiaries stand to gain and development takes place fast in the state.

Similarly, we here in Meghalaya, have witnessed for the last 49 years this archaic monster of red-tapism and similar stumbling blocks standing in the way of fast-paced development in our state. We urge the present MDA government under the leadership of the NPP to do away with the archaic procedural practices, red-tapism and other anti-speed delivery systems. If these ills are removed the pace of development in the state will speed up. How we long to see this in our state befitting the occasion of celebrating the Golden Jubilee of Meghalaya's statehood in 2023.

Yours etc.,  
Philip Marwein,  
Editor, Youth Today,  
Via email

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State	Population in lakhs	Eligible pop'n in lakhs (18 yrs+)	1 <sup>st</sup> dose taken %	2 <sup>nd</sup> dose taken %
Sikkim	6.11	4.60	93	22
Tripura	42.0	27.3	60	22
Arunachal	15.9	10.4	55	10
Mizoram	12.6	8.50	66	8
Assam	360	234	27	6
Nagaland	23.0	15.0	33	5
Manipur	32.0	20.8	36	4
Meghalaya	34.0	22.0	31	4
India	13800	8970	33	7

"When a man's knowledge is not in order,  
the more of it he has the greater  
will be his confusion."

— Herbert Spencer

## The Shillong Times

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### Vaccination conundrum

THE Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW) is very concerned with the growing Covid infection rate in the North Eastern states. When the numbers in the rest of the country have fallen and the lockdown has been eased even in states like Delhi, where the numbers were very high in April-May this year, the growing Covid cases in the eight states is worrying. The Ministry has reached out to media persons to disseminate the message of adopting Covid Appropriate Behaviour (CAB) which is essentially masking (double or triple layer), physical distancing and hand hygiene. But the worry for the North eastern states, particularly the tribal dominated areas is their vaccine hesitancy. It appears that people are more inclined to believe social media messages particularly those coming via WhatsApp. And if the messages come from the western world, then people tend to take them as gospel, even if these emanate from conspiracy theorists.

A large chunk of Christians, not necessarily from the mainline churches but from radical Christian groups have openly defied the government exhortations to be vaccinated. Several groups have stated that as citizens of a democracy they have the right to choose not to be vaccinated. In this case the rights of a few not to be vaccinated militates against the rights of others not to be infected by those who refuse the vaccine. There are those who argue that if the vaccine is effective then why do those who are vaccinated still carry the risk of contracting Covid and infecting others. Such skeptics abound despite the statistics which show that those who are vaccinated suffer from less serious consequences from Covid and might not need hospitalization.

But one message that troubles many is that the vaccine causes infertility. For a tribal society that believes in procreation as a reason for being born into this earth any intervention that threatens to disrupt that process is taken very seriously. Another fear created by conspiracy theorists is that people would die within two years of taking the vaccine. As far as Meghalaya is concerned, the Health Department has done all within its power to dispel the myths around the vaccine. In fact, the DHS and his cohorts are almost exasperated by the vaccine resistance. Perhaps one missing link is the pro-active involvement of the Dorbar Shnong in this exercise. The Dorbar Shnong have a way of communicating with their people in their own dialects which has an immediate connect. The Government would do well to involve the Dorbar Shnong in this important exercise of social messaging.

# Intellectual Property Rights and the Covid jab

By Brave Well Mawthoh

It is a tremendous achievement in the history of humankind that within one year since the beginning of the pandemic, scientists across different countries have come up with several vaccines to combat the coronavirus pandemic. However, vaccines are unevenly manufactured and distributed worldwide, with the rich and vaccine manufacturing countries inculcating a significant percentage of their population. In contrast, people of low and middle-income countries (LMICs) could not access these vaccines and other related medical products. As a result, they have been helplessly gazing and waiting in the queue to receive their share of the vaccines. Recently with the backing of the US, the demand to temporarily remove intellectual property (IP) protection and patent rights on coronavirus vaccines has gained steady momentum. The European Union and numerous countries have also joined in reconsidering their decision to waive IP protections and patents on coronavirus vaccines.

The demand was initially put forward by India and South Africa to WTO in October 2020 to waive intellectual property rights (IPRs) on vaccines, therapeutics and other allied medical supplies required to fight against the coronavirus pandemic. They argued that LMICs might also have adequate access to the vaccines by waiving IP protections and patents. More than 100 developing countries have supported this proposal. France and Russia have also abetted the waiving of IP protections and patents on vaccines. However, the manufacturing of vaccines is exclusively and predominantly controlled by few big firms located in high-income countries (HICs). As a result, there is a substantial gap in the number of vaccines received by LMICs and HICs. Earlier, most HICs such as the UK, US, Hungary, and the EU have rejected this move, insisting that waiving IP protections and patents will harm competitiveness since intellectual property rights and patent rights drive innovations, research, and development. They also disagreed that IP protection and patents act as a constraint in the manufacturing, supply chain and distribution of the vaccines. The WTO is likely to take up the matter in its next ministerial conference in November this year. Typi-

cally, WTO makes decisions through consensus, and voting is infrequent.

Only a few countries such as the US, China and India have administered the maximum number of doses to their citizens. India being a country with an enormous population, has vaccinated less than 14.7% of its populace. Nearly a dozen countries have succeeded in fully vaccinating more than 50% of their masses. However, the vaccination drive worldwide is biased, with HICs vaccinating a more significant percentage of their population. Some of these countries, such as the US, also hoard vaccines in large quantities more than their required capacity. Many LMICs received a petty share or could not have access to these vaccines. Therefore, advanced countries should shift their excess doses to countries in desperate need of vaccines. The coronavirus situation is significantly more acute in many Asian and African countries. There are incidences of under-reporting of the number of cases and death tolls. A remarkably few percentages of its population have vaccinated against the coronavirus. The shortage arises because the production and distribution of the vaccines are managed only by few colossal firms located in a few HICs. Many of them have engaged in a bilateral contract with these firms placing orders in bulk.

Several agencies and countries belonging to HIC groups have sponsored these firms in the initial stages of research and development. Hence, these countries impel firms to meet the demand made by them first. However, since they are yet to fulfil the order placed by most HICs, they cannot carry out the orders and distribution of vaccines set by LMICs. Many developing countries hinge on supply from rich countries since they cannot produce the vaccines independently. By waiving IP protections and patents on vaccines, it will permit manufacturing by countries such as Canada, South Korea and Bangladesh who have expressed their intention. It will enable manufacturers in middle-income countries to enter the race and speed up the production on a large scale and ensure even distribution of the vaccines to all nations. It will also ensure that all countries get access to the necessary vaccines vital to fighting the corona-

virus. Thus, we can combat the virus and overcome the devastation caused by it in a shorter period.

Earlier, many HICs have challenged the proposal saying that waiving patent on vaccines may impede research and development on vaccines in the future, which is vital to innovations. Leading pharmaceutical vaccine manufacturers also opposed the move, asserting that waiving patent on vaccines is not the solution. The real challenge which may impact vaccines supply, according to them, include trade barriers, bottlenecks in supply chains, scarcity of raw materials and ingredients in the supply chains and hesitancy on the part of the rich countries to share the vaccines with poorer countries. In addition, there is a scarcity of raw materials, which hinder the production process. Experts also claimed that removing patents on the vaccines may instead be detrimental. Also, there are likelihoods that manufacturers may compromise on the safety and quality standards of the vaccines in a rush to produce them in large quantities. They argued that manufacturers in LMICs might not have the required know-how and technology. They may not have the essential raw materials to make the vaccines even if there is a patent waiver. Earlier, several countries, like the US with the required raw materials, controlled their supply using the American Defence Production Act. It has affected countries like India which depend on the US for raw materials.

There are many other ways for vaccine manufacturers in LMICs to boost the vaccine supply. They may do so by voluntary licenses, contract manufacturing and proactive technology transfers. In the case of a voluntary license, a patent-holding company will give authorisation to a generic company. The patent holder company will monitor the quality and safety of the vaccines and also their supply. In contract manufacturing, the patent holder company will hire a contract manufacturer. Like in the case of a voluntary license, the patent holder company will monitor the quality and safety of the vaccines. In case of technology transfer, the patent holder company will share the knowledge, skills, expertise, and technology and know-how to a company

in LMICs to ensure that the vaccines are accessible and constantly monitor their production.

Countries can also produce vaccines under the WTO's TRIPS flexibilities via compulsory licensing, enabling LMICs to issue compulsory licenses to vaccine manufacturers to produce them for domestic uses without the permission of the patent holder company. The LMICs can also collectively purchase the patent rights from these vaccine producing firms and use them to rapidly increase the supply of vaccines and supply them equitably to all countries across the world. In all these cases, they should financially recompense vaccine manufacturing firms for acknowledging their efforts and encouraging them to invest in research and development in the future. It will also lessen the risk of investment in the research and development of vaccines, thus assuring investment stability in research and investment in vaccines and other medicinal products. Many countries, including India, have already produced the vaccines using either one or some of these alternatives.

The temporary waiving of intellectual property rights is not only the answer to speed up vaccines supply. The waiver may not help ramp up the production of vaccines because many LMICs may not have the production capacity. Also, the vaccine manufacturers cannot meet the global demand in a short span. Hence, what is required is a global proactive co-action, collaboration and collective responsibility. The vaccine manufacturers and government of different countries should work together to ensure that vaccines supplies are ramped up and at the same time ensure that safety and quality standards are maintained. They need to identify manufacturers in LMICs who can produce and collectively work to meet global demands and ensure equitable access to vaccines for all. We should approach this race of ramping up vaccine production as a global fight against the coronavirus pandemic. The world will swiftly emerge out of this pandemic only when enough vaccines are available and all countries have vaccinated their population fully within a shorter span.

(The writer is Assistant Professor, Don Bosco College, Tura; Email bravewell.mawthoh@gmail.com)

## Union cabinet rejig

# Focus shifts to states

By Insaf

A failed Central strategy has shifted New Delhi's focus on to the States both on tackling the pandemic and future of BJP on ensuing Assembly elections. This could be one of many interpretations being given to the Cabinet reshuffle undertaken Thursday last. Undeniably, the Modi team failed miserably in damage control viz second wave of Covid and therefore the axe fell on key ministers. But whether those handpicked now will be able to make amends, is a big question. Fighting Covid together appears now a strategy of the new Health Minister. In the first Cabinet meeting, Rs 23,000 crores package for emergency response to Covid-19 was announced to be used "jointly by both Central and State governments" (Centre will provide Rs 15,000 crore, States will spend Rs 8,123 crore) after "detailed consultation" with States. The package includes creation of paediatric

units in all 736 districts, installation of 1,050 liquid medical oxygen storage tanks etc. Perhaps, it means better preparation for the 3rd wave or at least ensure its not a catastrophe and the blame doesn't land on Delhi alone. The other focus is on States going to polls—2022. Selection of ministers show the highest number, seven, are from UP, where Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is under fire, taking the number to 16, three from Gujarat, one each from Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Manipur. All States, where BJP must ensure it retains control. Indeed, there's more than meets the eye.

**Complacency in NE?**  
North East is giving North Block a cause for worry. Statistics reveal that as many as 45 of 73 districts, which reported over 10% Covid-19 positivity rate in the past one week were from there. Clearly, the complacency of the virus not reaching this region, like the rest of the country wouldn't work. Thus, on Wednesday last, Home Secretary held a meeting with top officials from the eight States and asked them to adhere to MHA's five-fold strategy of Test-Track-Treat-Vaccinate and COVID appropriate behaviour, as laid out this June-end. Plus, they were advised to strictly monitor the situation at district/city level and consider imposing restrictions in a calibrated manner. While it may be not on the tourist list as Uttarakhand, it would do well to pay heed to the hill State's High Court directive asking the government to control their inflow and review its decision to relax the weekend lockdown. The two-judge bench took into account media reports of the hill stations being inundated with tourists every weekend and warned that tourists could be carriers of the Delta Plus Covid-19 variant! Remember a stitch in time saves nine.

**BJP's Bengal Concern**  
The growing discord amongst its leaders in West Bengal continues to rattle the BJP. How many will cross over to rival TMC? More so with the latest resignation of its MP Saumitra Khan from the post of state youth wing chief on Wednesday last. While he didn't cite any reason, the BJYM chief did use the Facebook to hit out at Leader of Opposition Suwendu Adhikari accusing him of trying to take credit for all the achievements the saffron camp has made as well as the State BJP President Dilip Ghosh saying he didn't comprehend half the things. While he claimed he wouldn't leave the BJP, which he joined in 2018 from TMC, the timing is interesting. It coincides with reports that some BJP MPs

from the State may be made MoS in Cabinet reshuffle. Well, he wasn't one of the four that Modi picked, all first time MPs—Shantanu Thakur, Nisith Pramanik, John Barla and Subhas Sarkar! The move may not only halt leaders from joining the TMC but give hope to others that there are rewards for good performance. Equally important is the fact that the choice appears to fix caste equations before 2024, General Election—3 of the 4 belong to SC/ST communities. Be that as it may, the big fight is a long way off and rivalry between the old and new loyalists may simmer. But BJP believes in well begin is half done.

**Uttarakhand CM Jinx**  
Uttarakhand seems to give the BJP a record of sorts. It's third Chief Minister in just four months! Indeed, the State going to the polls next year has the party worried. Not just the infighting within the party but fading possibility of Tirath Singh Ra-

wat getting elected to the Assembly by September, made New Delhi install a new Chief Minister, Pushkar Singh Dhami. He is said to be close to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, is just 45 years old, a two-time MLA and was formerly OSD to CM Koshiyari. While Rawat is the one who proposed his name among nearly half-a-dozen other MLAs, the big question is how long will he last. Tirath resigned after just 114 days in the seat, mired in controversies with the public upset over some of his statements, such as against ripped jeans as well as criticising his predecessor: Trivendra's policies, which included trying to restrict the gathering at the Kumbh mela, which cost him his job. However, the reason given is a constitutional crisis has emerged with uncertainty over the Election Commission giving permission to hold a by-poll for Rawat to be elected to the Assembly in these Covid times. For one, the Congress doesn't buy it and uses the opportunity to mock the frequent change in guard: BJP's high drama in Dehradun is an insult to people of Uttarakhand. Modi had promised to give a double-engine government, but the State only received different Chief Ministers and no development! With less than a year for polls, expecting miracles from Dhami will be a tall order.

**Humiliation For Tipplers!**  
Kerala High Court comes to the aid of tipplers! Overcrowding and long queues outside state-run Beverages Corporation's (BEVCO) outlets amid the pandemic is not done. On Thursday last, it asked BEVCO's MD and State excise commissioner to file a report on steps taken to reduce the crowd. Importantly, it noted: "When customers line up in front of liquor shops and spill over to public spaces and roads, it certainly is an affront to the dignity of a society as a whole. As far as the customer is concerned, he is put to a great amount of humiliation, which he is forced to endure because these of liquor is virtually a monopoly at the hands of Bevco." He directed sufficient facilities be given to customers so they can make their choice of purchase of liquor in a civilised manner like any other commodity. The aim of the court, he explained was not to find fault but to ensure a nagging problem that the State has been facing for the past several years be resolved in the most effective manner. Will this help in the long run? It may not be so simple in God's own country, for 'health being more important than revenue,' is a fact that the government, like all others, will choose to overlook! ---INFA

### Letters to the Editor

## Public concerns versus political motives

Editor,

The dumping of waste at Marten has brought about a series of chain reactions with the Seng Samla Mawlai Pylun (SSMP) being sternly vocal about the issue. The SSMP also has threatened to go on agitation and to close down the Marten if the mismanagement is not effectively tackled. We all know that Marten is the only waste dumping site in Shillong, a site where wastes from all parts of Shillong especially the urban areas are disposed of. It wouldn't be wrong to say that people do go around dumping wastes at Umshyri river but collection of waste done by the SMB is disposed of at Marten.

Marten is an area situated closely alongside residential areas and along the stretch of the highway from Shillong to Guwahati. There have been numerous complaints from residents around the area of the strong stench emanating from this site, a smell that can cause a series of illnesses if not checked properly. During summer times when the monsoon rains hit the city, the wastes also flow down to the Umiam river. Time and again voices were echoing, requesting the Urban Affairs Department and the Minister concerned, Sniawbhalang Dhar to look into ways to

effectively manage the disposal of waste at this site as it will pose a serious threat to the people and livelihoods around. But sadly, all these voices and laments were not given attention to.

Following the recent events of this mismanagement of waste disposal where the waste from Jowai is being dumped at Marten, it seems the Seng Samla Mawlai Pylun were able to convince the Minister of Urban Affairs, Sniawbhalang Dhar to carry out an inspection of both the biomedical waste and solid waste management plants at Mawlai. The minister also stated that the government and the department concerned is going on in full swing to identify new landfill sites. I don't really know how much of that is true and how much of it is a façade. It is however interesting to see how far this will go and how fruitful it will be.

Ironically, it makes me wonder why don't concerned ministers take up necessary action when needed? It seems they almost every time require a wake-up call, like some kind of warning or sign of protest to make them get up from their chairs and take up requisite steps. Issues like the mismanagement of waste disposal at Marten are not something new as the debate has been going on for a really long time now. For the concerned authority/department, and the minister, this shouldn't be a new subject for debate as I am sure they have been

well aware of the situation and the scenario. Then why is it that it takes a series of agitations, pleas, and threats for something to be taken an action upon? Couldn't the minister in charge, Sniawbhalang not have carried out the inspection sooner before it became a serious issue that has caused so much of a stir to even lead to the closure of Marten if things are not set straight? Or is there something behind the statement of the minister concerned? Maybe it's just a face-saving device. Or maybe something bigger — an act to get rewarded with something else, perhaps which could be just exactly what he is eyeing for.

Yours etc.,  
Maitshaphrang Khongwir  
Shillong — 8

## Disqualification for floor-crossing

Editor,  
Floor crossing in Indian politics has become almost a daily affair. But the issue of disqualification of a member who is elected from one party and then switches over to another party has not been resolved as yet. The decision to disqualify an elected member of the opposition party when he crosses over to the ruling party immediately after election has to be taken by the Speaker of the Assembly. Speakers are generally elected from amongst ruling party MLAs as a tradition and by the majority strength held by the ruling party.

The Indian political history has enough evidence that most of the Speakers who are supposed to be impartial and neutral, cannot afford to be disloyal to their party. Consequently, Speakers in practically all the states have been seen to flounder and dilly-dally on the issue of their decision for initiating action in cases of disqualification of an elected member of an opposition party who joined the ruling party soon after the elections.

Finally, the membership of such turncoats remains qualified by manipulating their sitting position and they even get prized-posts from the ruling party for obvious reasons of gaining political mileage. In order to establish their impartiality the Speaker truly needs to make the right decision and act within a definite time period to cancel the membership of a member, from any other political party, who intends to cross over to the ruling party after getting elected.

By their floor-crossing, power-crazy turncoat politicians are playing dirty games and this act of theirs indirectly supported by the Speaker, at the behest of the ruling dispensation, and is unfair and unethical. Ostensibly in the garb of loyalty to their party the Speakers in collaboration with the ruling party are flouting the enshrined Articles of the Constitution and the acts therein and bringing huge infamy not only to the fram-

ers of the Indian Constitution but also getting tarnished themselves by deviating from their neutral position as has been enshrined in the Constitution.

It is therefore necessary to list out more specifically the duties and responsibilities of the Speaker by suitable amendment of Article 178 of the Constitution through the joint efforts of the Ministry of Law & Law Commission of India with active involvement of the Election Commission of India. However to protect the right of a politician to change his/her party it may be necessary to fix a time period during which an MLA after winning an election from the banner of an opposition political party will not be allowed to cross-over to the ruling party. A six-month period after completion of the election process might be necessary so that if any elected member belonging to one party wants to leave his/her party and join another party before the 6 month period he/she will have to resign from the post of MLA and seek re-election. This needs to be made mandatory.

Moreover, after winning an election from a particular political party, the individual crossing the floor immediately constitutes a crass betrayal of the electorate who reposed their confidence on a candidate representing the political party of their choice and with their support. The validity of the election result

of such a turncoat should be immediately rescinded and made null and void. Such individuals who cross floor and join the ruling party after winning elections shall have to seek re-election from the same constituency. The Representation of Peoples' Act, 1951 may also be amended for incorporation of necessary provisions as being suggested.

It would be imprudent to leave the decision of cancelling the membership of an elected member who migrates to the ruling party immediately after getting elected in the hands of the Speakers alone because of their habit of procrastinating while deciding on such an important issue in the context of the political history of our country.

In fact, there should be a law that once an elected member leaves his party immediately after election he has to resign from his post as member of the legislative assembly simultaneously without exception. Otherwise the democratic system of holding elections would lose its sanctity and would render the peoples' mandate meaningless!

Yours etc.,  
Samares Bandyopadhyay  
Advocate, Kolkata High Court

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

# Sustainable travel

By N. Lothungbeni Humsae

The lockdown has been hard in many ways with travellers itching to get out and explore again. This pause has led us to reflect on our impact on the environment and local communities for when we do start taking trips again. According to Booking.com's 2021 Sustainable Travel Report, 88 percent of respondents revealed that it has encouraged them to travel more sustainably in the future and 75 percent of Indian travellers believe that people have to act now to save the planet for future generations.

Luckily, making sustainable choices has become easier and more affordable than one expects. There are many simple ways we can limit our environmental impact, and better support and engage with local communities during our upcoming trips. To help make it easier for everyone to travel more sustainably, Booking.com shares 7 handy tips to create a positive impact on your next trip, when it is safe to do so again.

## Choose a sustainable accommodation option

Picking a more sustainable place to stay for your next trip is a great place to start — and it doesn't necessarily mean spending a lot of money. There are plenty of sustainable options for every budget and taste. In fact, 98 per cent of Indian travellers from say that they want to stay in a sustainable accommodation in the upcoming year. One of the easiest ways to confidently book a more sustainable property is to check and see if it has an established eco-label or third-party sustainability certification. There are numerous, reputable third-party sustainability certifications that properties can work towards and achieve.

## Get off the beaten track

The pandemic has influenced 72 per cent of Indian travellers to avoid popular destinations and attractions to ensure they aren't contributing to overcrowding. Being



mindful when choosing your next trip can help reduce over tourism, which can be a major issue for fragile environments, ecosystems and local communities. Consider travelling to lesser-known destinations or a location just outside a busy sightseeing area. Alternatively travel during off-peak seasons when there are fewer other visitors.

## Bye Bye, plastic!

Limiting single-use plastic is arguably one of the greatest environmental challenges we face. With an estimated 91 percent of plastic not being recycled, most of it ends up either in the ocean or landfills. Many properties have taken numerous steps to either reduce or eliminate single-use plastics from their operations, but travellers can also take simple steps like using reusable water bottles instead of buying plastic bottles of water while on vacation or packing your own reusable toiletry bottles with your favourite products from home. An alternative to single-use plastic are steel water bottles which are more

durable and can be used for years. This will not only reduce your consumption on holiday but you can also bring it home with you — helping you become more sustainable in your day-to-day life.

## Give back to the community

When planning activities for your trip, look for tour companies that give back to and empower the local community, and also engage in ethical tourism practices. According to Booking.com's recent report\* respect for the local community is high on the list of Indian travellers with 74 percent wanting to have authentic experiences that are representative of the local culture when they travel, and 91 percent mentioning that increasing cultural understanding and preservation of cultural heritage is crucial. By supporting these companies, local communities can directly and equally benefit from the travel industry.

## Pick up rubbish when you leave

A good rule of thumb for travelling more sustainably, is to try

and leave the places you visit better than when you found them. A simple way to do this is to pick up a discarded item of rubbish that isn't yours when you leave — a small but important step in taking care of our environment. And every action counts — just picking up one piece of plastic on a beach means one less piece ending up in the sea.

## Buy locally

When you travel, one of the best ways to support the local economy and limit your carbon footprint is to shop locally and eat food from street vendors or restaurants that use sustainably sourced produce. Avoid eating at popular fast-food chains that usually import produce from all across the globe and eat in local restaurants that likely use local produce instead. And if you're cooking for yourself, try to purchase from local markets, too. This is also in line with the Indian traveller sentiment where 74 percent of Indian travellers want to have authentic experiences that are representative of the local culture when they travel.



## Bring good habits with you on vacation

Many are already conscious at home about turning off the lights when we are not using them, or being careful about when and how high we use the air-conditioning. However, 59 percent of Indian travellers believe it's harder to make sustainable choices on vacation. A sustainable first step could be as simple as remembering to carry those mindful habits from home along when you travel. While switching over to LED light fixtures or having keycard controlled power in the room aren't things

you can control as a guest, travellers can ensure they switch off the lights when they step out of their room, reuse their towels or forego daily linen changes and being more mindful of the length of the showers they take.

No matter whether you're already a superstar sustainable traveller or just looking for a few tips to be a little more mindful during your next trip, there is always a next step to take. This can ultimately make travel that's truly beneficial to the planet, the places we love to visit and the people who live there, the norm. (IANSLife)

## Chocolate Heaven!



By Puja Gupta

Did you know that your favourite chocolate brands like Nestle, Lindt, Toblerone are all Swiss? Chocolates from this beautifully diverse country are famous across the world for a few reasons. Here they are:

## SWEET HISTORY

The nation has a long history of excellence in chocolate making that goes back 200 years when Francois-Louis Cailler opened the first mechanized chocolate factory in Vevey in 1819. He put into practice all the tricks he'd learnt as a trainee in Ticino with Italian chocolatiers. That was the start of Switzerland's love affair with chocolate that continues even today with local chocolatiers still using traditional recipes handed down from generations. Though the Swiss chocolate industry is founded on tradition, it is always looking to break new ground which is one of the secrets of its success. In 1887, after many attempts, the Swiss chocolatier Daniel Peter, created the original formula for what was to become the first successful milk chocolate in the entire world. Peter called his product, "Gala" from the Greek, which means, "from the milk". Before this, Chocolate was not considered a delicacy. It was more of a nourishing and medicinal food because of its bitter taste. Apart from this, the Swiss have taught confectioners several new and important techniques like tempering of chocolate and conching to texture and flavour the chocolate that creates a melt-in-the-mouth experience.

## PASSIONATE CHOCOLATIERS

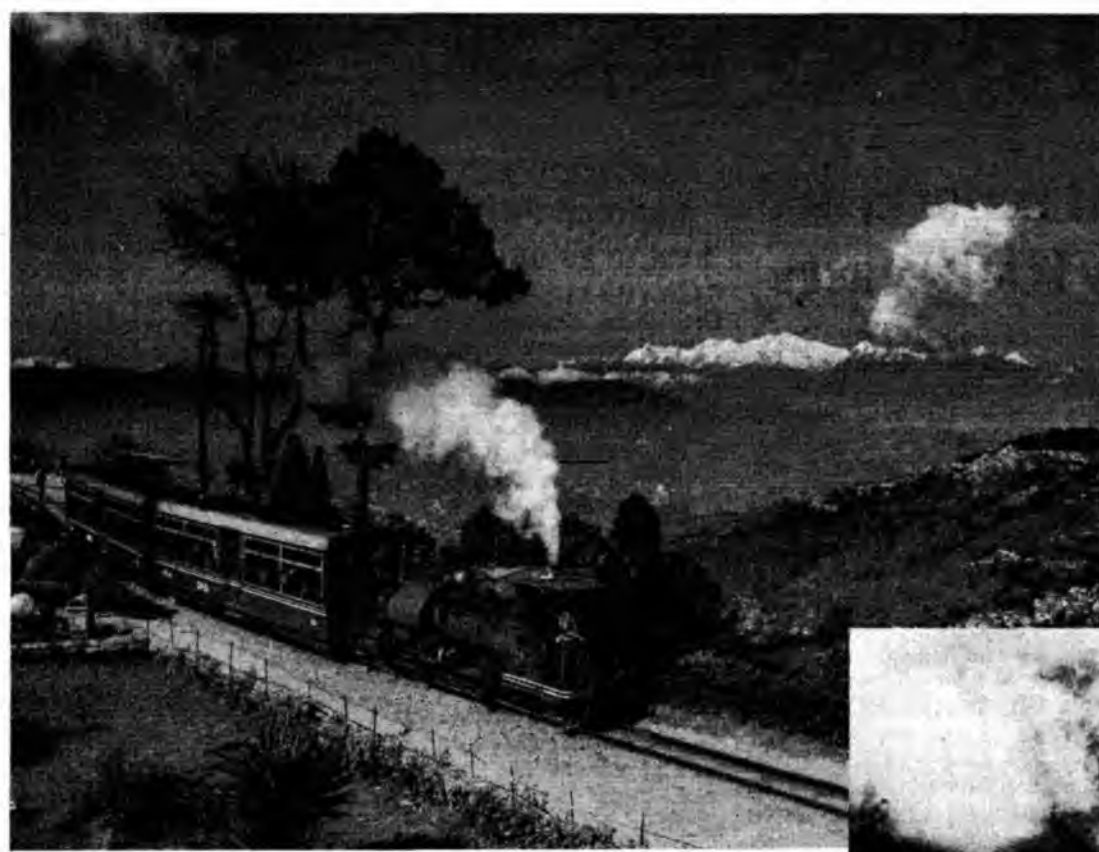
Last year, one of the oldest Swiss chocolatiers in the world — Lindt, launched the 'Home of

Chocolate' in Zurich. This 65,000 sq. ft., three-floor, multi-functional museum space dedicated only to chocolate, is devoted to the history and production of one of Switzerland's most delectable exports. The space also houses the world's largest 'Chocolate Fountain' which stands tall at 9m at the entrance of the building, as well as the world's largest Lindt chocolate shop, a Lindt cafe, and a Lindt Chocolateria for people who like to make their own chocolate creations. An ode to chocoholic's world over, this chocolate haven is yet another reason why we all need to add Switzerland to our travel bucket lists!

## CHOCOLATE TOURS

Across Switzerland, travellers can experience different chocolate tasting tours in Zurich, Bern and Basel. One of the more unique and fun chocolate tours takes guests through Lavaux. On this route, travellers can go on a hike to learn more about the history of this sweet temptation while also savouring the delights of Grand Cru pralines en-route! One can also head to the Funky Chocolate Club in Interlaken to discover the art of chocolate making. The Club provides visitors with aprons, a chef's hat and all the ingredients needed to step into the shoes of a real chocolatier and create a personalized Choco masterpiece!

In addition to the tours, the Montreux-Berner Oberland railway has dedicated a whole train to the world's most irresistible temptation. The Chocolate train runs between Montreux and the Cailler-Nestle chocolate factory at Broc and is a 'must-do' for those who want to satiate the 'sweet tooth' as well as for the railway and travel enthusiasts. With such an abundance of chocolate available across the country, it is not difficult to imagine that the Swiss are the biggest consumers of chocolate than any other nation in the world. They eat a record 11kgs of chocolate a year! No wonder then that they are a happy lot. Chocolate is known to have extremely soothing properties and is a known brain stimulator. So, the best thing to take your mind off morbid news and thoughts these days would be to grab a bar of Swiss chocolate, uplift your spirit and relax! (IANSLife)



The Indian railways authorities have initiated the process to give permission digitally to make films and documentaries on Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR), a UNESCO World Heritage site, which is also known across the world for its fascinating journey through the hills of Himalayas in narrow gauge toy trains.

Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) Subhanan Chanda said that the decision of online process of scrutinising applications and to give permission in a digital mode was taken to facilitate and encourage making more films on DHR, which was included in the World Heritage Site list in 1999.

He said that before the new online initiative, officials of the film production houses or documentary film makers from different parts of the country and abroad had to come physically several times to NFR headquarters in Maligaon near Guwahati before finally going to Darjeeling for shooting.

"Sometimes they had to reschedule a pre-fixed shooting programme also. In order to mitigate the issue, the NFR has now provided a link in their official website (<https://nfr.indianrailways.gov.in/>).

"Any film producer or enthusiast from any part of India and abroad

kept to undertake film shooting either using the toy train or railway premises in DHR can now apply online without physically coming to the shooting sites or NFR offices," Chanda told IANS.

"Film producers can also deposit the requisite fees required to be submitted before undertaking the shooting online. Fees are required if the shooting is to be done for commercial purposes and there will be no charges if the shooting is to be undertaken for non-commercial, academic and awareness purposes."

The new system would facilitate the filmmakers of India and other countries to plan for shooting within a much shorter time period than earlier, the CPRO said adding that as the entire process can also be monitored by the applicant, it brings about transparency and ease of doing business with railways.

Giving details of filming in DHR, the official said that over the decades, shooting of a large number of Bollywood, Tollywood and other Indian states films was done in Darjeeling areas.

Some of the famous Bollywood films which were shot in Darjeeling include *Jab Pyaar Kisi Se Hota Hai* (1961), *China Town* (1962), *Aradhana* (1969), *Raju Ban Gaya Gentleman* (1992), *Parineeta*

## Toy train goes digital



(2005), *Barfi* (2012) and *Jagga Jasoos* (2017).

"Lots of short films and television serials were shot in DHR over the decades. In January this year, a documentary film on Nobel laureate Mother Teresa was also shot on-board a toy train from Siliguri junction to Kurseong," the NFR official said.

He said that although the complete section of DHR is a cherished location for shooting of films and documentaries, some of the most preferred locations on DHR are Batasia Loop, Agony Point, Ghoom Station, Darjeeling station, Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary between Sukna and Rongtong stations.

Attracting tourists from all over the world who don't want to miss the mesmerising romance of the

toy train ride through the hills criss-crossing the Hill Cart road, the DHR also helped people to earn money for their livelihood.

Chanda said that the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO, at its 23rd session held at Marrakesh in Morocco on December 5, 1999, decided to inscribe DHR on its World Heritage Site list.

Work on the narrow gauge DHR, which covers 88 km from West Bengal's New Jalpaiguri to Darjeeling, was completed between 1879 and 1881.

The NFR, one among the 17 railway zones in India, operates fully and partially in six of the eight northeastern states, excluding Meghalaya and Sikkim, and in seven districts of West Bengal and five districts of north Bihar. (IANS)

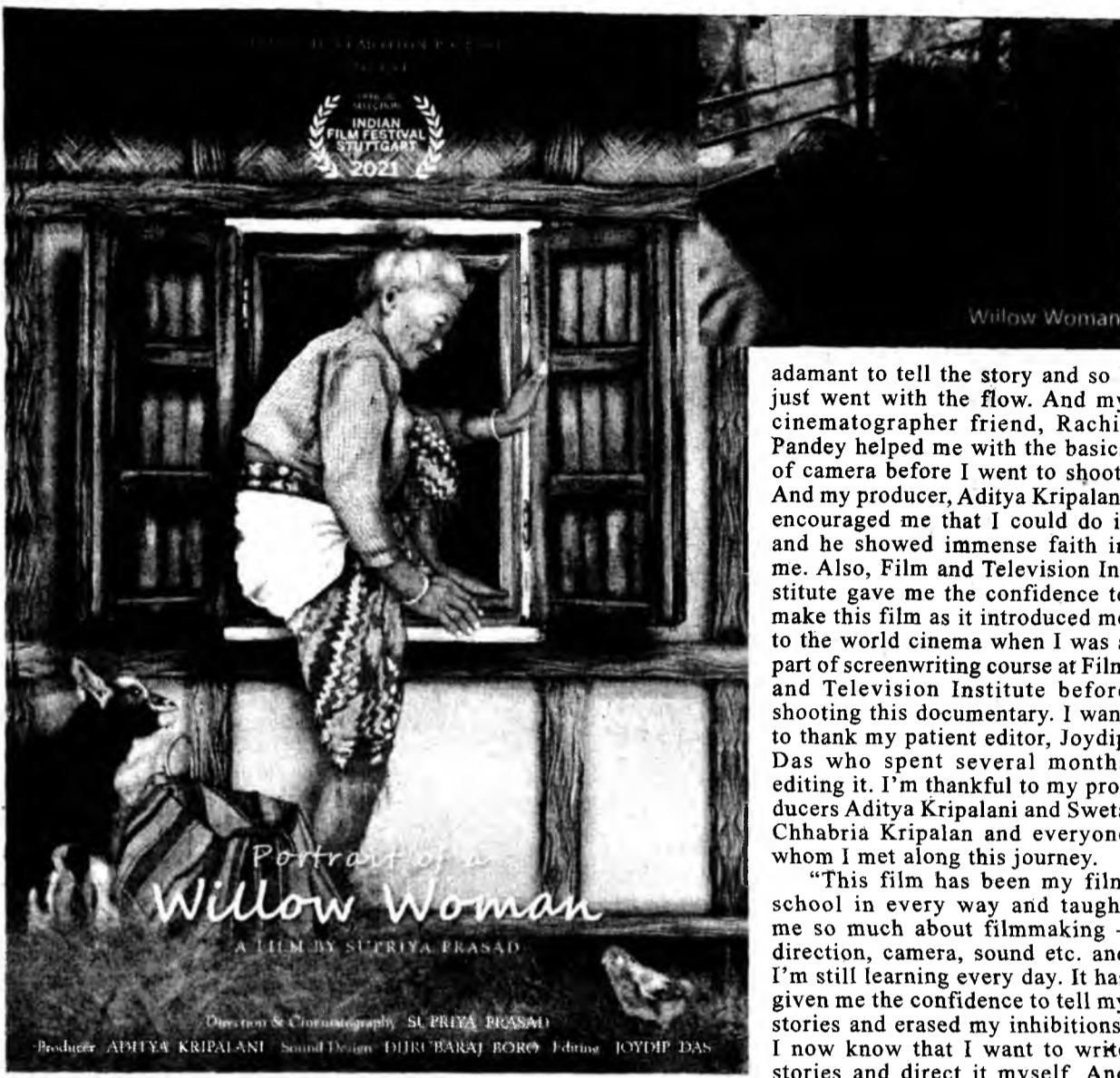
# The Willow Woman

Supriya Prasad's directorial debut *Portrait of a Willow Woman* is all set to be screened at the 18th Indian Film Festival in Stuttgart, Germany. The film is also competing for the coveted German Star of India Award.

The film will be screening in Europe's largest Indian film festival - Indian Film Festival of Stuttgart, Germany. The event will take place from July 21 - 25 virtually in the wake of the pandemic.

The film describes the life of Deeptimoni Hajong, an old indigenous woman from Meghalaya who lives without remorse and clings to traditional healing practices, beliefs and spirituality. Memories and myths that have been passed on through generations are made accessible to the present and what began for the filmmaker as a search for Deeptimoni leaves her longing for more. Three different languages have been used in the film namely Garo, Koch and Bengali.

"I met a woman (the protagonist of the film) in my hometown in Meghalaya. I was baffled to see a wrinkled vegetable seller frolicking like a 20-year-old at my doorstep. Upon asking, I learnt that she was 82-year-old and her name was Deeptimoni. The thought of this woman kept lingering even when I came back to Bombay. It kept irking me for a year. I wanted to know more - about her life and her home. After a year, I went back home when a producer was intrigued after hearing my story. I went back clueless - I had no idea about her home. All I knew was her village name. So, when



all my family members thought I was going crazy after this woman, I finally convinced them to allow to me go in search of her and they finally gave in. I somehow believed that I'd find her. Going from door to door, I finally found her and she recognized me too. I could not control my tears after all I've been dreaming about it for a year now," Supriya said.

"She was an ordinary woman whose death wouldn't have affected anyone. And for me that

became an urge to capture her story because for me she was no ordinary. Capturing her life was the only way to keep her alive and to keep alive the memories of many strangers whom we wish to meet but we couldn't.

"Before picking up the camera, I wasn't sure if I could shoot and direct it all by myself without any training or experience. As until this film, I had never operated even a dlsr. But the urge to tell the story outweighed my inhibitions. I was

adamant to tell the story and so I just went with the flow. And my cinematographer friend, Rachit Pandey helped me with the basics of camera before I went to shoot. And my producer, Aditya Kripalani encouraged me that I could do it and he showed immense faith in me. Also, Film and Television Institute gave me the confidence to make this film as it introduced me to the world cinema when I was a part of screenwriting course at Film and Television Institute before shooting this documentary. I want to thank my patient editor, Joydip Das who spent several months editing it. I'm thankful to my producers Aditya Kripalani and Sweta Chhabria Kripalani and everyone whom I met along this journey.

"This film has been my film school in every way and taught me so much about filmmaking - direction, camera, sound etc. and I'm still learning every day. It has given me the confidence to tell my stories and erased my inhibitions. I now know that I want to write stories and direct it myself. And for anyone who wants to pursue filmmaking, the best thing is just to pick up a camera, shoot something and edit it.

"With the film selection at Indian Film Festival Stuttgart, Germany my parents have finally been able to make sense out of it. And it has instilled hope in me," Supriya signed off.

*(Supriya Prasad was born and brought up in Tura and is currently pursuing filmmaking in Mumbai)*

# Philip: A tale of contrasts

This is the story of Prince Philip, the late Duke of Edinburgh - the longest-serving consort to the longest-reigning sovereign in British history. It is an extraordinary story, told with unique insight and authority by Gyles Brandreth, a multi-talented author who knew the prince for more than 40 years.

Philip - elusive, complex, controversial, challenging, often humorous, sometimes irascible - is the man Elizabeth II once described as her "constant strength and guide".

Who was he? What was he really like? What is the truth about those 'gaffes' and the rumours of affairs? This is the final portrait of an unexpected and often much-misunderstood figure. It is also the portrait of a remarkable marriage that endured for more than 70 years.

Philip and Elizabeth were both royal by birth, both great-great-grandchildren of Queen Victoria, but, in temperament and upbringing, they were two very different people.

The Queen's childhood was loving and secure, the Duke's was turbulent; his grandfather assassinated, his father arrested, his family exiled, his parents separated when he was only ten.

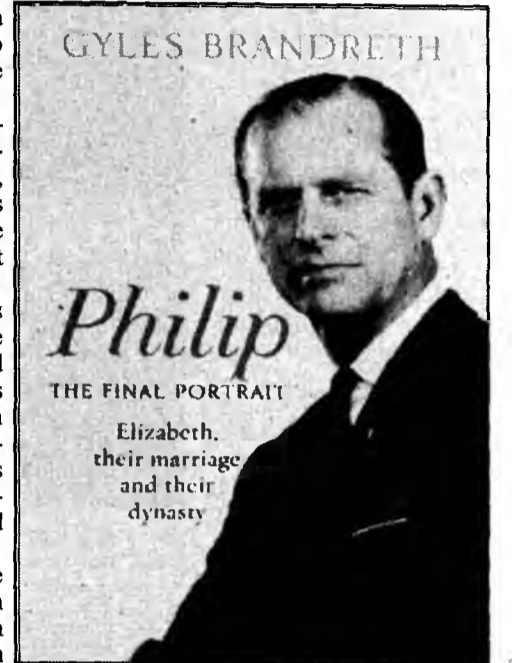
Elizabeth and Philip met as cousins in the 1930s. They married in 1947, aged 21 and 26.

"Philip: The Final Portrait" (Hodder & Stoughton) tells the story of two contrasting lives, assesses the Duke of Edinburgh's character and achievement, and explores the nature of his relationships with his wife, his children and their families - and with the press and public and those at court who were suspicious of him in the early days.

This is a powerful, revealing and, ultimately, moving account of

a long life and a remarkable royal partnership.

Gyles Brandreth is a writer, performer, former MP and Government Whip, now Chancellor of the University of Chester and probably



best known these days as a reporter on BBC1's The One Show and having been a regular on Radio 4's Just a Minute. On TV he has featured on Have I Got News For You, QI, Room 101, Countdown, and This is Your Life. As a journalist he writes for the Telegraph and Daily Mail and is a columnist for The Oldie.

The founder of the National Scrabble Championships, his books about words and language include four best-sellers, "The Joy of Lex", "Word Play", "Have You Eaten Grandma?" and "Dancing by the Light of the Moon".

His novels include seven Victorian murder mysteries featuring Oscar Wilde as his detective and he has published two volumes of diaries and two acclaimed royal biographies. In 2020 he published "The Oxford Book of Theatrical Anecdotes". (IANS)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, JULY 11, 2021

Mercury semi square Uranus on your solar return chart and it will give you mixed results. Financial position will remain stable but you will have to work hard. Keep an eye on your expenses. You will have to put extra efforts in your new task. Be practical and stop dreaming. You will put your best efforts to complete your tasks. You will receive help from friends and family members. New job offers will come. You will also plan to get married. Your family will support you. You will feel more emotional and bonding towards your family. Students will get positive results. Being close to experienced people will prove to be extremely helpful and beneficial. Your love life will be fantastic. You will plan to go on a date with your lover. You will be appreciated for some of your works. You will increase your work potential and capabilities.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

It is a very satisfying week. Your dignity will be high. You will make progress in your job. Your business will flourish and prosper. Your work will gain momentum. Your task will be completed quickly and smoothly. Your peers and bosses will support you. This is the time to enjoy quality time with your friends. You will also become busy in fun and entertaining activities. You will have financial gains. Your time is very favorable. You will take decisions with your intelligence and patience. Students will spend their time learning something new. You will complete all your tasks with cooperation of colleagues.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

It is a peaceful week. You will be successful in completing all your tasks before their due dates. You will also receive inspiration for new tasks. You will have new ideas and they will get executed. Your financial position is going to be good. And you will be busy in shopping. Some pleasant encounter can lead to a romantic affair leading to marriage. The atmosphere at home will be good. You will be tensed about your children's future but you need to take it easy. There will be joy and cheer in family ties. There will be betterment in your destiny. You will receive happiness and support from others.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You will have a favorable week. Your dreams will get fulfilled and you will get your desired things. There will be an atmosphere of bliss and joy all around in your family. Your creative capabilities will prove your imaginative skills to everyone. Talking to a number of people will be fruitful for your business. You will also behave well with others. You will also spare time for your family and have fun, relaxation and entertainment. You will feel happy and receive profits. You will listen to people's problems and also try to help them. You will implement new ideas to expand your business. You will also buy new things for your household. With your attention and concentration something positive will come out for you.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Your earnings will rise. But your expenses too will increase. During this time your health will be in a better condition. But you will have to tackle problems even at your workplace. You will do well in your business/job without any troubles. You will have fun with shopping. The latter part of the week is going to be wonderful. There will be a miraculous change to your behavior and personality problems that had been going on for a long time will get resolved. Despite several attempts your enemies will not be able to cause any harm to you. You will have good time with your brothers. You will also enjoy wonderful bonding with your mate. Your bosses will expect a lot from you. You may receive and set some tough targets for yourself.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

It is an extremely fruitful week. You will make progress in your job. You will receive materialistic pleasure. You will also give importance to your favorite tasks. You will also make plans to visit your closed ones. Your financial position will get better. Those who are in jobs will get bonus. You will also make plans to repair or renovate your house. You will have good romantic life. Your partner will be a source of pleasure for you. You will also get your money back that was given to someone. You will spend this time leisurely. You will also spend this time in fun and entertainment. You will share burden of your work well. The time will be spent swiftly. You will be in a comfortable position. Your financial situation will become stable. You will share happiness and joy with your friends.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You will be full of fun and excitement this week. You will be able to fulfill your desires. You will also spend your time with your loved ones. In order to reduce the pressure and stress of your job, you may take a short break to visit some picnic spot near you. You will also be able to fulfill your wishes. These are extremely favorable days. The star of your destiny will start sparking. You

will also get a promotion in your job. You will be ahead of others in terms of knowledge. You will keep working hard. Your health will get better. You will meet people nicely and also carry out your duties well. You will be ready to accept any kind of challenge. And rise to the occasion.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)

It is a wonderful week for you. You will have favorable days. You will manage to keep your family happy and fulfill their material needs. Your physical health will be very good. You will also try to keep your bosses and colleagues satisfied with your hard work and dedication. You will have good financial gains. You will also keep a positive approach towards life. Your work will get done with ease. You can buy some gifts for your dear ones. Youth/students will be on the lookout for various alternatives in career. Beware of interfering in other people's matters. You will also perform some noble deeds.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You will work with a lot of dedication and bring about a betterment in your work. You will be inclined towards spirituality too. This will bring you happiness and spiritual peace. You will also bring about a betterment in your work. And will not rest till your work is complete. You will also enjoy good relation with your partner. And will spend quality time with your family. Love mates will have a wonderful time. You will have the desire to move ahead in life. You will also be good at making contacts with people. Students will achieve success through their hard work. They will get admission in college/institute of their choice. Small problems will keep cropping up in your mind. Your hands will remain tied in monetary matters.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)

It is going to be an exceptional week in all aspects. You will have financial gains. You will also spend with open hands. Your time will be spent happily. You also need to keep your anger under control. You will work with lot of dedication and your image in the eyes of others will improve. Spring will return to the life of married persons. You will also make tour of nearby places. You will also fulfill your responsibility well. You will experience mental peace. You will also decorate your house. Love mates will have an amazing time. You will share good bonding with your mate. You will get sudden gains. Your efforts will also bear fruits. You will meet people with the same thinking. You will also remain busy in sports and entertainment. You need to be careful about your diet. You will be tired of hard work.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

A dispute that was going for a long time will get resolved. You will undertake a business journey with gains. Your popularity will rise at your workplace. You will be appreciated for your contributions in society and work place. Your opponents will be active, but will not be able to face you. You will fulfill your family responsibility very well. The time is in your favor. You will also receive money that was struck somewhere. You will also develop close affinity with a person known to you. You will also enhance your knowledge. Someone may try to spoil your name and complaint against you to higher authorities.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

The beginning of the week will start with money inflow. Couples will have cordial relations. Those who are single will plan to get married. The family will receive some good news. You will also be able to establish yourself in office with your hard work. There will be plans to expand your business. Your financial position is good. There will be peaceful atmosphere and calmness at home. Everyone will take advice from you. You will have a feeling of dedication. Your struggle in career will come to an end. You will get success. Your boss will be happy with your performance. There will be extra pressure at work and that will affect your family life. Do not let your objective get out of sight. It may affect your earnings.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

All your worries will get over. Your boss will adopt a helpful attitude towards you. He will praise your work and you will become enthusiastic about it. Your meetings with an influential person will open the doors of progress for you. Your romantic life is going to be good. You could be promoted in your job. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will have some relief from pain and chronic diseases. If you control your extravagance, you will be able to save good amount and can invest. You will feel like going on a pilgrimage with your family. You will get much needed emotional support. Your time will be spent in reading knowledge enhancing literature. You will remain healthy and fit.

# Make a career in population studies

By Ranjan K Baruah

We must know that it took hundreds of thousands of years for the world population to grow to 1 billion - then in just another 200 years or so, it grew sevenfold. In 2011, the global population reached the 7 billion mark, and today, it stands at about 7.7 billion, and it's expected to grow to around 8.5 billion in 2030, 9.7 billion in 2050, and 10.9 billion in 2100.

This dramatic growth has been driven largely by increasing numbers of people surviving to reproductive age, and has been accompanied by major changes in fertility rates, increasing urbanization and accelerating migration. These trends will have far-reaching implications for generations to come. The recent past has seen enormous changes in fertility rates and life expectancy. In the early 1970s, women had on average 4.5 children each; by 2015, total fertility for the world had fallen to below 2.5 children per woman. Meanwhile, average global life spans have risen, from 64.6 years in the early 1990s to 72.6 years in 2019.

In addition, the world is seeing high levels of urbanization and accelerating migration. 2007 was the first year in which more people lived in urban areas than in rural areas, and by 2050 about 66 per cent of the world population will be living in cities. All these bring more challenges ahead of us. We are aware that 11th July is observed as World Population Day to generate awareness and raise issues related to population worldwide.

Let us explore career avenues related to population and what aspirants may choose as their area of study if they want to work related to population matters. Well, demography is the statistical study of populations, especially human beings. As a very general science, it can analyze any kind of dynamic living population, i.e., one that changes over time or space. Demography encompasses the study of the size, structure, and distri-



bution of these populations, and spatial or temporal changes in them in response to birth, migration, aging, and death.

Courses are popularly known as population sciences or studies. Population Science is a research discipline that looks for having a transitional brunt on public health and clinical practice through the reduction in disease risk, incidence, and death as well as improved excellence of life for all individuals. Population Science looks across the entire spectrum of factors that can impact health outcomes. These health factors include the realms of health care, individual health behaviours, environmental factors, social and economic factors, policies, and genetic determinants of health. Researchers in the field of Population Science come from various disciplines, such as Public Health, Medicine, Pharmacy, Economics, Demography, and Urban Planning.

Students' after completing their graduation may specialise in population studies which are available as M Sc or M A courses in different universities. Courses includes M.A./M.Sc Programme in Population Studies, Master of Science in Biostatistics and Demography, Master of Population Studies (MPS), Master of Philosophy

(M.Phil.) in Population Studies, Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Population Studies, Master of Population Studies (MPS) (Distance Learning), Post Doctoral Fellowship (P.D.F.), Diploma in Health Promotion Education (DHPE), etc.

Apart from full time courses there are some short term courses like diplomas or certificates programme apart from short term training programme. One of the best institutes to study these courses is Indian Institute of Population Sciences (IIPS). There are scopes in India as we have many activities carried out for the population of India. From surveys to activities these subjects bring scopes for young people to work related to population. Aspirants may get jobs in government departments, research institutes or developmental organisations after finishing their courses related to population studies and United Nations agencies like the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Apart from the academic qualifications one must possess employability skills to be successful when it comes to career with population.

*(The author is a career mentor and skill trainer and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkrnanjan@gmail.com)*

*There is joy in work. There is no happiness except in the realization that we have accomplished something.*

— Henry Ford

**The Shillong Times**

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**UP shows the way**

AT a time when the Modi government and state after state vacillated for a year and a half in the name of Covid pandemic, shut offices and engagingly set in a holiday mood across the nation, the Uttar Pradesh government of Yogi Adityanath is scripting a different tale. The state has come up with a population policy. Short of effecting a legal bar on excessive procreation, it sends out the right signals to the society at large. Uttar Pradesh is the fourth largest in land area and carries with it the largest population size. Its population per square kilometre is about 850 against a national average of 450. This is posing serious problems -- even after the bifurcation of the northern UP districts and formation of the Uttarakhand state in the Year 2000. The population policy aims to deny several rights to those who do not conform to family planning norms. Members of such families cannot hold any elected post and cannot get government jobs, among other proposed curbs.

Prima facie, the new policy may be interpreted by some quarters as part of the Hindutva brigade's penchant to target Muslims or cause discomfiture to them. As a matter of fact, large numbers of Muslim families are reticent about such planning at home. This has been a normal practice for them for ages and this is happening across the geographical spectrum and across continents. Yet, notably, large segments of the educated among this community too are ignoring diktats from mullas, realizing the ill effects of large family size and limiting child births. Other than for well-off families, proper upbringing of children is not an easy task. In Japan as also in European nations, the social trend now is not only against procreation but also against marriage. People want to have a free life and be done with it. Even in China, this trend is catching up in Shanghai and elsewhere as hiring a space for a family life is unaffordable. India, tied to its old traditions, is a different ball game. Many Hindu families too are not giving due regard to family planning norms and there are large-scale procreations. China brought rules half a century ago to limit the number of children for a couple to one, to start with, and later to two. Now, faced with a geriatric population bulge, and factories requiring hands, it is liberalizing the scene. Serving national interests is important. It's as important as taking care of our personal interests. UP shows the way.

# The lost kingdom

By HH Mohrmen

More often than not, the internet and social media in particular are being blamed for generating many ills in the society including spreading of fake news, but sometimes interesting and worthwhile things also happen on these sites. Internet and social media could also be an interesting place because a lot of good things happen in different platforms. For those who use the medium seriously, it is not only a mean for information sharing but more importantly a place to learn for one who desires knowledge. Sometimes the information exchange on social media platforms could lead to discovery of new truths and wisdom.

For so long no serious study was done on the Jaftia kingdom and the history of the monarchy has been lost except for folk stories that have been told by the hills people of Jaftia. All along the assumption especially by the hills people was that since the kingdom belongs to them, only they know about it. The assumption was that the subjects from the plains belts of the country have very little or no information about the greatness of the kingdom. But recently rather unexpectedly, the gap between the hills and plains portion of the erstwhile Jaftia kingdom was bridged.

In the last few months three articles about the Jaftia kingdom which were aptly titled "Jaintia: The story of the lost kingdom" was shared on Facebook by people from Jaintiapur, Bangladesh. The three posts have drawn the interest of many who live on both sides of the India-Bangladesh border. The write-ups, originally written in Bengali by Asif Ajar was translated to English by Faisal Khonglah who are themselves residents of Jaintiapur. And the fact that one is a Khasia and another is a non-Khasia descendant of the people who live in Jaintiapur make the incident more interesting.

The posts have brought to light the truth about the Jaftia kingdom, which was later ruled by more than 20 kings of (Khasia/Jayanteah) Pnar descent for more than 200 years. The kingdom according to the post, comprises 18 regions in the plains and the 12 elakas headed by the Dalois who are representatives of the king in the hills. This is also in accordance with the common perception amongst the highlanders that theirs is

the land of the 12 Daloi or the twelve chieftains. Interestingly the hill region is also traditionally called as (ka Ri Khadar Daloi) the land of the 12 chieftains.

According to the story from the hills portion of the kingdom, the Sutnga kings invaded a kingdom in the plains and expanded its dominion to the area. There were references about the long history of the kingdom in the chronicles of the Ahom kings which was later compiled (in Assamese) into a separate volume by Prof. S.K. Bhuyan and called "The Jayantia Buranji". Other neighbouring kingdoms also have records about the Jaftia kingdom in their chronicles. Many references about the kingdom were also made by British officers and visitors

Jaftia kings are the only kings amongst the Khasi Pnar tribe who had issued coins.

The Facebook post has evoked much interest in the history of the lost kingdom amongst the people who live in the Khasi and Jaftia hills region. Many have sought more information about the kingdom and were surprised that they were not aware of this very important part of history. The same has also created a lot of interest amongst the people of Jaintiapur in Bangladesh and most of them are plains people or non-Khasia.

There are considerable amount of evidence about the approximately three hundred glorious reigns of the Jaftia kings over the plain and the hills portion of the kingdom. True the written records have

the path from Nartiang to Jaintiapur will help establish the dates when the kingdom extended its dominion to the plains. The need of the hour is to date the monoliths both at Jaintiapur at Nartiang and the megalithic bridges along the path from Nartiang to Jaintiapur.

It is now obvious that compiling the complete history of the kingdom will only be achieved if sources from both sides of the border are taken into consideration, which hopefully will happen sooner than later. But more than compiling the history of the lost kingdom, there is a need for opening an opportunity for people to people contact between the hills and the plains people of the erstwhile Jaftia kingdom.

One cannot predict which direction this journey of discovering the lost kingdom will take but there is definitely a deep desire to know about the history of kingdom from people on both sides of the border. What will be interesting is the outcome of this new found discovery of the history of the kingdom by the people on both side of the border. The immediate outcome is that the hills and plains people of the two countries realise that they were once upon a time part of the same glorious kingdom and they have a shared history. It may also not be out of place to mention that Sylhet region up until the reign of the British was attached to Assam. It is rather unfortunate that the region was made part of East Pakistan during Independence. The erstwhile kingdom is now divided into two independent countries, the hill region of the country becomes part of India and the plains portion was made part of Bangladesh, earlier known as East Pakistan. It will be interesting to see if this shared history will help connect the people of the two regions which were once upon a time part of the glorious Jaftia kingdom.

But the most important outcome of this study is that it provides evidence of the existence of the Jaftia kingdom since time immemorial in an area which is now part of Bangladesh. It has also proven beyond doubt the fact that the Khasi Pnar people who live in Bangladesh are the autochthons of the place. They are indeed the indigenous people of the area that they live in because they are the descendants of the erstwhile Jaftia kingdom.

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to the kingdom at different points of time.

But the major source of information about the kingdom could be found in books like "The History of Jaintia" written in by SM Ali and published from Dacca in 1954. Other books which include one by Shadap-Sen Namita Catherine "The origin and early history of the Khasi-Synteng people," which was her PhD thesis was published from Calcutta in 1981. Another book which mention extensively about the kingdom is "The History and culture of the Khasi people" written by Hamlet Bareth Ngap Kynta and published by Spectrum Publication, Guwahati (2016). Recently N.G Rhodes & S.K. Bose published another book which brought to light the numismatic history of the kingdom in a book titled, "The coinage of Jaintiapur" (January 2010). Perhaps the

established the fact that the Jaftia kingdom has existed for the past two hundred years plus but the tribal kings must have ruled the kingdom much before they achieved the glory and fame that they had before the British arrived in the region.

The exits of the monoliths around the palace in Jaintiapur which is now in Bangladesh not only establishes the connection that the kingdom has with the Khasi Pnar culture, but it will also help answer the question of how long the Pnar family has ruled the territory. The answer to the question when did the Sutnga king capture the kingdom and extend their dominion to the plains is still open. Whether the Pnar kings have ruled the kingdom since prehistoric times is a question which we are yet to find answers to. Perhaps dating the monoliths and the megalithic structure in Jaintiapur and all along

He was the icon of Modi govt's intolerance

## The inevitability of Ravi Shankar Prasad's exit

By K Raveendran

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut is not known for his oratory. But his one-liners have been straight to the point and often controversial, at times without any justification. But on many occasions his comments were noted for the insights these provided to behind the scene activities. Recently, he said the relationship between Shiv Sena and BJP was not like 'India-Pakistan', but rather like the one between Bollywood power couple Aamir Khan and Kiran Rao, who recently announced their separation, although they said they would continue to collaborate at the professional level.

Some time ago, Raut's

trust actions against these platforms, which often act like predators, occur as a matter of routine. So there was nothing unusual about the clash between the Modi government and the social media platforms.

But Ravi Shankar Prasad did it look like a personal fight between himself and these platforms. And his utterances often bordered on arrogance and arbitrariness that allowed the platforms to play the victim. It caused a huge embarrassment to Prime Minister Modi, whose respect for freedom of expression was always viewed by the outside world with suspicion even otherwise. At a time when Modi's cred-



confession that he always took medicine from the compound and never from the doctor had stirred up a hornet's nest and placed him at the receiving end of the ire of doctors of all hues. His target was the World Health Organisation, which he described as a 'useless organisation' and responsible for the outbreak of Covid pandemic.

Probably his best yet was reserved for the ouster of Law and IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad from the Modi cabinet, ahead of the jumbo cabinet expansion. "Ravi Shankar Prasad always used to boast about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's actions terming them as masterstrokes. However, this time this "masterstroke" seems to have rebounded on him," Raut said. He could not have been more right.

Ravi Shankar Prasad, by way of his body language as well as abrasive ways, had become an icon of intolerance,

ability as a ruler in effective control was on the block for his inability to deal with the second wave of the pandemic, an embarrassment on the social media front was eminently avoidable. And somebody had to pay the price and in this case the choice was not at all difficult.

Prakash Javadekar keeping company with Prasad on the exit came as a big surprise to most, as the affable Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Environment, Public Enterprise and Heavy Industries was just the opposite of whatever Ravi Shankar Prasad was. Perhaps, Javadekar was too polite and good-natured to be an effective minister, otherwise the commonality between the two was only in terms of domains that belonged to IT and IB ministries, both of which had to do with information and freedom of expression.

**The conflict of interest between the social media giants and the ruling establishment is a universal phenomenon. The likes of Google, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp often breach the contours of operational good conduct in the pursuit of their business interests and have faced administrative action and massive punitive responses from governments which recognise individual privacy and freedom as one of the most fundamental tenets of democracy.**

which critics have been seeing as the most pronounced trait of the Modi government. He was apparently conjuring up himself as a super minister who had more powers and authority that those conferred on him by way of his official position as the Law and IT minister. In fact, it was suggested in one of the columns here that his face was perfect as an emoji for intolerance and arrogance. He apparently thought his 'Modi bhakti' was a benediction that would provide sanctity to all his actions.

The conflict of interest between the social media giants and the ruling establishment is a universal phenomenon. The likes of Google, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp often breach the contours of operational good conduct in the pursuit of their business interests and have faced administrative action and massive punitive responses from governments which recognise individual privacy and freedom as one of the most fundamental tenets of democracy. Anti-

Modi's advice to the new ministers immediately after the swearing in had clues to what had gone wrong with those who were asked to leave, particularly Ravi Shankar Prasad. Modi is reported to have told the new ministers that their efforts should be such that their work shines instead of themselves. The Prime Minister also advised his ministers to avoid making 'unnecessary statements' in the media, and rather channelise their energies into ministerial work, rather than self-promotion.

But despite all his failings in terms of mutual respect, Modi was more diplomatic than Ravi Shankar Prasad in all his interactions, whether with the media, players of the domains he was in charge as minister and even the opposition parties. Modi told the ministers to meet their predecessors and 'learn from their experience'. Even if he had intended it as a pun, it was well-disguised, an art that was completely alien to Ravi Shankar Prasad. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

**When will Meghalaya open up?**

Editor,  
The second Covid wave has receded from most parts of the country, except a few regions, Meghalaya being one of them. Despite severe lockdowns and restrictions for over two months, it is not immediately clear how our state is still seeing 400 to 500 daily cases. In pursuit of transparency, I request the Health Department to shed light on the current situation instead of merely supplying daily statistics. What are the sources of infection for the cases over the past few weeks? How many cases are attributable to new entrants to the state, and their contacts? Is contact tracing and micro-containment not adequate to control the spread? Are there any specific activities that correlate strongly to the continued spread - based on rational scientific analysis? It would greatly help the public to know how these cases are coming up consistently, so that we may take adequate preventive measures.

With regards to the ongoing vaccination efforts, it is an indisputable fact that we are unlikely to see complete normalcy without mass vaccination. With slow vaccination progress, the entire state is likely to be under extended restrictions for the upcoming months, if not years - unless things change! Given the vaccine hesitation, the gov-

ernment should disseminate daily data on the percentage of vaccinated persons (either partial or complete) with regards to the new cases, hospitalisations and deaths. This should help the public at large make informed choices based on the probabilities of Covid consequences for each vaccination status. At some point the government should be decisive enough to remove most intra-state restrictions and allow the non-vaccinated citizens to deal with the consequences, if any, of their own choice - rather than continue with restrictions that severely affect the lives of ALL common citizens, including the vaccinated segments. If someone can decide for themselves as per the law on vaccination, then why does the government have to play such a protective parental role on behalf of adult citizens? Give people freedom and let them handle the responsibilities of freedom - this notion is the very essence of a sovereign democracy, and the government is requested to respect this.

At this point, with vaccines available to the willing, no one in the state will have a strong base to criticise the government for covid consequences if restrictions are lowered - hence this must be considered strongly.

Lastly, the government is requested to evaluate specific targeted restrictions to combat Covid instead of freedom-crippling measures. The new restrictions of night curfews and Sunday curfews

are a shot in the dark. Is there a verifiable connection between Covid spread and night time hours? Would these curfews curtail Covid spread if the markets and businesses are allowed to open across the other six days of the week? Is the government acting in the best interests of its citizens when it constantly adds blanket restrictions? Even with vaccination being freely available - when will this lockdown state of life end?

These are questions we all have to ponder upon as we sit locked up in our houses during the upcoming curfew hours and days.

Yours etc.,  
Joe Lyngdoh,  
Via email

**HIKAI - a headache for teachers**

Editor,  
My son brags about our download speed and tells me that he downloaded a game from Steam and the max downloading speed was 25Mbps! I am astounded by this and think deeply about his life and compare it to the life of our maid servant's daughter who goes to a state government school in Police Bazar. Our maid has a monthly income of Rs 15000 out of which she has to educate her child and also look after the family. She is a widow and the only income source for her family. Her husband passed away in 2018 and since then she is

the sole earning member for the family.

A 'Device Availability Survey' conducted by the Ministry for Education revealed that only 2.51% of government school students had access to a computer or a laptop. Students having tablets are confined to 0.89% and smart-phones with internet connection to 47.98% while 10.42% of the students have access to a smartphone without internet connection.

Now with these insights let me come to our beloved Shillong and talk about the sorry state it is in because of this digital divide. In this specific school, that my maid servant's daughter attends, teachers and students are compelled to utilize an internet learning gateway called HIKAI by the school management of Ramakrishna Mission, Cherrapunji. Having gone through the interface of HIKAI, I find it admirable. The interface is at par with online learning portals used in schools and universities abroad. There are resources which teachers can update and ask the students to read and study; there are drop-boxes assigned to each student for them to submit their assignments which only the teacher has access to and then grades them accordingly.

However, there is a huge gap in the execution of the learning gateway. What the administration needs to understand is that students attending this school are not at all from an economically strong background. They all do not have stable internet

connection; also their parents have only a single smart phone so how does the administration expect students to gain access to this portal? Not only that but proper technical knowledge is also not given to the students so that they can gain access to the portal and reap its benefit.

My maid servant has one smart phone and one regular feature phone. She tells me her monthly expenditure due to this pandemic has also increased as she has to recharge her smart phone with data packs quite often. Earlier, she could subsist for an entire month with a Rs 100 top-up for talk time; now she has to recharge a minimum of Rs. 250 for a 50 GB monthly plan or an unlimited plan of Rs. 128 or so for 28 days. At least her daughter is lucky and we help her whenever she needs some help uploading an assignment to HIKAI. But not all are as fortunate as she is. I have heard from teachers of that school that students ask their tuition teachers to rent out their smart phones so that they can send pictures of their assignment to the class WhatsApp group that the teachers have created.

This process of uploading documents to the portal should have been done by the students but since the students of the school are not instructed on how to use the HIKAI portal interface, all of the uploading has to be done by teachers now. It is truly distressing not only for the parents and the students but also for the teachers. Teachers get something like 35 to

40 raw images of the assignments per class depending on the number of classes they teach and have to convert those to PDF format and then upload to the students' account themselves.

I spoke to one of teachers in this school and he disclosed to me about the amount of stress he has to go through everyday due to HIKAI. He said he had to create about 50 odd accounts for each of the students in his class each having a user ID and a password. He additionally disclosed that he gets in excess of 100 pictures in his WhatsApp class groups that he has to process and convert to PDFs and then upload to each account of these students. He finds it really distressing as he has to stay up late into the night to complete this task.

Even though HIKAI has the potential to be a fascinating educational portal, its implementation leaves much to be desired. Proper checks and balances are not in place. The fact that the administration pressurizes teachers to maintain 80% submission rate is meaningless as the proper enforcement of Education is missing. Whether the administration checks the contents in these assignments or just checks the statistical data is something to ponder upon.

Yours etc.,  
Dushyant Wadhwan  
Via email

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

"In the night of death, hope sees a star, and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing."

— Robert Green Ingersoll

## The Shillong Times

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### DoNER as mediator

THE new Minister for the Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), GK Reddy appears to be serious about the development backlogs in the North Eastern States and has stated upfront that speeding up the socio-economic development of the region will be his key focus. Reddy's focus is also to complete ongoing projects on time to avoid time and cost overruns. DoNER should now also focus on making Prime Minister Modi's Act East Policy a reality. This has been out of the radar of the NDA Government for a while now and is driven essentially by the Ministry for External Affairs (MEA) which in recent times seems to be more focused on events in Afghanistan post the departure of the US troops from there and the resurrection of the Taliban's atrocities. The NDA Government's stance vis-a-vis the turn of events in Myanmar where democracy has yet again been replaced by military dictatorship is problematic. In fact, India's stand on this critical question of whether it supports democracy in Myanmar has been muted. Reasons given are that Myanmar's junta had assisted India in flushing the North East militant outfits taking refuge in that country.

If Myanmar continues to remain in a state of flux we might as well say goodbye to the Act East Policy. Myanmar is the overland bridge between the North Eastern states and South East Asia. The India- Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway that links to the Asian Highway in the North Eastern states is still under construction. This highway will connect Moreh the land customs station in Manipur, with Mae Sot in Thailand via Myanmar. The Stilwell road in Assam too is linked to Myanmar. These are important trade routes which need to be given a fillip under the Act East Policy. DoNER could be that critical link to make sure that the Act East Policy becomes operational and the tag of "landlocked" for defining the North East is erased from the vocabulary of the people here.

Since the takeover of the new Chief Minister of Assam, Himanta Sarma, talks of resolving the border disputes between Assam and the states of Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya have been revived. Sarma has spoken about a give and take policy and recently he made a statement that the CRPF would be placed at the respective troubled borders to contain violence. But without a moderator in this conflict resolution process, things might not move in the right direction. DoNER, which is the agency overseeing all development aspects of the eight states, is best placed to be the interlocutor.

# Stan Swamy's death — time to look within

By Albert Thyrniang

The custodial death of the 84-year old Adivasi rights crusader, Stan Swamy sparked off fury and grief in the country. The central government and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) came under heavy criticism for the alleged 'false charges' implicating the activist in the Elgar Parishad or Bhima-Koregaon violence and slapping him with sedition under the 'draconian' Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1963 for having 'Maoist' links. The Special NIA Court and the Bombay High Court were also slighted for refusing to grant bail to the 'oldest prisoner' several times. The undertrial, a Parkinson's patient besides other ailments was allegedly treated inhumanly in jail. He ultimately passed away on 5 July 2021 in hospital in police custody.

Father Stan Swamy's real name was Stanislaus Lourduwamy. He is hailed as the champion of the indigenous tribes who worked heart and soul to protect their land and forests from corporates and mining companies that are out to grab the resources for their selfish ends. He also questioned the 'powers that be' for caring little for human dignity and instead exploiting the Adivasis with hard labour and minimum wages.

Swamy saw that the Fifth Schedule was blatantly violated. The Fifth Schedule of the Constitution deals with the administration and control of the tribal areas mainly in Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan and Telangana. One of the special provisions of this Schedule states that land belonging to the Scheduled Tribes (STs) were acquired for large scale mining, building of dams and setting up of industries without consulting the land owners. The Fifth Schedule stipulates the setting up of Tribes Advisory Councils. However, the provisions were being bypassed. Swamy's activism challenged this violation.

Partly due to his works the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) was passed by parliament in 1996 ensuring that the Government of India entrusts the governance of Scheduled Areas, with the traditional Gram Sabhas or village councils and grants them power to administer their lands and forests. With this law in effect the central, state governments and private players could no longer take advantage of the "disempowered" tribals. This obviously upset the influential industrialists and powerful mining lobbies.

Another crusading work that got on the nerves of vest-

ed interests was the passage by Parliament of the Land Acquisition Act, 2013 or the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition that lays down the procedures and rules for granting compensation, rehabilitation and resettlement to the affected persons. Swamy campaigned for the Act and was enthusiastically involved in spreading awareness among the affected people to claim their rightful dues even if they lose their land to the government or private companies.

Swamy's effort got a boost with the Supreme Court's verdict of July 2013 that states that the 'owner of the land is also owner of the sub-soil/mineral wealth' and that ownership of such resources under the ground are not with the government. This is a rejection of the argument that individual owners cannot claim any proprietary right on the sub-soil resources under Section 425 of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957. Swamy organised the tribals to assert themselves citing the favourable Apex Court's judgement.

A third action that might have threatened governments, the police and the administration was the filing of the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Jharkhand High Court detailing it that the 3000 Adivasi youths languishing in jails for years together deserve a speedy trial. Prior to the PIL Swamy had conducted a detailed and credible study of the conditions of branded 'Naxalites' in jails. His decision to found the Persecuted Prisoners Solidarity Committee (PPSC), a conglomerate rights organisation put Swamy under surveillance which ultimately led to his arrest and hastened his demise.

Stan Swamy is hailed for holding a mirror to the powerful. The mirror reflected injustice and exploitation. Since Swamy was a Catholic Priest it is perhaps an opportune time to relate to the Church as well. The tragic death of a member of the Society of Jesus (SJ) challenges the Church. The undertrial held a mirror to the Church as well. The image from the mirror is the silence of the Church on social, political and economic issues affecting the less privileged. In a story someone grimly observed, "The Jesuit priest battled for the underprivileged as a lonesome rider on a lonesome road." Persons of the calibre of Swamy are on the decline.

Outspoken individuals are becoming a rare commodity. The Church does not encour-

age daring speakers. The Church prefers 'prudence' rather than being a martyr. Stan Swamy asks us today: How many current Church leaders have been vocal on constitutional rights of the Dalits, Adivasis, tribals, minorities and the under privileged? Why is the Church leadership been silent against hate, intolerance, communalism, religious bigotry and the dangers from right wing ideology? Has the Church made known its defence of the constitutional principles and values like secularism, pluralism and tolerance whenever they come under attack? Is it too evident that the Church has been found wanting particularly during the present regime? Will the church raise another Stan Swamy? Will he/she get the backing if someone was to follow the footsteps of Stan Swamy?

Though Swamy was born in Tamil Nadu he spent most of his adult life in Jharkhand and in united Bihar state. He completely identified with the Adivasis. He sacrificed his life for them. He is even hailed as their 'martyr'. This shows that others can also empathise with us. They can work for our welfare. They may even do a better job than us. Therefore, exclusive attitude is unwise. We only stand to lose. I personally know officers from outside Meghalaya who are more hardworking and committed than many of their local counterparts. Before retiring an officer told me that he took only three casual leaves (CL) throughout his career. How many indigenous officers can say so?

My repeated mention of the parochial clergy is an irritation to the concerned. The clergy in Jowai diocese for example won't accept any 'outsider' to be their bishop. They seem to claim they have capable candidates. But if there are able candidates why have the authorities not found one after so long? Their closed-mindedness is a loss to the people of the diocese who are eager to have a leader. It is very much possible that a non-local can perform his duties selflessly like Stan Swamy.

Prior to his eventful three decade sojourn in Bihar/Jharkhand Swamy worked in Bangalore and Tamil Nadu in the 1970s. In the 'Silicon Valley', while the director of the Jesuit-led 'Indian Social Institute', Swamy was in the thick of the struggle on behalf of the bonded agricultural labourers. In Villupuram and Tanjore he organised Dalits to demand for their right to be treated as human. His decision brought displea-

sure among a section in the Church.

Obviously Swamy was moved by the injustice and inequality in the society and in the Church particularly in the Southern states. Caste system discriminates a great deal. It is too harsh to call the Church 'casteist' but caste discrimination exists visibly in the Church. A Google search yields the following results: Is the Church finally acting against India's caste system?

'Stop caste discrimination in the Church' - *New Internationalist*;  
'Caste system and Christianity - Kerala bishops';  
'Church & caste - The Indian Express';  
'Discrimination within the Church - The Hindu';  
'Not even the Church escapes India's caste system - UCA News'.

The other day a friend of mine narrated that to date different castes occupy only the allotted space in many Churches. Members of his society were working in a particular local Church. The highest castes sit in the middle of the Church, the next highest castes in the right and the lowest castes in the left. Holy Communion must be distributed first to the middle occupants then to the right and finally to the left. The order can't be reversed. His society did try to do away with this practice but surprisingly the first to oppose were the priests and religious from that Church. Another religious society took up the challenge to reform this blatant inequality but again the fiercest opponents were the clergy and Church leaders.

Is the Church serious to end this unchristian practice? There's need for serious soul searching as to what is the Church doing to eradicate untouchability, and casteism? Why did the Church not fully support Stan Swamy to rid this evil in the Church?

In seminars and updating courses, resource persons openly say that caste plays a crucial factor in the appointment of Bishops and other leaders. Even choosing candidates for higher studies is done on caste considerations. My four years in Bangalore were an eye opener. Priests publicly protest against appointments of bishops from another caste or region. It was a shock that in a cosmopolitan city like Bangalore, in certain Churches, except the local language, mass in any other language is forbidden. Church leaders themselves campaigned for the 'ban'. An introspection could reveal that the ideals and values of Stan Swamy are not welcome.

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## India's tight rope walk on Myanmar poses problems

# N-E states clueless on how to deal with refugees

By Ashis Biswas

Some recent policy decisions made by Government of India (GOI) in the context of the civil strife in Myanmar have come at a price. Negative perceptions of the ruling NDA II as a regime with a paranoid obsession about national security and an expansion of commercial interests of selected Indian corporate concerns abroad, have been strengthened in the Northeast. During the past few weeks, anti-Indian criticism has acquired a new keener edge among major sections of liberal opinion in the NE and Myanmar, going by local media accounts.

In the context of the unfortunate death in official custody of 84 year old dissident leader Stan Swamy only days ago, this is a trend that Delhi-based policymakers would do well not to ignore.

Only days ago, the Burmese HR organisation Justice for Myanmar (JFM) in a media release reported the delivery of advanced surveillance equipment and other sensitive items produced by an Indian public sector unit, to Myanmar authorities. It was common knowledge, said JFM spokesman Mr Y. Maung, that the ruling army junta currently suppressing an armed struggle against Myanmar's own citizens, used such weaponry and equipment against pro-democracy forces.

Yet the Indian PSU Bharat Electronics Ltd BEL had delivered electro-optic systems, radar radio extractor receivers, VHF communication systems, graphics processors, workstation hardware, server storage equipment and batteries etc. to the ruling Junta headed by gen Min Hlaing. Most unfortunately, such assistance was provided even as most other countries/nations were suspending official dealings with the present administration in Myanmar following its illegal February coup, overthrowing elected political authority. The despatches were made from Jaipur and Bangalore in March. Already under army occupation, over 900 people mainly pro-democracy protestors had been killed as violence erupted in different parts of Myanmar.

This comes in the wake of a recent announcement made by the Adanis, who have promised to stop work on a new container terminal project in Myanmar, in the face of protests by HR groups. Around \$130 million had been invested in the construction and about 300 people were working on the site. However, two civil rights groups alleged that the Adanis had paid around \$30 million to the MEC company in Myanmar for securing lease rights. This company had been hit by Western sanctions because of its close ties with the Myanmar army.

As the controversy continued, the Adanis announced their pullout decision in a recent statement, without clarifying the position regarding their having made any payments to the MEC. However, Australian civil rights spokesmen, who have had their own problems with the Indian Corporate group over certain projects earlier, felt that construction should not have started in the first place as the sanctions had begun to take effect.

The point is, in the eyes of the pro-democracy people of Myanmar and international liberal opinion, both India's private as well as its public sector seem to be keen to continue business as usual with sanction-hit countries. Commercial interests take precedence over all other considerations in international relations. The adoption of such an approach puts India in the same category of countries with dubious HR records, such as China. Leaders in Beijing insist that

they prefer not to lecture other countries on how to handle their internal affairs. But this has not saved China itself from coming under Western sanctions over what is seen as its indifference to fundamental human rights issues, within its own borders and elsewhere.

Kolkata-based officials say that GOI has its own tight rope walking act to carry out in Myanmar. India's own ACT-EAST policy has been stalled effectively following the February coup. The economy was slowing down even before the Covid 19 pandemic began. Now the situation has worsened and India's economy has been hit harder than China or Bangladesh. As for Myanmar, India accounts for less than 4 per cent of its total imports, as against 30 per cent plus for China.

While the Kaladan multimodal infra development project which would significantly improve India's connectivity through Myanmar on to other South East Asian countries is nearing completion, China has already invested billions of dollars in a range of projects as against India's relatively minor investments.

Therefore, given this financial backlog vis-a-vis China, Japan or Thailand as investors in Myanmar, any further slippage in earnings from bilateral trade and business could only further marginalise India. This puts Delhi in a delicate position where it has to tread carefully and not react emotionally to new challenges and issues.

But in Mizoram or Manipur, where people fleeing from Myanmar are still crossing over for safety, putting up in relief camps, with relatives or NGO help, GOI's insistence in discouraging further exodus smacks of insensitivity. Unverified accounts suggest that the number of such people is lose to 20,000 now and increasing. Despite official instruction from the highest levels in Delhi to dissuade such people from staying on Indian territory gently and not to treat them as refugees, it has proved difficult to turn away crowds of old men women and children fleeing from army excesses.

The number of internally displaced persons within Myanmar according to UN and other estimates range from 1,50,000 to 2,00,000. During the height of monsoon weather, some are reportedly without shelter and in urgent need of medical attention or other help. Regardless of orders from higher authorities it is difficult to turn people hit by such distress away from Indian territory.

Chief Minister of Mizoram Mr Zorathanga has written to Prime Minister, Narendra Modi explaining why states in the Northeast find it difficult not to shelter the fleeing Burmese people on their territory. Most local tribes are spread across both sides of the international border between India and Myanmar and are linked by marital and other ties. As of now, such people are being looked after by state governments in Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and elsewhere. A number of local NGOs and other agencies have come forward to help materially. Efforts are on to step up the scale and range of such voluntary assistance.

Naturally NDA leaders cannot officially exercise any hard option-type of solution here. Yet, GOI's basic concern -- the increasing presence and activities of large numbers of Burmese refugees including militants fighting against Naypyidaw authorities whether civil or military for years, creates fresh security issues for the troubled NE states -- cannot be dismissed summarily either. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

## Uniform Civil Code – need of the hour

Editor,

The Delhi High court has identified what modern India needs - a Uniform Civil Code (UCC). In fact, there is a critical need for a common law for a modern nation. The court must be commended for making such a candid observation. This is particularly relevant at a time when certain sections of the Indian society are stubbornly insisting on personal laws for different communities and groups. The court has expressed the feelings of majority of common Indian people on the issue.

There is no denying the fact that political will is essential for the implementation of such a law. True, common people across the country are in favour of such a law. Issues related to property ownership, succession, marriage, divorce could be resolved to a great

extent when such a common law is legislated. Relaxations in laws for certain sections of people will lead to division of people based on laws. Hence a common law that is applicable to all sections will prove to be beneficial to the Indian society. The architects of modern India had envisaged an inclusive society where everyone came under a common law. For this to materialise, there needs to be a common law that transcends religious, regional, linguistic considerations.

If such a common law is formulated and implemented, Indian society can get rid of many social evils. Many social evils have been adopted in society as part of religious practices. Everyone wants our country to be progressive and modern in all aspects. A common law that is based on practical and logical ideas will be acceptable to all. Different laws for different communities often leads to controversies and complications. In such a situation even the judiciary is at a loss

and unable to pronounce the right verdict.

If all sections of people can be convinced about the importance of such a law, if all political parties cooperate and if the government has the political will, this can be achieved. Further, a massive social awareness and approval from all sections of society is essential for the formulation and implementations of such a law.

Yours etc.,  
Venu G S,  
Via email

## Conversion of IP land to reserved forests

Editor,

In the article captioned, 'Land of indigenous tribes converted to reserved forests in Manipur,' the writer T S Haokip (ST July 9, 2021) referred to free movement of Kukis in their ancestral lands. To quote him "That they fought the British in the

Anglo-Kuki war 1917- 1919 in defence of their ancestral land and freedom is well documented and acknowledged world-wide". Not to speak of worldwide acknowledgement, even within the state of Manipur both the Manipuris and Nagas including British writers never acknowledged such claims. Such a statement is a complete distortion of historical facts.

What really happened was during the First World War in the month of April 1917 the British imperialists had requisitioned the recruitment of Indian Labour Corp for the war efforts in France which included North-East tribesmen like Lushais, Kukis, Manipuris, Khasis, Garos, Nagas etc. However, some Kuki villagers refused to comply with the British order. As a result the British sent military punitive expeditions against those rebellious villages. Therefore, to label such non-compliance movement as a rebellion is wrong and it cannot be unnecessarily glorified as the Anglo-Kuki war for the defence of their ancestral lands and free-

dom. Moreover, historically speaking there is hardly any mention of the word Kuki before the 19th century in any recorded history. On the contrary, when the Kukis as late migrants settled down in Naga areas they used to pay nominal taxes to the Naga chieftains as permit settlement. Therefore, my humble request to the writer is that distortion of historical facts and unsubstantiated exaggeration should be avoided to maintain credibility and quality of writing.

Yours etc.  
Xavier Mao  
Department of Philosophy  
NEHU, Shillong

## COVID widows need livelihoods

Editor,

The Assam Government should be applauded for launching a scheme to grant one-time financial help of Rs 2.5 lakh each to widows whose husbands died of Covid-19. Widows with a family income of less than

Rs 5 lakh per annum will benefit from the new scheme. Many states have also introduced various schemes and programmes to rehabilitate pandemic-affected households and help them get back on their feet. Financial assistance may provide some relief to widowed women. For these women's lives to be sustained, they require a multifaceted rehabilitation programme. State governments, corporate sectors, and private organisations must provide them with chances for skill development and employment at various levels. Widows may benefit from self-help groups led by women. Society's combined efforts and constructive support is needed to empower Covid widows.

Yours etc.,  
Amit Singh Kushwaha,  
Via email

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"Climate is always evolving, and natural disaster have always existed."

— Marco Rubio

## The Shillong Times

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### Countdown to space tourism

GOOD things must get going. This July will be etched in history as the moment when space would come a bit closer to humans and signal the green light to the long-awaited 'space tourism,' albeit in a small way. Billionaire Richard Branson and a crew of five flew above the edge of space, less than 90km above Earth's surface -- an altitude good enough for them to experience a few minutes of weightlessness -- and then glided back to the Spaceport America rocket ship. They did so from the New Mexico desert. Soon, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos too will be heading for space in a similar mission on July 20, the day that marks the 52nd anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing. In due course, loads of tourists will keep taking off for space.

Russian space agency Roscosmos had facilitated the trip of businessman Dennis Tito to the International Space Station (ISS) in 2001, the first time anyone other than an astronaut went and "lived for a while" in space. Bookings are now open for space tourism. This is the calling of the times. The earth is just a tiny spot in the universe about which we know so little. Physically reaching out to this wide spectrum is impossible. But, technology could someday facilitate contact with living beings in outer space. Aliens could also reach us. Space is a big mystery which makes its exploration exhilarating. Life of humanity could change in unimaginable ways as this exploration carries forward. What happens this month is just a start.

Down below, aviation itself remains less explored. Attempts are on to use rocket technology for passenger flights, which can take people from one part of the Earth to the other -- as between New Delhi and New York -- in a matter of less than an hour. Rockets leap up with a speed of 5,000 to 10,000mph against the over 500mph speed for passenger flights. Bookings for space tourism cost a bomb but this is the latest craze for the super-rich who have already experienced it all down here. The possibilities are immense. Notably space explorations received a set-back after the end of the Cold War, since the 1980s, as the competition was mainly between the US and the erstwhile USSR. Thereafter, these two nations collaborated via the International Space Station, but the old enthusiasm is missing. Notably, India had made some early steps in space, while those like China, France and Israel, even the UAE, are seriously considering the space exploration venture.

# Environmental decay Strategy adaption critical

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

A recent study published in 'The Lancet Planetary Health' journal found that nearly 74,000 excess deaths in India annually can be attributed to abnormal hot and cold temperatures related to climate change. The deaths related to hot temperatures increased in all regions from 2000 to 2019, indicating that global warming because of climate change will make this mortality figure worse in future. The number of deaths in the country per year linked with abnormal cold temperatures is 6,55,400, while those associated with high temperatures is 83,700, according to the researchers.

The study helps to underscore that recognising the geographic patterns of temperature-related mortality is important for international collaboration in developing policies and strategies in climate change mitigation and adaptation and health protection.

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic since last year has stalled international climate governance as several governments started announcing emergency stimulus packages to rescue their economies instead. Besides, the United Nations Climate Change Conference, which was supposed to give a practical shape to the Paris agreement got deferred.

And though some may like to profess that the pandemic offered an opportunity to plan sustainable pathways in the run-up to Agenda 2030, it does require much more attention. An ecological transition is necessary and the process is underway with a shift from fossils to renewables for faster economic recovery. However, recovery packages call for mobilising funds for achieving sustainable pathways and the crucial COP26, is now scheduled to take place in November.

At the same time, it is encouraging to note that a framework adopted by the UN Statistical Commission would ensure 'natural capital' -- forests, wetlands and other ecosystems -- being counted in reporting wealth of countries. A school of economists has for sometime argued that environmental capital be considered a factor of production just like labour and capital. They said if environmental degradation is measured, the 'real growth'

of a country would be apparent. And while India, China, UK, France, Germany and many other European countries have already made some progress in implementing the System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA), the adoption of the new framework will push others, including the US, towards figuring out the worth of their natural ecosystem and including it in accounting process.

The new framework goes beyond the commonly used statistics of GDP in economic reporting. It means the countries' wealth will reflect dependence of the economy on nature or its impact on it, such as the deterioration of water quality or the loss of a



forest. Similarly, restoration or conservation may be a 'credit' that lessens the loss of GDP. India has already taken a step towards measuring values of nature when it figured out economic valuation of 16 tiger reserves as part of a conservation plan in two phases in 2013-19. The study indicated that the monetary value flow benefits from the selected 10 tiger reserves range from Rs 5094 to Rs 16,202 crore annually.

A UN backed IPCC report two years ago had noted the criticality of the situation, wherein nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history and its impact will see extinction of one million of the eight million estimated number of animal and plant species, many of them within decades, unless their habitats are restored.

This apart, in India, though there has been some decline in the agriculture sector, it remains the main source of methane (CH4) and ni-

trous oxide (N2O) emissions. Methane emissions occur from this sector mainly due to livestock rearing (enteric fermentation and manure management) and paddy cultivation while N2O is principally emitted due to the application of fertilizers to agricultural soils. In the energy sector, electricity production was the single largest source, accounting for about 40 per cent of national GHG emissions in 2016 while manufacturing industries and construction together emitted over 18 per cent of total emissions.

Seven family conglomerates -- Reliance, Adani, Tata, Aditya Birla, Mahindra, Jindal and Vedanta -- are said to be responsible for emitting

at least 539 million tonnes of CO2 annually. This is equivalent to 22% of India's total CO2 emissions. In 2019-20, these seven groups operated 25% of India's coal based power plants (50,000 MW), produced 39% of steel (43 million tonnes), 27% of cement (91 million tonnes) and 22 per cent of passenger and commercial vehicles (0.92 million).

To avert a crisis like climate change, forward thinking and long term planning is required, for which the value of committed visionary leadership cannot be underestimated. As family conglomerates are organised around visionaries, if they sincerely act on the climate crisis, they can help in tackling environmental degradation in a better way. Unfortunately, however, the contribution of corporates in India is quite meagre compared to most other countries.

At a time when natural disasters are increasing, specially floods and cyclones, affecting lakhs of people almost every year, there is an imperative need for integrated action. And for this not just the government but the corporate needs to join hands. In fact, the government should take the initiative in asking business houses what action they plan to take and in which sub-division or block during a financial year.

On another front, at the recent G-7 meeting, India reminded rich nations of their responsibilities citing their historical emissions and said they still owe \$1.1 trillion to developing countries as per what was promised 11 years ago. Then Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar observed at a webinar that revival, regeneration and conservation of nature, India's cumulative contribution to climate change (in terms of emissions) in the last 200 years is just 3 per cent. The unbridled carbon emissions, particularly by Europe, US and in the last 40 years by China caused climate change disaster. And while these countries prospered economically they polluted the world, with India being one of the suffering countries with the least contribution to climate change.

Be that as it may, India is in a relatively good position as its emissions per capita are quite low despite its 1.3 billion people though total emissions continue to be high. It has the opportunity to leapfrog to LED bulbs, electric vehicles, electric cooking and digital technologies which can create an enabling environment. However the big question remains how soon India would achieve net zero emissions and how.

To counter the problem of environmental degradation, manifested through different forms of pollution and its adverse bearing on human health, there is need for concerted action, especially by the big polluters and financial and technological assistance to high population countries like India to tackle the crisis effectively. Individually also, nations like India, with high population growth and high population density, have to earmark more resources towards this end. Undoubtedly there is a need for a good balance between environmental concerns and rapid development needs. Concrete action towards this end is the need of the hour. ---/NFA

## Technology & automation - Impact on human evolution

By Kaustov Kashyap

Technology-driven automation is omnipresent and pervading our lives like never before. From robots and chatbots to virtual/augmented reality, machine learning, artificial intelligence (AI) and beyond, the physical space is littered with digital influence.

The impact of increased automation is already upon us and influencing our lives in all possible ways. Up till now technology adoption has never been so rapid, versatile and secular but the presence of connectivity has enabled this growth. The focus of this narrative will be to explore how exactly human life gets affected because of these inevitable technology trends. There are six such changes that look imminent.

The newer technologies are enabling embryonic assessments in early stages, hence alleviating the need for morphological assessments where high degree of human skills was required. The issue is that morphological grading by humans leads to wide inter- and intra-operator variation. These long-standing difficulties may now be improved by using advances in AI. Thus, mathematical variables derived from time-lapse images of embryo development may now be used such that an algorithm can classify images of an embryo's development automatically, and so remove the human variable from the crucial task of morphological assessment.

This was also highlighted in a study presented on July 4, 2017 at the 33rd Annual Meeting of ESHRE in Geneva. Start-up Deep Genomics is leveraging AI to help decode the meaning of the genome and their learning software is developing the ability to try and predict the effects of a mutation based on its analyses of hundreds of thousands of examples of other mutations -- even if there's not already a record of what those mutations do. Another example is the case of actress Angelina Jolie where she had a one recessive gene in her genome that was predicted using deep learning algorithms on her DNA sequence using the data from past studies, which predicted that she is susceptible to breast cancer. She underwent pre-emptive mastectomy to prevent herself from cancer. The confluence of medicine and technology will bring unprecedented transformations in human life.

Another biological victim of the digital automation will be ubiquitous handwriting skills. Already most of the content that's getting produced and published is digital. Handwriting skills have already suffered as most of the content gets digitally typed and then printed if at all needed in the physical format. Dematerialization has already inflicted the damage on the physical copy. It is now rare to write something on paper except when it's your own signature, which is also digitally available now. Handwriting is almost nostalgic now. More and more people are digitally publishing the content online with handwritten notes becoming virtually non-existent. When was the last time you wrote a handwritten letter or note to your friends? The growth of virtual assistants like Apple Siri, Google Assistant or Cortana that can translate the verbal instructions into written word will further deteriorate the physical handwriting practice whatever is left so far. This may impact the anatomy of hand including the fingers, which may become less flexible, and thinner to aid typing. Maybe in the future the meta-carpel and carpal joints undergo significant changes as they are no longer used for writing purposes.

The third biological influence will be on the eyes. The sheer amount of information flow that's happening is coming from social media apps, devices, digital displays or the web, which is exerting enormous strain on the eyes. Reading has exponentially multiplied, as is typical of information age where status quo is consistently challenged. The knowledge bust that's happening is fuelling the information fire. With

faster and better technology, development and evolution is becoming possible in every sphere of our life, be it medicine, law, science, engineering, education, hence necessitating the constant need to upgrade and update. The concomitant impact of it will be largely borne by eyes. With so much to read and ingest, the shape of our eyes may get adapted over a period; they may become enlarged or may be more bulged. In fact, the underlying neuron system powering the vision may undergo subtle changes as well because of the way the things will be perceived and seen in the VR, AR-infected world.

Another impact is going to be on the neck and the backbone. With the advent of smartphone the average time we are spending on the device is about 180 minutes. Yes, that's correct: three hours per day. We are continuously stretching our necks for longer periods of time, which is therefore bent most of the time. Now most of things can be auctioned, can be monitored or searched on phone, which is reducing physical movements all the time. For example, you can monitor your employees working remotely on your phone using the GPS and camera, thereby obviating the need for physically moving yourself. This is not only forcing your neck to constantly gobble up the data that's being ejected on your smartphone screens but also increasing your seating time, making you more sedentary than ever. Seating continuously for longer periods of time puts pressure on the spinal cord and the vertebrae. Hence all these lifestyle changes will have an anatomical impact on our spinal cord and neck in the time to come. As a result, the spine may become more rounded and short. It may be so that in future humans have few extra movements in neck due to some extra cervical spine joints.

With the problem of plenty, memory will be worst affected. As more and more information is produced collaboratively and co-operatively on social platforms lesser and lesser will be retained. Also, with advanced search algorithms by our side, who needs to worry about remembering something? Learning by rote will be extinct in future. This will impact the memorability of human beings as lesser effort will be given to remember anything. The incentives that existed in the past to learn mathematical tables or capitals of the countries have ceased to exist. Society is now rewarding people who have application skills, who can combine expertise in multiple subjects to yield insights and solve layered business problems. The demand for people who can blurt out facts has completely evaporated. The processing that's required to memorize things will weaken during time, leading to complete adaptation of the neurons and brain functions that govern memory.

With so much data floating around us and machine learning algorithms parsing them, AI is getting adaptive by the day. The rich data that's getting ingested is only leading to more informed choices and better decisions. The role of luck, or the unknown is getting subsumed by intelligent analytics or processed data that was earlier not available. The traditional belief structures rooted in religion of God are getting displaced by more data-centric approach or 'Dataism', as Yuval Harari calls it. So much structured and unstructured data is getting generated -- be it location data, emails, OCR processed reports, Facebook posts or likes, WhatsApp messages, tweets etc. -- which enables algorithms to do the data analysis and decipher the subterranean trends, patterns and phenomena underlying these data sets, paving the way for better understanding of society and things around us. As more and more evidentiary proofs are available for our actions, the needle of our belief will keep swerving away from the universality of God.

### Letters to the Editor

#### 2-child policy violates constitutional rights

Editor,

The draft of the proposed population control Bill released by the Uttar Pradesh State Law Commission promotes a two-child policy. Violation of the two-child policy would deprive people from contesting local body elections, applying for government jobs or receiving any government subsidy. Public servants who adopt the norm will be provided with incentives.

It is a fact that India's population is growing and will continue for the next couple of decades. However, the country-level total fertility rate (TFR) in India is 2.23. It is not hugely above the desired level of 2.1. If this level is achieved, population will stabilise in the long run. It is gratifying to learn that twenty states/UTs have achieved this and another five have reached the level of below 2.2. As a matter of fact, there won't be a population explosion in the country. So the states with very high population such as Bihar, UP, MP, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh must focus on social development instead of strict population control measures.

If the two-child norm becomes a policy, it has far-reaching consequences.

Many women would be forced to go for unsafe and illegal abortions. Apart from this, the policy is likely to lead to gender imbalances. Neglect and death of female infants, pre-natal sex determination, abortion of female foetus and adoption would rise if the two-child norm becomes a policy. If a couple goes for a third child, they will forfeit all government aid and subsidies. The parents would be punished by depriving them of the opportunity to contest elections and apply for jobs. In fact, these measures are against our Constitutional rights. It is ironic that while India's own National Population Policy(2000) is based on voluntary and informed choice in family planning, states like UP have decided to impose strict population control measures.

The two-child policy is regressive and violates the principle of voluntary informed choice, human rights and rights of the child. India must not ignore the social problems brought about by strict population control measures. A comprehensive socio-economic development will lead to a stabilised population.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS,  
Via email

#### When dropping the axe turns into narcissistic ploys

Editor,

Delays in the adoption of political reforms are an important issue in the world of politics. Modern politics is characterized by blame games -- offensive and defensive. The Opposition's main goal as always is to erode the credibility of those in power by drawing public attention to stories of how the ruling government's legislators' bad deeds and character have and are causing harm, loss, or failure to the existing ruling system and the state or country. They are usually "on attack" mode every time as they attempt to change the status quo and gain power. At times, the Opposition does tend to come around with constructive criticism, but mostly it will always be on the 'defensive' mode.

Opposition politicians tend to employ widely reported social and economic problems as ammunition to attack the ruling government. Coming to the political scenario of our state, we have the Congress who is in the Opposition. They do not stop attacking the government and pounce on any opportunity available to them. A subject of debate, an issue that has continued ad nauseum is about the Power Department and the Minister concerned, James Sangma. Since the year 2020, follow-

ing up to the present times, demands for his removal have been echoing high with even the politicians of the allied parties in the coalition, especially the United Democratic Party being the first to raise their voices against him and demanding for his removal. Ironically, this party in itself is inept and spineless as they do not have it in them to raise their voice against their own corrupt party leaders who are involved in a series of illegal activities themselves. I need not remind anyone of the issues of rampant illegal coal mining happening under the watch of the UDP minister, Lakhmen Rymbui, or even the recent rice scam of the Social Welfare Department under the watch of another UDP minister, Kyrmey Shylla.

The Meghalaya Energy Corporation Limited (MeECL) has been under the radar for many issues. Demands were made to constitute an Inquiry Committee to look into the alleged scams of the MeECL and the demands were met. We now have an Inquiry Committee which is being headed by a retired judge of Allahabad High Court, Justice Ifaqat Ali Khan with retired IAS officer, Manoj Kumar as an administrative member, and retired executive director, REC Sunil Kumar as the technical member of the Committee. What is ironic, however, is that even this hasn't quenched the thirst of the Opposition as it reiterated its demand for immediate removal of the Power Minister to ensure a free and fair investigation, the argu-

ment being that they feel his presence might influence the Inquiry Commission and lead to manipulation or tampering of relevant data.

Now then, is the Opposition party doubting the authenticity of the Inquiry Commission and its members, that they feel the presence of the Power Minister is a threat? Do they really feel that the members of the Inquiry Commission are random people who can be manipulated? This act of the Opposition party is akin to doubting the character and judgment of a retired judge of the High Court who has years of experience and who knows better how to conduct the inquiry rather than these political spokespersons who sometimes speak out of exasperation.

I am not here to defend the Power Department but these childish acts of the Opposition make them appear like destructive critics rather than a constructive opposition. Nothing that comes out of their mouths is ever deemed as constructive for their demands have always been to pressure the Government to take a series of actions especially regarding the removal of the Power Minister that has been reverberating in high tones. Has the Congress forgotten that the reason why the MeECL is drowning and is where it is at the moment is because of them in the first place? How has the Congress forgotten the long duration of load shedding that would go on for hours that even our day-to-day activities were getting affected? I was still a student at that time and

I still remember studying under candle light because not all of us are privileged to afford a generator or inverter in our homes. What made matters worse was when load shedding happened during late nights. This gave rise to many petty crimes such as thieves breaking into people's homes, drug addicts on the prowl and so on.

During their tenure the Opposition were not able to do much. The then Power Minister, Zenith Sangma failed to revamp the MeECL. Why not then accept that somewhere in the past they have been the reason for why the MeECL is in deep waters, so much so that it is gasping for breath? Whatever the current government is doing at the moment to revive it is still being seen as faulty and wrong. Not to play the blame game here, but sometimes reminders are necessary, especially past reminders as they are reasons why something in the present is the way it is.

Loopholes exist and will continue as there is no political party or government that is perfectly perfect and that is not denied. But the role of the Opposition should not only be to keep playing offensive but to also play the role of a constructive defender. Point out the wrongs but trust the judgment too.

Yours etc.,  
Pynshngain Lyndem  
Shillong -- 22

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

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### Reinventing education

TO say that the Covid 19 pandemic has disrupted learning is an understatement. The forced closure of educational institutions has resulted in an abrupt end to education as we have known it. This has pushed school managements to evolve and develop digital learning tools. For over a year now online education has become the buzzword. The pandemic has pushed schools across the world to adapt to online teaching. In every new initiative there are bound to be hiccups but once a pattern sets in, both teachers and students benefit from online teaching. Experts suggest that the greatest advantage of the online education system is that knowledge can become global. In India at present institutes like IITs, IISc and NITs have globalized online education while universities have tried to nationalise their online education system. With the third Covid wave looming, many countries foresee a long term shift away from the classroom and adapting to better online learning modules. However this shift is not without its challenges. Experts believe that the unplanned and rapid move to online learning – with no training, insufficient bandwidth, and little preparation is bound to result in a poor user experience that is not conducive to sustained growth. Others however are of the view that a new hybrid model of education will emerge, with significant benefits. The integration of information technology in education will be further accelerated, and online education will eventually become an integral component of school education.

There are, however, challenges to overcome. Students in distant villages without reliable internet access and/or technology struggle to participate in digital learning. This gap is seen across countries. But those with access to the right technology have benefited. Research shows that on average, students retain 25-60% more material when learning online compared to only 8-10% in a classroom. This is mostly due to the students being able to learn faster online; e-learning requires 40-60% less time to learn than in a traditional classroom setting because students can learn at their own pace, going back and re-reading, skipping, or accelerating through concepts as they choose. In recent times there have been raging debates about a learning app developed by a particular educational institution for schools in Meghalaya that follow the MBOSE curricula. As with every new initiative there are teething problems for teachers and students since adaptation requires time and a mindset change. Not all teachers can transition to online teaching with the same speed. It's a new learning for teachers as it is for students. But time is the greatest teacher and soon the students, teachers and parents will experience the benefits of such apps and laud the efforts of the app developer.

Of late HIKAI, an online educational portal, launched by RKM Ashrama, Sohra, in collaboration with Vivekananda Cultural Centre (VCC), Shillong, has been publicly debated on its pros and cons. Thanks are due to Dushyant Wadhwan, who has gone the extra mile in attempting to dissect HIKAI (albeit superficially), in his letter to this newspaper captioned HIKAI – a headache for teachers (ST, 12/07/2021). As an insider and a teacher involved in HIKAI, after giving a serious reading of Wadhwan's observations, I feel it is important to put things in clearer perspectives.

HIKAI is an immediate and timely response to the sudden halt of normal schooling following the onslaught of the Covid pandemic in 2020. RKM Ashrama Sohra, has over 10,000 students under its wings and it is imperative that these young minds should not suffer collateral damage as far as their education is concerned. It is proven, historically and psychologically that any continued and major disruption of normal life affects children not only in the present but also has the potential to make them future losers in many fronts of life. Left unattended and unengaged with mind building activities, children are prone to go wayward and hence their vibrant energy gets channelized into unwanted ends.

Though started in 2020, it is only this year that HIKAI has been implemented in full throttle. Last year the portal was operated on a trial-error method (technically speaking) where pre-recorded videos on different subjects were available for the students to watch. Submission of assignments was not overstressed because offline teaching was also allowed by October-November, and the term end exams also could be conducted offline. However, the Covid trend now seems to reinvent and linger, putting the student community in disarray. This has motivated the Ashrama in Sohra and the VCC in Shillong to modify and upgrade the portal enabling both students and teachers to study and work from home so that a semblance of serious work for teachers and educational engagement for students is in place and constructive and consequential results (not only academic, per se) achieved.

other way round. And whosoever is feeding wrong and tempered information is really committing a crime. It is alleged that HIKAI was thrust on us without any preparation. This is far from the truth. If there is any slack in its implementation, we are all equally responsible, if not more, in taking time to adapt to a new method of teaching. It is basic human nature to run on old groves than to struggle to create new ones. But what we could achieve with all our limitations is a matter of pride, not a headache. We are among a chosen few schools that could function during the pandemic, and to complete more than 40% of our syllabus, conducted exams, and published results. Just allow us more time, and we may be complaining when you ask us to go back to the old ways.

Not only us, it is amazing also to hear online lexicon being used by children of these interior villages (Sohra is 25 kms from Sohra towards the Bangladesh Border). There are days together when we are cut off from the rest of the world because of no internet. And suddenly, we are introduced to HIKAI that still works, internet or no internet. Yes, my children will tell you they can upload their assignments or watch videos even if they are unable to use their mobiles for other purposes because of a modem in our School. This is the intranet WIFI zone they are aware of thanks to the Mission for installing a WIFI tower. They

are also conversant on how to convert files, reduce sizes and all online nuisances. In a way our children received an additional skill thanks to HIKAI. Do you know how much training and support we received before saying "its implementation leaves much to be desired" to create confusion? We are always initiated in any activity, new or old, by our management by conducting orientation training to at least one program coordinator. I should say use the word "host" instead of "train" as we are provided transportation even during the pandemic, good lunch, tea, etc. along with the training. The Head Teachers also get oriented separately about these initiatives. For HIKAI, additionally, a single point of help specific to each school is created by the Mission to address day-to-day problems. All our schools are well equipped to handle HIKAI and also train students and their parents during the pandemic. Some schools and teachers take these seriously and some do not and land up burning midnight candles to complete their targets. They should work sincerely instead of propping up this issue in the newspaper.

And who is Dushyant Wadhwan to cast aspersions on teachers when he questions whether the assignments are checked or only 80% statistics? Perhaps the writer is content with the lot of government schools which are now being instructed

# In Defence of HIKAI

By Banlam K Lyngdoh

But this is not to say that acceptance and success should come overnight. It is too early to make a judgment call on HIKAI. Even now HIKAI is in an evolving mode. But whatever is said, the point that this portal is created for the sole benefit of students should not be understated and overlooked. If we are ready to accept that this is for our children, then whatever we would have to say would be only towards its enhancement.



Yes, one may find some aspects of the endeavour to be wanting. Firstly, connectivity is a serious circumstantial issue. But this should not be a stumbling block. Gradually the mind-set of both parents and students should change and once the mind-set changes a hurdle is just something to be overcome. If parents accede that this is for the future of their wards, then they too should try to leave no stone unturned in seeing that their children derive the most from it. A friend, a relative somewhere is there to help. Questions can be downloaded and sent across. Students on their part can write a heap of assignments on a weekly basis and travel to the other end of a village where connectivity is good and ask a friend or a relative or a well-wisher to help in uploading them. Surely it takes a village to raise a child. You will see that when you desire for anything intensely, the entire universe collaborates to make it happen. Impediments will always be there for a new thing to function and it takes the cooperation of all stakeholders to make it a success. I reiterate on the change

of mind-set, because this is the only way for any initiative to become a blessing. If in Meghalaya, this mindset change had not taken place when education was offered to the local two centuries ago, where would we be? Then poverty was rampant coupled with superstition. But because gradually people's perspectives changed, we are now where we are.

Secondly, most teachers are rural based who haven't faced the camera in their

entire life until very recently. Some of them are on the verge of retirement and to whom modern gadgets are rather an encumbrance. They never dreamt that they would experience such a drastic change. But desperate times call for desperate measures. In spite of their camera shyness and clumsiness with the tools, they are trying their best for the sake of the students, and in the process exposing themselves to the judgment of all and sundry. Believe me, we may be good and fluent educators speaking with confidence in the classroom, but we may be found stuttering in front of the camera. As mentioned above, we are evolving.

Nothing can be further from the truth than to say that HIKAI is a headache for teachers. A workload may be, but certainly not a headache. Since Mr Wadhwan has spoken personally to one teacher, whose views he values and shares with the world, let me also be personal. In fact, I encourage students to send their raw footage to me. I continue giving them instructions over phone or WhatsApp. If that doesn't suffice I offer to help

(The writer teaches at RKM HS School, Sohra. Email analakuly@rediffmail.com)

them. And I know of many RKM teachers who do this. Only a day before I got a call from one teacher in Zakabari who wanted clarification on a certain assignment of the subject I teach. He told me that he and the teachers in his school help the students in everything except (he joked) on writing their assignments. And one thing is worth mentioning here. It is not that the management monitors our work from home. We may sit in front of the screen following the normal school hours or we may burn the midnight oil, that's up to us. But that the management should know that both teachers and students are sincere, a minimum submission of 80% of the assignments is a must.

Which brings me to my last point, why 80%? In normal school mode, generally schools make 80% attendance a criterion for students to be allowed to sit for a term end exam. Irrespective of students' performance in other domains, they have to satisfy this condition. Regularity reflects sincerity and responsibility. But considering the newness of the programme and the direness of the times, this demand is never made draconian in HIKAI. Yes pressure is given to all stakeholders but that too by extending and re-extending the deadline. All students were made to understand before the first term online exam, that they were eligible to appear only on submission of 80% assignments. Most students didn't comply. Yet all were allowed to appear for the exam. We gave the defaulters a chance to still submit their assignments before publishing their results. Those who complied got their results. But for defaulters we extended the deadline further and further and further to the extent that teachers are overburdened with correction of both first term and second term assignments. Why so much trouble? Is it not that we want to see all children through considering their parents' lack of resources? All we are doing is creating avenues for the horses to be taken to the water. Whether they bend down to drink or not it's a different matter, and here a modicum of students' sincerity or insincerity becomes apparent. But one should not be blamed or critiqued for showing them or taking them to the water.

(The writer teaches at RKM HS School, Sohra. Email analakuly@rediffmail.com)

clear manifestation of their absolute ignorance.

Whatever be the case, we (teachers of RKM) aren't perturbed or distracted by such lobbies who have been trying hard to mislead others just because they cannot lead themselves. We are at our own stations as appointed, always ready to help the students through various means in case of any distress without causing any extra burden on parents. We will march ahead to carry on the legacy of Ramakrishna Mission (RKM), the Mission with a vision. As Swami Vivekananda once said, "If the poor cannot go to education, let education go to them".

May good sense prevail upon each and every one, even the lobbies too.

Yours etc.,  
H. Isslowell Khongsit,  
Assistant Teacher  
RKM School, Sohra.

**Editor replies:** The Shillong Times is committed to providing a platform for all voices including dissenting voices. Not everyone will agree with everything that is done even with the best of intentions. Instead of berating the dissenters the RKM would do well to explain the benefits of the HIKAI App.

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

## Civil war imminent in Afghanistan as Taliban terror intensifies

By Sankar Ray

The 20-year US war in Afghanistan, hand in hand with the Afghan National Security force against the Taliban is over. General Austin "Scott" Miller – the highest-ranked officer on the ground – handed down command to US-based four-star General Kenneth McKenzie, bringing the longest US war nearer to its end at a time by the end of August. Seizing the power vacuum, the Taliban are making sweeping advances across the country. Cashing in on the gradual reduction of NATO (mostly American) forces, the Taliban army is out to capture the whole of land-locked country. The Taliban propaganda is on through YouTube claiming that it occupies 85 per cent of 652,864 square kilometers of Afghanistan, but that appears exaggerated. Nonetheless, one-fourth of the hilly country is under the Taliban.

The Taliban seem speaking from high horses with powerful assault arms, aimed at people who tend to speak out, but unlike in the past, the common masses, even in



the rugged rural terrain are against the Taliban rule and its nightmarish dramatization. All this hints that a civil war awaits Afghanistan and it may be a protracted one.

The question is whether the westernmost SAARC country will be under Taliban control and by when? Or is it that the opponents of Taliban regime will combat the Taliban juggernaut, no matter even if the ANSF, hypothetically, collapses completely? Almost half of 37.5 million people are women and Taliban are against woman empowerment despite their recent pretension to allow social development of women. Little wonder, hundreds of women in the streets of the northern and central Afghanistan were seen marching with assault rifles, waving their arms and chanting anti-Taliban slogans. The ruling government in Kabul, headed by President, Dr Ashraf Ghani, backs the defiant "Second Sex", albeit secretly. "There were some women who just wanted to inspire security forces, just symbolic, but many more were ready to go to the battlefields," stated Halima Parastish, head of women's directorate in Ghor and one of the marchers. "We're ready to go and fight", she assured.

Afghanistan Analysts Network in a study "Between Hope and Fear: Rural Afghan women talk about peace and war" narrates the happenings in large parts of the country on how Afghan women activists and their unrelenting and articulate push for greater and more meaningful representation in the peace process. In their campaigns and advocacy they made it clear that their struggle was not "just" for the protection of women's rights, but rather for a sustainable peace.

Women are desperate to be assured of their social, economic and cultural rights. Peace is what they crave for, but the option to take up arms is a compulsion, forced by "political Islam", to quote a frontline woman functionary whose parents were brutally killed when she was a toddler.

Given this situation, the Afghan authorities informed that they have installed an anti-missile system at Kabul airport to counter incoming rockets and Taliban's a blistering offensive across the country. Over the years, the US military installed several C-RAMs (Counter Rocket, Artillery and Mortar

Systems) across its bases, including at Bagram, to destroy incoming rockets targeting the facilities. But the operations are no easy as they are of a complicated technology. But necessity imposes an imperative for invention, expectedly, the problem will be successfully tackled. The system is already operational.

The external situation is not favourable for the Taliban. Even Pakistan is treading a path which may not make the ultra-Islamic leadership happy. Apparently sympathising with the Taliban, the Pak army brass are for moderation of their Afghan policy. Recently, the Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa and Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed, head of the intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence at an off-the-record meeting with the members of National Assembly and Senate of Pakistan briefed about the post-US security situation in Pakistan. More than the grapevine had it, the law-

makers army were told that any crackdown against militants of the Afghan Taliban group inside Pakistan might generate a blowback. The two military biggies reportedly said the Afghan Taliban and the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan – the Pakistani Taliban have all along been "two faces of the same coin." The Pak army and the executive are professedly antagonistic towards the TTP.

There are clear signs of a policy shift of the China which in the 1990s had bonhomie with the Taliban purely for commercial reasons. In end -2000 the Chinese envoy called on the Taliban supreme Mullah Omar in Kandahar in late 2000 in order to convince the Taliban to stop harbouring ethnic Uyghur militants who were sheltered operating in Afghanistan with the East Turkmenistan Islamic Movement and in return, the Taliban wanted China to accord diplomatic recognition to the Taliban government and veto further UN sanctions. They agreed. Chinese companies set up and spread their activities in Afghanistan. A strange coincidence was inking of an MoU for augmenting economic ties on 11 September 2001. Things had turned upside down immediately thereafter.

Volte face in international diplomacy is not very uncommon. The recently released Atlantic Council's Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East report, a new report by Dr. Jonathan Fulton, "China's Changing Role in the Middle East." Speaks of a perceptible shift in geopolitics with East Asia and the Middle East drawing closer together. 'Energy trade explains part of this, as Japan, South Korea, and China are consistently among the largest export markets for Middle East oil and gas. In the case of China, the relationships have moved beyond economic interests to incorporate strategic concerns as well', the report observed.

Russian unpredictability apart, Turkey, Qatar and several Islamic countries are very unlikely to back the posture of Taliban which is in no mood to walk collaterally with the international peace process. Women are desperate The Taliban obstinacy to force unwilling to bow down to guns may cause their isolation. The civil war ahead is due to thoughtless Taliban leadership. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

## HIKAI – a boon for students

Editor,  
Apropos the article by Dushyant Wadhwan captioned, 'Hikai - a headache for teachers' (ST July 12, 2021), I am a teacher and also a parent working in Ramakrishna Mission Secondary School, Sohra. The writer should stop acting as if he is the mouthpiece for RKM teachers or parents with his personal opinion about the Ramakrishna Mission Schools or the HIKAI app. It was especially disgusting to note that while the writer flaunts a rich man's charity in helping the helpless widow's daughter upload her assignments, he also feels sorry for us teachers who help our own students to do so even though we are paid for it. Give us the opportunity of being of service to our children without a patronizing tone. And how on the earth do we understand the extra expenses she has to incur in uploading assignments when our children are able to manage with existing upload limits in our mobiles? HIKAI videos can be preloaded on any device without the internet. Even these videos assigned as per daily timetable do not take much space. Do we have to presume that his son's gaming download is affecting the maid's children and not the HIKAI? HIKAI is a poor man's saviour and not the

Editor,  
I would like to bring to your kind notice the positive development that has been taking place in the state since the last few months especially in the field of education, by those who have taken this persistent problem as an opportunity. As parents, teachers and all right thinking citizens from cross sections of society are worried about the future of our young minds due to the severe impact of the pandemic, Ramakrishna Mission has introduced a new and effective online portal named HIKAI (Hybrid Interactive Knowledge Assimilation Initiative), thereby giving huge relief to students and teachers of the schools affiliated with MBOSE. Through HIKAI, the processes of teaching and learning are brought back to life and both teachers and students are back on the right track. It gave a huge relief to parents as their children can have access to it without spending extra money. More interestingly, is that, this free online portal which has been planned in accordance with

to start preparing the study materials for students. Or is it worth appreciating that the RKM schools are already using video lectures and notes and setting pace for the rest to follow. It is better to wear out than to rust out.

Yours etc.,  
H Kynsai Tangdhara  
RKM, Sohra

Editor,  
I would like to bring to your kind notice the positive development that has been taking place in the state since the last few months especially in the field of education, by those who have taken this persistent problem as an opportunity. As parents, teachers and all right thinking citizens from cross sections of society are worried about the future of our young minds due to the severe impact of the pandemic, Ramakrishna Mission has introduced a new and effective online portal named HIKAI (Hybrid Interactive Knowledge Assimilation Initiative), thereby giving huge relief to students and teachers of the schools affiliated with MBOSE. Through HIKAI, the processes of teaching and learning are brought back to life and both teachers and students are back on the right track. It gave a huge relief to parents as their children can have access to it without spending extra money. More interestingly, is that, this free online portal which has been planned in accordance with

"The best thinking has been done in solitude.

The worst has been done in turmoil."

— Thomas A. Edison

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIII No. 329 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 16, 2021

### Violence, rape in Bengal

THE National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has indicted the Mamata Banerjee-led West Bengal government for the "gross apathy" it showed in containing the mob violence following the huge electoral success of the ruling Trinamool Congress after the May assembly polls. An NHRC panel that enquired into the series of incidents across districts has reported to the Calcutta High Court that there were grievous offences like murder and rape; and that this called for a detailed CBI probe to fix responsibility. What it meant was that the present state police probe will not help in fixing the guilty.

The violence in several parts of the state could not have taken place on such a massive scale had there been no planning at the apex. Allegations were that the ruling party and chief minister Mamata Banerjee who headed it had created the conditions for these violent incidents to teach the rival BJP a lesson. This was for the aggressive manner in which the saffron leadership including Prime Minister Narendra Modi campaigned against the CM and her party. The NHRC panel stated that there was no rule of law but only "law of the ruler." In fact, the post-poll situation in West Bengal was similar to the 2002 Gujarat Riots, but less in intensity of course, and then CM Modi had been accused of complicity. Even though this might have a grain of truth, nothing can be proven in court. Just as Modi could not face any retribution or indictment from court, Banerjee too is bound to have an easy escape. The systems in the country are progressively losing their teeth.

At the same time, the Banerjee establishment has dismissed the charges against it and said all the allegations were politically motivated. This is the standard style response from politicians across the spectrum. Yet, what should not go unnoticed is the hurt that is caused to reputations of Constitutional mechanisms like NHRC and the National Commission for Women over time. No one is convinced that such institutions formed to help the weaker sections do any great work. In part at least, they are there for the show. They beat around the bush. They act as adjuncts for the ruling political establishment whether at the central or state level. The appointments of heads of these entities are politically-guided. Little wonder that they dance to the tunes of the establishment. This could happen in respect of the West Bengal-level State Commissions too. As a result, the trust deficit against the ruling establishment is growing.

### Assam-Meghalaya border disputes

# Who's the referee?

By Patricia Mukhim

kata, Deshmoreah Block I and Block II, Khanduli and Retacherra.

Assam's contentious borders with Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh too have been the location of some bloody and ugly reprisals from both sides of the border. In Assam's Barak Valley three districts share a 164 km long border with three districts of Mizoram. Border disputes started ever since Mizoram was created in 1987. In a recent incident people from Mizoram allegedly lobbed grenades at the road construction workers in Cachar district of Assam near the Mizoram border. Thankfully there were no injuries on account of the blast. Ironically the incident happened a day after the chief secretaries of Mizoram and

collects about Rs 8000 per truck load of agricultural produce.

This writer had visited the same areas in November 2020 and found a police outpost of Assam Police in areas which are evidently in Meghalaya territory. Meanwhile, a particular community has been settled there by Assam Government. The community is engaged in farming, cattle and goat rearing. The Rangbah Shnong of the area spoke to us about the problems they face there and said they felt orphaned since the border dispute seems to be unsolvable and an ongoing headache for them even while there does not seem to be any aggressive action or contestation by Meghalaya Government.

But Meghalaya is not

"In 1985, a Committee headed by YV Chandrachud, retired chief justice of India was constituted to go into the claims and counter claims by Assam and Meghalaya on their areas of dispute."

Assam met in New Delhi to discuss the ongoing border dispute between both states. What does this imply but that the people of Mizoram do not agree to the claims of Assam on their land? As can be expected the meeting remained inconclusive since Mizoram sought more time on Assam's proposal to maintain status-quo along the border and withdrawal of security forces from the disputed areas.

In their recent visit to the border villages under Ri Bhoi district Congress MLAs George Lyngdoh and Mayralborn Syiem heard the villagers complain about high-handedness from the Karbi Anglong District Council which lays claim to those areas under Meghalaya. Jalong village with 63 households and a population of over 300 people is now mapped as belonging to Assam by the Survey of India. Further, Jalong is now declared a reserved forest. There are two Blocks under dispute between Assam and Meghalaya in Ri Bhoi district since 1950. But what is distressing is that the farmers of the area who grow wheat, ginger and broomsticks, are reportedly being harassed by the Karbi Anglong District Council of Assam which

alone in this situation. There are regular skirmishes in the Assam-Nagaland border. Unlike the Meghalaya Police which is more benign, Nagaland Police have not taken things lying down. To be talking of a give and take policy when it comes to resolving border disputes between Assam and Nagaland or between the four states of the region and Assam is like asking the avaricious big brother to concede to give away what he already possesses. Is that even possible unless the big brother discards his precious avatar and turns gracious and magnanimous? And what would be the election reprisals if the big brother takes such a decision? This matters in the politics of optical illusions being played today.

For the moment Himanta Biswa Sarma nurses ambitions of being India's future Prime Minister. In the North East, Himanta is seen as the natural leader because he heads the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) Look at how our own political leaders from Meghalaya are making a beeline for Dispur. Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma has visited the Assam CM for issues that are seemingly related to the border disputes

but which political observers believe revolves around matters related to the MDA Government in Meghalaya which has been sailing on stormy seas for a while now. Assembly Speaker, Metbah Lyngdoh and Health Minister AL Hek have all been confabulating with Himanta for different reasons. The BJP in Meghalaya has been fighting internecine battles for a while now. Some want the present BJP president Ernest Mawrie to step aside and let health Minister AL Hek take over as President- an action that violates the one man one post principle of the BJP. Mawrie and Hek have been meeting Himanta to resolve this matter. In a sense therefore, Himanta is the Prime Minister of the North Eastern states by virtue of being the NEDA chief.

In Assam, Himanta has marshalled two Bills - one against cow slaughter and the other to implement the two-child norm. The only other state where the two-child norm is being proposed is Yogi Adityanath's Uttar Pradesh. The legislation banning cow slaughter will have its impacts on the tribal states since the cattle have to transit Assam and the cattle merchants are from Assam. Already our cattle butchers are feeling the pinch and not getting the requisite number of cattle for slaughtering. So far, the Government of Meghalaya has not taken up the issue of cattle shortage with Assam when that is the only protein that the majority of Meghalaya's residents rely on. This shortage has led to beef prices spiralling here. Meghalaya is one state where price rise never seems to be an issue.

Considering that all the six states plus Assam are part of NEDA, might it not be possible that the above two laws might also surreptitiously enter the tribal states also? We never know, for politics makes strange bedfellows. For now, Himanta is one up on everyone else. I don't see how the border dispute can be resolved through a give and take policy when Himanta stands to gain in stature by wresting areas belonging to the other states and making them part of Assam. The only way out is to have an independent mediator. But is Union Home Minister Amit Shah going to be that referee? Only time will tell.

## Afghan turmoil: Big challenges before India

By Dr Jayashree Nath

The withdrawal of the United States security forces from Bagram Airfield on July 1 after nearly two decades and without informing the Afghan government signals a strategic failure of the US approach on Afghanistan. The recent pull out of US forces signals the coming instability and insecurity that Afghanistan and the region will face in the coming days. In its early years, the US led war on terrorism was motivated to ensure that Taliban regime in Afghanistan could no longer harbour international terrorists. The policy provided a positive aspect of stability and security in Afghanistan, established a democratic regime for a temporary period. However, after the killing of mastermind Osama bin Laden, the weariness that overtook the US gradually reenergised the Taliban to regain control in the region. Currently, almost 85 to 90 percent of Afghan territory is under the control of the Taliban and the country has been going through a civil war like situation. Besides, the established democratic institutions and government in Kabul also remained limited and powerless due to its overdependence on foreign aid. The US has not specified a comprehensive plan on economic aid and security assistance.

Post 9/11 and India's Approach on Afghanistan

Post 9/11, war on terrorism in Afghanistan provided India prospects to revitalise its lost relations with Kabul extending towards Central Asia, Iran, Russia and beyond. India, considering the geopolitical, economic, energy and security implications, had established relations based on humanitarian assistance and development. India's developmental approach towards Afghanistan is the embodiment of the soft power approach benefiting both the countries. India's humanitarian assistance and developmental projects despite the attacks and threats includes the construction of parliament building, schools, colleges, hospitals, dams, construction of roads and railways to connect within and bordering countries, sending biscuits, wheat etc. New Delhi helped to connect major highways and provide an alternative gateway to land-locked Afghanistan by constructing roads that connect to the Chabahar port of Iran. The major advancement of Taliban in Afghanistan is a setback for India as New Delhi has established cordial relation with the Afghan people and a democratic government in Kabul post 9/11 had engaged in community building services, medical and health-care services through deployment of Indian doctors and nurses, engineers for construction of roads, training and scholarships to civil servants, training Afghan military personal in India etc. India's investments in various projects and humanitarian assistance is aimed at future prospects and prosperity in Afghanistan that will augment the security and stability of the country and the region. The TAPI pipeline project, INSTC are some major ongoing projects to be mentioned which are hamstrung by the security situation in Afghanistan.

India's Afghan Concerns

Afghanistan remained an important factor in furthering India's foreign policy in its neighbourhood region. It is a nation that shares a long border with Pakistan that always carries security implications for India both internal and external, on the other hand, it shares border with energy rich friendly countries of Central Asia, Russia and Iran. Besides, since remote past the region shared cultural and civilisational relations which found a new dimension post-colonial development, while partition divided colonial India into two independent countries founding the ground for lifelong enmities. Interestingly, Afghanistan was never ruled by colonial master and managed to remain as a buffer zone between Tsar Empire and British Empire. Moreover, New Delhi for a very short period of time af-

ter independence was able to establish good relations with Kabul resulting the signing of 'Friendship Treaty' in 1950.

Nevertheless, the rise of Islamic fundamentalists and Taliban regime in Afghanistan impacted the relations and creating instability to the whole region at large and India too. The hijacking of Indian Airlines and the nexus between Pakistan, Taliban and Islamic fundamentalist worked against India in J & K region gained a new height in terms of security concerns. Pakistan is a key player that used to spread anti-Indian propaganda not only in Afghanistan but towards Central Asian region. Pakistan plays a key role in terms of security, stability and broader security point of view that is interlocked with India's domestic and regional security perspective and connected with New Delhi's Central Asia policy too. Islamabad reserved a very cynical view on India's approach in the region. Pakistan was found carrying out anti-Indian activities and attacks in Afghanistan associating with insurgent groups especially with the Haqqani Network which was engaged in attacks of Indian aid workers in Afghanistan including the 2008 suicide bombing attack on Indian Embassy in Kabul. The U.S. intelligence agency was able to trace the connection between Haqqani Network and Pakistan's Intelligence Agencies for the attacks. Pakistan is a key concern for New Delhi in furthering Afghan policy. Afterwards, India was allowed to deploy its own security personnel ITBP to provide security for Indians working in Afghanistan.

The controversial amendment of Indian Citizenship Act that provides conditions to apply for Indian citizenship by those who are persecuted on grounds of being religious minorities that included the people of Afghanistan is an important area of concern. The ethnic minorities of Afghanistan already started fleeing to neighbouring countries of Central Asia, Iran and Pakistan. New Delhi may see a sharp rise in asylum seekers from the region.

The Initiatives: At the diplomatic and strategic level, New Delhi has been engaged in cooperation and negotiation with major stakeholders on Afghan issues. It has been proactively engaged in both bilateral and multi-lateral initiative that advocates for a secure, stable and prosperous Afghanistan. New Delhi supports an Afghan-led and Afghan owned peace process that will help to establish a sovereign, united, democratic, peaceful, inclusive, secure and stable Afghanistan. As a major developmental partner, India shares Dialogue platforms with United States on Afghanistan including becoming a key member of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process on Afghanistan. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is another platform that includes major regional powers of Russia, China and India. It also includes all neighbouring countries of Afghanistan; Central Asian countries and Pakistan. Afghanistan is an observer member of SCO group. However, nothing can change the upcoming turmoil if the differences among the countries of the region and major powers continues. The need of hour is to join hands together to find a definite plan to resolve the Afghan crisis. The picture is one of disarray right now.

At this critical juncture, New Delhi is looking at dialogues with Eurasian countries as these countries share their concerns with India. Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar was visiting one country after another starting from Tehran, Moscow, Eurasia in line with the ministerial level meeting of SCO to ensure a common programme on the recent developments in Afghanistan.

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### Letters to the Editor

#### Give HIKAI a chance

Editor,

Apropos of the letter in your esteemed daily by Dushyant Wadhwan (ST July 12, 2021) I am distressed by the caption, 'HIKAI-a headache for teachers.' At the outset the writer describes it as an admirable App after having gone through the interface of HIKAI and claims it to be at par with online learning portals used in schools and universities abroad. If that be so, then why the above caption? It is not only confusing and misleading but it also misguides. It will upset the teachers, who are putting all-out efforts to make it successful and absolutely productive for their students. However, Wadhwan deserves special thanks for finding the HIKAI portal an admirable one.

We are all aware that the present COVID pandemic has affected everyone but especially the student community at large. Students are specially worried about their uncertain future. At this moment of crisis, the launching of RKM HIKAI portal has relieved many of them. HIKAI portal can be accessed by any student of any school in Meghalaya through free registration. In this period of stagnation, at least the students can continue with their studies sitting at home and do the needful by submitting their assignments etc. for different videos of different subjects. The students of RK Mission

schools have already appeared for the 1st Term Examination and even got their online results. The facts and figures are all available in the RKM HIKAI portal. The figures available in the portal itself reflect how popular and useful it has already become among the students.

So far as the RKM teachers are concerned, they too are busy in correcting the assignments submitted by the students through the portal. The statistics of activities performed by the teachers of RK Mission Schools through HIKAI in different districts of Meghalaya are not only overwhelming but also quite appreciable. Through this, they are doing their job sitting at home quite successfully and efficiently. Many of the RKM Teachers hailing from the deep gorges/interiors of Khasi hills have been striving to help their children in uploading the completed assignments. Many of those schools' performances are more than 80% and in many cases it is 100%. The teachers have never been grumbling nor been feeling it a headache. Their sheer love and responsibilities towards their students have motivated them to do so. Such acts by our teachers in the interiors, where the network is always very poor and where the community of people are socio-economically challenged they deserve not only appreciation but they should be an eye-opener for those rare few (as mentioned by Wadhwan) who feel that uploading assignments for the students to be cumbersome.

It is surprising to find that the teacher as mentioned by Wadhwan finds it a big stress to upload assignments for his students. What can be more ridiculous than this? The concerned teacher should feel proud that he is trying to help many students because at this time, he neither has to attend to his regular classroom teaching nor involve himself in any activities, which otherwise he should have done on usual school days. This is a real time of struggle when the teachers should be more in contact with their students to boost their morale and guide them so that students do not lose track of education. This is an emergency-situation and the roles played by the teachers towards their students become more significant than ever before.

So far as the submission of 80% of assignments are concerned, there is nothing wrong in it. The students must be given certain specific tasks to ascertain their active presence on the portal to keep them busy in their studies and related activities. Had any such indicator not been set up, the progress of the students would not have reached up to the point as it has reached now. It can be well understood by anyone.

Through the HIKAI portal, RKM authorities have kept both the students and the teachers active during this period of stagnation. Even, Wadhwan deserves special thanks for helping his maid-servant's child in this regard. Such a noble gesture must motivate many others to come forward and help the

socio-economically weaker ones and also help RKM HIKAI portal to become an increasingly helpful one. Because of this COVID pandemic, we cannot sit at home idle for months together doing nothing. Think of those students, who do not have such a system to come to their rescue. It needs no explanation that the adverse to state that sitting at home idle for months together, what may have been happening to them. For the sake of their children, even the parents belonging to the weaker section have been trying their best to help their children. Because there is no way out now but to accept the current situation as a challenge and try the best possible means to overcome it.

So far as the imparting of technical knowledge to the students of different steps regarding accessing and using of the HIKAI portal is concerned, videos are uploaded from time to time for all concerned. Any new technology needs some time for the masses to grasp. But blaming and counter-blaming shall only retard the progress and create unnecessary controversies. When an innovation is being tried out in the best interests of students and teachers it is expected that all should cooperate to make it actively functional. The situation demands that every individual co-operates and helps RKM authorities to make it a very strong portal for each and every student and teacher of the state.

The motto of RKM HIKAI portal is to keep the

teachers and the students actively involved with their day to day teaching and learning. Far from being a headache this active digital medium is an innovation that will carve out a constructive way forward through the present period of stagnation and crisis.

Yours etc.,  
Indrajit Das  
Ramakrishna Mission  
Teachers' quarter  
Khlieshngong, Sohra

#### Welcome break from lockdowns

Editor,

The Euros have been a great place of escape for most of us during the last month, especially during these hard times. It has provided us with something to look forward to each night particularly at a time when there are few things to look forward to. The games themselves were entertaining; yes the tournament started off very cagey in the group stages with teams pulling up their opening jabs hesitating to swing hard and constantly testing the waters, as the risk was not worth it, for in this tournament even a third place team would usually qualify provided you win one of the three games. That all changed in the knock-outs though and we were treated to that wide variety of football paradigm that the competitive European game with all its prestigious Leagues had to offer.

It always amazes me how art and sports (particularly football for us as a people) manages to provide temporary relief from the stress and strains of daily life. And what the pandemic has taught us especially during the complete worldwide lockdown last year, is that these activities are not trivial but, in fact, necessary aspects of a functioning civilization, because of the real life lessons they teach us or at least for the sake of keeping us sane if not anything else.

To conclude, one of the lessons that I learned from the finals between England and Italy is that England with its galaxy of attacking "stars" decided to start with five defenders in the final, scored one goal and was happy with it for the rest of the game. It was not until the 71st minute (after Italy had equalized) that a tactical change was made and in the 199th minute two other "star" forwards were brought on not to change the game but to take penalties. The Italians on the other hand were decisive and risked everything and ended up winners. "No risk, no gain." In football as in life one needs to take chances because it hurts more to lose by playing it safe than losing after you've given it your best.

Yours etc.,  
Celestial P. Passah,  
Via email

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

"Do not go where the path may lead,  
go instead where there is no path  
and leave a trail."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

## The Shillong Times

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### Manipur back to lockdown

THE Manipur government has imposed a strict 10-day lockdown in the state, starting 18 July. This came after Manipur reported its highest single-day surge over the past few days as the state recorded 1,104 fresh Covid-19 cases over a span of 24 hours, taking the cumulative number of active and positive cases to 8,210 and 80,521 respectively. The wide prevalence of the Delta variant of Covid-19 in Manipur has necessitated that the state takes stringent measures to break the chain of transmission. According to the Manipur Health Department as many as 17 people succumbed to the virus across different hospitals on Thursday even while a total of 70,985 patients have recovered from the disease. With more people getting cured of the disease, the state's COVID recovery rate has improved. Only essential services related to water and power supply, telecom, internet, air travel and agricultural activities will function as usual.

The rising Covid graph in the North Eastern states has been a cause of worry for the Centre as cases in the rest of the country have come down and unlocking has begun. Only Kerala is now battling the Zica virus. Among the North Eastern states, cases in Tripura have been on the rise. Moreover, data from states like Mizoram and Nagaland are difficult to come by even as testing and vaccination hesitancy both remain a challenge. This time Covid has taken a toll even in distant villages where healthcare infrastructure is at its worst and communications bottlenecks abound. Reasons for the virus entering the villages this time is due largely to movement of people from villages to the urban centres and then carrying back the virus with them. Inter-district movement can only be curtailed up to a point. There are traders and truck drivers who have to bring essential goods to the villages. With strict testing facilities remaining largely absent the virus gains entry into these villages and what happens thereafter remains unreported. Also, reasons for the high mortality rates in most of these states is because of delayed admission to hospitals. Mizoram and Manipur have also had large influx of refugees from Myanmar where the Covid situation is unreported but which the refugees claim is bad. The army which has taken control of the country does not allow anything to be reported. North East India has to remain on high alert.

# UP's anti-people law on population

By Jagdish Rattanani

The draft bill by the Uttar Pradesh government to enforce what is commonly referred to as the two-child norm has caused much political noise. In sum, 'The Uttar Pradesh Population (Control, Stabilisation and Welfare) Bill, 2021' proposes that married couples who bear more than two children will forfeit the right to a government job, to contest local polls and a host of other benefits. The timing is of course wrong, but there is much more that is obnoxious here with the trap of false debates on population numbers being the root of all the nation's troubles. The Chief Minister of India's largest State Yogi Adityanath was plain wrong when he

of view, their unique lenses and their expectations of the place they will land in the foreseeable future. This is no different from how inflation expectations of the rich and the poor are known to vary — in one study, "while the high-income group displayed a marked increase in concern about the risk of deflation, the low-income group generally maintained its concern about ongoing inflation." Life hits the rich and the poor in different ways and so their behaviours and responses are naturally different.

The poor tend to have more children because of sev-

demographic indicators these States showed, relative to rest of India. Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, UP made for the acronym 'Bimaru', which indicated that they were demographically "sick"; the areas also covered Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Uttarakhand, which were not separate States when the term was first coined in 1980. Research dating to 2015 showed that the 'Bimaru' States had not converged on most of the indicators studied — they continued to be backward compared to the national average.

Yet, there has been prog-

fails to ask who in the family will suffer if food runs short — it will inevitably be the mother and the children, further ingraining poverty into the next generation rather than help the State move up the development ladder. It speaks of polygamy and polyandry and gives multiple sets of explanations on how the number of children will be calculated — still restricted to two, but it offers no view on divorcees, widows or widowers. It does not speak of children who may be born out of wedlock. It says adopting more than two children would be in contravention of the proposed law, if the couple already has two children, opening new worries and



said on July 11 (Sunday) that rising population is the root of inequality and other ills facing society. But he is not the only one to blame. Across the political spectrum, the idea appears to have taken root that our population numbers are problematic. Witness Sharad Pawar and some others coming out in support of this position, which turns all understanding of demographics on its head. Several other States already have put in place some version of the two child norm over several years, but it's impacts have not been formally studied.

The movement on the population graph follows the same patterns everywhere. Underdeveloped economies, poorer families, uneducated couples have a high fertility rate. As they move up the socio-economic ladder, the number of children per couple declines and this taken in the aggregate eventually leads to population numbers stabilising, even declining. This is so of all observed people anywhere in the world. Muslims are no different from Hindus or from any other religion. Couples forced by their circumstances take decisions that are wise and useful and meaningful from their point

of view, they are well-researched, widely understood and universally accepted among all demographers. The poor have less access to health services and so child mortality tends to be higher; a higher number of children then becomes an insurance against the death of the child and the financial support that an extra pair of hands can provide early on in life. The poor also have less education, are less aware of the available contraception method-mix and often cannot access services in a safe, timely and cost-effective manner. And when the girl child is not educated, when the age at marriage is low, when the health of the child is weak, it leads to poor health of the mother and low birth weight of the child in pregnancies that are early in life, reinforcing a cycle that leads to more children and higher mortality. In other words, a high population growth is nothing but a mirror to the state of development of the nation or the State under question.

In these terms, Uttar Pradesh is a less developed State. It featured among the earlier 'Bimaru' States, so called because of the poor

and it has come without the draconian law that is now being proposed, denying rights to a couple on the basis of the number of children they have. Consider the simple statistic: UP's Total Fertility Rate, or TFR (the average number of children a woman would have in her child bearing years, based on current birth trends) has steadily declined — 4.2 in 2006, 3.5 in 2010, 3.1 in 2015 and 2016, 3.0 in 2017 (SRS data). To compare, Kerala's TFR has moved in the same years down from 1.8 to 1.7, staying well below replacement levels of 2.1. How has this been achieved by Kerala? The answer is well-known — active policy measures that support health and education. In UP, the decline is slow as support systems and health infrastructure improve rather slowly over time. NFHS-4 (2015-16) reports that 46.2% of Under-5 children in UP are stunted, the second worst performing State — only Bihar is worse. Improving this requires investments in the health sector, not laws that deny rights, check papers or set up punishments for couples.

The proposed law limits ration card entitlements but

questions on how adoption should be viewed. It appears not to consider the risk of a rise in unsafe abortions, sex selection or children being given up for adoption.

The bill is clearly hastily drafted. It will meet with legal challenges if passed in this form. But it does deep damage already. While we debate the two-child norm, the real issues that have caused UP to become 'Bimaru' while vast tracts of India are close to replacement fertility levels without these laws, will be forgotten. We will sink further into the idea of force, power, law to fix an issue that has everything to do with people, poverty and development. We will spend money on administering rewards and punishments, on affidavits and claims, on increments and incentives, and that much less on health care centers and services that are the only guarantee of giving us a nation where people are educated, healthy and on the way to becoming productive citizens so that the nation can truly reap the demographic dividend.

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

## POLITICAL DELICACIES

By Rahul Nora Chopra

### Prashant Kishor meeting Congress bosses sets stage for poll battles

As Congress's Punjab drama continues to play out, election strategist Prashant Kishor on Tuesday met former Congress president Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra amid speculation that he was involved in finalising a truce deal between Punjab Chief Minister Captain (retd.) Amarinder Singh and his arch rival, Navjot Singh Sidhu. Though there was no confirmation from the Congress, as per sources, Congress president Sonia Gandhi too met the poll strategist and the discussions were regarding the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. While

policy. Kumar said that Bihar rather emphasizes on educating girls to bring down the rate of reproduction. Former CM and Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) chief Jitan Ram Manjhi came in open support of CM Nitish Kumar, whose bold stand has divided the state NDA. "In matters of population control, HAM welcomes the statement and ways as given by Nitish Kumar. It is due to the impact of education among girls that the fertility rate of Bihar is less than the national average," Manjhi tweeted. "Therefore, it is necessary that other states also adopt the Nitish Kumar model on population control," he added. However,



Navjot Singh Sidhu had left everyone guessing about his next move by tweeting that Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab understands his vision and Punjab model, however, the presence of Congress general secretary for Uttar Pradesh, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, former Uttarakhand Chief Minister Harish Rawat, who also is the Congress in-charge for Punjab, at Mr. Gandhi's New Delhi residence, along with general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal conveyed a sense that the meeting could be about other poll-bound States like Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand that go to polls along with Punjab early next year. The speculation is that the party could be using Prashant Kishor's services in all these poll-bound states. Kishor has worked with the Congress previously in all these three states.

### Congress plans to corner BJP in House on COVID, Rafale, fuel hike

The Congress is looking to corner the ruling Bharatiya

former Bihar deputy chief minister and senior BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi urged the allies to not make contradictory statements on the issue and suggested that the party sit together and arrive at a common agenda. Meanwhile, with BJP leaders in several states advocating population control policies, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said had the Jan Sangh not opposed the then Congress government's measures in the 1970s, India's population would have been under control by now.

### A national role for Kamal Nath after Congress re-jig?

Senior party leader and former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath met Sonia Gandhi setting off rumour of a possibly bigger role for him in the party. The meeting was also attended by Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. Kamal Nath had also recently met Sharad Pawar at his New Delhi residence after the NCP chief met

**The monsoon session of the Parliament is set to commence from July 19 and will continue till August 13. The debate will be led by Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury in Lok Sabha and Mallikarjun Kharge in Rajya Sabha.**

Janata Party (BJP) over various issues like alleged mismanagement of the Covid-19 crisis, border disputes with China, farmers' agitation and the questionable Rafale deal during the monsoon session of the Parliament. The Congress leaders are also set to raise the issue of rising fuel prices in the Parliament. Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday asked Rajya Sabha Opposition leader Mallikarjun Kharge to coordinate with other Opposition parties and formulate a joint strategy to take on the NDA government in both Houses of Parliament. The monsoon session of the Parliament is set to commence from July 19 and will continue till August 13. The debate will be led by Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury in Lok Sabha and Mallikarjun Kharge in Rajya Sabha. It was discussed in the meeting of the Congress parliamentary strategy group, chaired by party president Sonia Gandhi.

### As Nitish takes issue with UP population policy, NDA stands divided

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar refrained from endorsing Uttar Pradesh's new and controversial population

some Opposition leaders amid talk of the formation of a larger opposition front against the BJP. Congress sources have said that the Congress Working Committee (CWC) would soon meet and the process to elect a new party president would start. The AICC session is likely to happen in September-October of this year. Sources have further said that Kamal Nath is likely to get an important responsibility in the national Congress.

### AAP, Shiv Sena, Samajwadi Party silent on Stan Swamy's death

The death of Stan Swamy, the 84-year-old priest jailed on terror charges in Mumbai, sparked criticism from all most all opposition parties but for the Samajwadi Party, Shiv Sena and Aam Aadmi Party, which have elected to stay mum on this matter. The silence of AAP has further alienated the party from its progressive supporters who backed its stance against the Centre. AAP leaders privately admit that their leader Arvind Kejriwal has decided not to make public intervention if there is no political gain. (IPA)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Poverty is upfront and personal

Editor,  
Poverty and the sufferings of ordinary citizens are not sexy subjects to write on and debate about. Social media is replete with discussions on politics. What triggers debates especially in Meghalaya and among our urban millennials are topics on corruption and the trading of charges between political parties. Even newspapers are full of such topics because it is assumed that readers are interested in only politics and crime and nothing else. Of course, sports aficionados scan the sports pages religiously and those interested in feeling the real pulse of Meghalaya read the articles by our local writers who prise out the entire gamut of issues plaguing the State and its people.

It takes a certain sensitivity to understand that people are suffering the consequences of the pandemic to the point when they no longer feel shame to enter peoples' homes and ask for food and money. This has been the experience of quite a few people these days. I am not sure if that is called begging. When people are desperate (and what can be a

more desperate situation than to not have food to eat when one is hungry), everything is fair. In Khasi we call it — "Ka banse ka thom ia ka sang" meaning that when one is at the end of one's tether then the word taboo is alien.

Meghalaya is nearing three months of lockdown and it does not look as if things will open up any time soon even as the State awaits the third wave. The daily positive cases seem to move like the tide; one day up the next day down. Thankfully the daily death toll has waned. And what's troubling the Government is peoples' stiff resistance to the vaccination. But the continued restrictions on movement on account of the lockdown is beginning to tell on peoples' mental health as their small and medium businesses struggle to survive. Then there is the plight of taxi drivers who only get to drive twice a week and whose salaries have been drastically reduced.

Owners of retail stores across Shillong too are feeling the pain and they see their businesses folding up. Their only option is to take a bank loan but with repayment looking problematic in these times, even banks are reluctant to lend. I was speaking to a shop owner in Laitumkhray who bitterly quipped that those in

the State Secretariat who take decisions to open and close shops according to an undefined rationale get their salaries every month without fail so they can juggle around their decisions even if those don't make sense. He went to state that the Government seems to have a special affinity only for hawkers who are allowed to sit and sell their wares until 8 pm when all shops are asked to close at 3 pm.

Since shops open on alternate days even in localities if people run out of groceries they have to get their cars out and go to Laitumkhray or Police Bazar where shops are open. This is a nightmare they can do without in an already distressing situation.

Shop owners in Police Bazar, Laitumkhray and other commercial areas wonder whether it is not the brief of the MLA to speak on their behalf. They moan that no one is representing their voices in the Government. The question that arises is — who is the Government consulting when it passes these arbitrary orders? Almost all states of India have opened up because the economy is crumbling even while inflation has shot up but in Meghalaya we are paying the price for the Government's bungling in handling the second wave of the pandemic.

And sadly those who have never encountered poverty are now taking decisions on behalf of the poor.

Yours etc.,  
Phrangngi Dohling,  
Via email

#### On the 2-child policy

Editor,

Far from becoming a burden on the nation, population is actually a national asset which needs to be harnessed to the full to make a nation truly prosperous in all respects and in different fields. And India is fortunate enough that this huge population includes a very large percentage of youth brigade who have the luxury of years, energy and agility to lead the nation for a significant period of time. Hence when leading figures of Indian politics lament about the "population explosion" as if it is a hindrance to the nation's growth, it certainly invokes laughter. It resembles ignoring the value of precious minerals by sitting upon unlimited gold or oil reserves.

To ensure full utilisation of human resources, the concerned authorities are required should create more job opportunities. But far from creating it; be it in the central sector to the states — all are engaged in a lunatic rat

race to shrink human strength just to lessen the "burden" of paying salaries, pensions and related benefits like medical assistance. However, there is no shortage of funds while spending on bullet trains, organising mass yoga, gigantic statues, lofty flags, new capital projects, temples or space missions!

Today there exists not a single sector in the country where vacancies do not exist! When necessity demands more creation of job openings to provide livelihoods to the youth brigade and in turn render proper service towards the society, the hard reality is that even the existing posts are rendered vacant! While vacancies have increased the youth are not getting jobs. The ever-shrinking workforce is burdened with more and more work load and as a result the delivery is unsatisfactory.

Moreover, in a chain reaction the vacancies in several sectors have a ripple effect. In office premises many people gain sustenance by vending food articles, tea and snacks. Most of them have a fixed clientele and earn their livelihoods in that manner. But with the passage of time while personnel retire, recruitments have either stagnated or the intake is negligible. Automatically with loss of clientele, their

income also gets reduced of-ten compelling them to wind up their business.

With Covid forcing more retrenchments even the children of the hapless job losers will have to drop out of school or college and enter the market of child labour. If more job openings are created along with filling up of all vacancies in all sectors our borders can be protected with more vigilance, our medical centres can provide better service, our educational sector can ensure better teaching, policing in society can be more stringent, people would have more money in their pockets, their children can get highly educated. Also purchasing power will increase demand thereby providing that much needed boost to the economy. Hopefully economic inequality will give way to all round prosperity.

However, which path the concerned authorities adopt is their prerogative, but this excuse of "population explosion" must stop immediately.

Yours etc.,  
Kajal Chatterjee,  
Via email

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

# Looking anew at urban planning

As temperatures rise and global warming is a 'hot' topic, literally, cities need to implement adaptive strategies that are responsive to local circumstances to mitigate the climate crisis, writes Steve Fox

Although cities occupy just two percent of the world's landmass, they consume more than two-thirds of the world's energy and are responsible for more than 70 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions, according to the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, a New York-headquartered coalition of 97 global megacities (including five Indian cities), that supports sustainable action on climate change.

As temperatures rise due to climate change, dense metropolitan areas are likely to be affected in a more pronounced manner than other areas. Additionally, with many of the world's largest cities located on coastlines, urban areas face huge risks from rising sea levels and devastating coastal storms, which are both effects of climate change. "Cities are not only the main cause of climate change but also the most affected," says Rohit Vijay Tak, a Fulbright-Nehru Master's Fellow in urban design at the University of California, Berkeley and manager in the Sustainable Cities: Urban Transport and Road Safety program at the World Resources Institute India.

"While newly planned cities can be developed considering



climate change, it's the inhabited cities where the challenges are more complex," says Tak. "More than half of the world's population lives in such urban areas, which are responsible for about 75 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions.

To mitigate this challenge, cities need to limit their greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the demand for energy, developing greener energy alternatives and supporting more sustainable lifestyles."

Policies that target specific industries have proven quite effective, says Shalini Sharma, a postdoctoral Fulbright-Nehru Environment Leadership Fellow at Columbia University who is

now chief executive officer at the Sanshodhan E-Waste Exchange in Hyderabad.

"In India, the government has mandated that the construction sector use a minimum of 30 percent renewable energy," she says. "This has been a great strategy, as it can reduce 30 percent of greenhouse gas emissions from this sector."

Tak notes that cities must also respond to the reality that climate change is already happening. "To prepare cities to better respond to the current or expected climate change, it is important to implement adaptive strategies that are location-specific and responsive to local circumstances," he says. "Adaptive strategies help prepare



cities to adjust to the effects of climate change, thus limiting their magnitude and severity."

There are many adaptive strategies cities can take to combat climate change, says Sharma. "Cities can use renewable energy, retrofit buildings, use compressed natural gas and biofuels, increase the use of public transport, reduce emissions from the waste sector, establish online services for citizens throughout the city, plan urban forestry, oxygen parks and cool roofs, cap emissions from industries, and focus on minimizing emissions from supply chains, among other things," she explains.

There's no time to waste — 70 percent of the cities in the C40 network report that they are already feeling the effects of climate change. Many experts believe that emissions must fall dramatically to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius, a goal set forth in the 2016 Paris Agreement, which included com-

mitments by more than 190 nations to combat climate change and adapt to its impacts.

Although climate change is a worldwide phenomenon, Tak and other experts agree that opportunities to address global warming may be greatest at the level of city government.

Local governments often have closer relationships with their businesses, residents and institutions, allowing new policies to be implemented more rapidly and decisively.

"A bottom-up approach needs to be followed," says Tak. "Since greenhouse emissions are concentrated in certain cities, treating them as hotspots and implementing mitigation policies can have a large effect in demonstrating, monitoring and evaluating change that can help guide governments at regional and national levels in effectively scaling up their efforts."

Tak and Sharma agree that recent extreme weather events

have accelerated recognition of climate change and the need to adopt new approaches to managing emissions.

"As opposed to immediate dangers, climate change is often a large-scale and slow process," says Tak. "However, the frequency of extreme weather events like flooding, landslides and extreme heat and their disastrous effects have increased awareness and pushed scientists and governments from the developed as well as the developing world to declare a climate emergency and increase awareness about climate change."

While the challenges of global warming may seem daunting, Tak notes that both the source of the problem and its solution reside in the same place, offering reason for optimism. "Climate change is mostly a result of human-caused greenhouse gas emissions," he says, "and thus could be mitigated by influencing human behaviour." (SPAN-TWFF)

## Bengal on a plate



If there was one MasterChef Australia Season 13 contestant who had judges and viewers eating out of her hand throughout the just-concluded edition of the reality TV show, it was Kishwar Chowdhury, a printing press owner and mother of two from Melbourne, and one of the three who made it to the grand finale telecast globally on Tuesday, July 13.

Bangladeshi netizens may have been outraged over what Dhaka Tribune described as "such blatant Indian appropriation of what they considered to be a Bangladeshi icon", but the truth is that Kishwar's parents are from both sides of the border.

Her father, Kamrul Chowdhury, who Kishwar says moved to Australia as a student around 1971, met her mother, Laila, who's from Kolkata, in Melbourne. They got married and settled down in their adopted city, which Kishwar, the self-proclaimed "Royal Bengal Tiger mom", now, considers home.

Kishwar's choice of dishes for MasterChef Australia was a tribute to her mixed parentage: 'khashi' (mutton) rezala, 'machher jhol' (every Bengali's staple fish curry), 'bhapa machh' (steamed fish in mustard curry), 'phuchka chotpoti' (tangy pani-poori), the street favourite on both sides of the Great Bengal Divide, and vanilla and pistachio kulfi, which she described as 'Persian and Vanilla Roses'.

In the grand finale, Kishwar prepared 'panta bhaat', which she gentrified as Smoked Rice Water. A humble peasant dish, it consists of cooked rice soaked in water overnight, served with 'pakodas' and a sour preparation made with 'mourola' fish (the local equivalent of anchovies), lashed with a generous squeeze of the fragrant 'gondhoraj' lime.

Kishwar served 'paanta bhaat' with 'aloo bharta' (the Bangladeshi equivalent of what Bengalis on our side of the border know as 'aloo bhaate' — boiled potatoes mashed with hot mustard oil, onions and green chillies). The inventive home chef added sardines and salsa to make the duet a truly cross-over dish.

The MasterChef Australia Season 13 favourite lives in Melbourne with her high-school sweetheart and husband, Ehtesham, who's also of Bangladeshi origin, and they have two children — an 11-year-old son, Mikayle, and a four-year-old daughter, Seraphina.

Her parents, as Kishwar shared so proudly with Network10, the Australian TV channel that hosts MasterChef Australia, are "pillars and founders of the Bangladeshi community in Victoria".

Her father, in fact, has been awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for his outstanding contributions to his adopted country.

And as Kishwar's profile on the Network10 website, 10play.com.au, states: "Their [her parents'] stature led to her home becoming a self-described soup kitchen of sorts, with family members, friends and community members popping over at all times."

Having lived in Melbourne, where she earned her Bachelor's in Commerce from Monash University, followed by London, where she studied graphic design at the University of the Arts, and then in Dhaka, where she established her printing press, Kishwar considers herself to be very much a citizen of the world. Her idea of comfort food is "dressed-up soupy ramen" and her idol is Malaysian-born Australian cook Poh Ling Yeow, an artist and author who was a MasterChef Australia contestant in one of its early seasons.

With her multi-cultural upbringing and culinary influences, Kishwar truly represents Australia's rainbow culture. As Dhaka Tribune concluded grudgingly, "Let us not forget that she was born and brought up in Australia and so is Australian above all!" (IANS)



## Streaming: The game changer

By Siddhi Jain

Pop sensation and electronica producer Ritviz, who has recently released 'Khamoshi' as the first of a string of 22 songs that he plans to release in 2021, opines that music streaming has changed the game. "Today, a new artist does not need to get signed to a record label in order to have their music placed in the same store as more popular artists — global distribution is a single click away for just about everyone," Ritviz tells IANSLife.

The synthpop-laced 'Khamoshi' is a collaboration between him and producer Karan Kanchan and has Ritviz's trademark vocal stylings with a layer of melancholy to the synthpop-laced beat that resonates with nostalgia and a time past, and the end result is a song that has all the makings of an earworm.

The new release shot in Jaipur has also been added as the sixth track on Ritviz's debut album, DEV, the tracklist of which also included 'Thandi Hawa', 'Chalo Chalein', 'Liggi', and 'Pran'. In addition to 'Khamoshi', Ritviz will release 21 songs — two collaborative albums, one each with Nucleya and Seedhe Maut — starting August till the end of 2021.

Ritviz, the most streamed Indian indie artist on Spotify India, speaks to IANSLife:

**Q: The indie music scene in India is at an all-time high and has grown to be at par with film music across streaming platforms over the last year. As the most streamed indie artist on Spotify India, what are your thoughts on this surge of popularity for independent music?**

**A:** Hence there's more independent music coming out of the country today than ever before, and it's only going to get bigger and better. What every independent artist needs to realise though, is that while distribution is a click away, the key is marketing. Film music is marketed on the back of blockbuster movies, synced to visuals which accentuate the user experience and build relatability — it's the complete package. As an independent artist — how far and wide are you going with your marketing?

**Q: Can you take us through the making of 'Khamoshi'? What about it drew you to working on this beat that Karan Kanchan gave you?**

**A:** Last year, Karan sent me a track that he was working on, and as I was



listening to it some parts really struck a chord with me and I started building a whole different song in my head. He was working with someone else on that song but I couldn't help it, and I called him up and said, "Let me get in on this, I want to write this song with you!". He probably wasn't expecting that but he was game for it, and that was it. From then, it took us almost 6 months to finally finish the track. In between, we got together in December to shoot the music video and we actually planned to release it back then itself, but the song wasn't ready so we had to call it off. That said, I couldn't have asked for a better time for this to happen, I'm about to drop so much music this year and this is where it all starts!

**Q: The name 'Khamoshi' is intriguing. Were you in a slightly different creative headspace given what was happening around you, and the world generally?**

**A:** Personally, I've seen a lot of change in the last 10 months. I moved from Pune to Goa, rented out a place by myself for the first time, brought home

two beautiful dogs and above all spent endless quality time with the people that I deeply care about. It's been so drastically different from how my life has been for the last five years. What really stood out to me in this time was that, ever since the world changed a year ago, there has been so much noise we've all heard and seen on our screens, but there's this weird silence in our realities that has made us think inward, and find ourselves as well as the world in a new way. For me, the song is about that. The title 'Khamoshi' is just a vague summary of it.

**Q: You recently premiered in the NFT space on WazirX. Why are NFTs exciting for you? Do you have plans to become more involved in this space?**

**A:** NFTs are a brand new concept to most of us, and it's exciting for me just as it is for anyone else. I don't know yet what all the possibilities are with it but I know it's going to be a huge part of the future. My drop with Santanu was an experiment and I feel it was totally worth it. My eyes are opening up to the bigger picture now. (IANSLife)

# "Winning is everywhere, doesn't happen at once"

By Vishnu Makhijani

The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not winning but taking part; the essential thing in life is not conquering but fighting well — Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the International Olympic Committee and the driving force behind the revival of the modern Olympic Games in 1896, had famously declared.

Perhaps the only example of this was immortalised in the film "Chariots of Fire" when Eric Liddel of Great Britain refused to run in the 100 metres heats at the 1924 Paris Olympics as his Christian convictions prevented him from running on the Sabbath. It made headlines around the world.

Sounds like an oxymoron in today's world, when all that matters, whether in sports or life, is the winning?

And rightly so!  
"Winning puts you on the biggest stage. And shuts off all the lights," elite performance coach Tim S. Grover writes in "Winning - The Unforgiving Race To Greatness" (Simon & Schuster) as he strips away the clichés that create mediocrity, and challenges you to embrace reality with a single-minded intensity.

"I've seen Winning in all its glorious generosity, and all its excruciating cruelty. One day it wears a halo. The next day it has fangs. You don't get to decide which it will be. You can only chase it, and if you're willing to pay the price, you might catch it. Briefly," writes Grover, who was born in London of Indian parents, offering a brutally honest 13-point formula for winning in sports, business or any arena where the battle is fiercely unforgiving.



## THE UNFORGIVING RACE TO GREATNESS WINNING

TIM S. GROVER

Author of 'The Unforgiving Race to Greatness'

Marcus Rashford MSc

"Winning is everywhere. Every minute, you have the potential to recognise an opportunity, push yourself harder, let go of the insecurity and fear, stop listening to what others tell you, and decide to own that moment. And not just that one single moment, but the next one, and the next. And before long, you've owned the hour, and the day, and the month. Again, Again.

"It doesn't happen all at once... For everyone, there are endless setbacks, challenges, roadblocks, letdowns, and issues that force most people out of the race," writes

Grover, who is world-renowned for his work with Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant, Dwayne Ward and thousands of athletes and business professionals and is the Founder-CEO of Attack Athletics Inc.

"Winning requires you to be different, and different scares people. So if you're worried about what others will say, the long-term effects, the sacrifices you'll make, the sleep you'll lose, your family being angry...I can't help you with that. There's nothing typical about the lifestyle and choices you'll have to make. Winning is inside all

of us, but for most, that's where it will stay, trapped under a lifetime of fear and worry and doubt," Grover asserts.

So, how does one describe Winning in one word? Uncivilised, Hard, Nasty, Unpolished, Dirty, Rough, Unforgiving, Unapologetic, Uninhibited, Everything - that's how the greats Grover has worked with have termed it.

"If that describes your journey and how you attack your goals, we are speaking the same language," Grover writes as he unveils his 13-point formula that he says can be

WINNING never lies.

WINNING is not a marathon, it's a sprint with no finish line.

WINNING is everything.

"Winning will cost you everything, and reward you with more, if you're willing to roll up your sleeves, just rip the fucking things off - and do what others won't or can't. They don't matter anyway; you are in this alone.

"Stop being afraid of what you'll become. You should be more afraid of not becoming that.

"If you can't buy into this, if you believe you're not ready or not deserving, if you're not willing to commit to your own success, you've never won, and you probably won't. Because winners all understand one thing: There's a price to pay and you must pay it," Grover maintains.

Contending that in the language of Winning, there is no talk about motivation, he writes that motivation is for those who haven't decided whether to commit to their goals, or how much time, effort, and life they're willing to invest to achieve them.

"I'm not measuring their level of success - someone can be broke or out of work or overweight or in a bad situation, and extremely motivated to change that. I'm talking about their need to have others to push them into action with a swift kick in the ass.

"I don't work with clients who need that kick in the ass. If you come to me, I need to know that you are already kicking your own ass, and you're ready for more. Likewise, I'm not a 1/2 motivational speaker'. I don't write motivational books. I don't want to 1/2 fire you up' - that's your job. My job is to take your greatest achievements and build on them. I want to speak to you in a language that takes your best work and makes it better.

"That's the language of Winning," Grover declares.

It's up to you now! Do you have what it takes?

(Vishnu Makhijani can be reached at [vishnu.makhijani@ians.in](mailto:vishnu.makhijani@ians.in))

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JULY 18, 2021

Sun opposite Pluto on your solar return chart will give amazing results. You will perform your job well. You will also earn a lot of respect. You will also fulfill your responsibilities well. You will also have the inclination to do impossible tasks. You will also have good monetary gains. You will also make good investment decisions. You will also be alert about the matters of the home and office. Tasks with your bosses will give wonderful results. You will also enjoy a wonderful equation with your partner. Those who are single can get married. It is also important to take proper care of your health. Useless thoughts will not cross your mind. Your family members will come close to you.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)  
It is going to be a hectic week for you. You will be very busy in your work. You will also have to deal with sudden developments at your workplace. Your social life will also keep you engaged. You will be busy in meetings, discussions and parties. In the middle of the week you will receive a good news from somewhere. It will lift your mood. But you need to be careful in financial matters. Your expenses will rise. Your income will keep increasing. Your graph of popularity will creep upwards. This may make some persons jealous of you. You will have an amazing time with your mate. He/she will keep you happy. You will also share good relations with your family members.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)  
It is time to take stock of the things that have been going on for a long time now. You need to do a major rethink on your way of doing things and expecting a lot from others. It will prove to be helpful for you in the long run. You will have mental peace. And also monetary gains. Some important decision will be taken at your workplace. You will also make certain changes in your business. You will be sharing amazing bonding with your spouse/partner. You will also be embroiled in family matters. Time management is in your hands. You will meet some close friend or relative who will be very happy on meeting you. Business trips will prove to be beneficial.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)  
These are days for fun, relaxation and lot of excitement building in your life. You will be spending lot of time with your family after a long time. You will plan to go on a picnic, retreat or long drive with family. You will also look at the priorities of your family members and discuss a few vital things with them. You will remain close to your mate. Your siblings will also support you. You will also remain on good terms with your peers and seniors. They will support you a lot. You will remain financially well off. Everyone will give you a lot of respect. The time will be in your favor. You will also make efforts to recover money given as loan to someone. You will also meet an important personality in your field.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)  
Lot of good things will happen for you this week. You will have gains in work/business. You will also remain popular at your workplace. You will be having monetary gains. You will be busy in doing good deeds. Your self confidence will also be high. You will also make plans to buy a new house or vehicle. You will also undertake major expansion of your business. You will remain close to your family members. Availability of things will bring happiness in your life and will help to make you feel secure. Your mate will remain a source of strength. You will spend most of your time on entertainment and fun activities. There will be situation of changes and transfer during this time.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)  
You will feel more energetic than usual. You will be cheerful and happy with your family members. There will be a lot of love, warmth and respect in family relations. You will make preparations for a auspicious function. The favorable placement of planets will bring lot of money to you. You will also get opportunities to rise in your job/work. You will also fall in love relations with an unknown person all of a sudden. You will maintain a time table for your daily activities. You will feel mental peace. Troubles that were facing for sometime will vanish. Despite efforts and opponents, they will not be successful. T

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)  
Your personality will come in front of everyone all of a sudden. People will be amazed at this sudden transformation. Your potentials and capabilities will be highlighted in front of everyone. People will be completely impressed by your skills. You will also make lot of friends. And get opportunities to rise in your work. Your financial position is good. You will also undertake major renovation in your home. You will be flush with funds. The feud will come to an end. Your brothers, sisters and family members will pour emotions of love for each other. Your bosses will be happy with your performances. You will meet old acquaintances, new friends and loved ones, and happiness will enter your life.

Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)  
You will be kept busy with your work. You will be getting chance with lot of like-minded people. You will associate with people of similar thinking and ideology. You will be having heavy work load. Your bosses will be giving full support. You will also share perfect equations with your spouse. You will look after your elders well. And will take interest in affairs of your family members. Students will study hard and will be getting good results. You will flaunt a more principled and diverse perspective. Your worries will get resolved. You will get back your money that was given to someone. You will also take important and tough decisions in your work. Money will be spent on luxury and lavish lifestyle related works.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)  
It is a period of change. You will be taking even minor things in business and profession seriously. Business related trips will keep you busy. Keep your eating habits and daily routine in an organized way or you else may suffer a bit. You will receive money from somewhere. You will also complete your tasks in a peaceful way. You will pick up an argument with someone senior at high position. It might upset you and spoil your mood. You will get attracted towards love and romance. You will purchase some new items for house hold needs. You will also give a final shape to the future projects seriously due to the financial condition being favorable for you.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)  
You will work hard at your job but results will not be that satisfactory. Maybe you need to relax a bit and just take things easy. You will be having tensions for money and finance. And will have to struggle a bit. But you will find a way out of things. Gradually you will gain profit in your work. It is time to regain confidence of your seniors. You will exchange good vibes with your spouse. You will also spend a lot on your family members. You will remain devoted to your family and not afraid to take responsibilities. You will be diligent in order to achieve your targets. You will go on catching every opportunity from your financial point of view. People will be impressed by your intelligence. The time is favorable for you and you will take full advantage of it. You will make every work possible due to your courage and determination.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)  
The placements of planets indicate extravagance. But you need to remain careful and not go overboard. Your reputation will improve. You will be having sudden financial gains. Your expenses too will rise. You will need to keep things under control. You will think about a job change. It is expected that you will maintain pleasant relation with your bosses. Your earning will be good. There will be miraculous change in your fortunes and situations. You can also be drawn to a person known to you leading to warm and fulfilling relationship. You will solve family matters. You will also get relief from all the tensions you have been carrying for a while. You will receive the money that has been stuck somewhere.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)  
There will be sudden changes in your life. You can think of a job change. You will also get a marriage proposal all of a sudden. There will be spurt in expenditure on children related activities. There will be some misunderstanding between husband and wife which will get resolved timely too. You will also receive the blessings of parents, elders, relatives and senior persons. New acquaintances and contacts will be made. You will share good bonding with your spouse. You will develop contacts with new people and improve your relations with old acquaintances. Government related matters will be solved. You will feel a new energy within you.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)  
It is a wonderful week. You will get support of your better half. You will also get favorable marriage proposals. You will also be busy in preparation for a festival or function. Your financial position is strong and stable. There will be on the spot expenses but do not worry as these expenses are for betterment and will be challenging. There will be success in many spheres - relationship, love and profession. You will feel a lot more energetic at this time. Your children will study hard and you will be proud of your children's activities. It is time for love and romance. You will share amazing bonding with your mate. You will also get extra income. You will get close to family members. And will remain devoted to your Guru. People will show faith in your abilities and you will not disappoint.

# Skill Development for vibrant careers

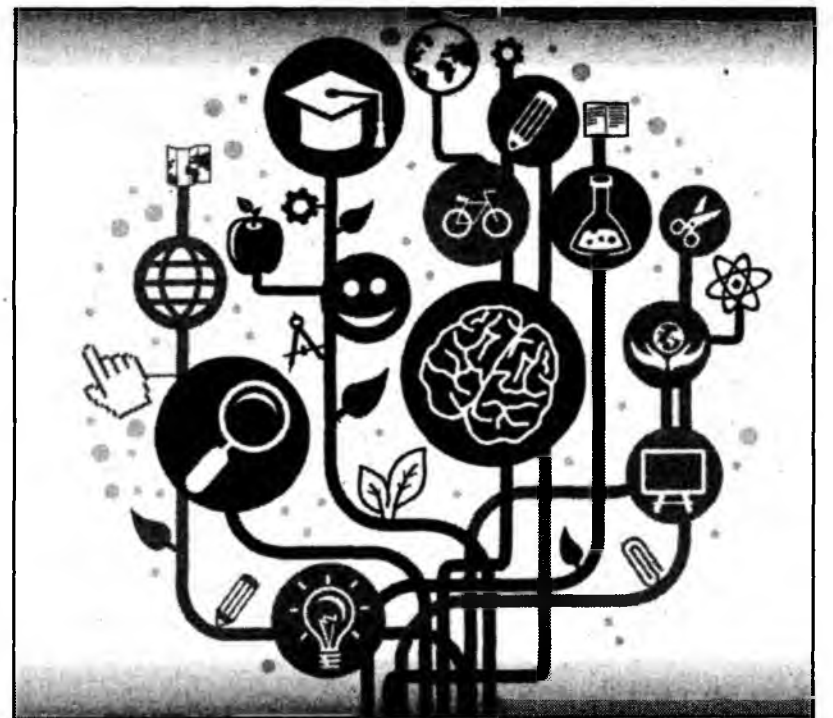
By Ranjan K Baruah

The current pandemic has hit the job sector directly around the world and more in developing nations like India. Recent global data are alarming and challenging for young people as well as elders or people working with young people. Young people aged 15-24 have been even more severely affected by the COVID-19 crisis than adults. Globally, youth employment fell by 8.7 per cent in 2020, compared with 3.7 per cent for adults. Young women have been particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic as compared to young men. We have to plan for the future with the help of skill development.

Youths are over-represented in the hardest-hit sectors of the economy and the ILO estimates that even young people who still have jobs have seen their working hours cut by nearly 25 per cent. Eradication of poverty means people must be engaged in income generating activities so that individuals can manage themselves and also manage others in their family. We are aware that low skills perpetuate poverty and inequality. When it is done rightly then skills development can reduce un- and underemployment, increase productivity, and improve standards of living.

The global community has realized the importance of skill development for getting decent jobs and employment. In 2014, the United Nations General Assembly declared 15th July as World Youth Skills Day (WYSD), to celebrate the strategic importance of equipping young people with skills for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship. This shows the importance of skill development and it is time to explore and develop our skills for a sustainable future.

When we talk of skill development then we have to understand what it means. A skill is the capability to do something, in fact abil-



ity to do something effectively.

We develop skills through experiences in life and work. We may learn skills by seeing others or reading from books but it is important to explore and make them our strengths if we want to be employed easily in any profession. Let us understand the skills which are important and needed. The list may be endless but we shall discuss a few skills in this edition. Skills can be simple, such as making a bed, or more complex such as playing a musical instrument. In the workplace you'll use a combination of technical and personal skills.

Though the list is big but few types of skills include Literary Skills, Language Skills, Vocational Skills, Sports Skills, Cultural Skills, Life Skills and Employability Skills.

We are aware that people who can read and write are literate. Literacy skills are all the skills needed for reading and writing. Language skills include ability to read and write or communicate in different languages or dialects. Knowing

different languages is always helpful for any profession. Vocational skills are related to different vocations like being a technician. There are many different training sessions conducted for the vocational skill training by different training institutes in collaboration with government and other agencies. Sports skills are ability to play and do well in any sports and similarly cultural skills include different performance. The important soft skill includes life skills and other employability skills which are most apart from having academic qualification to get placement or get a decent job. We have to understand differences between soft skills and hard skills or technical skills as all are important to be successful in life. We shall publish about different skill training provided by the government and other agencies for young people.

(The author is a career mentor and skill trainer and can be reached at 8473943734 or [bkranjjan@gmail.com](mailto:bkranjjan@gmail.com) for any queries)

"There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure."

— Colin Powell

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIII No. 332 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 19, 2021

### Monsoon Session

IT'S time to take stock of the situation in the country. Parliament begins its Monsoon Session on Monday. Apart from presentation and passage of a string of 20 bills, major issues of the nation are bound to come up for discussion. Among those, what could be expected is one on the government's handling of the second wave of Covid19, which saw massive deaths including in the capital due to shortage of liquid oxygen for ICU patients. The axe has fallen on the health minister, but this is small comfort. The Modi government will have to do a lot of explaining on why such a scenario was created and why no planning was done in advance to face such a widely "expected" eventuality. The government has collective responsibility and an accusing finger might be raised against the prime minister himself.

Another issue that could come up for heated debate will be the long-standing agitation by farmers principally in the Punjab-Haryana-UP belt, encircling the capital regions. The government is understandably not willing to dump the reform legislation lock, stock and barrel. Such a demand was unusual. The agitation will have major implications on the approaching assembly polls in Punjab and hence the government is likely to take a step or two backwards. Significantly, farmers in most states are willing to give a try to the reforms and are keeping out of the protests except for the Left and Congress-inspired campaigns. A protest by farmers is being planned in front of Parliament. This might be allowed to be held at some distance away and in a symbolic manner only, due to existing Covid19 restrictions.

With the induction of a large number of new faces in Modi's council of ministers and removal of several senior ministers, the government itself has a fresh look while it faces parliament for the Monsoon session. The exit of these ministers will go unsung, as several of the ministries could not impress the nation with any significant step forward in Modi's second term. Nearly half the term of the government is over. Many of those who are still inside also leave much to be desired. The Covid pandemic since March last year, which could continue affecting life in a serious way at least until October, should not have been an excuse for the government to take matters forward on multiple fronts. Its failure will also have a bearing on the coming assembly polls in a few states. It's high time for the Modi government to give new hope to the nation with some pro-people policies.

# MDA and change of land ownership in Jañtia hills

By H H Mohrmen

The fact that the Sixth Schedule which was incorporated in the Constitution as an instrument designed to protect the interests of North Eastern tribals particularly their land, is now open to discussion. Things have changed now and it is fifty years since we have had a state of our own. Meghalaya is a tribal state where the majority of people indigenous to the state are local tribals and almost all the elected representatives to the legislative assembly are also tribals. The question then is, why in this sense of being threatened, persist amongst the indigenous people even after having a state of our own for half a century now?

While many have tried to define the land tenure system in the state, the truth remains that the land holding pattern is not uniform. The land holding system in Meghalaya varies from place to place or from one community to the other. It is therefore wrong to assume that there is one general land holding pattern for the entire state. It cannot be painted with one brush as ownership pattern is different and complex, particularly in the two districts of Jañtia hills. Land ownership in the two districts can be broadly divided into two categories. Traditionally, it is either owned by the community or the clan depending on the region in the district.

Tradition like everything else evolves and changes with time. A case in point is a village called Shnongrim which is under the Nongkhlieh eleka. Till the late 1990's and early 2000's people in the area never registered their land. They refused to either register it with the Jañtia Hills Autonomous District Council or the Deputy Commissioner's office because they reason that according to tradition the land still belongs to the community. Members of the community only have the right to use the land. If it is left un-used for three consecutive years the land reverts to the community. That has of course changed now and people register their land and the tradition has ceased to exist.

In the War Jañtia area or a large part of the Amlarem sub division, land is owned by different clans. Again in the different villages, different clans own major parts of the land in the respective villages. In fact the distribution of land in the area is based on the time of the clans arrival in the region. The first settlers or rather the clan or clans which came to settle in the area first, selected and distributed among themselves the greener pastures or the best part of land in the area. They leave the lower grade

or un-cultivable and none arable land for the migrants who come to settle in the village later. Members of clans who came to settle last have to depend on the earlier settlers, who in turn lease the cultivatable land to the late comers for their agriculture use.

In the War Jañtia area, to this day, the clans which owned large tracks of land are still called (z) Jamindar and they lease out land they cannot use to farmers in their respective villages. So farmers who have no land have

belongs to the community, the farmers' rights over the land is only as long as he/she uses it. But even in the area where the community is holding a major portion of the land, some Kur or clan in the community still own large tracts of land.

The sad fact is both these traditions are declining as community and clans lands are fast becoming private lands. The size of the clans' land decreased from time to time on being divided and subdivided amongst the members of the clans. Simi-

**Tradition like everything else evolves and changes with time. A case in point is a village called Shnongrim which is under the Nongkhlieh eleka. Till the late 1990's and early 2000's people in the area never registered their land. They refused to either register it with the Jañtia Hills Autonomous District Council or the Deputy Commissioner's office because they reason that according to tradition the land still belongs to the community. Members of the community only have the right to use the land. If it is left un-used for three consecutive years the land reverts to the community.**

to take on lease land from the clan for use in farming or other purposes. The farmers then have to pay a yearly compensation to the land owner for the land they have taken on lease from the clan. This practice is still prevalent in the War Jañtia area of the Amlarem Sub division. The question here is whether the farmer owns the land in this case? Most of the farmers in this region are landless except the land where their house is located. The land that they use for farming is taken on lease from the clans and they only have the right of use over the land. This is apparent especially when farmers want to avail credit from the bank and they cannot mortgage the land because the ownership is still with the clan.

Of course the good thing about this tradition is that the clan which owns the land cannot just take the land back at their whims and fancy even if the land belongs to the clan. Ownership of land in the uplands like eleka Jowai, Nartiang, Shangpung etc is different from the southern slopes of the district, because in these areas land is owned by the community. Even in the case where the land

largely due to the exponential growth of the population, community land is also decreasing day by day.

Now to the question whether Khasi Pnar is an egalitarian society? The answer is that despite the Khasi Pnar female being in a much better position when compared to women in other societies, yet gender inequality is apparent in the community. On the other hand, even if there is no caste system in the society, class system exists as some clans are bestowed with rights and positions that were denied to the other. By tradition there is no equality in the social structure of the society as some clans occupy a better position and a higher status than the others.

The threat is that as time goes by community land is distributed for settlement and agricultural use and gradually public land is shrinking. Few years back many villages by tradition provided a plot of land to every new family in the community to start their home, but now very few villages have that luxury. Now many villages do not have common land anymore - not even to provide housing plots for construction of houses for new families.

In Meghalaya, the threat to the people is not from outside but from within the community in the form of the rich grabbing the land of the poor. In the coal mine areas much of the land is now owned by the coal mine owners. In the entire state the elite section of the community which include coal baron, politicians, bureaucrats, policemen own majority of the land now.

The other major threat to land is when there is no restriction of how the land is used. The Autonomous District Councils have no power to regulate how land is used by the public. For instance agriculture land in the district can be converted to commercial land. Anybody can mutate agriculture land or for that matter any kind of land, for housing or commercial purposes. There is absolutely no rule or regulation on how land is used in this state which puts farm land and even forests under threat of being converted to commercial areas.

Even in the case of cement companies at the eleka Narpuh, land grabbing happens and huge areas of tribal land changed hands with the tacit support of the village headman and local representatives of the companies. A large tract of land in the area is now owned by the companies or their representatives who were given a dummy post as local directors. In Narpuh with the tacit support of the former MDCs even the Council land which was considered as un-classed forest was converted to private land and transferred to individuals and later sold to the companies.

In all the above situations, it is the poor people who are being marginalised. When land is continuously being privatised, it is the poor who are at the receiving end of the stick. Rich people and companies continue to own large tracts of land depriving the poor and the farmers of their source of livelihood.

Adding fuel to the fire, the Chief Minister's tacit support to limestone mining at Brichymot by cement companies made it obvious that the MDA is the government of the rich and the powerful. The government does not seem to understand the tradition that land is an essential part of a tribal's life. This will not only encourage cement companies to grab more land but more importantly the chief minister surrenders the authority of the state over land in a tribal state to the central government. This is not only unprecedented but it will also create a precedent as the right of the State Government over land in a tribal state is jeopardised.

hhmohrmen67@gmail.com

If act can be misused, safeguards run risk of abuse

## Govt stand on sedition law betrays undemocratic

By K Raveendran

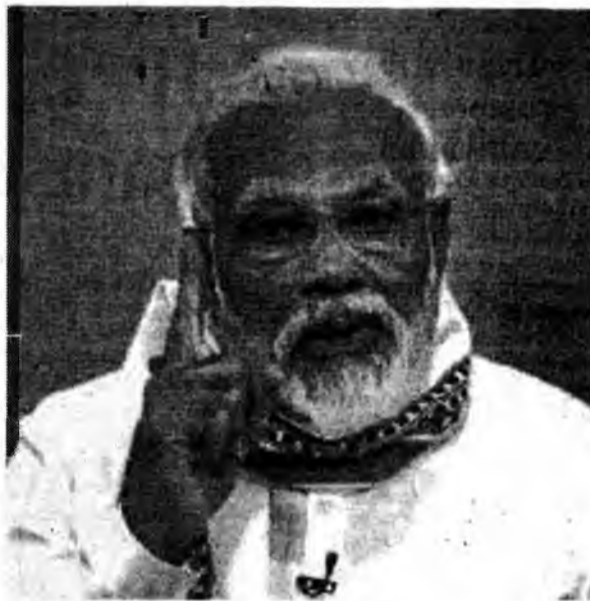
The stand taken by the Modi government in the Supreme Court that the 'colonialist' sedition law can remain, but with certain safeguards, betrays the authoritarian traits of the government and its intention to use the draconian law whenever it feels threatened by dissent and adverse public opinion.

K K Venugopal's advocacies as the solicitor general of the Modi government against constitutional morality and the so-called supremacy of the Executive are well-known, but considering his eminence in the profession, it is most unlikely that these would be his personal disposition. Probably, the compul-

to catch up on more progressive ideas.

But we are persisting with it, because it serves the purpose of authoritarian regimes that have no respect for opposing points of view. Any criticism of the government is misinterpreted as an enemy act against the state. As such, sedition law has become a dangerous tool in the hands of governments with its zero tolerance of dissent and invoking of sedition has become an obnoxious daily occurrence.

The Chief Justice pointed out how the law allowed a factionist to invoke the penal provisions to implicate the other group of people. If a



sions of his responsibilities are forcing him to go against his nature.

The position taken by Venugopal in the court is yet another manifestation of the Modi government's colonial mentality, which places subjects in an adversarial role, rather than the source of its authority, just like the British did.

Hence it is hardly surprising that the court lamented the 'enormous power of misuse' of the sedition law and asked the government why it should not scrap a colonial law that was once used by the British government to

particular party or people do not want to hear a voice, they will use this law to implicate others, Justice Ramana said.

In fact, the use of sedition law to clamp down on even black flag demonstrations has become a matter of routine under the present dispensation. The other day, the sedition law was invoked to book farmers in Haryana's Sirsa, who allegedly broke the windshield of a minister's car while staging a black flag protest. Hardly a day passes without an instance of the imperialist law being used against ordinary



oppress the freedom movements and leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

"Unfortunately, continuance of this law after 75 years... is a serious threat on functioning of institutions and individuals' liberty," remarked a bench, headed by Chief Justice NV Ramana. It likened the indiscriminate use of Section 124A (sedition) in the Indian Penal Code to a saw in the hands of a carpenter who cuts the entire forest instead of a tree.

Though a relic of the colonial legacy, the draconian law has been used in independent India to suppress dissent. The British used it to protect the Empire, although modern day England frowned upon its use as a threat to democracy. The colonial government justified enlarging the ambit of laws on sedition in its colonies, clearly reflecting a tendency to use sedition to suppress any kind of criticism.

The British parliament abolished sedition as an offence in 2009, reasoning that sedition and seditious and defamatory libel were arcane offences with no place in an era where freedom of expression is considered sacrosanct. But like in many other instances, India is yet

citizens.

Any criticism of the government is taken as an anti-national act and those who raise such criticism hauled up and put behind bars and treated like traitors who do not deserve the right to defence as envisaged in the rule of law.

The Modi government is so short-sighted in its approach on the issue that it seems to be blissfully ignorant of the risk of the law being used against its own workers when the party goes out of power. It is true that the Modi government has been mandated to successive terms. But we have had ruling establishments that remained in power for many more successive terms, and yet were banished from power forever. For, the Indian Constitution has no provision to ensure continuity of a government beyond its five-year mandate. And even if an incumbent government dares to change the statutes to make itself permanent, it will not stand the test of time. The Modi government, including its senior most law officer K K Venugopal, would do well not to gloss over this hard fact of life. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Call for limited tourism

Editor,  
It is indeed a welcome decision by the Government to explore ways to reopen tourism in the state by allowing only tourists that have taken the double doses of Covid vaccine ("Govt. may allow vaccinated tourists to enter state" -ST July 16). It is time to start somewhere and government should explore ways and means to assuage the grief of people relying on tourism. More than anything else the loss of jobs and livelihoods has hit people the hardest.

On my visit to Nongriat in early February 2021, I was bowled over by the humility of the owners and family members of the homestay at Nongriat. The serenity and mesmerizing beauty of those villages around are beyond words. In fact, such spots are assets to the state. It touched my heart to see those simple-hearted people in the village who eke out a living by setting up these humble homestays and others by selling locally grown products to tourists.

Sometimes it haunts me to think how they are managing to survive at this time when their only source of income has been totally cut off. The Government must find ways at the earliest possible to mitigate their sufferings. Many of them had just started this homestay business in 2018-19. We need to help such entrepreneurs to sustain their initiatives. Their humility and virtues draw tourists to this state and improve its economy.

Unfortunately, those most aggrieved by the present circumstances and the poverty-stricken people can't ever express their hardships and bring them to the notice of the concerned authorities. But their hard lives demonstrate how they try to put the pieces of their lives together if only we have the time and empathy to talk to them and listen to their body languages. Just observe their activities for a while and watch how much they have to shout to draw the attention of passers-by to their vegetables or fruits which they often palm off at throwaway prices especially as the day passes and it's time for them

to return to their villages. All these vendors might do better when tourism opens up.

Of course, the government must ensure that all the tour operators and associated service providers should be vaccinated; better with double doses. We cannot throw caution to the winds. We also never know if the vaccine-resistant variants could emerge from any corner and spread with a vengeance.

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gewali,  
Shillong

#### Getting back to work

Editor,  
I work in the hospitality sector which has taken the most painful hit in this State which has been promoting itself as a tourists' paradise. It is now almost three months since the government has locked us in without giving us any kind of help and subsistence grant. This sector has many verticals. There are those of us employed as managers in hotels and resorts. Last year our salaries were first reduced by 30% and this

year we were told that the hotel and resort owners will not be able to pay us if they are not doing any business. Hotel and resort owners on their part tell us that they have to repay bank loans and cannot continue to dip into their meagre savings to pay staff salaries when business has come to a standstill.

Take the case of tourist taxi drivers and those driving local taxis. Those who have purchased vehicles with bank loans are struggling to explain to the banks that without income there can be no repayment but banks have said they are not authorised to waive off instalments. There are cleaners, bell boys/girls, tour guides in different destinations who are now jobless. Is anyone even bothered to listen to their plight? At the end of the day the pandemic has been cruel only to those of us working in the private sector. Those in government receive their salaries regularly and will never understand what it is to not have a job and to face the sudden loss of income.

I do not want any charity from anyone. All I want

is to be able to get back to work and this Government must realise that it cannot lock us down forever for fear of the rising cases. A time has come to take a hard call that we have to live with this pandemic. Just because our health infrastructure is in shambles due to meagre investment in health with almost no supervision in the past 50 years and we are seeing this failure now, the entire population cannot be punished. Those who have to answer to the public are the respective Health Ministers of this State for 50 years now. What have they done for the state? We see they have become rich but the state has become poorer.

The present Health Minister was looking after Health Department even during the Mukul-led government. What does he have to say about the poor state of health infrastructure? This state cannot even set up a medical college since the past several years. Those in the government of course are shameless. They are never held accountable for the list of failures that this state has

accumulated. In this state, the back-scratching policy works. If you know someone in politics, especially someone powerful, your life is made. You acquire sudden wealth and no one questions anyone about the source of the wealth because we tribals don't pay income tax. I was hoping that the Modi Government would straighten this opportunistic trait of all tribal states, especially their politicians who have made crores just by being in politics. While all of us are becoming poorer (and I am speaking especially of people like me who have lost our jobs) only the political class is getting richer. Is this fair? Everyone talks about change but after every five years we get a government that is more mercenary than the previous one. Where will we end up? Do we have any answer?

Yours etc.,  
BR Khongsit,  
Via email

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

"Accept the challenges so that you can feel the exhilaration of victory."

— George S. Patton

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXIII No. 333 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 20, 2021

**Vaccine & communications challenge**  
HEALTH Department officials must be appreciated for going the extra mile to create a platform where the voices of citizens, their fears and anxieties are being addressed and their questions answered adopting the participatory model. Vaccination hesitancy in Meghalaya comes from several factors. Primarily, however, there is anxiety and fear of post vaccination reactions. Those involved in information dissemination to vaccine hesitant people both in rural and urban areas must address those fears from a position of empathy. It is natural for health workers armed with information to be impatient about what they think are needless fears, but, for the person on the other side those fears are real. Hence communication laced with empathy in a non-threatening space is the soft skill that can come in handy during this pandemic. Unfortunately, the pandemic left no time for health workers to be exposed to these specifically nuanced communication skills.

Added to the inherent fears about vaccination there are secondary fears arising from WhatsApp videos and messages without any scientific bases; of listening to religious preachers that believe religion trumps science or by listening to the more educated or vocal ones in the community. Countering such disinformation and misinformation requires intelligent communication skills from those entrusted to cancel out the disinformation campaign. Communication skills in doctors and nurses also helps avoid medico-legal and ethical issues. Of course, communication skills are imperative across all professions but more so when dealing with patients whose mental state is already fragile. Further, interpersonal skills are needed to respond to a patient's feelings and concerns. As this pandemic continues to rage, all of us are prospective patients needing a listening, empathetic ear.

Communication experts speak of Patientology which implies being empathetic and understanding a patient's state of mind; her/his fears and worries so that these can be set to rest. Unfortunately, such skills are either not taught or taught cursorily in medical and nursing schools. Experts also maintain that doctors and nurses more than anyone else need high Emotional Quotient (EQ). EQ enhances empathy and that is demonstrated by the way a health worker responds to what a patient says and also deciphers the patient's unspoken, body language. Patientology means showing a patient or a vaccine hesitant person that she/he is being listened to and that their hesitancy is well appreciated. Communication is effective when the message being communicated registers in the mind of the person intended, leaving no room for misunderstanding or questions. Communication skills training is now internationally accepted as an essential component of medical education. Meghalaya's Health Department needs to expose its human resource to these essential soft skills.

# Cognition a cure for PGI woes

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The performance grading index (PGI) report for Meghalaya is not a surprise. As stakeholders in education, we all know that a number of things are going wrong. The only difference now is that the shortcomings are quantified and are out in the open for interpretation. Yes, it is true that government departments are known to fudge data. A case in point, the international community does not trust the Covid-19 numbers reported by India. In the case of PGI, a number of people have opined that they have seen far worse in UP and Bihar. One person unequivocally debated on social media that if Meghalaya is so bad then why do students from other states come here to study. But here lies the heart of the issue. The PGI is basically a statistical representation and it deals with 'averages'. Shillong and other towns might do well, but on the average, for Meghalaya we do paint a dismal picture. Similarly, students from other states come mainly to Shillong for studies. It is important to get these points straight. Accordingly, despite the allegations of political and religious bias, in the grand scheme of things the PGI report stands as a valid document which must be taken note of.

Education Minister, Lakhmen Rymbui while acknowledging the report pointed towards the improved performance of Meghalaya over the period 2017-18 to 2019-20. While that is fine, we must not lose sight of the fact that we are laggards. Over the three years, the aggregate scores (out of 1000) are 584 for 2017-18, 610 for 2018-19 and 649 for 2019-20 representing an increased rate of 5.29%. This is minuscule. Although the views of the readers might differ, it would be fair to point out that of all the five domains, 'learning outcomes and quality' is the most important. Interestingly, in this domain the score of Meghalaya has remained constant at 126 (out of 180) over the three years. This is a red flag and it indicates the gravity of the problem. The constant score of 126 basically means that the other domains such as infrastructure and governance have improved (an increased rate of 19.82% and 8.86% respectively). But how does it help when the most important domain (learning outcomes and quality) has seen no increase? The claims of our education minister excludes

different from thinking. As a thought process, cognition implies that a person is continually involved in a topic/subject consciously or subconsciously. It is not a stop-gap measure. If it is so, then it becomes just plain thinking. The real point of distinction between thinking and cogni-

*"Education Minister, Lakhmen Rymbui while acknowledging the report pointed towards the improved performance of Meghalaya over the period 2017-18 to 2019-20. While that is fine, we must not lose sight of the fact that we are laggards."*

tion is that in the former it is inconsistent. One thinks on a topic in the morning but does not do so in the afternoon. In the case of the latter, the topic evolves in the mind of a person as a thought process. It is always in the mind and the student tries to understand it in a practical sense. This is what is required with regards to our students. This process ideally starts at a very young age. It starts at school. It goes without saying that in the ef-

orts to nurture cognition in the minds of the students, the role of the teacher becomes critical. However, it is sad to note that the training of the students into realms of cognition has received less attention in academic circles. This is one of the reasons for poor critical and analytical skills of students. Teaching-learning is theoretical and only confined to the classroom. The moment school gets over, so does all forms of education. It is time to factor that the 'cognitive student' has now become a way of life

out the size of our homes in feet and meters, etc. The list goes on. The point here is that Arithmetic can be perfected outside the classroom. It is not about marks but a way of life. This is what cognition does. It brings a realization on the students that we will need Arithmetic till the day we die and not just till class ten. Hence, a student may not score 95% in it, but as a thought process it becomes an invaluable help in carrying out daily activities. This similar advantage is true for other topics/subjects as well. Like, we may learn photosynthesis in the classroom. It becomes even better if it is learnt in a smart classroom. But the ultimate learning happens when a student observes the plants in the garden and relates photosynthesis to it.

In the end, cognition has outcomes. The first is called 'cognitive flexibility'. It is the ability to make the best use of time/situation. Say, the light goes off so I cannot study; well, no problem; I will watch the stars instead and try to figure out the constellations. As a result, one does not get irritated because of no electricity but makes even better use of time. The second is called 'scientific temper'. It is about drawing conclusions only through adequate observation of scientific facts and more importantly it is the ability to change conclusions in the face of new evidence/developments. Scientific temper takes time to develop. It normally happens when one reaches higher classes such as college and beyond. However, the starting point is cognition at school. A continued practice of cognition ends up in the development of scientific temper. One might say that cognition over time is equal to scientific temper. Examples of scientific temper include people who earlier hesitated to take the Covid-19 vaccine but now in the face of new evidence have agreed to take it. Similarly, people who earlier hated the LGBTQ community, on learning more about the condition and the reasons thereof have become more accepting. This is the very purpose of education. Thus, the focus on cognition as a cure right from schooling can do wonders for human resource development, far beyond the PGI woes.

(Email: benjamin21in@yahoo.co.in; The Author teaches at NEHU)

get elected. That is why this increasing trend of investing crores in winning a petty MLA election. There is no governance. Only the selling and buying of resources of the state. The Democratic exercise we practice once every five years is simply how to make a few rich men richer and the poor poorer. I wish some spirited politician would dare challenge the above claim.

However there appears that a new trend is now emerging among our political elite which is that they are now beginning to learn how to joke. I should not be misunderstood, but I believe that one who jokes is usually called a joker. Keeping within the confines of this definition I would like to refer the reader to ST July 12, front page heading which says "Mukul should not meddle in MDA affairs: Kharlukhi". The report refers to Rajya Sabha MP and NPP President's retort to Mukul Sangma's barrage of criticism over the performance of the MDA Govt over a number of issues. Now I am no supporter nor lover of the Congress but it happens to be the main opposition in Meghalaya and again Political Science teaches us that the job of the Opposition is to oppose. Now if the Opposition does not criticise the Govt then what is it expected to do, cuddle it? Strange logic of the NPP

president indeed and people are of the opinion that it is (ka nia tep eit miaw suda), comparing it to a cat trying to bury its own scat. The statement has also made a number of people start wondering as to when the RS member will start voicing in Parliament, the field where he is expected to speak, the woes of Meghalaya which range from border disputes, collapsing infrastructure (the Dwar Ksuid bridge, urban waste disposal, abuse of the environment) and the raging Covid pandemic in the state that is threatening both lives and livelihoods. Ignoring his duty and mandate as RS member and devoting his energy instead in censoring Opposition criticism is a joke, but a poor joke at Meghalaya's cost.

Yours etc.,  
Veronica Shabong,  
Via email

## List of Covid positive people goes viral

Editor,  
On Sunday morning, shockingly many people in Tura town received a WhatsApp post with the names, cell numbers and localities of Covid positive patients. Whoever is responsible for this callous act must be hauled up by the courts. The post is a serious breach of

privacy of citizens. The High Courts of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Madras have frowned upon this low-down despicable act of revealing names of Covid patients and in the case of the MP High Court ruling a fine of ₹25000 was threatened to be imposed on the petitioner who wanted the names of Covid positive patients be made public.

Further, the repercussions for this reprehensible act are many. Now the question arises as to who had access to this data. Who compiled it? What was the need to create a breach of privacy of the citizens? The present system in Tura as far as checking on the positive Covid patients each morning is working extremely well and it's a genuinely caring gesture. So what was the need to make a list and ridiculously make it public?

I repeat that those responsible for this negligence must be brought to book and the guilty must not be shielded for the Covid pandemic. Far too many rights of citizens are being trampled up.

Yours etc.,  
Tyron D'Brass  
Tura.

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

## Pegasus reveals complicity of Modi government in surveillance

By Sushil Kutty

Nearly 300 phone numbers of Indians most-likely, unfriendly towards the Modi Government were hacked and infected by a military-grade Israeli spyware during the run-up to the 2019 general elections which the BJP led by the Modi-Shah combine won with a thumping majority. In all 50,000 phone numbers worldwide were unearthed by a global investigation conducted by 17 media houses including one Indian news outlet.

The phone numbers included those of 40 Indian journalists, three prominent Opposition leaders of India, at least two ministers in the Modi Government, one justice of the Supreme Court of India, scores of businessmen, scientists, activists and current and retired heads of Indian government security organisations. In all there were over 300 verified Indian mobile phone numbers. The Israeli spyware 'Pegasus' that was used to hack and infect these phone numbers is only licensed to governments.

In 1988, the then Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde quit following charges of phone-tapping

of political rivals. Hegde had a sterling reputation but then "snooping" via phone-tapping is a weighty charge and those accused often crumble under its weight. Current Home Minister Amit Shah was also accused of ordering "snooping" on a woman in 2013. But the charge did not stick though it did not go away entirely.

That said, the Hegde and Shah cases were national embarrassments. Now we have this international scandal to reckon with. That of an Israeli military-grade spyware used to spy on Indian

Harassment apart, it'll be extremely expensive and time-consuming to get off the government's criminal/terror list.

The NSO Group said in a statement that neither did it "operate the spyware it had licensed to governments", nor did it have "regular access to the data gathered by these governments". In other words, the NSO Group gave itself a clean chit and claimed that its technologies actually helped prevent bombings and bust criminal rings including those involved in human and sex/child trafficking. The company denied spying on Jamal Khashoggi's relatives.

But forensic tests on a cross-section of these phones showed signs of targeting by Pegasus spyware in 37 phones, ten of which were of Indians. The NSO Group says it has sold Pegasus to "36 vetted governments", but refused to identify its clients. The majority of the 50,000 phone numbers are from 10 countries including India, Mexico and the United Arab Emirates.

Incidentally, the technical lab of Amnesty International was also involved in the investigation. The use of hacking to deliver surveillance spyware is



an offence under the Indian Telegraph Act, and the Information Technology Act. The names of the Indians whose phone numbers were spied upon are not known though it's believed that the accused in the Elgar Parishad Case were spied upon.

According to a report, the Prime Ministers' Office and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology have both said that India is committed to ensuring the right to privacy to all its citizens and that there was no truth to the allegations that the Government spied on

"The NSO Group has refuted the allegations, calling them "baseless". The media partners involved in the investigation call it the "Pegasus Project". There's intense speculation as to who all were under surveillance accompanied by a vicarious thrill."

specific people. MEITY said "each case of interception, monitoring, and decryption is approved by the competent authority, and done as per due process of law."

So, given the conclusions of the global investigation agency it would be interesting to know who all were spied upon by the Modi Government prior to and during the run-up to the 2019 General Elections, and how much of the data mined go to help the BJP to win the elections? According to one report, "the procedure for lawful interception involves not just written, time-bound authorisation in each instance, but the use of the telecom or computer resource intermediary as well as which is supposed to enable the interception, and does not cover the activities proscribed by Section 43 of the IT Act under the definition of hacking. Hacking an individual's smartphone is a necessary step in subjecting an individual to surveillance by spyware such as Pegasus." (IPA Service)

The NSO Group is on record that the Pegasus software is used only for legitimate criminal and anti-terror investigations. But what if tomorrow any of the client-governments turned and accused somebody innocent of being involved in criminal/terror activities based on what Pegasus unearthed? The onus will be on the accused to disprove the allega-

## Letters to the Editor

### Intriguing political developments

Editor,  
As a citizen of Meghalaya with a wee bit of education and understanding of political thought and practice as drummed into us by our political teachers in college 1, and I am sure there are many like me, who are totally intrigued and bemused, perplexed and confused at the political episodes and events unfolding before the state. What is happening is totally at odds with that is supposed to happen in a parliamentary democracy where people are supposed to be elected for their love and desire to serve the state and its communities from platforms called political parties who in turn are expected to project through their manifestos the principles, ethos, values, ideology, philosophy and ethics that are supposed to guide the party and their members in their service to the people. As God is my witness, I see nothing of the sort occurring in our state but instead with each passing day the very opposite happens - to exploit the state and rob the poor, is increasing by satanic leaps and bounds, with all political parties both national and regional maintaining the calm of mute conniving silence.

Now Political Science,

at least in theory, informs us that in a democratic parliament (in our case the Legislative Assembly) the Speaker of the house is elected from among the elected members, usually from the ruling party. He is supposed to preside over the proceedings of the House and to moderate its discussions and debates. Once a member is elected as Speaker of the House he is supposed to shed his party affiliations and don a neutral and unbiased disposition. In Meghalaya, however the President of one of the ruling coalition parties is elected as Speaker of the House (so far so good) but this incumbent character simply refuses to let go of his position in his own party. As Speaker he continues to retain the Presidency of his party. Now what happens if and when heated House discussions erupt on the poor performance of the Home and Education Department or on the potential scam of illegal sale of Government quota rice from the Social Welfare Department? Both departments are headed by MLAs from the Speaker's party. Can the Speaker then maintain and carry out an unbiased dispassionate stand in such a case? Is that possible in an environment of unprincipled politics of opportunism? Our politicians will no doubt bristle with pseudo indignity at such a question but one would love to hear

the views of our learned political science professors, experts and lecturers on the matter. One would love to be further enlightened on the matter.

There is another question about Meghalaya politics that increasingly continues to boggle the mind. The question is, "Why did we break away from Assam and ask for a state of our own"? Obviously the answer everybody expected 49 years ago was that through a state of our own we would be getting better performance in governance, improved administration, enhanced delivery of justice (social, cultural and economic), greater social confidence in Government and overall growth and development would be the end result of statehood. All of the above was based on one simple fundamental fact - that the persons we elect to power and those elected to govern will basically be driven by the noble selfless desire to serve wholeheartedly the state and its people. Has this happened? The sad answer is a big NO. Instead the process of election and of Government being the platform to serve the interest of the people has been turned into a business opportunity. Only businessmen now seem interested in contesting elections since they see tremendous opportunities to increase their own businesses once they

*"There is no terror in the bang,  
only in the anticipation of it."*

— Alfred Hitchcock

## The Shillong Times

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### Showdown in parliament

A stormy start to Parliament's Monsoon Session was expected anyway. That's how the Indian Parliament functions. Every time the two houses assemble, there will be a backlog of contentious issues to be raised to put the government on the mat. This time, the governmental failure on the Covid front, the fuel price hike and, if nothing else, the farmer's agitation against agriculture sector reforms were waiting to erupt. Yet, the icing on the cake came from the Pegasus Israeli spyware, with evidence cropping up over the communications system of hundreds of VIPs likely being kept under watch. The Opposition thwarted the introduction of the new ministers to Parliament by Prime Minister Modi. While nothing worthwhile happened, the Lok Sabha session was adjourned to July 22.

Fact of the matter is, that in session after session, nothing meaningful happens for most part in Parliament, even as its conduct involves a huge expenditure of Rs 10 to 15 crore for a single day at the rate of Rs 2.5 lakh per minute. Every minute is thus precious. Fights inside the two houses are followed by fights as if to prove a point. Members get away with their act. Discussion, which is what such representative bodies are all about, is more often a casualty. The result is that several key legislations are passed in the din without discussion. At the session's start, Prime Minister Modi had urged the Opposition to ask the sharpest questions to the government, but also allow ministers to answer these questions.

The report about the Israeli spyware was published by the Indian media close to the start of the Parliament session so that it has maximum effect. At the same time, this is projected as something that is a new assault on the democratic system. Fact is, each individual is under watch and no telephone link is secure from snooping by governmental agencies. Aware of this, no senior politicians ever discussed confidential matters over their own phones. The Pegasus spyware is purchased by governments across continents because spying is part of the governance process. No government can exist without spying on what an enemy country is up to. But to spy on its own subjects is to violate the very essence of the Constitution. Intelligence agencies do snoop on phones of suspects in terrorist activities and that is how they prevent terror attacks. But snooping on political rivals is unwarranted as this infringes on the right to privacy of every individual. However, disrupting parliament proceedings is not the only way to press a point. Members should make their points in a reasoned debate and expose the wrongs of the government.

# Is Government waiting for natural death of HNLC?

By Albert Thyrniang

Now and then The Hyniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) seeks public attention through IED attacks. The latest one is the IED blast at Khliehriat police reserve in East Jaintia Hills in the wee hours of Wednesday last. Thanks to the explosion that damaged the walls of the facility and injured a havildar the banned outfit has able been able to put forth its points of view in the public domain. The face of the militant organisation, publicity secretary Sainkupar Nongtraw, justified the violent act as a 'revenge' against the police for allegedly torturing and killing its members in custody besides warning Star Cement against carrying out mining operations in Brishymot in the same district.

The 1993 founded armed outfit also demanded implementation of Inner Line Permit (ILP) besides setting its condition for peace talk even as it threatened another blast in a more strategic place to 'create history in the state'. It is up to the government whether to take the HNLC seriously or not. By the look of it both the central and state government have been lackadaisical in their attitude. They have not positively responded to the calls of the outfit for peace parleys. They have delayed accepting repeated offers for negotiation from the outfit. The establishment appears to consider the once feared force in Khasi and Jaintia Hills in the 1990s and first few years of 2000 a spent force. The government at the centre and at the state seem to await the natural death of the 30 year old underground outfit that claims to fight for the 'Khasi-Jaintia homeland'.

The Union and state government with all the intelligence at their command may not be any serious threat for taking the HNLC lightly but a callous attitude could give legitimacy to an outlawed group to pontificate people's cause. Claiming responsibility for the attack the Bangladesh based group demanded implementation of Inner Line Permit (ILP) in the state sending a warning even to the Union Home Minister, Amit Shah for being 'adamant' on the issue. Bringing the offshoot of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act, 1873 into operation in Meghalaya has been the loudest demand of the whole state ever since CAB was converted to CAA by Parliament in 2019. The Meghalaya Legislative Assembly unanimously passed the resolution urging the Government of India to implement ILP in the whole state. Pressure groups were up in arms demanding ILP leading to the unprecedented resolution being adopted

while pressure groups held vigil in the premise of the state library. In the meantime the Union Home Minister has been keeping the issue in the backburner, entertaining no discussion with the stakeholders and speaking neither for nor against the proposed law. When people are ignored through democratic means, the danger could be that extra constitutional groups could take advantage of the situation. In such a situation who is to be blamed? I have a clear answer in my mind. Do you?

Unresponsive governments could create space for militancy and anti-social elements. This alarm bell is clear from the fact that no pressure group has condemned the violent incident in East Jaintia Hills. The space has been yielded to 'Rambos'.



This is not the first time. No organisation has ever spoken against the militant group in earlier incidents as well. No one has dared to issue statements articulating that the demands may be valid but violence is not an unacceptable tool. If the trend continues it looks as if the loud pressure groups have outsourced their cause to the insurgents. The HNLC knows it can survive only through public support. For the record, no politician has condemned the vile act of intimidation a week ago. A silent acceptance seems to prevail and this could be dangerous.

The HNLC might have scored over the Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma and Home Minister Lakhmen Rymbui. Both have rubbished intelligence failure that led to the blast. If there was no intelligence failure, the blast should not have occurred to begin with. Arrests might have been swift but the bomb had already gone off. The message is that if the HNLC can strike in a security facility it can plant bombs anywhere else. The security and safety of the people of the state could be at stake.

The HNLC has also countered the Chief Minister and the Home Minister arguing that the honourable ministers' appeal to the outfit to

shun violence before a peace deal is meaningless since the government has been ignoring their offers to come to the negotiating table. The Council is able to have an upper hand over the government stating they want an interlocutor appointed before any movement towards peace talk. They claim they have documented letters sent to the central and state governments to prove their intention but reciprocity has been not forth coming. Each time an offer was made, the state government would welcome it but followed up with little action. Just to jog our recent memory in December 2019 the separatists talked peace. In June and October last year too the rebels repeated the advances. The present Home Minister assured that he would take up the matter

with the Centre but nothing came out of it. The government lacks strategy in dealing with the HNLC. A strategy is worked out only when something is important or urgent. If the HNLC is ignorable then naturally a strategic plan will be absent.

The government's precondition is abnegating of violence for talks. But the irony is that the government does not take note of peaceful and democratic overtures. Let us assume a scenario wherein for ten years the HNLC does not involve in any violent activity but regularly appeals for peace talk. The government will probably pay no attention. Unfortunately, often the government responds only when disruptive activities take place.

The HNLC, a split group of the Achik Matgrik Liberation Army (AMLA) has been in decline since around 2005. Julius K Dorphan, the former chairman who surrendered in 2007 claimed in 2010 that only about 50 cadres are left in Bangladesh. In its wisdom and based on ground assessment the government may take this position and decide to snub the HNLC. The state may downplay the occasional blasts of the HNLC and the threat for more violence as a ploy of the outfit to stay in the

news. However, no one wants to return to the violent past of killing, abduction, robbery, and extortion. If militancy revives in the state because of the government's poor policy, who is responsible? If the central government can hold talks with the NSCN-IM whose cadres are in designated camps why not with the HNLC?

By the look of it the government responds only when hit hard or cornered. In 2018 the dreaded militant leader, Sohan D Shira was shot dead almost immediately after the NCP candidate Jonathone N Sangma was killed in an explosion. Before that brutal incident the GNLA's 'commander-in-Chief' escaped police action for a long time in spite of repeated acts of violence. The MDA government is presently not under the heat of ILP because of COVID-19 restrictions. It should have also used the time to get some clarity on the vexed issue from the Centre. Months have passed but the MDA leaders have not succeeded in convincing Amit Shah to lend his ears to Meghalaya. The West Bengal and Assam elections were given as excuses for the delay tactics. The government might have played tricks by inviting the Union Home Minister to the state on a couple of occasions giving hope to the pro-ILP groups that they could meet him. The lockdowns have come as a blessing to buy time. But once the coronavirus situation subsides the government may have to face a potential pent-up anger from the pro-ILP groups and then be forced to take a hasty decision that may not be in the best interests of the state.

The Khliehriat attack was 'heard' in Garo Hills with NCP chief Saleng Sangma urging the state government to sustain peace in the once militancy-ravaged region. Forced to hail the initiatives of the former Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma the NCP leader mentioned a 'few lacunae and loopholes' which the present government must address. The lone NCP legislator suggests the government is aware of the 'lacunae and loopholes.' It could be non-implementation of the points of agreement with surrendered militants. It could be the inability to comprehend the complexity of militancy. It could be the lack of a considered policy as in the case with the HNLC. The government is unsure whether to accept or reject the insurgents' proposition for peace dialogues. The fallout could be costly.

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## The COVID crisis we don't see

By Lekha Rattanani

The official death count due to Covid-19 in India stood at over 400,000 around mid-July. It is widely understood and accepted that the actual death toll is many times that figure. Yet, these numbers do not count the deaths of despair caused by a host of factors that are not directly due to Covid-19 but are indirectly a result of the pandemic - like suicides, depression, anxiety, and the devastation and deprivation of families whose lives have been upturned either because they survived, or after Covid-19 has claimed one or more of their loved ones, or the financial difficulties as family incomes have vanished. There is no official count of this tragedy playing out in parallel, painfully and silently, leaving families to manage what essentially is a desolate, hopeless situation. As Covid-19 numbers come under control, as vaccinations pick up and as the health system prepares for a possible third wave, the government will have to begin to turn its attention to providing support and relief to those suffering in silence. This may well be the silent majority of Covid-19 related victims, a group that needs a helping hand but is too weak to even ask for it.

Consider the case of Reshma Matthew Trenchil, a journalist, who jumped from the 12th floor of her rented suburban Mumbai high rise in June, taking her seven-year-old son with her on Father's Day. Her husband died of Covid nearly a month before that, as he contracted the disease tending to his parents, both of whom died in Varanasi while on a pilgrimage. Reshma was left alone in a nuclear family system with no one she could turn to or depend on for support in Mumbai, where they had moved from Bengaluru recently.

This is a silent crisis that is already here and growing. Research by US-based institutions have shown that alongside the thousands of deaths from COVID-19, there is a growing epidemic of 'deaths of despair' due to the pandemic. As many as 75,000 more people will die from drug or alcohol misuse and suicide, according to new research released by the California-based Well Being Trust. The report from WBT notes that "if the country fails to invest in solutions that can help heal the nation's isolation, pain, and suffering, the collective impact of COVID-19 will be even more devastating." The three factors cited as "already at work" in exacerbating deaths of despair in America are not uncommon here: unprecedented economic failure paired with massive unemployment, mandated months of social isolation and possible residual isolation for years.

Many Indian nuclear families of three and four members have virtually collapsed after losing their mainstay, especially those who have moved to new cities or are estranged from their relatives after disputes or inter-faith marriages. Shut indoors as State governments have been continuously reinforcing lockdowns after every spike in Covid cases, and without any recourse, those left behind in these family units are moving into increasingly desolate situations. Many have suffered traumatic experiences as they could not be with their loved ones in their dying moments, and often were unable to fully participate in the last rites and/or perform all rituals as prescribed by their faith.

There is also the case of many families coming to terms with a lifestyle that is considered the norm - high EMIs and maintenance charges for houses and cars that signal success and achievement in an age of consumerism. Now, this high-expense living is coming to terms with realities as loans come calling and self-esteem is sacrificed at the altar of recovery agents and processes. Take the case of the Shetty family in Gurugram, where the father committed suicide, followed

by his wife and a daughter a fortnight later as debts piled up. The suicide note, according to reports, requested that their home and car loans be waived.

Reports of this breakdown will only mount as Covid-19 extracts its price, economic, social and psychological. An online survey in May covering some 8,000 respondents reported that 61% of Indians were feeling angry, upset, depressed or worried as the second wave of Covid-19 hit. The survey by 'Local Circles' said 23% of the respondents reported that they were "anxious or worried", 8% said they were "depressed, gloomy or sad", 20% said they were "upset and angry", 10% said they were "extremely angry", and just 7% reported being "calm and peaceful". Other reports have indicated that calls to helplines and other support centres have jumped during the pandemic.

Another study has drawn on 1,856 Indian print and television reports and scientific literature to obtain 151 Covid-related suicides, or CRS, reports to compare suicide-related pressure between lockdown and unlock phases. The findings showed that 80.8% of the CRS cases were male. And the average of the deceased was around 38 years. Those who died by suicide during the lockdown were significantly younger compared to those who died when the lockdown was lifted. Similar findings were made by Mpower, a mental health helpline which has a tie-up with the Maharashtra government. The helpline received as many as 70,000 calls from people across India between the lock down last March and this April. The maximum number of callers were between the age groups 26 and 40 and over 70% of the calls were made by males. Timely intervention with medication, grief therapy and psychotherapy have helped pull back many suicidal callers from the edge. But what happens to those who don't call?

Yet, a causal visit to shopping centres or places that are open might indicate that matters are returning to normal. Several stores have reported seeing a rush of buying as pent-up demand makes its way to the market. This is sometimes used to signal the return of normalcy but it ignores the ticking time bomb caused by disruptions, lying just beneath the surface. Clearly, it would be a mistake to conclude that this nation and its people will be back with business as usual, unharmed and not changed by the effects of what the pandemic has done - on the health front and behind the scenes.

For those who are alone, and working in different cities, cut off or estranged from their families, the pandemic and lockdown have exacerbated a problem that has been brewing slowly as some social changes entered the Indian family system and culture with the liberalisation of the 1990s. This is when aspirations rose, EMIs multiplied, and the joint family was given a jolt. Today, there are more than a 100 million Indians over the age of 60, according to the 2011 census. These "senior citizens" who once headed, guided and held together the joint family of the past now face an uncertain future themselves as the Indian family has been changing.

Looked at from this perspective, the pandemic may be etching some new fault lines in the Indian social structure. Will "Work from Home" reverse the trend of nuclear families? What impact will it have on the culture of instant food, instant cash and instant gratification that the new generation has grown on? While these trends build and take root and are watched by marketers, it is time for the government to wake up to the unseen crisis that is brewing and will hit a new high as Covid-19 itself wanes.

(The writer is the Managing Editor of The Billion Press) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Vaccination - A student's viewpoint

Editor,  
Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I would like to share my point of view as a student on the vaccination drives that are taking place across the country. I am a student of St. Edmund's Higher Secondary School, studying in the Class XII, Science Stream. I have closely followed the letters to the editor section ever since the pandemic began and I have noticed that most contributors are adults who share their thoughts and opinions. So, I, a student, would also like to share my thoughts, especially at this time when the pandemic is still running parallel to the vaccinations being done.  
I am 17 years of age and not yet eligible to take the vaccine. However, that does not stop me from having my opinions and thoughts voiced out through these columns. Although I have not been vaccinated, I have followed our journey through

the pandemic, its spread, the subsequent scientific discoveries and breakthroughs to know a little about the vaccine and to have a limited understanding of it, at least from my point of view. Is it safe to take it?

Many people are hesitant to get vaccinated while many others have received the vaccination. We are not supposed to shame or stigmatize in any way those who are hesitant, opposed to or unsure whether or not to be vaccinated, we are not supposed to shame or stigmatize them in any way. Some may be afraid while others may not buy the fact that a vaccine has been developed in just a year. Perhaps, they do not trust the data; perhaps, they are suspicious; that is human nature. All we can do is encourage them, show them what is right. We cannot force anyone; coercion is not the way. It will come to no good.

I have seen people airing their opinions on different social media platforms. I have seen some say, "It's my body, it's my choice." While we live with the fact that we cannot really force anyone,

I pray that all will turn out fine in the end. Those among us who are educated know that taking the vaccine is the only way to be safe. We have prayed for solutions and this vaccine is the answer. The rest of the world is limping back to normalcy, after all their citizens got vaccinated. This is a lesson to be learnt. We have to be responsible citizens. We the people are responsible for the well-being and development of the state. If we want that for our state, we have to start taking the right steps.

I would like to conclude my letter by saying that constant reminders are needed in order to lower uncontrollable rise in active cases and unfortunate deaths and the SOPs are to be made aware to one and all. Children and teenagers of my age have not been vaccinated yet, so wearing masks and sanitizing diligently will still be needed. We are in this together so it is our responsibility to take care of each other. It is time to be our brothers' keepers.

Yours etc.,  
Emily Grazel Jyrwa  
Via email

#### Setting the record straight!

Editor,  
This is with reference to the letter dated July 13, 2021 by Xavier Mao, NEHU. At the start of the letter, Mao appeared to have questioned the mention of 'worldwide' acknowledgment of the Anglo-Kuki War in my write-up which was meant to highlight the cause and concern of the indigenous tribes in Manipur. Since the question of 'worldwide' could differ from one perspective to another, it will be a waste of one's energy and time to get engaged in a debate over it, however tempting and alluring it might appear. However, his real intention surfaced in the latter part of his letter, i.e to discredit the Kukis of their historic struggles against the mighty British.

It must be mentioned that Manipur has a history of communal clashes wherein more than thousand Kukis were massacred allegedly by the NSCN (IM) in the 90s. The incident had left

a lasting impact on the relationship of the Kukis and Nagas of Manipur. Mao could thus be forgiven for harbouring enmity towards the Kukis and their history. But citing the reaction of the Manipur Nagas to discredit the historic Anglo-Kuki war 1917-1919 is akin to believing Israel does not exist as a country based on the statement of a hardcore Islamic radical.

That Kukis have fought the British at the helm of their glory has been a fact many wish to sweep under the carpet. The British did their best to underplay the great uprising by adopting a strategy to hide one of their most humiliating encounters. The Kukis, who followed oral tradition of maintaining records and histories would fall victim to suppression of their history if not for the records found in a few books like Colonel W L Shakespear's 'History of the Assam Rifles'. While the efforts to divide the Kukis and rule continue to be used against them, their historic struggle against the British in defense of their ancestral land and freedom have their evidence even in the

British Museum. The British Museum currently displays "Thingkho-Malcha" which is a customary oath then performed by the Kuki Chiefs when declaring war against the invading British in 1917.

Mr. Mao, being an academician in the Department of Philosophy in NEHU as per the details he provided, if he is interested in finding the real facts of Anglo-Kuki war 1917-1919 should read the book, "The Anglo-Kuki War, 1917-1919: A Frontier Uprising Against Imperialism During the First World War" published by Routledge. However, if his intention is to dishonour the history of the Kukis, he is better advised not to resort to cheap and incorrect narratives which could affect his credibility, if there exists one.

Yours etc.,  
TS Haokip  
Freelance Writer,  
Mumbai

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

*"Violence is the language of the unheard."*  
— Martin Luther King III

**The Shillong Times**

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**Gangrape amidst the pandemic**

THE news of the gangrape of a 14 year old girl in South Garo Hills in the midst of the pandemic is both shocking and troubling. While the girl was fortunately found and rescued by a police team from Rongsa Awe, what is alarming is that she had to be taken from one health centre to another, merely on the plea of jurisdiction. From the health centre at Nangalbibra the girl was referred to Williamnagar Civil Hospital which was 22 km away. Surprisingly the doctor at Williamnagar Civil Hospital refused to treat her citing jurisdiction issues and referred her to Baghmara Civil Hospital, 75 kms away. Jurisdiction used to be an issue of the police in registering FIRs. Now even doctors seem to have resorted to this escape route. This sheer callousness from a medical practitioner who had taken the Hippocratic oath to serve suffering humanity is grossly unethical and a medical misconduct that should be taken seriously by the Government. That a similar incident took place two months ago making this a repeat offence by the Williamnagar Civil Hospital should necessitate an enquiry followed by necessary punitive action.

While lockdowns are necessary to reduce the community spread of Covid, it also has serious psychological and socially disruptive consequences. This is known as the lockdown paradox and studies have revealed that amongst the many consequences of such lockdowns is the surge in cases of gender-based violence. Since March 2020 when most parts of the world went into lockdown domestic violence has been on the rise which is also linked to close proximity between members of the family in enclosed spaces for too long a time. But the darker side of the lockdown is the amount of screen time that adolescents spend on a daily basis on the pretext of online classes, which in the absence of supervision is diverted to watching pornographic videos.

While the attention of care givers at home is directed towards keeping family members safe from the Covid infection the other aspects of care centred around the mental health of adolescents during the pandemic has been left untouched. At least two of the sexual offenders who were nabbed by the police are teenagers. The manner in which the gangrape was inflicted on the 14 year old minor appears to have been pre-meditated. Otherwise it is impossible for different sets of men/boys to rape a minor girl at different locations. The State Social Welfare Department and Health Department both have the onus to set up counselling centres to deal with such major societal disruptions and gender-based violence. Covid cannot subsume the other predicaments wrought by the pandemic.

**Letters to the Editor**

**Why no protest on price rise?**

Editor,  
For the common man there is no respite. Prices of vegetables have shot up again with carrots selling at Rs 100 a kg and other vegetables selling at a premium simply because there are relaxations and more buyers. The prices of meat, especially beef and mutton have gone up exponentially. Yet we never hear a whimper of protest against price rise in Meghalaya. When petrol and diesel prices have just shot up it can be expected that the cost of transportation of goods would go up. As it is the ordinary citizen is bearing the burden of loss of livelihoods due to Covid and now with price rise it can be expected that the nutritional status of the poor will go down even more and thereby reduce their immunity levels and consequently their ability to fight any infection. It is seen that Meghalaya has always remained silent on price rise. It would appear as if the people of this State are all well off and can afford to shell out any amount for essential commodities. But perhaps the common person is too disempowered to protest. Normally, in other states the political parties come out on the streets to protest price rise. Pressure groups too are expected to

raise their voices against the unprecedented price rise of essential commodities and of vegetables and meat but no such protest has ever been seen on the streets of Shillong. Pressure groups will only raise their voices against issues that will gain them political points. Talking about price rise is unlikely to win them votes since this is not a popular topic that will gain them air time on the local YouTube news channels that can make an instant star of someone and can also demonise someone. Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong is a good example of a politician who has been vulgarized by these web based/YouTube news channels. Today he has stopped speaking to the media after his faux-pas of advising people not to eat meat because it is unaffordable and to eat vegetables instead. Well, Mr Tynsong should be informed that vegetables too are no longer part of the poor man's diet because their prices have shot up. What then does the poor person eat? Dal is too expensive, meat and fish are out of question, vegetables too are beyond most budgets. Milk is something that most people have left out of their diets a long time ago. Most people are left with rice and salt, potatoes and some dry fish. That's all! What vitamins and nutrients would that diet contain? Do people in government ever

UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, launching the State's Population Policy stated, "We should not forget that increase in population contributes to poverty in society. Hence, until all sections are made comprehensively aware, there will be a delay in fulfilling various goals". The root of all major problems and prevailing inequality in society is believed to be in the rising population size. The CM touched a sensitive and controversial issue when elections are due in six months.

UP Population Bill (also referred to as Population Policy) aims at enforcing two-child norm and encouraging one-child family not so far tried in any other State in India. China's "one-child policy" with strict penal action for violations was in force between 1980 and 2016 for 36 years to arrest population growth, and was replaced by two-child policy which is now being changed to three-child policy to correct the demographic distortion of ageing population and dwindling working age-group.

Under the UP Population (Control, Stabilisation, and Welfare) Bill 2021, by adopting two-child norm, a couple will become eligible for a number of benefits including two special increments during their service, subsidy for purchase of a house, maternity or paternity leave with full salary and allowances for up to one year, and free healthcare and insurance coverage for the spouse, rebate on charges for electricity, water, etc., 3% increase in employer's contribution to pension fund and such benefits.

Additional incentives will be extended to couples having one child only like four additional increments in salary, free healthcare facilities and insurance coverage for the single child till the child turns 20 years of age, preference in admission in educational institutions and free education up to graduation.

The Bill contains certain penal provisions also for violations. A person who has more than two children after the law comes into effect would be disqualified from applying for any government job, debarred from contesting elections to local bodies and would be denied

ponder over the dilemma of the poor? No, they don't because they don't hear voices of protests against these core affordability issues that almost about 80% of the citizens of this state face on a daily basis. Where do we go from here?  
Yours etc.,  
Josephine Kharmujai,  
Via email

**Meghalaya & its ranking for doing business**

Editor,  
In light of the ongoing struggles faced by business people due to the disruptions caused by the government's response to COVID-19, it is worth reflecting on what can be done going forward. The Government of India in collaboration with the World Bank produces an index called the Ease of Doing Business ranking that measures progress across a range of measures like time taken to obtain a license, policy simplification and so on. Meghalaya was ranked last, along with several other north-eastern states. What this means in practice is that Meghalaya is an extremely anti-business state that actively hampers employment growth through the creation of jobs and wealth. This is tragic. With its English-speaking population, it is

**UP population policy Incentives & penalties**

By Dr S. Saraswathi

the benefits of government welfare schemes. No ration card would have more than four units with not more than two children. Existing government employees violating the law would be denied promotions.

Many States - Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan,

Telangana and Uttarakhand -- have adopted two-child policy in some form. Some States disallow them from contesting local elections. Haryana Panchayat Act which restrained people having more than two children from contesting panchayat elections was upheld by the Supreme Court.

Assam Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma had a discussion a few days back about the real threat posed by population explosion to economic development and decided to set up eight sub-groups to work for stabilisation of population by promoting two-child norm by revising eligibility criteria for various welfare schemes. The State with migrant Muslims and indigenous Muslims having different ideas on population management has to reach a consensus in the matter. Soon after taking oath as CM, he advised migrant Muslims to adopt "decent" family planning measures. According to NFHS data, Assam's fertility rate is 1.9 which is below the replacement rate. Immigrant Muslims have also recorded sharp decline in birth.

But, the country has not adopted a national policy on family size and sticks to the Action Programme adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development 1994, which rules out any coercion or

incentives and disincentives in implementing family planning programme. Assam and Gujarat have now announced a legislation on 2-child policy which provides a penalty for having third child. Rajasthan Health Minister has come out in support of UP bill though his party, Congress, views it as an anti-minority gesture. Karnataka is attracted by the proposed UP law.

Pre-election season is the



ripe time for announcement of policies and promises that concern the entire population going to the polls. Uttar Pradesh, where Assembly election is due in about six months, is witnessing speeches and actions that will rouse everybody to realise that political masters have the power and authority to decide on matters which they have been believing is in their hands.

Population policy is a matter of immense significance for development and welfare of people. Very few people are aware they can determine the size of their family by their own individual decision and the size of the population of a State or nation by collective decision on individual family size. This has necessitated direct government intervention and has led to adoption of state policies and enactment of laws. Incentives, disincentives, preferences, denials, rewards and penalties are instruments of enforcing population policy prescriptions of governments. Advanced nations have achieved stable population not through compulsion of any law, but with the force of development. But they now face the problem of ageing population.

UP CM, while launching the Draft Population Policy 2021-30 coinciding with the World Population Day, stated that the sole aim of the policy was to align the State's reproductive rate to its development goals and that it was in line with the Sustainable Development Goals to be reached by 2030. The aim is said to be to ensure that resources reach everyone. The larger objective is to bring prosperity to the lives of the people and also reduce the infant and maternal mortality rate along with stabilising the population. He inaugurated Population Stability Fort-night Programme starting from 11 July to draw people's attention to the new Population Policy.

Fertility rate in UP, which was 3.8% a decade ago, is now 2.7%. In rural areas, TFR is 3.0% against 2.1% in cities due to level of development and education. The policy aims to bring down the reproductive rate to 2.1% by 2026 and 1.7% by 2030. Yogi Adityanath emphasised the need for "adequate gap" between two children which is necessary for maternal and infant/child health. UP has a population exceeding 2 crore. It is the most populous State in India and the density of population is also high - 828 per sq.km while national average is 382 per sq.km.

VHP is quick to reject the one-child idea as a potential threat to Hindu community whose number will decline while Muslims will lag behind in adopting the policy. In Assam and Kerala, the TFR is below the replacement ratio of 2.1, but separately it is much higher for Muslims at 3.16 in Assam and 2.33 in Kerala. If the Bill is passed, it can alter Hindu-Muslim ratio in the state population in course of time.

VHP's Acting President has pointed out that the law will increase dependency ratio as contracting population will upset working age population-dependent adults ratio. TFR has been declining in the country and in the UP also. The decline is caused by economic growth, migration, education of girls, decline in infant mortality rate and not by official policy. Union Government also informed the Supreme Court in response to a PIL that it is against any kind of coercion to control population that would be counter-productive and lead to demographic distortion. ---INFA

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

**Impact and influence of social media**

By Kaustov Kashyap

We are currently in the golden age of the Internet and social media. Conventional media such as newspapers, magazines and TV are on the path of being redundant. Today, social sites such as Facebook and Twitter are driving the discussions in the public sphere. They show us what is trending/ in fashion around us. That trend can range from fashion to protests.

Social media has become the most important and influential source of information and news for the current

of the social media age. An old poem Hum Dekhenge by Faiz Ahmed Faiz turned into #HumDekhenge, a slogan for any movement which challenged the authority, from anti-CAA protests to farmers' protests.

A new way of protesting has been born - Twitter storm - where people use certain pre-decided hashtags and put up multiple posts on Twitter during a particular time on a certain day, which if done sufficiently puts the hashtag/s in the trending list and causes people to notice



generation. Social Media and the Internet are creating and changing socio-political narratives across the world, from the Black Lives Matter Movement to anti-CAA-NRC protests in India. These are all examples of the impact and influence of social media.

Between 2013-2016 in the Indian internet space, right-wing/pro-BJP IT cell dominated social media trends. One of the reasons the Congress lost in 2014 was that it became the butt of all social media jokes. Narendra Modi was one of the first major Indian politicians to use social media effectively for image building. That helped him tremendously attract the youth of this country in 2014.

Social media can make or break careers, public images and even social movements. In this era of social media, everyone who has access to the Internet is a broadcaster. Everyone can express opinions, ask questions, and even criticise anything: governments, judiciary, or even celebrities. From questioning the government and courts to running campaigns, social media is the medium for everything and everyone.

In the era of conventional media, to fight or respond to

it even if they were not aware of it or did not have an opinion on it. Even news channels today decide their headlines observing such social media trends.

These types of awareness campaigns and their impact is the biggest reason behind the Indian government's decision to ask Twitter to shut down accounts using hashtags related to the farmers' protests in early February 2021. But even the act of shutting down those accounts caused a global reaction, forcing Twitter to restore those accounts. This whole series of events caused a great awareness about the government's politics in India and across the world, prompting responses from various international bodies like the UN Human Rights Council and the US President who spoke about protecting free speech.

When American popstar Rihanna asked a simple question combined with a hashtag about the farmers' protests and internet shutdowns, it sparked an aggressive reaction from the Indian government and Godi Media.

In school, we learned that India's Constitution guarantees us several fundamental rights, and today

*"When American popstar Rihanna asked a simple question combined with a hashtag about the farmers' protests and internet shutdowns, it sparked an aggressive reaction from the Indian government and Godi Media. In school, we learned that India's Constitution guarantees us several fundamental rights, and today the Supreme Court of India has said that the Internet is a fundamental right."*

fake news or misinformation could take up days and create chaos, but now social media has speeded up this process very significantly. Any false claim can be fought immediately using the power of the Internet and social media. Websites like AltNews are doing this job incredibly well. Today, in India, all parties, especially their youth wings like the Youth Congress and Yuva Sena, have started using social media platforms for election campaigns and to criticise and attack the opposition. Many politicians, including PM Modi, use social media in place of conventional mediums to address people and connect with them.

During the historic anti-CAA-NRC protests, there wasn't any leader or organisation organising the nationwide protests or gathering the masses. The people, who before these protests weren't into politics or social movements, got engaged in the movement because of social media.

The hashtags used on social sites such as Twitter have become newsmakers

the Supreme Court of India has said that the Internet is a fundamental right. A comment made on social media today can shake up society and influence the social narratives around us. Even an issue in the remotest place can become a global issue due to social media. That is the impact it has.

While responsible use of social media can result in public movements that result in governments revising their policy decisions and redressal of grievances, there are many who use this same platform to create communal hatred and frenzy. It is for this reason that platforms like Facebook are now more careful about not allowing bullying and spreading hatred through this medium. While social media has the power to do good, it can also be a negative force in the hands of trolls that are paid by vested interests to bully certain personalities and character assassinate them. But social media platforms are like the genie that have come out of the bottle and are difficult to put back into it.

**Of Covid orphans**

Editor,  
According to a new study published in The Lancet, an estimated 1.5 million children worldwide have experienced the death of a parent, custodial grandparent or other rela-

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*"To hunger is to be alive and to hope."*

— Crescent Dragonwagon

**The Shillong Times**

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**Tokyo Olympics**

CURTAINS rise today on the Tokyo Olympics, ending a long delay and months of uncertainties caused by the Covid's deadly sway. The glittering, action-packed events will engage the world for 16 days even as the shadow of the pandemic looms large. India is putting its "best foot forward", but the expectations are tamed by the poor shows of the past. Projections are that India will do better this time, as against the tally of one bronze and one silver at the last mega show in 2016 at Rio. This itself was a draw-down on the six medals that the nation won in the London Olympics in 2012. Notably, there have been some attempts from the Modi dispensation since 2014 to change India's poor record at the Olympics as also at Asian Games and other international competitions. These attempts did not make any impact in 2016. NITI Aayog has set a target of winning 50 medals at the 2024 Olympics. Tokyo must show that there is considerable momentum towards achieving this goal.

In tune with the tendency to make a comparison between India and China in matters of national achievements, Rio too presented an example. China carried with it 26 gold and a total of 70 medals, against India's two medals a silver and bronze respectively, while the US topped the show with 46 gold and a total of 121 medals. In the haul of medals, the UK stood somewhere in between the US and China. A similar trend could be expected this time too. While India talks big about a likely economic super power status, ground realities should enlighten us that this is a mirage. India lacked good leadership after the end of the Nehru era. Faced with the worst, Narasimha Rao did some fire-fighting and Manmohan Singh effected a turnaround in the national economy. This too is by now a washout. At the root of India's problems is the play of nepotism and favouritism. Merit is hardly a criterion across the spectrum. This tendency reaches out to the arena of sports and athletics too. The results are there for all to see and fathom.

The training and selection of athletes should be in competent hands and those trainers must be given a free hand to identify and nurture talents in sports and athletics. Politicians should play no role in deciding who should represent the country in such events. In fact, politicians should neither head nor be involved in governing bodies of sporting bodies. How far has NITI Aayog succeeded in such matters is open to public scrutiny. As the curtain falls over the Tokyo Olympics on August 8, it will again be time for stock-taking.

**Letters to the Editor****Dilemma of long COVID**

Editor,  
A recent study published in the Lancet's journal eClinicalMedicine highlighted that patients who were affected by the Covid virus can report over 200 symptoms post-COVID known as 'Long COVID'. From visual hallucinations, heart palpitations, bladder control issues, tinnitus among others the added burden of these symptoms should not be ignored. This shows that the rehabilitation process will have to be a multi-pronged approach by the Health Ministry covering all areas of concern, as SARS has been known to affect the quality of life.

With the revamping of the health infrastructure, what is also needed is setting up post COVID clinics in urban and rural settings. Alongside mitigating this aspect, the world together should not also forget diseases which have plagued humans for years such as diabetes, HIV/AIDS, malaria and cancer to probe for new therapies and vaccines.

Dr Martin Blaser, in his book *Missing Microbes*, narrates the repercussions of overuse of antibiotics, reminding humankind that with advances in health care, it also has its own consequences. Hence we need to maintain a proper balance.

Yours etc.,  
Christopher Gatphoh,  
Via email

**Poor joke on us citizens**

Editor,  
Over 4,15,000 people died due to Covid-19 (thereby leaving at least 16,00,000 family members in inconsolable grief and helplessness. Many children have turned orphans or lost the sole bread-earning member), several hundreds of them succumbing during the "Long March" home and millions finding themselves jobless overnight with many of them compelled to die of suicide. But it is disgraceful that the who's who of the BJP and Union government should boast about their "impeccable fight" against Covid and their "glorious victory" over the pandemic! So, when the top honchos of the party assert that Pegasus-exposure is nothing but an "international design" to "defame" the country as a sort of "revenge" for the way "India handled Covid"; it sounds not only bizarre but silly too. Also shocking is their "enviable" unfathomable magnitude of shamelessness, insensitivity, falsehood and rhetoric!

The displacement of millions of starved, malnourished poorest of poor migrants comprising children or senior citizens also negotiating the highways for months in the harshest of conditions; the inhuman queue for procuring oxygen cylinders with several hapless

dying because of the massive oxygen shortage, burning of mass pyres in parking lots, mass burial of bodies on the banks of the Ganga or discarding dead bodies in the water have exposed the horrors and insensitivity of the Modi Government. Has any country in the world witnessed such horrors in these "modern" times? And all these are nothing but direct results of a series of callous steps decisions and programmes including the zealous attempt to implement the NRC-CAA, "Trump show", toppling of the Madhya Pradesh government through the backdoor; instant lockdown without notice, "Occupy Bengal", Kumbh Mela, mindless megalomaniac obsession with VISTA etc. This when the sole emphasis should have been in preventing the intrusion of the pandemic or controlling it through creation of adequate medical infrastructure!

Far from drawing inspiration from "Visva Guru", the civilised responsible nations around the world must be citing the state of affairs of India as a stern warning how not to act irresponsibly when a pandemic of such a proportion poses a threat to civilisation!

And just as any criticism of steps like demonetisation where hundreds died of heat wave while standing in queues or rendering millions of people jobless, the unilateral abrogation of

Constitutional provisions in Jammu & Kashmir and its fragmentation, divisive anti-humanity NRC-CAA; questioning how Pulwama or Ladakh incursion happened or anything related to Covid-deaths and oxygen-vaccine shortage immediately invites the accusation of being "anti-national." In the same vein, obviously any query revolving involvement of the Union Government in the Pegasus scandal is also construed as a "direct attack upon India's integrity!"

Instead of coming up with concrete answers in a sane and sober tone and based on logic, facts and truth the Modi Government instead decides to character-assassinate the questioner and invoke foolish sentiments by invoking the name of the nation! Unfortunately these tactics of jingoism regularly fetch rich electoral dividends also in the country!

What a tragic state of affairs!

Yours etc.,  
Kajal Chatterjee,  
Via email

**Signs of climate change**

Editor,  
Heavy rainfall triggered devastating flooding causing dozens of casualties in Western Europe. Raging rivers submerged towns leaving Europeans shocked. Hundreds had died of heat

in the north western United States a few days before. Wildfire had removed a village from the map in Canada. Wildfires spread across 12 states in the Western America.

Two important facts are emerging from these disasters: the world is not willing to slow down climate change. It is not willing to live with it either. Some of the world's wealthiest nations that are burning coal, oil and gas in large amounts have been severely affected by climate change. These disasters in the developed world have significant bearing on what these wealthiest countries are doing to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases. These disasters that occurred a few months before climate negotiations in Glasgow serve as a warning not just for the developed countries but for all the countries.

Disasters induced by global warming have brought about massive destruction in different parts of the world. Crops in Bangladesh were destroyed, villages were completely destroyed in some other countries. Typhoons brought about widespread destruction in the Philippines. Developing countries that were not responsible for climate-induced disasters demanded funding to deal with the loss and damage but it was rejected by richer countries. Although

climate-induced extreme weather conditions cause widespread destruction and great death in developing countries, they are seen as their responsibility. Developed countries evade responsibility for it.

Global emissions have increased since the 2015 Paris Agreement negotiations. China is considered to be the world's biggest emitter today. While emissions have declined in the USA and Europe, it is not sufficient to limit global temperature rise. Although developed countries are aware of the catastrophic results of rising temperatures, they do not adopt strict measures to combat it. Notwithstanding the fact that there is consensus on halving emissions by 2030, global emissions continue to rise. Global average temperature has increased by more than 1 degree Celsius. Sadly, developed countries are under the notion that they are invulnerable. By the time countries realize the seriousness of the situation, more catastrophic events would have occurred.

Yours etc.,  
Venu GS,  
Kollam

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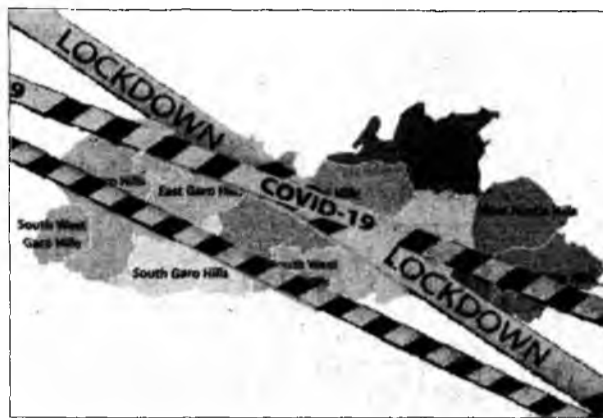
**Lockdown dilemma****How long is too long?**

By Patricia Mukhim

a question that leaves many nonplussed and some fuming. How does opening shops on alternate days help in slowing the spread of the virus? What is wrong in opening all shops every day from 9.30 am to 7 pm? What could happen in the second alternative that will not happen in the first one?

Secondly, the Covid data given to the public daily is incomplete. Of the 14 people who are reported to have died of Covid on July 22 and in the past several months after

reported 25 cases on July 21. The previous day the number of cases was 7. Mawlai has consistently reported higher incidence of Covid. On July 21, the Sohra cluster reported 21 cases, Upper Shillong - 12 followed by Umpling with 10. How did the number of positive cases in Mawlai shoot up by 14 counts from 7, to take the tally to 21? What has happened between July 20 and 21 that saw Mawlai register so many positive cases? Are those cases detected in the same locality/



the last data was published, how many have been fully vaccinated and how many are partially vaccinated? Why is this data not provided on a daily basis? Would this not have been a better incentive for people to go get vaccinated? The paucity of research and data in Meghalaya is troubling. Why for instance are some localities in Shillong more vulnerable than others? Why do they have a consistently higher incidence of infections? What are the localities not doing right? Who is responsible

localities? Could it be possible that people queuing up to fetch water from public taps spreading the infection? We have to remember that Prime Minister Modi's most favoured scheme, the Jal Jeevan Mission which promises piped water to every home is not yet fully complete in rural Meghalaya. People still need to queue up at water points. Could this be a spreading point?

In urban Shillong the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) was launched

*"Three months of lockdown has resulted in fatigue, depression for some, job loss trauma for others and arrears in rent payments for those renting shop spaces in commercial areas. Government has appealed for empathy from house owners but that is easier said than done because most house owners too rely on house rent for their livelihoods. Life is a value chain. Every chain has a value and when the chain breaks everyone is hurt. The pandemic has broken that value chain."*

for that? For instance, the entire East Khasi Hills is now divided into clusters to quickly understand which clusters have high infection rates and therefore need to be more vigilant. Mawlai cluster

in 2015 to create universal coverage of water supply as well as sewage management to households, especially the poor and disadvantaged. The objectives of AMRUT are among others to ensure

that every household has access to a tap with assured supply of water and a sewerage connection. This noble objective has not been met in the whole of Shillong (urban agglomeration). People, especially those living in rented accommodation still access water from public taps. They congregate around the taps every morning; they chat and exchange notes while waiting their turn for water. Social distancing has no meaning for them. Yet in a pandemic these are the critical issues that are missed.

Meghalaya has two important national health institutions - NEIGRIHMS and the Indian Institute of Public Health (IIPH). The second institution should have been our sheet anchor during this pandemic providing us critical data on why the Covid surge continues despite the lockdown and looking at what aspects of human behaviour are the reasons for the Covid numbers not coming down. Does the genome sequencing of those affected by Covid now suggest that we have entered the Delta stage? Is it because the Delta variant is more infectious? The public should be kept informed about these developments after observing the infection pattern. The IIPH (Shillong) is adding to the information bank of the State through its cutting-edge research to enable the Government to take effective measures but it needs to be more visible as an independent institution.

What we know so far about the Delta variant is what the World Health Organisation (WHO) and medical scientists across the world tell us, which is that the Delta variant is a variant of concern because it has increased transmissibility. This is observed in several countries. And where the Delta variant is identified, it really rapidly takes off and spreads between people more efficiently than even the Alpha variant that was first detected around December, January 2021. As of today, the Delta variant has been reported in 96 countries of which India is one and it is expected that this variant will continue to spread but vaccination is the only way to reduce deaths. This is where Meghalaya scores poorly and will therefore bear the lockdown pain much more than other states. The lockdown is its own worst enemy.

**Timing of release of report significant****Pegasus scandal has potential to unsettle Modi**

By Devasis Chattopadhyay

Just when the monsoon session of the Indian parliament was about to begin, the Pegasus scandal resurfaced and created a political row in the country, two years after it initially came to light. For the record, Pegasus, the sophisticated spyware developed by the Israeli cybersecurity and tech company NSO could take over the control of your mobile phone without your knowledge.

Unlike the last time, now, the scandal grew in proportion tangling influential politicians, well-known journalists, and political game-makers in the country with names of targets of potential hacking coming out in instalments. The media reportage, including by The Guardian, The Washington Post and India's thewire.in, was triggered by a bank of data first accessed by Forbidden Stories, a Paris-based media non-profit, and the United Kingdom headquartered global non-governmental human rights organization Amnesty International. Forbidden Stories said that the list it had shared with the international media outlets comprises intended targets of Pegasus. However, the Israeli company NSO through a press release clarified that just because a phone number appeared in the database did not mean it was successfully targeted or compromised.

Pegasus had been under the scanner, over its surveillance activities, for a while now. In September 2018, The Citizen Lab, a Canadian cybersecurity organisation, had published a report identifying 45 countries, including India, in which the spyware was being used. In October 2019, WhatsApp revealed that journalists and human rights activists in India had been targets of surveillance through Pegasus. However, Israeli company NSO never named the buyers of its software, such as Pegasus. But, its website said, "NSO Group develops best-in-class technology to help government agencies detect and prevent a wide-range of local and global threats. NSO products are used exclusively by government intelligence and law enforcement agencies to fight crime and terror".

The current session of parliament is supposed to continue till August 13 and would hopefully be the first full session of our parliament in recent times, since Covid19 invaded our shores. According to all available reports, nearly all Opposition parties in India raised issues related to fuel prices, farm laws, Covid19 and the state of our economy during the all-party meeting last Sunday, the day before parliament was to start. The DMK raised the issue of GST devolution and the Telangana Rashtra Samithi appealed to the central government to make public sector units profitable and not opt for disinvestment. The Samajwadi Party accused the BJP government of passing bills in a hurry and alleging that the Maharashtra and West Bengal governors had belittled the respective chief ministers of the states.

Mismanagement of the Indian economy since 2014 and lackadaisical handling of Covid19 by our central government created an enormous pressure on fiscal position. Most of the economic indicators are off the target and almost ruined. The huge investments required to salvage the economy are not on the horizon. On top of these, the BJP lost decisively in West Bengal. The Punjab and the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections ought to happen next year but already started warming up the knuckles of the electorates. So, from here on, it would be an uphill task for the BJP led central government.

Hence, the timing of the leak of the current round of Pegasus data just before the monsoon session of the Indian parliament by a France based media NGO, the country where Rafael deal has reached the court on the premise of a bribery theory to the powerful Indian power-brokers, along with

Amnesty International, the organisation much maligned by the BJP government, would be too much of a coincidence. Hence, leak of the Pegasus papers at this juncture is an interesting phenomenon.

Add to this that on July 3, just about a fortnight before the Pegasus paper leaks, 'France begins judicial probe into Rafale deal with India' screamed the French media.

On July 4, the US based economist Kaushik Basu revealed details of a January 2015 meeting in the White House with former US President Obama, whereby he had advised former US President Barack Obama to remind the BJP government of India's traditional and well-established commitment to democracy and secularism during his visit as chief guest at the Republic Day Parade in 2015, which Obama did touch upon during his speech at Siri Fort on the last day of his visit on January 27, 2015.

The question again is 'why did Kaushik Basu speak about the Obama incident now? Is it because the Democrats are in power in the US now? What happened after that speech in 2015? Regime change took place in America. Republicans came in. Donald Trump happened. The Republicans and the BJP became awfully close. 'Howdy Modi' took place.

And, on July 19, the day the current round of Pegasus papers were circulating, the U.S. came out with a policy memo where the US Attorney General Merrick Garland announced that the 'US Won't Force Journalists To Reveal Sources'. The new policy came following revelations that former president Donald Trump's Justice Department secretly obtained phone records of journalists investigating his administration, including from CNN, the Washington Post and New York Times. The current U.S. administration was seen to be distancing itself from the use of spyware like Pegasus.

When in January this year a Democrat President took charge in the White House, once again, foreign policy shifts were expected. Rumblings and covert indications of the seismic shifts could be felt even before.

Ashley J. Tellis, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a think-tank, specializing in international security and U.S. foreign and defence policy with a special focus on Asia and the Indian subcontinent, had said in November last year that, 'there is likely to be an increase in constituencies in America that voice concern about Indian democracy and India's treatment of minorities.' He had also said that there were rising concerns in the United States about these issues. However, he added that there would be a real possibility that if Democrats raise these issues officially their Republican opponents might choose to take an opposite stand. If that happens the traditional bipartisan consensus could easily erode and lead to India becoming a football or a partisan issue in US politics.

He had further said that 'This promise notwithstanding, uncertainties abound as New Delhi swiftly pivots to deal with the incoming US administration. Modi's conspicuous embrace of Trump can be explained away by saying his actions served India well in their time. But the gnawing qualms surrounding possible shifts in US policy cannot be dismissed as easily'.

Many in the USA see 'Howdy Modi' as an unwarranted foreign policy misadventure and it was considered an unnecessary intrusion to the domestic politics of an immensely powerful sovereign nation. And, when seemingly chips are down in India for the ruling party, if we are to believe Sir Isaac Newton's third law - opposite intrusion would be expected, covertly, in all probability. (IPA Service)

"Strength and growth come only through continuous effort and struggle."

— Napoleon Hill

The Shillong Times

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Of contentious borders

ASSAM Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma arrived in Shillong on Friday to iron out the border disputes between Assam and Meghalaya. He has a clear mandate to do so and is expected to carry out that mandate keeping Assam's best interests at heart. In Meghalaya, we have several discordant voices and quite a few stakeholders who may not necessarily agree with what the Government through its Chief Minister will eventually decide. In the past few days, the Assam and Meghalaya governments had been flagging the issue of "give and take." This is a utilitarian view that would involve a mutual ceding of territories presently under dispute. This also involves a process of redrawing boundaries after studying maps that existed before Meghalaya was partitioned from Assam. The difference between the two states is that in Meghalaya, the community are supposedly the real owners of the land and the chieftains – the Syiems and Dollois are the custodians of such land in the Khasi-Jaintia areas which are also the location of the disputes. Unlike in Assam, where land belongs to the state and it has the authority to mow down shops and other commercial establishments that encroach on roads and highways, in Meghalaya that sort of action is unthinkable. During the chief ministership of Prafulla Mahanta, several shops in Dispur and adjoining areas were brought down for road widening and for construction of flyovers.

In Meghalaya the state owns no land other than revenue land and reserved forests. It becomes imperative therefore that the Syiems and Dollois are involved in the process of resolving the border disputes and that they produce their maps so that their claims represented by the Government of Meghalaya are backed by concrete evidence. In Meghalaya the Congress party has also asserted that it should be made part of the border disputes resolution process. That is only fair since at least two Congress MLAs represent the people in quite a few disputed areas of Ri Bhoi District. The Assam Police has also begun staking claim to parts of Khanapara. Pilangkata with a substantial Khasi population has now virtually come under the administration of Assam which asserts that Langpih in West Khasi Hills is part of its territory.

The 'give and take' narrative has been created essentially to soften the contours of the conflict. Is the Chief Minister of Meghalaya authorized to cede land that does not belong to the state, unless the people of those areas and their Chieftains/Dollois agree? This is a tough question to answer and the dispute cannot be resolved in a hurry. It will require several sittings before an amicable solution is arrived at.

# The lockdown stalemate is hurting us

By Glenn C. Kharkongor

The special article by Patricia Mukhim, "How long is too long?" (ST July 23, 2021) has pertinence and poignancy. The Covid pandemic and ensuing lockdowns have moved beyond statistical data, political point-scoring and blurry conspiracies. The TV and print media make much of all this, but a human tragedy is unfolding before our unseeing eyes.

Yet there are individuals and groups with untiring compassion, whose deeds, sung and unsung, have brought relief to many. For humanitarian work, we usually think of organizations like gurdwaras or the Sisters of Charity, but the pandemic has brought to the fore others of all ethnic, religious and political hues, whose humane work are an example to us all. They are many such people in Shillong.

As Patricia Mukhim says so appealingly, "Life is a value chain...when the chain breaks everyone is hurt. The pandemic has broken that value chain". In this value chain, each link is a precious human being, man, woman, child, and the non-binary individual. Yet in the data, they are reduced to ciphers, and have no place in the empty brouhaha of armchair dialogues. Data is not an end in itself. It is not even the beginning.

Amid the many distractions that the government faces, so evident on the front pages of the daily newspapers, Covid fatigue seems to have set in. Part of it is complacency, part of it is not knowing what to do next. The connections between political governance, bureaucratic administration, health services, expert institutions, and so-called traditional bodies, seem to be disjointed and ineffectual.

The government, rightly so, depends on data to make policies and schemes, to apportion funds and to determine urgent priorities of action. There is no dearth of data on Covid, it flows endlessly, and while we may despair at the evolving and incomplete science, the government and its expert advisors must parse and disaggregate the data daily so that directions and mid-course corrections can be decided. This seemingly, is not happening.

**Missing data and analysis**  
The table below shows the data breakdown that should be available and looked at. Maybe it is available in some backroom, but the lack of definitive decision-making reflects the paucity of proper

Health Mission and the Department of Health & Family Welfare websites provide the same basic and undifferentiated data, the only difference is the colour display of the graphics. Evidently the expert resources in the state are inadequate or unavailed. The Health Minister is reported as stating that "we have called people from Delhi to give presentations." (ST July 23, 2021)

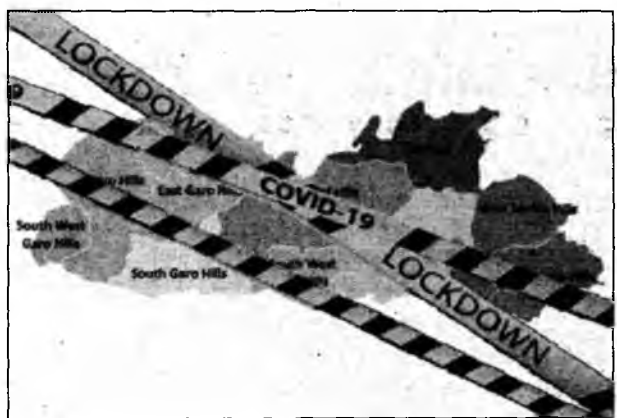
Category	Need number
New cases e.g., 513 on July 23, 2021	What was the total tested, how many negative? Were these sick, or contacts or border screening? How many were asymptomatic? How many are sick? What ages?
Of those sick	How many mild? How many hospitalized? How many vaccinated? What ages?
Deaths	How many late stage from rural areas? How many vaccinated?
Surveillance	Level of herd immunity? How many Delta variant?

The Hindu of July 23, 2021, has provided a detailed analysis in a special feature titled, "Covid-19 Grips Northeast". Some telltale snippets are revealing and useful. Three-fourths (75%) of the cases in Meghalaya are

in the state. **Surveillance**  
Three days ago the ICMR published its fourth Covid sero-surveillance report which showed that two-thirds of Indians have Covid antibodies.

ies, including more than half the children. This is encouraging progress towards herd immunity, but the study has gaps. Out of the 21 states in the survey, none of the Northeast states are included, apart from Assam. Meghalaya should conduct its own survey and compile its own granular data. This is not a very costly or logistically difficult exercise. The national survey needed to include only 30, 000 individuals in 69 districts. The number of individuals that will need to be tested in Meghalaya will be far less.

The level of antibody-positivity found in such surveys are not the only input to deci-



of the Delta variant. From this we may infer that because the Delta variant is about three times as contagious as the original strain, the number of daily positives will be expected much higher. Since most of them will be asymptomatic or mild, perhaps the current numbers of daily positives may not be such a worry. This is corroborated by the fact that as of yesterday, only 42% of Covid beds were occupied

making but may provide a more nuanced evaluation of rural-urban and age group differences that can assist in differential administrative strategies between regions and districts.  
**What next?**  
Vaccination: The High Court of Meghalaya has observed that the issue of vaccine hesitation has not been addressed effectively in the state and has made it clear

that it will monitor this issue closely. It does seem that the government is trying hard by various means to reach out and convince the hesitant. Unfortunately, vaccine refusal in Meghalaya is higher than in the rest of the country. A large portion of the blame rests with the people.

Dr Gangadeep Kang of CMC Vellore, suggests a goal for vaccination coverage of 70%. Till then, we must use masks, ensure good ventilation and limit human contact. Stubborn refusals to take the vaccine will not only delay the lifting of lockdown restrictions, but may also provide human harbours for the emergence of new variants. One of the graphics from The Hindu shows the decreasing fatality rate in Sikkim and Tripura, because of high vaccination rates.

Lift more unlock restrictions: The alternate days for opening of shops has little logic. While new cases seem to have plateaued at about half the peak rate, the number of severe cases requiring hospitalization has decreased markedly, and most deaths are reportedly those brought in late stages. Opening tourist spots for limited numbers of vaccinated visitors should be allowed. Delhi has announced a graded-response plan that is linked to hospital bed occupancy.

The rising restlessness of the economically-affected will disrupt lockdown attempts. It is better to open up while urging vaccination and citizen responsibility. There is little need for restrictions in rural areas. Dr Gangadeep says that while a third wave is expected, it is unlikely to be "anything like the second", unless there is a new variant.

Open educational institutions: Karnataka has begun priority vaccination of college and university students to enable the opening of higher education institutions. Rajasthan has announced that all schools will be opened on August 2. If parents and teachers are vaccinated, schools will be relatively safe for children.

Meghalaya seems to have reached a stage of stalemate, adrift in uncertainty and lacking in clear-cut strategy. There is passivity in data gathering and analysis, piecemeal decision-making and scant progress towards vaccination goals. At this rate, the human costs will gather momentum quickly and a tsunami of shadow pandemics will overtake the Covid wave.

# PM-Kisan Scheme & landlessness in Meghalaya

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

Agriculture, undoubtedly is the most important sector of the economy of Meghalaya. It contributes to more than 20% of the State's GDP and provides employment to more than half of the labour force in the State. Therefore, it wasn't a surprise when during his visit to Songsak in East Garo Hills, Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma, declared that his government prioritizes the farming community. Of course, he is not the first and won't be the last to make such a statement. Words are judged by the actions that precede them. In this matter, there seems to be some gap.

A couple of months ago it was reported that less than 9000 farmers, which constitutes around 1% or less of the State's farming population, benefitted from the PM-KISAN scheme. This particular scheme of the Central Government was very important considering the severity of the Covid-19 second wave that hit the country earlier this year. Unlike the first wave, this time around, the virus was able to penetrate the rural hinterland. Now more than ever is the time to support the farming community. The meager number of farmers from Meghalaya who were able to avail the benefits points to the fact that this did not happen.

To be fair, the entire blame cannot be laid at the doorstep of the current government. The low number of beneficiaries is the outcome of the systemic changes that have been at work since the colonial period. These changes are characterised by the ongoing process of privatisation of the commons, i.e., 'Ri Raid' or 'A'king' land, which has created the phenomenon of landlessness in the State where more than 70% of the population of Meghalaya are landless. The link between landlessness and the low number of beneficiaries is brought out by the eligibility criteria fixed for availing the PM-KISAN scheme. In the Frequently Asked Questions section of the PM-KISAN website, question number 6 is regarding the eligibility of the beneficiaries: Who is eligible to get benefits under the PM-KISAN scheme? The answer was "all land-holding families, that have cultivable land holding in their names, are eligible to get the benefit under the Scheme". On the other hand, the Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011 had already brought to light the fact that almost 60% of the rural households do not own any land. The criterion, thus, was a sly move to remove the need to support this substantial section of the rural population reducing the financial expenditure of the Government. This tactic worked only too well in the case of Meghalaya with not even 2% of the farmers getting the benefit in 2021. The blame was laid on the inability of the beneficiaries in providing 'correct and verified data'. That, of course, is an excuse and reveals more the ineptitude of the administration in checking the veracity of the documents rather than the people who provided the information. But even if correct data is provided, the number of farmers who would have potentially got the benefit is very small. This can be verified by looking at last year's figure of those who got the benefit under the PM-KISAN scheme.

The story published in the Financial Express by Rajeev Kumar on February 20, 2020 revealed that in 2020, 78,331 farmers from Meghalaya applied for the scheme. The number of farmers who got the benefit was 70,236. It is difficult to imagine that the more than 70,000 farmers who were able to correctly submit their documents and get the benefit last year have somehow been left out this time around. The number of beneficiaries should have gone up, not down. This is nothing but an excuse by the Government to cover up its own ineptitude. At the same time, even if the same number of beneficiaries from last

year were to get the benefits, that number is just around 10% of the farmers in the State. Majority of the farmers will still miss out. Being landless they are not eligible for the Scheme.

Something which has to be considered in the case of North East India in general and Meghalaya in particular is the land tenure system. In many cases, individual rights to land are subsumed under community rights. Not having land does not mean not having access to land. The community allocates land to the residents for farming. Therefore it stands to reason that landlessness does not exist because the concept of private property does not exist. This might be a compelling argument if private land holdings are non-existent or limited within the local community. Data and personal experience proves otherwise.

The Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011 has also reported that more than 34% of the rural household population in Meghalaya derives the major part of their income from manual casual labour. This population for sure is landless. Such a conclusion is supported by experience. On December, 2021, NESFAS organised a workshop on Soil and Seeds in the village of Umsawwar (located in the Mawkyntew Block of East Khasi Hills). Farmers from different parts of the State participated in the program. In the workshop, discussions were held with the farmers regarding the ways to improve soil fertility. Prevention of soil erosion through terrace constructions was discussed as a possible solution. Some of the farmers cited their inability to implement the solution because they were farming on rented lands. Since they did not own the land, they cannot make any permanent improvements on it whose benefit they may only enjoy in the long term. For those who live a hand-to-mouth existence, short term gains which means the daily struggle of not going hungry takes precedence. In the Mawkyntew area itself, entire villages do not have any agricultural land of their own. They instead lease it from the neighbouring villages. In a story published in the Times of India on the 13th July 2015, Subodh Ghidiyal had emphatically stated that landlessness as revealed by the Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011 is the key to rural deprivation in the country. The same holds true for Meghalaya as well.

If the Conrad Sangma government is really serious about its commitment to the farmers it needs to take the issue of landlessness seriously. Till date this does not seem to be the case. In the same program where the Chief Minister made the statement, he informed the audience that the State Government is looking to set up more PRIME hub centres (akin to the Songsak PRIME hub) across the State. These centres, according to the PRIME Meghalaya website, are centres for innovation, knowledge sharing, incubation and skill development. In short, the answer to rural distress is entrepreneurship. While the solution has merit, without reforming the background on which any such solution will function, i.e., the existing land tenure pattern characterised by high degree of landlessness, the chances of its success stand truncated. Political concerns in Meghalaya have mostly been about identity which in its most basic form is linked to land. However, concerns of land per se have remained subsidiary. If landlessness is not tackled it will become the most conflict-ridden issue in the future, if it is not already so.

**About the writer:** Bhogtoram Mawroh is a Senior Associate, Research and Knowledge Management at NESFAS and can be reached at bhogtoram.nesfas@gmail.com

Letters to the Editor

## Sad time for a proud land

Editor,  
The country celebrates its Independence Day in two weeks but in our state of Meghalaya - we are far from being free. We are close to a hundred days of lockdown with no consideration for the public. Livelihoods and lives are being suppressed, perhaps unfairly, in the name of containment. All this, despite vaccinations being available for all who opt for it. Will the government take no decisive action? Will it have no reply to the persistent queries on social media and newspaper editorials advocating for removing restrictions? Am I mistaken in assuming that the government within the Indian sovereign state is completely answerable to the people? All this apathy seems to stem from the dissonance that the current legislative and bureaucratic class have from the lives of common citizens. They receive full salaries to put food on the table for their families regardless of lockdowns. If they had a sense of personal honour, they would perhaps forgo a percentage of their earnings towards covid relief during each day of lockdown, but that is a pipe dream.

The powers that be delude themselves with self-grandeur and disrupt the people immensely. If not the courts, perhaps someday their own conscience will judge them. Today, people have reached the point of threatening public protests (To be fair, it is not a good idea to be on the streets protesting) but all the administration does is term any noticeable dissent as 'illegal' - without once trying to show some empathy and engaging in dialogue. If the powers that be are reading this - please try feeling hungry or helpless today - for just one day - and maybe you will understand what it means to be a human being, just like the lakhs that you do have the power to serve! It is a sad time - If one were to go back in time to the British era, they would not see a version of Shillong any different from what it is today - filled with hopelessness and repression. Incredible times for our city and state on the brink of the 50th year of statehood.

Adding to the lockdown woes, we now have an additional barrage of VVIP worshipping restrictions imposed on the common citizens. Shops are abruptly forced to close, people are officially 'requested' to stay at home when VVIPs come visit, and countless man

hours of government servants (i.e. public servants) are put to use to ensure an incredibly smooth trip for one single citizen - at the expense of lakhs of people. Even 30-50 speed breakers on the Shillong-Sohra route have been completely removed! Most of us would understand security measures undertaken - but a semi-lockdown for an entire weekend is nothing short of VVIP worship, and not necessarily for security.

We are a people with a rich culture, a culture of social justice - with a strong sense of community and support. This used to be a land where the people valued democracy and equality even before the liberalised western world. Even our 'chieftains' were elected and they dutifully 'served' their people. Yet now, it is a matter of shame to see our own government submit itself on behalf of the people - to become meek, uncomplaining slaves all over again. The government is incapable of even raising issues like the ILP despite being passed by the people's assembly lawfully - because of the potential political underpinnings of such a move within state-centre power dynamics. What is the point of MLAs and Ministers if we have to count on pressure groups to

communicate on behalf of the people? Our ancestors would recoil in their graves with absolute disgust if they were to see the weak leadership that now governs this land. Money, power, status and metaphorical fat bellies, instead of justice, humility, honour and service. But what else can one expect when the political and bureaucratic system is filled to the brim with people who want to BECOME "Very Important People", and not a single one wanting - with all the strength they may have in them - to DO "Very Important Things" instead.

Yours etc.,  
Joe Lyngdoh,  
Via email

## BJP's true colours emerge

Editor,  
The leadership tussle over the post of president in the BJP Meghalaya is gaining ground each day. While AL Hek is eyeing the coveted position, his bete noire, and current president, Ernest Mawrie is trying hard to save his kursi. But in this political slugfest, precisely bordering upon individualistic pursuit more than societal good, BJP Meghalaya is missing core public-related issues which otherwise need prompt ac-

tion from this political party. I can state several here but the one, which I feel needs special mention is about a so-called member of BJP Meghalaya, a former media convener of the party, who is up in arms to tarnish the name, image, and sanctity of this political party and its leaders. I am no supporter of the BJP but what I feel is that as a people-centric party, BJP should also try and see the issues that are afflicting the commoners instead of being pre-occupied with "Kaun banega BJP President?"

This person in question has collected several thousand rupees in the name of BJP and several of its national and regional leaders for processing and settlement of their applications / claims in the respective Union Government Departments. This is with respect to the petitioners' meeting with the former Minister of State for Home, Mr Kiren Rijiju in 2015 at Shillong and petitioning him with their grievances and resubmission of their petitions again in 2019 through the former National Secretary, ST Morcha, BJP Central - who had in March 2019 resigned from the saffron party in protest against the Citizenship Amendment Bill, and facilitated by this so-called BJP Meghalaya

member - who seems to have utilized his criminal tendencies and earned some fast buck in the process. Few such affected petitioners told me that they were told that this member was asked by the former national secretary to collect the money from the petitioners. Well, if that is so then can the former national secretary please clarify why he has asked this BJP Meghalaya member to do so? One can only wonder in awe how a mere party-man can use the name and fame of his leaders to pursue his criminal desires with impunity. Is BJP Meghalaya unaware of the malafide ways of its rank and file? Well, ideally I would like to see an end to the Modi regime post-2024 general elections because of the severe hardships that he has inflicted upon the people of this country, by "fair" or "unfair" means. The "deeds" here in BJP Meghalaya mirrors the bigger picture inside this party - which needs to be dethroned and it is heading there.

Yours etc.  
BC Paul  
Shillong - 4

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

# Life, lens & India's first female photo journalist

By Siddhi Jain

**H**omai Vyarawalla (1913-2012) commonly known by her pseudonym 'Dalda 13' and India's first woman press photographer among 120 trailblazing photographers from over 20 countries to be featured at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The ongoing exhibition titled "The New Woman Behind the Camera" runs till October 2021. Vyarawalla began work in the late 1930s and retired in the early 1970s.

In 2011, she was awarded the Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian award of the Republic of India.

Some of her photographs on display include one of the Victoria Terminus, Mumbai; ashes of the Mahatma Gandhi being carried and Students at the Sir JJ School of Arts.

There is also a photograph of Homai Vyarawalla photographing Ganesh Chaturthi at Chowpatty Beach, Mumbai. In 2010, the Alkazi Collection of Photography acquired the poignant photographic archives of Homai Vyarawalla.

'The New Woman Behind the Camera' features 185 photographs, photo books, and illustrated magazines by diverse photographers and highlights the work of the diverse "new" women who made significant advances in modern photography from the 1920s to the 1950s.

According to The Met, during this tumultuous period shaped by two world wars, women stood at the forefront of experimentation with the camera and produced invaluable visual testimony that reflects both their personal experiences and the extraordinary social and political transformations of the era.



The exhibit examines women's pioneering work in a number of genres, from avant-garde experimentation and commercial studio practice to social documentary, photojournalism, ethnography, and sports, dance, and fashion photography.

It highlights the work of photographers such as Ilse Bing, Lola Alvarez Bravo, Claude Cahun, Florestine Perrault Collins, Elizaveta Ignatovich, Dorothea Lange, Lee Miller, Niu Weiyu, Tsuneko Sasamoto, Gerda Taro,

and Homai Vyarawalla, among many others.

For many of the daring women of the 1920s — a symbol of a woman with bobbed hair, stylish dress, and a confident stride broke down conventional ideas of gender — the camera was a means to assert their self-determination and artistic expression.

For many women, commercial studios were an important entry point into the field of photography, allowing them to forge professional careers and earn their

own income.

The availability of smaller, lightweight cameras spurred a number of women photographers to explore the city and the diversity of urban experience outside the studio.

During this period, many women travelled extensively for the first time and took photographs documenting their experiences abroad.

The unprecedented demand for fashion and advertising pictures between the world wars provided



new employment opportunities for many female photographers.

Finally, the rise of the picture press also established photojournalism and social documentary photography as dominant forms of visual expression.

Galvanized by the effects of a global economic crisis and growing political unrest, many women photographers created powerful images that exposed injustice and swayed public opinion.

As per Max Hollein, Marina Kellen French Director of The

Met, "The international scope of this project is unprecedented. Though the New Woman is often regarded as a Western phenomenon, this exhibition proves otherwise by bringing together rarely seen photographs from around the world and presenting a nuanced, global history of photography. The women featured are responsible for shifting the direction of modern photography, and it is exhilarating to witness the accomplishments of these extraordinary practitioners." (IANS/ife)

## No one like Uttam Kumar



**T**his is the story of a clerk who became an actor; an actor who became a star; a star who became an icon and an icon who became a legend almost a demigod and of whom even Satyajit Ray said: "There is none like Uttam and there will be no one to ever replace him. He was and he is unparalleled in Bengali, even Indian cinema."

Uttam Kumar (1926-1980) is a titanic figure in Bengali public life. He was a leading actor, a matinee attraction, an extraordinary performer, a textbook star and an industry behemoth, dominating Bengali cinema's commercial and cultural assets for close to three decades.

He won six BFJA awards; the first national award for best actor in 1967; was the only living person whose life was fictionalized by Satyajit Ray; and whose work has been repeatedly remade into Hindi with at least nine actors re-playing roles originally played by him alone.

Uttam's screen persona has also managed to attain a distinguished afterlife; having included, over the years of television, a new generation of viewers.

A definitive cultural and critical biography of this towering figure

of cinema was long overdue. "Uttam Kumar - A Life in Cinema" (Bloomsbury) by Sayandeep Chowdhury is the story of his cinema, the time of that cinema, and the afterlife of that time. With Uttam Kumar as the chief protagonist, this book tells the story of Bengali cinema between 1950s and 1970s, with a comprehensive post-mortem of his legacy.

To do so and to stay close to the richness of its subject, the book abandons an exclusive academic template and includes anecdotal prattle, industry chatter, urban legends, incipient filmy folklore etc., because those are important channels of appreciation, appraisal, and comprehension of a star figure.

The primary conceptual aim for the book is to be able to encompass the importance of the figure - to try to locate a celluloid life within a larger historical, political and cultural context. A complimentary metier of the book is to explore why and how a star-persona could reconstitute the bhadrolok Bengali visual cultural world in the post-Partition period.

Born in the late 1970s Chowdhury is the right-mix audience who grew up in an era still very much enamoured by the touring presence of Uttam Kumar, as he continued



to rule the Sunday cinema space on Doordarshan for the Bengali audience. Sayandeep Chowdhury teaches in the School of Letters at Ambedkar University Delhi and is a doctoral fellow in the Department of Film Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata.

His research and teaching interests are in colonial and postcolonial visual modernisms, cinema and photography studies, adaptation studies and city studies.

His essays have been published in Film International, Journal of South Asian History and Culture, South Asia Review, European Journal of English Studies, Economic and Political Weekly (EPW), and scholarly collections like "Rituparno Ghosh: Cinema, Gender and Art" (2016), "Sea Narratives:

Cultural Responses to the Sea 1600-Present" (2016), "L'entree en ville: Amenager, Experimentier, Representer" (2017), "Mistrust: Developmental, Cultural, and Clinical Realms" (2017), "On the Politics of Ugliness" (2018) and "Ideas of the City in Asian Settings" (2019).

He was a UKNA Fellow at the International Institute of Asian Studies, Leiden, in 2015 and a Charles Wallace Fellow in 2016. He has written on art, books, politics and cinema for Huffington Post, The Monthly Review, Art India, Caravan Magazine, Cafe Dissensus, Outlook, Biblio, Indian Express, Critical Collective, TheWire, Scroll, Business Standard, The Hindu, Anandabazaar Patrika and others. (IANS)

## Bee pollen: The wonder food

**R**ecent years have seen an influx of health and fitness trends, especially pertaining to diets, making their way into our social media news feeds and our daily lives. More often than not, these trends simply include superfoods that have existed for several years or even decades. These superfoods come with a myriad of benefits and in several cases, are merely being incorporated in innovative recipes. Amid these, there is one that has existed for several decades with its benefits being widely recognised across the world — bee pollen.

### What is bee pollen?

A mixture of flower, pollen, nectar, enzymes, honey wax, and bee secretion, bee pollen is collected by honeybees from plants and transported to their beehives. Most of us would have come across these yellowish pellets stored in jars at local shops dealing in organic/health food or sprinkled on top of smoothie or acai bowls in social media as a finishing touch and garnish, or even included as a salad ingredient.

### Rise to fame

Now, although bee pollen has been considered a nutrient-dense superfood in several cultures, including Chinese medicine, it has gained immense traction in the health community over the past few years. Realizing that it is packed with nutrients, amino acids, vitamins, lipids, and over 250 other active substances, bee pollen is now increasingly being included by several consumers in their regular diet. While the nutritional level and contents of the pollen vary depending on the plant source and season during which it was collected, bee pollen on average contains approximately 40 per cent carbohydrates, 35 per cent protein, 4-10 per cent water, and 5 per cent fat. Here are some of the key health benefits that can be derived from bee pollen.

### The abundant benefits

Although it is significantly different from bee venom and honey, bee pollen is also a form of apitherapy. In fact, a single teaspoon of bee pollen can contain over 2.5 billion nutrient-

packed flower pollen granules, making it one of the richest sources of vitamins and other nutrients. It also works as an anti-inflammatory agent and has high antioxidant properties, similar to fermented foods, and counters the oxidants stemming from external factors such as air pollution that can damage our internal organs. Helping to keep our livers healthy, bee pollen even facilitates the healing process if a person has gone through liver damage.

Yet another crucial benefit that bee pollen offers is strengthening our immune system. With its antimicrobial, antifungal, and antiviral properties, bee pollen helps the body fight bacteria and viruses and bolsters immunity — something that is currently much-needed. Containing bioflavonoids and Vitamin-C, bee pollen not only promotes muscle growth but also assists in speeding up metabolism and helps in longevity. These small ball-shaped yellow pellets also come in handy when it comes to easing menopause symptoms in middle-aged women such as hot flashes and helps reduce irritability and joint aches while facilitating better sleep, mood, and energy levels. Containing anti-estrogen properties, this superfood even lowers the risk of breast and prostate cancer. Besides, it also improves blood flow to our nervous system, thereby reducing stress levels while also alleviating tiredness.

### A word of caution

While bee pollen certainly contains abundant health benefits, it's best to consume it in limited quantities. Furthermore, bee pollen may not be advisable to those with pollen allergies or women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. It would also be best for those on long-term medications to consult their physicians before including bee pollen in their diet as it can interfere with certain medications.

Despite not being a miracle cure, bee pollen, if consumed in moderate quantities, can help improve your health in the long run. For your daily dose of nutrients and a boost in flavour, add it to your yoghurt, oatmeal, or cereal, drizzle some honey on top, and dig in! (IANS)

# Drive Away Destinations



Indians are looking at travel in newer ways and exploring flexible, nearby travel and travel to work remotely, according to new YouGov research conducted in May 2021.

The survey showed that 43 per cent of Indians would like to travel this year when able to (66 per cent to destinations that are a drive away) and are excited about visiting new places with loved ones, relaxing in nature, enjoying offbeat destinations and sharing their experiences and recommendations with others. A third would like to spend time travelling and working in different locations.

Here are top trends from the latest survey:

### Looking forward to travelling

\* While the timeline for travel recovery depends on a number of external factors such as vaccination coverage, Indians continue to be eager to get back to travelling and connecting with new people and places

\* The survey showed that 43 per cent would expect or plan to travel in the year and 66 per cent would consider trips that are within driving distance

\* More than a third of respondents (36 per cent) would like to travel and explore new places with loved ones. About eight in ten (78 per cent) said they would like to be closer to their family in order to receive or provide support

### Flexible living and working

\* A third of Indian travellers (33 per cent) would like to spend time travelling and working 'anywhere'

in different locations, in a post-pandemic world.

\* About two-thirds (62 per cent) of respondents say they would opt for off-peak times of the year to travel.

### Hosted travel catering to desire for flexibility and unique experiences

\* Seven in ten (69 per cent) respondents are interested in unique accommodations when they travel next (formats such as heritage homes, havelis, farm stays and villas), and a third (35 per cent) say that they are very likely to stay in unique accommodations when they travel next

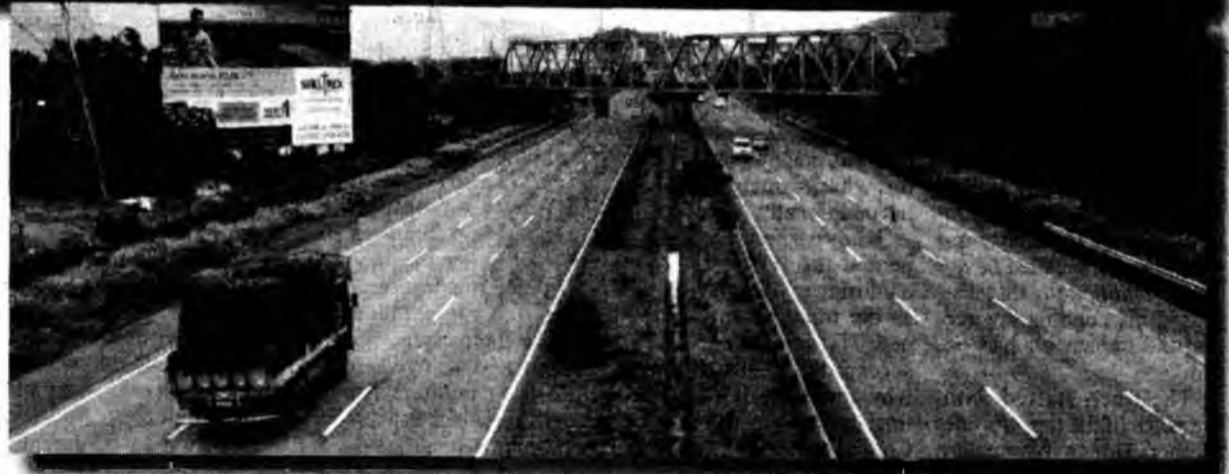
\* GenZ (70 per cent) and Millennials (73 per cent), who comprise a large pool of current and future travellers, are leading this trend.

\* We expect a travel rebound unlike anything we have seen before, and we've made it easy for anyone who wants to host and take advantage of the coming travel surge. Half of new listings globally that were both activated and booked in early 2021 got a reservation request within four days, and for the year ending April 30, 2021, the average annual earnings per Homes Host who has welcomed at least one guest on Airbnb was about US\$9,600.

### Nature travel continues to inspire

\* Nature travel continues to be preferred by four in ten (40 per cent) respondents.

\* Hill stations seem to be a popular choice, with 44 per cent of Indian residents wanting to visit destinations such as Manali, Mussoorie, Nainital, Ooty,



Munnar, Coorg, and Kashmir.

\*The beaches of Goa, Kerala, and Pondicherry are also sought-after destinations for Indian travellers (38 per cent).

\* In addition, Gen Z (25 per cent) and Millennials (23 per cent) hope to explore offbeat travel to new destinations such as visiting a wildlife reserve, when they travel next, compared with Baby Boomers

### Capturing travel experiences and sharing them with loved ones

\*Thinking about ways they can remember their trip, six in ten (59 per cent) Indian residents hoping to embark on a holiday say they will take pictures as a way of remembering their trip, with close to

half (47 per cent) saying they will share stories with loved ones.

Commenting on these trends, Amanpreet Bajaj, General Manager — Airbnb India, Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan, said, "As many of us think of travelling again, stepping out of the door will be about spending quality time with loved ones and creating new memories in unique destinations nearby or in nature. It will also be about exploring more flexible ways to live and work in a new world. Reflecting these preferences in India and around the world, Airbnb recently launched more than 100 upgrades that include new ways for customers to discover unique nearby destinations and easier ways to sign up to be a host on Airbnb." (IANSlife)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JULY 25, 2021

Moon square Uranus on your solar return chart and it will give mixed results for the whole year. Your expenses will be high. You will be having excess of expenditure on vehicles. It could prove to be difficult days. Do not give loan to anybody otherwise. You will have a tough time in recovering them. You should not have much expectations from others. Otherwise you will only get disappointment. However, your family members will support you. You will work on improving relationship with your family members. And will be able to get your work done. You will also pay attention towards your family and domestic responsibilities. You will work for your progress. You will also avail some government facilities. Gradually you will be relieved of stress. You will develop interest in meditation, yoga and prayers.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**  
You will get victory in legal matters. You will even perform professionally well. You will have upper edge in official matters. You could be given an important position. You will also complete all held up tasks. You will be flush with funds and will have no financial problems. You will also enjoy robust health. There is also joy for getting married to a person of your own choice. You could get a promotion too all of a sudden. Senior officials will be supportive. You will also start a new work/business. You will also share good bonding with your male and family members. Days will bring joy and wealth. You will also get success in every work. People associated with technical jobs will reap more benefits.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**  
It is a major gaisany week for you. Your worries will come to an end. Your confidence will be high. You will also make contact with new people. New job/business offers will come. With the help of your friends your messed up tasks will improve. You will have financial gains. Your romantic life is going to be wonderful. A chance encounter can lead to a rollicking affair. Those who are in a relationship for a long time will plan to get married. You can also go on a fun trip with family. You will be having lot of unforgettable moments with your friends and loved ones. You could get attracted to politics and social matters. You will also achieve success in your business. You will also see positive changes in yourself.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**  
Your prestige and importance are going to increase with your work. You will make immense progress in your job/business. Your work conditions will be better and you will spend days enjoying yourself. You need to be careful in financial matters. You also need to limit your expenses. You will be having no major health issues yet you need to take care of your health. At your workplace you need to keep your important documents safely so that your enemies could not harm you in any way. You will succeed in government related matters. It is also time to have fun and joy with family members. You could plan to go on a picnic or fun filled trip.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**  
The start of the week is going to be pleasant. You will be happy and cheerful. Some unforgettable moments will be spent in the company of your love mate/partner. There will be a family get together too. Old memories will be refreshed and you will become nostalgic. These are also good days in terms of money. You will also hear a pleasant or happy news from somewhere. You will get good job/business offers. Due to your strong will power you will start moving towards the path of success. Money and wealth will keep coming. Your enemies and opponents will not succeed in harming your interests.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**  
These are enlightened days. You will see life again with a lot of hope and interests. Your financial position is going to get better. You will also make progress in your work. You will have the desire to do something new for yourself for which you will learn a lot of things. Your bosses will support you. The time will be favorable. You will have a wonderful romantic life. Your partner will support you a lot. The star of your destiny will become strong and help you in moving forward in your life. Business partnerships will be extremely favorable during this time. You will work with full of energy on receiving a desired task. You will start doing a good deed.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**  
It is going to be a wonderful week. You will be happy and in a pleasant mood. You will be relaxed a lot. These are days to acquire lot of money. You will also be busy in your official matters. You will show your potential to everyone through your work. It is also a time to get recognized. You will share fun moments with your mate. Lovebirds will be having a wonderful bonding. You will also fulfill your new plans and hobbies. You will give importance to everything. It is going to be an important time from

the point of view of worldly and spiritual perspective. You will move forward with focused target. Husband and wives will have good understanding. The chances of your victory in disputed matters appear bright. New projects will take shape.

**Libra: (September 23 - Libra 23)**

It is going to be prestige enhancing week. The graph of your self respect, dignity and popularity will go upward. You will also get lot of opportunities to rise in your business/work. You will reach the peak of your potential. Even your financial position will get better. You will spend quality time with your mate. You will also fulfill all of your potentials and capabilities. You will also win trust of your closed ones. People will also appreciate your gentle and sober nature. In the latter part of the week, you will take a short business trip which will turn out to be beneficial. Some pleasant news will lift your spirit. It is likely that you can come in contact with a seer or spiritual guru and receive the blessings.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

The favorable placement of planets will stabilize your monetary profits. You will feel a lot more secure now than even before. You will also attend a party or function. And will be the center of attraction. You will attract people with your gentle nature. But you will have to put in lot of efforts to shine in your work. Your opponents will remain active but unable to harm you. You will remain busy in your work but will take out some time for your family. You will be worried about the career of your children. You will also like to spend some time in seclusion and like to meditate and reading informative and adventurous books. Even Yoga, prayers, worship and religious acts will attract you.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)**

It is now the appropriate time to decide about your future plans. A change in job looks certain. You may also undertake expansion of business. Your bosses will be satisfied with your performance. This will make you happy. You will be interested in focusing towards attention in studies, writing and exams. There can be some situations in your job where you will have to take quick decisions. You will also have the support of good friends. Your bonding with your partner/spouse will get better and both of you will be able to understand each other much better. You will also make new friends. Your hard work and efforts will be behind your sudden success.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

You will be busy in your work and will fulfill your targets. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will also look for new job or business. A chance encounter with an unknown person can lead to romantic ties. You will give full time to your family. Enemies and opponents will be active but will be unable to harm your interests. Relations with relatives will be cordial and sweet. Your romantic life is going to be wonderful. Lovemates will have a wonderful time and understand each other's feeling better. You will also clinch a major financial deal. But read all documents well before signing them. You will remain active in diversified work area. Your income will increase. Bosses and seniors will be satisfied with your work.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

You will be able to finish all the tasks that have been pending for a long time. You will make good progress in your job/business. Opportunities will bring peace and happiness in your life. You will also be able to achieve the targets you have set at your work. People will praise your intelligence, creativity, potentials. You will also meet an important personality. The opportunities for good news and monetary gains are high. You will work with lot of dedication. You will make new contracts. Your responsibilities will also increase at your workplace. The communication among colleagues is going to be very good. Both will understand the feelings of each other.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

You will get opportunities to move ahead in your career and everyone will agree on your potential. Don't trust everyone in financial matters otherwise they can betray you. Your love life will be filled with colors. You can get involved with a very charming and intelligent person. You will take decision after a lot of thinking. Your time will be spent reading an informational or adventurous book. Your mind will be happy after meeting an old friend after a long time. You will think about new plans. You will take care of even the small needs and desire of your children and family. There will be smoothness and easiness in the relationship between you and your partner. There is possibility of buying new things. There will be improvement in the health of your parents. Your journey will be favorable.

## Understanding Online Tutoring as Career

By Ranjan K Baruah

We have seen the impact of the recent pandemic and young people have lost their jobs and there are no new openings except a few limited opportunities. Many entry level professionals ask me what they can do as they had just started work but due to lock down and pandemic things have stopped for them. The confusion is more with aspirants who got good marks in their university exams and aspiring to be teacher or professor in near future. In today's edition, let us explore something for those who are educated and qualified and eager to do something digitally for their livelihoods. We are going to discuss online tutoring as one of the career options.

Initially it is important for us to understand online tutoring. It is the process of tutoring in an online, virtual, or networked, environment, in which teachers or tutors and learners participate from separate geographical locations. It is practiced using many different approaches for distinct sets of users. The distinctions are in content and user interface, as well as in tutoring styles and tutoring methodologies. We have seen the growth of many online tutoring platforms due to lock down recently as schools and colleges are closed and students are staying inside homes.

An institution or individual may offer online tutoring through an internal or external tutoring website or through a Learning Management Systems. Online environments applied in education could also involve the use of a virtual learning environment platform such as Google Meet, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc. Some of these are paid systems but some are free and open source. Online tutoring may be offered either via a link in an LMS,

or directly through the tutoring service's platform, where the subscriber may be required to pay for tutoring time before the delivery of service. Tutoring may take the form of a group of learners simultaneously logged in online, then receiving instruction from a single tutor, also known as many-to-one tutoring and live online tutoring. It may be one to one or like customized tutoring.

Another form of tutoring, called

technologically advanced because unlike traditional face-to-face tutoring, online tutoring requires a usable user interface and technical support to maintain both the hardware and the software sides of the operation.

There are few doubts or questions when it comes to online tutoring which includes how one does know about the tutor and his or her qualifications.

There are startups and companies dealing with online tutoring



peer tutoring connects peers, such as recent or fellow students within a course or subject, tutoring each other, and this may also be conducted as online tutoring over an online conferencing interface.

There are many challenges as well as opportunities to be a successful online tutor. We must be aware that from the very beginning of online tutoring, controversy surrounded several concerns voiced by educators and parents. It means anyone who wants to be successful and sustain as an online tutor must have a good strategy to be successful. Now the question is can someone with good academic records or someone who used to teach become a successful online tutor. Aspirants must know that apart from knowledge of the subjects they must be

and they publish details about their tutors for branding and getting more students but the challenge would be when someone wants to start it individually as they do not have many resources to brand and publicize about their credentials. We must understand well about online teaching and online tutor as online presentations may be made by anyone.

We shall write more about how to become successful as an online tutor and how one can plan to be successful in this job. There is scope at present and it shall increase in near future but we must have a strategy to be successful.

(The author is a career mentor and skill trainer and can be reached at 8473943734 or bkranj@gmail.com)

**"You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose."**

— Dr. Seuss

## The Shillong Times

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### Liberalization, Leadership

THIRTY years past the historic Economic Liberalization, this is time for India to look back. The bold initiative from Narasimha Rao, the then Prime Minister and Manmohan Singh as finance minister brought about massive changes to the way India functioned under the Socialist system for half a century. The 1990s were the days of Globalization too, and India welcomed both these concepts. The nation courted Capitalism and gave a refreshing new life to the national economy. Its impact reached all, by way of a trickle-down effect but it also made the rich richer and the poor, poorer. Manmohan Singh, who went on to become Prime Minister, was among the first now to come up with an overview of the impact that the two major policy shifts have had on the nation. "Nearly 30 crore Indians have been lifted out of poverty in this period and hundreds of millions of new jobs have been provided," he said. The reality is also that the liberalization process was left half done. Bureaucracy continues to have a stranglehold over the systems.

When Liberalization came in, a promise was that it spelt the end of the "licence-permit raj" and that there will be minimum controls on economic activities. In reality, things have not changed and those who want to start a unit will have a rough ride and have to grease many palms. While the central government came up with a subsidized food scheme for the poor during the UPA-II, what is happening is also that the nation is encouraging laziness. A day's work fetches a labourer money enough to get cheap ration for a week's family upkeep. China introduced Liberalization a decade or more before India. China grew by leaps and bounds. Here, growth was steadily on the decline before Covid arrived. Predictably, it took a nosedive thereafter. "The road ahead is more daunting than during the 1991 economic crisis," Singh says. That was the time when, with its coffers empty, India was compelled to ship its gold reserves to fetch a huge IMF loan to run day-to-day governmental business. Singh lifted the economy from such a mess and he deserves all our praise. There are also the optimists in these days of despondency. Business magnate Mukesh Ambani feels India is on the right developmental track, and when it reaches age 100, by 2047, it can aspire to have an economy the size of the US and China. Yes, a post-script to this is that leadership matters the most.

# MLAs and disbursement of MLA Scheme

By H H Mohrmen

### Signs of the times

One realises that elections are around the corner when the media is replete with news related to MLAs and their schemes. During this season Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) take the limelight and start appearing in the news on a regular basis. Newspapers and media outlets overflow with reports of MLAs donating ambulances, chairs, utensils, trucks and what have you to the communities. Some MLAs also distribute grants to the dorbar Shnong. Even faith-based organisations receive grants to support their respective community projects like schools, orphanages etc. The MLA scheme has no doubt benefited many communities and faith groups, but is also not free from criticism. It is also time to take stock and examine the use or rather the misuse of the MLA scheme. It is also time to question how MLAs select the beneficiaries or organisations which will receive the support from the Scheme.

### MLA mere disbursers of MLA scheme

Of all the responsibilities that the MLA is entrusted with distributing the MLA scheme is one thing that they take seriously. In fact the MLA scheme is the one important fund that MLAs, who are not part of the cabinet, or those who are in the opposition have at their disposal. It is one scheme that enables them to help their constituents, or so the MLAs with a dearth of ideas believe. If the MLA's job is only to distribute grants and decide how the MLA scheme is being spent then any Tom, Dick and Harry can be an MLA.

Surely it is not so difficult to decide and select beneficiaries for this scheme or any scheme for that matter. After all, the Government now supports and even benefits such as this are being decided along party lines. Beneficiaries are selected based on their allegiance or whether or not they supported or will support the MLA during the election. In most cases the criteria on which the beneficiary is selected is not on merit but rather on which side of the divide the person is.

**MLA Scheme is Taxpayers money**  
The other pertinent issue is the manner in which MLAs

treat the MLA scheme. They consider it as their private funds or as if the money for the Scheme is something that they shell out of their own pockets. MLAs and MDCs of all hues and colours have the penchant to have their names inscribed on the items purchased from the Scheme. They ensure that it is written in bold 'donated by... and the name of the MLA' on all the items that they provide to the public from this scheme. Isn't MLA scheme public money, generated from the tax that the citizens of this country pay? And since the time the GST was implemented in the country, everything people buy is taxed. Ironically, in a tribal state like Meghalaya where the rich do not pay income tax, this makes everybody in the state equal. In fact, the Chief Minister or for that matter any tribal millionaire in the state pays the same tax as the daily wage earner or the domestic helpers or even the beggars in the streets.

It is therefore wrong for the MLA to treat the poor as 'mere beneficiaries' and consider themselves as benefactors when they also pay as much tax as all of us citizens and other tribal officers do. The poor contribute to the public exchequer too because they also pay tax every time they buy salt, dal, oil, soap and other essential items for their daily use. They also pay tax when they travel on a bus, taxi or use any public services, so why are public representatives acting like they are being generous when they distribute the MLA Scheme?

### The Timing

The timing that the MLAs choose to distribute the Scheme also needs to be questioned. The time before the election is the busiest for the MLAs as they are busy deciding the beneficiaries and how the Scheme is going to be distributed. The question is why do MLAs have to wait till the eleventh hour to distribute schemes to the people? The simple answer is - to influence the voters! There is no other reason other than that. But the other pertinent question that is not being asked is - Isn't it wrong to use public money to influ-

ence voters?

The public should remember that public representatives who only provide MLA Schemes before the election are non-performing MLAs. They have wasted precious time sitting idle the last four years and wake up at the fag end of the term. More importantly they are not only non-performing MLAs but they have ulterior motives too. They say public memory is short, so the timing needs to be perfect and what better time to distribute the grants than just before the election? If the main objective is to influence voters' decision then the question is - Can public money be used this way? Is this fair or is it even legal to use public money for personal gain and does this not amount to buying votes? Whatever the reason it is for the delay, it is but a sign that the public representative is not able to perform and does not have anything other than the MLA Scheme to fool the voters with.

### Monitoring and evaluation

The other question that nobody asks is the impact the MLA scheme has on the public at large. Has any study been done to understand the impact that hundreds of crores of money channelled via the MLA Scheme has had on the public. How have people benefited from the scheme? For instance what kind of service did the hundreds of ambulances provide to the public? How many times a year was it being put to use? How long or how many years did the organisation run the ambulance service? In case the organisation has collapsed, does the property go back to the Government or does it become private property?

The respective Block Development Officers do monitor how buildings constructed from the Scheme are implemented but what about other items purchased using the Scheme? Is there any kind of monitoring done to ensure that the money is used for the purpose that it was meant for? Did the target groups benefit from the intervention?

With the funds supported from the MLA Scheme, private and even schools run by

faith groups have fancy buildings and are better equipped compared to government schools but they pay the teachers a pittance. While the government pays good salaries to its teachers, the irony is that the facilities in the schools are lacking. In most private projects run with the support of the government, be it schools, orphanages etc., the employees of these institutions are always at the receiving end. The objective of having better school infrastructure is a noble one but the ultimate goal of having quality education becomes futile if the management pays peanuts to the teachers.

The question that needs answers is why do the MLAs have to resort to just becoming disbursers of the MLA Scheme? Isn't there another way of spending the money which will have major impacts on the public?

### Engage and Empower

Democracy is healthy and strong when people actively engage in the democratic process. Then why are communities not engaged in deciding how the scheme is used. Why is the MLA given the sole authority to decide on how the scheme is used and to select the beneficiaries at his or her own whims and fancy? The duty of the leader is to encourage the public to engage in the democratic process and when they are engaged in the process, they feel empowered. And empowered constituents are enlightened citizens.

Enlightened citizens will emerge when MLAs engage the constituents in the decision making at every stage of the democratic process. This will help the citizens understand that when MLAs provide help to the people they are not doing the voters a favour, but only providing them what is rightfully theirs. Public who are aware of their rights will also not allow MLAs to claim ownership of the Scheme because it is public money which is rightfully theirs. Enlightened citizens will also understand that their role in a democratically run country does not start and end with the election. And faith groups also have a big role to play in educating, empowering and enlightening the members of the community. Because democracy without constant public participation is not real democracy.

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## The Shillong Dorbars in the Marten standoff?

By Toki Blah

The standoff at Marten between the Seng Samla Mawlai Pylun (SSMP) and the Minister, Urban Affairs, Govt of Meghalaya has now been called off based on the spot visit of the Minister to Marten and agreement to meet and further discuss the matter between the two parties on the August 3. Solid waste disposal for the entire Shillong conglomerate was thus given temporary breathing space for the time being. We shall of course merrily continue to dump our garbage at Marten and the "Out of sight, out of Mind" mentality of the citizens will continue to flourish, that is until a fresh crisis erupts again. To tell the truth it seems that our leaders, our elders, citizens as a whole and the entire machinery at the disposal of the state seem at a total loss on how to dispose of the waste we generate. A belief seems to prevail that we are the only people on earth faced with such a problem and that the only solution lies in another 19th century Marten waste disposal model termed as a "Land Fill system". Other people the world over have

Shnongs of the localities of Shillong have nothing to say on the matter? Do they not consider themselves primary stakeholders to discussions; decisions and outcomes of what happens to their respective localities? The solution for our waste disposal is not another landfill. The landfill "throw and forget" model of Marten can no longer serve our modern waste disposal requirements and it is doubtful if any community or village will be willing to part with land for such a purpose. Yet news reports emanating from the discussions at Marten indicate that alternate landfills are still on the agenda as potential solutions. What we really require is a sustainable and viable waste management system that poses no threat to the environment and nearby communities. It is therefore not only necessary but indispensable for Dorbars of Shillong Conglomerate to have an agenda for a permanent and viable solution to the Marten problem and to present this viewpoint to the Govt for its consideration.



ST File Photo

discovered new technologies and sustainable methods in disposing their waste. Rediscovering the wheel however continues to remain a Meghalayan obsession!

The SSMP agitated with an agenda and the agenda was shifting the waste dumping site at Marten to some other place. It's quite obvious that Marten has outlived its purpose and the pollution and stench it emits has become a menace and a nuisance to the residents of Mawlai Pylun. The SSMP agenda has the full support of the people of Mawlai and nearby areas who are primary local stakeholders to this local problem of the locality. The other party involved in the Marten crisis is the Urban Affairs Department headed by a Minister whose agenda, to be quite honest, is not so clear. People are yet to be convinced whether he is in Government to serve the people and his department or his own business interest. Be that as it may, the dismal failure of the department to find a solution to the Marten problem for the last 50 years is disgraceful. This must be a record of sorts for departmental apathy and indifference. Ministerial and departmental priority and interest in the matter seem to be in absolute short supply. The Urban Affairs Department as such is a stakeholder that is apparently approaching the current crisis with an unclear, ad-hoc and unreliable agenda.

Of much greater concern therefore is the indifferent stance of the people of Shillong to the status of Marten; their apparent indifference to the larger question of solid waste management and most important the outcome of the discussions between the SSMP and the Urban Affairs Department. The upshot of these discussions are going to affect each and every one of us and therefore the silence of the Dorbars of Shillong who represent the civic interest of the people of this city is disturbing if not actually alarming. Does it mean that the Rangbah

An unfortunate aspect of our present solid waste garbage disposal practice is that segregation of waste has not been possible. One is however given to understand that such a practice also prevails in other parts of the world and that the Koreans have developed a technology wherein unsegregated waste (as what happens in Shillong) is processed into fuel briquettes. These briquettes are sold and the entire process is self-sustaining. So the focus should now be on a waste processing unit not a landfill where waste is simply dumped, forgotten then left to rot and stink. It is believed that the Koreans had visited Shillong and had offered such processing technology to the state but the main stumbling block had been availability of land to set up the unit.

Now if the CM can facilitate land in a declared wild life sanctuary for the expansion of Star Cements mining operations, I see no reason why our politicians cannot bestir themselves to procure some land for setting up a garbage processing plant not only for Shillong but for all the other urban units of Meghalaya. It is the need of the hour! Funding under the Smart City project and from DoNER should not be a problem and the interest of the people will be served.

Mr Naba Bhattacharjee, member of the State Planning Board had visited garbage processing units in Korea, had interacted with the Koreans and has detailed information on how this process works. His views can shed more light in our search for an environmentally friendly garbage disposal system. A permanent solution based on proven waste disposal technology should be the demand and agenda of our main stakeholders - the Dorbar Shnongs of Shillong. Simply shifting Marten to some other landfill location is not the permanent solution that we need. Dorbars should be united in their demand for the Govt to sit up and listen.

### Letters to the Editor

#### On arrogance and servility

Editor,  
The photograph published on the front page of your newspaper on July 23, 2021 showing an ambulance with a patient which was forced to wait at the Shillong Civil Hospital Premises as police conducted a drill ahead of the visit of the Union Home Minister has proved yet again that a photograph can speak a thousand words. It mirrors the depths of inhumanity we have sunk into. Common people are told in no uncertain terms that their lives count for nothing. The arrogance of power on open display is mind boggling and sickening. The photograph also implies that arrogance has a flipside --- servility. It means that the arrogant are also willing to worship those who are higher up in the power hierarchy. Indeed, the Ri Tibpiew Tiplei has travelled a long way down the bottom in a few decades.

Yours etc.,  
Samuel Swett,  
Shillong-2

#### BJP's hold on Meghalaya

Editor,  
It was all too visible that the BJP Government in Delhi holds complete sway over Meghalaya. In 2023, we can expect more BJP MLAs to be elected since the NPP is

just a camouflage for the BJP and serves as its footstool. The security drill for Union Home Minister has been sent by Delhi and the State Government has to merely obey every dictat from the Centre, including keeping citizens locked in by closing down every shop; every market, every road. This is really unprecedented and dictatorial. Recently this newspaper carried a report that some MLAs in the present house want to join the BJP. I will not be surprised if those are Congress MLAs. They have nothing to look forward to since the Congress leadership lives in a bubble and refuses to recognise its organisational problems. They can't seem to find another leader more politically savvy and capable than Rahul Gandhi. 2023 will be here soon and Congress MLAs cannot wait forever for their party to be resurrected. Congress leaders like Mukul Sangma, Vincent Pala, Charles Pyngrupe would be pursuing a nebulous political future if they stick on to the Congress - a party that refuses to learn any lessons. Many believe that the Pegasus snooping spyware case will bring the BJP down. But that's not going to happen. The BJP has enough fire-fighting abilities and will come out unscathed. Mark my words!

Yours etc.,  
M Syngkli,  
Shillong- 14

tribals too. The regional parties on their own will never come to power. They don't see eye to eye on anything - much less on leadership. It is Meghalaya's fate that it will always be ruled by a national party so it's better to accept that and move on and not pretend that the BJP is a "No No" here in this state.

Senior Congress leaders like Mukul Sangma, Vincent Pala, Charles Pyngrupe would be pursuing a nebulous political future if they stick on to the Congress - a party that refuses to learn any lessons. Many believe that the Pegasus snooping spyware case will bring the BJP down. But that's not going to happen. The BJP has enough fire-fighting abilities and will come out unscathed. Mark my words!

Yours etc.,  
M Syngkli,  
Shillong- 14

#### Shrinking economy, no vision

Editor,  
In the write up, "How long is too long?" (ST July 23, 2021), the writer has raised many pertinent questions and I fully agree with her that "the paucity of research and data in Meghalaya is troubling." This is a fact because the cluster numbers are made available to the public which I see in Shillong Times everyday but there is no analysis to

explain how and why Mawlai registered so many positive cases. There is every possibility that people queuing up to fetch water are spreading the infection when mask is not worn properly and distancing is not observed that allows the droplets to have a field day. It could be lack of awareness on the part of the people and the Health Department not doing its job well in enlightening them. We are depending on the research of WHO, MoHFW, USA, UK and Israel about Covid-19 but our own research and analysis is absent except that only numbers are being shared on clusters of infection on a day to day basis without any analysis on how, what and why some clusters record higher numbers than others. Here the concerned department has to wake up and provide proper information to the public who they are paid to service. The Government on its part has to first speed up the implementation of JJM and AMRUT and stop making announcement of new ideas that it proposes to take up when the coffers are empty.

Patricia Mukhim has correctly observed that the Indian Institute of Public Health (IIPH), Shillong, "needs to be more visible as an independent institution". Meghalaya has already borne the brunt of the first lockdown and as per my estimate approximately Rs 11,000 crores business was lost because of this insensible lockdown. Though

the Chief Secretary on July 5, 2021 admitted that Covid-19 has taken a toll on the state's economy but could not quantify the losses. "Perhaps after a month, we will be able to tell you how much the state has suffered. The losses are definitely huge," he said. I hope the report will be out in another 12 days as assured by the Chief Secretary Mr MS Rao.

Yours etc.,  
Vijay K Lyngdoh  
Via email

#### A border dispute

Editor,  
In this so-called "dispute" (?) between the two states - Assam and Meghalaya - we should realize that there was no objection to the boundaries of the Districts within the province till 14th August, 1947, the last day of British rule in India. So, we should assume that those district boundaries which, we believed, were defined by the Act XIV of 1874 (Boundary Notification under section 8) under Act IV (B.C) of 1864 and Regulation II of 1880 and Boundary Notification under Act XXII of 1869 and Regulation I of 1878, were the ones accepted by all concerned - province and the districts as defined.

There was no talk of boundary dispute until 1985; thirteen years after the State was established.

In October, 1985, the Governments of Meghalaya

and Assam had referred the question of interpretation of the boundaries between the two states to the Committee headed by Mr. Justice, Y. V. Chandrachud, former Chief Justice of India. The Committee was to complete the work within a period of six months - It submitted its report in 1987. The report was not made public and is not made public until now.

These facts are bound to raise questions among the people at any time; but, no one in Meghalaya does so because the people had implicit faith in their elected representatives.

Now that the issue has become centre stage in our polity because of Langphih and other transgression by the Assam Police, so, we ask :- (a) what is in the Committee report? (b) Why is it not made public? (c) We suggest that Mr. Conrad Sangma read the report of Assam-Meghalaya Boundary Committee (July 27, 1987) and tell us what he understands about it or he should get his legal experts to tell us why it was not accepted/why the Government of Meghalaya did not accept the Y. V. Chandrachud Committee's Report?

Yours etc.,  
Morning Star Sumer,  
Shillong - 2

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

"Any kind of crisis can be good. It wakes you up."  
— Ryan Reynolds

The Shillong Times

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HM's visit: A stocktaking

THE sum and substance of Union Home Minister, Amit Shah's visit was to get the parties in conflict over state borders to sit across the table and iron out their differences. Those in the HM's inner circle say that the border conflicts between Assam and the states adjoining it namely Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh will be resolved during this Government's tenure. How that will be achieved is essentially politics. All the governments in power in the above four states are either with BJP or aligned with the NDA. Perhaps Amit Shah has a clear mandate from the Prime Minister himself to sort out the mess in the eastern fringes of this country. Shah in fact confidently announced that insurgency/militancy is dead and under the Modi regime people and governments in the region are singing the tune of development. Shah is not far off the mark. Among the existing militant outfits only the ULFA led by Paresh Baruah now holed up in neighbouring Myanmar is not in talks with the Government of India. The rest, including the NSCN(IM) and the other breakaway groups have all agreed to sit down for talks. Assam CM, Himanta Biswa Sarma might soon get Baruah to come over and sign a truce. After all, he is getting on in years and the numbers of rebels have dwindled considerably after the Myanmar military took over the reins of the country. The junta is unsparing when it comes to rebel groups from foreign countries taking refuge in its territories and had collaborated with India in flushing out extremist groups from the country.

Things have undergone a change. The law and order machinery and the military under the NDA is uncompromising when it comes to dealing with terror outfits. This is evident from what's happening in Kashmir and the reduction in militant activities in the valley. There are fringe groups that continue to extort and make life difficult for people in Nagaland and to an extent in Assam but the Centre is keeping a strict eye on these activities and is likely to apply pressure on state governments to deal with the situation or allow the armed forces to do so.

Modi's Act East Policy slogan which intends to create economic hubs in the North Eastern states to do business with South East Asia and beyond has not taken off. The internal political strife in Myanmar has put paid to all ideas of economic engagement with South East Asia as Myanmar - the bridge is temporarily dislocated. Other than putting pressure on the states to resolve the border imbroglio, Shah's visit is inconsequential being reduced as it has to a series of inaugurations of projects mostly started by the previous Congress Government.

Covid, Pegasus. China. climate crisis

Life on Earth is becoming an Orwellian nightmare

By TN Ninan

comparison as a threat.

Without corrective action, an Orwellian nightmare beckons.

Fourth, there is a global power shift under way as

Japan.

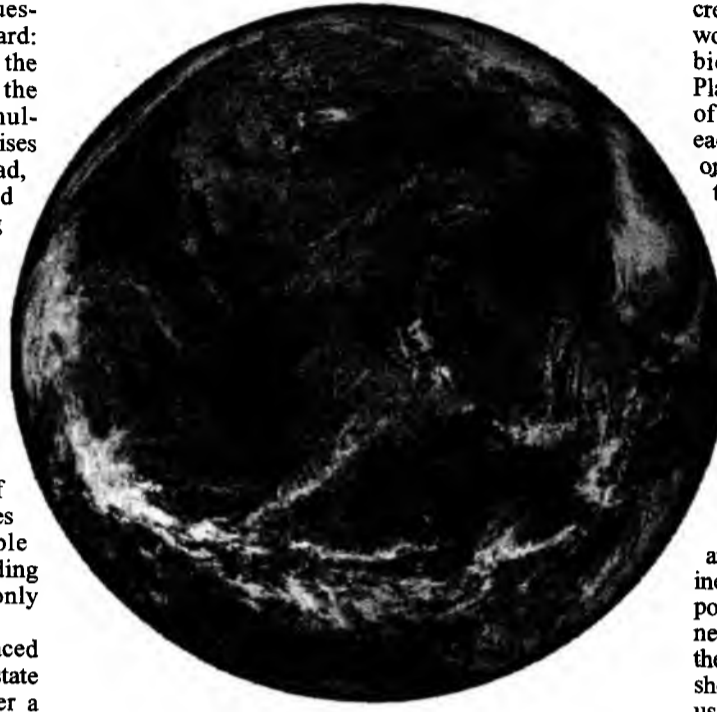
A final addition to the causes of current neuroses is the growing inequality that threatens the future stability of societies in countries both rich, poor and

These developments are driven by forces that have complex roots in economic systems, the vulnerabilities of networked societies, historical memories, the primeval urges for more power and wealth, and the relentless march of technology that defines the anthropocene age, creating a civilisation that (it would seem) needs to create bionic species and escape Planet Earth in the next stage of its evolution. Ironically, each of these developments once facilitated the illusion that (in the Dickensian summary) "We are all going direct to heaven", only for the realisation to dawn, as the author put it, that in fact "We are all going direct the other way".

How does one confront these trends? The world has come alive to the dangers of climate change, but the tipping point is probably long past and a price must be paid. The inequality in societies and the political dangers it poses need new social compacts where the wealthy look beyond their short-term self-interest. It is useful here to recall what a person rightly reviled for his racist imperialism did as a young British minister early in the last century.

Winston Churchill, in the unlikely role of reformer, introduced an eight-hour day for miners, the right to a minimum wage and meal breaks, employment exchanges, a state-subsidised unemployment insurance scheme, and not least a system to prosecute exploitative employers. He also campaigned for the taxation of wealth - not because he was a Leftist but to preserve the existing order by offering a fairer deal. A fairer deal is needed today, and would help to build new bulwarks for endangered democracies and institutions, without which we cannot address the deeper pathologies.

**By special arrangement with Business Standard**  
(The author is former editor Business Standard)



the US struggles to contain the multi-faceted rise of a China determined to establish regional hegemony and challenge what was briefly an American imperium. Such power shifts usually come along with military conflict. World War I, in its many proximate causes, had as an underlying factor the

middle-income. A spreading underclass consciousness seeks escape from harsh realities through a retreat into cultural identities and ethnic hostilities - substitutes for the brighter economic futures once dreamed of. Meanwhile, policymakers risk both inflation and instability as they test the

*"How does one confront these trends? The world has come alive to the dangers of climate change, but the tipping point is probably long past and a price must be paid. The inequality in societies and the political dangers it poses need new social compacts where the wealthy look beyond their short-term self-interest."*

rise of Germany. A decade earlier, the unexpected outcome of the Russo-Japanese war had signalled the rise of

limits of fiscal and monetary experimentation.

*"We are all going direct the other way"*

Pegasus snoopgate: Macron and Modi are studies in contrast

French president orders probe, Indian PM resorts to silence

By Sushil Kutty

The French are quick on their feet. Within 24 hours of 'Forbidden Stories' piercing the cover on Pegasus spyware, with French President Emmanuel Macron's personal telephone numbers also among the infected, France ordered an investigation. And on July 25, Macron called new Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and requested him to get to the bottom of the affair, ASAP. Earlier, Macron had spoken of a "series of investiga-

and waves of deception. A criminal complaint has been lodged in France by the editor of Mediapart, whose name figures in the Pegasus-hacked list. In India nobody is thinking of filing a police complaint or going to court. The Modi Government is silent as a grave, while the BJP is asking those accusing the Modi Government to go to the cops.

"Let Rahul Gandhi submit his phones for forensic inspection," BJP spokesper-



sons are shouting from TV studios, even as the opposition parties are retaliating with "the Modi Government should order a probe ASAP". This is the script played out every evening on TV channels and getting repetitive by the day. The only impatient BJP leader is Subramanian Swamy, who said: "If we have nothing to hide, then Modi should write to Israeli PM and seek the truth about the NSO's Pegasus project including who paid for it."

The names of over 40 Indian journalists figure in the leaked database. Hacks working with the Hindustan Times, The Hindu, India Today, Indian Express and Network18. And some of these journalists report on sensitive issues pertaining to the country's external and internal security - on defence, home, election commission and Kashmir! Nobody has to remind Modi that these are sensitive beats with a bearing on India's security.

The Congress wants an independent probe. There's a demand for Union Home Minister Amit Shah's resignation. Amnesty International says 14 world leaders' phones were targeted for hacking. The NSO Group, however, denied that Pegasus was used to hack or infect. This is the Modi Government wouldn't divulge if India had "bought" Pegasus. Snooping on political rivals and citizens is hardly gentlemanly, and Modi and Shah do not want to come out ungentlemanly, and like novices when it comes to India's security.

Which, by the way, brings

us to the question, whether NSA Ajit Doval has something to contribute to the Modi Government's refusal to clear the air on Pegasus? Mr. Doval likes cloak and dagger and is the 'Spy's Spy' - his exploits straight out of the 'Spy who Came In From The Cold'. Reports say Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's phone was slated to be 'Pegased, and now the Pakistanis are in a tizzy.

Since Macron told Bennett that Morocco used Pegasus to snoop on his cell-phones, what's the guarantee that foreign governments haven't already got hold of India's secrets? Isn't it time Prime Minister Narendra Modi became serious? Shouldn't Modi, like Macron, call up Bennett and ask him to take the issue seriously? Cannot let the impression gain that authoritarians are getting away with impunity. (IPA Service)

*"For Macron's Office Pegasus might amount to a heart attack - serious! But for Modi's PMO, it is common cold, happens to all, happens all the time! This even as temperatures rose to a crescendo all around."*

hacked list. And the day after the story hit headlines, Macron's Office said, "If the facts are true, they are clearly very serious. All light will be shed on these media revelations... Some French victims have already announced they would file complaints, and legal investigations will therefore be launched".

Modi's Office didn't show similar alacrity. In fact, all is quiet on the PMO Front. For Macron's Office Pegasus might amount to a heart attack - serious! But for Modi's PMO, it is common cold, happens to all, happens all the time! This even as temperatures rose to a crescendo all around. The Opposition parties, led by the Congress, wanted a post-mortem by a certified authority, but the ruling BJP asked, "Where's the body to conduct the autopsy on?"

There couldn't be bigger bamboozlement, waves

us to the question, whether NSA Ajit Doval has something to contribute to the Modi Government's refusal to clear the air on Pegasus? Mr. Doval likes cloak and dagger and is the 'Spy's Spy' - his exploits straight out of the 'Spy who Came In From The Cold'. Reports say Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's phone was slated to be 'Pegased, and now the Pakistanis are in a tizzy.

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Letters to the Editor

Saving face when things go downhill

Editor,

A month has passed by since the food grain scam shook Meghalaya as 1 lakh bags of rice was seized from a godown in Assam. This scam brought to light the irregularities in the Social Welfare Department and its alleged involvement with a tainted company to which the Department allocates the rice, which then gets supplied under the SNP. After much deliberation, the government constituted an independent inquiry commission to get the matter probed.

On July 24, members of the managing committee of Mynri Umsning Upper Primary School informed the Hynniewtrep Youth Council (HYC) that a school in Ri-Bhoi District received sacks of rotten rice meant for the mid-day meal programme for school students. The Mid Day Meal Scheme was introduced in Meghalaya since 1995 to provide dry rations to primary schools. One of the primary objectives of the Mid Day Meal Programme in Meghalaya is to attract more children to come to school and increase enrolment and attendance bringing down the drop-out rate while also improving the nutritional status of children and encouraging them to attend school regularly.

In Meghalaya, the Mid Day Meal Scheme falls under the watch of the Directorate of School Education & Literacy, a branch of the Education Department in the State. We all know that children need a healthy balanced diet containing foods that will add to their growth and nutritional needs. In India, it has been found that many children under the age of 15

succumb to death every year because of poor nutrition, which leads to 'Childhood Malnutrition'. This recent incident that came to light had prompted the HYC to demand an enquiry by the Education Department.

There have been instances of various CAG reports stating the poor quality of mid-day meals served in schools across the country. In our State, this is not the first that a scam related to the mid-day meal programme has been unearthed. There have been instances in the past when similar cases were reported in different districts of Meghalaya. It makes me wonder then that if this is not something new, why has the Education Department not done anything yet? It seems no action has been taken; thus, another incident follows. Is it not necessary to look into such matters, especially as it concerns the health and well-being of the students? I am sure the files and complaints related to these incidents are lying piled up somewhere in a cupboard bearing dust, waiting to be uncovered.

In all these, it is also ironic that whenever such incidences occur, the Department always has to be under the watch of a United Democratic Party (UDP) legislator. I am not here to point fingers at this Party. No. But the only reason that makes me do so is because from multiple observances, this Party is one that likes to criticize the government in all aspects, so much so, that they enjoy nipping and seizing every opportunity they can get to demean the government, even highlighting irregularities, but once something happens that's related to a minister of their Party, they recoil into their caves and do not raise a question. Is it because the concerned department at

fault is under the watch of a minister from their party that they take a silent stance? When the rice meant for the underprivileged children was being transported to another State, they did not utter a word; simply because the minister in charge of the Social Welfare Department is a UDP legislator. Now, with the children in schools being fed rotten rice, we have still heard nothing from the minister in charge, Education - Lahkmen Rymbui or the Party.

Scams related to the mid-day meal scheme have occurred multiple times in Meghalaya. This should have been a priority for the Minister to conduct a probe into the matter and nip it in the bud. But it is depressing to see that nothing is being done. Our education system is in shambles; illegal transportation of coal and other irregularities are still taking place and now scams of poor-quality food under the mid-day meal scheme all make us question the competence of this UDP minister who we all thought would fit the portfolios best because he belongs to a regional party that claims to look into the welfare of the people.

I also would like to pat the back of organizations like the HYC which bring to light such matters that concern the welfare of the citizens at large.

Yours etc.,  
Maitshaphrang Khongwir  
Shillong - 8

A Young Airline with promises to break

Editor,

Since the daily operations of flights in and out of Shillong (Umrroi) Airport by Indigo Airlines we have seen

many other airlines too that are keen to start flights from our lone, young yet developing airport. One of these is Flybig Airlines which has promised and also advertised its operations from Shillong to Delhi. As a regular flier, I was happy to hear this news and had made plans to travel to New Delhi (Indira Gandhi International Airport) on Flybig.

I remember I had planned in the month of January and visited the company's website to make reservations only to find that Shillong was not on the destination list at all. This left me dumb struck as advertisements and hoardings were seen all over the city boasting of this young and new airline. They had taken on lease SpiceJet's aircraft at that time for operations as they had not yet received their own aircraft.

Nevertheless, I contacted the customer care service of Flybig only to find out that there was no flight between New Delhi and Shillong and till date this is an impending issue whereby no further notice was received from Flybig Airlines regarding operational status etc. I later learnt that it had started operations in some parts of the country including Guwahati to Rupsi, Dibrugarh, Agartala, Pasighat and other sectors.

Now the question is why do these young airlines make imprudent and tall claims to start flights and then do not fulfil their commitment to serve the people of the State and why is the Government quiet on this matter? We need answers. After all this particular airline had even done an inaugural flight from Shillong to Delhi, and now the services have suddenly stopped. This is ridiculous and an embarrassment for the airline company and for us and our State Government.

I request the AAI Shillong, DGCA and The Transport Department of the State to treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves and resolve it at the earliest.

Last but not the least, I praise Indigo Airlines for their commitment of serving the people of the State and now it is expanding its aviation network to other parts of the North East. Big kudos to the Go Indigo Team. I wish Indigo airlines was given this route (Shillong-Delhi-Shillong) for operations or any major airline of the country to operate. Then we could probably see the Shillong-Delhi connectivity dream come true.

Yours etc.,  
Dr. Chanmiki Laloo  
Via Email

Time to Audit official Covid stats

Editor,

The false Covid 19 death reporting of Stanborlang Dohtdong (18) is a sign of how callous the health system has become in Meghalaya. A senior officer committing such 'miscommunication' cannot be let go easily through apology. There needs to be thorough investigation and accountability.

This case speaks volumes of the competence levels of health officials employed by the state govt. If one cannot feed a simple statistical data of death into the system, I can fully understand what is to come when faced with bigger tasks. Questions will be asked as to the competence and skill levels including the method of recruitment of such officials and other fellow colleagues who are working in a similar environment.

It raises serious doubts as to how many more such

cases of 'miscommunication' could there have been in the piles of Covid related data shared everyday by the state govt. Is anyone bothered to look into the details? Isn't it because of such data that the state continues to adopt a policy of imposing lockdown and other restrictions that seem never ending?

The reported death of an 18-year old should have raised alarm bells immediately in the mind of any sensitive health official to cross check the information as Covid affects the elderly more. Why was not reverification done to reconfirm the case before sharing data with the public? Had not the family of Stanborlang made the revelation, the case would have been brushed under the carpet.

This matter needs to be investigated thoroughly and urgently. Likewise all Covid related deaths and hospitalisation needs to be audited by a third party to check any anomaly or hidden conspiracy. Media too should be allowed to recheck/verify the names of all dead Covid victims. In the same spirit, all Covid positive cases need to be reverified as RT PCR tests are determined by the technical competence of the person performing the test and the analytical skills of the interpreters.

If more such false cases are found, it would suggest that the number of Covid deaths is much lower than official statistics, and therefore the danger of the disease has been overblown.

Let truth guide us all  
Yours etc.,  
Bhaskar D  
Via email

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

*"Intimidation, harassment and violence have no place in a democracy."*  
— Mo Ibrahim

## The Shillong Times

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### Border dispute turns bloody

IT is ironic that 48 hours after the chief ministers of the eight North Eastern states met at Shillong on July 24-25 to deliberate on the issue of contested borders, with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in attendance, violence erupted in the Assam-Mizoram border claiming the lives of six Assam policemen and injuring many others. Coincidentally, there was a fracas in the Assam-Meghalaya border at Longkhuli in Ri Bhoi District too where Assam Police prevented the setting up of electric poles in areas they claim to belong to Assam. These border skirmishes between Assam-Nagaland, Assam-Mizoram and Assam-Meghalaya have also been the location of much violence and bloodshed. Between 1979-1985 at least 100 people have died in the clashes between Assam and Nagaland. While some of these disputes have reached the Supreme Court or have been referred to Commissions headed by retired judges, their recommendations have been disregarded.

The North Eastern states could gain more by collaboration, more so when Assam is the link state to the other six states. In the past Assam had inflicted economic blockades on Mizoram and Nagaland after every border tussle and caused pain to people of these respective states. No central government has taken these border disputes seriously, much less tried to resolve them. Institutions like the North Eastern Council and later the Ministry for Development of the North East (DoNER) too never invested their time and effort to iron out these differences. Land being a scarce commodity is much sought for by states with bigger populations and shrinking spaces for accommodating their growing population.

It is evident that the borders will continue to remain contentious until some creative solutions are found. In the past there were proposals to turn the contested areas into economic zones which will benefit both states and become growth centres. Disputed borders can, through a process of give and take, also become educational hubs, IT parks, health centres and tourist destinations where investments will come from DoNER and the benefits shared by people across borders. It would be in the interest of all concerned if all these contested areas were administered by a central agency to prevent future claims and counter-claims. How would it be if these areas were brought under one umbrella administration such as a centrally administered territory so that there is no quarrel over which state is investing more and which one less, even while people from both sides of the divide who are already residents there gain economically and also by way of good educational and health facilities that could come up in these contested spaces.

# He came, he saw, he did not conquer

By Albert Thyrniang

Union Home Minister, Amit Shah was on a two day visit to the state on July 24 and 25. Much was expected from his high profile visit but the outcome was disappointing. It was a damp squib for many!

On Inner Line Permit he had nothing to say. He did not give any commitment whether ILP will be implemented in the state or not. There was no assurance absolutely. This had left the pro-ILP groups fuming, their hopes of seeing the state under the ILP regime, dashed to the ground. Ever since the Legislative Assembly, in its special session, adopted the resolution on December 20, 2019 recommending the central government to bring Meghalaya under the colonial law to counter CAA, the cry for the same has been very loud, courtesy a series of agitations. Ministers camped in Delhi in the beginning of 2020 for appointment with Shah but failed to make any impression.

Deputy Chief Minister, Prestone Tynsong returned home and informed the public that the Union Home Minister himself would visit the state to understand the situation via a detailed discussion with the stakeholders. The promise was never sincere. It was never kept. It was a mere delay tactic unsuspected by the state government and especially by the pro-ILP groups. The second most powerful person in the country came to Shillong on January 23, 2021 but the pressure groups were politely pushed away after the photo-ops of them handing their memoranda to the guest were done with. Since that humiliating experience, demands for immediate implementation of ILP has been simmering. To calm tempers down the state government again invited Shah to visit the state again. The lieutenant of the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi did come. The pro-ILP pressure groups pinned their hopes on his second visit in less than a year. Alas! It was not much of a difference from the first visit. After the 15/20 minute audience, the man who was the force behind CAB/CAA, kept completely mum leaving the pressure group leaders disgruntled.

Introduction of ILP in Meghalaya is, of course, not a simplistic decision. The crave for it is perhaps unnecessary too. The state is already shielded against CAA by the Sixth Schedule. The discussion should have been

on portions of non-Scheduled areas in Shillong city being included in the Sixth Schedule. Another matter that makes Meghalaya unfavourable to ILP is because of its transit nature. However, for the Union Home Minister not to explain the reasons for the refusal to cover the state under the British era law is unacceptable. The ILP leaders termed the silence of Home Minister an insult to them and to the 60 MLAs who said 'yes' to ILP two years ago. ILP may be unsuitable for and unnecessary in Meghalaya but a clear clarification is required. It is only just. It is a minimum respect to the people of the state.

The C&RD Minister, Hamletson Dohling revealed that Shah promised to look into the matter. If the Home Minister assured so, why did he not utter a word to the pressure group leaders? The state minister is only attempting to pacify the agitating leaders. Anyway, the present C&RD Minister has understood that being in government is different from shouting from the side lines. The minister was the general secretary of the KSU in his activism days. Leaders of pressure groups are impatient. They want quick solutions. We have heard them scream how the Harijan Colony can be solved easily in record time but when they become ministers they realise that things don't work the way they want.

One gets the impression that the MDA government is no longer keen on ILP. No aggressive pursuance was seen. No posturing was visible. Perhaps the MDA does not want to offend the NDA. The Chief Minister and his colleagues want to be in the good books of Prime Minister, Modi and his aides. But has friendship worked? Not with regards to the ILP. If the question is asked to the ministers and legislators from the ruling coalition they take refuge by pointing to the unanimous resolution. But do they have personal convictions about the necessity of ILP? Even the BJP MLAs may, by now, not be too convinced about the ILP.

The Union Home Minister launched the Green Sohra Afforestation Campaign and inaugurated the Greater Sohra Water Supply Scheme at Sohra on Sunday (July 25). Perhaps, it was for the first time that a government function was held

on Sunday in the Christian majority state. No wonder it landed in controversy with a politician and religious leaders raising the red flag saying the programme could have been fixed on any other day. On the face of it, there is nothing wrong in organising an official function on a Sunday. Good can be done on Sundays. But one suspects that the Sohra event was intentionally arranged. It was to diminish the importance of Sunday, the most significant holiday for Christians. If Sunday was unavoidable then there is nothing to be worried about but if the plan was to disregard the Christian community then we have to raise our voices. The Hindutva ideology has infiltrated into the MDA government. It is now accepted that the Chief Minister of Meghalaya has shared values with right wing circles. His party the NPP is branded as a camouflage of the BJP. But the fault is not only with the Chief Minister alone. Why did the other ministers have no objection to the Sunday ceremony?

In other parts of India migrant Christians work on Sundays. If they don't they lose their jobs. Thus in Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore etc Sundays are working days in hotels, restaurants, banks, malls and other services. And there are a lot of migrants from Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram and the other North Eastern states working in these cities. To tell them that it is a sin to work on a Sunday is inhuman and ungodly. Keeping Sunday holy is not merely attending Church. To bring the rule that we should not earn on Sunday is also insensitive.

In a village that this writer has recently been to no one is permitted to open their shops on Sundays. If they do so they are fined. Their religious zeal is admirable. But one personally knows that a couple of the petty shop keepers struggle to have a square meal on Sundays because they can't earn anything. Even as I tried to cope with this harsh reality I suddenly realised that I, as a religious leader, 'earn' mostly on Sundays. Then who am I to vouch for a 'no business policy' on the 'Day of the Lord'? But it does not mean I propagate work on Sundays. It does not mean I disrespect those who consider the 'rest' day significant. Per se the Sohra function on a Sunday was fine. But if there is a sinister

intention behind it, then it is problematic.

Another dissenting note against the public event was that it was held in spite of the fact that Churches are closed and religious gatherings are still banned. Even for funerals only ten attendants are allowed. Reports say that there were at least 60 vehicles for the event in Sohra. A religious leader vented his frustration on Youtube saying 'if they (the law makers) organise functions is okay but if we the ordinary citizens do so it is not okay'. Many also pointed out that Amit Shah was photographed without wearing a mask during functions. The law makers are law breakers. Police personnel saluted Amit Shah but penalised people on the street for not wearing masks. Unfortunately there are two sets of rules in the state.

On a mandate from the Prime Minister himself the Home Minister also addressed the North East Chief Ministers and stressed on the need to amicably resolve the long standing boundary disputes Assam has with Mizoram, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. But no sooner had Shah concluded his stay when a skirmish took place in Longkhuli village, Umling, Ri Bhoi district. The next day six Assam cops were killed and around 80 people injured in firing by Mizoram police in Lailapur along Mizoram-Cachar border. Even as the Home Minister lectured on cordial solutions the vexed dispute has escalated into full-blown confrontation. Assam and Meghalaya had agreed on a 'give and take' approach to redraw their boundaries. Do the two states have in mind which disputed areas in the border to 'give and take'? If names do not come up, then why agree on the policy? So this is easier said than done.

To expect that the boundary row will be settled before Meghalaya's golden jubilee is impractical. Amit Shah did not come to endear himself with the people of Meghalaya. His next visit could be hostile. We might see boycott and black flags greeting his long convoy. But the central and state governments could be enacting a drama. ILP could be granted just prior to Meghalaya Assembly elections of 2023 so that the BJP, NPP and the allies return to power. Amit Shah could be a hero then!

albert.thyrniang74@gmail.com

## A break-in that shames and endangers India

By Jagdish Rattanani

In 1983, the well-known Pulitzer Prize-winning US journalist Seymour Hersh wrote a book (The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House) in which he "revealed" that Morarji Desai had worked as a CIA spy. No one in India believed him. Supposedly well-researched allegations by a journalist known for such nation-stirring exposés as the My Lai Massacre, and charges which would have routinely stuck in other cases, were met with almost unanimous contempt and dismissal across India—such was the moral standing of Morarji-bhai, whether in power or not. Morarji Desai sued and lost the case in the US courts on legalese but that loss did not matter as this nation cared not what anyone said of a Prime Minister known for his integrity.

Cut to today, and a series of denials, statements and the force of an army of social media accounts fail to give any credibility to a government that is armed with a brute majority in Parliament but has little moral standing in the eyes of many Indians. The divisions it has created, the strife that it has nurtured and the diet of hatred that it has served only go to show and tell that the Pegasus scandal is exactly the kind of ditch that this government would drive the nation into.

Rahul Gandhi is not too off the mark when he calls this an act of treason. This is the act of deploying a weapon of such destructive power that the homes and private spaces of key people in India are broken into, which is what the spyware built and sold by the NSO

won't break in! What this is saying is trust us—we do the right things. And trust is precisely what is missing in this relationship. Apart from internal trust issues in India, who could trust a company that sells software that intrudes into phones without the target having to do anything for the malware to takeover and leak data? Further, this package is sold to other governments without identifying the buyers, while seeking "approval from the export controls unit of Israel's Ministry of Defense, an unusual decision because at the time the unit only regulated overseas weapons sales," to quote the Washington Post. Who is to say if the reported hacking by the Indian government, busy settling personal scores and political battles, provided a smokescreen for foreign powers to hack into key powers and positions in India, including listening in to meetings of our highest political and military authorities? Israel may be categorised as a friendly power today but it is worth pointing out that its closest ally, the United States, does not allow the software to operate on its shores or on US based phones.

From an outside perspective, the company is more like a military-intelligence collaborator, selling weapons-grade equipment to collaborators it sees as friends, in the long-term strategic interests of its nation. Here is a master controller allowing customers to play their little games and making money on it knowing full well that it can interfere and stop the game when required.

In any case, it should be

*"The picture of the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, holding aloft her smartphone, plastered with brown tape to prevent prying eyes from looking, recording, breaking in is in many ways the picture of India - equally broken, taped and patched. The Chief Minister is not on the list of those allegedly hacked but you don't have to be on the list to worry."*

group of Israel is designed to do. The government has of course denied the reports that have stirred a global alert. Ashwini Vaishnav, the Minister of Electronics & Information Technology, says illegal surveillance is not possible in India "with the checks and balances in our laws and our robust institutions". It also leans on the NSO denial, saying: "It is evident that NSO has also clearly rubbished the claims in the report." Yet, the government is unwilling to categorically state whether it has bought and deployed the NSO-built spyware or not.

The argument that the data from this act of illegal snooping was available not to the Israeli company/group that sold the stuff but only to the Indian government that presumably bought and deployed this weapon is frivolous. Consider what the NSO group, which has built and licensed the Pegasus software to select governments, said on July 21: "We do not operate the system, nor do we have access to the data of our customers, yet they are obligated to provide us with such information under investigations... NSO will thoroughly investigate any credible proof of misuse of its technologies, as we always had, and will shut down the system where necessary."

The NSO co-founder and CEO Shalev Hulio has been quoted by Forbes as saying: "While NSO isn't actively monitoring what customers do with its technology, the company can get access to log files from customers when it has cause to investigate, allowing the company's auditors to check what numbers were selected for surveillance."

This appears to be a case of we can break in but we

anyone's guess that a super-hacker let loose isn't about to have any boundaries; hacker and hacked are both trapped. In this view, India's ramparts have been breached and the nation's sovereignty has been put on the line by a bunch of leaders who continue to plunder the richness and the intangible wealth of India - its democratic traditions, its respect for diversity and the values of togetherness that bind us as one nation. This is why the charge of treason holds.

The picture of the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, holding aloft her smartphone, plastered with brown tape to prevent prying eyes from looking, recording, breaking in is in many ways the picture of India - equally broken, taped and patched. The Chief Minister is not on the list of those allegedly hacked but you don't have to be on the list to worry. Anyone seeking to protect themselves will have to adopt such rudimentary stopgaps while we ponder how we had reached this low.

The government can escape the charge of treason if it cooperates across the political spectrum and agrees to an impartial JPC probe. If its hands are clean, nothing is lost and there is everything to be gained from a probe that can record, if required, some of the evidence in private. In India, it is time to say "enough is enough", which curiously is the header of a NSO statement that announced "it will no longer be responding to media inquiries on this matter..."

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

### Letters to the Editor

#### No such thing as a free-ride

Editor,  
Rajya Sabha MP Manoj Jha (RJD) deserves kudos for his historic speech in parliament. "I pay my tax, so I demand my rights," is a common refrain among many, "educated elite and enlightened," persons! It seems they are engaged in a sort of "charity" to the State by paying taxes on their income with those not falling within the ambit of tax being "lesser citizens" also having no authority to raise rights entitled to a human being!

Jha deserves special kudos for hitting the nail hard right on the head by stressing, "This is a welfare state, isn't it? When a poor man buys a bar of soap, he is as much a taxpayer as are Adani and Ambani. And you're telling him 'free vaccine, free treatment, free ration!' Yes, it needs to be repeatedly reminded to the class-conscious Indians that each and every citizen of the country pays taxes - direct or indirect. So even the richest of rich hold no right to consider themselves as belonging to any "special stock" with the indirect tax payer being any lesser to them in any respect.

Hence as citizens of that State, all are equally entitled to all sorts of rights, hence

no Government at the Centre or any state holds any moral right to blow its trumpet of providing necessary amenities/services for "free"; more so when the recipient of the supposedly welfare state is of economically poor vintage. Jha has rightly stated that the citizens have a stake upon the amenities/services and it is nothing but denigration of the recipient when the State advertises its "magnanimity" by stressing upon the word "free".

While Jha has rightly shown the mirror to the top honchos of that particular party/Government who dare to project themselves as "successful warriors" against Covid-19 by sweeping aside the deaths and miseries of several millions either falling to the virus, languishing in "Long March" upon highways after finding themselves homeless overnight, driven to suicide, turning jobless with innumerable students/children compelled to enter the labour market. Jha also stressed on the collective failure of all governments since 1947 for not ensuring Constitutional guarantee of the right to health life and work for all citizens. After all, the basic necessities of food, shelter, attire, health, justice, education and livelihood are infinitely more important than the moon/mars missions, hosting Asian/Common-

wealth Games or coming up with gigantic statues, lofty flags and bullet trains for the elite to name a few!

All political parties and Governments, be it in the Centre or states, should awaken their respective conscience on the cardinal call of Manoj Jha and devote all its resources, energy and time towards welfare of common Indians only; ensuring basic human necessities, rights and dignity to literally each and every citizen of the country.

Yours etc.,  
Kajal Chatterjee,  
Via email

#### How the education system failed us

Editor,  
As a student of class X, I write this to address an issue that has been brushed aside too often. This current system of education that we follow often turns a blind eye to a lot of students struggling with mental illnesses. Students with depression, anxiety disorders, autism, ADHD, whether it's undiagnosed or not, are often looked over. They are labelled as "lazy" or "stupid" or "uninterested", which is downright ignorant and insensitive. I shall state my opinion on the exams to be held this year. The

students of class X, of this year, haven't regularly been to school for two consecutive years. That is a long time off from school and proper learning.

Concepts are far from clear, so we have to resort to rote learning. So the "assessment of everything we've learnt this year," is mostly based on how much we can remember. It is not how much we have understood, but how much we can memorize. Online classes are frankly good for nothing. Most of the students barely have network connectivity. Not only are the exams quite unfair, but it also totally neglects the students who are already struggling with learning disabilities. Most of these disabilities go undiagnosed, therefore treatment is ignored. And when they fail to score proper grades, they are shamed and taunted for it and somehow gaslighted into believing that it is their fault and that they're incapable, but that couldn't be farther from the truth.

In fact, standardized tests are one of the worst ways to evaluate a child's learning capacity or intelligence. Children's minds aren't standardized, so how can you measure their value with these tests? But that's a whole different matter altogether. It would be a lot more appreciated if schools actually addressed mental

health issues and prevented students from trying too hard and experiencing burnout. It is important to call out these instances because it affects the lives of children whom the education system could not do justice. Maybe learning was supposed to be a fun process, but somehow it got distorted into something tyrannical and exhaustive.

Yours etc.,  
Rupsa Marak,  
Matchakolgre,  
Tura

#### Northeast shamed

Editor,  
Just when Chanu Saikhom Mirabai brought prestige for the Northeast by winning a medal and creating history on the first day of Tokyo Olympics 2021, the region seems to lose that same prestige in no time due to the major border conflict that occurred between Mizoram and Assam on July 26 last.

The dispute which could have been solved across the table occurred due to alleged encroachment into each other's territories which accelerated into stone-pelted, firing, damaging of local people's property, vandalising of vehicles and ultimately claimed the lives of 6 Assam cops besides leaving

many injured. Not only in the field, the fight seems to have found its way on social media too as the Chief Ministers of both states have engaged themselves in a free for all twitter war.

The sad part is when we, the seven sisters of northeast should be standing in support of our players for making us proud in Olympics; when we should be standing in solidarity against racism and other evils happening around the country, here we are seeking vengeance against each other through bullets and arms. Not only that, we also seem to cross the line of inhumanity by demanding the stoppage of food grains from being transported to Mizoram. Unfortunately, many other North-eastern states are also embroiled in repeated border disputes.

It's absolutely important that while we desire equal respect and recognition from other parts of India, we should first learn to respect one another, else we are not very far from being called barbarians.

Yours etc.,  
Ritika Das,  
Guwahati- 8

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

"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way."

— John C. Maxwell

## The Shillong Times

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### Change in Karnataka

A change of guard in Karnataka was in the offing. The saffron party's fortunes were taking a nosedive in the state even as it remained the only BJP stronghold in the South. Chief Minister Yediyurappa had become increasingly unpopular and the BJP's 'Modi aura' was on the wane there. The only option for the BJP was to let Yediyurappa go and swear in Basavaraj Bommai in his place if it is to retain its base. Clearly, the party's chances of winning the next assembly polls in 2023, which will be followed by the Lok Sabha polls the next year, looked remote. Every other southern state has regional satraps holding charge and a saffron penetration is difficult in what is essentially the Dravidian belt. Good sense prevailed on the BJP to change the CM in Karnataka. Yediyurappa had four (incomplete) terms as chief minister and remains a highly controversial figure. What weighed in his favour was the support he got from the Lingayat community that forms some 17 per cent of the state's population. It has an all-encompassing character distinctive from the caste-centric Hindus and yet remains part of the majority religion. The single-minded concentration of the BJP on the Lingayats continued to alienate it from other segments of the population. The BCs took refuge in the JD-S outfit of Deve Gowda while the SCs and minorities sided with the Congress. It was due to the anti-incumbency sentiment that the BJP emerged as the single largest party in the last assembly polls but it still could not gain power. It manipulated a majority later by defections from other parties.

While Yediyurappa was brought back as CM two years ago, the result was a further erosion in the base of the BJP. He relied more on his sons to run the government and broker deals, which irritated sections within the BJP too. By his actions, Yediyurappa dug his own grave. His current attempt is reportedly to get one of his sons a top party or governmental position and a governor post for himself. If the BJP's Lingayat leanings have seen the Party's stock fall it is curious as to why it chose to swear in another Lingayat - Basavaraj Bommai. But irrespective of who the BJP picks for the CM's post, it is unlikely to pick up speed in Karnataka. While results of future elections depend on the ground situations, chances are that the BJP's chances are receding in Karnataka. When corruption and nepotism marry it becomes a lethal combination. Question is, how did the BJP allow Yediyurappa to run riot for so long. It demonstrated the lack of strength of the party at its apex.

### Trinamool Supremo confident on ensuring widest possible opposition unity

# Spectre of Mamata haunting Modi and BJP

By Arun Srivastava

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee is on a mission to the National Capital, after assuming office for a third term, to prick the aura of Narendra Modi and dismantle the perception of his being invincible. Just before leaving for Delhi she sent a clear message through her action of constituting a judicial commission to probe the Pegasus scandal not only to the BJP but also to her opposition allies. Her move not only turned the table on Modi, a task which should have been done ideally by him but also heralded the emergence of Mamata as the national figure, amidst trending of #Ab Ki Baar Didi Sarkar on social media.

Ironically some political analysts, and especially some journalists who claim to be anti-Modi, are not convinced with her move and are sceptical of her success. It is again the fault of their perception. These people hold the view that Modi after winning the 2014 Lok Sabha election succeeded in creating the perception of being invincible. They also seek clarification from Mamata whether she would be able to restore the glory that the country has lost in the last seven years.

Even if one subscribes to their trepidations, it cannot be denied that she has exposed the wrong side of Modi. Why has he not been announcing a probe into Pegasus scandal? The probe panel comprising retired Supreme Court judge Madan B Lokur and former Calcutta high court chief justice Jyotirmay Bhattacharya will look into allegations of snooping on people from Bengal using Israeli spyware Pegasus. The two-member panel has been formed under Section 3 of the Commission of Inquiry Act, 1952. The Act empowers both the Centre as well as states to institute an inquiry commission. Questions are asked as to whether the officials will be under legal obligation to depose before the panel.

One ought not to forget that states have been ordering judicial probes. In this case the Modi government would have to cooperate with the panel else it would have to bear the stigma of being in collaboration with the main accused. This also

highlights the concern about the security of the country which has been frequently used by Modi to humiliate and denigrate his political opponents. More than the legal implication, the political importance of the probe panel is quite pronounced. She succeeded in apprising the people that Modi was a collaborator. Mamata's move has an underlying message for the opposition. By trying to checkmate Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the snooping issue, the TMC leader is positioning herself as the main challenger to the BJP strongman.

They also ask if she will be able to de-privatise the PSUs, restore the character of the RBI, to revive the economy and restore the properties that have been usurped by the Ambanis and Adanis. Their questions are genuine. But for rectifying the wrongdoings of Modi it is imperative that Modi should lose the 2024 elections. This could not be achieved unless the opposition is united and goes to the polls under the leadership of an individual. They argue that these achievements would bring about a change in perception.

An insight into their arguments makes it explicit that if she cannot promise to deliver these, then she must not aspire to replace Modi. Really their arguments are preposterous and ridiculous. By raising these questions at this stage when Mamata is yet to make an effective intervention in the national political structure and system, these political experts and progressive journalists are simply strengthening the hands of Modi. Already similar sets of suspicions and wrong premonitions were created against Rahul Gandhi. Even today a large section of people nurse doubts about his administrative and political capabilities.

Modi did not create the perception just after winning the election. The ground was created by the BJP patriarch L K Advani and the opportunity was provided by the Congress. Modi simply exploited and used the objective conditions that were

made available to him. The Goa meet of the national executive of the BJP made it abundantly clear that RSS was ready with the resources. But in the case of Mamata the situation is quite different. TMC is Bengal based and the opposition parties are in a state of trance. Obviously she would have to do all the task, from worshipping the gods to performing the task of a cobbler.

These experts and journalists have also been trying to convey that she does not have numbers in her favour by citing the seats won by the BJP under Modi in the last two elections of 2014 and 2019. Playing with the electoral figures is the easiest task. But predicting results based on the electoral arithmetic is a tough call. In Bengal itself the BJP had won 18 Lok Sabha seats in 2019 elections. In fact, Amit Shah was expecting more than 200 seats based on the permutations and combinations of the 2019 election. But in 2021 assembly election people negated all the arithmetical exercises. The electoral gains are not mechanical. Many other things, like culture, economics, politics, social changes, play significant roles.

The major plus point for Mamata is the prevailing perception amongst people that she had the guts to call a spade a spade and catch the bull by horns. No doubt Rahul Gandhi has sharply emerged as the potential challenger to Modi. But he is being haunted by his own failures and wrong imperatives. How do these experts explain Modi losing the elections held during the last four years? BJP had lost assembly elections in Goa and Madhya Pradesh. Amit Shah managed to form the governments in these two states by bribing the MLAs. Incidentally all his machinations failed to bring in the desired result in Bengal. It is ironic that Modi's invincibility did not help him in Tamil Nadu. Even if one goes by the common perception that Kerala is a regimented state and it was not easy for Modi to win the election there, he could have won the elections in Tamil

Nadu which is open, having no political regimentation.

Modi and Shah had met with their worst results in Bengal. The defeat they suffered has broken them from inside to such an extent that they are in a state of stupor in deciding their strategy for the elections in Uttar Pradesh. The Bengal defeat has made them lose their authority and it came into open when they failed to goad the UP chief minister Yogi who virtually challenged them. Mamata has signalled that she is leading the opposition charge and it is enough to rejuvenate the forces opposed to Modi. It is worth mentioning that the CPI(M) which had treated TMC and BJP as its enemies on equal footings, has brought about a significant change in its ideological stand and has resolved to join the opposition to ensure the defeat of BJP. It no more believes in the thesis of equidistance between the TMC and BJP. The recent gains would play a major role in convincing the opposition leaders about her prowess and subsequently bring them together.

The intensity of the Mamata fear that grips the BJP could be gauged from the simple fact that the 22 IPAC employees of Prashant Kishor who are in Tripura to assess the political situation and potential support base for the Trinamool Congress for assembly election in 2023 were stopped by the state police from coming out of their hotel for carrying out the survey. The police has not given any official reason for the detention, only claiming the IPAC team had violated Covid norms. Sources in the IPAC said the team had all the necessary Covid-related papers. In her mission of uniting opposition against the BJP ahead of the 2024 national elections, Prashant Kishor -- her poll strategist in the assembly elections -- is playing a key role. If the sources are to be believed, the police has been interrogating the team members as if they were terrorists. Surprisingly the state police were verifying their credentials. This was confirmed by the officer-in-charge of East Agartala police station Saroj Bhattacharjee who said they were not detained but their documents are being verified. The BJP game plan! (IPA Service)

### Israeli agency NSO sold its software only to authoritarian countries

# Demand rising globally to probe Pegasus spyware

By Sangam

Four prominent U.S. lawmakers have jointly issued a statement calling for action against NSO-like companies that sell spyware to authoritarian regimes across the world. Terming such companies as the "A.Q. Khans of the cyber world", the statement called for stricter regulations as it was used against "peaceful activists and journalists". The statement was issued on Monday by Democratic Party lawmakers Tom Malinowski, Katie Porter, Joaquin Castro, and Anna G. Eshoo.

Abdul Qadeer Khan (A.Q. Khan) is a Pakistani Nuclear Engineer and metallurgist famously known as the "father of Pakistan's nuclear bomb". He was the founder-director of Khan Research Laboratories, a Pakistani government nuclear lab located in Kahuta near Islamabad, which played a key role in the success of Pakistan's nuclear program. He made headlines in 2004 after his open confession in the media over US allegations of illegally selling nuclear technologies to North Korea, Iran and Libya.

The lawmakers suggested six points to the U.S. government to punish such companies including the addition of the NSO Group in an 'Entity List' administered by the U.S. Department of Commerce to keep the spyware out of the way of authoritarian regimes and consider sanctioning such regimes under the Global Magnitsky Act.

The lawmakers also suggested to the U.S. government to finalise accession to the Wassenaar Arrangement's limited controls on cyber-intrusion tools which would result in transparent human rights assessments on items with surveillance capabilities

Moroccan intelligence agencies in 2019. The reports also suggested that Morocco's intelligence agencies had even spied on its own monarch, King Mohammed VI.

Morocco's decision comes amid fears that the revelations might damage the kingdom's diplomatic relations with France. The French government, taking the issue seriously, had earlier held an emergency meeting to prevent such surveillance in the future. President Macron had called Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett earlier demanding a quick probe into the issue.

The latest revelations by Direkt36, a Hungary based publication that is part of the Pegasus Project, suggests that over 300 Hungarian politicians, lawyers, journalists, and activists were snooped upon by the Federal government headed by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

The list includes former State Secretary Attila Aszodi in charge of Hungary's nuclear power plant, a former Minister and Professor Attila Chikan, President of Budapest Bar Association Janos Banati, and four journalists including two from Direkt36 among others.

Attila Aszodi, a prominent nuclear energy expert, made it to the list at the end of 2018 when he was still an official in the Hungarian government. He began to have a series of conflicts with his superior, Minister Janos Suli, for opposing measures that would have disrupted the timetable of the Paks 2 nuclear power plant. He had assumed the post in 2014, following the

**The number of four journalists was included in the list of 300 numbers, including two with Direkt36, Szabolcs Panyi and Andras Szabo. The forensic analyses of their phones have confirmed that their devices have been snooped upon by the agencies.**

and consider Securities and Exchange Commission regulations requiring companies to publicly disclose exports of technologies with surveillance capabilities. The lawmakers cautioned the Federal government that permitting private companies to develop and sell drone or missile technology might result in its use against Americans.

North African country Morocco has decided to sue international human rights organization Amnesty International and French non-profit journalist organization Forbidden for their "expose" on Moroccan intelligence. Both organizations initiated the international media consortium the Pegasus Project, whose reports have suggested that Moroccan intelligence had used the Pegasus spyware to target French public figures, including President Emmanuel Macron and many of his cabinet colleagues.

"The Moroccan state immediately intends to go to the French court because it wants all the light to be shed on the false allegations of these two organizations which put forward elements without the slightest concrete and demonstrated proof," Morocco said in a statement before filing the case. Morocco has tasked Olivier Baratelli, a prominent French lawyer to represent the country in the Paris Criminal Court. The first hearing on the case is set to take place on October 8.

Le Monde, a French newspaper and a member of the Pegasus Project's group of 17 media organizations, had earlier reported that the numbers of President Emmanuel Macron and 15 members of the French government may have been among potential targets of surveillance by

Hungary-Russia agreement on the construction of this nuclear plant.

Aszodi refused to comment on his targeting by the spyware. His phone could not be examined to confirm the targeting by the forensic lab as he no longer uses the phone. Direkt36 reports that a former Intelligence officer told it that the Hungarian government had started using this software since 2018.

Professor Attila Chikan, an economist and former minister in Orbán's first government is also on the list. In recent years, he has become a critic of Orbán. Another prominent name that is featured in the list is Janos Banati, the former President of the Budapest Bar Association. Presently, he is the president of the National Hungarian Bar Association.

The number of four journalists was included in the list of 300 numbers, including two with Direkt36, Szabolcs Panyi and Andras Szabo. The forensic analyses of their phones have confirmed that their devices have been snooped upon by the agencies. The list also features Zoltan Media Group owner Zoltan Varga, who has been critical of the government for a long time. Many of his close associates and friends were also on the list.

58-year old Orbán, has been Prime Minister of Hungary since 2010 (he was also PM from 1998 to 2002). His tenure has been marked by widespread autocratization, corruption, Euroscepticism, curtailment of press freedoms, erosion of judicial independence, and anti-sexual minority laws. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### A study in contrast

Editor,  
Two news items published in your newspaper on July 27, 2021 are studies in contrast about why Mizoram is a strong state which can respond robustly whenever the wannabe big brother of the North-East, Assam indulges in territorial misadventures while Meghalaya remains a doormat and punching bag of Assam. At the risk of sounding politically incorrect and even parochial, the obvious reason, in my opinion, is that almost all members of the Mizoram Police Force are mainly sons of the soil willing to defend their own land. Apparently, this is not the case in Meghalaya for, like it or not, it is a bitter fact of life that most of us always identify ourselves as Assamese, Khasi, Garo, Mizo, etc and then as Indians later.

Then there is the disadvantage of (for Meghalaya) the joint public services cadre with Assam. Guided as it is by this cadre, it is disappointing that our government is yet to formulate a strong and mature policy on the border issue with Assam. Another consequence of this is that even the statements coming from our leaders are timid. In addition to this point, I find it inexplicable that our leaders seem to sincerely believe the pious declarations of good intent by Assam while leaders of other Northeastern states take similar statements from

Assam with sacks of salt. Reading and watching the national print and electronic media, one can draw a lesson that nobody respects the weak. The Mizoram - Assam border skirmish has been widely reported while Assam's aggressive incursion into Meghalaya found no mention at all. Even the Union Home Ministry intervened to calm the situation along the Mizoram - Assam border while Meghalaya has been left at the mercy of Assam.

I hope the border disputes between the North Eastern states are settled at the earliest for it is shameful that states in our great country are fighting each other. But there are no signs on the horizon that this is going to happen. In fact, the signs are ominous. If press reports are to be believed, Assam is now raising 10 police battalions specifically to "guard" its inter-state borders. This force will be imparted a high level of training equivalent to what the elite National Security Guard receives.

Yours etc.,  
Samuel Swett,  
Shillong - 2

#### Of intrigues within BNP-NPP

Editor,  
Apropos to the front page news item, "Hek makes way for Shullai" and "Hek unaware of being dropped", (ST, July 28, 2021), the whole

drama appears to be like the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth men of a football team who never know who can be called while replacing a player among the eleven. We know how Shullai made way for Hek in the past and now that has been reciprocated by the latter it is fair enough. But that both BJP legislators were unaware of their being removed and sworn in until late yesterday is strange indeed. It looks like this bombshell was prepared inside the NPP factory for dropping inside the BJP camp. While the BJP President, Ernest Mawrie, is engaged in a personal duel with Hek to save his kursi in the ongoing battle of "Kaum Banega BJP President", the former was less than a mere spectator here in this new replacement strategy.

The BJP has effected similar changes in Uttaranchal and Karnataka, recently, replacing the sitting CMs there and that mirrored here in Meghalaya - where two legislators changed guards, at the hands of the BJP's carbon copy called NPP. If political will is taken into consideration and the gossips that went around and were echoed during the Union Home Minister's visit to the state last week are to be believed then Hek is perhaps set to occupy the kursi of the President of BJP Meghalaya. After all, it is also a matter of satisfying the dethroned minister and that seems to be well justified for the sitting President to be axed. For Hek, if that happens, it may well be, "You win some, you lose some".

Many say the change is desirable since the present President is only talking about corruption instead of taking action on matters that he is expected to. BJP Meghalaya certainly is in much need of a revamp, keeping in mind the public issues that have remained unaddressed to date, and that may well start with the replacement of the current president. The BJP leadership in New Delhi can take a leaf out of the NPP's style here and effect a change keeping the two duelling individuals here at bay from knowing what is cooking inside.

Yours etc.  
BC Paul  
Shillong - 4

#### What will you do if you win a lottery?

Editor,  
Consider yourself in a situation where you risked your faith and won a lottery which is really precious. Now that you have won it, what are you going to do with it? The current situation in the state seems no different when it comes to demanding for ILP? For, this is one of the most highlighted keywords in the newspaper with the famous phrase 'NO ILP. NO REST', but again the question is what will you do with ILP once you get it? Just demanding ILP to protect your rights doesn't seem to meet the purpose. I'm aware of the harassment, discrimination, and undue

restrictions being imposed on the Non-Khasi speaking people in the state. Are you still going to impose your authority on poor, hardworking non tribals once you get this privilege? Well, let's not talk about the discrimination because it would be unfair to put up anything without a proof. But again the question is What Will You Do, Once You Get ILP?

The Americans had sent their second rover to Mars for exploring the possibilities of existence and the major role was played by Dr Swati Mohan, an Indian-American scientist who successfully landed the rover on the Martian surface. Now, think of a hypothetical situation. Had NASA and America not given the opportunity to Dr Swati and discriminated against her for being Indian do you think NASA could have really successfully executed the operation? Maybe, maybe not! America respects and welcomes talent and does not discriminate people on the basis of their being Indian, African or a Hindu or Muslim.

I was born and raised in this state and have spent nearly 25 years here. Nothing dramatic has happened here, except political parties getting changed every 5 years. Unfortunately, no party has shown deep interest in bringing transformational change in the state. Now, you can counter me on this but ask yourself... How many athletes has the state sent to the Olympics or Common-

Wealth Games? How many sportspersons, actors, economists, journalists, scientists, politicians, doctors, educationists or entrepreneurs from here have made it really big at the national level? Or let me ask this... how many Medical Colleges, Engineering Colleges, Universities, Companies, Industries have really come up in Meghalaya?

Our state has a rich heritage of culture, songs, poems, stories and food delicacies with the gift of mother Nature, but honestly how much effort has been put in to promote them? The current pattern of development is not sufficient to meet the demands of the state and the youth in particular. There is a need for massive investment in infrastructure which will bring more job opportunities. The youth and students' bodies should fight to promote their culture and language. You have all rights to ask for that but make sure you do not misuse it, once you have it. In the end Diversity and Inclusion are all that are needed to grow and prosper.

I hope this article will make those in Government rethink their decision and restructure their PURPOSE and VISION for the State.

Yours etc.,  
Manish Thakur,  
Via email

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

*"A feeble execution is but another phrase for a bad execution; and a government ill executed, whatever may be its theory, must, in practice, be a bad government."*

— Joseph Story

**The Shillong Times**

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**Blinken, Afghanistan & more**

THE talks between India and the United States in New Delhi this week were obviously multi-dimensional. Yet, at the core of these were Afghanistan and China. Matters linked to the Quad and Indo-Pacific as also human rights figured prominently in the talks. The visit by US secretary of state Antony Blinken took place at a time when Afghanistan is passing through a major political transformation and the government there is tottering in the face of a massive push by the Taliban to seize power there. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said there was convergence of views on the way forward in Afghanistan when the two sides discussed the matter. The backing from the US for the Afghan government is crucial even as Americans and NATO have pulled out their troops and abandoned their bases there. The Taliban's prominent faction is backed by Pakistani ISI. The two put together, its lethality against India and Afghanistan is unpredictable. The Taliban claims to be closer to seizing power; but, at the same time, aerial bombings on the militants have killed hundreds.

What adds to this lethality of the Taliban, vis-à-vis India, is also the close link that it is establishing with the Chinese. Taliban's chief political negotiator Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar reached up to foreign minister Wang Yi this week in its first formal engagement with the Chinese, and perhaps succeeded in pulling down the government led by Ashraf Ghani. A mix of Pakistan, Taliban and China is a prescription for serious trouble for India. The huge investments that India has made in Afghanistan to strengthen goodwill between the two nations, over decades, might now come to naught. How the evolving scenario would impact the militancy and terrorism in the Sub Continent and their impact on the Indian side of Kashmir are anybody's guess. At the same time, China has its own problems of Islamic militancy in its western sector.

Mechanisms to counter the Chinese designs in the region are of equal importance to both the US and India. The four-nation alliance of Quad involving the US, Japan, Australia and India is principally aimed at checking Chinese designs in the Indo-Pacific region. While Blinken discussed human rights and other aspects too and put across the US views vis-a-vis CAA and issues related to minorities, these involve a sense of understanding and corrective steps would follow. His meeting with a representative of the Dalai Lama has sent out the right signals to the Chinese.

**Opposition MLAs failing the voters of Meghalaya**

By Patricia Mukhim

The caption of my article might sound strange. Ruling party MLAs are having a field day because the Opposition is sleep-walking. There are time they are garrulous and then go completely silent as if they have taken a break to watch the Olympics. Or they prefer to leads lives that are worry free. It is left to the media to unearth issues of corruption and scams.

It is strange that as voters we expect miracles to happen after every election even when we vote those very people with no human or intellectual qualities except that they have the wealth to bribe us voters a couple of days before voting day. The large majority of voters don't care after that. It's just the few gadflies that the elected government would rather not listen to, that continue to plague it with questions and point out its flaws. And then of course there is the media! And here I must also point out that the Opposition Congress, barring a few MLAs is also quite happy to see things slide at a rapid pace, whichever indicators we use to measure the achievements of this state. Look at some of the projects that were started since the 1980s like the Crowborough Hotel. Why do successive governments allow such projects to hang fire? Who is benefitting from this status quo? And that's just one project; there are many others too.

Recently, Union Home Minister, Amit Shah was asked to inaugurate the Inter-State Bus Terminal (ISBT) when it is a fact that it is incomplete. The Shillong Times reported this but the next day there was a rejoinder from the Transport Department. This project was started sometime in 2013 at an approximate cost of Rs 40 crore and the contract went to a company in which a minister of the MDA Government has a direct interest. Our reporters went to the ISBT before the inauguration and reported accordingly. Following the inauguration, our reporters again visited the ISBT to ascertain the claims and see whether the ISBT was operational. Surprisingly they were stopped by plain-clothes policemen. Why? What is the Transport Department trying to hide? And since when have policemen been given orders to prevent journalists from visiting a facility funded from taxpayer's money? Are the police now also being used as a tool by the Government to hide its misdemeanours? Don't the police swear by the Constitution too? Are they not there to protect public, not private interests? Why should a member of the public be stopped from checking if a

public utility is complete? This brings me to an important point about legislative accountability that is completely lacking in Meghalaya. Why does Meghalaya have its assembly sessions only twice a year - in March and Sep-

Elaka of East Jaintia Hills. They have started a social media page to solicit help from all quarters. The reason is that the pollution in the area is abnormally high. If the State Pollution Control Board were to measure the pollution

*"It is strange that as voters we expect miracles to happen after every election even when we vote those very people with no human or intellectual qualities except that they have the wealth to bribe us voters a couple of days before voting day. The large majority of voters don't care after that. It's just the few gadflies that the elected government would rather not listen to, that continue to plague it with questions and point out its flaws."*

tember. There are so many irregularities in the present MDA Government yet the Opposition does not deem it fit to demand that a session be called to raise questions on the several scams that have erupted and to seek clarity on the different schemes that

levels it would reveal that the place is no longer liveable. The question here is (a) who has given clearances and permission for setting up so many coke plants whose raw material is coal. If rat hole coal mining is banned then where do the coke factories



are being implemented. In Meghalaya, it appears as if pressure groups like Thma U Rangli Juki (TUR) are more informed about the inadequacies of governance than the elected representatives. It's only when the media unearths the irregularities that the Opposition MLAs jump to raise questions, but again through the media when they should be demanding that such ques-

source their coal from? Actually, this is a case of blatant and shameless political lying. And who should call this bluff if not the Opposition MLAs? Why are they silent on this? Why are they vocal only on some issues and not on others? Opposition MLAs should remember that they too will be judged on the issues they raise on behalf of the people. They cannot get

*"Why does Meghalaya have its assembly sessions only twice a year - in March and September. There are so many irregularities in the present MDA Government yet the Opposition does not deem it fit to demand that a session be called to raise questions on the several scams that have erupted and to seek clarity on the different schemes that are being implemented."*

tions be discussed in the Assembly. Is that not the reason why MLAs are elected? Or do they think their duties are reduced to implementing MLA schemes?

There are organisations today that are deeply concerned about the mushrooming of coke factories in Sutnga

away by pleading that they are in the Opposition and are therefore powerless. That's absolute bunkum. All MLAs ruling and Opposition have the same mandate - to serve public interest and to keep that interest uppermost.

The presence of the State Pollution Control Board too

does not draw any comfort. What pollution is the Board checking when they appear to be giving clearances to all manner of polluting industries in the State? Is the Board actually facilitating pollution and endangering our collective health? What do the people of Sutnga do when the State Government refuses to listen to them? They will be left with no alternative but to approach the National Green Tribunal (NGT). But has the NGT too become a toothless tiger? And who is actually benefiting from these coke factories? Who are the direct beneficiaries who are making their millions at the cost of the health of the residents of Sutnga? The MLA of Sutnga-Shangpung constituency, Shitlang Pale belongs to the Congress. We have not heard him speak a word to the media or in the Assembly on the issue of coke plants that are poisoning the very air that his people are breathing. Not only that but even the water they drink is laced with acid mine drainage. What sort of an MLA is Pale when he does not even care about the health of his own people?

Recently the Assembly Committee on Environment had visited the area. When are they making their reports public? Is there not a time line when the report should be tabled in the Assembly? Hence isn't an Assembly session due now? If Parliament can meet thrice a year why can't the state assembly do so?

Recently the MLA of Nongpoh, Mayralbom Syiem had given a call for an Assembly session to discuss the border issue. This is imperative because the recent border skirmish needs to be debated in the Assembly. More so when tussle erupted just 48 hours after the Assam CM met his Meghalaya counterpart in Shillong. We wonder now what the two CMs discussed that emboldened the Assam CM to return and start a war at several fronts - Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya simultaneously. Surely this is not what is called a give and take agreement. This is all 'take' and no give. And it is done with deliberate impudence because the man thinks he is virtually the Prime Minister of North East India, by virtue of being President, NEDA.

Our own MLAs and our CM have been visiting the Assam CM in Guwahati to pay obeisance to him. We are not sure what favours they have gone to seek for that will always be a closely guarded secret. So, is it any surprise that he should feel he has the right to squeeze out every inch of land from the states adjoining Assam?

**Does Biden trust India?**

By Ambassador T P Sreenivasan

An eagerly anticipated visit by United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken in the context of the Taliban advancing towards Kabul with assurances of Chinese and Pakistani support did not result in the formation of a strategy to prevent a Taliban takeover of Afghanistan by force. It seemed to be an exercise in pursuit of the US global agenda of which Afghanistan was not a priority anymore. The pictures of Taliban leaders being feted in China were flashed in the media even when Blinken and External Affairs Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar were discussing Afghanistan. But they merely repeated their pious wishes for a democratic, stable, inclusive government in Kabul.

Blinken revealed no strategy to stop the forceful takeover of Kabul by the Taliban, but merely reiterated the

ture, it appeared, would revolve around containment of China, though Blinken made it a point to say that the Quad was not a military alliance for India's sake. Jaishankar added in good measure that China should not see any action by other countries as being aimed at China. There was no indication, however, that the impasse on the Line of Actual Control was discussed or the US had shared any assessment of China's intentions in pausing disengagement in the remaining sectors in Ladakh.

Blinken's meeting with the Tibetan leaders may only have aggravated the situation on the Line of Actual Control. There has been a stiffening of the US position on Tibet even during the Trump administration. President Trump had signed a Tibetan Support Act in 2020 which had certain new elements. The US expressed



US commitment to remain engaged in Afghanistan and to support the Ashraf Ghani government without any elaboration of the nature of such support. He seemed to expect that Pakistan would play a role and restrain the Taliban so that the US interests in Afghanistan would be protected.

The India-US partnership in Afghanistan was not raised as a possibility in bringing about stability in the region. Nor was there any agreement on any kind of division of labour between India and the US with respect to Afghanistan.

Blinken characterised most of the ingredients of the growing 'vital India-US relationship' as a 'work in progress' including democracy in both countries, Indo-Pacific strategy, the Quad and COVID-19, indicating that the Biden administration had not reached final judgment on any of these.

His meetings with Tibetan representatives and activists on India's domestic issues such as the CAA, farm laws and others indicated that he had his own agenda to pursue in Delhi. There was a time when India denied the facility for the American representative for Tibetan affairs to meet the Dalai Lama in India not to provoke China, but the open meeting with Tibetan leaders this time was a departure from existing practice.

One of the elements that Americans admire most about India is the steadfast commitment to its people to democracy, pluralism, to human rights and fundamental freedoms. Blinken said, but went about examining the way India functioned in a quest for 'self-correcting mechanisms' to 'repair challenges' to democracy. India, on the contrary, had not cast any aspersions of democracy in the US even when an insurrection threatened to reverse the election results. Blinken's preoccupation with China did not seem to include the emerging China-Pakistan axis in Afghanistan, but he stressed the importance of the Quad and announced President Biden's intention of convening a face to face meeting of the Quad without delay. There was also talk of Prime Minister Narendra Modi visiting Washington later this year.

India-US relations in fu-

its intention to open a US consulate in Lhasa and stated that if it was not possible, China would not be allowed to open any new consulate in the US. On the selection of the next Dalai Lama, it was stated that only the lamas should have a say and that any outsiders will not be allowed to interfere. Financial provision was also made for scholarships for Tibetan students and also for the upkeep of their camps in India. Perhaps, the meeting with the Tibetans was in connection with the more proactive position with regard to Tibetan exiles in India. In the context of Chinese President Xi Jinping's recent visit to Tibet, the US signal in favour of the Tibetans was significant.

Combating COVID-19 occupied a good part of the discussion and there was a specific commitment of \$25 million to provide for vaccination in India. Blinken linked the US assistance to the timely assistance that India gave to the US in the initial stage of the pandemic. No multilateral effort was indicated, but there was no doubt that the US would not be found lacking in the case of extending support to India. We should expect that the US would be liberal about intellectual property rights of vaccines and their components.

The competition with China is also an element in the COVID-19 issue as the US is still pressing for investigating the source of the 'Wuhan Virus'. The Blinken visit indicated that the Biden administration is still somewhat tentative about the specifics of its relations with India. The general approach is positive, particularly in the context of China, but contrary to Trump's position, there was no clear commitment on Biden's part to stand by India in the event of a deterioration of the border situation. This may have to do with the fact that the US has not yet reached definitive conclusions about its relations with China itself and India's role in it.

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Washington later this year may be an appropriate opportunity to work out the equations more clearly. Ambassador T P Sreenivasan (IFS 1967) is a former Ambassador of India and Governor for India of the IAEA.

Letters to the Editor

**Let's get vaccinated & save ourselves & others**

Editor, There is no denying that this new normal that has forced us to recalibrate our lives is far from easy. The elderly, the youth, students, professionals, teachers, office goers, workers and daily wage earners, entrepreneurs, are all going through their share of hardship and pain. While the elderly are forced to stay home and not expose themselves, students in schools, colleges and universities are equally forced to adjust to a new mode of teaching-learning that is cumbersome. While every section of the society is going through its share of trials and tribulations, it must be acknowledged that those suffering the most are the daily wage earners and small businesses that are struggling to make ends meet

to bring food to the kitchen. The pandemic has indeed spared none!

Like the other states in the country, Meghalaya too is trying to get back to normal and relax restrictions, by regulating movements and opening up shops and offices. However, the daily COVID-19 update still shows an alarming increase in the number of people infected as well as the number of deaths. With authorities confirming that 100% of infected cases are of the Delta variant that mutates rapidly with short exposure, the only shield against Covid is the vaccine. It has indeed been very challenging for the government to create awareness and make people understand the need to get themselves vaccinated to safeguard themselves as well as others. Each one of us have come across those who question the worthiness of the vaccine and express their lack of faith in its efficacy. Some are so ignorant and adamant that all efforts at convincing them have fallen

on deaf years.

The reason why Government is opening things up is for us to at least begin to pursue our livelihoods and make ends meet so that gradually we can get back to our normal lives. How long can we continue to lock up and restrain ourselves from going about our daily works? Children need to return to their schools and colleges and get back to a disciplined life and to interact with their teachers and peers. The closing down of educational institutions is detrimental to the mental and physical wellbeing of our children. The elderly need to breathe fresh air and visit or be visited by relatives and friends; the young need to get back to outdoor activities and exercise both their minds and bodies.

Hence if we wish to stay together we must work together. At this hour, the best thing we can do is to get ourselves vaccinated and continue to maintain social distancing, wear our masks and wash our hands. If we

fail to adhere to these SOPs the number of cases will escalate. To educate people and make them understand; to try and convince them on the need to vaccinate and still maintain all SOPs must be the responsibility of every citizen. As citizens we must take it upon ourselves to inform all to safeguard themselves. Are we ready to face yet another lockdown? Imagine what would another call for a lockdown do to our mental, physical, emotional, social and spiritual well being!

Yours etc.,  
Jenniefer Dkhar,  
Via email

**Assam-Mizoram border clash**

Editor, The fratricide that transpired along the Assam-Mizoram border is nothing short of a national shame and is an unprecedented event in the history of independent

India. The death of six Assam Police personnel in the unwarranted firefight is extremely unfortunate and calls for immediate intervention and thorough investigation from the highest authorities of the land. The failure of the government machinery to diffuse the situation on either side is a matter of great concern given the sensitivity of the region. It is in the best interest of both the State governments to maintain peace and harmony in the disputed area and prevent further escalation of any kind.

Interestingly, in the last few months, there has been a sudden rise in border skirmishes at several segments simultaneously along Assam's territorial boundary with other States. One might wonder whether a larger political game might be at play ahead of the crucial national elections which might destabilise the prospects of the North-East Democratic Alliance.

Establishing peace in the Northeast has been a hard-earned effort. After decades

of insurgencies and political instability, the region has slowly begun to bury the ghost of the past and adopt development as the new mantra and contribute to nation building. Issues like territorial disputes which can result in animosity among indigenous communities will only help derail all peace building efforts and hinder development in the region. Assam, as a responsible State, must play the bigger role in resolving the boundary disputes through consensus, compromises and confidence building. Meanwhile, other States should also realise the futility of such territorial claims and work together with Assam for an amicable settlement.

Yours etc.,  
Himangka Kaushik  
Guwahati, Assam

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

*"Life is a mirror and will reflect back to the thinker what he thinks into it."*  
— Ernest Holmes

**The Shillong Times**

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**Of Olympic medals**

LOVLINA Borgohain hailing from a non-descript family in Golaghat Assam is the second woman from the North East to win an Olympic medal this time in Boxing. Lovlina has entered the semi-finals and is assured of a bronze medal. Earlier Mirabai Chanu of Manipur also hailing from a poor family finished second in the women's 49kg weightlifting event on July 23 winning a silver medal for the country. India has 125 athletes in Tokyo, the country's biggest contingent at an Olympics. Badminton player PV Sindhu will be playing the semi-finals today. MC Mary Kom had a sad exit at the last moment because of a split-second decision.

Before the Olympics Lovlina had won two World Championships bronze medals and two Asian Championships bronze medals. In October last year, Lovlina had tested positive for Covid and went through the treatment regimen. Before the Tokyo Olympics she had trained at Assisi, Italy. The story of almost all the sportspersons from the North Eastern states who have won medals at the Olympics is similar in that they all come from difficult economic backgrounds and had to struggle to be where they are today. The picture of Mirabai Chanu eating with her family in a little kitchen back home is a story of hope and encouragement that a person's economic status is no deterrent to winning medals provided the person has grit and determination. Then there is also the training, discipline and the support that these sportspersons get from the state – such as the coaching facilities, allowances for a proper diet and nutrition and participation in the world championship events that give them the exposure to compete with the best and therefore not to take things for granted. This gives them the confidence to win medals and bring glory for their country.

Another important aspect is to catch these promising sportspersons young so that talents are honed and nurtured early in life. In India there has been a lot of politics in selecting sportspersons when the criterion should be just one - their potential and the spunk they show in overcoming the hurdles that life throws at them. It must be a moment of pride for the people and governments of Manipur and Assam that they have one Olympic medal winner each. These states must have done something right in identifying sporting talent from the back of beyond and not just from the state capital. Coming to our state of Meghalaya, it is time that due attention is paid to finding and ensuring that those potential sportspersons get the best of training and financial support. For that the state has to have a vision and work towards making that vision a reality.

For those obstinately wanting to stop using the term "Central government" even casually and replace it with special efforts with the term "Union government", though nobody is opposing and Constitution speaks only of "Union of States", the real state of unity among the units of the Union must be a cause of worry. They are not keen on promoting inter-State cooperation and collaboration for mutual progress and amicable settlement of any differences and frequently go to courts for legal settlement of even trifling issues. Cauvery Rights Retrieval Committee in Tamil Nadu tried to burn the effigies of Karnataka Chief Minister. Perhaps a friendly gesture between two neighbours of the "Union of States"!

Disputes over sharing water among riparian States is the outstanding issue that divides concerned States and provokes manifestation of state loyalty unbecoming of the "Union of States". Worse still is the importance of State borders between two States speaking the same language and were till recently part of one State. Readiness to adopt a policy of "give and take", indispensable for unity and integration, is missing in inter-State water relations.

There are about 25 major river basins in India with most rivers running across many States. Regulation and development of Inter-State rivers is in the Union List (No.56) in the Constitution and "water", i.e. water supplies, irrigation and canals, drainage, storage and power in the State List (No.17). Role of Union comes in entry 20 in the Concurrent List on Economic and Social Planning.

Tamil Nadu, which has water disputes with all its neighbours, has been loudly opposing construction of Mokedatu Dam by Karnataka over Cauvery and has ruled out any negotiations over the issue putting trust in legal settlement. Karnataka has approached the Supreme Court staking claim to 91 tmc ft of surplus water annually in the Cauvery basin while opposing the Cauvery-Vaigai-Gundar (CVG) link project planned by Tamil Nadu for transferring 45 tmc ft of surplus water annually. This Link Project would compel Karnataka to make

**Water disputes**

**"Give & take" missing**

By Dr S. Saraswathi

an advance commitment to transfer the surplus water. Karnataka CM has also stated that the State would go ahead with construction of Mokedatu Dam irrespective of the opposition from TN, Kerala, and Puducherry -- an outstanding case of disunity among States.

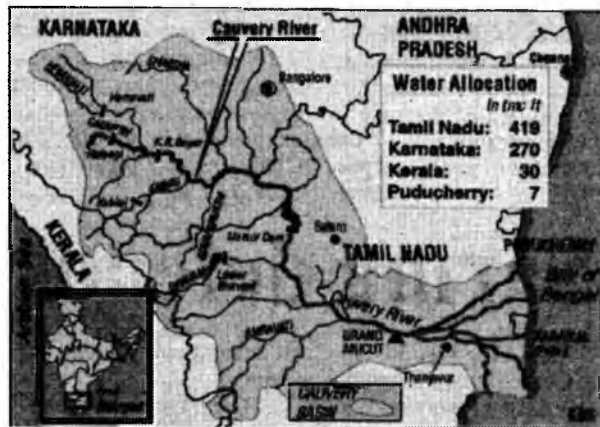
Tamil Nadu Chief Minister has ruled out any scope for negotiations on this issue or any need for talks with the other two affected States

States Reorganisation Commission (1956) considered bringing the two basins of Godavari and Krishna under a unified control and recommended formation of a united AP. A major point on which the Telangana Movement thrived was allegations of uneven distribution of river waters. Such is the power of water rising above language affinity.

AP has moved the Su-

preme Court over the "unjust usage" of Krishna river water by upper riparian state of Telangana in "contravention of the directions" of Krishna River Management Board (KRMB) and violating the water allocation by Bachavat Tribunal.

Palar that starts in Karnataka flows through the dry areas of Rayalaseema in AP and enters TN with little water. AP has increased the height of a check dam on their side of the river once in 2014 and again commenced work in 2019 for further increase in height which TN considers to be a violation of a 30-year-old agreement between Mysore State and then Madras Presidency.



A dispute over Mahadayi river between Goa, Karnataka, and Maharashtra was taken to court as the report of the tribunal set up to resolve the issue was not accepted by the parties.

River water disputes are not confined to South India. Comparatively water rich States in northern and eastern India also face similar problems when the interests of two or more States are involved.

Construction of Sulej-Yamuna Link (SYL) canal is cause for dispute between Punjab and Haryana showing that States cannot unite by their own volition though

any compromise is seen as an infringement of a State's rights and betrayal of the interests of one's State. The contending State is seen as an adversary and not a friendly neighbour with whom the available natural resource is to be shared. Water sharing is a contentious issue for drawing water from a public tap by nearby residents as well as for sharing a common river water.

In water disputes, no State is willing to concede even a single point to the opponent State though the concept of cooperative federalism is widely accepted as most advantageous to unite this multilingual country. It shows the quality of cooperative federalism working in India. We have to evolve suitable approaches to strengthen unity among the units of Indian Union as a matter of utmost urgency. —INFA

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

**Don't consign working households to peril**  
**India's labour policy needs to be more humane**

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

Majority of working households in India have been undergoing an unprecedented hardship ever since the countrywide lockdown was announced on March 24, 2020. They remained largely uncovered by any social security schemes on the one hand and only 28 per cent of them had salary earnings or regular wages – in rural areas only 12.9 per cent and in urban areas 41.3 per cent. About 14.7 per cent households in the urban areas and 9.1 per cent in the rural areas did not have any income from economic activities.

These figures are revealed in the Periodic Labour Force Survey July 2019 – June 2020 published recently by NSO. When the country was locked down without any preparation we had 72 per cent of the household who had no regular wage or salaried income – 56.9 per cent in the urban areas and 87.1 per cent in the rural areas which was 30.2 per cent more than urban areas. At that time casual labour in the rural areas were 24.8 per cent and self-employed

point of fall in the rural areas in this category from 10.1 to 9.1 per cent during this period. This percentage is very high in absolute numbers if keep in mind the 140 crore population in the country.

Labour force participation rate (LFPR) on current weekly status (CWS) basis, was 38.3 per cent in 2019-20. The female participation was only 20 per cent as against the male participation of 56 per cent. It means our labour policies were not able to provide much needed work to women which was required to their economic empowerment despite publicity blaze of the government. The female participation in the urban areas were even less at 17.5 per cent while in rural areas it was 21.1 per cent. Women are worst hit during the pandemic despite theirs being the main care giver of the society, and were in the forefront during the corona battle even as doctors and nurses. Their pathetic conditions need urgent attention.

As for LFPR for youth between the age group 15-29, it was far worse than LFPR for all categories in all



were 53.2 per cent. For the urban areas these figures were 11.5 per cent and 30.7 per cent respectively. There is MGNREGA scheme for providing employment in the rural areas from which only casual labour household could get some benefit, but in the urban areas there is no such schemes.

Thus the unprepared lockdown had devastating effect on working household in the country who actually needed more humane policy than the Modi government has shown thereafter. In the midst of the crisis when labour market is yet to open up fully, the Centre has come out with four labour codes that the working class – trade unions and employees unions – has called "anti-labour" while majority of non-wage and non-salary earners working households are voiceless or no one is listening to them. The new labour codes are not yet fully implemented, but the Centre is pushing them slowly despite the states, business, and industries are not fully prepared to implement them because they are also facing the unprecedented crisis after the pandemic.

The survey reveals that self-employed people in agriculture sector were little less at 37.7 per cent in 2019 compared to 37.8 per cent in 2017. In non-agriculture activities these figures were 15.5 and 14.3 per cent. It means agriculture sector was supporting lesser number of work-force, and then returning of the labour force from the cities after the pandemic has increased the load on agriculture even more, deterioration the overall condition of the agriculture labour. Many of the returnees started working in non-agriculture activities but it was able to support on 15.5 per cent of the household prior to the pandemic. It deteriorated the already paltry earnings of the working households depending on non-agricultural activities.

Is should be also a matter of serious concern as to why the number of households without income from economic activities in the urban areas were on the rise even before the pandemic struck the country. Percentage of such households grew from 14.4 per cent in 2017-18 to 14.7 per cent in 2019-20. There was one percentage

the four quarters of the year 2019-20 under survey which were 20.6, 19.2, 21.1, and 34.7 per cent respectively. It also demands special attention because future of our youth was already at stake prior to the pandemic. The lockdown of the economy and its disruption during implementation of the containment measures has further been pushing them to great distress.

The survey has made a separate category for Working Population Ratio (WPR). It is the percentage of population employed in total population, not only as percentage of the labour force as in LFPR. The WPR in 2019-20 on CWS basis, was only 35 per cent – 50.8 per cent for male and 18.6 per cent for female. For rural areas it was even less at 33.6 per cent – male 51.2 per cent and female 15.4 per cent. For urban areas the WPR was 35.5 per cent only a half point better than the rural areas. For males in the urban areas it was 50.6 per cent and for female 19.9 per cent. Conditions of employment in even the category of regular wage and salaried employees were pathetic. A total of 67.3 per cent workers had no written job contracts, which means they had no secured employment in 2019-20 – male 68.1 per cent and female 65 per cent. In urban areas 66.8 per cent – 66.3 per cent male, and 68.2 per cent female, and in rural areas 68.3 per cent – 70.9 per cent male and 58.7 per cent female had no written job contract.

It was the same Modi government under whose dispensation such a pathetic condition prevailed for working class just before the pandemic struck India. There was a demand to improve the working conditions and increasing the availability of jobs, but Modi government came with four labour codes that do not aim to mitigate the pathetic conditions of the working class but to make business and industries more profitable without providing social security for working households. Economic recovery plans must keep the labour force at its centre, as it is generally agreed world over, including the ILO, World Bank, IMF, and the UN. Modi government must heed to this suggestion. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

**The elected have no vision for Meghalaya**

Editor,  
There were over-expectations from the visit of the Union Home Minister, Amit Shah that he would give clear answers on the demand for the Inner Line Permit. But his tentativeness on the matter and as reports came in that Shah did take much interest in the matter except for a few grins and smiles there was a sense of being let down. In my opinion the ILP issue should have been left to the civil society pressure groups. Our elected representatives should have spoken more on the inter-state border issue with Assam, on investment, improvement of the existing state infrastructure in all sectors and above all ensuring that our educated youth have access to jobs in centrally funded institutions. Unfortunately, all that was hardly discussed. The MLA from Mawkyrwat briefed the Home Minister about an incomplete road project in his area. We are lagging behind in so many areas and sectors and unemployment is soaring. Will the ILP help in reducing this unemployment scenario? What has been proven yet again is that our MLAs have no vision for the state. Each one thinks only of his/her constituency.

Yours etc.,  
Dominic Stadlin Wankhar  
Shillong

**Facts are sacred; opinions free**

Editor,  
Apropos of the letter by TS Haokip published on July 21, 2021 the writer has not refuted what I wrote on July 13, 2021. By referring to the book, "The Anglo-Kuki war, 1917-1919: A Frontier Uprising Against Imperialism During the First World War," published by Routledge, the writer tries to reaffirm that the Kuki resistance against the British was a great Anglo-Kuki war primarily in defence of their ancestral land. The book he referred to, is an edited book in which majority of the contributors of the papers are Kukis. Therefore, he is not providing any substantial evidence to support his grossly distorted statement earlier. It is as good as producing one more copy of the previous one without producing new evidence to the contested point.

Another so called evidence he has brought is: "The British Museum currently displays 'Thinko-Malcha' which is a customary oath performed by the Kuki chiefs when declaring war against the invading British in 1917". This only refers to that historical event of protest movement against the forcible recruitment for the Labour Corps during the First War in France which I did not deny and which is irrelevant. What I am

objecting to, is that he and other Kukis should not unnecessarily glorify and blow out of proportion a protest or resistance movement into a big Anglo-Kuki war of independence.

Almost all the North-East tribal people including the Khasi, Jaintia, Lushai (Mizo), Garo, Dafla (Nyishi), Abor(Adi-Galo), Nagas, Kuki (Thadou) etc, resisted the British initially as a protest movement coupled with perhaps other cumulative reasons and causes. He cites another example to support his case and I quote: "The Kukis, who followed oral tradition of maintaining records and histories would fall victim to suppression of their history if not for the records found in a few books like Colonel W L Shakespeare's history of the Assam Rifles". It is Colonel L W Shakespeare who wrote history of Assam Rifles and not W L Shakespeare. Merely mentioning the book or dropping names does not prove anything. No one disputes that L W Shakespeare is a chronicler of events though serious historians regard his book on Assam Rifles as bunkum since he did not have proper documents and evidence though he participated in the suppression of Kuki resistance. Haokip has to prove what he claims because I am not denying the event of the Kuki resistance or protest movement against the recruitment of 'Labour Corp' for the First World War in France.

In this context, even the

Maram Nagas also refused to be recruited in the Labour Corps. Haokip has to produce concrete documents and evidence to show that they fought against the British primarily in defence of their ancestral land. Haokip is contradicting himself by making the following statement: "That Kukis have fought the British at the helm of their glory has been a fact many wish to sweep under the carpet. The British did their best to underplay the great uprising by adopting a strategy to hide their most humiliating encounters". He repeatedly claims and asserts the so called great war against the British without substantiation. He does not even show the distinction between war and resistance/protest movement. To give one example, the British expeditions against the Angami Nagas lasted nearly half a century from 1832-1880, still I will not call it as the Anglo-Angami Naga war whereas Kuki resistance lasted about three years.

To reiterate my contention, as far as possible, one should be objective, impartial and balanced and not allow subjective biases and prejudices into one's writing.

To quote another statement of Haokip, "It must be mentioned that Manipur has a history of communal clashes wherein more than thousand Kukis were massacred allegedly by the NSCN (IM) in the 90s". It is true that in 1959 Kuki-Hmar clash, 1993 Meitei-Pangal clash, 1992-97 Naga-Kuki

clash, 1997-1998 Kuki-Paite clash and 2015 Meitei-Kuki clash at Moreh had occurred in the recent past. But while describing the communal clashes he exposes his partial and distorted writing. It is not NSCN-IM that killed the Kukis, rather villagers of both Nagas and Kukis directly or indirectly supported by the respective militants of NSCN-IM and KNA (Kuki National Army) killed each other. For his information, the NNC (Naga National Council) openly condemned the Naga-Kuki conflict as some Kukis from Nagaland state are also in the NNC and other Naga political factions. It is true that the number of casualties and house burning on the side of the Kukis is much higher but that does not mean no Nagas were killed or their houses not burnt. Haokip's writings are either one sided or distorted. This is precisely what I am pointing out.

Lastly to quote another statement: "Mao could thus be forgiven for harbouring enmity towards the Kukis and their history". In pointing out distorted and prejudiced writing, I cannot be accused of having ulterior motives or of harbouring hostility towards the Kukis. My sincere appeal is that in order to prevent future possible communal clashes anywhere one should be as faithful to the facts as possible regarding any past event.

Yours etc.,  
Xavier Mao  
Department of Philosophy  
NEHU, Shillong

**Don't be slaves to social media**

Editor,  
Nowadays social media is no longer a new thing for the internet literates. Undoubtedly social media has many advantages but this does not mean that it does not have its downsides. The advantages and disadvantages depend on how we use social media. The few negatives include wastage of time and being stalked by cyber-criminals that lure people. What I want to focus on here is that we should know how to use social media. Spending too much time on social media is harming students and the youth because it becomes addiction. This might affect their academic performance as well as their mental health. Its time to self regulate the use of social media and not allow it to control us. Instead, we should know be holding the remote on social media use. Unless we understand that social media is a servants we are at risk of bringing Albert Einstein's quote to pass, "I fear the day technology will surpass our human interaction, the world will have a generation of idiots".

Yours etc.,  
Dr. Mebandabha Rapon  
Dy. Librarian  
Captain Williamson  
Memorial Govt. College,  
Baghmara

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