

"It's not that some people have willpower and some don't. It's that some people are ready to change and others are not."

--- James Gordon

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Traffic- checks and balances

THE traffic chaos in Shillong city has reached unmanageable proportions. Elite schools continue to resist use of school buses to ferry their students to and from school in order to reduce the number of cars on the road. The Government has not been able to enforce its diktat on such schools even while other educational institutions have exhibited their social responsibility by using school buses for their students and staff. The question is if some schools can use school buses why not others? Governance is a world that is loosely used and even the Government which is vested with the mandate to govern does not often take this word seriously. Governance requires compliance of certain rules and regulations by members of the public. Not doing so should attract a penalty.

There are several reasons for traffic congestion in Shillong. Firstly there are a growing number of drivers with a 'Learners' license who are at the steering wheel without a professional driver by their side. Without any checks by traffic police these learners become a danger to other drivers and the cause of accidents as well. While there is a rule that drivers cannot speak on mobile phones, every person at the steering wheel violates this. Speaking on mobile phones while driving tends to slow down traffic and can cause accidents. That drivers don't respect this rule only shows that we are a lawless citizenry. And since there is no fear of any penalty, drivers continue to cock a snook at the rules. Drunken driving in the evening hours is another menace. Scores of young people have turned their cars into open air bars and only return home in the wee hours but by then their driving skills have gone for a toss. At that time of the night they are on their own. They can get away with accidents. In this city there are under-aged drivers in school uniform who also are at the wheels. This is against the law but if the parents don't show responsibility then the police cannot do much. It is noticed that "No Parking" signs are violated with impunity. This happens because the Traffic Superintendent is hardly seen on the road. Top cops of the district have to be more visible to infuse a sense of respect for the law among citizens.

LOOKING BACK

February 18, 1989

Karbi Students deny issuing quit notices

Autonomous State Demand Committee and Karbi Students Association have denied the allegations made against their volunteers wing People's Guard regarding issue of "Quit Karbi Anglong" notices to non-Karbi residents of the district. In a statement, Mr Borsing Rongphar, general secretary KSA and Mr Bharat Timung, convenor, ASDC accused "a vicious circle" for indulging in circulating anonymous letters in the name of ASDC's volunteers outfit 'People's Guard' to a number of respectable citizens and businessmen warning them of dire consequences if they failed to quit Karbi Anglong within February 1989.

The ASDC and KSA described this campaign as the handiwork of the sinister political caucus that had been thrown out of power recently by the people with the aim of projecting an altogether wrong perception about the on going peaceful democratic movement for the autonomous state. They alleged that these vested interests had been shamelessly using the criminal gangs and resorting to such heinous tactics so as to destabilise the new district council elected on the massive mandate for the autonomous state. Describing the People's Guard as an open democratic volunteer organization for protecting common people from criminal attacks and state repression the ASDC and KSA asserted that People's Guard was committed to

undertake any risk involved in safeguarding the unsuspecting victims of threats and defeat the sinister plans of anti-social gangs who were spearheading well orchestrated malicious campaigns against KSA and ASDC to reap a political harvest.

Boeing pilot mistakes Umroi for Guwahati

In what was a clear case of error on the part of the pilot, on February 15 an Indian Airlines Boeing carrying full passenger load in IC 490 flight from Imphal to Guwahati nearly landed at Umroi airstrip.

Eye witnesses said that the aircraft was only a few feet above ground when the Control Room brought the pilot to senses. Sources said that had the Aerodrome Officer delayed a few seconds in establishing radio contact with the pilot, a major disaster would have resulted. Not only the airstrip was occupied by straying cattle but also the regular Vayudoot flight arrived barely a minute later.

Sources said that a new-recruit lady was commanding the aircraft. Apparently she was already in touch with the Borjhar Control Room which gave her clearance to land. Apparently, the pilot confused Umroi with Borjhar. It is understood that the incident has been brought to the attention of the Indian Airlines authorities and a probe is being conducted.

How sustainable is Meghalaya tourism

By Patricia Mukhim

issues.

Tourism is becoming a major revenue earner for Meghalaya but is the present model of tourism sustainable? Recently when Prime Minister Modi visited Shillong he made it a point to visit two tourist spots. One the Elephant Falls at Upper Shillong and the second, the Heritage Village at Mawphlang. Heavy rains prevented the PM from entering the sacred groves nearby. At the Elephant Falls Modi met with the San Shnong Youth Welfare Organisation (SSYWO) which has been running the place for over fifteen years. Mr Modi asked the members of the SSYWO how many families benefitted from the Tourist Spot. He was told fifty families. He asked why there were only so few beneficiaries. The SSYWO said their plans to expand were thwarted by the Forest Department, although the Organisation was actually caring for the surrounding forests. The SSYWO knows that the forest must be sustained if they are to attract tourists.

Modi's second question was why there were so many overhead wires in a tourist spot and whether the place was wified (the PM was probably trying to tweet about the Elephant Falls but could not detect any internet connectivity). He was told that mobile service providers have not been able to provide quality connectivity to the area. The next question was why the railings leading to the Elephant Falls were painted white and green (the typical Forest Department trade mark) when waterfalls were set against a brown background of boulders and rocks. He was told that the SSYWO had nothing to do with that.

It was fortunate that during the PM's visit Shillong experienced heavy rainfall and hence Modi was not greeted with the stench that afflicts the place during the drier seasons. Guess where the stench comes from. The entire toilet soak-pits of the Eastern Air Command of the Indian Air Force empties into the beautiful Elephant Falls. This has been reported times without number but to no avail. After all it takes a lot to shake up a defence establishment. But had the PM been briefed about this he would have been furious about the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan was blatantly ignored by the Indian Air Force despite several reminders from the local communities. The SSYWO has since written to the PM on these crucial

Now coming to the point of sustainability of the Elephant Falls, one wonders if the SSYWO is capable of handling the nearly two thousand footfalls daily during the peak seasons of May to October. How do they manage garbage comprising thousands of discarded plastic food packages plastic bottles? Where does all this garbage go? Does it also go to Marten? Marten is a symbol of a solid waste management system gone kaput and it announces itself to every visitor to Shillong.

When the PM went to the Heritage Village he was "entertained" by the traditional dancers and musicians and in view of the limited time he did not really observe and comment on the place. If someone who understood heritage tourism had accompanied Modi the person would have pointed to the monoliths and their significance to Khasi history, culture and their narratives. Mr Modi would have wondered why there was no write-ups in stone on the importance of the monoliths. Indeed, when the yearly festival itself is called the Monolith Festival, why are the same monoliths so badly maintained. Some people sit on them. Others set up shops on them. Still others walk all over the megaliths (the ones that lie horizontal) without a care about the significance of these stones which date back thousands of years and are intricately linked to our culture.

Today the Mawphlang Sacred Grove is another place that is teeming with visitors in season. Is there anything sacred about it anymore? Those who run the place see it as the golden goose and are about to kill it and take away all the eggs. There is a distinct sense that "money" has become the all-important criterion for the local community looking after the Sacred Grove and its surroundings. The reason I say this is because if you pay the collector enough cash you can take your vehicle and park right next to the Grove. If you pay the normal fee then you park at what has been designated as a parking place. To my mind if anything is going to kill tourism in Meghalaya, then GREED certainly will be that one factor.

But why does all this happen? What are there no regulations that tour operators whether they are village bumpkins or smartly trained youth should not cross the carrying capacity of any place in a particular

day and season? A study needs to be conducted by environmental scientists/ecologists about the carbon footprints that all our tourist spots can get away with. We would have noticed that the number of foreign tourists to Meghalaya has dropped and hence our ability to earn dollar revenue has gone down. Earlier foreign tourists used to enjoy the serenity and simplicity of Mawlynnong. Now they see greed written on the faces of those who run the place. So they have begun to look for more distant destinations where they are undisturbed by noise, chatter and garbage. A foreign tourist looking at the quantum of garbage generated by the tourists at Mawlynnong said he was heartbroken. He knows that the people of Mawlynnong don't even have a garbage management system in place, particularly plastic garbage.

More recently, we would have seen an online petition put up by Robert Paine on behalf of Byron Nongbri who owns a home-stay facility at Nongriat, to stop the construction of the road that links Nongthymmai village to Tyra because that would leave Nongriat vulnerable to overcrowding. Paine is a regular visitor to Nongriat where the many splendoured Double Decker Living Root Bridge stands witness to the engineering genius of our ancestors. This indigenous knowledge is precious. Hence people who step on this living root bridge must do so with reverence. Alas! The tour guides to Nongriat don't know to weave stories around this marvellous wonder where the gift of nature blends with the ingenuity of humans to produce such a spectacular piece of art.

Nongriat is perhaps one of the few destinations today that it is difficult to scale and so has remained relatively undisturbed by groups of over-enthusiastic tourists from within the country (whose understanding and appreciation of tourism leaves much to be desired). If Nongriat is invaded we can imagine the tragedy, not just of the home-stay owners who have made a living out of tourism, but also of the villagers who would have to contend with thousands of visitors on a given day. Do the villagers of Mawlynnong or Nongriat actually revel in the fact that their villages are sold as destinations? Were they ever consulted? Are they benefitting from the huge tourism market? The answers would be interesting to hear.

So why does all this

happen? It happens because the Tourism Policy of Meghalaya is still in a draft form. It has been carefully crafted but has not been adopted as a Policy. Hence there are no benchmarks for tour operators to follow. Also, the Tourism Department itself functions without a roadmap. Let me quote from some key vision statements in the Draft Policy.

Statement 1: "Keeping in mind the requirement to provide economic opportunities to the local communities as also the need to preserve the ecosystem and the ethnic identity of the people, the tourism policy has been designed to sustain the rich cultural heritage and biodiversity of the state." Where is the design for sustainability?

Statement 2: "Construction works relating to tourism projects may be designed in such a way that the structure will merge with the surroundings and the natural environment of the area so as to present a good ambience, taking into consideration the need for durability and sustainability of the structure in a particular environment." Agreed, so what are those concrete matchbox like buildings doing in a pristine forested environment?

Statement 3: "To establish a set of best practices in the tourism sector." May we ask what those best practices are that can be replicated by tour promoters?

Statement 4: "Launching of a state wide campaign to keep Meghalaya clean and beautiful. All stakeholders will have to contribute to this effort." Which of the tour operators are contributing to this cleanliness effort? What is their corporate social responsibility? It has been left vague and ambiguous.

Statement 5: "Protection and promotion of caves in collaboration with professional and experts in the field and the local community." Has the person who enunciated this policy visited the Sohra caves in recent times? Does he/she they know how many footfalls a day invade the caves? I just hope the caves do not collapse one day because of anthropogenic activities.

On this note I sign off and hope that avid tour promoters get their act together. But then I learnt that the tour operators don't even have an umbrella organisation under which they can speak to and engage with the Government. Each one is doing his/her own thing. Good luck to Meghalaya Tourism!

Kejriwal opens pandora's box on referendum

Delhi may not get full statehood so easily

By Kalyani Shankar

Is Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal chasing a pipe dream by trying to seek a referendum on full statehood for Delhi? Should Delhi have a referendum on this issue or will it open up a Pandora's box? Whether he succeeds or not Kejriwal has indeed started a debate when he tweeted after the Great Britain's exit from the European Union last week "After UK referendum, Delhi will soon have a referendum on full statehood."

A full statehood to Delhi has been a long pending demand. Interestingly, Kejriwal's predecessors had also been seeking it as they felt their hands tied with the current limited powers. Kejriwal's predecessor Shiela Dixit had made it abundantly clear that in the absence of the police not in her hands, she could not have done much when the Nirbhaya rape case rocked the capital. She was opposed to the multiplicity of agencies ruling Delhi. The BJP too before AAP came to power, had made similar demand.

The unprecedented success in last year's Assembly poll has emboldened AAP to pursue the full statehood demand. Last month Kejriwal had released online the Delhi government's draft bill on full statehood. The draft retains control of areas under NDMC with the Centre and seeks to include subjects like policing, law and order, land and services, currently outside its purview under the Delhi government. The official period for public

many other major capitals are examples of this pattern.

Also holding a referendum might open up the Pandora's box. Since there is no provision in the Constitution which legal provision will govern this intended process? Kejriwal is not clear how it could be conducted. Will it be the Election Commission or any other state or central agency is not very clear.

Experts say that in the absence of a constitutional provision, there should be an informed debate on the issue and Kejriwal simply cannot impose a referendum on the people of Delhi without due consideration. Where is the guarantee that such an emotive issue would not result in law and order problem?

Secondly, it might lead to other Union Territories making such demand. Delhi is only one of seven Union territories (UT) as listed in Schedule I of the Constitution. The Union Home Ministry through the Lt Governor administers them. Delhi, being the capital of India the Union Government is reluctant to hand over the police and land power to the state government. There is a historic reason for this. In 1911, when India's capital was shifted from Calcutta to Delhi, the British Government did not bring Delhi under any state, but it was given the status of capital of British India. The father of Indian Constitution, Dr BR Ambedkar, who as chairman of the Constitution Drafting

The States Reorganization Act, 1956, didn't merge Delhi with any other state and left it as a national capital. In 1989 when Parliament passed 'The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 granting full statehood to Delhi was not agreed to.

feedback ends on June 30.

Historically, soon after the 1975-77 Emergency, the Janata Party government tried to introduce a provision for referendums through the Constitution (44th Amendment) Bill, 1978, but this did not materialise. The only instance of state-sanctioned direct democracy was in Goa. Sanctioned through a law enacted for the purpose, it was called the Goa Opinion Poll, 1967, to decide the future of the Union Territory of Goa, Daman and Diu within the Indian Union. Goa finally became a state in 1987 during the Rajiv Gandhi era following persistent demands including a resolution for full statehood in the Goa Assembly in 1976.

Those who are supporting the idea include former AAP leaders like Yogendra Yadav. They argue that just because the Constitution does not provide for it, the subject cannot be barred. Also granting statehood to Delhi is also in line with idea that sovereignty lies with people and elected representatives by people of Delhi could deal subjects affecting Delhi residents wholly.

Those who oppose argue that Delhi has specific characteristics as vital institutions such as Parliament, Supreme Court and foreign embassies are located in the capital. Secondly most new capitals around the world are administered as a Federal territory distinct from states. Beijing, Canberra, Washington DC, Ottawa and

Committee, after studying the federal structure of government in the US, Australia, Canada, etc noted that the national capital can't be under a state or a local government. The States Reorganization Act, 1956, didn't merge Delhi with any other state and left it as a national capital. In 1989 when Parliament passed 'The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 granting full statehood to Delhi was not agreed to. Delhi Assembly was given the powers to govern and make laws on all but three subjects - public order, police and land.

Thirdly, while many including some European countries follow the referendum route on crucial issues but India, through a largest democracy, is not yet mature enough to do so and the exercise will involve huge costs.

So why is Kejriwal harping on the referendum idea? Is it because he wants to divert attention from controversies surrounding his government and the party? Or is it because he wants to divert attention from the fate of 21 of his MLAs who might lose their membership on the office of profit issue? How does he propose to make sure that the Parliament will vote for the amendment to the Constitution that would require two thirds majority to enable Delhi have its referendum? He has just three MPs. The simple answer is that he believes in confrontational politics and this is his way of dealing with issues. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Is MS Exit in the offing?

Editor,
When Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose appeared for the Indian Civil Services examination in 1921 he was asked in the interview his opinion about the British Raj in India to which he replied, "Divide and Rule". This apt description was not only seen in British invasion over Asia alone but also in Africa and elsewhere wherever this empire ruled. The Raj may have ceased for long but the aptness of this description continues till today. This "Divide and Rule" policy is a blood ingredient of the English people, which displayed once again during the recent Brexit vote that paved the way out of Britain from the European Union. But many Englishmen may not have thought that this policy

would haunt them one day and history will repeat itself. What Britain would see now is what their empire had done in the past by cutting and dividing nations into pieces and ruling over them. It would be a misnomer to prefix the word 'Great' before Britain post Brexit. It would be again a misnomer to term it UK (or United Kingdom) since Scotland would in all likelihood seek another independence referendum from Britain to join the EU to be followed by the merger of Northern Ireland with Ireland and the long desire of the Welsh people for a Republic of Wales. So what will Britain be left with, only London and some counties? Nonetheless, the EU exit of Britain has left behind many new words for the Oxford University Press, Collins Dictionary and others to coin like 'Brexit', 'Regrexit' - a poll term used by the American Free Press about those who regret the exit

decision, 'LeoMexit' - the exit of football giant Lionel Messi from the game after the defeat of Argentina in the recent Copa America Cup. Now, it is to be seen if we can have our 'MS-exit' - the departure of Mukul Sangma in the face of growing dissidence in the Congress.

Yours etc.,
PK Dwivedi,
Via email

Drug peddling a serious offence

Editor,
This refers to your report "Drug peddlers arrested" (ST, June 29, 2016). Drug trafficking is a major crime. Killing someone or helping someone to kill himself is equal to murder. This is what common sense and human sense says. The ones who are trafficking and helping such drugs reach each and every corner of the country are committing a heinous crime. Drugs and drug

dealing is a scourge that can bring down a mature and intelligent society to intolerable levels of depravity. It is better to nip this crime in bud so that our country doesn't follow the horrible western malady. There should be no leniency when talking about peddlers and pushers who destroy the victim and his kith and kin and put the victim into unalterable habit which will make the individual take to all crimes including murder and rape. If we need to stop this menace from spreading we need harsh steps and stringent punishments. Only love and affection can help the youth from falling into the clutches of drugs. Societal control is necessary along with a legal framework. Let us develop our Lives, our Communities, our Identities... Without Drugs."

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad- 15

"Just as I had to go through a transition period, I guess [my friends and family] did, too."

--- Jennifer Hudson

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Service extension - exception not rule

CHIEF Minister Mukul Sangma's rant against the NDA Government for not extending the services of the Director General of Police who superannuated on Thursday is inherently flawed. Extension of service to bureaucrats or their re-employment should be the exception not the rule. Granted that the recently retired DGP is an excellent field operative and has extensive experience in counter-insurgency strategies and that under his leadership there have been a series of surrenders by some of the hardcore militant outfits. But to extend his service beyond his tenure is to admit that his successor does not have the same caliber, commitment, energy, drive and policing acumen. And for the Chief Minister to lambast the Centre for not agreeing to his proposal is to undermine the wisdom of the Union Home Ministry. There are enough feedback mechanisms for the Home Ministry to rely on other than the state government's own recommendations on behalf of a particular officer. Sangma's argument that the extension would enable a smooth transition from the incumbent to his successor is also questionable. The new incumbent (Acting DGP) would be retiring by September this year. If the outgoing DGP is allowed a six-month extension, it would scuttle the chances of his successor to occupy that favoured post.

There is no doubt that politics weighs heavily in the transfer, posting and extension of services of bureaucrats, especially top officials. In Meghalaya there was a hue and cry when the service of a particular chief secretary was sought to be extended. The Government at the time did not have the clout to push through its decision and jettisoned the idea. Since then we have not heard of service extension for those at the highest rung of the bureaucratic ladder, although some have been reemployed. And this should be the rule since no one is indispensable. It's a different matter that chief ministers desire to operate within a comfort zone of their creation but at the end of the day it is public interest that should be the prime consideration of any government.

LOOKING BACK

February 18, 1989

Salve stresses on reduction of non-plan expenses

Chairman of the Ninth Finance Mr N K P Salve has laid emphasis on cutting down non-plan expenses both at the Central and State levels as a means for putting the country's economic on the rails again. Addressing a press conference in Shillong he said the Centre's financial position was "precarious" with some Rs. 50,000 crore revenue deficit.

He said that it would be the endeavour of the Finance Commission to bring the staggering deficit to zero level by end of the financial year of 1995. He sought the cooperation of the State which accounted for an additional Rs. 12,000 crore as revenue deficit. In this connection, Mr Salve noted that half of the country's revenue was going for the payment of salaries and wages of its employees. He regretted that taking a cue from the Centre most of the Government had made up ward revision of the pay and allowances of their govt servants. "This is extremely dangerous for the nation", he added. Reacting to the State Chief Minister's appeal for introduction of helicopter service and high court in the State, Mr Salve virtually turned them down. He said although he was not competent to comment about the political import of the demands, a Chairman Finance Commission he would hardly endorse the same. Mr Salve described as "commendable" the State Government's efforts in

raising the people from below the poverty line. Giving statistical backup, he said against 47.4% in 1975-85 period, only 28% remained below the poverty line in 1987-88.

Majumder warns opposition not to provoke lawlessness

Tripura Chief Minister Mr Sudhir Ranjan Majumder has warned frustrated opposition leaders not to provoke lawlessness and said the peace-loving people of the state would not tolerate their designs to bring back chaos. He alleged that the opposition leader Mr Nripen Chakraborty could not tolerate the current peaceful atmosphere in the state and was trying to take political mileage of certain incidents in which CPI(M) supporters were allegedly involved. He said nobody was above the law which will take its own course.

He said the state government was successful in restoring law and order in the state after a decade and the people were now living in peace. The opposition leaders could not tolerate this and were trying to provoke the people with false allegations, he added. Earlier, leader of the opposition Mr Nripen Chakraborty had written to the Director General of Police alleging that a murderer was being protected by the Chief Minister.

Festival tourism vis-à-vis religious festivals

By Omarlin Kyndiah

A festival is an event, a social phenomenon in virtually all human cultures. Festivals have been present in human life since antiquity. Etymologically the term festival is derived from the Latin 'festum'. But originally Latin has two terms for festive events: festum, for "public joy, merriment and revelry" and feria, meaning "abstinence from work in honour of the gods". In social sciences, the definition of festival can be understood from the viewpoint of various disciplines such as comparative religion, anthropology, social psychology, folklore, and sociology which collectively define as 'a periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participates directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds and sharing a worldview.

Scholars have defined various types of festivals, generally based on sacred or secular dichotomy. Festivals are generally considered to be the types of cultural performances i.e. those associated with religious traditions. However, we do also have festivals which are associated with localized ritual entertainment. Such festivals are termed as 'festival tourism'. It is an instrumentalist discourse in which festivals are viewed as tools for promoting tourism, economic development and marketing. In Meghalaya, we have many such 'festival linked tourism' like the Monolith Festival, Autumn Festival etc., which are lavishly sponsored and promoted by the various government departments. These festivals have different objectives and functions. They are designed to support tourism and attract national and international visitors where crores of rupees are spent for managing such festivals. There is no doubt that these festivals provide incentives for locals and businesses. However, recently, the Mawlai legislator expressed displeasure over the huge spending on these festivals at the cost of development. At this point of time, I shall not go into details with this genre of festival. However, I shall touch on the function of community festivals with special reference to the Behdeinkhlam Religious festival or Niam

Behdeinkhlam of the Jaintias of Meghalaya. In a religious festival, 'rites' and 'rituals' are considered the building blocks or the units of the festival which are strongly linked to myths. In Niam Behdeinkhlam the rituals are connected to the myth of U Lakriah and the descent of U Niaw Wasa (the Seven huts) through Ka Tangnoob Tangjri (the golden ladder). During the festival the community members are reminded of their Golden Age through the myth of U Lakriah. This version of the myth is known in Jaintia Hills. Besides, the origin myth of U Niaw Wasa, the other significant aspect of Behdeinkhlam talks about the divine origin of the river Myntdu and the emergence of the founding clan- the Sookpoh Clan. The myth of U Lakriah points to the rules of religious and social conduct which are handed to U Niaw Wasa by U Tre Kiro (God) through U Lakriah. In fact, the story of the origin of Niam Behdeinkhlam is part of the origin myth connected with the appearance of the Jaintias and Khasis in their present location. Thus Behdeinkhlam religious festival is part of the kinship and belief systems of the Jaintia and Khasi community.

In order to understand the mythological base of Behdeinkhlam one needs to look at its origin. The narrative is as follows:

At the beginning God, U Tre Kiro created the universe in three layers. The topmost layer called Soorkep rests God with the immortal, ki Puri blai (angel). Here, the judgement of the mortal takes place. In the second layer called Bneiñ(Heaven) lives ki Khadyru Wasa (sixteen huts) and the third is called Sla Khyndaw Pyrthai (Earth).

One of God's (U Tre Kiro) desires is to send his loving Niaw Wasa (seven huts) to earth through the golden ladder, Ka Tangnoob Tangjri to live and prosper happily. God selected a leader, U Syiem Lakriah and bestowed him with divine qualities to maintain contact with Him on behalf of Niaw Wasa. U Tre Kiro appeared before U Lakriah in the form of a rainbow. Rainbow is a symbolic bridge to the divine, a sign of God's covenant. It is a symbol of peace and hope. However, this literalism is not universal. In many cultures rainbow is an evil presence-dangerous to even point at.

When God made the earth, no life was yet in it except rocks, water and air.

There was no soil which is essential for cultivation. Therefore, the Niaw Wasa was unhappy. They told Syiem Lakriah that in such a barren place they could not build their huts and could not cultivate. God, therefore, put the earth in order. First, He instructed the goddess, Ka Bei Rymaw (Earth Mother) to give three basketful of soil known as 'ka le khoh le sun' to make the earth cultivable and productive. Thus the earth became green. Second, He directed goddess, Ka Bei Waboo (goddess of fertility) to fill the earth with birds, animal and fishes, so that the Niaw Wasa would be able to survive and sustain themselves. The Earth became a beautiful place to live in for the Niaw Wasa. Later having seen that Niaw Wasa lived harmoniously and comfortably, God convened a Divine Dorbar (Dorbar Blai) in order to give a moral and ethical basis of living together. He handed over the law of life to the people through His Divine decree (Ki Hukum). This provided the Niaw Wasa with a system of belief called Niamtre. So, the Niaw Wasa was happy.

But one day, in the Divine Dorbar, God told them that they would no longer be able to see Him, since His task of creation is completed. He would not come face to face with them. They were shocked as if struck by a thunder bolt. They were full of tears. Then God told Syiem Lakriah that he would visit them once a year and stay with them for four days and three nights. At this juncture, God asked them what they would offer Him during His stay. U Syiem Lakriah could not answer. God said that he wanted to see a dance. He told them, they could dance anywhere-be it mud, rock or water. They would feel their thumping heart, which would signify His presence within their hearts, so that they will get good health and prosper in life. It was like a covenant or divine sanction to help the Niaw Wasa. The Niaw Wasa agreed to fulfill it. Then God ordered Syiem Pyrthai (Thunder God), one of the Khatso Waheh (fourteen elders) to go to earth. He along with U Mookhai, U Mooralong, U Moonsiang, U Mootong collectively called Ki Soodwar sooluti (stone deities) and Ka Myntdu, Ka Sati Myntdu, Ka Lamynchi, Ka Sangman, Ka Syntu Ksiar collectively called Ki tawiar takan and U Blai Langdoh, Ka Aitnar, U Moosmai and U Ryngkaw descended to earth so that they can protect the people

and their land. U Syiem Pyrthai then decided to honour God's instructions, to stay on earth along with his companions, till he brought their four sisters- Ka Bon, Ka Teiñ, Ka Wet and Ka Doh to a place called Loom Sooyung at Jwai. Thus emerged the founding clans the Sookpoh, San Syngkong, Challam, Passah and Chullai collectively known as Phra Kur Phra Kmái. From these clans emerged the sacred and secular functionaries or the sacerdotal ruler known as Ki Khatso Wasan. They are U Dalloi, Pator, U Langdoh, Ka Langdoh, U Sangot U Maji, U Harnamoooid, U Myrliangot, Chutia and Dhulia.

To celebrate the settlement of Niaw Wasa on earth, the Niam Behdeinkhlam is performed. It symbolises reverence and thanksgiving to God, the creator. The rites and rituals performed during the festival are eventually directed towards the veneration of legendary ancestors like U Syiem Lakriah and the four sisters, Ka Bon, Ka Teiñ, Ka Wet and Ka Doh. Prayers are offered to God invoking Him to drive away all the evil spirits. Sacrifices are made to Ki Blai Chnong Blai Raid invoking them to protect from natural calamities and prevent the people from famine and diseases. Prayers are also offered to Ka Bei Rymaw for bountiful harvest. During the festival, 'ritual food' offered to the ancestors (Ki Sangia Ki Saret) signify a means to communicate with gods and ancestors who are invisibly present with their families during the four days of this religious festival. Behdeinkhlam is an occasion that brings the Niaw Wasa closer to God and it also explains the concept of the creation of a community and its religious Niamtre. Since Behdeinkhlam is usually celebrated during the high monsoon and after sowing, rites and rituals are also performed to drive away the evil spirits of plague and pestilence. This is a natural practice of the agrarian society.

It goes without saying that festivals like this which strengthen the identity of indigenous community would be interesting for many cultures around the world. It deserves to be given due recognition and promotion by the government and its agencies.

(The writer is the General Secretary, Sein Raj Niamtre Shillong)

TO THE EDITOR

CLP leadership issue

Editor,
The leadership issue within the Congress Legislature Party in Meghalaya is still hanging fire and will do so until the arrival of the AICC representative in charge Meghalaya, Mr. C.P.Joshi on July 5. The reason is because a few weeks ago as many as 17 Congress MLAs expressed their unhappiness with the style of functioning of the Chief Minister and "for his aristocratic and dictatorial attitude in the functioning within the Government", they said. However, they find it difficult to pull him down from leadership position because they are not united and they do not have a consensus on who would be the alternative leader. Because of this the AICC is reluctant to tell Dr Mukul Sangma to step down from his position.

However, in spite of that there are still some Congress MLAs who hope that something will happen to the leadership issue. Some have even mooted the idea of forming a new dispensation by a faction of the Congress MLAs combined with other opposition MLAs. But it appears that the opposition MLAs are looking for some other alternatives as they are not united among themselves.

Many of the Congress MLAs here may hate the style of functioning of the Chief Minister but among the current lot of Congress MLAs, Dr Mukul Sangma is still the most active, dynamic, wily, able, capable and not a slave of indecision. Be that as it may but change or no change within the CLP in the state the party can salvage very little from its ebbing trends as it proceeds towards the 2018 general elections.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Shillong-2

Intermittent load-shedding

Editor,
On June 26 and 27 the MeECL played havoc with power supply by whimsically pressing "off" and "on" switch button through the day. This was repeated on July 1, in the wee hours from the local power grid sub-station without any rhyme or reason. One feels that an itchy-fingered switchboard operator in the main switch distribution system is gleefully savouring the utter discomfort of the consumers during humid hours of the summer heat. Once or twice I asked the meter consumption data collector, "Are your people manning the switchboard with "songrura or ta'gong" (itchy plant) that itches to switch the button off and on at the drop of a hat?" If not then why is it that when there is no storm, no lightning and no cyclone the electricity is playing truant! The man

kept mum.

What irks the consumer most is that hefty amount of bill almost always not below one thousand rupees is dumped on our doorstep despite frequent power fluctuation or load-shedding. My view is shared by the bulk of power consumers who silently bear the brunt of such utter arrogance! My appeal is to the authority of the MECL to look into the matter seriously. Some interior villages of Sangkinigre and other villages have been cut off from power supply for months together. Villages like Do'mindigre, Do'panangre to name a few have suffered power failure. My appeal is also to the local MLA of the area to take up the matter in right earnest with the concerned authority because we the townsfolk can somehow manage but not the simple villagers without help from their elected representatives.

Round the States

By Insaq

Education Fraud Spreads

Mathematics wizard Aryabhata would be turning in his grave if he is told that Maths is all about cooking! If this was the story of the education fraud in Bihar recently, ditto is the case in Modi's Gujarat. Shockingly, 500 students of class X who got 90-95 per cent in their mathematics objectives do not know the difference between a triangle and a circle. Worse, they were unable to solve the two digit multiplication and subtraction sums. This came to light when the authorities scrutinized the fairness of the Gujarat Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board (GSHSEB) examination process. However, unlike Bihar where the rule of lawlessness is the order of the day, in Gujarat the modus operandi was different. Herein, the conspirators would whisper out the answers to the students while the teacher stood below the CCTV camera to block the view. As things stands, the GSHSEB has awarded the students zero, notwithstanding Chief Minister Anandiben Patel's BJP Government claiming credit for bringing down cheating in schools. What next?

When it comes to Uttar Pradesh the less said the better. If its school students in Bihar and Gujarat, its college professors and lecturers who are enmeshed in a tutoring deceit. Add to it they boast PhD degrees, extensive teaching experience and have been evaluating students' papers for years. Most scandalously, examples abound: The IMF (International Monetary Fund) stands for International Money Found asserted an economics lecturer; he also had no idea what 'audit' meant. While, an associated professor of English spells evaluation as "evaluation" and spelt finance as "finesce". Topped by school teachers who do not now the names of the Prime Minister and UP's Chief Minister. Like Bihar and Gujarat this abysmal state of affairs came to light at the Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management during evaluation of BA English, economics and history answer sheets. Even as Governor Ram Naik who is also the University Chancellor has asked for details, the rot continues to spread far and wide.

Bengal's Chit Funds Scam

Barely, had the West Bengal Government recovered from the 2013-14 Saradha scandal, it now finds itself enmeshed in a new ponzi scam: chit funds under the garb of "agricultural schemes" in rural parts of the State. The State's Consumer Affairs Department is getting a spate of complaints about investors not getting returns on their investments or the capital being siphoned off in various agricultural schemes. While some chit funds promised huge returns on a potato flexi scheme promising a 20-100 per cent to gullible villagers on their investment within a fixed time period, others guaranteed large sums on tree plantation and poultry farming. True, these chit fund companies are operating at such a small

level whereby it is tough for the local administration to locate them. "Our hands are tied we can only educate the people not to invest in these funds," stated the State Consumer Affairs Minister. The ball now rests in Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's court!

Yours etc.,
S M Sangma
Tura

India hits rock bottom in children's education

Editor,
According to the reports released by UNICEF and World Economic Forum in terms of providing children their right to life and education, India is placed at the rock bottom with Nigeria, Pakistan, Congo and Angola. A family can

improve its lot mainly by ensuring a good future for its children. So too a country. But we seem to have forgotten this ABC. Ours is a lopsided, malignant path of growth that makes four out of ten children malnourished and stunted. How long shall we keep on flaunting the moon, Mars, space, CERN and bullet missions, leaving our children out in the cold?

Shanti Geet In Naxal Territories

The Centre in an out-of-the-box thinking plans to use music to counter Left wing propaganda in 35 districts of seven Maoist and Naxalite affected States and win over the minds and hearts of the locals. Towards that end, AIR plans a major push into the Maoists war zone in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Andhra, Odisha, Telangana and Maharashtra showing the ill effects of violence with shanti geet, traditional folk songs, programmes on local culture, sports and arts, religious and spiritual discourses topped by various Government schemes to eliminate poverty. Further, these programmes would be broadcast in 30 tribal languages, including Bhojpuri, Maithili, Dhurvi etc. That too, in districts which till now had no access to TV and limited radio frequency. It is a moot point whether the tribals will sway to the sounds of music!

Telangana & AP Quibbles

Two years after the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's dream to build massive office complexes in Hyderabad over premises vacated by the State TDP Government were torpedoed by his counterpart Chandrababu Naidu who made plain that till Hyderabad remained the common Capital till 2024 he would not part with any building. No matter the Andhra Administration is shifting its Government staff to new Capital Amaravati. As things stand today, these premises are being shared by the two Telugu speaking States despite Telangana. Further, Naidu intends extracting his pound of flesh in 142 State-owned institutions located in Telangana under the IXth and Xth schedules of AP Reorganisation Act. Predictably, this has paid out to many of Telangana Chief Minister's dream projects. The last word has still to be said by the Supreme Court when it adjudicates on a petition filed by Rao.

Gita In Haryana Schools

Haryana is busy on a spree of imparting religious and moral lessons to class six and above students in State-run schools. Towards that end the Bhagavad Gita and lessons of other religions including Islam and Christianity will be taught from the current academic session. The first book in Hindi which includes a chapter on Gita will be at Kurukshetra on Tuesday according to the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) Director. It is another matter that the Congress-led Opposition accuses Manohar Lal Khattar's Government of "saffronisation" the education system". What gives? ---INFA

Send those who exasperate the regular current bill-payers packing!

Yours etc.,
S M Sangma
Tura

India hits rock bottom in children's education

Editor,
According to the reports released by UNICEF and World Economic Forum in terms of providing children their right to life and education, India is placed at the rock bottom with Nigeria, Pakistan, Congo and Angola. A family can

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.

Cricket still rules, not Olympics or Champions Trophy, feels Veturi Srivatsa

India will go to the Rio Olympic Games with over 100 competitors, crossing the three-figure mark for the first time; the hockey team played a Champions Trophy final after 36 years. Yet, the most discussed topic was the appointment of Anil Kumble as coach of Indian cricket team!

The track and field athletes ran out of their skin as 23 qualified in 16 disciplines for Rio as against 14 in 11 events at the London Games four years ago. It could well be 29 if the relay squad also makes it as expected.

A couple of months ago, Sports Authority of India Director General Injeti Srinivas put the figure at around 110 after an internal assessment and he is spot on. At 103, the contingent will be 20 more right now with swimming and golf yet to get their qualifiers.

Naturally, the authorities are confident that the quantity will also produce quality performances to win quite a few medals. The London tally was two silver and four bronze, number-wise the

were down at 55 compared to the 50th at Beijing where Abhinav Bindra's gold pushed them up.

In the run-up to the Olympics, the Indian hockey team has always done well, beating top teams on tours to Europe to raise false hopes of medal at the Games. This time they showed their mettle by fighting it out with Australia in the final before being knocked out in a shootout.

There is again a talk of a podium finish at Rio and for once they really look like true contenders. But then the Indians have a knack of goofing up at the tournaments that matter, losing to opponents whom they had beaten more often elsewhere.

Finally, to cricket. The Supreme Court kept badgering the Board on the issue of transparency while hearing the reasons for the inability of the game's administrators to implement some of the key recommendations of the Justice Rajendra Mal Lodha Committee.

Surely, neither the apex court nor Justice Lodha will



Anil Kumble

Jumbo task

coach of the Indian team was gone through. The board called for

It is not clear who all applied and the board short-listed 21, though it revealed the names of only the prominent applicants like Sandip Patil, who is still chairman of selectors and a couple of others essentially from the Mumbai-Maharashtra belt.

Ravi Shastri, who did well enough as team director when the chips were down, was still the front-runner for the job with Patil close on his heels. But the new dispensation saw Shastri as a relic of the discredited previous regime which gave him enormous clout as commentator, member of the Indian Premier League Governing Body and a scout to select India coaches along with his former captains Sunil Gavaskar and Srinivasan Venkataraghavan.

It can now safely be deduced that the authorities

were clearly not in favour of Shastri and pushed Anil Kumble, fondly called Jumbo by his teammates, to throw his hat in at the elev-

Laxman, with Sanjay Jagdale, a former Madhya Pradesh captain and former board secretary as convener. The committee went



The quintet: Kumble, Sachin, Dravid, VVS and Ganguly

best-ever tally even though in the medal listings they

be happy with the way the process of picking the head

applications and this time 57 stepped forward.

enth hour, prompting one of his former Karnataka and India teammates, Venkatesh Prasad, to aver that he would not have applied had he known Kumble was in the race.

Tendulkar was overseas and joined a teleconference with the other two members of the advisory committee, Sourav Ganguly and V.V.S

through the exercise, interviewing a few, including a couple of overseas candidates, but it had already zeroed in on Kumble well before. It is unthinkable Kumble could have jumped in without getting the nod from the board and once he was in, it was a one-horse race. Has party (Contd on P-VII)

Following our dreams

The car window winds down and new age author Paolo Coelho asks for directions to the expressway. "Here, have this map," I reply, handing him a folded piece of paper with "Follow Your Dream" on it.

Okay, that hasn't happened yet, but scientists say we live in an infinite multiverse which means that it is statistically guaranteed to happen somewhere at some point.

It worries me that so many young writers and filmmakers I meet think "Follow Your Dream" is the most profound idea ever. My question is: Which dream? The one where I'm chained naked to Goofy at a Disneyland parade? The one where Kylo Ren is fondling his light sabre and looking at me in a creepy manner? Or one of the disturbing ones?

A colleague offered advice. "I think they mean follow your daydream, not the weird dreams you have at night, thanks to your strange eating habits," he said, as if other people didn't eat late-night basins of mac 'n' cheese with jalapeno chillis.

Following my daydreams makes it worse. How do I arrange for Taylor Swift and Emma Watson to fight over me? Or have a group of novice nuns chase me with tickling sticks? The phrase needs a disclaimer: "Follow your dream unless it's kind of obvious that you shouldn't."

Ambition can be a bad thing. In my crime reporter days, I recall a one-legged petty thief in Indonesia who decided to follow his dream by graduating to bag-snatching. He was quickly caught by police who said he'd made a poor career choice.

It strikes me that what many people really mean

by the phrase is that they want to be famous. To achieve this, forget your dream and just have a startlingly original idea. Here's evidence for that from the news media.

Ketan Kumar, 24, stole a train for his girlfriend. He thought she would be impressed with a gift, the newspapers reported. She wasn't, and nor were the police. Ketan, buddy, you need to think about how girls work. Big, ugly steaming lump of metal? Perfect for guys. For girls, think romance and fancy dinners.

Ketan did get into the press but ideally one should find an idea that is eyebrow-raising enough to get media attention without getting you locked up.

A good example is the pair of student scientists in Indonesia who created a dung-flavored air freshener. They collected cow poop, fermented it for several days to maximize the, er, fragrance, and then found a way to put it into a handy spray-top container. The result was instant news media fame. Personally, cow poop is not my top choice for house fragrances, but others disagree.

Karuna Menon, a reader with Indian and Malaysian roots, remarked: "The smell of cow dung reminds me of summer vacations, playing with cousins, gulmohar flowers, and reading novels in the court yard under the shade of a mango tree."

It takes all sorts, Karuna. The comments put me in the mood for a relaxing daydream. I doze. I close my eyes and Taylor and Emma approach, looking daggers at each other and growling.

(The writer is an Asia-based frequent traveler. Send ideas and comments via his Facebook page)

The Funny side



By Yogesh

Remembering Panchamda

In October 1990, a packed auditorium in Odisha's steel city of Rourkela was dizzy with excitement. There were 30 minutes to go before a concert by R.D. Burman. Backstage, however, his troupe was tense. Forget singing, Panchamda (as RD was lovingly called) could barely speak because of a sudden throat ailment. "He tried everything, hot water gargles, sticking a clove into a cigarette and smoking. Nothing worked," remembers singer-composer Jolly Mukherjee, who was summoned by RD. "His secretary Bharat Ashar said Panchamda was calling. I thought he wanted me to fetch medicine. But he told me to sing from backstage so he could lip sync. Though I knew his songs, I expressed my fear of being able to match his prowess. He just fixed me with his signature stare over his glasses, pointed at me and left. I get goosebumps every time I remember how the maestro kept the show going."

Twenty-six years later, Mukherjee was in the thick of rehearsals for a tribute concert to RD (June 27 being the maestro's 77th

birth anniversary), which



Jolly Mukherjee

was on Saturday. An annual fixture for Mukherjee since RD's death in 1994. "He was

him stand out. Long after him, many still benefit from his Midas touch. Even young audiences go ecstatic." Mukherjee, who first got to know Panchamda when he was a little over eight, should know what he's saying. "My brother-in-law Bhanu Gupta played the harmonica and guitar for all of RD's iconic songs.

Both Panchamda and Asha Bhonsle were a loving couple. I'd freely go back and forth while senior musicians like Basudev Chakravarty, Manohari Singh and Marutirao Keer worked. I learnt how to write music in the western style with that team." Born



Panchamda with his father SD Burman

blessed. Even in a packed hall, his aura would make

into a musical family, where

his father played the sarod, Mukherjee had music in his genes. "But it was exposure to RD who thought up tunes, rhythms, melodies or sounds no one could think of, that helped me hone my skills. Later, when I began singing chorus (a break given to me by RD in 1978), it helped me move up quickly. I'd read the music and trained others."

Explaining how the genius' mind worked, he recounts a music sitting. "Bhavani Shankar was playing the pakhawaj when Panchamda said, 'Maza nahi aa raha hai. Tu yeh kisi ke peeth pe baja de. (I'm not getting the feel. Play it on someone's back)' First everyone thought it was a joke. When others shied about going shirtless, he told me. Immediately I removed my shirt and Bhavani left it all red with his energetic playing," he chuckles. "Whether this or using the late Pakistani dictator Gen Zia-ul-Haq as inspiration for a song, nobody could predict what RD would do next."

There was this one time, Mukherjee recalls, when RD woke up after a late night. Filmaker Bedi and Barkha Roy (Reena Roy's sister) were waiting for him. They had arrived for a planned sitting



for Sanam Teri Kasam with all musicians. But RD had forgotten. "Panchamda saw Pakistan in a newspaper headline and immediately asked, 'What's their dictator called?' When told it was Gen Zia, he began tapping his foot, slapping his thigh and sang, Zia... Ah ha ha.

Bedi asked him why Zia and he asked, 'Achcha heroine ka naam kya hai?' Somebody said Reena Roy only for him to snap, 'Arrey picture mein naam kya hai?' That's how it changed from Zia to Nisha. Just like that."

Sanam Teri Kasam, the 1982 super-hit, not only left

the nation in raptures but got RD his first Filmfare with songs such as Nisha, Ah Ha Ha and the title track going on to become chartbusters. The same genius was seen when RD composed the iconic Musafir Hoon Yaaron from Parichay (directed by Gulzar) a decade earlier,

while having a bath. Mukherjee says that his brother-in-law Gupta had reached early so he picked up the guitar to warm up with a rhythmic chord he'd thought of. RD, who had just gone for a bath, opened the door, snuck his head out and asked what he was playing. He insisted the same rhythm continue, came out wrapped in a towel and sat at the harmonium with just the end of the song refrain. He then went back to bathe. And suddenly began shouting: "Mil gaya." Darting out all wet, he sat in a towel, hair dripping, playing the tune of the song." But fame is fickle, even when it comes to stalwarts like R.D. Burman.

Mukherjee laments how the film industry treated RD when down with a heart attack in 1988. "After his immensely popular music for Sagar (1985) -- though songs for most films he did later still play by the hour on every FM channel -- the films were either disasters at the box office or sank without a trace.

That gave him the heart attack. He'd often bitterly joked about his removal as composer for Ram Lakan (1989), 'Bypass ke liye gaya, toh mujhe hee bypass kar diya.' He couldn't handle disdain from the same industry that wouldn't tire singing his praises." Mukherjee remembers how Panchamda worked extra hard on 1942, A Love Story. "If this doesn't work, I'll give up." And it worked. The film and its music got both critical and mass acclaim when it released in April 1994. Only, RD had given up three months before...

By Ranjan K Baruah

Skill development

We have been publishing articles related to different career opportunities. These are helpful for the students who are either studying or have finished formal education and striving for jobs. However, there are millions of young people in the country who cannot do well in formal education. Some of them are drop out because of many problem in the family or locality and some do not get marks which are required to qualify for exams or entrances. As we are a populated country and every individual is important for the country, so, we cannot ignore then force which do not have higher education. In this regard the key word that comes in the lime light is skill development or skill education.

Today, India is one of the youngest nations in the world with more than 62% of its population in the working age group (15-59 years), and more than 54% of its total population below 25 years of age. Its population pyramid is expected to bulge across the 1559 age group over the next decade. It is further estimated that the average age of the population in India by 2020 will be 29 years as against 40 years in USA, 46 years in Europe and 47 years in Japan. In fact, during the next 20 years the labour force in the industrialized world is expected to decline by 4%, while in India it will increase by 32%. This poses a formidable challenge and a huge opportunity. To reap this demographic dividend which is expected to last for next 25 years, India needs to equip its workforce with employable skills and knowledge so that they can contribute substantively to the economic growth of the

country.

Skill development, however, cannot be viewed in isolation. It is estimated that during the five year period from 2004-05 to 2009-10, only 2.7 million net additional jobs were created in the country. For a skills strategy to be successful it should be complemented by commensurate creation of jobs in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors which will be a key outcome of overall economic growth including entrepreneurship cutting across all sectors. The Indian capacity for harnessing entrepreneurship has not been fully realized the MSME (micro, small and medium enterprises) sector contributes to only 17% of GDP as 3 compared to 85% in Taiwan, 60% in China and 50% in Singapore. Given the realities of rapidly changing economic landscape in the country, entrepreneurship opportunities have emerged as an important source of meeting the aspirations of the youth.

Skill development and entrepreneurship efforts across the country have been highly fragmented so far. As opposed to developed countries, where the percentage of skilled workforce is between 60% and 90% of the total workforce, India records a low 5% of workforce (20-24 years) with formal vocational skills. Today, more than 20 Ministries/Departments run 70 plus schemes for skill development in the country. However, there are gaps in the capacity and quality of training infrastructure as well as outputs, insufficient focus on workforce aspirations, lack of certification and common standards and a

pointed lack of focus on the unorganized sector.

Recognizing the need and urgency of quickly coordinating the efforts of all concerned stakeholders in the field of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Government of India notified the formation of the Department of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship on 31st July, 2014 which subsequently led to the creation of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship on 10th Nov, 2014. We shall publish details related to National Skill Development Fund, National Skill Development Corporation, Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship, etc., in our next edition.

Updates:

An Examination will be conducted by the Union Public Service Commission on 18th September, 2016, for admission to the Army, Navy and Air Force wings of the NDA for the 138th Course, and for the 100th Indian Naval Academy Course (INAC) commencing from 2nd July, 2017. The approximate number of vacancies to be filled on the results of this examination will be as follows: - National Defence Academy: 355 (208 for Army, 55 for Navy and 92 for Air Force) Naval Academy: 55 (10+2 Cadet Entry Scheme) Total: 410. The last date of applying and submitting application is 15th July.

(The writer is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 98640 55558 for any career related queries)

There is revival of interest in Rabindranath Tagore in Germany. Researcher Martin Kampchen tells Sirshendu Panth during an interview

German interest

There is a slow revival of interest in Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore and his works in Germany, but mostly among a niche readership, says German scholar and Tagore researcher Martin Kampchen.

"Yes, a revival is slowly happening. But it is happening at a deeper level, at a more informed level, not at a superficial level," Kampchen said in an interview.

Kampchen, 68, who has been staying for the last 36 years in Birbhum district's Santiniketan founded by Tagore, said the German interest in Asia's first Nobel laureate is now more pronounced at an "existential level".

"That denotes seeing



German scholar and Tagore researcher Martin Kampchen

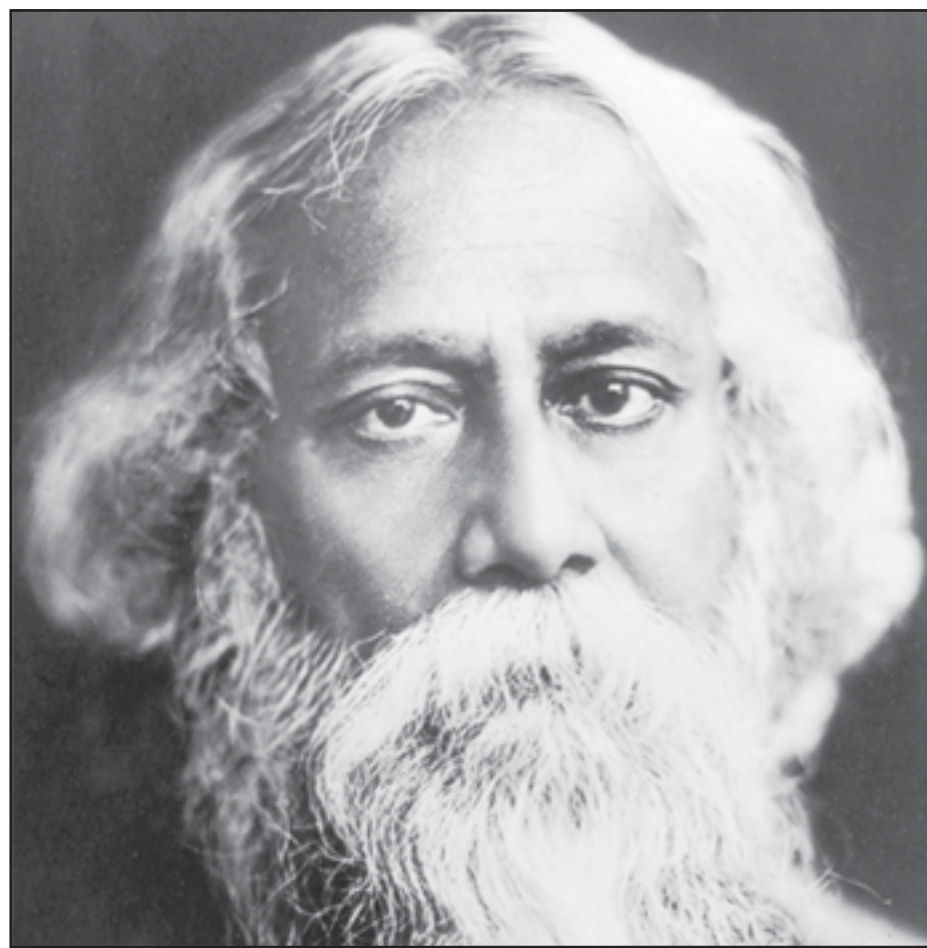
Tagore in all his various facets, not in a very limited facet because his own translations only deal with certain spiritual subjects. He has done other things - he has written nonsense poetry, children's poetry. But he himself did not translate those works."

"At the moment you can

say the revival is mostly among a niche audience," said Kampchen, who has written a number of books on Tagore, translated his works in German and delivered lectures in various nations on the bard.

A much feted man of letters, who can converse with equal ease in Bengali, English and German, Kampchen was awarded the Rabindra Puraskar by the West Bengal government in 1992.

Tagore had visited Germany thrice - in 1921, 1926 and 1930 - and received



translations. "His works were translated into German from English, not directly from Bengali to German. Tagore had himself mostly translated into English those of his poems which had a spiritual content.

Kampchen said he himself has translated Tagore's works into German from Bengali and not from the English translations done by the poet.

"These I call a more genuine kind of translations. If these translations can revive an interest in Tagore, I will be all too happy," said Kampchen, who came to Santiniketan in the 1980s.

Kampchen, who holds a PhD in comparative religion apart from another doctoral degree in German, has set up a Tagore library at Hamburg. "I am setting it up for the

last four-five years. I continue to supplement it every year. There are books in English, Bengali and German. All books that have come out on Tagore, and by Tagore in German are available. Many of the scholarly works in English are also there."

However, it is an accepted fact that even in India, including Bengal, apart from the evergreen popularity of Rabindra Sangeet (songs composed by Tagore), the readership for his other works has dwindled to a large extent.

Kampchen prescribed that to rekindle an interest in the large oeuvre of Tagore, studies on him should link the bard to the modern concerns.

"Link Tagore to the modern concerns we have today - like ecology, climate

change, global warming, the salubrious effects of poetry, psychology.

"All of these can be linked and connected with Tagore. That is what we should do, and that is what we still fail to do.

"These need to be done, apart from singing Rabindra Sangeet, which is obviously important as Rabindra Sangeet has a healing effect on the mind. But there is so much more to, and that is how we should look at it."

Tagore, who won the Nobel prize for literature in 1913, holds the unique distinction of composing the national anthems of two countries - India and Bangladesh.

(The writer can be reached at s.panth@ians.in)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, July 3, 2016

Moon square Uranus on your solar return chart indicates some mixed results this year. You may get caught up in non-essential activities. Getting your priorities right could produce some impressive results. There would be opportunities to establish new contacts however don't let emotions guide professional interactions. Gather your strength and do not lose perspective; draw strength from the family nucleus to enable you to re-strategize. Draw on your experience to overcome delays. Good news in the family will bring joy. Travel will be rejuvenating and beneficial.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

The planetary configuration brings mixed results for you. You are compassionate and generous with family, friends and relatives. You are likely to see benefits and improvements in the areas of work and health, as well as daily routines. Your ability to handle the details required to do a good job is significantly enhanced and others increasingly become more aware of your skills. Benefits may come through co-workers or employees during this period. You spend more time on phone calls, emails, short frequent trips and communicating with friends.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You are patient, laborious and clever with material aspects and manage finances and business ventures with ingenuity and success. There would be cooperation and understanding in professional and relationships. You might pay attention to various ways to increase personal funds, resulting in more than one avenue for monetary gain. You would always be willing to work all the more harder to meet your new responsibilities. Your love life has been erratic for some time, and this trend continues. You could find that you invest in real estate. You would also bring a more playful environment to your home. There will be a fluctuation in energy levels.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

The planetary configuration of this phase brings good results. Any type of service that you may provide is likely to go well. You are more successful in hiring people to work for you and improvements in your working environment are likely. You find more enjoyment in the work you do, and it is easier than usual to find employment now. You may get a new job during this period. Others will derive more enjoyment from the current job. Work tends to be very easily accessible to you. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Your natural talents would meet with reward and acceptance. Practical matters are a large focus and are very strong. More security in your job is likely. You are more willing than usual to work diligently for money, and your natural talents are likely to be utilized more in the work you do and appreciated by others. You would enjoy some time in your family and there you find affection and love. This is altogether a happy and relaxed time for you. Take care of your health and adopt a routine of regular walk and exercise.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Communication, creativity and authority in professional matters are highlighted as an exciting job offer, reward, recognition, or promotion is possible. An opportunity to expand on a global level arrives now. You would have more energy for work and your daily routines tend to speed up now. Perhaps you have a larger workload than usual. You are ready to perform and express yourself and take charge and responsibilities on your shoulders. This is a very significant period when you are inspired creatively and emotionally. Romance could make you think along serious or practical lines and look to a more committed relationship.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 23)

This is a phase that brings fun, entertaining events and happiness to the fore. Your effectiveness, self-worth and finances are also highlighted. This stage of your life may

be marked by hard work. Financial success may not be remarkable, yet it is generally steady, if slow to come by. Matters of personal courage, confidence and independence are emerging. Issues surrounding income from foreign sources could also figure at this time. You should be careful not to over-analyze your relationships. You feel on top of things with good health and positive energy.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

You would participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you. You are in a position to inspire others through what you create. Turning a hobby or favorite pastime into a career could also figure. Partnership ups and downs continue to persist, as you struggle with matters of freedom and dependency. Children may require more discipline or attention. You may also bring more creativity into the work you do. Health is likely to prosper and medical procedures or programs, if necessary, are more apt to be successful.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Good financial returns are on the cards. You might have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort and status. You probably should be on the lookout for a tendency to create your own financial stress due to extravagant spending habits. You may visit religious places and strong feelings towards religion are enhanced. You learn to look inside of yourself with a newfound clarity and realism and ideally draw up considerable strength from within. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities or a structured exercise routine.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

The planetary combination opens new horizons in your romantic and love life. You would pay attention to various ways to increase personal funds. You are bound to experience your fair share of fun, and good times. Creative projects are likely to fare well, and could possibly even bring some type of recognition. Love and romance may enter your life or is enhanced with good humor and warmth, and social engagements abound. For singles, meeting a special person is highly likely. Health is likely to prosper and medical procedures or health programs, if necessary, are more apt to be successful.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You would be more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental about work commitments. Investments in stocks and other speculative matters could earn tidy profits, although care should be exercised with any dealings that tie you to other people and others' money. Your creativity and social life are stimulated, and plenty of opportunities to express yourself uniquely and creatively will present themselves. Relationships with your children may be especially fulfilling now. The desire for some form of recognition is going to be strong.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

This is a fabulous period in which to take the vacation you have always wanted to take. Those with artistic or athletic talent can be especially prolific and prosperous at this time. You may find great joy and reward in your creative projects and hobbies, and could discover a new hobby or creative talent you never knew you had. Healthy risks are likely to pay off, but be careful of overconfidence in speculative investments. Pleasure-seeking activities, recreation, and amusement are increased. Health is likely to prosper.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

This phase highlights friendship, love, romance and children in your life. You may visit and spend a lot of time in the company of your friends and loved ones. This is also a favorable time to go for higher learning and joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency. Your family would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. These positive circumstances will not necessarily fall into your lap, and are unlikely to come all at once. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities in these areas of life.

Pakistani-American terrorist David Coleman Headley liked Osama bin Laden's theory of having several women in one's life but found Pakistani women to be cumbersome than those from Arab countries, says a new book.

Laden's father, Mohammed bin Laden, had at least 54 children from 22 different wives. So while Laden was attending college, he and a friend decided they would each also take several wives and have large families. Laden himself had over 20 children from six wives.

"Laden later developed a theory on the advantages of having several women in one's life. Four was the optimal number, prescribed by the Prophet Muhammad himself, according to bin Laden," writes investigative journalist Kaare Sorensen in his new book "The Mind of a Terrorist."

"One is okay, like walking. Two is like riding a bicycle: it's fast but a little unstable. Three is a tricycle, stable but slow. And when we come to four, ah! This is the ideal. Now you can pass everyone!" he says quoting Laden.

According to the author, Headley was, as usual, very excited about Laden's thoughts, including those on women.

"Headley himself loved women. And he had many of them. He bragged to a group of friends that he had

Headley liked Osama's theory on women!

been with more black women than his entire class at the military academy combined. That was about one hundred students," the book, published by Penguin

"Arab women are much more understanding and open to it. They only ask that you be fair," Headley wrote to his friends, he says.

However, the author says Headley's many women were also his Achilles' heel.

"He could manage the American narcotics authorities; connections to the drug trade; heroin smugglers in Pakistan; major

Iqbal from the intelligence service; and Pasha, Sajid Mir and the others in Lashkar, and he could juggle all his roles and opportunities at once - without everything coming

crashing down to the ground. "But when it came to women - wives, girlfriends, friends and his own mother - everything went wrong," he says. Headley revealed too much and there was always one who talked; her name was Faiza Outalha, the author says.

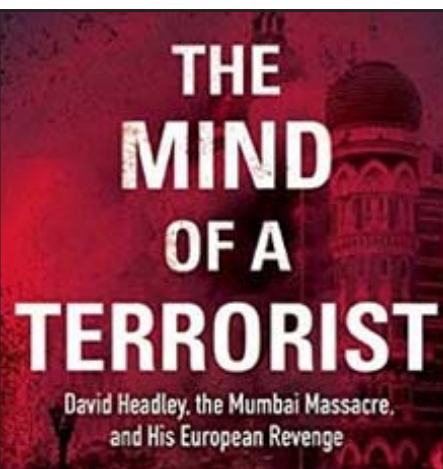
"She was originally from Morocco, but she was studying medicine at a uni-

versity in Lahore, and it's not difficult to see why Headley fell for her. In late February 2007, the two got married in Pakistan...Near the end of 2007, less than a year after they got married, his relationship with Faiza was on the verge of collapse," the book says.

In December 2007, Faiza talked her way into the American embassy in Pakistan.

"She was angry and loudly let the agents from the department of state's security agency know that her husband, an American citizen, was a terrorist. He had stayed in Lashkar-e-Taiba training camps and sometimes spoke about suicide missions, she said. And he might be involved in some activities in Mumbai.

"A few months before the Mumbai attack, Faiza went directly to Lashkar leader Hafiz Saeed and asked for help in saving their troubled marriage. Saeed then paid a visit to Headley, who downplayed the matter and explained that he had been busy with his Lashkar duties and hadn't had much time to take care of wife number two," the book says.



Random House India, says. It contains Headley's personal emails, revealing the psyche of the terrorist.

"But he (Headley) found Pakistani women to be cumbersome. They'd all seen too many Bollywood movies with big, dramatic romance scenes, and they didn't want to live their lives as the third or fourth wife in a complicated marriage," argues Sorensen.

Jumbo task

(Contd from P-VI) politics played any part in Kumble's selection? It appears so, as he is considered close to the ruling party at the Centre and he almost contested from Bengaluru for the Lok Sabha in the 2009 general election on the BJP ticket, but for the caste calculation. He is likely to be a star candidate in the next assembly election.

Once a political decision is taken, the rest was easy. The three advisers to the board are all Kumble's teammates and three weeks ago, board president Anurag Thakur significantly stated that the three wise men "were

not averse to travelling with the Indian squad".

At least one of the members has always been keen on travelling and once wanted to go with the team even when an injury ruled him out for the overseas tour.

Though for the time being, Sanjay Bangar and Abhay Sharma have been retained to assist Kumble, soon the advisers may join Kumble on a rotation.

Is it the end of Gavaskar-Shastri era in India's cricket matters? Don't be sure, there are no permanent friends or foes in the board.

(The writer is a senior journalist and the views expressed are personal. He can be reached at sveturi@gmail.com)

"When other people reject positive changes you make for yourself, there is always some nerve to get to the root of in those other people."

--- Jennifer Hudson

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LVIII No. 323

SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 4, 2016

Unnecessary Post-mortem

THE CPI (M) in West Bengal can retreat into a gloom of self-analysis for 5yrs. After a great deal of vacillation it agreed to go into an alliance with the Congress which is called a "jot". Even after the formation of the alliance, there was hair splitting over whether it was an alliance or just seat-sharing. In the circumstances, a common programme could not be chalked out nor was it necessary. If anything, the indecision of some leaders weakened the "jot". It is true that the state unit took a decision which clashed with the line taken by party general secretary Sitaram Yechuri and his predecessor Prakash Karat who had long been indifferent to the state unit's electoral prospects. But why they took this attitude has never been explained. The Alimuddin street mandarins will now be asked by the Central committee to go to the CPI (M)'s primary unit in West Bengal to tell members that it was wrong to form the alliance. Even the state party secretary, Suryakanta Mishra who supported the alliance fully now has to retract.

What Yechuri and others mean by the West Bengal unit's violation of democratic centralism is not clear. Yechuri has been wallowing in self-contradiction. It is not clear why the Kerala unit of the party was allowed to be in an alliance with the state Congress and seize power. Does it indicate that the West Bengal CPI (M) should not have gone all out to fight the Trinamool Congress though the BJP has little strength in the state? One wonders what it will do now, trying to appease allies like the Forward Bloc and the RSP whose loyalty to the Front had always been suspect.

LOOKING BACK

February 18, 1989

Terracotta and the tribal ethos

Terracotta, which essentially involves intuitive handling of Mother earth and the tribal ethos have always gone hand in hand through the millennia of Indian history and pre-history. If terracotta imagery is "in" today, with urban sophisticates going in for votive vessels, stylized animals and toys, pots 'in' with folk and tribal India as utility vessels and jars, as votive vessels to appease tribal gods and goddesses, and as images of gods and goddesses to be worshipped on religious occasions. In fact, the village tribal craftsman and potter in remote corners of India today, fashioning his exquisite terracotta toys and animals, his votive vessels and religious images could well be a direct descendant of his Harrappan forebears or even of his brilliant Mauryan and Gupta ancestors, so remarkably unchanged is the terracotta culture, so continuous and all pervasive.

Terracotta belongs peculiarly to the Indian tribal not only because much of it is fashioned by him but also because the potter's craft is closely linked with the socio religious life of tribal's all over India, with the potter making various terracotta items according to the need of the tribal: animal and human figures, and other 'murtis', terracotta limbs representing diseased parts of the body etc. In Gujarat for instance terracotta figures made by Kumbars' are found in practically every tribal village. Tribals like Bhil garasias, Dungri Garasias, Chodri, Gamit and Bhils visit the potters regularly to buy the terracotta items, offering them to their Gods who may be mountain Gods, the crocodile gods, medicine god, the small pox goddess and so on. You offer a clay eye to cure your own, a whole terracotta body to heal your sand so on.

In Madhya Pradesh too

the potters craft is closely linked with the life of the tribals. Utilitarian and votive terracotta craft is practiced amongst all the tribals of MP. The Baster tribal terracottas are excellent pieces of handcrafting, untouched by modern influences, simple in form and forceful in expression. It is closely connected with the Pora festival celebrated with great élan in all the tribal areas of MP. During this tribal harvest festival ceremonial offerings are made to the terracotta Bull and their household diety. Goddess Danieshwari is offered terracotta elephants, and horses are offered to Shiva. The tribals of Gujarat take their chosen terracotta to sanctuaries where they are offered the gods. Some of these terracotta items especially the votive horses are stylised, finely executed and full of aesthetic vitality.

But perhaps the most basic archetypal terracotta's are made by the tribals of Bastar and Sambhalpur. Here the clay animals are simple roiled dowels of clay with pinched and incised delineations as major features. However, the tribes of Baroda and Surat districts portray a highly sophisticated form of abstraction in their rendering of terracottas. The terracotta horses of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh made by the tribals have their own solid charm while the clay animals made by the tribals of Bihar and Bengal abound in sophisticated decoration. But without a doubt the terracotta of Tamil Nadu are the most sophisticated, excelling in style, rendering and figure representation.

The story of clay and terracotta, it has been said, is the story of the basic, primeval relation between man and earth, the earth from which he sprang, which gives him unbounded joy, sustenance and succor and the earth to which he goes back.

Non Congress coalition in the offing?

By H H Mohrmen

It is exactly one and half years to 2018 the general election year to the state Assembly and it is also time for political parties to solicit alliances. It is therefore of no surprise to see that several alliances have already been proposed in preparation for the coming election. The political situation in the state is such that except for the Congress no party is confident of facing the election all by itself; not even the mighty BJP, so there are proposed alliances from left and right.

For reasons best known to UDP leadership the party took the bait and entered into a grand alliance with the BJP vide the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) to eradicate Congress from the region. It is however not the same with the NPP which has already had an alliance with the NDA before the 2014 general election when the party was under the leadership of its former supreme leader late P.A. Sangma. And the other Assam-based regional parties had also been part of the BJP led pre-poll alliance and now the BJP led government in the state.

Everybody knew of the BJP's grand plan in all of this which is to rid the Congress from region and the entire country and I think this is a very dangerous ploy. The sole objective of the BJP to eradicate the Congress which is the only remaining national party from the entire country is not good for democracy in India. Right now the only objective of the BJP under the leadership of Amit Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is for the BJP to replace India's own Grand Old Party (GOP) as the only national party with a presence in the entire country. Of course there is no harm in that, but the consequences or the outcome of achieving that objective is a threat to democracy in the country.

The BJP like everyone else saw the rise of regional parties in the political scenario of almost all the states in the entire

country. Every state has at least two or more regional parties which can influence the decision of the voters, hence there is only room for one national party in this entire scheme of things. Previously the Congress had staunchly occupied this space, but now the opportunity is open for the BJP to claim that space. There is no harm in that but to try eliminate options is bad for democracy. The BJP has also realized that the survival of the NDA post 2019 will also depends largely on the support of these regional parties, because it will not be able to repeat the 2014 feat again, hence such alliance(s) are vital.

This is a dangerous proposition because if the BJP succeeds in its plan then there will be no alternative to the BJP. In the future only the BJP led government will rule the country at the national level and the opposition in the parliament will comprises of tens of regional parties with no unity and cohesion. The country had experienced that same situation in its more than seventy years history after it had attained independence and then it was the Congress which was the only Grand Old Party (GOP) in the country. Maybe it is not wrong to say that the Congress is now in a mess because it has taken the position it occupied for so long as the only GOP in the country for granted.

Therefore for a healthy democracy we need a viable and a strong alternative not only at the state level but more importantly at the national level. We therefore need both the Congress and the BJP to be strong to offer the country alternative coalitions. The voters need to have viable choices in every election. Since coalition is imminent it is therefore for the benefit of the country and for its citizen's own good that to have a healthy democracy we have feasible alternatives be it, a BJP led or a Congress led coalition government and strong opposition led by either the BJP or the Congress.

Coming to Meghalaya, BJP's position in the state is still at its nascent stage to say the least. The party on its own will not be able to come up with numbers to rule the state in the ensuing Assembly election, so it is desperately in need of an alliance in Meghalaya. Maybe the UDP had only looked at the local situation and not at the party's grand plans at the national level so it quickly enter into the alliance with the BJP, and the BJP, NPP and UDP alliance will certainly have great prospects in the post 2018 election had it not been for another alternative alliance in the offing.

At the state level the other option that could accomplish the goal of getting rid of both the national parties is to have a coalition of only regional parties in the state. This brilliant idea was first proposed by the president of the HSPDP Ardent Miller Basaiawmoit and then KHNAM also joined the chorus. Now the UDP is in a sticky wicket. Will it continue with the BJP, NPP, UDP alliance or will it join the all regional parties alliance which is again another viable alternative in the state.

The question is also whether this will work? This is certainly not the first time the regional parties in Meghalaya had tried to come under one banner. The minds of the people are still fresh with memories of many effort to come up with a single united regional party in the state. The first instance was when the regional parties were dissolved and the outcome of that effort is the Hills People Union (HPU), then again there was an effort to merge all regional parties and the outcome of that merger is the United Democratic Party. In all these previous efforts, it was the HSPDP which has chosen to stay out of the merger and continued to walk solo while all the regional parties were dissolved to make way for the new united party. This however is history; maybe the new attempt will bear fruit.

Should the UDP continue

with the BJP grand alliance or shift to the proposed all regional parties' alliance in the state? This is not an easy question. And since it is still the single largest regional party in the state it will certainly be able to tilt the balance to whichever coalition it chooses to side with. In the case of the other two major regional parties, since both the parties are campaigning for bifurcation of Meghalaya into Garo and Khasi Jaintia state, the HSPDP like the NPP will remain a region specific party in the ensuing election. Though HSPDP already started organizing its party units and tried to make inroads into many nooks and corners of the Khasi and Jaintia hills region of the state, one will have to wait and see if it will be able to make any difference in the 2018 election. The issue here is if the two parties cannot come into understanding then it is certain that in the coming election both the UDP and HSPDP will be fighting each other and their common enemy the Congress to win the votes of the people in the two regions. And from previous experience we have seen that in every triangular fight it is always advantage Congress.

Whichever way the coalition goes, be it the BJP, NPP and UDP alliance or the all regional parties' alliance, it is the Congress which is the common enemy of all the parties. Shillong MP Vincent Pala is right that the BJP still has a long way to go to be able to influence the voters in the state. Hence for the Congress in Meghalaya the BJP is not the enemy number one, but the united regional parties is the party's worst nightmare. The GOP knows that as long as the regional parties are fighting their own battles then the chance of the party forming a government or a Congress led coalition government is still bright. As for the other national parties it will still be an arduous journey and the BJP in Meghalaya will still have to ride piggy-back on some other party/parties at least in the foreseeable 2018 election.

A tipping point in Pakistan

By M J Akbar

Given the track record, and growing influence of regressive conservatives in Pakistan, this news item was unusual. The Pakistan Senate's Functional Committee on Human Rights has recommended that the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), be dissolved. The CII was established in 1962 by the semi-benevolent dictator Field Marshal Ayub Khan, when he forced through his new Constitution, to recommend ways by which all laws could be in conformity with religious doctrine.

Demanding dissolution of a Constitutional body is hardly routine, but the tipping point seems to have been CII's suggestion that husbands should be allowed "light" violence against "errant" wives, with the decision on quantum of crime and punishment being left, naturally, to the husband. It is true that CII's recommendations are not mandatory, but they affect public discourse. This preposterous instance of misogyny and, indeed, misogamy, made headlines across the world, eliciting ridicule mostly. But ridicule is an inadequate response.

The misuse of religious power is always a delicate matter, since vested interests always blanket themselves in hypocritical piety. So a little perspective is in order.

First, Council of Islamic Ideology has been misnamed. It may be a council of sorts, although it surely does not meet the first requirement of any democratic committee, which is representation from all sides of the house. In any case, it is not Islamic. When Islam defined a social and moral code in the 7th century, its revolutionary vision was far ahead of its times, particularly on gender issues. This is why women were among the most eager of converts. Islam gave women inheritance rights and a form of alimony when no one else did.

But over time, male monopoly over the interpretation of law has ruined its liberal original spirit and turned practice into male gender aggression. Islamic jurisprudence includes the concept of ijthihad, by which you can interpret the law in order to preserve its basic intention. Let us take a very familiar example. The holy Quran enjoins the faithful to cut off the hands of thieves. But this is no longer done in any Muslim country, because societies have found other ways to control the problem. In Pakistan, the utterly non-benevolent dictator General Zia ul Haq tried to revive this

punishment during his long and brutal decade in power. He failed. If there can be amendment in one area of law in the light of changing conditions, there can surely be in any other where regression has occurred.

We saw, for instance, how Indian conservatives rallied successfully to mobilize public opinion during the 1980s after the Supreme Court ruled that Shah Bano, an elderly lady, deserved far more than the pittance she was getting as alimony. The money offered by her ex-husband was not enough to buy one meal, let alone survive for a month. This was an instance of how a progressive Muslim law had been reversed by gender brutality, by men who treat wives and other female relatives as their possession rather than individual human beings. Such a mindset takes shelter in false religiosity.

This problem has become a crisis in Pakistan. The Hindu reports that "Some of [CII's] rulings are that DNA tests were not acceptable as primary evidence in rape cases and a model bill prohibiting mixing of genders in schools, hospitals and offices. While the Council has been proactive in taking cognisance of complaints under the dreaded blasphemy law, it has refused to entertain pleas for measures to punish those who file false complaints under the law."

What is, however, encouraging is that influential sections of Pakistani opinion are ready to challenge such abuse of authority. People are willing to speak up. Members of the human rights committee are one, but not the only, example. A major Pakistani English daily, Dawn, condemned the Council for Islamic Ideology for flooding "the airwaves with distorted interpretations of religious and cultural norms" and urged the country's legislators to ensure that in a democracy, "laws impacting women are passed through Parliamentary consensus". Implicit in this advocacy is the belief that obscurantism will not survive, let alone thrive, in Parliament.

The Quran reserves a very special place in hell for hypocrites, and those who exploit a great faith for selfish, personal ends must surely be hypocrites of the worst kind. In whatever shape they come, in whichever context they exercise their malevolence, hypocrites should not "be taken as friends" but treated as deceivers and cowards. Hopefully, Pakistan will unmask and expose its hypocrites.

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Lethbridge AB Canada

TO THE EDITOR

Appoint teachers on merit

Editor,

We the Meghalaya elementary Pre-Service Trained Teachers Associations Tura Unit (MEPSTTA) have the honour to inform and request you to publish the following information. After filing the RTI in three SDSEOs in Garo Hills we have found that 156 teachers have been appointed during 2014-16 under contractual basis, out of which 56 posts are occupied by untrained candidates, i.e. 10 candidates in Tura, 11 candidates in Ampati and 35 candidates in Dadengre SDSEOs. As per The NCTE Norms such appointments are unacceptable. The Director of School Education and Literacy Department has already directed all the SDSEOs to follow the NCTE Norms which took effect from 23rd Aug 2010. To ensure quality education in the state the Govt has discontinued the in-service teacher training course and launched the pre-service teacher training course in D. El. Ed. for 2 years from 2013. It is almost 3 years after the completion of training yet the Govt has not taken any steps to conduct any fresh recruitment to fill up the

vacant posts which are lying in various Govt L.P. Schools. So if the same continues the Govt should give direct permanent appointment to all trained teachers according to their batch or merit if they have completed 2 (two) years Pre-service teacher training course in various District Institutes of Education and Training (D.I.E.T).

We, the Elementary-Pre-Service Trained Teachers Association, are also dissatisfied with the procedure of appointment of contractual teachers for Govt L.P schools undertaken by the Education Department. The appointment of teachers under contractual basis is to avoid the disruption of classes caused by absence of adequate teachers. But if there is more than one applicant for the vacant post then what is the reason for not conducting any interview and giving the proposal letters in favour of all the candidates instead of the selected qualified candidate? The same thing is happening in the Directorate of School Education and Literacy Department wherein the interviews are not conducted and the appointments are given as per their own will instead of selecting and appointing the qualified candidates.

Therefore, we urge all the SDSEOs of Garo Hills whether they are permanent or on contractual

appointment that in case there is more than one applicant for a post then they should conduct interviews and give only one proposal letter of appointment to the selected candidate according to merit.

Yours etc.,

Browning A Sangma

President

MEPSTTA, Tura Unit.

Mr. Tengrang R Sangm,

Secretary

MEPSTTA, Tura Unit.

Skill development for whom?

Editor,

It is very disheartening and disappointing to note that a group of educated and qualified youngsters who had undergone their skill development training mentored by a private skill development company in Haryana recently had to come back empty handed after being harassed and denied placement. The irony is that they had approached the State Employment Exchange and the Director in-charge to intervene on their behalf but all they got were empty promises. How will parents or youth trust the system which has let them down? Is the Chief Minister himself aware of their plight or is he only good in preaching 'empty skills'

without jobs? Why should not those officers responsible for the fiasco be held responsible and accountable for playing with the future of young people? Or do they want them to take to the path of extremism? The Opposition should take note and raise this matter and push the Government to take the matter to its logical conclusion.

Yours etc...

Dominic S. Wankhar

Shillong-3

Football is a team game

Editor,

In the shocking defeat of Argentina by Peru at the 2016 COPA has raised many unanswered questions related to international football with particular reference to Latin America. First it has once again established the fact that football is a team game and the individual charisma of a megastar is not good enough for victory against tough challenges by a formidable opponent. Secondly, the two jewels in the crown of Latin American vis-à-vis world football, Brazil and Argentina are only shadows of their former selves in strength, skills, charisma, penetrative power and team coordination. Both are loaded with average players too feeble to

compete at the tough international competitions. Thirdly, it is time to welcome new emergent powers in world football like Chile, Colombia and others with full sincerity and appreciation as they deserve their hard earned top positions. Fourthly, Messi has taken the right decision to retire from international football as he consistently failed to deliver anything big for Argentina and should focus only on club football, although he is likely to change his decision later. Fifth, it is a humble reminder for over assertive Messi fans to learn to respect all-time greats like Pele and Maradona for their monumental contributions towards their national teams; and not an empty

handed super star who earns billions of dollars with zero international success for his country. Lastly, Pele and Maradona became all-time greats not just for their individual super skills and talents but for the support extended by outstanding team members who are equally members of the Hall of Fame of international football which currently both Argentina and Brazil pathetically lack.

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 only way you can sustain a permanent change is to create a new way of thinking, acting, and being."

--- Jennifer Hudson

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 5, 2016

Bangladesh terror attack - the fall-out

THE ordeal that the hostages at Holey Artisan Bakery Café in upmarket Gulshan area, Dhaka went through before they were mercilessly slaughtered for not knowing the Koran or for not speaking Bangla must have been an excruciating. Now that terror is a global phenomenon no country can claim to have a remedy for dealing with this human crisis. They can only try to minimise the risks but claims of a fool-proof security mechanism is no longer possible. The international community is shocked at what happened on that Friday evening. Such terror attacks tend to destabilise a country's economy even as corporates look to shifting to safer environs. In recent times Bangladesh's human development index (HDI) has gone up. In key sectors such as maternal and infant mortality and other health parameters, Bangladesh is doing much better than India. Hence human development, the yardsticks for measuring which are crafted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) using a western model of development, fails to measure the complexities of the human mind and its ability to deal with multiple challenges, including the radical forces that embed themselves in ideologies and theologies which preach terror as a means to an end.

The seven states of North East India are Bangladesh's closest neighbours. Trade and commerce are being proactively promoted and there are ongoing talks about communication links between Bangladesh via Tripura to Kolkata. Other routes through the North East which would link Bangladesh with Bhutan, Nepal and China are also being proposed. With terror gaining ground in Bangladesh there is a danger that those routes may also be used as transit points for arms and terrorist outfits of different hues. There are discussions galore about the identity of the killers on that fateful day. It is learnt that they are educated, young men who have been radicalised by a form of Islam that is intolerant of liberal ideas and the brave and emerging new world which accepts the third gender (LGBT) as part of the new human order. The killers claimed they are ISIS and that is the troubling point. ISIS is an ideology, not a group. Ideologies are adopted and embedded into the minds of those who believe that the world is too accepting of what in their opinion is unacceptable behaviour. The café at Gulshan that was stormed by the terrorists represents that new liberal, tolerant counter-culture that is also another form of modernity. Many wonder if Islam has evolved to adapt to these cross-currents of change or whether it has remained uncompromising and strictly illiberal in these times when the control of all forms of religion over the human mind is fast loosening.

LOOKING BACK

February 18, 1989

Violence escalates: Toll 26

Attempt on DC & SP of Kokrajhar

Bodo extremists killed an Opposition party activist and made an abortive attempt on the lives of the Kokrajhar District Commissioner and Police Superintendent as violence escalated on the third day today of the 120 hour Assam Bandh.

Four militants were also killed in encounters with police and two government employees died in cross fire taking the toll in the week long violence to 26 latest official reports said. Troops staged flag march at Bijni, Salekkhati and Sildi Bazar in the violence-rocked Kokrajhar District for the third day today.

The militants shot dead Mr Biren Narjary, an activist of the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA); a regional party, at Jingir Beal in Kokrajhar district. They had killed Asom Gana Parishad's Rani Atha unit president Binod Dutta yesterday.

Four extremist were killed in encounter with police at Penabari, Sildi, Bengtol and Dangjol today. Besides, a forest guard and an Irrigation department employee were killed in cross fire between extremists and police at Panabari. Official reports said the Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police, Kokrajhar escaped an attempt on their lives when extremists exploded a powerful bomb in front of their vehicle.

The extremists snatched a rifle, two guns, set fire to wooden bridges and attacked police patrols at several places. Assam Home Minister Mr Bhriku Kumar Phukan today invited the All Bodo Students Union, sponsors of the bandh, for talks on their demand for a separate home land for Bodes, here on February 28.

Feasibility of privatisation of Oilfields in Assam

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

BEATING THE RHETORIC

The government has recently arrived at a decision to privatise 12 small oilfields in Assam. This, as part of the new policy towards privatisation of 67 small oilfields in India, has understandably drawn strong reactions from the vocal civil society of Assam. Assam has had a long chequered history with oil, with its roots in the Assam movement when slogans like "Tez Dim Tel Nidui" had evoked sentiments of all. Thus naturally any talk about oil in Assam evokes strong reactions.

30 years have passed since the movement has taken place in Assam. The homegrown Oil companies in Assam like Assam Oil have withered away. Refineries like Digboi oil refinery with its falling production limit are now within the gambit of Oil India Limited (OIL). And millions of metric tonnes of oil and oil equivalent gas stand unused. Despite having immense potential, the natural resources in Assam lie unused. Royalties from oil payments are stuck in legal battle since 2008. And a large demographic population stands unemployed.

It is in the background of these issues that the question of privatisation of oilfields in Assam must be addressed. The first theory, that is often propounded whenever there is talk of foreign investment, is the bogey of foreign investment. The image of foreigners, exploiting resources often make for vivid imagery in the socio political landscape of Assam. Yet the fundamental point is the fact that mere declaration of a policy intending to invite foreign investment will not automatically translate into foreign investment. The global economy is at an all time low, Brexit has hit international markets and oil prices are yet to see a high. This, seen with the domestic market not being robust, the chance of foreign investors flocking in to invest in Assam seems quite remote. To this, when one adds the perception of North East as a relatively unsafe investment location, the chances of foreign corporate coming here seem even bleaker. Hence the chance of foreign incursion in oilfields is unfounded.

Another aspect of the

privatisation debate is the "threat to environment". It is true that extraction of natural resources always extracts its cost from the environment. However, in a fast developing world where oil is the basic consumption fuel, from machines to transport, to sit on top of oil reserves and do nothing makes no sense. At some point there has to be systematic efforts to harvest natural resources. However, this must be coupled with the twin paradigms of sustainable technology and accountability.

Today a number of companies worldwide are investing and implementing technologies that make oil and gas drilling as sustainable as possible. For example Cenovus, a company working in northern Alberta, Canada is trying to minimize their impact on this pristine landscape by using reusable wooden mats to create temporary access roads. The wooden mats provide stable work conditions for equipment and the crew and help protect the ecosystem underneath. When finished, they simply pick up the mats and move them to the next location. Petrobras has been drilling in the Urucu province in the Amazon. In a span of more than two decades, the company has built on less than 0.5 percent of the site; the rest is undisturbed. Petrobras has built 71 kilometers of paved roads, but they are built only when needed. When doing exploratory drilling, for example, Petrobras doesn't build a road to a potential site; it clears a patch of land and brings in equipment by helicopter. If the exploratory work proves disappointing, native plants from an on-site nursery are brought there to restore the forest. The nursery, at last count, had about 200,000 seedlings and more than 85 varieties of orchids. Apart from these, companies can go paperless and give back to the community in form of plantation programmes among others. Thus, in the 21st century oil and gas drilling is beginning to evolve as a sustainable face that can't be ignored. Steps like giving back to marginalised communities in form of building hospitals

and schools would further strengthen this process. Though contested, it can't be completely denied that the poor have less access to sustainable means of development. For example, while the poor use firewood for cooking, a better option is use of cooking gas, which is more sustainable. Hence upgradation of livelihood has an indirect spinoff on environmental sustainability as well.

There is however the "perception" of environmental damage that is much harder to confront. In the last thirty years, streams have grown dry, hills have been mowed down and river beds have become thriving business avenues for a large number of people. A Ramsar site of repute, the Deepor Beel, is under continuous threat of encroachment. The hills around Guwahati have become the site of illegal settlements. And yet it is oilfields alone whose exploration is seen as bringing out massive environmental upheavals in Assam!

The threat to environment is real. However the real solution to that lies in accountability and self restraint. Environment will wither away irrespective of whether investments in oil fields are made or not, if there is no accountability. Hence a nuanced approach would be to involve in the oilfield operations and ensure their environmental accountability. Social and Environmental Impact Assessments are the heart and soul of any modern day programme. Accountability must be placed upon those who seek to invest in the oilfields with assurance, not only to give back to the community but also contribute towards innovating sustainable measures for themselves. Steps like construction where only needed, would ensure that balance is maintained between the quest for oil and gas and the environment.

The question arises, as to how the privatisation of oilfields can benefit Assam. The answer to that would lie within the socio political milieu of Assam, if it can assert itself as a responsible actor that is vigilant and cooperative, instead of indulging in uninformed

rhetoric. According to the NSS 66th Round Sample Survey, Assam has the third highest unemployed population in the country. While urban unemployment stands at 52% rural unemployment stands at 39%. The numbers for urban unemployment seem dismal already, the lower rate of rural unemployment is no cause for cheer either. The number stands at 39% because primarily rural employment is in agriculture that itself is plagued by large scale underemployment and disguised unemployment. If these numbers were rectified, the number of unemployed in rural areas would rise even higher.

The State GDP of Assam during 2013-14 grew by 14.68%; when states like Bihar grew by 25% and Goa by 39.84%. While the growth of Assam is slightly above the national average of 14%, yet this growth rate, seen in the context of large number of unemployed people, does not seem enough to fulfil the aspirations of a burgeoning youth population. At this juncture, government estimates of the 12 oilfields generating Rs 4000 crore to Assam would act as a big boost to development of the state. This is, apart from the money that would flow into the state coffers, in form of oil royalties.

This auction must also be seen as an opportunity to develop homegrown potential within the state. Today, Gujarat Power Corporation Limited takes part in auctions for oilfields and has ventured into new areas like solar energy. Tripura has a similar success story with regards to gas exploration. The process of auction opens the possibility of reviving Assam Oil as a premier oil and gas exploration company. Also if such small oilfields are developed, not only would a large number be employed, but also create the human resource of trained manpower to work for oil companies in the future.

The debate around privatisation of oilfields, therefore, has to be approached in a nuanced manner. A jingoistic approach cloaked in unwillingness to reason would harm the interests of Assam, rather than protect it.

(Views expressed in this column are personal)

Meghalaya might be buried under mounds of plastics

Beware of the Chips invasion

By Barnes Mawrie

Perhaps one of the greatest curses that have come into our city apart from the socio-political hazards that we face, is the silent invasion of potato chips which come to us in different flavours and packages. This is what I call an invasion on our natural environment as well as on our food habits. Potato chips have become the craze of every person, child and adult alike. School children and college students spend much of their pocket money on potato chips. It is a good time pass especially when you are on a long journey or when you go perambulating in the parks or in the country side. These chips are tasty and they have the potency of inducing addiction in the consumers. No wonder, children who get used to such taste keep pestering their parents to buy more. Potato chips to my knowledge have a twofold

packets. They are irresponsibly thrown into the field without any concern for the environment.

Sad to say but even parents seem to forget their duty of training their children not to pollute the environment. Even grown up college students commit the same ecological crime. One wonders what kind of education our colleges are giving to these youngsters that such a basic civic sense is not fostered in them. What is more harmful to the environment is the fact that these chips packets are made of non-degradable materials which are also toxic to the environment. God only knows how much of these chip packets are dumped into the Wah Umkhrah and Umshyri rivers and how much of them are deposited in Barapani lake. The potato chips companies are making

First of all, they have a health hazard on us. Addiction to potato chips is disastrous for one's health. Like any junk food, they create obesity and can lead to many other health issues. Besides too much consumption of potato chips kills our natural appetite for food and this can be health hazardous for children who are supposed to eat their daily food.

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First of all, they have a health hazard on us. Addiction to potato chips is disastrous for one's health. Like any junk food, they create obesity and can lead to many other health issues. Besides too much consumption of potato chips kills our natural appetite for food and this can be health hazardous for children who are supposed to eat their daily food. I have seen children who are addicted to potato chips and consequently refuse to eat their meals.

Secondly and perhaps the point I would like to emphasize more in this article, is the environmental hazard that potato chips are having on our natural environment. It is enough to go on Monday to Golf Links and there you will invariably witness a sea of chip packets littering the beautiful green sprawl. On weekends in particular the Golf Links roads are infested with roadside shops selling chains of potato chips and other similar stuff. People buy them or else they would not come with a huge supply of these chips. I do not complain about people buying and eating these chips, but what I am concerned about (as other right thinking persons would do), is the way people dispose of these chip

money at the expense of our lives. These chip packets have invaded even the rural homes in the remotest parts of our State. Some of them have even reached pristine rivers and forests in the rural areas. Perhaps picnickers are largely responsible for this or else the villagers themselves must have acquired this bad habit.

It is my sincere conviction that the citizens of our State must rise up to this challenge. We need to pressurize the Government to ban these chips in their present packaging. If these chips are to stay at all, they ought to be packaged in degradable materials, namely in paper packages. If the State authorities could take up the matter with the production companies, perhaps this issue could be settled. But what is urgent now is that we stop the culture of littering chip packets or any garbage at all. I would also suggest that if the Golf Club is not doing anything about providing dust bins in the Golf Course, the Municipality could take up the responsibility of providing them or impinge upon the responsible group/s to do so. I have a dream of a "chips free country where people are liberated from such addiction, where junk food has become a thing of the past and where traditional food is loved and preferred and a simple life-style is chosen."

TO THE EDITOR

PHE denying water connection to the deserving

Editor,
It is very sad that WATER, the basic amenity of life remains outside the reach of the residents of Umsohkhlur at Mawlai Mawroh. The PHE authorities were duly approached (the SDO, i/c, the EE, i/c, the SE i/c and the CE, i/c), which should not be the case when the Rangbah Shnong of the area has fully recommended our application for water connection. Instead, when we approached for water connection to Umsohkhlur the PHE stopped issuing forms and for a long time we were advised by the EE i/c to ask for a public tap which is not a necessity. We were denied direct access to the CE i/c for water connection by the Assistant. This is all too awkward for an office dealing with the public and we are the sufferers. I ask this question to the PHE: "Why is our right to get

water from the PHE after our long wait, not granted when many others have got their connection? At first, we were being told to wait for the new scheme to come after a short time only. But we later learnt that the feasible project work was stopped (due to sundry reason) thereby leaving in the lurch those who have completed the construction of their houses in that area. It seems that nothing till date has been done by the authorities to give the waiting public our basic necessity of life- the right to get water from the PHE. For how long do we have to wait? Five, ten or twenty years just to get water-connection? The PHE must come up with some plausible replies so that we do not get frustrated. If the authorities can enjoy the same right in their homes as we deserve to then why are we citizens deprived of the same right? In fact, Umsohkhlur is not too far from the Municipal area of Shillong and not in a difficult terrain that people there have to spend lakhs of money to drill underground water or buy water from water-sellers for

years and years as an alternative?
Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

Is Dr. Mukul Sangma really communal?

Editor,
I belong to no political party nor do I subscribe to any political ideology. I am apolitical and ordinary citizen of Meghalaya. Recently some groups have accused Dr. Mukul Sangma of being communal and promoting Garo Hills while neglecting Khasi and Jaintia tribes. There is not even an iota of truth in this accusation. Rather it smacks of communal vendetta and hatred by those groups who are trying to divide people on communal lines and trying to destabilise the Government. This is dangerous for the peace and tranquility of the state. The truth is there for all to see. In the past 44 years since statehood what has Garo Hills gained in terms of physical and human development? Compared to

Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills is the least developed region in all parameters of development due to sheer neglect and partisan attitude of successive state governments. All development activities are centred around Shillong and Khasi Hills got the lion's share of all development funds. All infrastructure development is concentrated in Shillong and Khasi Hills in general. Even in employment opportunities Khasis and Jaintias are enjoying the major share as Government employees.

The guidelines for reservation of 40 percent for Garos and 40 percent for Khasis and Jaintias is also only in theory. It is not followed in letters and spirit. Even in the field of transport and communication, Garo Hills faces a nightmare due to dilapidated condition of all the major roads. Health services and education are also in a total mess. The standard of living and wealth ranking is also much higher in Khasi and Jaintia Hills than the Garo Hills. Dr Mukul Sangma is undeniably the only Chief

Minister who brought major development schemes to the State of Meghalaya. Incidentally he is also the first Chief Minister who brought some development schemes to Garo Hills, that is why he is accused of being partisan which is a totally baseless allegation. Is Garo Hills not part of Meghalaya? Should not the Government of Meghalaya develop other parts of the state like Garo Hills and Jaintia Hills other than Shillong or East Khasi Hills? Can one accuse the Chief Minister of working only for the interest of the Garos for taking some development schemes to Garo Hills? How narrow minded is this? Really speaking Garos are never

communal. They welcome in their midst people from all over the country with open arms. Instead, those accusing Garos of being communal are themselves communal to the hilt. Just introspect and you will know what I am talking about. Of course as a human being Dr. Mukul Sangma may have some plus and minus points but no person can be perfect.

Yours etc.,
Sylvester Marak
Vill Dilmaj Rajakgittim,
Mendipathar

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.

"Turbulence is life force. It is opportunity. Let's love turbulence and use it for change."

--- Ramsay Clark

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Modi's expanded cabinet

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi inducted 19 new ministers into his cabinet on Tuesday. The expansion seemed to serve the twin objectives of including the social groups (Dalits and Adivasis) that voted for him in the last general election while also keeping an eye on the elections in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. Two more women ministers are added to the cabinet - Ms Krishna Raj and Anupriya Patel. After having floated the slogan, "minimum government, maximum governance," during his election campaign in 2014, Modi has backtracked by having the biggest cabinet of 78 ministers. There is no logic to this expansion but the politics of survival must have guided the decisions on who is to be made minister and who should be dropped. Renowned journalist MJ Akbar is the Muslim face of the BJP after Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and Najma Heptullah.

The surprise package was the elevation of Minister of State for Environment and Forests, Prakash Javadekar to cabinet rank. Is this because Javadekar has ensured smooth environmental clearances to major projects and therefore facilitating the "Make in India" campaign without a glitch? The five ministers dropped from the Union Council of Ministers include Nihalchand, Ram Shankar Katheria, Sanwar Lal Jat, Manuskhbhai D Vasva and MK Kundariya. Modi had personally assessed the score card of all his ministers and found their performance lackluster and uninspiring. But of the 19 new ministers inducted by Modi on Tuesday very few inspire confidence. The others lack experience so there is no guarantee that they will perform and, "boost the economy" as Modi has opined. That three Dalits found a place in Modi's cabinet should silence his critics who have leveled charges that the NDA Government is largely represented by higher caste Hindus. This is also a direct challenge to Mayawati, the champion of Dalits and one who has ridden on the caste bandwagon to come to power in Uttar Pradesh. It remains to be seen if the new batch of ministers will be assets to the Modi Government or its bane.

LOOKING BACK

February 18, 1989

The crossroads of high Asia

Walk in the Bakerwal shepherds through the mountains. Drink Tibetan butter tea and with monk in a gilded monastery, watch polo played against the backdrop of a palace that rises like Lhasa's Potala Drift down the Indus, shop for masks and prayer-wheels and turquoise in markets as old as caravan trails, trek across green meadows where half-wild horses thunder and marmots whistle their warnines on the clear, cold, crisp air of the highest bastions of the world. Tibet? Guess again, Mongolia? Have another try. The wild steppes of Russia? Turkestan? Yarkhand? Wrong again, but you're coming close. We're talking about that 3,500 meter-high fragment of Central Asia snuggled in the mountains of India. It's called Ladakh but we prefer the name that author Janet Rizvi gave to it, the Crossroads of High Asia.

You can fly into Ladakh's city Leh, from Delhi or from Kashmir's lake centered capital of Srinagar. But if you have the time and, frankly, if you don't have the time, don't go to Ladakh travel up by road. It's a two day journey starting from Kashmir's Golden Meadow, Sonamarg, where you can take a morning's horse ride to the foot of a glacier. From Sonamarg, if you catch one of the most awe-inspiring vistas you have ever seen. Occasionally you will get glimpses of green, river threaded, valleys where pony-trails still mark the course of the ancient Silk Road to China. Here you will encounter the wiry, bearded, Balti men who look like woodcuts from some

forgotten Kipling tale. In places the road cuts through high walls of impacted snow across which the goats and sheep of the Bakerwal shepherds walk like tip-toeing ballerinas and the headmen, with their staves and blankets and fierce guards dogs, plod with great care. Over the Zojila Pass. Now the snow-fed streams, which have been flowing away from you, begin to flow with you. You have reached a great watershed behind lie the beautiful valleys of Kashmir ahead lie the stark mountains of Ladakh.

There is nothing quite like these mountains anywhere else in the world. These saw-toothed naked ranges rise in temperature shades of pink and khaki, umber, mauve, charcoal, and bronze. And starting, in irrigated river valleys, are oases of incredibly lush green orchids of apricots rising out of barely fields where willows not over gushing irrigation ditches and the tall spires of polars rise as sentinels against the painted hills. The houses of Ladakh are of stone and mud-mortar and seem to grow out of the austere hills, and above them, very often, rise ancient forts, places and monasteries rich with murals glinting in the glow of flickering butter lamps. Leh, the first city of Ladakh, is really an over grow Ladakhi village. A great old cliff walled for stands brooding over the town. It was damaged by an invading army a century ago but the air of Ladakh is so dry, clear and unpolluted that the palace still stands much as it was when the invaders left Ladakh.

The decimalization of Hawkers and Vendors in Shillong

By Phrangngi Pyrtuh

The street hawkers and vendors are part of the city's landscape for a very long time but at the same time the most marginalized. Trade and commerce in the state have traditionally been run on informal lines and hawking and vending is part of this tradition still widely practiced in rural areas. This group of people have persevered through thick and thin. These are people who have no other opportunities in life. There are hawkers/vendors who manage their household, children's education etc through this profession. They have persevered through the most inhuman and cruel brutalities inflicted by none other than their own Government, the Police, the Municipality, the Dorbar not to mention being degraded as sub-humans by pro-capitalist individuals/columnists/organizations which have been going on for far too long. Some hawkers have tried in their own individual capacity to resist the harassment of the authorities by going to court, mediating with the authorities etc but to no avail. Thankfully they have awakened up to their rights. Without caring for the hate campaign and concocted lies by individuals and groups and ignoring a section of the population (the elite, the classist and the racists) who subscribe to these lies and bigotry, the hawkers have come together for the first time under the Meghalaya and Greater Shillong Progressive Hawkers and Vendors Association (MGSPHVA) formed a few weeks ago for the assertion of their rights.

It was not easy to bring these groups of (scattered) people to organize themselves. They hail from different background, areas, ethnicity and circumstances. But to have suffered years of humiliation made it pragmatically possible to bring them together primarily for securing their rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the law of the land. The formation of MGSPHVA must therefore be appreciated as past efforts of organization have failed. However their coming together is causing anxiety to a lot of people who are unable to fathom the emergence of a social consciousness among the hawkers and vendors of Shillong.

Maybe it is time for an alternate political ideology where the perspective of the hawkers, the landless, the farmers, the workers etc reinforce themselves to such an ideology. And what if these hawkers, workers, labourers etc harbour a different ideology? Is it criminal to have an ideology which is anti-capitalist and anti-establishment? And is it wrong if such an ideology finds favour with the lowest section of the society who have been victimized and castigated all along just because they (allegedly) congest the walkways/pedestrians?

Interestingly the hawkers were compared to couding and colorful plastics (Shillong times, 24th June). The author seems to forget that couding is used in school and church compounds/yards to fertilize the flowers/plants and make the church/

displayed in the main notice board of the hospital with the seal of Tura Civil Hospital Management Society. As per reports patients with Smart Card Health Insurance are exempted from payment but not all the people of Garo Hills are beneficiaries of the same and hence are liable to pay the charges as decided by the Hospital Management Society. Not only are the weaker sections of the society affected by this drastic change, but the working class have also to undergo the burden of payment as it ranges from a few hundred to several thousand rupees.

Patients have recounted spending something like Rs 40,000-50,000 for purchase of utilities ordered from Guwahati by doctors, citing its non-availability in the local supply chain. Some recalls ordeals like having to sell their land or a cow for simple ailments like Malaria and Typhoid simply because all the medicines have to be purchased and blood tests conducted at nearby laboratories, and the expenses for the same are high. Sources at the hospital have justified such payments since there is no supply of medicines and reagents from the

school pretty. As for plastic bags the author should know that he himself is equally responsible since I fail to see how he can get on without a plastic bag. The author went a step further to condemn the hawkers on moral grounds. I shudder to think about his views on domestic workers, mine labourers, bar dancing girls etc whose occupation falls outside his moral compass.

This incoherence of these arguments reveal a sinister and well orchestrated "demolishing" plan (by the district administration) to cleanse the city's streets and markets in the race to secure a spot in the smart city plan of the central government. Those supporting the smart city concept have used punctured and ill conceived analogies to insult, criminalize and blame the hawkers for the dirt and congestion. The next time round they may even blame the hawkers for rising crime graph in the state. These anti-hawkers lobby group have failed to understand the complexity of the problem.

Smart city will not solve the agrarian crisis which compelled farmers to migrate to Shillong and take up vending and hawking. Smart city will fail if the Government refuses to tackle the flow of private cars and check the mushrooming of parking lots to suit only those citizens with cars. Smart city will fail if rampant construction and illegal encroachments on foot paths/walkways continues in violation of Meghalaya bye-laws. Clean Shillong campaign will not succeed in the absence of proper waste and garbage disposal mechanism since the Shillong municipal has clearly failed in its task of keeping it clean.

The Government should think of an alternative framework of partnering with the Hawkers and Vendors to decongest Shillong by empowering them. There is no legal obstruction for doing so. In fact the government will have full legal backing if it chose to review its stance towards the hawkers. A synergy between the Municipal and the Hawkers/vendors could do wonders for the state's economy, generate resources, ensure livelihood and make Shillong more humane. Corporatization of Shillong and the concretization of its space is

transforming Shillong into a living hell. And the vendors/hawkers have no role in conjuring the unfolding nightmare.

In Meghalaya the poor and the downtrodden have always been caught on the wrong side of the law while those with money power and political connections remain above it. Individuals/organizations/media and enlightened individuals known for their allegiance to protect and secure human rights have turned a blind eye to the issue on hawkers rights by asking them about their duties instead. This is hypocritical. It's like asking those who live in AFSPA controlled areas (where human rights do not exist) to be more responsible lest they got caught in between the security agencies and militants. They indirectly support the harassment of the hawkers and vendors by arguing that the law of the land is weak in its execution and enforcement. While they oppose biased laws they support the same legal machinery which is used to suppress the hawkers.

The essence of the struggle for human rights is to challenge these defective laws irrespective of the ideology one professes which is not the case in the state at this point. The meeting of June 23rd where TUR and the MGSPHVA collaborated opposes these partisan laws and demands strict compliance of the stay order of the Meghalaya high court on evictions. The ball is now in the Government's court. The debate on the hawkers is already spilling over to be a tribal versus non-tribal issue. The xenophobic elements are out to exacerbate the problem that the community faces. A few vernacular newspaper have refused/delay to publish clarifications on the vending/hawking community. They are either intimidated or have already condemned the hawkers and feel it unworthy to hear what they have to say lest it changes the society's perception on them.

The Government should immediately recognize that hawking and vending is a profession and a gainful economic activity. Any delay in doing so would only succeed in segregating this group in the society with adverse consequences.

affordable health care. In an era, when our Prime Minister has emphasised time and again on free health care, why are we lagging behind? And the irony is that we have a Chief Minister who is a medical doctor himself!

Yours etc.,
Joshua Sangma,
Tura.

Govt guilty of environmental destruction

Editor,
Apropos the news item regarding the threat to the Root Bridge located at Nongriat in view of the construction of the PWD road from Tynra to Nongthymmai village (ST June 29, 2016), I would like to state that there are similar constructions undertaken by the government elsewhere which are disastrous to the environment and have serious negative impacts on tourism. The examples are (a) the construction of PWD road from Lad Mawphlang towards Wah Umiam Mawphlang which has destroyed the David Scott Trail (b) construction

of parking space for the elite parents of Pine Mount School children thereby reducing the size of the famous Lady Hydari Park (c) destroying the Rose Garden opposite the Lady Hydari Park for expanding the official quarters of Dr Donkupar Roy, Leader of opposition (d) construction of residential houses of Forest Department at the Malki-Lumparing forest where not less than 20 full grown trees are destroyed

with an aim to destroy the catchment areas. These are the examples where the ecology and places of tourist importance are being slaughtered mercilessly at the whims and fancies of the rich and the famous. I would therefore urge upon those who are in the legal circles to file PILs against these shameful acts committed by ruthless and unscrupulous individuals.

Yours etc.,
B Lyngdoh,
Shillong-2

Uses of Scepticism

By Avner Pariat

The recent attacks in Dhaka have made people more paranoid than ever. This paranoia is very easy to catch. Especially if you have a screen in front of you all the time. It is much harder to contract reason and calmness. We have become intimate with discussions about 'global terror'. There is now along with Big Finance, Big Pharma, Big Media etc this concept of Big Terror. This terror is multinational, disregarding national borders; it is certainly multi-cultural, able to merge 'local' and 'international'; it is a brand, a franchise which can be replicated everywhere.

Sometimes we become so acquainted with these brands and ideas flowing freely across space that we hardly notice them anymore. We fail to see how odd they are in the context of our own particular circumstances. This is the sublime power that they wield over us, they embed themselves unceremoniously into our minds. It is a power enforced primarily through the media, through the eyes and ears, influencing our minds and hearts, finally flowing out as deeds through the arms and hands. In the light of the recent attacks many people did just this and began sharing the usual islamophobic content on social media, the usual call urging pre-emptive action against "Islamic terrorism" which is an old but still powerful message.

Why should Big Media's depictions of Big Terror be our only source of hysteria, sorry, "information". Often we fail to remind ourselves that the online world is like a gated community wherein everyone knows your name but without any other details. We know about "Islamic terror" but we don't actually (really, truly) know anything about it; aside from someone else's perspectives and from primary sources which might be far removed from us both spatially and politically. The age of information has thus paradoxically become an age of disinformation. We are more 'unsure' today than ever before. We just communicate faster.

People wilfully share their most vile ignorance with others and parade it as surety. There is a Khasi phrase for such people "balain stad" (know-it-all), you cannot enjoy this phrase without taking into consideration the exaggeration implicit in it. The Big Media houses are "balain stad", their terror experts and chat-show guests are as well. They discuss the events and inevitably they draw out the horrific terror acts of the recent past that have occurred in far flung corners of the globe. They have bought into the idea of a Big Terror, skilfully portraying the worst cases imaginable using the globe as their canvas. In their clambering for security, they have made the world more insecure. Big Terror needs Big Security and vice versa; both oddly enough rely on Big Guns to arm them with grenades, rocket launchers and other weapons. They buy from the same source to destroy each other. We are caught in the cross-fires.

Now if we are going to be bigots, let us at least have a jurisdiction. The terrorists might buy into the idea of Big Terror but why should we? The actual motivations of terror are too complex to simplify. Terrorists have now struck at Medina, the second holiest place in the Muslim world. Where is the Islamophobia that we like to parade as liberal science? Can we not admit that the Dhaka terrorists are, like

most terrorists, fundamentalists? That terrorists simplify in much the same manner that we tend to simplify? What has happened today is that our gaze is being directed continually from one spectacle to the next by Big Media. We observe, become shocked and react. These are all distractions that should be seriously critiqued.

In worrying about what is happening "over there", we have neglected the beauty of our own backyards. When we see our screens relay such 'foreign' threats, we start to assume things about those around us, even though the situation and circumstances between Istanbul and Shillong are totally different. Master Iqbal, the tailor down the road then loses his individuality and becomes simply a Muslim, a plain stereotype compounded by our fears and ignorance. I will include a short anecdote. I was once inside a shared cab in Delhi. Sitting beside me in the backseat was an Arab man donned in the traditional outfit of his culture. I was quite surprised to see an Arab dressed like this but my initial wonder was suddenly and inexplicably overtaken by fear. As he conversed over the phone in Arabic, I suddenly became paranoid in spite of my 'open mindedness'. I felt like he would blow us all up! Then I thought to myself calmly: "Why would he want to blow this cab up now? If he wanted to do such a thing, he would have done it in the busy place we just left (Nehru Place)". This is perhaps a very politically wrong thing to write about, but these were my exact thoughts and I can't censor them. The reason I include this anecdote is to highlight how easy it is to be overwhelmed by paranoia and that paranoia comes to a large extent from ignorance. Though in my case it was also out of irrationality. I should have started a conversation with the man, instead of assuming malevolent roles for him. This is just one story that illustrates how much Big Media has warped us and our views of the world.

If there are terrorists among us, we have to share a large part of the blame. By pushing the poorest and most vulnerable into ghettos and leaving them out of the pursuit of prosperity and economic upliftment, we have helped create terrorists. We have to espouse progressive values. The world today is far too conservative. The brave fronts presented by certain countries, against calls by conservative Right wing groups to take actions against minorities is still too rare and extremely commendable. In spite of fierce opposition and home grown fundamentalist movements, the progressives have been able to win so far. Our own response seems clear. We need to reach out and learn more about Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Niam Tre etc from their followers. I am not proposing that we should all play 'pretend.' There are things we will obviously not like about someone else's religion. We need to bring these out critically and that requires courage. This is much harder to do than simply listening to your TV host as he tells you about what things to believe in. We must enter the rooms of understanding because right now all we have is a view from the window, looking in. Ignorance is never bliss.

Yours etc.,
B Lyngdoh,
Shillong-2

"If you want change, you have to make it. If we want progress we have to drive it."

--- Susan Rice

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JULY 7, 2016

Arrest of beaureaucrats

RAJENDRA Kumar, Principal Secretary to Delhi's Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Tarun Sharma, Deputy Secretary to the CM and three other officials have been arrested by the CBI. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has naturally reacted strongly. The CBI has alleged that these officials are involved in a Rs 50 crore scam. The court should adjudicate on the case. The AAP's response shows a lack of confidence in the due process of law. It scents political conspiracy behind it. Its charge is that the Centre has deliberately put the officials in the dock. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Delhi lieutenant government Najeeb Jung are said to be behind this. To this has been added the transfer of eleven bureaucrats from Delhi to the Andamans. It has been done to strengthen the AAP's allegation that Arvind Kejriwal is the target. All this has further soured relations between the Centre and the AAP government in Delhi.

The thing is that AAP was a movement but it is now a government. The dividing line between the party and the government is often lost sight of. The party is also now in the election campaign in Punjab and Goa. The language and rhetoric it is using in the campaign does not suit a party running a government. It has no respect for institutional constraints. The operation against the bureaucrats has been mounted by the CBI which is the foremost investigative agency in the country and should be free from political motive. It has to deal with the court and if the Delhi government has concerns, these should be expressed in court. The AAP cannot claim immunity for officials or legislators. Street agitation fouls the process.

LOOKING BACK

February 18, 1989

The Andhra drama

Although the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Mr. N.T. Rama Rao left acting when he joined politics, histrionics of the absurd kind has not yet left him. His recent antic of asking all his Ministers to submit resignations on February 8 and immediately forwarding them to the Governor for acceptance indeed belongs to the genre of political drama. To top it all, after removing all the 31 Ministers he disappeared from Hyderabad for four days, first to New Delhi to attend the non-Congress(I) Chief Ministers' meeting and then to Guwahati to address an AGP rally. There was not a single Minister to look after the Government at Hyderabad when Mr Rama Rao was away to attend to matters incidentally connected with the government of his state.

Although the leakage of the budget said to be the reason of removal of all the Ministers at one drastic go is a serious constitutional lapse and needed some action, the fact remains that Mr Rama Rao found this excuse to demand resignations of all the colleagues in his council of Ministers only speaks of a more serious malady afflicting his party and government. Ever since the recent turmoil in the state following the murder of a Congress (I) MLA, Rama Rao was finding it difficult to enforce discipline in his party and government which was also plagued by rumours of corruption in circles close to the Chief Minister. Personal rivalries among people in his inner circle are stated top have been responsible for rampant indiscipline in the ruling party. Significantly the New Delhi based Editors Guild after a visit to the state has recently stated in its report that Andhra Pradesh was sitting on a bomb.

As chairman of the National Front of five opposition parties. Mr Rama Rao considers himself a man

with a mission having ambitions on the national scene beyond the boundaries of his own state. This obviously called for immediate refurbishing of his party set-up and the image of the state government which suffered badly as a result of recent disturbances and growing activities of Naxalite groups. While the resilience of the present of the present political and administrative system helped the state government to run on its own for a few days in the absence of the Chief Minister from Hyderabad, the first such instance in the Indian polity, he also proved through a dramatic example that the government can be run by him alone without any Minister to help him. In an equally dramatic move Mr Rama Rao inducted 23 completely new Ministers on February 15 without including anyone of his former council of Ministers. Strange as it would appear, there was not even a whimper of grumbling or dissidence among the 31 former Ministers left in political wilderness in the new reorganization of the Andhra Ministry. This lends credence to the belief that in Andhra Pradesh Mr Rama Rao is the party and the government both rolled into one. This dramatic disciplining of party colleagues by Mr Rama Rao will be proved good provided only the new Ministry gives the state an efficient and dedicated government.

Tikhait threatens massive agitation

Bhartiya Kisan Union leader Mr Mahander Singh Tikhait said if the government does not provide required electricity to the farmers here a massive agitation will be launched. Addressing a rally of farmers here today, Mr Tikhait warned that farmers will blackout the cities unless their due is provided to them.

KHADC: Going Beyond the Rhetoric

By Sumarbin Lyngdoh

The KHADC has recently celebrated its 64th Anniversary in which its Chief Executive Member, Mr. Pynshngaiñlang Syiem, urged his 'council members and officials to take responsibility for proper functioning of the autonomous district council to achieve the objective of the Sixth Schedule and for the benefit of the people'. I welcome this appeal of Mr. Syiem and would like to highlight some of the issues that require attention of the council.

The KHADCs as well as the other two ADCs in Meghalaya are single tier local governments empowered with all the three organs of government-legislature, executive and judiciary. However, compared to ADCs in Assam the councils in Meghalaya have very limited legislative powers which is further restricted by para 12A of the 6th Schedule which gives preeminence to state laws over laws enacted by the councils. When it comes to development and civic functions, here too we find that the councils in Meghalaya have very limited functions as the State government has not transferred any additional subject to them outside those under para 6 (1) of the 6th Schedule. In contrast, the State Government of Mizoram has entrusted functions of 20 departments to its three ADCs in areas within their jurisdiction, in exercise of provisions contained in paragraph 6(2). Similarly, the State government of Tripura has transferred executive powers of schemes of about 15 departments to its lone ADC.

The expansion of functions of ADCs in Meghalaya can happen only through an amendment of the 6th Schedule or by the State government transferring some of its functions to the councils as in the case of Mizoram and Tripura. The former route is unlikely as the substantial power assigned to Bodo, Karbi and Dima Hasao autonomous councils of Assam under para 3A and 3B took place under intense statehood agitations from these areas. Similar situation does not exist in Meghalaya. Therefore, if KHADC desires to play a greater role in development and civic functions the second alternative is more accessible provided the present vitriolic

relationship between the two tiers of governments is replaced by one of engagement and cooperation.

Of course devolution of functions to ADCs in the state is meaningless if they are not able to effectively implement functions already assigned to them. If KHADC has ambitions to expand its operations then it has to show its competence in delivery of existing functions. Here the council can steal a march on the state government by enacting a law for time bound and transparent delivery of limited public services such as issuing of land documents, mortgage clearance, trading licences, etc., in line with similar public service acts passed by Odisha, Bihar and other states.

The ability of KHADC to better serve the public depends greatly on its functionaries. Today all the three councils in the state faces a dilemma of overstaffing while at the same time facing an acute shortage of technical and professional expertise. This situation has arisen as successive members of the Executive Committee have used their tenure to provide backdoor appointments to their supporters mainly in clerical and ministerial positions. This unhealthy practice has to stop.

The councils needs to augment its human resource base for which it should adopt a dual strategy of appointing consultants to advise and assist the council in critical areas while at the same time providing hard and soft skills training to existing staff. Let me now turn to another aspect of functioning of the ADCs which requires urgent attention and this concern the finances of the councils. KHADC has recently received Rs. 133 crore sanctioned by the central government as special assistance grants and already there is expectation for more of such funding in the future. However, this would largely depend on the effectiveness and efficiency in the manner in which KHADC and the other councils utilise the public funds provided to them. I don't think the central government would continue to pour money to the ADCs if they prove to be public fund sink hole, which unfortunately is a reputation that they have

acquired.

Here again Mr. Syiem can take a lead and introduce improved financial reporting system to bring in transparency and accountability in the finances of the KHADC and for this he does not need the consent of the state government. A good starting point would be in introducing uniformity in accounting of receipts and expenditure of the council. KHADC should therefore move towards adopting accounting structures and system followed by state and Union governments as prescribed by the CAG. This will allow for capturing the receipts and expenditure under proper heads which will in turn facilitate better control and decision making based on the financial information derived from such an accounting format. It will also bring clarity, transparency and accountability in the finances of the council. Alternatively, the council can also consider adopting a more simplified format for preparation of budget and accounts as has been done for the PRIs. Extreme fluctuation of year to year receipt of own source revenues of the KHADC indicates existence of leakage and misappropriation of funds. These revenue loopholes should be identified and plugged along with decisive action against perpetrators.

The council has also not fully exploited powers to raise own revenue as evident from the low per capita own source revenue. All the ADCs in the state are not fully implementing the Meghalaya professions, trades, callings and employments Act, as many professionals do not pay this tax to the councils. On expenditure front, we find that major proportion of council's outflow is towards meeting salaries and pensions liabilities, while capital expenditure is met mostly from tied up grants from Union government. KHADC and the other councils should take steps to control its revenue expenditure so that more funds can be diverted for productive purposes. It's time that the council constitute an expert committee to suggest new ways to raise revenue and better manage expenditure. Analysis of the finances of the councils also show extreme volatility in funds originating from higher governments indicating

unpredictability and irregularity in sharing of revenues between State government and the councils and also in the flow of grants.

The State government and ADCs must work together to bring transparency in the collection and sharing of taxes and royalties along with a procedure to ensure release of the shared revenue to the councils within a definite time period. This is also true for timely release of central grants to the councils by the State government. On its part, KHADC should introduce appropriate reporting system for regular monitoring for projects and timely submission of UCs, which are prerequisites for ensuring steady flow of funds from higher governments.

Another issue that deserves attention is the financial devolution to local bodies which has not been addressed by the KHADC in its much hyped VAB. How will the local bodies under the council execute functions assigned to them without proper funding? A revenue sharing mechanism has to be in place between KHADC and local bodies. Last but not the least, KHADC and the other two ADCs should engage with the state government in order to operationalize the State Finance Commission so that it can review and recommend the distribution of financial resources between state and councils to enable the latter to improve their financial position.

I cannot conclude this column without commenting on the present war of attrition launched by the State government on the KHADC and GHADC. Just as the Congress government of Meghalaya must get a fair treatment from BJP government in the Centre not with standing differences of political ideology, the same is expected from the former in its dealing with the ADCs. Moreover, as village and urban administration is with the ADCs both these governments have to work together to improve the dismal state of public service delivery at the grassroots level. The present political slugfest between the state government and the councils has continued for too long at great cost for ordinary people of the state. Time for it to end.

TO THE EDITOR

The hawkers' issue

Editor,
Apropos Phrangngni Pyrtuh's "The decriminalization of Hawkers and Vendors in Shillong (July 5, 2016), has possibly forgotten that no one is opposed to hawkers or vendors selling their wares because we directly or indirectly depend on the same system. However, the point of the debate is the resistance of the hawkers to be accommodated in a special hawkers zone which is already in the Government's plan to decongest the main thoroughfares of Shillong. Speaking of dirt and garbage everyone is responsible, however, the remedy is to have a recycling project of all wastes generated by these vendors and to convert them into manure or other materials which can be done through proper funding and project management. To say that their livelihood violated is

wrong because they remain and continue to remain in the same place and are doing brisk business as usual without caring a damn about others using the streets and lanes. Therefore what is seen as a one sided effort should transform into a concerted effort by all stake holders to create space within a legal framework.

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

Modi's cabinet

Editor,
This refers to your editorial "Modi's expanded cabinet" (ST- July 6, 2016). Constitutionally in India, the prime minister is accorded the status of "first among equals" in the council of ministers. Modi's cabinet expansion has confirmed that, unlike the past, the council of ministers would be an extension of the PM's Office. By setting for a Cabinet reshuffle PM has demonstrated that there will be no administrative

islands in his government. Every expansion of the Council of Ministers is a part of the political messaging of the government and this was no different. The transfer of the HRD portfolio from Smriti Irani, to Prakash Javadekar has surprised many. Modi's numero uno position entitles him to choose his council of ministers to run the government.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad-15

A dirge on charcoal issues

Editor,
It is extremely disheartening to read the daily dose of news and views on charcoal illegal trade and its aftermath. In my opinion there are three agents here - the illegal traders, the government and the media. While I don't sympathize with any one of them I want to pin point the real issues here. The apex court has called a complete ban on the felling of trees in the State for production of charcoal

since 2007. A complete ban without alternatives? The aam aadmi continues with the mal practices to earn their livelihood. The media have taken upon themselves the job of policing by faithfully trying to report these illegal practices.

Illegal production and transportation of charcoal is unacceptable. It is true mass felling of tress continues while re-planting is nil. At the same time our state and constituency leaders have not even lifted their little fingers to solve the issues and find alternatives. Did it ever arise in their minds why people continue to produce charcoal after the ban? Did the Government play its role constructively? The media needs to widen its horizons too here. While we appreciate its tireless efforts to follow up the story we want to ask, "Is your job to only report about wrongdoings?" You go around Nongstoin to catch the rat while you don't see the elephant. Is

Footpaths are not for hawkers

By Jenniefer Dkhar

Enshrined in our Constitution is the right to life of every individual citizen of the country and the right to choose the profession of his/her choice. Why not, after all we are a democratic country! It must therefore be understood that no citizen can and should be allowed to put another citizen in any kind of inconvenience and hassle in any way and any form. Armed with rights, every individual is a rightful and law abiding citizen of the State. Therefore, in the case of vendors and hawkers in our state, if they do occupy public places like the sidewalks, footpaths, etc they very well have the right to do so. After all, the Meghalaya Street Vendors Act, 2014 permits them to do so.

The question is whether these street vendors and hawkers should be allowed to do so, only on the basis of the Act. Granted that the hawkers can spread their wares on any public place as per the Act but isn't it also true that public space is meant for all citizens? Can convenience of one and inconvenience of the other be adjudged as sane, rightful and legitimate? However, legitimacy here comes with the clauses of the Meghalaya Street Vendors Act, 2014 which is flawed in its very definition of a street vendor. Thus what really needs to be done is to actually set right the wrongs. It must be realised that just as the hawkers and vendors have their rights on the lanes and footpaths, etc similarly the general public too have their claim over the same public spaces.

The state government must therefore re-examine and re-define the Act altogether because as of now the hawkers and vendors appear to be violating no law. If at all there is any form of violation it certainly has evolved due to the lack of open mindedness and bird's eye view of the law makers towards serious matter and concerns. While providing support and solace to one, the law must not turn a blind eye to the other. As of today, the public spaces are being used mostly by vendors and hawkers in and around commercial areas of the town.

There have been a lot of views for and against the matter. While some are sympathetic towards them others have expressed distress and opposition. Mind you, the distress must not be read as being unsympathetic towards these hawkers. Instead the distress emerges due to the inconvenience caused by this section of the society. As for congestion, it must be understood not only in terms of vehicular movement but also the difficulty in smooth passage and movement of people sans vehicles. Take a walk at Iewduh and one can experience the kind of difficulty of walking in and out of the market. Yes, Iewduh falls within the purview of the Syiem of Hima Mylliem yet Iewduh is one fine example of congestion. Outside Iewduh just take a walk at Motphran and there one is sure to feel the pangs of congestion. Here the vendors and hawkers have

actually not only spread their wares and set up shops on footpaths, lanes and pavements but right in the middle of the road. Here, one sees the convergence of hawkers, pedestrians and vehicles.

One complete picture of togetherness but certainly not a very happy and cheerful coexistence of the three! This rubbing of shoulders between three distinct entities becomes inconvenient as it poses a threat to the lives of the passers-by. They have to be watchful of the vehicles as well as the goods of the vendors lest they step into any of the goods lined up in the middle of the road. As experienced by many, if by any chance one happens to step on any of their wares then what follows are heaps of abuses. Another example is visible at the entrance and exit gates of the Civil Hospital. Prior to the visit of the Prime Minister, one part of the footpath was conveniently blocked and closed down by the vendors and hawkers thereby leaving pedestrians with no choice but to squeeze their way alongside the vehicles.

Granted that the footpaths in the city are narrow and that every building must have their parking space and granted that there are too many private vehicles and that the use of public transport must be encouraged but can we just turn a blind eye to the fact that the lanes, footpaths, pavements, etc are also meant for movement of people to and fro? Whose fault is it then? One is sensitive of the need to be supportive of the means of livelihood of one's fellow human beings but at the same time one is also sensitive towards the need to be supportive of the convenience of all instead of just a section of the society. One is supportive of providing a common space for these vendors and hawkers so that they can do business without any disturbance but at the same time one is also supportive of a congestion free and a hassle free sidewalk and footpaths for pedestrians.

Encouraging rural products and economy through the hawkers and vendors is a wise and pragmatic thought. For this reason, to further strengthen it there has to be a proper, safe, secure and specific space assigned to the hawkers so as to enable them to carry on their business peacefully. Only then perhaps will we be working towards improving and sustaining the rural economy. The hawkers and vendors are not a problem provided they do not encroach on spaces meant for walking by all.

At this stage, the ball is in the state government's court. Therefore, first and foremost a re-examination of the Meghalaya Street Vendors Act, 2014 is needed in order to arrive at a plausible solution while addressing this grave and serious matter. Secondly, a specific space must be allocated to the vendors and hawkers so that they have a space of their own and also so that pedestrians can use the footpaths and pavements freely no matter how narrow they may be.

the media blind to other developmental issues? True greatness is not just finding loopholes but specially filling up pot holes. Travel from Nongstoin to Mawkyrwat then you will know the conditions of the road. The media should also follow up where the charcoal is being taken and what the officials do with it. The real issue is that West Khasi Hills from time immemorial has not developed. It has received step-motherly treatment repeatedly. Anyone who visits Nongstoin can clearly

see the difference. When will its leaders stop trampling over the people and when will the people rise up for their rights? When will the sun shine in the West? When will the media broaden its horizon?

Yours etc.,
Gervasius Nongkseh
Khliehriat,
East Jaintia Hill

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

"He who rejects change is the architect of decay. The only human institution which rejects progress is the cemetery."

--- Harold Wilson

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 8, 2016

Advances in solar energy

THE US will have solar power contributing more new electricity to its grid than any other form of energy. It has come at a time when the world is combating climate change to the best of its ability. What is likely to be done is provision of zero emission energy without deviating from the goal of power for every home. The International Energy Agency (IEA) has made forecasts which reveal that renewables may surpass coal by the early 2030s. Solar energy is most prominent among the renewables. What is more, its cost is steadily going down. It is no longer necessary to offer large production subsidies which are necessary so far to promote generation of clean energy like solar power. At some big solar installations in the US, solar power costs less than natural gas.

All this is very relevant to India. The Narendra Modi government attaches great importance to solar power. Its National Solar Mission (NSM) provides for subsidy to enable expansion of the roof top solar system. But this system is not merely expensive but also inefficient. Much better are large scale solar installations which feed solar power into the grid. The roof top solar system is necessary only when it has to be operated in locations which are outside the grid. It is also necessary if one wants to generate one's own solar power. Technological progress should make the roof top system dispensable. If that can be done, solar energy can be competitive with subsidies done away with. The Indian government should take it into consideration while framing its fiscal policy.

LOOKING BACK

February 18, 1989

ABSU Bandh Enters 4th Day Violence Unabated 2 More Killed

Two People including a Home Guard were killed in Gossaigaon of Kokrajhar district as violence continued on the fourth day today of the 120 hour Assam Bandh" Called by the All Bodo Students Union.

Official reports here tonight said armed extremists attacked the Agriculture Research Centre at Gossaigaon. When police repulsed the attack one of the extremists and a home guard and a policeman were also injured. With this the total death toll in unabated violence in Kokrajhar and Udalguri subdivision on Darrang district rose to 32.

Two other extremists in Manas Tiger Project in Kokrajhar district and other in Khairabari in Udalguri subdivision were killed in encounters with police yesterday. Police also recovered the bodies of two forest personnel who were killed. Police intensified the combined operation to flush out extremists from their hideouts during which at least ten encounters took place during the past 24 hours. Director General of Police Mr. S. V Subramanian told newsmen that he would soon hold a meeting with his West Bengal counterpart to discuss the possible extremist hideouts across the border of that state and smuggling of arms by them.

Assam Police also launched a combing operation to flush out extremists from thick jungles in areas bordering Bhutan with the cooperation of that country he said. Meanwhile, Home Minister Mr. Bhriugu Kumar Phukan reviewed the situation at a high level meeting attended by Home Commissioner and Director General of Police and others.

ABSU wants MPs team to study situation

The All Bodo Students Union (Upendra Group)

today requested the Centre to send a team of MPs to study the situation in the tribal areas of Assam.

In a statement, ABSU vice-present Mr. Pradeep Kumar Dalmay appealed to the Centre to withdraw the army and para-military forces from the state. He alleged that the Assam Government was trying to inflame a communal conflict and create trouble in the tribal areas. He also alleged that ABSU Volunteers Force leader Mr. Sonaram Baglary, who was arrested on February 8 and another ABSU member Mr. Dharmeswar Basumatry, had been subjected to torture by police.

He urged the Centre to stop all repressive measures immediately.

Three new Governors appointed, two transferred.

President Mr. R. Venkataraman today appointed three new governors and transferred two, including West Bengal Governor Prof Nurul Hasan Mrs Sarla Grewal, secretary to the Prime Minister has been appointed Governor of Madhya Pradesh in place of Mr K M Chandry whose term has already ended.

Mrs. Grewal, presently on extension, is due to retire shortly. All India Congress Committee general secretary Mr Jagannath Pathadi will be the Governor of Bihar. He succeeds Ms Govind Narain Singh, who resigned recently. So far, Arunachal Pradesh Governor Mr R.D. Pradhan was concurrently holding the charge in Bihar.

Former Defence Secretary Mr S.K. Bhatnagar will be the new Governor of Sikkim. He replaces Mr T.V. Rajeswar who is going as Governor to West Bengal.

Hawkers versus Walkers: How is this a class debate?

By Patricia Mukhim

Sartre once said, "If the intellectual wishes to understand the society in which he lives, he has only one course open to him and that is to adopt the point of view of its most underprivileged members (Sartre, 1974). The academicians cum public intellectuals in this state seem to have taken this statement very seriously and unleashed something like a class war over the media which might soon spill over to the streets of Shillong. Those who have taken up cudgels on behalf of the hawkers have assumed rather smugly that all those who walk on footpaths belong to the upper middle class or have joined the league of the non-bourgeoisie "capitalists. That's a perfect lie because it is the large majority who do not own private vehicles and a few health conscious citizens who tend to use footpaths and walkways the most. The protagonists for hawkers are therefore trying to create social tensions through this warped debate.

And who wants a smart city anyway? Why is it presumed that those of us who demand more walkways and pathways are proponents for a smart city and that we are 'class' enemies and have joined the league of the soulless, brute state? Well, if we come to brass tacks it is actually the people in academia who have the luxury of taking up social causes since they are paid for thinking beyond the ivory tower and yes, they take home a fat pay package, under the UGC pay scale. This presumptuousness of the academics is in equal proportion to their angst to test their research theories on our streets and perhaps come up with another poser for a research paper considering that we seem to be running out of research topics from our backyards. With the proliferation of PhD wannabes we will soon run out of research themes. Hence every issue that has the propensity to demonise the state, (read socialism) is quickly picked

up because that is what academia still thrives on. But those who have read and seen socialism transformed into Perestroika and later abandoned in its cradle the USSR and China would agree with what FA Hayek in his book, "The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism," writes. Hayek says, "Morals, including especially our institutions of property, freedom and justice are not a creation of man's reason but a distinct second endowment conferred on him by cultural evolution - runs counter to the main intellectual outlook of the 20th century. The influence of rationalism has been so profound and pervasive that in general, the more intelligent an educated person is, the more likely he or she now is not only to be a rationalist, but also to hold socialist views (regardless of whether he/she is sufficiently doctrinal to attach to his or her views any label including 'socialist'). The higher we climb up the ladder of intelligence, the more we talk with intellectuals, the more likely we are to encounter socialist convictions. Rationalists tend to be intelligent; intelligent intellectuals tend to be socialists."

What are required to be brought into the debate are the rule of law and the role of regulatory authorities of a city. The Shillong Municipality has failed both in its regulatory role and in civic management. The perpetual gripe about fund inadequacy just goes to show that states like Meghalaya which are permanently dependent on central doles will not lift a finger to generate internal revenue to ensure that this institution is able to carry out its work as mandated by the Constitution. Of course we also must blame successive governments since 1965 for being so politically supine that they could not garner enough courage to conduct elections to the Municipal Boards. The policy of appeasing a few paranoid souls who are afraid that

they would have to cede space to a constitutionally elected Board as opposed to the showing of hands in a Dorbar election has brought us to the present crises. Without Ward Commissioners the Municipal Board remains in the hands of one Government official who is hamstrung by politics and perpetual funds crunch.

The Municipal Board should have ensured that more walkways/footpaths are constructed because these are community spaces. How else do we meet and greet each other but when we run into each other while walking to and fro in the city? But the kind of footpaths that this and other governments have constructed where walkers have to walk single file is not of much help. Now did we hear anyone even squeak? No because it is not in the culture of the genteel society to protest. When this writer first raised the issue of hawkers occupying the footpaths there were many who told me I had spoken for them too but except for a few brave souls no one stood up for their right to the footpath. It is curious that whereas the group that is standing up for hawkers includes the academically savvy, those who are deprived of the footpaths dare not raise even a murmur! Is this how democracy should function?

Protestors as we know them in Meghalaya are always anti-government. But what is wrong in raising a protest to demand that Government do something radical about dealing with Marten; that it get its act together to acquire a proper landfill and manage the conversion of garbage into bio-fertilizers etc., in the most scientific manner and without the stench we are used to? What is wrong in demanding that we have more footpaths in areas where there is hardly any space for pedestrians to walk on? Why can't we raise a bogey of revolt against the quality of roads that we have today? That hawkers need a space to vend their wares is

not the point of contestation here. Hawkets across the world are entitled to their space and those who support their cause need to engage with the Government rather than fire on all cylinders at those who claim their right to the footpath. And since hawkets serve a public good they must be allowed to peddle their wares in a decent and dignified manner. They cannot be looking behind their backs every few hours to see if some authority is going to drive them away from the footpath or the road because they will be obstructing pedestrians and/or vehicles. But for their protagonists to suggest that we all give up driving so that Shillong roads are un-crowded is utopian. Many among the protestors also drive themselves around the city. So let's not preach what we don't practice.

There will always be contradictions in our accepted views of the world that can be exploited for ideological challenge and resistance. But when it comes to civic utilities, why should we cede these in the interests of a growing population of people whose livelihoods now depend on occupying not just the footpath but also part of the road. Somebody has rightly stated that private troubles are converted into public issues because today personal is political. It is a fact that the number of poor people in Meghalaya has grown exponentially. This is on account not just of state policies that are not designed to deliver equity but also the much touted traditional-cultural patterns of land holding which has transformed community resources into privately owned, revenue yielding entities. What do you call an individual who buys a water source and sells water to all of us? A tribal capitalist? Are the protagonists for hawkets willing to take up these are other issues that lie at the root of what turns people from the peri-urban areas into hawkets whose lives are economically imperiled and who do not matter to their community as a social group?

TO THE EDITOR

Stultifying debate on street hawkers

Editor,

The debate on the issue of street hawkers/vendors is getting serious as well as merrier. It is understandable that any ordinary person with inadequate knowledge of the English language might misread and misinterpret my letter (ST. 24th June, 2016), but learned persons with intellectual stature as Phrangsngi Pyrtuh could have clearly discerned the logic of truth in the letter unless their perception is clouded with prejudice.

I had spoken of the resourceful cow dung and colourful plastic bags only as examples and compared them to every good thing and every human person, including myself, not only to the street hawkers. I had said that the street hawkers are ordinary and respectable citizens, but just happened to be in the wrong place. I agree that the street hawkers/vendors are recognized by law such as 'The Meghalaya Street Vendors' Act, 2014'. But I am sure that there is nothing in the law to specify or prescribe that any particular hawker/vendor would have the right to permanently occupy a plot of land in a

public place however small the area is. The provision that the hawkers can sell goods of everyday use or offer services to general public in a street, lane, sidewalk, footpath, pavement, public park etc., is of general nature, and does not amount to granting and registering them as legitimate occupiers of particular locations in the public places. Hawkets of various descriptions are permitted to sell articles and food items in the rural areas even in private places such as school playgrounds, or in the Church compounds, whenever there is 'ka jingiaseng' (Church gathering/celebration). But what would happen if particular hawkets start claiming permanent occupational right of space in such grounds to the exclusion of others?

The hawkets who occupy the public roads at Motphran area are not ordinary street hawkets, but they are a spill over of 'fewduh' (Bara Bazar). They might also be paying unaccountable taxes to the Syiem and Myntiris of Hima Mylliem or to some other organizations of questionable nature to extend the operation of fewduh right into the PWD roads which are not part of the natural market. The phenomenon might signify a spill over of the Sixth Schedule into the jurisdiction of the State

Government. Regardless of any existing legal provisions, the PWD roads, even in rural areas fall under the jurisdiction of the State Government.

Hawkets cannot be driven away from the roads or public places in general, but for the sake of general convenience, peace and order, they can be evicted from the particular spots in the public places where they had established permanent private businesses to the exclusion of others. That is the rational and legal ground for the WHY of their eviction, and I presume that Patricia Mukhim's article which initiated this discussion is concerned with this rational and legal ground.

I had not said in my letter that the hawkets should be evicted on moral ground. In fact, I had said that the HOW of their eviction invokes a moral question. Whether in the present circumstance it is morally justifiable to evict them straight away, or whether they should be provided with alternative locations, or be economically empowered through other non-objective enterprises is a joint responsibility of the society and the State. My letter referred to above is there in the paper and in the net for everyone to read, and it is not a rare document available only to selected persons to interpret as they will. Street hawkets are part of

our society compelled by circumstances to be hawkets, and they have the general right to trade their wares in public places as specified by law, but not to the extent of claiming permanent private occupational right to any spot in such places. The hawkets in the streets of Shillong constitute only a very small portion of the poor in our society. I presume that if for the sake of more income, the rest of the vast majority of the poor discard their present occupations in their legitimate localities and rush to Motphran for business, then a replica of 'ka Thma Phran' (World War I) would ensue when wares meant for sale are used as weapons of bloodshed to assault one another in the fight for free vending zones. The society and the State must come together to solve this problem rationally and calmly, as fanciful ideas and fleeting emotions and sentiments would only worsen the matter when the issue gets transformed from a real social problem into a dirty forum for party politics.

Yours etc.,
Fabian Lyngdoh,
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.

Education under Life Support

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The realization that a sizable proportion of the class XI applicants did not find/merit a seat for further studies comes as a bittersweet reality. It is an oxymoron which at best describes the self-ruining education trend of our state. It is bitter as it is not being able to provide an opportunity to the youth to further scale on their competencies. It is sweet as an increase in the demand for education reflects on the direction and desire for progress and productivity. Importantly, what matters now is how to ride on this macro-level indication of the state of affairs. Needless to say, this calls for brainstorming and in-depth planning and policy. This pressing matter cannot be demystified and solved through newspaper columns and street talks. Nonetheless, a seed which serves as a platform for additional deliberations can always be laid. In relation, I would like to place the following pointers -

Firstly, contractual appointment of teachers will not solve the problem. It is a temporary and half-hearted measure. At best, it will create classes amongst the masses. There is nothing more psychologically draining than to state for oneself as being contractually involved. This psychological pinch directly reflects on the loyalty and performance of the teachers. As such, it is high time to seriously think on this conundrum. As financially burdensome as it may be, we have to start acting now. A blueprint for reasonable and motivational pay must be devised at earnest. As a starting point, we may look at the initiatives at the central government level. There are continuous efforts to make attractive the entry level pay for teachers across education levels. This is done with the objective for motivating talented and dedicated human resources to take up teaching profession and their retaining as such. Consequently and as we are at the threshold of the Fifth Pay Panel, why not incorporate this agenda into our thinking process on education. This is more so as the demand for education is going to grow further and contractual appointments can only be counter-productive in the long-run.

Secondly, physical infrastructure is a critical issue. The construction of additional classrooms and related piecemeal efforts are again an indication of short sightedness. The more appropriate approach is to look at wide-ranging possibilities of public-private partnerships (PPP) in education. This is required both at the school and college level. A framework for this can be contemplated. Granted, that most of the educational organizations have some/all posts that are paid for by the government and this can be argued as already being one form of PPP. Conversely, the need of the hour is to move beyond this partnership covering soft skills alone and focus on brick and stone from the very foundation up. In the era of development that Shillong and other towns have seen, there must be a host of 'venture capitalist' who are more than willing to invest their wealth on education. However, these will come forward only on the back drop of a comprehensive and sustainable framework for PPP which is launched on a professional platform. As such, a business model concerning this possible

form of intervention may be feasible. To start with, some pilot projects on PPP may be taken up.

Thirdly, this is not with the intention of malice or of demeaning the innovative efforts of MBOSE. The intention here is to add value and effectiveness to the Institution. Overall, there is a need to have a relook and revisit the MBOSE curriculum. In addition, there may be a need to monitor and appraise on the current system of student evaluation. In a global economy where competition is more confined and cut-throat, we need to weigh our students (MBOSE) with the students from other more progressive boards. In general, we find our students lacking. This reflects till the time they scale to higher levels of education. Although there can be a host of factors for this, the one major factor is the curriculum. Increasingly, there are cases on the ground where in students from other boards find the MBOSE curriculum as a cake walk. Similarly, our students struggle to cope with the other curriculum (at least during the early few months). Clearly there is something wrong that is happening in our classrooms. It is high time that the appropriate authorities constitute efforts to bring 'at par' the curriculum. This can only bode well for our students.

Fourthly, I reemphasize on the need for a state university. The demand for education is increasing right up to higher levels. In every admission processes of NEHU, there are many deserving candidate who merit but do not find a seat. Depressingly, the university is turning into a helpless bystander to this unpleasant phenomenon. Herein lies the clarion call. We do not need just institutes; we need a full-fledged state university which is appropriately promulgated by the state legislature. As such, these deserving candidates can be absorbed accordingly. However and to this end, there are those learning which are to be acknowledged. It should be a 'state' university and not some private enterprise in the name of some person somewhere (where in the name of private education they commercialize the entire setup akin to selling groceries). After all, credible education is to be provided by a credible educational organization.

Lastly, why are the pressure groups silent on the matter? If there is anything at all worth shouting for, this is it. There is nothing more important than speaking up for your youth friends and try to ensure a path to their growth and development. In fact in the true sense of the term, this is your primary responsibility. For once do stand up and speak up and demand up and hence by then, people will start considering you as an NGO and a partner in development. Moreover, there is a need to move away from the 'age old rhetoric' of 'our seats are taken by outsiders' and look at the bigger picture and the bigger solution. This problem is a lot more than that. The 'age old rhetoric' cannot be the basis of your arguments anymore and it is time to find something better which will really spearhead the cause. This is primarily because moving education out of life support requires a monumental and ground shifting effort across all stakeholders.

(The writer teaches at NEHU)

*"We did not change as we grew older;
we just became more clearly
ourselves."*

--- Lynn Hall

The Shillong Times

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Racism alive and kicking in the US

THIS week two black Americans were gunned down by law enforcers. On Tuesday the Louisiana police shot at Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge while he was selling mixtapes. This was followed by the killing of Philando Castile, 32, after a traffic stop in Minnesota on Wednesday. These killings termed as 'racist' have provoked an equally brutal reaction where five police officers were shot dead and seven others were wounded in Dallas on Thursday night. This happened during a protest march against the two back to back shootings incident in separate incidents over the past two days. Those wounded in the attack against the police included two civilians. The shooting now ranks as the deadliest targeted attack on U.S. police officers in nearly 100 years and the deadliest day for law enforcement since the 9/11 terror attacks. None of the protesters, who scattered in search of cover immediately after the shots rang out, have been reported dead. However, the city's mayor, Mike Rawlings, said one member of the public was wounded.

Thursday's shooting could further polarize the ongoing debate centred around race and law enforcement in the US following the two deaths this week. President Obama who is in Warsaw, made a chilling comment that when incidents like this occur, there's a big chunk of American citizens who feel as if because of the colour of their skin they are not being treated with dignity and equity. That racism continues to be a problem in the world's oldest democracy is a troubling thought. Yet race and religion have been the themes around which the current debates of the presidential election have revolved around. Republican candidate Donald Trump is known to be a motor mouth populist who will say anything to appease his radical supporters. If leadership is going to be about appeasement of raw, unbridled ethnocentrism then America is doomed to regress into the dark ages of racist politics. Law enforcers take their cues from politicians and often let loose their own prejudices based on what they hear being spoken by eminent persons on public platforms. If politics alone is to determine the standards of behaviour in society then the US can no longer be called, "The Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave" as is scripted in its national anthem.

Ka Lakhympong: Khasi romance and courtship dance

By Fabian Lyngdoh

The values and ideals of any society reflect in the thought and behaviour of its members, but more markedly through collective expressions such as traditional religious rituals and cultural festivals. To understand the collective attitude and behaviour of any tribal community, we need to keenly observe and analyze its collective expressions. One aspect of these collective expressions is through cultural dances. Every tribe or community has its own variety of dances in relation to various aspects of people's socio-religious life and according to the different seasons of the year.

The 'Lakhympong' was one of the cultural dances of the Khasis living in the Ri Bhoi region in the northern part of the Khasi Hills. This was a dance of thanksgiving to God for the blessings of the year that passed, and for future prosperity before the people take up their working tools for the next agricultural year that was to begin. The dance was organized for three consecutive days every year normally during the second week of March in facilitation of spring, at a time when mother earth is wearing beautiful green attire to revive the hope and joy of humankind.

The 'longsan' of the 'Raid' (authority of the political commune) concerned, authorized a certain 'bara-khynraw' (Khasi traditional cooperative society) which had first commenced work during the previous year, to organize and sponsor the Lakhympong of the current year. It was this particular bara-khynraw which bears the expenditure and selects the place or the village as the venue for the dance.

The Lakhympong was also the traditional dance of love, romance and courtship for 'ki khynraw' (unmarried young men) and 'ki khyllud' (unmarried young women). The term 'samla lud' always applies to young women, and not to young men as frequently misinterpreted in Khasi literature and news papers. In this dance, unmarried young men and women, dressed in their best attires closely held each other alternately in a circle at the centre of the dancing ground, and danced in a merry-go-around throughout the

day to the sounds of drums, cymbals and flutes.

The Lakhympong might have several external aspects in common with similar dances in other parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, or even with the Bihu dance of the Assamese. The Karbi tribe too had adopted this Khasi romantic dance and called it 'chumang kan' which means 'Khasi dance'. But, the Lakhympong had its own philosophy in relation to the socio-economic life of the people in Ri Bhoi region. The inhabitants of Ri Bhoi region were farmers, engaging in seasonal type of cultivation; hence they were seriously engaged in their works and had no time and attention all through the year to get involved in love, romance or marriage. So the traditional authority of the Raid sanctioned a particular occasion during a particular time of the year for the youth to get involved in love, romance and marriage, or to publicly reveal the love they have for each other through this occasion.

A wise elder called 'u Damdar' was appointed by 'ki baheh-khynraw' (elderly leaders of the bara-khynraw) as a director and master of ceremonies to guide and manage the discipline of the dance. U Damdar accompanied the dancers and urged them to dance more merrily and with full abandon and enthusiasm. There were also some knowledgeable elderly women called 'ki ñiakha-lakhympong' who knew well 'ki syrtap syrbi' (kin relationships) among the dancers to guide them in the selection of their dancing partners, so that no boy or girl would be engaged as dancing partner with a person belonging to the same clan, or with paternal uncles or paternal aunts, as incest is considered a serious taboo among the Khasis. These elderly women would also coax and encourage the girls to participate in the dance whole heartedly and to ward off shyness and fear from their minds.

Romantic verses and jests were chanted along with the music by u Damdar as well as by some elderly members of 'ki dahulia' (orchestra). One of such jests was: "O Damdar, o Damdar, / Lam hanga khyllud Lamcha. / Da joh re me khyllud Lamcha. / Te lam

ka bei me hanga," which means, 'o Damdar bring me a Namcha damsel; if you cannot bring a Namcha damsel, then bring me your mother.' Occasionally, sexually exciting verses were chanted, including words which were implicitly and explicitly immodest in normal times. This was intended to remove shyness and to arouse the sex instinct and romantic yearnings of the youth to the full, while they were dancing and holding each other tenderly. All this was permitted and acceptable during this particular annual romantic dance of the youth.

According to the culture of the people living in the Raids of Ri Bhoi region, this was the only period during the year recommended by the social authority for the youth to enter into marriage. A girl who had found her lover during the dance would joyfully take him to her house to be a husband and a worker in her farm land. A boy after marriage could no more be a member of his bara-khynraw because he had graduated to full manhood. As the Lakhympong was a romantic and marital affair, the concept had also reflected in the lives of the adults as well. In the past, a man who divorced his wife could not marry another until the next Lakhympong. We could occasionally hear even today in the villages that when a man is so displeased with the harsh and humiliating treatment that his wife has meted out to him, he might in anger threaten her with divorce by these words, "Ap pha mo poi chuh ka lakhympong" (wait and see in the next Lakhympong).

Sometimes, marital encounter might happen abruptly during the dance due to 'love at first sight', but majority of the marriages were among those who were already in love, and already arranged with the full knowledge of the two kurs (clans), and the romantic encounter in the lakhympong was only a social formality to reveal that to the society at the opportune time. A boy who was already in love with a girl had made a beautifully decorated bamboo comb by his own hand to stick as a hair clip on the head of his beloved, as a sign to every other possible suitor that he had booked the girl.

All ki khynraw and ki

khyllud who had not married during the Lakhympong would diligently return to their working tools and farms, leaving behind all matters of love and romance until the next Lakhympong. The young men would reorganize their 'ki barakhynraw' and compete with each other to come out as the first group to start working in the field so as to qualify as the leading group to organize the next Lakhympong. Likewise, the young women would also leave behind all thoughts of romance and marriage and return to their normal duty of assisting their parents in the household works and the farms.

This romantic dance was open to all unmarried young men and women with the freedom to choose their spouses from among those involved in the dance. It was an expression of equality and freedom. When such a dance was organized, a woman can no longer complain that she had not been given the freedom to marry a man of her choice, and no man can say that he had not been given the opportunity to woo the woman he loves. All freedom and opportunity for selection of marriage partners were duly given to one and all by the sanction of the social authority. The dance taught the youth the social value of sexual love and marital relationships, and regulates and sanctifies the inescapable sexual attraction between a male and a female as endowed by God in everyone for the purpose of reproduction, 'ban roi u trum u tyndai' (to increase in number and strength of the clan), and 'ban nang khraw ka mawbah ka mawsan' (strengthening of the clan religious cult).

But today, traditional social norms and cultural ideals can no longer regulate the reproductive behaviour among the Khasis in the urban and rural areas as well. A great number of Khasi families became disoriented because on the one hand, the traditional matrilineal system with avuncular leadership has become redundant; and on the other hand, the nuclear family with the father as head and provider is not yet culturally institutionalized. So, in the present situation there is a need to introduce modern legal instruments to keep the society in order.

Fearing the human race

By Ananya S Guha

We had Orlando, Istanbul, Dhaka, Baghdad and Medina, all happening during the holy period of Ramzan. The closest to home was Dhaka, where a hapless Indian student along with nineteen others were hacked to death. We are perhaps sick to hear or see the words, " Terror Strikes". We are a terrorised global community, despite all talk of global communities and a borderless world. The very internet which is bringing about unification is also a source of destruction, by inciting people and misleading youth to think that killing is for a divine cause. No religion sanctions that. Yet, why this mayhem, this perfidy? Even if we ask these questions, the world is stunned into silence. And this silence could well be an acceptance. So long as the victim is not someone known to us we do not feel the real pain and anguish of those affected. Perhaps we do not add the stricture, " What if we were in their place?" So we either keep silent or condemn, and many a time in our condemnation we tend to generalise by spouting anger against a people, race or community. Sadly speaking, that is another error of judgment.

But condemn we must against such brutal killings and their perpetrators, without thinking in terms of race, religion or colour. Can we do it when those involved are apparently invoking the name of religion? That is the tricky, sticky if not queasy task. Hence many if not most opt to remain silent. This is of course with the exception of political leaders who mouth platitudes and vow vengeance, but they are as helpless as the rest of us and they know it. This is the irony as well as the tragedy. One can do little to combat heinous acts, in open spaces, or where there is gathering of people.

Coming to India we know that secularism is our professed social belief and we pride in our democracy and our social and religious rights. Despite this we know the truths, gross inequalities, in living standards, abysmal poverty, plight of street children. But we also rightfully protest against incidents such as the one that happened in Dadri where a person was killed for allegedly storing beef in the refrigerator. That was undoubtedly most unfortunate. We protest also about the killings of writers by people who think that their religion has been insulted and who we call bigots or rightists. Fine. I do that, many others do that. Fundamentalism is baneful, we are agreed on that; at least many of us 'like minded' people, with a tilt towards what people would call 'leftism'. But when fundamentalism takes the most barbaric and bizarre shape, as in these recent

killings in the world then pray where are the suave, broad minded 'leftists'? Will their condemnation remain only in their Facebook status?

This is the tightrope we must walk, without prejudice, without bias. I am a votary for all kinds of rights, including minority rights, but I cannot simply keep quiet over senseless, irrational killings. Blame it on the internet, blame it on Western policies of intervention and aggrandisement but the fact is that killings are murders, and no one has the right to take the law into their hands. Not that killings on the basis of language and religion have not been taking place in India. They have. They are equally wrong, just as the mass massacre of a particular religious community was about fifteen years back. We have to understand this very clearly and not make condemnation of any community/ peoples a fashion, especially when it comes to India with so much diversity, in terms of ethnicity, religion, caste or class and the secular values we hold dear to. If we hold precious to those values we must think about precious lives, and respect for all, irrespective of the whether the person speaks a different language, or belongs to a different ethnicity.

True, the world is becoming one and borders are shrinking just as internet spaces are shrinking, but what is also happening is the stark anonymity of things. At times we do not know the backgrounds of people we are talking to in this space called the web or the internet. We write for an online magazine, and we do not know its exact location, because it is not mentioned! Also because the world has narrowed down drastically in terms of space. And that is the obverse problem. Maintaining contacts for perpetration of crimes becomes easier. So on the one hand we celebrate the rights of LGBT people, great, but we not celebrate the right to live, the right to survive in the midst of abject poverty, the right to be educated, go to school, eke out a living. What is happening to these rights in the real world, and the real is grotesquely mingled with the virtual, resulting in monstrous acts and wild chimera.

To remain starkly objective and dispassionate is the test of our times, without falling into clap traps of misplaced ideologies. To look at the root causes of violence will be another exercise one must take up independently. To reach out to people as individuals is a must for survival of the human race. " I love the human face/ But I fear the human race".

TO THE EDITOR

Govt needs to think better

Editor,
The old Directorate of Supply office next to the District Transport Office (DTO) is in a deplorable condition and it is being misused by shady elements. Other old buildings there are the Forest Development Corporation and an adjacent building of the Forest Dept constructed by the then Assam Government. Since all Govt offices such as Tourism, PWD, DTO, PHE, Treasury, Sales Tax, Industries and others are located in this area there is acute parking problem. Only the DTO and PWD have their own parking area which is used by their own officers and staff. Public vehicles are not allowed to park there. The Tourism and Treasury offices have no parking space so the staff park outside their building. Members of the public who need to visit these offices have to park by the side of the road and sometimes on both sides of the road. This causes traffic jams. I also found many condemned vehicles parked in the DTO and

blocking the space there instead of being disposed off immediately. Similarly, many condemned vehicles are parked in the main and additional secretariat compounds and block the area. I suggest that all the vehicles be disposed off immediately by the concerned department i.e. SAD. This will solve the problem of parking of Govt vehicles.

There are Govt departments such as Excise, Labour, Women Commission, etc., which operate from rented buildings and pay lakhs of rupees monthly in rent. I suggest that Govt immediately dismantle the Supply office which is lying unused and plan it in such a manner so that a basement and road level floor can be used for parking and the 1st, 2nd and 3rd floors are used for offices. Office operating from rented premises can shift to this place once it is completed. This way Govt will save money and solve the parking problem.

Regarding the parking hassle at Police Bazar, the MTC land is totally vacant and Government can plan it like it did with the MUDA complex which I think will accommodate at least a thousand vehicles plus

shopping complex at the road level. Government should be able to earn good revenue out of this.

Another problem is the entrance to Shillong Peak from the main road at 5th Mile Upper Shillong. This single-lane narrow road is difficult for two vehicles to negotiate and considering that the tourist flow to Shillong has increased and the volume of traffic on this route quite high there is every chance of collision of vehicles coming from opposite directions. The road is also in a pathetic condition right up to the Air Force gate. So, Government should not only repair the present road but also make it a double-lane one.

Then there is the problem of tourists and even local visitors being harassed at the Air Force Gate. When the tourists visit the view point at Shillong Peak, they are stopped at the Air Force gate and the driver's license must be submitted there. This tends to create a jam as it takes a while just to get the entry card. Sometimes the Air Force runs short of entry cards so people have to wait for a tourist vehicle to return from the viewpoint and deposit their card before another vehicle is allowed

to enter. From the Air Force Gate and until the entry to the view point from where we take the left turn, the road belongs to the State Govt. Also just before reaching the Air Force gate on the left hand side the hill belongs to the Govt or to the clans. I have passed through that rough road and found that a proper road can be constructed through that hill to the viewpoint. The Govt should construct that road to the Viewpoint so that visitors will not have to be delayed by having to seek permission from the Air Force authorities to enter this tourist spot.

I request the Govt. to take a serious view of my suggestions and do the needful in the interest of the public

Yours etc.,
B Khongwar,
Shillong-4

Insensitive bank manager!

Editor,
I wish to draw the attention of the public of the state and of Bhoirybong in particular, of the crude and

inappropriate behaviour of the Branch Manager of Meghalaya Rural Bank, Bhoirybong. On July 7, 2016, I went to the Meghalaya Rural Bank at Bhoirybong simply for an NOC that would indicate that I have not taken any loan from the said bank. For the simple clarification and for a signature I had to approach the lady Branch Manager. In my years of experience in dealing with any bank whether as a student or a professional, I have never come across a bank professional who lacks etiquette and sensitivity as this lady Branch Manager.

First the lady asked for my EPIC which I provided her with. She took it and asked for my name and I gave her my full name. She asked for my mother's name and I mentioned 'late' before her name since my mother passed away over two decades ago and she wrote my mother's name on the photocopied EPIC of mine. After that, the lady then wanted to know my father's name and I gave her his name. In a tone laced with suspicion she asked me if 'this man' is my father (une u briew u dei u kpa jong phi seh?). I was so hurt and shocked that she mentioned my father as 'this man' (une u briew) . To add to my

distress, she called someone to check in case my mother took a loan from that bank. When the bank employee cordially refused to, she pinpointed at my father's name on the paper and told the person to check on him instead.

I am the one applying for the loan so I fail to understand why my parents (dead or alive) should be dragged into this. The experience of meeting with such an uncouth person left me shaken and my heart goes out to the simple and fear-stricken citizens of Bhoirybong, Ri Bhoi District in particular. It also seems that I am not the first unfortunate client who had an uncomfortable encounter with this lady. If Meghalaya Rural Bank needs clients I would suggest that its service providers, with special reference to the lady mentioned above, undergo a training on professional etiquette added with a human touch. I hope the concerned authorities of the Rural Bank in the State take prompt action against this person so that others, especially the simple and uneducated rural folks, do not face such harassment.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

LOOKING BACK

February 21, 1989

Opp. to grill govt

Thirteen major opposition parties and groups today decided to "grill" the Government in the budget session of Parliament commencing tomorrow on the alleged partisan appointments and transfers of Governors and acceptance of "inadequate compensation" for those affected by the Bhopal gas tragedy.

Twenty-seven selected issues will be raised by them in the session which will begin with the customary address by President Mr RVenkataraman. The Lok Dal headed by Mr H N Bahuguna, Jan Morcha and the Janata Party were not invited to today's meeting since these have merged with the Janata Dal which will approach the presiding

officers for recognition as political party. According to opposition sources, West Bengal Chief Minister Mr Jyoti Basu has protested against the transfer of Sikkim Governor Ms T V Rajeshwar to the state without consulting his Government.

Andhra Pradesh and Kerala Governments have also demanded recall of their governors, alleging that they were creating trouble in the functioning of the state Governments, it is learnt.

On the Bhopal gas tragedy issue the opposition is unanimous that the centre had "surrendered" to the multi-national Union Carbide company for a ridiculously low compensation and termination of all liabilities.

Your whatsapp secrets are safe. But..... writes Aditi Singh



When Facebook owned mobile messaging service WhatsApp announced to turn on end-to-end encryption for its over one billion monthly active users, CEO Mark Zuckerberg hailed this as an "important milestone for the WhatsApp community." It means that for WhatsApp users, every call they make and every message, photo, video, file, and voice message they send, will be end-to-end encrypted by default, allowing users to protect their conversations from being hacked.

"So when you send a message, the only person who can read it is the person or group chat that you send that message to. No one can see that message. Not cyber criminals. Not hackers. Not oppressive regimes. Not even us," said Jan Koum, CEO and co-founder of WhatsApp, in a blog post. The move -- coming after the FBI-Apple tussle over unlocking an iPhone used by a terrorist -- has not gone well with cyber security

they connect. WhatsApp's end-to-end encryption provides



experts in India. According to them, this may be a boon for terror groups operating in India and across the border as this ensures that their communications cannot be intercepted as

more encouragement to terror groups to be bolder in their communications in coded languages which can then be transmitted without the fear of being cracked on the way," warns Pavan

Big brother is watching

Duggal, one of the nation's top cyber law experts.

In a country where WhatsApp has become somewhat of a de-facto religion for the Indian smartphone users, end-to-end encryption will hamper the Indian government's plan to counter terrorism. "Given the fact that WhatsApp does not have an office in India, it further complicates the scenario. The Indian approach to encryption is also not clear. The draft of the National Encryption Policy received massive protests and was withdrawn by the government in 2015," Duggal said.

Experts feel that end-to-end encryption will boost cyber radicalisation to a great extent. Recently, Islamic State (IS) released a technology guide ranking the security of more than 30 chat apps -- including WhatsApp, Telegram, and Signal. Reports indicate that heavily encrypted Telegram

app -- built by a Russian developer -- is currently hot among IS supporters, but with WhatsApp starting end-to-end encryption, experts fear that the IS militants -- who plotted Paris attacks using WhatsApp and other encrypted apps -- may shift base back on to the popular platform. In the ensuing debate over user privacy- versus- country's



security, experts give security a priority.

According to Rakshit Tandon, a consultant at the

Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) and a cyber security expert, "if a smartphone or any other device or messaging app has been used against the country, law enforcement agencies have all the right to get the information out," he said. "I will not call it hacking as is being said in the FBI-Apple case but getting the

Tandon, who is also an advisor to the Cyber Complaint Redressal Cell (UP Police, Agra). "We need better technology but not something that helps terror organisations in the long run," added Tandon.

Lucknow based social media analyst Anoop Mishra fears that if we can use it as a major tool for day-to-day communications, the tool can also be used by skilled terrorists or sleeper cells to plan their activities in a more secure and encrypted way. "This is going to pose more challenges for the national security agencies, especially in countries like India, where terrorism is active in the form of sleeper cells and where cyber security policies are less effective and poorly implemented," Mishra said. Krishna Mukherjee, analyst (telecoms) at market research firm Cyber Media Research (CMR), also feels that end-to-end encryption

(Contd on P-VII)

Brains are an optional extra

Scientists discovered a snail which can make decisions using only two brain cells, a report from the University of Sussex says.

Yeah yeah, so what? Male humans can make decisions after performing complete temporary lobotomies on themselves using only cans of cold beer. Mind you, the decisions are uniformly bad ones, such as the ordering of additional cans of cold beer.

That report reminded me of the famous 2012 experiment when scientists tried to teach a splodge of slime mold to navigate a maze. The slime successfully completed the task despite having no brain, no eyes, no legs and no Wi-Fi access to Google Maps.

That also left me unimpressed: I had a look at the maze and reckoned I could do it myself, probably, if I had a decent map and got one of my kids to do it for me.

But what scientists are basically saying is that mounting evidence shows that brain processors are not needed for most activities.

Welcome to real life, boffins. Any adult who has tried to get a child (or let's be honest, a husband) dressed and breakfasted and loaded on to a 7.15 a.m. bus knows that the absence of conscious awareness is not a factor one way or the other.

But all this is a blow to the "you are your brain" school of thought and a bonus for the "announcer is not in the radio" school of thought, whose scientists say consciousness is a quantum phenomenon.

The piece of evidence that raised my eyebrows the highest was the recent discovery that plants have memories and can even count, despite

having a brain of a very kind. A researcher noticed that Venus fly traps know the difference between bits of tasteless dust and yummy visiting bugs by counting three footsteps before they snap shut and consume them.

Considering the aston-

ishing inability to count the staff at my local fruit and veg shop regularly demonstrates, I am tempted to suggest to the manager that he replace the somnambulant cashiers with a selection of plants. The plants' math will be better and the general level of small talk will improve too.

The findings also lend weight to scientists who say high IQs are an anti-evolutionary trait. One of my evangelical atheist friends last week showed his spiritual sister a study "proving" that his type had higher IQs than her type. She responded with a much bigger study showing that his type was more likely to be childless and die earlier.

Given his predilection for self-lobotomy-by-application-of-Carlsberg, that's probably true.

A recent book by scientist Bob Nease explains why. Humans process 10 million bits of information a second, but only 50 bits, which is 0.0005 percent, are devoted to logical thought. In other words, hearts rule heads, and people who let this happen are more likely to survive and reproduce.

Consciousness is over-rated, anyway. Consider the following scene, which happens at my house every Saturday

The Funny side

lunch time. Me to teenage daughter: "You slept 14 hours!" Her: "I'm up, I'm up, see?" She moves from bedroom doorway to sofa - where she lies down. Now that's living. (The writer is an Asia-based frequent traveller. Send ideas and comments via his Facebook page)

By Vidhi Dhankar

'Flying Sikh' cried five times in his life

Flying Sikh Milkha Singh has shed tears on five occasions in his eventful life -- and the most heart-wrenching was when he saw his family being killed during the 1947 Partition.

Another frustrating moment which brought tears to his eyes was when he missed an Olympic medal by a whisker at the 1960 Rome Games.

Narrating his bitter-sweet tearful moments at an event here last week, the sprightly octogenarian told an enraptured audience: "Milkha Singh has cried only five times in his life... Thrice these were extremely sad moments while on two occasions, they were tears of joy..."

Taking a stroll down memory lane, the ramrod-straight lanky former middle-distance runner said he still rues having missed an Olympic medal in the 400 metres race at the 1960 Rome Games.

"When I lost the medal in the 1960 Rome Olympics by one-hundredth of a second because of a blunder, it brought tears to my eyes," said an emotional Milkha Singh, who had led the 400 metres race till the 200-metre-mark, before he lost steam short of the tape to finish fourth -- pipped to the bronze by one hundredth of a second.

Earlier, Milkha Singh became the first Indian athlete to win an individual athletics gold medal at the 1958 Commonwealth Games in Cardiff, Wales.



But the bitter memories that still haunt him are those of the Partition when he lost his parents, brother and two sisters in the communal violence

that rocked the sub-continent.

"During the 1947 Partition, my family was killed before my eyes. I was wit-



ness to all the brutal killings that took place. I was around 16 years old then. We didn't want to leave our village (Govindpura, which

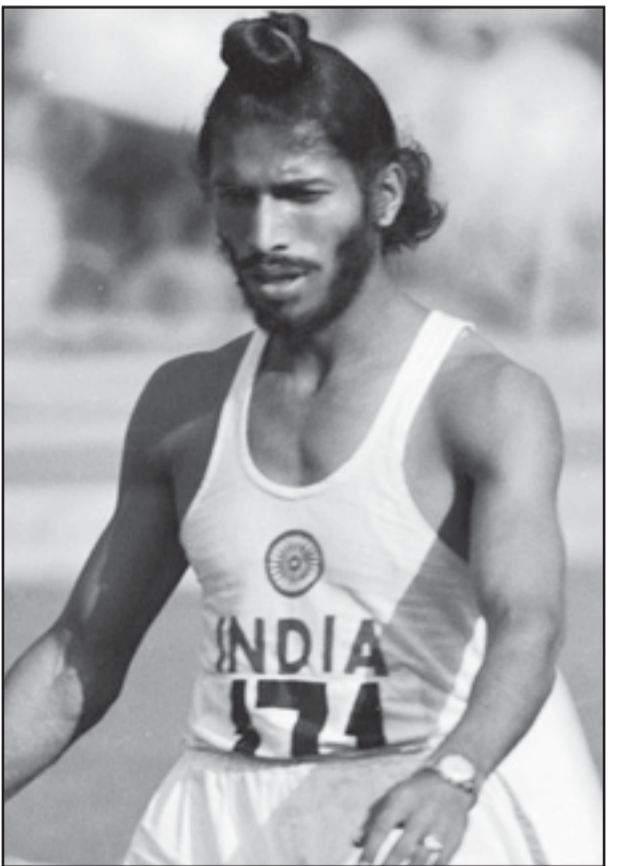
is a few kilometres from Muzaffargarh city in Punjab province of present day Pakistan). But when we resisted, my family had to face

the ugly side of Partition. There was bloodshed all around and I was in tears," Milkha Singh recounted to an audience that listened to him with rapt attention.

He further added: "When we reached Delhi, I saw bodies everywhere at the Old Delhi Railway station. There was neither food to eat, nor house to stay. Many deaths took place due to civil disorder. Just because of the fight between two people (Jawaharlal Nehru and Muhammad Ali Jinnah) for the post of the Prime Minister, the partition took place..."

Milkha Singh also recalled how reluctant he was to go to Pakistan in 1960 to participate in a friendly race against Abdul Khaliq, who was also known as the fastest man in Asia, but later agreed on being persuaded by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

"Another moment which brought tears to my eyes -- though of happiness -- was when I won the race in Pakistan in 1960 against Abdul Khaliq. There is an interesting story behind the race. When the invitation came from Pakistan, I initially refused to go. But later I was persuaded by Jawaharlal



Nehru who told me to keep aside the memories of the Partition," said Milkha Singh, who was awarded the coveted Padma Shri for his success in the 1958 Commonwealth Games.

He said the title Flying Sikh was given to him by then Pakistan President Field Marshal Ayub Khan who was impressed by his feat after defeating Khaliq.

Milkha Singh credited the Indian army for his success on the cinder track. "I was rejected at the recruitment stage thrice before I finally succeeded in qualifying for entry... and then I was able to get training facilities there which helped me tremen-

dously improve my inherent capabilities..."

In 2013, a film directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra 'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag', starring Farhan Akhtar as Milkha Singh, was made on his life. The Flying Sikh admits he became very emotional while watching the movie.

"Tears rolled down my eyes. Farhan Akhtar asked me, 'Why are you crying Sir?'. To which I replied: 'I saw my whole life in the movie. Every moment reflects reminiscences of my life. It made me very emotional,' said Milkha Singh.

Recalling his Commonwealth Games triumph, he said: (Contd on P-VII)

By Ranjan K Baruah

Skill development -II

Last week, we have published about skill training and its advantage. One may also build his or her career through skill enhancement. Present government is also focusing on skill India and skilling the young generations. Skill development is more important for youths who are not good in studies or drop out for various reasons. Some trades needs qualified persons too. In simple we may say that youths who are struggling to get a job may try and explore options related to skills. Here are some agencies and institutes which are related to skill development.

National Skill Development Fund: The National Skill Development Fund was set up in 2009 by the Government of India for raising funds both from Government and Non Government sectors for skill development in the country. The Fund is contributed by various Government sources, and other donors/ contributors to enhance, stimulate and develop the skills of Indian youth by various sector specific programs. A public Trust set up by the Government of India is the custodian of the Fund.

NSDA: The National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) is an autonomous body of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, which will coordinate and harmonize the skill development efforts of the Government and the private sector to achieve the skilling targets of the 12th Plan and beyond and endeavour to bridge the social, regional, gender and economic divide by

ensuring that the skilling needs of the disadvantaged and marginalized groups like SCs, STs, OBCs, minorities, women and differently-abled persons are taken care of through the various skill development programmes and by taking affirmative actions as part of advocacy by the NSDA.

Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE): The Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE) was established in the year 1993 in Guwahati by the erstwhile Ministry of Industry (now the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises), Government of India as an autonomous national institute with an aim to undertake training, research and consultancy activities in small and micro enterprises focusing on entrepreneurship development.

Its objectives are to promote and develop entrepreneurship, to conduct research and provide consultancy for entrepreneurship development, to coordinate and collaborate with other organizations in undertaking training, research and other activities to increase outreach of the institute, to provide consultancy and monitoring service to MSMEs/ potential entrepreneurs and enhancing employability of participants, to promote greater use of information technology in the activities/functions of the IIE, to comply with statutory responsibility. IIE also conducts skill training programme for the youths of the region.

Updates:

Youth Scholarship: Ministry of Education, Singapore offers SIA Youth scholarship for Indian students for Pre-University studies in selected Singapore Junior Colleges. The scholarship will be awarded for Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education 'Advanced' (GCE 'A') Level (or equivalent) certificate. Last date for sending application is 17th July.

ECSS: Students may apply for 'Educational Crisis Scholarship Support' which is provided by HDFC Bank. It aims to cover students from recognized Private / Government aided schools between standards 6 and 12 and students studying in undergraduate and post-graduate courses who due to personal/family crises are unable to continue bearing the cost of education and are at risk of dropping out of school/college/university. Last date for applying is 15th July.

Science Scholarships for Young Women: L'Oréal has initiated the L'Oréal India For Young Women in Science Scholarship Programme, which encourages and supports young women to pursue careers in science. Class XII passed and graduate may apply for the scholarships. Last date for sending application is 10th July.

(The writer is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 98640 55558 for any career related queries)

By Uma Ramachandran

Research, in the Indian context, has revealed that regardless of their socio-economic strata, married couples today are increasingly asserting their right to a better future, in the event of matrimonial unhappiness. They are rejecting society's dogged determination to sustain marital ties which tradition had clothed in an aura of religiosity.

The Hindu Marriage Act 1955 and its subsequent amendments, while responding to the needs of the Hindus, especially women, has somehow failed to take note of the social reactions to situations emerging out of a divorce.

This is especially noticeable in the disapproval shown by several sections of society who continue to view those involved as deviates deserving ostracism and criticism. No one emerges from a divorce unscathed, nevertheless in a society, predominantly male-dominated, the plight of women is always worse. They face a new set of problems -- first and foremost uncertainly regarding where to live, child management, employment and possibly re-marriage.

The existing social environment is such that neither friends nor relatives consider it their ethical responsibility to furnish material or emotional support to women, during and after the period of disintegration. Even when these women are able to gain financial and affectionate anchorage, society places hurdles in their way to re-establishing links with their former kin or social groups.

Regardless of whether women are prepared for the final break-up or not, a large majority among them feel incapable of living in a different environment to the one to which they have been accustomed. It is true that, in several cases, the unpleasant experience of a

When a woman walks out of marriage



Honesty, in the view of divorced women, scarcely pays them the dividend of good accommodation. To overcome this obstacle, many of them either pose as windows or take along some male member who wants stands surety for them. Despite all the precautions taken by them in respect of their social life, as long as they live alone "women continue to look upon them with suspicion and men with anticipation".

Married women hesitate to befriend them for fear of losing hold over their own husbands, while men feel that such women are in a state of perpetual sexuality. Deprived therefore of a normal social life, these social isolates either fall back upon the company of such male colleagues who are prepared to meet them "discreetly" or relegate themselves to a lonely existence immersed in work and childcare.

Perhaps the worst sufferers in both situations -- whether in the parental home or living independently are the children. Social views continue to be that the absence of a father -- the authority figure exercising discipline -- leads to children becoming anti-social. Divorced women, who even while married had single-handedly managed their children, develop feelings of inadequacy when free unsolicited advice is offered by friends and relatives. The children, on their part, made to feel deviates, develop "not OK feelings". Fear of being caught in the web of social ostracism prompts them to tell lies about their family structure -- either their fathers are dead, or away on business or some even name any male member visiting the house as the father. Despite such evasions of truth the friendliness of the neighbourhood children gradually wanes. Possibly due to the influence of neighbouring adults who feel that the company of such "deviates" would pollute their children. Nearer the truth, perhaps is the fact that the womenfolk feel that close friendship with children of divorcees could pose a threat to the security of the two-parent domain. It is any wonder, then, that the children of divorced parents become insecure and loses capacity to relate in a healthy manner with others in society?

Other than problems of accommodation and emotional disturbance among children, divorced women are burdened with the combined role of father and mother -- getting credit for neither. As bread winner and authority-figure, they are compelled to exercise control over their own disturbed emotions while at the same time they are required to reciprocate the emotional needs of the children.

family break-up is by their own choice and therefore not totally unexpected. They are mentally prepared for the separation after having gone through a period of tension, bitterness, fights, physical and mental cruelty. Nonetheless, not being habituated to living independently, they are emotionally disturbed at the thought of life without a male support.

The immediate problem after the final break-up is, therefore, with regard to somewhere to live. The choice is limited, either to setting up an independent establishment or returning to the parental home. By and large, as research shows, over 80 per cent of women opt in favour of the protective umbrella of parents -- possibly due to the unconscious hold of tradition, financial difficulties or child management.

Not a single factor influence a woman's decision in respect of her residence after the marriage disintegrates. Indications however relatively speaking are that it is only women who are mature in age, employed, with school-going children and coming from non-conformist backgrounds that opt for living independently.

Others mostly seek the shelter of their parents' homes, perhaps to gain reassurance that it was not through any fault of theirs that the marriage broke down. Interviews with women (primarily middle class), opting for parental security reveal that in the majority of cases, paucity of funds compels them to seek the shelter of the parental roof. Other factors which play an important part are fear of social stigma, being accustomed to dependency upon the kin-group, having young non-school going children, or being pregnant.

However, in most cases, the women indicated that going back to parents is not out of choice but necessity. Life in the parental home, especially if it is a joint set

up or parents are dead, is not a very pleasant experience for many. Recounting the suffering and humiliations they have borne, several interviewees indicated that queries of relatives and neighbours make the family members "hang their heads in shame" their presence is camouflaged by excuses such as "She is here because her husband has to work in a place where accommodation is difficult to get or, her health was suffering, she is here to recoup."

The women's feelings are further aggravated, by the antagonistic behaviour of sisters-in-law (bhabhis). Instead of giving them emotional support, the sisters-in-law expect them to give a helping hand in household chores. Soon the unhappy women are reduced to menials handling all and any sundry tasks to prevent such sarcastic remarks as "your idling habits must have caused the marriage breakup. I am sure you could not manage the house; otherwise why should your husband throw you out? Oh God, now your presence is a financial drain on us. To feed you, we have to deprive our children of food. The least you can do is work to justify your existence".

The other family members regard the presence of separated/divorced woman in the house as an economic burden. An offer to contribute towards family expenses by such women who get employment is reluctantly accepted, but later the amount contributed becomes the butt of criticism -- "She thinks she and her children have bought us with the measly amount she pays."

Rani Saheba wants milk and eggs while we live on dal and roti". Discriminatory behaviour is very often reflected in the treatment of children -- the sister-in-law quietly feeding her own on fruit or other luxuries while the divorcee's children are deprived of them. In this

plight some women attempt to improve their education and/or develop efficiency in a job so that they can carve out a better future for themselves.

In consequences, they spend less time on household chores which obviously is not taken kindly by the sisters-in-law. Taunting remarks are a daily occurrence. "There goes 'Chamak Chalo' on her daily rounds of enjoyment leaving the drudgery of home and child care to me who is an unpaid servant".

Although they are conscious of the stifling, unwelcome atmosphere in the parental home, divorcees suffer it in silence because of their inability to set up an independent home. If not legally divorced, they are pressurised to return to the husband's home, regardless of the suffering they encountered there. In the event of their refusing to return, they are encouraged to fend for themselves so that parents are relieved of their social and financial responsibilities. Surprisingly family members are reluctant to shield them from public criticism. Blaming them for not made the desired adjustments to sustain the marriage.

The decision to lead an independent life of her own is no easy task for a divorced woman especially if she has to look for a rented house. Very often, rents in the better localities are beyond their reach. Even where they are prepared to pay the rent demanded, landlords openly express reluctance to rent premises to single-parent families headed by women. They remark, "last time I rented out my home to a single woman, she virtually, turned it into a "call girl den". Men came and went at all odd hours and there was music or dancing daily. Several times, arrears went unpaid. You know how important it is for us to have a man living in so that "good behaviour" and regular payment of rent is assured.

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, July 10, 2016

You develop new areas of interest which could bring you in the limelight as Moon sextile Venus on your solar return chart. Your image would enhance and you gain recognition in professional and social circles. Restructuring financial decisions and dealings would be productive and favorable. You will draw on your experience and use the information at your disposal to resolve the delays and obstacles. Wedding bells could ring for those in a relationship. You will be drawn to research and writing. Travel will be focused and rewarding. Health matters and diet would need attention. Anything you do behind the scenes to help friends and family will be to your benefit.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Your career, reputation, and public life are influenced by the planetary combination. Increased public recognition and professional success characterizes this period. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. Reliability and creativity will take you places now. The more willing you are to put yourself in the limelight, the more positive the rewards. You are outgoing and your initiative is stronger than ever. Business associates bring good news and lucrative terms and opportunities.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Friendship, love, romance and children are highlighted. You would have new attitudes towards family, finance, and social relationships. Home and family matters capture your attention and are a strong source of pride. It is a time when worldly matters are not as important to you. Use this energy to find ways to improve your interpersonal relations and your home and work environment. You might be a bit of a showman at this time. This is a favorable time to go for higher learning and for joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

With communication, creativity and judgment you gain money and influence in business ventures. Success brings status and respect as you dominate the professional scene. This is the right time to participate in community events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you. This phase brings rewards and recognition in your professional life. You would also work hard with an inclination towards more detailed work, and it can get to you at times. Personal projects are on an upswing. You are in a position to inspire others through what you create. Income from foreign sources could also figure this time.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

A period of hard work and effort is in your forecast. You would be taking on new responsibilities and will enjoy the challenges. A new set-up in an existing home or a new home altogether may be part of the picture in the coming weeks. There will also be a sense of renewal and reinvigoration with regard to your domestic routines, comfort, and feeling of security. This is a phase when you have an increased awareness of your need for a solid foundation--a place to return to when the rest of the world gets to you. Do not isolate yourself when you are feeling down. Friends and loved ones will support you and listen to you when you air your feelings.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Practical matters come into strong focus and demand attention. An opportunity to expand on a global level arrives now. You would have more energy for work and your daily routine tend to speed up now. You are required to do a balancing act, and something big is in the pipeline. There may be some confusion about your dreams and ideas regarding your career. Give yourself time to digest everything before you make a move. You will also thoroughly enjoy artistic, musical, or cultural events and activities, especially in the company of a loved one. Increased energy for health routines and work is with you.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

There may be debates and discussions in family and you may face some opposition. You are likely to exert your energy and initiative into actively pursuing a rewarding love life, social amusement, and pleasure in general. You

have a likeable and competitive temperament. There is a stronger desire for creative endeavors, athletics and risk-taking pursuits. It might be hard for you to work with others in a harmonious manner and a few conflicts are possible. You especially enjoy games that involve competing with others on a mental level. You have a stronger need than usual for intellectual stimulation.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This phase brings good-luck for love and romance. Ego confrontations with family members are possible now, but the best way to handle this is to do your best to strengthen your relationship with your family and your home base. This is a time to do what you can to build trust in your family life and a strong foundation within yourself, so that regardless of what you meet in the outside world over the next weeks, you have a secure place to return to. Besides spending more time tending to domestic affairs, the focus can be on cultivating and nourishing your inner foundation that support you and your growth.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

Associates at work might find you less sociable, as you are busier than ever and you focus on your activities and your needs. You might have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you status. You can improve your love life by bringing more understanding and sharing views with each other. You are more inclined to seek a broad understanding of people and of your immediate environment. Concentrating on listening, connecting, communicating, and learning is your best bet now. If health is affected, fevers or infections are more likely.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

This period brings new horizons in your romantic and love life. You explore and search, make new connections, and pay attention to your immediate environment. Give other people a little extra time and attention, notice their efforts on your behalf, and strengthen your connections. You are more curious and alert than usual, and you could be quite busy with work. Much energy is expended in understanding and adapting to your immediate environment. Siblings, neighbours, close relatives, friends, and co-workers may play a more important role than usual in your life. You are eager to investigate new things, whether scientific or technical.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

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

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Pay close attention to performance, it will be rewarded and continuity to perform work would be visible to senior colleagues and people in authority. You will have the ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and can expect good returns from overseas business. Your idealistic nature is stimulated, and you are likely to yearn for a connection to more spiritual or idealistic pursuits. A sense of belonging through connection to something larger than yourself is something that is entering your life now. There may be a development of romance at your work place. You turn your attention on fitness and diet programs.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

There would be happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening of your social circle, travel, and connections to people of a different cultural background. Your dreams and ideas about intimacy come into focus, but could also bring the flaws in this area of your life to light. An income boost is likely in this period. This is a phase when you have an increased awareness of the physical world of the senses, and this is a time to start fresh in terms of how you arrange your life in order to feel a sense of value and worthiness. It is also a wonderful time for taking moments to please yourself through earthy, tactile, and comforting endeavors.

'Flying Sikh' cried five times in his life

(Contd from P-VI) "When I won the gold medal in the 1958 Commonwealth Games and received the medal from the Queen, tears of joy rolled down my cheeks."

"Suddenly, a lady sitting next to the Queen came up and said 'Milka Singh, you made India proud and Panditji (Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru) wants to know, what do you want'. The lady introduced herself as Panditji's sister Vijaylaxmi Pandit (who was then the Indian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom)," he added.

"I replied to her saying if Panditji wants to give me something, then he should announce one-day government holiday in India," a visibly emotional Milka Singh said.

A day's holiday was declared countrywide to celebrate Milka Singh's feat.

(The writer can be contacted at dhankhar.v03@gmail.com)

Big brother is watching

(Contd from P-VI) is a blessing in disguise for terrorists. "Encryption means maintaining privacy for users but

on the other hand, the law enforcement agencies will have a hard time in accessing critical information when dealing with terrorists. Therefore, the need of the hour is to bring some regulations with respect to this."

Mukherjee said. According to the experts, technology companies and the Indian government should join hands in zeroing in on the criminal outfits to help safeguard the national interest.

"The collaboration between the two parties will help in

maintaining the privacy of users and in securing them too. Although encryption is welcome, it should come with some riders," she adds.

There are no golden principles or formulae and everything will depend upon the peculiar, specific approach to be adopted by state actors as they move ahead. "End-to-end encryption is now a ground reality. The fact remains how sovereign states try to come up with legal mechanisms and processes to deal with this," asserts Duggal, also a Supreme Court advocate. "As such, India will need to come up with its own customised approach on how to deal with this," Duggal said. INAV



"This isn't good or bad. It's just the way of things. Nothing stays the same."
--- Gordon Atkinson

The Shillong Times

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SC ruling on AFSPA

THE Supreme Court has come out with a welcome ruling on the controversial issue of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). It has issued a strict warning against the Centre and the security forces based in AFSPA areas. The ruling is that the armed forces must not apply excessive or retaliatory powers. The immunity they have enjoyed so far should be done away with. The CBI had investigated the alleged 1528 cases of illegal killings in Manipur between 2000 and 2012 perpetrated by the armed forces in the state. The SC said that fake encounters in Manipur need to be looked into. However, attorney general Mukul Rohtagi has said that security forces cannot be blamed for collateral deaths. Rights activists have been demanding repeal of the act for years. According to them, the law should protect human rights and ensure accountability for the action of armed forces. It is a major issue not merely in Manipur but also in Assam and Nagaland.

The crusade launched by Irom Sharmila against the AFSPA is memorable in history. In 2015, Arunachal Pradesh set its face against a home ministry notification bringing in more areas under the AFSPA. The Tripura government has withdrawn it. In addition to fake encounters with militants, there occur false encounters killing innocent civilians. The armed forces get credit points for such insensate cruelty. The SC has done well to issue the recent ruling. But it must also institute effective machinery enabling people to protest against uncalled for military action.

LOOKING BACK

February 21, 1989

North-East Neglected

The state-owned National Hydro-electric Power Corporation (NHPC) has chosen the 120 MW Dhaleswari project in Mzioram to be started during the Eighth Plan and this is the only one so far to be taken up by the NHPC in the north-eastern region. Its present construction activities are in full swing in most of the northern states having abundant hydel resources in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir. But, strangely enough, the sub-Himalayan north-eastern range has been totally ignored all these years. This is intriguing since the north-eastern states are known to hold enormous hydel power reserves which is beyond the means of the respective state government agencies to explore due to financial and other constraints. The NHPC's Dhaleswari project is only a tiny one, considering the huge projects taken up in the other states. Also it taps only a microscopic part of the region's huge hydel potential, which can reasonably stand well in comparison to that in the rest of the country.

Nor has the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) done any the better in its treatment to the north-east, which is left out of its map altogether. It is probable that provision for thermal power on a large scale in this region has generally been ruled out because of cheaper power being available from hydro resources which this region has in plenty. If this is so, it is all the more reason why this region should have received much more preferential treatment from the other agency, the NHPC. The NTPC's giant Singranli super thermal power station located in Uttar Pradesh with fully commissioned load of 2000 MW is linked to the northern grid through a 400 KV transmission network of over 2,300 CKT Km. This benefits states like Uttar Pradesh, Harayana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and

Rajasthan some of which are well on the map of NHPC also. In the case of the north-east, it neither enjoys the good grace of the one or the other and this obviously betrays a step-motherly attitude which is regrettable.

The two Central Public Undertakings are allotted huge outlay of public funds running into thousands of crores, a reasonable part of which can naturally be expected to benefit this far-off region also, which is no less starved of power than the others. The regional Power Corporation sponsored by the North Eastern Council can hardly compensate for the non attention by these two national-level public undertaking. Regional treatment on an economic plane, it seems, has therefore been hardly beneficial to the north-east to the extent expected or necessary and this is an aspect to which the State authorities in the region should lend their due attention.

"I would have killed Rushdie"

The Muslim Integration Council here has called a Bombay bandh on Friday to protest against the British Government protecting and sheltering author Salman Rushdie, who has been sentenced to death by Iranian spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini for his novel "The Satanic Verses."

Council general secretary Mr Anwar Sadar told UNI that procession would be taken out from Mastan Talav in central Bombay to the British Council after namaz juma (Friday prayers). He appealed to members of all religious to observe the bandh and join the procession.

Extolling Imam Khomeini as the "Only Imam of the Muslim world," Mr Sadar said "Shaitan (devil) Salman Rushdie was a hypocrite and he deserved to be killed for writing a novel which blasphemes Muslim religion". He said if Rushdie was in Bombay, he himself would have killed him.

Behdienkhlam: Reliving the stories

By H H Mohrmen

Behdienkhlam is often defined by its literary meaning which comprises of three words beh-dienkhlam. 'Beh' literally means to chase or to rid off and 'dien' means wood, tree or log and 'khlam' means plague, epidemic or pestilence. So literally Behdienkhlam means the festival to get rid of epidemic, plague and pestilence but is that what Behdienkhlam is all about?

There are those who are of the opinion that "Behdienkhlam is an agrarian festival which testifies to an advanced culture of wetland cultivation as against Jhum cultivation practiced by other indigenous communities." It was also said that "during the festival family members and relatives experience the joy of homecoming. It is a time to be at home with Mother Nature and dance on its lap, its soil and its water. Behdienkhlam also expresses the relationship between man and god, man and nature and man with fellow men."

K.C. Rymbai Daloi of the elaka Jowai confirmed to this writer that the festival indeed has a fine connection with the agricultural activities of the people. The main part of the festival is the council of the four high priests of the four rajis, the raj Jowai, raj Tuber, raj Chyrmang and lalong. Rymbai also said that every part of the rituals performed throughout the year in preparation of Behdienkhlam are intricately linked with agriculture.

The significance of Thoh Langdoh is that only after the ritual is performed then people can start planting cucumber, pumpkins, beans and various types of vegetables and it is only after another ceremony ka Chat thoh that farmers can start tilling their paddy fields.

The various Behdienkhlam klam festivals celebrated by different raj also indicate the many important events of rice cultivation. The first raj to celebrate Behdienkhlam is the raj Chyrmang and it indicates the beginning of the season for tilling the paddy fields. The Jowai Behdienkhlam signifies the season when seeds have been placed on the lap of mother nature and the raj Tuber's Behdienkhlam coincides with the time

that farmers have done with weeding their fields. The raj lalong celebrates its Behdienkhlam when the rice plants start to flower and the celebration of the raj Mukhla's festival indicates the advent of the harvest season.

The four days and three nights Annual Behdienkhlam festival of the Pnars always starts with the tradition of offering food to the ancestors. In the afternoon of the first day, families prepare offerings with all sorts of foods bought from the market to offer to their ancestor in a tradition call "Ka Siang ka Pha" or "Ka Siang ka Phur." Therefore part of the festival also has to do with veneration of the loved ones who are no more.

Of course preparation for the Behdienkhlam festival starts several months ahead but the immediate rituals and sacrifices that precede the designated days of the festival are the 'kniā khang' performed on Muchai; the first day after the market-day of the week before Behdienkhlam and the 'kniā pyrhad' sacrifice to the thunder god on the Mulong, the seventh day of the same week. But the festival officially begins on the sixth day (Pynsiñ) of the eight-day week traditional calendar of the Jaintias.

In every Behdienkhlam festival, nine huge trees (Dienkhlam) and hundreds of 15 to 19 feet trees called 'ki Dienkhlam khian (small Dienkhlam) are cut by the followers of the Niamtre. Two or three tiny Dienkhlam are kept at the frontage or veranda of every house of the followers of the Niamtre. The tiny Dienkhlam are used when the community dancers come to bless the house and use it to beat the rooftop of the house symbolizing ridding off plague/epidemic and evil spirits from the house as well as invoking the Almighty God to bless the family.

But the main part of the festival is the coming together of all the khon (children) ka Niamtre at the sacred Aitnar, a pond where the last significant part of the festival is performed. The dance symbolizes the oneness of the people and everyone joyfully joins without any distinction.

The traditions of 'ia knieh khnong' where men compete to set foot on the 'khnong' symbolize cleansing of the souls and blessing of the Almighty for good health.

There are altogether six Behdienkhlam festivals celebrated by the Pnars throughout the year. The first is celebrated by the raj Chyrmang followed by the raj Jowai, Tuber, along, Mukhla and the last Behdienkhlam is that of the raj Muthlong.

The largest of all the Behdienkhlam is that of Tuber Kmaichnong, which has the highest number of "Rots" or rongs. Altogether 25 villages from different parts of the district bring their "rots" to Tuber Kmaichnong. The 25 villages are situated in different parts of the district from Jalaphet in the Sutnga-Sumer area to Mupyt in the Elaka Amwi and Mihmyntdu and Khliehtyrchi in Elaka Jowai.

Behdienkhlam is also like a homecoming of the people to Tuber; the place of their origin. Since time immemorial people who originate from Tuber migrated to different parts of the district in search of livelihoods. Once a year these people would join their brethren on the last day of the Behdienkhlam which culminate at Tuber Kmaichnong.

Therefore the other significance of the Behdienkhlam festival is that it is a time for homecoming for the people who originate from the Raj and had migrated to other parts of the District. In the Behdienkhlam of the Raj Jowai too, people of Jowai origin living in Shillong and Ummulung join in the last day of the festival and bring their rots as an offering and to celebrate.

Similarly, khon ka Niamtre from the Wahiajer who originally hails from along also take part in the Behdienkhlam at along and carry their rots to the aitar. Ki khon ka Niamtre from along join their counterparts in Chyrmang for the last day of the Behdienkhlam. So the annual Behdienkhlam festival is also like going back to the roots as well as celebrating the present.

But Behdienkhlam is also about stories and reliving those folk tales. The tradition of 'ka Bam tyngkong' led by

the Daloi at the residence of the representative clans of the first four settlers of Jowai town, is a ritual which is being performed in honour of the first settlers of Jowai town, ka Wet, ka Bon, ka Tein and ka Doh. So it has to do with the story of the people who first settled in the area now called Jwai.

Behdienkhlam also has a profound connection with the creation narrative of the Pnar and u Lakriah who delivered and helped the seven huts to settle on earth. The story goes that after God was done with creation and saw that the seven huts had finally settled and everything that he had created is good and fruitful, he decided to go back to where he dwells. But before the Creator departed and left the seven huts he entered into a covenant with the seven huts and told them that he will now go far away from them, but he also promised to visit the 'ynniaw wasayniaw wasung' once a year and during his visit he will be with them for the period of four says and three nights.

The 'ynniaw wasayniaw wasung' on their part too, promised to welcome the Creator in a befitting manner with pomp and gaiety and also pledge to celebrate his coming by offering him the festival. Of course people make various offerings to God and his deities throughout the year, but Behdienkhlam is the biggest and the greatest offering that they can offer. Behdienkhlam therefore also has to do with the creation stories of the Pnar. It is the fulfillment of the covenant by the seven huts. It is also a yearly reenacting and reliving the creation narrative.

In fine it can be concluded that Behdienkhlam shares something in common with many other religious festivals in the world which re-enact or relive their creation stories. If one looks at all the major festivals; be it Christmas, Easter, Eid, Dussehra, Durga Puja, Pesach and others, there is always a story behind the festivals. The stories are like the structures and the festivals are like flesh. In other words the festivals are derived from the religious narratives. Every time the festival is celebrated, it is also reliving the stories one more time.

Europe Falls Lessons for India

By Shivaji Sarkar

India needs to be cautious. It needs to prepare for a futuristic change in economic, trade and diplomatic policy. True, this might appear far-fetched, but Brexit could mark the beginning of the fall of the European Union and collapse of the Euro. Notably, it might also be the reprocessing, if not undoing, of globalization which the late UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had projected as the TINA (there is no alternative) factor, when the Soviet Union started collapsing in 1980s.

Undoubtedly, this holds important lessons for India so it should desist from becoming a bureaucracy-oriented democracy. See how Europe today is revolting against the Brussels bureaucracy, which is imposing rules and laws, on democratically elected Governments. Britain's exit is the first major onslaught on that process.

Consequently, New Delhi needs to rethink about the Goods and Services Tax (GST). Instead it should have a uniform tax rate. The GST empowers the Central tax bureaucracy, weakens the States and is likely to create a convulsive situation where the Central system could create a situation, leading to an increase in tax oppression. Despite Prime Minister Modi and his Finance Minister Jaitley repeatedly calling on the tax bureaucracy to behave in a civil manner, taxmen are sending notices to even virtual non-earners (or very low earners) thereby building up resentment.

Moreover, with GST, the bureaucratic net widens wherein many babus in State Governments are likely to lose their jobs, leading to discontent. Hence, political leaders in States having to bear the brunt which might lead to an impulsive situation similar to what is happening in Euro-zone.

As it stands, the bureaucracy rarely listens to sane advice. Instead, it thrives on stringent impractical rules, which helps them in rent seeking. India needs to be wary of this before allowing the Central taxman to rule the States, especially against the backdrop of Europe being the laboratory for studying failures of a stringent monolithic system as opposed to diversity signified by India. As everyone now acknowledges, the Euro has been a disaster. Remember, this economic catastrophe was imposed on the people of Europe in order to achieve the central objective of the EU and to pander to the French establishment's view of what was in France's national interest.

Interestingly, a Pew research survey in February-March found that a plurality of voters in France, Italy, Germany and Netherlands want the EU to return some of its powers to national Governments. Hungary is planning to hold a referendum. Importantly, the key question arising from this episode is about what might happen in the future. The euro is not an isolated occurrence. It followed other crazy decisions, including the Common Agricultural Policy and the Schengen passport-free travel zone.

By giving free rein, who knows what monstrosities the Brussels elites will yet unleash upon the people of Europe? It wants a common pension policy and tax harmonization, which is not to the liking of most EU countries.

In fact, not only has it impoverished the countries of southern Europe, with huge unemployment numbers but it has also allowed Germany to run an enormous current account surplus, amounting to over 8 per cent of GDP and obliging other countries to run corresponding deficits. All EU members are

subjected to heavy austerity doses witnessing a steep rise in the number of people living below the poverty line. Clearly, the recent European Central Bank (ECB) announcement of "quantitative easing" — a monetary sleight-of-hand to pump money into the Euro zone — is too little, too late.

Alas, the major principle of European integration is on the reversal. Instead of Eastern and Central Europe catching up with the rest of the EU, pockets of the "West" have begun to fall behind the "East." For example, the GDP per capita of Greece has slipped below that of Slovenia and, when measured in terms of purchasing power, even Slovakia, both former Communist countries.

Former Belgian MP now at the London School of Economics, Paul De Grauwe, asserted, "In many countries the perception is that national Governments are powerless and that there is nothing at the European level to address problems. Both Europe and national Governments lose legitimacy." It is a terse statement. India needs to listen.

Unfortunately, the European project is teetering. Growth is anaemic at best and socio-economic inequality is on the rise. The countries of Eastern and Central Europe, even relatively successful Poland have failed to bridge the income gap with the richer half of the Continent. And the highly indebted periphery is in revolt.

Politically, the centre might not hold and things seem to be falling apart. From the left, Parties like Syria in Greece are challenging the EU's prescriptions of austerity. From the right, Euro skeptic Parties are taking aim at the entire quasi-federal model. Racism and xenophobia are gaining ever more adherents, even in previously placid regions like Scandinavia.

Besides, the standard of living in Hungary, 25 years after the fall of Communism, remains approximately half that of neighboring Austria. Similarly, it took Romania 14 years to regain the GDP it had in 1989 and yet it remains stuck at the bottom of the EU. Poland, Slovakia and Hungary all remain economically far behind Austria. Thus, it is a Continent of severe disparity. Many others, Sweden, Denmark and Ireland too are unhappy.

Additionally, the EU sanctions on Russia had a boomerang effect on itself whereby it took too much for granted. As things stand Brussels autocratic functioning has led to the resentment, which now might turn to even a revolt, among the unwilling, who do not want to have free movement of people or labour and an unmanageable currency festered by ECB.

In sum, India is on the threshold of building a new economy. The EU remains one of its biggest export destinations. A fall or splintering of Europe or weakening of Brussels would lead New Delhi to rethink its strategies. Its cost on diplomacy might increase. True, it is too early to predict but India has to start the process of building bridges with individual countries in Europe. Happily Prime Minister Modi has partially started this process with his foreign visits.

But it is clear that European countries or the US with Presidential candidate Donald Trump want to build walls. India has to learn to penetrate this. One hopes the European dream does not become a nightmare. However, India must be ready to accept the impending changes in a robust way to take the advantage of emerging situations. --- INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Clarification

Editor,
With reference to the front page news item "Questions raised over 'exorbitant' fee charge at Tura Civil Hospital" in your newspaper (ST June 06, 2016), I would like to draw the attention of the Achik Youth Council (AYC) organization and also inform the general public that processing fee for blood is charged from the replacement donors at the prescribed rate given by the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, dated 6th January, 2006 which is Rs. 250 (Rupees two hundred and fifty) only per unit for patient in General Ward and Rs. 500 (Rupees five hundred) only for patients in Private Ward and Private Hospitals. While the same is free for Thalassemia & Haemophilia patients and BPL patients.

It is to be noted that before blood transfusion, the test performed is not a "single cross matching" (as stated) but mandatory tests for Haemoglobin, Grouping and Cross

matching, Transfusion Transmitted Diseases which are Malaria, STD, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV have to be done to provide safe blood transfusion to the patients, for which different reagent kits are required. The reagent kits are not only expensive but are done in both SPOT and ELISA. These reagent kits and the blood bags are purchased by the Hospital Management Society and are not supplied by the Government. Though the cost is high, the fee charged is subsidized as per the guidelines of Government of India. So, the "exorbitant" fee as stated by the organistaion is unfounded.

While establishing the Blood Bank, the equipments are supplied by NACO, New Delhi and the services are provided by the hospital by taking nominal service charge as recommended by NACO. So the revocation of the fee as demanded by the organization can be done only by NACO, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, New Delhi. It is also to be noted that processing fee is not charged from voluntary donors.

It needs to be highlighted that Blood Banks can store blood when voluntary donors donate blood. But sadly in Garo Hills there are few voluntary donors, except BSF, Police, CRPF personnel and few individuals who donate blood voluntarily, and keep the only Blood Bank in Garo Hills region active. In fact when blood transfusion is required for any patient, the relatives often refuse to replace blood but try to purchase blood from professional donors at exorbitant rates.

It would be worthwhile if the concerned organization and more people come forward to donate blood voluntarily to save lives of the needy patients for a noble cause.

Yours etc.,
Dr Minakshi A. Sangma,
Superintendent,
Tura Civil Hospital,
Tura

Galleria, Gold woes

Editor
Through your daily, I would like to express my disappointment while checking out the movies presently running at Galleria and Gold cinema in Shillong.

Through the past week till today, the same and only movie, "Sultan" has been showing in both cinemas. I had wanted to take my family especially the children out for other movies, but have been thoroughly let down by both theatres. I request managers/owners of such theatres to not only take their profit criteria and the majority demand into consideration but should also see that other movies showing in different parts of the globe are also given due space in their halls. Theatres in this time and age should cater to a wide spectrum of viewers; hence more genres catering to varied age groups with different choices are also to be given due respect. I hope this appeal is duly considered as I am looking forward to take my family out this week for other movies but "Sultan".

Yours etc.,
B.Khonglah
Shillong-14

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

"Progress is a nice word. But change is its motivator and change has its enemies."

--- Robert F. Kennedy

The Shillong Times

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Solid Waste Management Act 2016

MANY in Meghalaya might not be aware that Environment Ministry has revised the Solid Waste Management Rules after 16 years and the Ministry of Environment and Forests is the agency in charge of implementing the Act. An important aspect of the Act is that it is now applicable beyond Municipal areas and will extend to urban agglomerations, census towns, notified industrial townships, areas under the control of Indian Railways, airports, airbase, port and harbour, defence establishments, special economic zones, State and Central government organizations, places of pilgrims, religious & historical importance. In India roughly about 62 million tonnes of waste is generated annually at present, out of which 5.6 million tonnes is plastic waste, 0.17 million tonnes is biomedical waste, hazardous waste generation is 7.90 million tonnes per annum and 15 lakh tonne is e-waste. The per capita waste generation in Indian cities ranges from 200 grams to 600 grams per day of which 43 million tonnes per annum (TPA) is collected, 11.9 million is treated and 31 million is dumped in landfill sites, which means that only about 75-80% of the municipal waste gets collected and only 22-28 % of this waste is processed and treated. Waste generation in India will increase from 62 million tonnes to about 165 million tonnes in 2030. Responsibility of waste generators has been introduced to segregate waste into three categories – Wet, Dry and Hazardous Waste.

The generator will have to pay 'User Fee' to the waste collector and a 'Spot Fine' for littering and non-segregation, the quantum of which will be decided by the local bodies. It is in this context that the new Act becomes important to Meghalaya. Urban Local Bodies now have a responsibility to share not just on garbage collection and dumping but also on how it is managed until it reaches stage where waste is converted into a resource. Under the new act waste processing facilities will have to be set up by all local bodies having 1 million or more population within two years. In case of census towns below 1 million population, setting up common, or stand-alone sanitary landfills by, or for all local bodies having 0.5 million or more population and for setting up common, or regional sanitary landfills by all local bodies and census towns under 0.5 million population will have to be completed in three years. The Government has also constituted a Central Monitoring Committee under the chairmanship of Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to monitor the overall implementation of the Rules. It will be interesting to watch how Meghalaya implements the new Act where the urban local bodies – in this case the Dorbar Shnong respond to the same. The Act further provides for a penalty clause in case it is violated.

LOOKING BACK

February 21, 1989

Ranji Trophy

UP struggle against Bombay

Uttar Pradesh facing an extremely difficult task of achieving a victory target of 521 runs, were 74 for one in their second innings against Bombay at close today on the third day of the Charminar Challenge Ranji Trophy quarter finals here at the Wankhade Stadium.

The wicket they lost was of their premier batsman Shashikant Khandkar, who was unfortunately run out while in good nick for 17. The man who was responsible for not responding his call for a quick run, Inder Pal Singh and Vishal Yadav thwarted the local spin trio of Ravi Shastri, Iran Mokashi and Suru Nayak for 15 overs on a worn out pitch. Both are on 26.

Bombay today built their second innings totals of 422 on the century of Sanjay Manjrekar (131) and the reason's champion batting kid, Sachin Tendulkar's 75. The rest failed against Gopal Sharma's Ranji best tally of

seven for 113.

Bengal restrict Punjab

At Calcutta, a fine spell by medium pacer Sagarmoy Sensarma (3/77) of Bengal restricted last year's semifinalist Punjab to 285 for five on the third and penultimate day of the Ranji Trophy quarterfinal match at the Eden Gardens here today. Yesterday a few minutes before the close of play Bengal had notched up score of 594 for eight.

Delhi moves in for innings victory

Meanwhile, Delhi moved close to an innings victory grabbing four Orissa wickets for 144 runs on the penultimate day today of their four day quarter final match of the Charminar Challenge Ranji Trophy Tournament here. Earlier, Delhi took a massive 477 run lead when they declared their first innings at 638 for 6 ten minutes after lunch.

BREXIT, VAB and what-have-you

By Toki Blah

In retrospect one can't feel anything else but sorry for the British. Ever since they joined the European Union in 1972, (that too pretty much on their own terms and conditions. The Euro was rejected with cold disdain, the pound was retained and the Schengen was never accepted.) they have been cursing themselves. The feeling is that they had bartered away their freedom. How, has never been fully nor satisfactorily explained to the rest of the world. But to be honest, the main bug in the pants, has been the loss of imperial identity. The empire where the sun never sets had faded away. It had become Kaput!

The Brits of the 21st century are a nation with a strong sense of colonial history and nothing much else to write home about. People no longer listened to St George. Good Old Obama messed up royally in Iraq- Syria and English diplomacy with all its rich century old experience could only squeak in protest. The ISIS then bloomed and its immigration thorns were felt as far away as the cold shores of a North Sea island. Time to cut the rope!

Come to think of it 1972 also saw the birth of a new North Eastern state called 'the abode of the clouds'. People endowed with an artistic and poetic frame of mind even went to the extent of describing it as 'a patch of beauty and grace and a shining outpost of India'. Nothing like that, of course ever happened but like Britain, Meghalaya too despite attaining full statehood managed to retain its outdated Autonomous District Councils. They became the fly in the ointment. The loyalty of the citizen was divided between the developmental benefits of full statehood and demands for preservation of indigenous culture. No prizes in guessing which way the chips fell. The state stagnated not sure where it was heading but sadly pining and longing for a long gone imagined past. John Keat's 'La Belle

Dame Sans Merci' sums it up neatly- "Oh what can ail thee, knight-at-arms/ Alone and palely loitering?" That's Meghalaya for you after 44 years of statehood.

From all accounts the most pressing factor that greatly influenced the 'leave' brigade in the UK was the immigration issue. Unchecked inflow of immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Levant into EU countries and EU membership compulsion on Britain to share the burden of immigration, proved too much. Britain was already plagued with migration from its earlier colonies in the commonwealth. Terrorism on British soil was increasingly being traced to people of non Anglo Saxon origin. The Brits had no answer to the problem. That legendary stiff British upper lip collapsed. In their panic the only way out was to cut loose their ties with the outside world. Suicidal, but what the hell? Globalisation can wait. Survival of the indigenous people comes first!

Nick Booker, a 'remain' supporter in his "Letter from Briton to Britain: Say Namaste to India" Telegraph (June 26, 2016) had made a cheeky satirical suggestion that the best future for Britain is to now declare itself as a Union Territory of India. This however in no way provides a solution to a deep-rooted apprehension of Britain ultimately being overwhelmed by outsiders. The answer to the dilemma perhaps is to be found in Meghalaya. We both share mutual apprehensions over uncontrolled influx. Meghalaya however has been able to come up with non suicidal solutions to the problem. It's simple. First remain in the Union of India. Don't let go otherwise you become a castaway in the ocean of globalisation. Next let the ADCs come up with a VAB (Village Administration Bill). Halleluiah, God be Praise, governance will still remain in indigenous hands.

Lastly let's not forget the ILP. The best safeguard against influx, or so we are

told. We can of course sell the ILP concept to Whitehall. Bereft of an influx answer of their own the Brits will simply grab it. It'll be retributive justice at its best!

Mention has been made above about the English nostalgia for their glorious past. Let's accept that much of documented history for the past 500 years has been all about British wars, conquests, monarchs, adventurers, conquering generals, illustrious statesmen and legendary Prime Ministers. Like it or not its documented history and John Bull for one, would not like anyone, least of all Europe, to forget this greatness and bury in the debris of the EU. London for centuries shaped history. It was the centre of the Earth. Now suddenly the focus has shifted to Brussels. European concerns; European woes and European hopes are what count nowadays. I mean if you were in English shoes, and not Made by India ones, the shoe would pinch. Europeans are Jonny-comatelays and they are now calling the shots. Please don't laugh at the English if they have this psychological problem about historical justice. Why couldn't the EU Secretariat have been located in London? After all its the financial capital of the universe. Its historically justified! Why not indeed!

Now not to be outdone or over shadowed by a foreign empire of the past, we the inhabitants of Meghalaya too do have our own historical greatness to boast about. We simply don't have documented proof (some idiot out on a swim, accidentally swallowed the ancient script he was tasked with safeguarding and with it the ancient history of our people) but we do have imagination don't we? Who needs a script and written documentation when a creative imaginative mind would serve just as well. Simply imagine a glorious past; call this unknown era "Ka Sotti Juk" (The golden age); believe its real and presto, you have a past to

be proud of. Like the Brits we too have a mythical history we like to boast about; it's a place we like to withdraw into; lets cut ourselves off from the rest of the world. Creep back into the Sotti Juk and isolate ourselves from reality. Fortunately for us we have no English Channel to make our dreams come true. So sometimes we need to thank God for his small mercies.

The British are now waking up to the real post BREXIT world and it appears they don't like what they see happening around them. Aside from the adverse economic impact the result of the referendum is having, the political fallout for the UK seems to be something no one has cared to foresee. Part of the UK, Scotland to be precise, wants to be with the EU and is prepared to walk out of the UK. Wales might not be far behind. Northern Ireland might just rediscover its desire to be anything but British. The only fig leaf of an excuse left with the English might well be the Meghalayan adage of "small is beautiful". Reading the local papers one is delighted to see that Meghalaya is still loyal and faithful to this silly childish sentiment. The state is already an unviable economic entity yet here we find a horde of political leaders espousing the idea and need for further bifurcation of the state.

Shouts for a separate Garoland are becoming shriller by the day. Not to be outdone raucous patriots from this side are also raising their voices for a Khasiland of their own. Perhaps the Jaintias, the Bhois and the Wars will not be far behind with their own demands. It's once again the divide and rule theory. Benefits to the common man are unclear and vague; the political profit for wanna-be leaders who can incite and rouse public emotions is enormous. One does see an uncanny emotional similarity between rabble rousers of the Scotland of the East and those of the West. Whoever said the twain shall never meet?

TO THE EDITOR

On Perpetual Calendars

Editor,

I am grateful to Mr. Prashant Naik for his article on Perpetual Calendar (S.T. 26th June, 2016) and the information he provided on the origin of the modern calendar starting with the Julian Calendar and progressing to the Gregorian Calendar which is the most widely used calendar in the world today. Naik had written that he had worked on his own mathematics to create a Perpetual Calendar as displayed on S.T. on the above mentioned date but "with the help of my daughter in the Microsoft EXCEL and WORD format." But what I and many interested individuals would like to know is whether any such Perpetual Calendar existed before 1959, the year when (L) Peter Wahlang published his 300 years Calendar, when computers and calculator were then not available to the common man.

For the sake of academic interest I request the Shillong Times to please publish the 300 years Calendar of late P. Wahlang in full together with the comments of Dr. Amadou B. Guisse, Department of Mathematics, Kutztown University, Pennsylvania USA, so that a more

enlightened discussion can come forth.

In fact, when Wahlang's son gave me a copy of his father's calendar in 1986 we got his permission to reprint this calendar in 1992 (15,000 copies) which we distributed to schools, colleges, the university and to the general public but there was no response. So in 2012, through a contact we sent it to Dr. Amadou B. Guisse, to find out whether the calendar of Mr. Wahlang was his original work or if it was copied from someone else. After more than 3 years of study and consultation with other professors he found that it was an original work and his research has not identified that any such calendar exist.

The comments of Dr. Amadou B. Guisse, if reproduced in full I am sure it will initiate an intellectual debate on the background of Perpetual Calendars and the ingenuity or otherwise of Peter Wahlang's 300 years Calendar.

Yours etc.,
Michael N. Syiem,
Vai email

Hawkers hawkers everywhere!

Editor,

These days much has been debated about hawkers or street/road side vendors in The Shillong Times. I say hawkers hanker

after a livelihood at the cost of the pedestrians. I once again air my views about how I feel towards the road side vendors in Jwai town. According to the news reported in your paper (ST June 24, 2016) Angela Rangad of TUR says the road side vendors or hawkers do not steal or beg therefore they may sell their goods by the street/road side. But I say they steal our footpaths which is not rightfully theirs.

In fact both verbal and written requests have been made to the District Administration Jwai to make Iawmusiang spacious and free from road side vendors and the DC promised to take matters seriously but to no avail. So how serious is their promise? Why can't the District Administration and the JMB not do anything? In the name of poverty can the authorities concerned allow these vendors to steal the right of the pedestrians, when in Jwai there are provisions for them to sell their goods somewhere in Iawmusiang? During Behdeinkhlam Festival we see how spacious Iawmusiang is. Why is that not possible every day? The District Administration and the JMB fail in their attempt to drive away the vendors to their rightful place. It seems they don't have the courage to do so, to make Jwai town clean and developed. Also it seems that in Jwai we are complacent and afraid to air

our views for fear of what others may say. This is our Town and I am sure everyone would like to see Jwai a developed Town.

Let not the road side vendors believe that the footpath in Iawmusiang is rightfully theirs, but they instead should occupy the space provided for them. But this cannot materialize unless the authorities concerned assert themselves and make the vegetable vendors shift to their place. Now we see them even making use of the wall below the DC's office. Are the authorities listening??

Yours etc.,
Omarka Laloo
Mynthong Jowai

Flouting NFSA norms

Editor

Through your esteemed daily I would like to draw the attention of the authorities of Food and Civil Supplies, West Garo Hills that as per the NFSA rules 2013, every beneficiary under PHH household is entitled to avail 5kgs of rice at Rs 3 per kg/per month. On the contrary, taking advantage of the ignorance of rules by the beneficiaries and vigilance committees, some fair price shop dealers of Tura are selling the same rice well above the specified rate and issuing less than the allotted

Living in a Time Warp

By Rafiul Alom Rahman

In a recent visit to a private clinic in Hallidayganj, a village in the plain belt of West Garo Hills in Meghalaya, I had a terrible encounter. A poor woman, who had complications in childbirth, was in urgent need of blood, and had to be driven almost 130 Kilometres away to Goalpara, a town in lower Assam that has in the recent years seen a number of private hospitals mushrooming up. The family had believed the doctor in his little clinic in Hallidayganj would offer a miracle, but he could only give the patient a few injectibles and advise for her to be taken to a hospital at the earliest. The family members were helpless. It took me little time to realize that they didn't have the resources or the mental strength to take the patient to a private hospital in Goalpara town.

This incident left me in a state of shock, anger and utter helplessness at the lack of basic healthcare facilities in the state. At a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi is busy campaigning for Smart Cities and Digital India, people in the region have to make do with abysmal roads, frequent power-cuts, dysfunctional schools and a negligent health sector. The only district-level hospital in West Garo Hills - the Tura Civil Hospital, is located in the district headquarters, Tura - at a distance of about 52 Kilometres from Hallidayganj. In the case of an emergency, people in the plain belt have little choice but to find their way to a private hospital in towns like Goalpara. But that is only when you have the money to afford privatized healthcare. Many people do not have that choice.

The plain belt of West Garo Hills, bordering the Dhubri, South Salmaria and Goalpara districts of lower Assam and the neighbouring Bangladesh, and having a non-tribal population that comprises mostly of Bengali-speaking Muslims, caste Hindus, Biharis and Axomiyas, remains one of the most neglected regions in Meghalaya. Stretching from Tikrikilla to Mahendraganj over the Western plains of Garo Hills and housing two non-reserved constituencies - Phulbari and Rajabala, the region is marred by wide-scale unemployment, poor educational and health indicators, unchecked crimes such as extortion and kidnapping, and river erosion-induced displacement - triggered every year by floods in the Brahmaputra river and its tributary, Zingram.

The Bengali-speaking Muslim community, often configured in mainstream media narratives as the 'illegal Bangladeshi immigrant' or 'outsider', comprises a significant part of the population in the plain belt. According to the 2011 census, the percentage of Muslims in Meghalaya is 4.40 percent, and a significant number of Muslims (16.60 percent) reside in West Garo Hills.

Earlier a part of Assam, the state of Meghalaya was created in 1972 under the State Re-organisation Act of 1971. The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHL), a conglomerate of political groups from the Garo and Khasi-Jaintia Hills that was formed in 1961 to

push the mandate for a separate hill state, assured the minority communities in the hills that their legitimate interests would be taken care of in the new state.

However, the plain belt of Garo Hills, because of its historical, social and cultural proximity with erstwhile Bengal and parts of Assam, and its largely non-tribal population, continues to be a blot on the landscape. There have been consistent demands in recent years by various Garo organizations in the region such as the Garo Students' Union (GSU) to bar non-tribals from voting in the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) elections. This would effectively mean cutting them off from socio-economic and political benefits.

44 years since the creation of Meghalaya, the plain belt of the Garo Hills remains educationally, socially and economically disadvantaged. As per the 2011 census, the literacy rate of West Garo Hills was 68.38 percent whereas the overall literacy rate of Meghalaya was 74.3 percent. The highest among all the districts in Meghalaya, the literacy rate of East Khasi Hills, was 84.7 percent in 2011. This shows that while East Khasi Hills has a literacy rate greater than the overall literacy rate of Meghalaya, West Garo Hills lags behind by 5.92 percent. Add to this the data for the various sub-divisions within West Garo Hills and what you have is a dismal picture of the plight of education in the region.

The fact that a large number of Secondary and Senior Secondary schools operate on an Ad Hoc basis only aggravates the problem. It is no surprise that there is not a single Government Secondary or Senior Secondary school in the plain belt. A meagre salary coupled with the total lack of job security in schools that function under the Ad Hoc Grant in AID scheme de-motivates teachers from performing well. Low income families who often send their children to these schools have to pay the price for a system that is at best indifferent to the educational needs of young people.

A host of factors contribute to the backwardness and underdevelopment of the area with political apathy topping the chart. It is only ironical that the current and the first ever non-tribal Speaker of the Meghalaya State Assembly, Abu Taher Mondol is a legislator from the Phulbari constituency and is a resident of this area.

When I first heard the news of Mondol being appointed as the Speaker of the Meghalaya State Assembly under the Mukul Sangma-led Congress government, I was filled with a sense of pride. For a non-tribal and a Bengali-speaking Muslim to be the Speaker of Meghalaya was indeed a historic event and need to be celebrated. It signifies not only Mondol's personal grit, determination and leadership skills, but also the generational leap of a community against impending odds.

(Rafiul Alom Rahman is a research scholar at the University of Texas at Austin. He can be reached at rafikul.delhi@gmail.com.)

quantity which contravenes the very objective of NFSA 2013 which is to provide adequate quantity of quality food at affordable price.

Therefore, in the interest of the poor beneficiaries, I urge the concerned authorities to look in to the matter and take stern action against the errant dealers.

Yours etc.,

L Ch. Sangma
Tura

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.

“That which we persist in doing becomes easier, not that the task itself has become easier, but that our ability to perform it has improved.”

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LVIII No. 333 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JULY 14, 2016

J&K's decisive moment

KASHMIR remains tense over the killing of militant Burhan Wani. Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti has appealed for calm. Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh made a telephone call to Sonia Gandhi and Omar Abdullah to show the NDA government's concern. The violence may ebb away but something has to be done to root out the sense of alienation in the Valley. When the PDP-BJP government took office in Srinagar, the BJP held out assurances that steps would be taken to address Kashmir grievances. The present Chief Minister, Mehbooba Mufti said she would tie up with the BJP 1000 times for the sake of peace. The Modi government should do well to reap maximum benefits from this statement. The PDP wants the BJP to abide by its commitment in letter and spirit. That means starting political initiatives which will lead to economic development and programmes. Bilateral relations with Pakistan which is essential to peace in Kashmir has been halted over the Pathankot attack and its sequel. The PDP-BJP agenda speaks of a broad based consensus on the resolution of all outstanding issues in J&K. Modi's government claims to be inspired by Atal Behari Vajpayee's spirit of 'Insaniyat and Kashmiriyat'.

It will be a good idea to send an all-parliamentary delegation to the Valley. Together with it, it may be advisable to a relook at the AFSPA at least in some areas of the state. The Supreme Court has already given an enlightened ruling on the issue. Security risks in Kashmir are pretty high but Mehbooba should make it clear to the people that she is among them and with them. She won praise for reaching out to the people of Handwara which was in tumult. Her video message to Kashmiris is a step in the right direction. All parties in the Valley should unite at this defining moment.

LOOKING BACK

February 21, 1989

CM Lauds MCS Role

The Meghalaya Chief Minister, Mr Purno A. Sangma has emphasized the importance and pre-eminence of the administrative leadership in taking the state towards progress and prosperity. The political leadership may not always measure up to the task but the administrative leadership should be infallible, he said. Addressing a Conference of the Meghalaya Civil Service Officers' Association in Shillong on Saturday, Mr

Sangma noted that the MCS Officers work at the grass roots level and their performance reflects that of the government. Mr Sangma, while reiterating the position of the MCS as the premier civil service in the state, said that money or salary cannot give full satisfaction which can only be derived by public service and called upon the officers to dedicate themselves to the task of building a strong and prosperous state.

The memorandum, enlisting the grievance of the officers was presented to the Chief Minister by Mr B. Purkayastha on behalf of the Association. The meeting was chaired by Mr S M. Syiem in which the general report of the Association was presented by the General Secretary of the Association, Mr W S Mawlong. The afternoon session of the Conference was addressed by the Meghalaya Development Commissioner, Mr J M. Phira. The Conference also elected a new set of office bearers with Mr Arun Kr. Roy as the President and Mr W.S. Mawlong as the Vice-President. While the post of the General Secretary went to Mrs C. Lamin and that of treasurer to Mrs F. Raneer, Mr P. Dkhar and Mr F.G. Momin are the two Joint Secretaries and Mr S.Nongsiej the Internal

Auditor the new Executive Members are Mr H M. Shangpliang, Mr B.Lyngdoh, Mr G. Changsan, Mr J Lyngdoh and Mrs D. Marak.

Two Bodo Extremists killed in encounter

One Bodo extremist was shot dead and another seriously injured in an encounter with police in Darrang district of Assam on Wednesday, according to a delayed report received here today. The report said the incident occurred when the two Bodo extremists opened fire on two constables who were returning from duty at Khagrabari under Paneri police station. Police returned fire killing one of the extremists and injuring the other. Police also recovered 14 round, of bullet, one empty magazine and two cartridges from their possession. Another Bodo extremist was also killed in a separate encounter with police at Udalguri of the same district on Thursday, last. Police identified the deceased as Matial Basumatary the report added.

Golden double for Leander Paes

Fifth seed Leander Paes shocked top seed Usman N. Rahim of Pakistan to lift the boy's singles crown and complete a golden double while Aradhana Reddy upset top seed Sukanya Choudhary to take the girls singles title at the International Tennis Federation junior tournament here today. Fifteen year old Leander of the Britania Amrit Raj Tennis Madras won 6-3, 3-6, 6-4 while Aradhana scored a 2-6, 6-1, 7-6, 7-5 win. Teaming with Gaurav Natekar Leander had yesterday won he doubles title beating Usman N Rahim and Farhan Z Malik.

Dhaka's Terror Attacks Bangladesh on the brink

By Amrita Banerjee

It's been a bloody month. First, Bangladesh endured its own Mumbai-like suicide attack when heavily armed terrorists targeted a bakery frequented by foreigners in Dhaka's plush diplomatic quarter last fortnight. They held them hostage and later savagely tortured and butchered 20 people, including a young Indian woman, sparing only those who could recite Quran verses.

Second, terrorists wounding and killing hundreds in US's Orlando, third Istanbul and recently in Baghdad where a bomb killed over 200 people in a shopping area buzzing with families who had just broken their Ramzan fasts. The Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for many and is prime suspect in others.

Undoubtedly, for a majority of Muslims worldwide, violence is completely dissonant with the holy month, which entails fasting, spiritual renewal and prayer with family and friends. But unfortunately the IS follows a perverted ideology as they believe Ramzan is in fact the opportune time to kill infidels.

Indeed, such terrorists killing innocents in the name of religion, that too during the Ramzan month are nothing but brute savages who do not understand any religion whatsoever.

Notably, one reason for the IS attacks in faraway locations is because it is facing military setbacks in and around the so-called 'caliphate', the seat of its influence. Thus, it wants to export terrorism to other countries so as to stay 'relevant' and find more recruits.

Also, it aims to fight against the civilisational values of the modern world. By attacking innocents, unarmed public especially foreigners it wants to create panic in free and open societies, break their social cohesion and then reap dividends.

Though Dhaka insisted the café massacre was instigated by local Islamist fundamentalists, Indian

and western intelligence agencies confirmed that the attack was mounted by the Bangladeshi module of IS led by Abu Ibrahim al-Hanif with foreigners as the main target.

However, Dhaka denied IS on its soil instead insisted that the banned Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) was responsible. In fact, Bangladesh Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan even went to the extent of saying that the terrorists were well educated Bangladeshis belonging to affluent families exploring the possibility of 'an international link'. Adding Pakistan's ISI, not IS was behind Dhaka's attack.

Whether or not the IS was involved in the attack will be established soon but this conscious targeting of foreigners appears geared to exacerbate the conflict between the State Establishment and extremist forces which have waged a bitter and bloody battle.

Undeniably, the Sheikh Hasina Government's counter-terrorism policies will be under international pressure now. This sort of scrutiny does occasionally help as with the Lashkar-e-Toiba after the Mumbai attacks, when the Pakistani Establishment was forced to rein in the violence if not the group's infrastructure.

Alas Hasina's Government has nowhere that kind of leverage as many Islamist groups are relentlessly challenging her Administration's authority. Wherein, terrorists have launched several brutal and violent attacks on bloggers, atheist activists, publishers, Hindus, Shias and foreigners. The mushrooming of radical Islamists has added to the terrorist activity over the last year.

More perplexing, is that terrorists unlike their earlier impoverished and rural origin now come from well educated and affluent backgrounds. Also, they have changed their modus operandi over time which can be easily understood vis-à-vis the place and targets they choose to

attack.

Remember, the Holey Artisan Bakery was a popular hangout for expatriates and rich locals because of its good food and leafy garden in Dhaka's toniest neighbourhood which boasted of being the only artisan bakery 'between Mumbai and Singapore'.

Besides, the misuse of the internet by terror groups is yet another dismal reality about globalization. There have been a series of Indian intelligence inputs that a large number of Bangladeshis have been radicalized and indoctrinated by the IS over the internet.

Clearly, terrorism is the new menacing reality of the 21st Century globalised world which knows no borders and aims at people regardless of the country, age, gender, religion and beliefs. Worse, the IS threat today lurks at India's doors wherein Indian intelligence experts predict that it's possible that some extremists might flee Bangladesh to escape the crackdown as India shares a porous border with it.

Another possibility is that the suave, educated and sophisticated terrorists who are part of Dhaka's attack might use the air, rail or road route along-with fake passports to enter West Bengal from Bangladesh. The Indian security forces led by the BSF are on high alert to cope with a crackdown on militants.

The Sheikh Hasina Government needs to wake up because Bangladesh is one country where both the IS and al Qaeda seem to be competing. Whereby, extremism and terrorism are almost impossible to tackle in Bangladesh as they themselves are a product of the deep dysfunction in the country's politics and State institutions.

Created by a bloody civil war in 1971, Bangladesh has a violent political culture and gridlocked politics dominated by two warring Parties according to the International Crisis Group. Further, it has extremely partisan State structures whereby institutions like

civil servants, police and judiciary are manned or manipulated by Party faithfuls.

Hasina's Government is opposed to violent Islamists but it has also presided over widespread repression of Opposition Parties like the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jamaat-e-Islami. This alongside the partisan nature of the criminal justice system has bred alienation and enhanced the appeal of extremist organizations and terror groups.

Furthermore, as a politically freighted bureaucracy is too invested in the continuation of a regime and prone to overreach, Hasina's Administration has cracked down on the media and sections of civil society thereby further undermining its legitimacy.

In sum, Bangladesh is experiencing a crisis of public institutions of which terrorism is one manifestation. The focus now will be on finding the conspirators but the country desperately needs a new form of politics and a sequence of steps that will manage social tensions.

Presently, this sounds like wishful thinking but the truth is that the Hasina Government cannot counter extremism unless it fixes State institutions. The need of the hour is to raise security operations to a higher standard and strengthen cooperation among other countries in fighting terrorist groups, provide harsher punishment by courts and establish a strict and broader security system in public places.

It's high time that the 57 Muslim countries globally and different Islamic organizations come forward to act against these heinous crimes. All countries should snap their sympathetic ties with these brutal terror groups. As the recurrent terrorist attacks underscores the need to counter terror unitedly. Terrorism is a global concern and so the response has to be collective too! ---- INFA

(The writer is Research Scholar, JNU)

Why corruption thrives in Meghalaya

By Barnes Mawrie

“A man who has never gone to school may steal a freight car; but if he has a university education, he may steal the whole railroad.”? Theodore Roosevelt

Meghalaya is definitely one of the most corrupted States in India. Corruption seems to have become the DNA of our State. What is sickening is the fact that those who perpetrate such corruption are the so called “educated” or persons in high positions, hereby proving the words of Roosevelt cited above. I have analyzed a few reasons for the success of corruption in our State and I hope the readers will agree with me.

First of all, people of Meghalaya appear either to be indifferent to many issues of corruption or too tolerant about the whole matter. This makes the villains bold and shameless in perpetrating such acts. There are too few RTIs filed against cases of corruption in comparison to the number of such cases. The RTI concerning the cleaning of Wah Umkrah which has surfaced these days, came after such a long period of time and perhaps most of the citizens have almost forgotten about it. Even NGOs like the Shillong-I-Care which had been spearheading the cleaning campaign seems strangely silent about the whole issue now. There are still a number of cases of corruption in the State but unfortunately there are very few who dare to take initiatives to file RTIs.

The result of such indifference is that many culprits go scot free and they are emboldened to commit more crimes. Among the Khasis there is a saying “ksan rympei rem dorbar” (vociferous at home but timid in public). It seems that issues of corruption are being talked loudly in families or in villages, among friends or fellow workers, but they all remain as conversations and are never translated into action. In this regard even the Church appears to have been affected by the same attitude. There is a strange fear to get one's hands soiled.

Secondly, the good people of our State do not possess the virtue of perseverance or persistence. What I mean to say here is that in many cases where RTIs are filed or cases against corruption have been taken up either by individuals, groups or NGOs, all of them lack persistence. They are like red hot iron which grows cold in no time. Even our NGOs who initially display good will in exposing the corruption of government or institutions, sooner or later lose their stamina and the issue is put in cold storage. You can be sure that this Wahumkrah corruption issue will meet the same fate. Another issue which comes to my mind is the one connected with the acquisition and allocation of land in New Shillong where an RTI report has shown a lot of anomalies on the part of the Government. This was

a very hot issue a few years ago, but today it has gone into cold storage. Even other socio-political issues like the demand for ILP have shown the same trend. Today who talks about ILP and those NGOs who were so vehement about it once, are inaudible today. There is a tremendous deficit of perseverance and persistency among our people when it comes to taking up such issues. It is this weakness that the culprits are capitalizing on knowing full well that all protests against them would fade away soon and then we would be back to square one. Perhaps Meghalayans need to look up to Manipur in order to learn from them the virtues of perseverance and persistency. The people of Manipur are resolutely adamant when it comes to addressing issues concerning their State. Take for example, the fight against the removal of AFSPA by Irom Sharmila and her group, the fight for ILP etc. All these issues are kept alive all through these years without any sign of surrender. The people are determined to get justice. This is what we need most in Meghalaya if we desire to rid of corruption from our State. The perpetrators of corruption must not escape the law and this can be done only if people stand firm and resolutely against such malpractices and fight them to the end.

Thirdly, I may say that the evil of individualism has infested our society today. The interest in the well-being of oneself or of one's family only, is making our people shy away from being involved in public issues. “Provided I and my family are not affected, I care a damn for the rest” this seems to be the philosophy of people in our State. But this is not the philosophy of tribal people for whom kinship and solidarity are primary values. How come that we have lost such fundamental socio-moral virtues? Imagine if we were to uphold our sense of solidarity, then what a tremendous force we would be against injustice and corruption. At times polarization along ethnic, religious and denominational lines is creating communication gap and enhancing individualism and sectarianism.

Corruption will keep on thriving in our State if we do not address these chronic problems that we have within our society. It is important to realize that we can no longer remain neutral or indifferent in the face of such evils in our society. We must act and act resolutely without fear and hesitation or else we would soon reach a point of no return. Let me conclude with the words of Albert Einstein: “The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything.”

That the EKH police is not approaching the HC to get the original papers, of the inquiry carried out by the CBI vide an order of the then Shillong Bench of Gauhati HC is curious. Is it because the enquiry may open up a Pandora's box? This is brazenness at its full display and a mockery of policing in the state. Parading some petty thieves and criminals in front of invited local media does not amount to police achievement. Rather cracking the whip and bringing to justice the high and mighty will do much to give a fillip to the dented image of the EKH police.

And by the way what is the CBI doing here? Should

it not be questioned too since as per the latest petition filed in the HC, despite the CBI initiating inquiry against those involved in the scam, no charge sheet was filed by it? Is it not a laughing stock that despite its findings about the misdeeds of the then education minister only the then Director of Mass and Elementary Education was inter-ogated? Let the rented CBI office at Oakland be vacated and used as a parking lot so that the residents of European Ward gets some parking space for their cars.

Yours etc.
PK Dwivedi
Shillong – 1

TO THE EDITOR

Perpetual calendar

Editor,
Apropos to the letter to editor by Micheal Syiem (ST July 13, 2016) where he had made a reference to the perpetual calendar worked out by me with the assistance of my daughter recently, I would like to mention that perpetual calendars have been in existence for several centuries in various forms. There are various perpetual paper calendars, object shaped calendars like paperweight dials etc. and many have even patents. In fact there are perpetual calendars even for Julian calendars before 1582. Though the Julian perpetual calendars differ slightly mathematically from Gregorian calendars, the concepts are the same, that is, they club similar centuries for example the first 2 digits of a century when divided by 4 with remainder zero first group, with remainder 1,2 and 3 the other 3 groups respectively. The second concept is repeating cycle of 28 years. These concepts can be presented in various ways. What I did was to present the concepts using windows software in a user friendly way. My calendar period is for infinity, that is, for any date in the Gregorian calendar. The same can be modified for any limited period say 100 years, 300 years and so on. The size of the calendar will get reduced to less than half for a 300 years perpetual calendar. I have not seen

Peter Wahlang's Perpetual calendar. I should however appreciate the efforts made by him to develop the calendar in the age where knowledge was not easily accessible and assistance of computers was not available compared to todays' world.

Yours etc.,
Prashant Naik
Chairman ARRRAC,
Government of
Meghalaya

On solid waste

Editor,
This refers to your editorial “Solid Waste management Act 2016” (ST- July 13, 2016). When it comes to waste management in India, little is the way it's meant to be. Many municipalities simply dump the waste and claim these dumps are landfills. Land-filling should be done only for inorganic wastes and the rejects after processing. Apart from Solid Waste, open defecation and sillage water management are huge problems to Civic Bodies. Improper waste management causes public health and environmental hazards like climate change, air and water pollution, soil contamination, etc. As responsible citizens of this country we must think whether we can do our part to clean up this mess and leave a better place to live for many generations to come. Every household must segregate the wastes at source into bio-degradable and non-biodegradable. We need to learn lessons from Sweden, which is a zero waste country and from Sri Lanka,

which is segregating its waste and Bhutan where everybody is conscious to not pollute their land. Public must be warned as to what to do and not to do through media.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
S M Road,
Ahmedabad

On uranium mining

Editor,
Allegations, counter-allegations and name calling seems to be the current flavour between anti-uranium activists and groups on one side and the Government along with our Hon'ble MP, Lok Sabha and UCIL on the other. What started as a missive from Mr Pala against the constant reaction of pressure groups for opposing most developmental projects soon graduated towards uranium and UCIL. The major part of West Khasi hills district stretching up to the Garo Hills is majorly underdeveloped from the social and economic view point and the blame equally lies in the myopic view of the MLAs' and MDCs' representing the people in the government. The opposing groups should sit and work out a solution as to what form of development they would want to happen not only because uranium mining is the core subject of the debate but look ahead towards other challenges that the future of the 'Jaidbynriew' or the 'Khasi race' would continue to face whether we mine or not mine uranium. Uranium mining is fraught with dangers even

though UCIL might give us thousands of assurances. So what is the stand of political parties like the UDP HSPDP, KHNAM, NPP, BJP and last but not the least the Congress, is something we would wait and watch as we move towards 2018.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S. Wankhar
Shillong-3

Education scam-handshake behind the scene?

Editor,
The education scam probe is more than what meets the eye. The High Court (HC) of Meghalaya took up the matter on a petition seeking CBI inquiry since the EKH police has miserably failed to make any headway. The HC later ordered the EKH police chief to submit the investigation progress which in turn is found wanting. One does not really know whether there is a handshake behind the scenes and what is appearing in the local media is only hurling of dusts in the eyes of the public. One also wonders if this scam that broke out in 2009 will ever be solved and justice be ultimately done to those denied. The incumbent urban affairs minister under whose tenure as Education Minister in 2009 this scam shaped up is ironically enjoying 'oxygen' in the form of political to legal patronage. Now all eyes are on the HC since police investigation, if at all there was any, only indicates that it bended to the dictum of the ministers and babus.

"The adventitious beauty of poetry may be felt in the greater delight with a verse given in a happy quotation than in the poem."

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 15, 2016

The Arunachal Drama

THE Supreme Court has restored the Nabam Tuki government in Arunachal Pradesh. It should serve as a warning to the BJP. The party has already caused eyebrows to be raised by forming the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) in Guwahati. The apex court has severely criticised the conduct of Governor J. P. Rajkhowa in Arunachal. He flouted the constitutional principle of following the advice of the council of ministers in the state and unseated the Tuki government. Rumours are afloat that the BJP is making a bid to oust Congress governments in other Northeastern states - Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram. It also has its eyes on the CPI (M) government in Tripura. The BJP had tried the same experiment in Uttarakhand which also failed. It has been on this destabilising course since its massive parliamentary victory. It hardly shows any regard for the democratic process. It should be aware that it cannot bypass democratic institutions which formed the basis of the Indian polity. What applied to Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh should be applicable to the confrontation with the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi.

The exercise of destabilising opposition parties ruling in states through the Governor was on in the 1970s and 1980s. Article 356 had often been enforced in an arbitrary manner, especially in Tripura and Uttar Pradesh. The regional parties however emerged powerful subsequently. The Bommai judgment of 1994 gave greater legitimacy to state governments. The Modi government professes to uphold what it calls cooperative federalism but it is acting very much to the contrary. It is encouraging that the apex court has arrested the unhealthy process though running the risk of being accused of judicial activism.

LOOKING BACK

February 21, 1989

Ranji Trophy

Gursharan's valiant effort in vain

West Bengal broke the 13 years old Voodoo and got a berth in the semifinals of the Ranji Trophy by virtue of the first innings lead after Punjab lost a grim battle despite a titanic knock of 298 by former international Gursharan Singh at the end of the four day tie at the Eden Garden here today. Bengal will now meet Delhi, who have already entered the semis defeating Orissa.

Set to score 312 after resuming at overnight 285 for five, Punjab fell 44 runs short of the target. Gursharan apart, Krishnan Mohan (112) lent some teeth to enable his state reach 551 all out. It was a sweet revenge for Bengal as Punjab had made it to the semifinals last year edging out Bengal on a better quotient in a high scoring thriller. Gursharan, who was unanimously adjudged the Man of the Match, appeared determined to turn the tie into a do-or-die one after he began his run hut today from his over night 161 not out. He ultimately remained unconquered at 298 and got some valuable support from Krishnan Mohan who brilliantly cracked 112.

Delhi knock out Orissa

Delhi bowled out Orissa for 262 runs to record an innings victory, and entered the semifinals of the Charminar Challenge Ranji Trophy Tournament here today. Orissa needing 477 runs to avert an innings defeat were all out 28 minutes before lunch today. The visitors had scored 161 runs in the first innings and

Delhi had declared at a massive 638 for six.

Delhi's medium pacer Manoj Prabhakar, who took six wickets in the first innings, was responsible for the quick Orissa collapse today. Bowling with the new ball in the 84th over, Prabhakar took three wickets - Sritam Das (42), Pannalal Bose (0) and S Mahopatra in the second, third and last ball. He had claimed the wicket of Biswajit Mohanty yesterday. Skipper Madanlal wound up the game when he bowled Pawan Agarwal. Delhi will meet Bombay from March 3.

Tamil Nadu whip Maharashtra

Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu entered the semifinal defeating Maharashtra by 39 runs nine minutes before stumps in the four-day Ranji Trophy quarter final match here today. Set a victory target of 373 runs, to be made in 188 minutes plus 20 mandatory overs, Maharashtra were all out for 333 runs in 63.4 overs in 239 minutes.

Earlier Tamil Nadu, resuming their second innings at the overnight score of 164 for four, were all out for 247 in 271 minutes, 102 minutes after play started today. The Maharashtra spinners, especially Hazare, bowled better in the second innings as the home team went for quick runs to set a stiff target for the visitors.

Arja Kripal Singh who too scored for Tamil Nadu made 89 runs with seven fours in 184 minutes. He was the last batsman to be out batting as number five. L Sivarama Krishnan and Arjan added 80 runs in 96 minutes for the fifth wicket.

Burhan Wani and the Kashmir question

Centre, State have let the valley down

By Kalyani Shankar

Kashmir is burning once again. The immediate provocation came after the Indian security forces shot dead Hizbul Mujahideen's 21-year-old poster boy Burhan Muzaffar Wani, along with two of his accomplices in Kokernag area on Friday. The incident has provoked mass mourning across the valley even as each new death is only fuelling further anger. Protesters, mostly young men, (more than 30) are reported dead and 1,400 injured. Whether the police intended to kill him or not, the damage has been done, and the valley is simmering.

Burhan may be dead but the fallout is huge. The situation reminds one of the 2010 unrest when 120 people were killed by the security forces trying to suppress the youth. Most of them born after 1990, and hundreds of thousands of mourners who joined Wani's funeral procession proved it.

The incident has brought out several facets. There is a local angle, there is a national angle, there is an international angle and also there is an Indo-Pak angle. The echo is heard in Pakistan as Wani's photos were posted on the social media. Taking this opportunity Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Monday called for a plebiscite in what he called "occupied" Jammu and Kashmir to let its people decide if they want to be with India or align with Pakistan. Radio Pakistan quoted Sharif as saying in a statement that the "massacre of citizens by Indian forces and use of brutal force against Kashmir is regrettable."

The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, has called on all parties to exercise "maximum restraint" to avoid further violence and hoped that all

concerns would be addressed through peaceful means. Last September Nawaz Sharif met Ban Ki-Moon on the sidelines of the UNGA Session, and urged for a plebiscite in Kashmir, stressing on the need for implementation of the United Nation's Security Council resolution in this regard.

As for the local politics, former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah has warned that Burhan dead is more deadly than Burhan alive. "Mark

BJP. Also the chief minister Mehbooba Mufti has fallen between the two stools. In 2010, she was the one who supported the youth uprising. As chief minister she has arrested the Hurriyat leaders and now she is appealing to them to come to her rescue. On the other hand the centre does not have the same confidence it had in her father late Mufti Mohammed Sayeed.

Secondly, the centre seems to think that the violence in the state can be tackled by deploying the

The incident has brought out several facets. There is a local angle, there is a national angle, there is an international angle and also there is an Indo-Pak angle.

my words -- Burhan's ability to recruit into militancy from the grave will far outstrip anything he could have done on social media," he had tweeted.

Who is Burhan and why should his death invoke so much violence? He represents the dangerous home grown militancy. The 21-year-old youth had a Rs ten lakh bounty on him. The son of a headmaster, he took to guns reportedly to avenge the death of his brother. Burhan joined the Hizbul Mujahideen and rose to become a commander. He was also the first militant from Kashmir to reveal his identity on social media.

The eruption has been coming for long and it is not clear why the authorities did nothing to prevent it. Firstly, there is no cohesion between the ruling coalition partners -- the PDP and the

army to crush militancy. This has not paid dividend, as political commentator Dilip Padgaonkar has observed the face of the militancy itself has changed in the state. The home-grown militancy has overtaken the foreign militancy from across the border. It is now the local youth, well educated, well versed in the social media and well indoctrinated who is now the face of the new militancy. According to one estimate out of the 145 active militants in the valley 91 are locals and the rest from Pakistan. It is perhaps this local factor the funeral attracted thousands of mourners.

The third is the lack of strategy on the part of the centre and the state. For the past one-decade and more since Manmohan Singh held a round table conference with the stake holders no fresh effort had been made to address their concerns.

So while the home-grown militancy is growing, the moderates are becoming irrelevant.

Fourthly, what Kashmir needs is a political solution. The ball is in the court of the BJP, as it is not only ruling at the centre but also a coalition partner in the state. It was indeed a welcome step from the Modi government reached out to the Congress and other opposition parties. Home Minister Rajnath Singh's telephone calls to the Congress President Sonia Gandhi was indeed part of that effort. An all party meeting may be of help before the Monsoon session.

Fifthly, as retired army chief Gen. Malik observes whenever the dialogue process is suspended the infiltration and militancy raises its head. The two prime ministers should take forward the tea diplomacy Modi practiced by dropping in at Nawaz Sheriff's residence in December last and resume the dialogue process.

The road ahead is clear. The priority is to restore law and order and reach out to the people. Mehbooba should be given all support from all sides as her authority is getting weakened by the day. There should be a healing touch, and all MLAS should fan out to their constituencies. Almost two thirds of the Kashmir population is now under 30. The Centre too should address the concerns of the Kashmiris and build consensus by involving all stakeholders including Hurriyat. It is a false hope that the situation like the 2010 will pass. One option could be a look at the interlocutor's report of 2010. There is urgency to address it, as the problem cannot be pushed under the carpet any more. (IPA Service)

POLITICAL DELICACIES

By Nora Chopra

IS RAHUL GANDHI GETTING MARRIED SOON?

The entire Allahabad as well as Delhi is abuzz with the rumour that Rahul Gandhi is getting married soon. Wedding preparations are said to be going on at his ancestral house Anand Bhawan in Allahabad. The girl is supposed to be a Kashmiri Brahmin girl, said to be the daughter of a very close friend of Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi. The rumour started after Sonia Gandhi visited last month accompanied by friend's daughter and stayed at Anand Bhawan. It was presumed that Sonia Gandhi had brought her future daughter in law to show her Anand Bhawan. However as yet there is no clarity on the matter with those involved refusing to confirm or deny reports of an impending wedding. Meanwhile according to one report, the girl is said to be the daughter of a former foreign secretary, close to Gandhi family.

BJP MAY PROJECT ANUPRIYA PATEL AS CM FACE IN UTTAR PRADESH

Uttar Pradesh this time will be the battle ground of three women Anupriya Patel of BJP, Mayawati of BSP and of course Priyanka Gandhi of the Congress. BJP which forced a split in Anupriya Patel's family has promised to project her as the chief ministerial candidate. Patel has inherited her father Sonelal Patel's kurmi backward legacy. She is well educated and articulate. It is for these reasons that the BJP president Amit Shah made her first join the BJP and then promised her the CM's seat. The BJP unlike Bihar where they depended only on the face of Narendra

Priyanka can pass on the buck on the alliance partner..

GHULAM NABI AZAD WILL RUN UPCC THROUGH RAJ BABBAR

The new Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee chief Raj Babbar is neither a Brahmin nor a Muslim but the charismatic film star Babbar got this lucky assignment because of the infighting amongst the Brahmin leaders. There was hectic lobbying before the high command zeroed in on Babbar. He was the choice of both Priyanka and Rahul Gandhi. Though a Rajya Sabha member from Uttarakhand, Babbar has been acceptable to all castes as well as to Muslims because of his Muslim wife. The other choice Sanjay Singh who was offered the post of chairman campaign committee, is said to have refused to accept the post. But despite the fact that he is casteless Khatri like his predecessor Nirmal Khatri, his advantage of being Raj Babbar is that he would now be used as a poster boy of the Congress and the strings will be pulled from behind by Delhi and especially by Ghulam Nabi Azad.

MAMATA TO ATTEND INTER STATE COUNCIL MEETING FOR FIRST TIME

The West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee, who has an eye on the top most post in the country of the PM, has now made tactical changes in her politics. She is these days being governed more by her brains than by her heart like the last time. After getting a two third majority in the state assembly poll, she is coming to Delhi on July 15 to attend the meeting of Inter State Council. This is the first

The new Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee chief Raj Babbar is neither a Brahmin nor a Muslim but the charismatic film star Babbar got this lucky assignment because of the infighting amongst the Brahmin leaders.

Modi has started to focus on caste particularly on the OBC castes as the other two UP parties that have ruled UP for the last three decades are basically OBC dalit parties. It is to counter the Samajwadi Party and Mayawati's BSP that Amit Shah is focussing on the OBCs and MBCs. First, with an eye on behenji's vote bank, Shah appointed Keshav Prasad Maurya, an MBC as their state chief. And now after much brain drill, they have decided to project Anupriya Patel as the CM candidate for 2017 assembly polls in UP.

PRIYANKA FAVOURS ALLIANCE IN UTTAR PRADESH ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Despite Priyanka Gandhi, the Congress is not sure of sweeping the assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh. Ghulam Nabi Azad, the general secretary in charge, is planning an alliance on the lines of Bihar. He is negotiating with behenji for either a covert alliance with seat adjustments in over 100 seats or an overt alliance with Congress fighting just 170 seats and the rest going to BSP. Mayawati too needs the Congress in these crucial times when the BJP is out to break her party.

PRASANT KISHOR GETTING LITTLE COOPERATION FROM UP LEADERS

Congress campaign strategist Prashant Kishor is fast losing his grip on the organization. Top sources said that Kishor's plug to pitch former Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit as the face of the party in Uttar Pradesh caught many leaders including Dikshit unaware. After Kishor took charge, his team had started calling Congress leaders and MLAs, asking them to arrive in Lucknow at short notices. While initially many leaders tried to oblige but after some time, the leaders have started to avoid his calls and pay no heed to his demands. (IPA)

TO THE EDITOR

Menace of drug abuse

Editor,
There are several things that drain the core strength of a society. The rampant drug abuse by young people is certainly one of them. Yes, many households have their own shares of worries with respect to drug abuse by their children. But they are forced to silently endure them all.

Not strangely, a lot many adolescents in the towns have taken to this bad habit for various other reasons. The company that one associates with is a crucial factor because most of the youth are drawn to substance abuse due to peer pressure which is part of adolescence. Another reason for drug abuse is lack of meaning in life because one is not gainfully employed. An idle mind usually looks for the wrong kids of indulgences. And with hedonism permeating the society the will power of our youth to "say no" to dope is non-existent.

This aside, the easy availability of illegal drugs is what allows substance abuse to thrive. Drug peddlers are available at every street corner. Here the cell phone pulls down the mountain of hurdles. Just by texting a message the stuff is delivered at one's home. The recent Bollywood film 'Udta Panjab' has brought into the open how such underhand deals come off. It also boldly exposed how foxy the big leaders are

who without any qualms get involved in what we citizens can hardly imagine. Yes, politicians have stooped to the gutter level to fulfill their self-centered missions. Thus, they drug the society only to remain in power or become richer.

Drug abuse and trafficking are becoming the biggest challenges to this country. Even in this technologically advanced age the government has literally failed to curb the increasing demand and supply of such life-taking drugs. Of course, the stick of the police to clamp down on the suppliers might achieve success to some extent if the government agencies act in concert. But, to knock down this awful habit the entire society and faith based organizations must share the burden. A healthy environment in society is a must and Government should roll up its sleeves to help sustain these good efforts.

Value-based education which has virtually disappeared from the school syllabi must be given due attention. Many past addicts have confessed that if they were shown the right path and inspired with a fair doses of homilies, and if their parents were a little strict and loving, they would not have fallen for such dangerous stimulants. Also, an effective method to combat the drug abuse is through the right teaching of one's religious values as it is often the most recommended course. Those who do not consider religion/God as important are three times likelier to use

substances to get a high as per surveys. By turning to God and religion most addicts have finally reformed themselves. Interestingly, spiritualism through meditation and Yoga is clinically tested and has been extensively used these days by many rehabilitation centers across the world.

The bottom line is that parents/guardians must be extra watchful. Keeping in view the deepening chaos in the society, parental responsibilities are higher now than ever before.

Yours etc.,
Saili Gawai,
Via email

Development please!

Editor,
The hot topic currently debated is whether or not uranium should be mined. But seriously what we all desperately need at the moment is a world standard functional airport and train services which will cater to our needs and do away with our having to travel all the way to Guwahati. May I live and may this generation live to see us taking a flight or a train to other parts of the country from Shillong, hopefully! Everything will then be cheaper and available once the railway is introduced to the Khasi-Jaintia Hills and those tense moments of catching a flight on time will be a thing of the past for the entire generation.

Yours etc.,
Dashan Warshong,
Via email

Kudos State Library

Editor,
The State Central library deserves praise for its membership touching 28,600 (S.T July 11, 2016). It should be kept in mind equally that it is because of the diversity both of old and new books of literature there that has led people to enrol as members. As a student back in the early 2000s, I recall spending most of my college years there. The library is very rich in Contemporary Indian Fiction, where every Indian literary-prize winning novelist could be found in its shelves. Research scholars can find an array of books of criticism on Shakespeare, American Literature, the poets Robert Frost, Rabindranath Tagore, Faiz Ahmed Faiz etc. There are some rare books too like 'The Penguin Book of Latin American Verse' edited by E. Caracciolo Trejo, 'Collected Stories' of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, 'Contemporary Latin American Short Stories' of Maple Press and a biography of Jack Kerouac by Ann Charters. The State Central Library has truly reinvented itself in these few years!

Kudos to its administration!

Yours etc,
Willie Gordon Suting,
Shillong-1

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 end of the human race will be that it will eventually die of civilization."

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

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River as critical linkages

THE two-day Nadi Festival is underway in Shillong. The conference looks at rivers as important linkages between countries that share common international boundaries. It has brought together high level ministers, diplomats and participants from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar to thrash out possibilities of trade, commerce and cultural linkages through the intricate rivers systems that criss-cross the region and could be harnessed for better waterways communication. Asian Confluence, a civil society organization that sees itself as the third space linking governments and other public institutions has been in the forefront of advocacy to bring the South and South East Asian countries whose futures are interlinked, on a common platform to work out a basic framework not just for creating trade outlets but to explore possibilities for people to people interface and cultural exchanges. This time the State Government of Meghalaya and the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Foundation for Asian Studies, Kolkata have joined hands to organize the Nadi Conference. The fact that North East India shares a long border with Bangladesh of which quite a sizeable length is a riverine boundary and that this strength has not been leveraged upon is a measure of our lack of engagement in the past on the economic advantages of such a cooperation for both countries. Since Sheikh Hasina Wajed took over as Prime Minister in 2009, India and Bangladesh have come closer to understanding each other and to work out bilateral agreements on economic matters. Other neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar have also seen the utility of such collaboration and come together under the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Association.

The Nadi Conference recognizes the fact that over centuries the lives of the people of this region have evolved and flourished around rivers from the source to the mouth. These rivers have not only sustained life but have also fostered culture and creativity. However the emergence of new nation states and their need for tight political boundaries has alienated rivers from people and broken the personal links among people across these boundaries. This festival seeks to move beyond these artificial boundaries and to re-imagine the integrative and assimilative role of rivers in the life of the people, with a thrust on intra-regional connectivity where rivers, rails and roads synergize a better people to people interaction. The key message going out from the Conference which will also see side events such as media dialogues, a sharing of plans and perspectives by tour operators from the countries listed above and also a brainstorming on connecting institutions of all the participating countries, is that rivers are best managed as basin units. This endorses Meghalaya's Integrated Basin Development and Livelihoods Programme initiated by Chief Minister Mukul Sangma in 2010. The Meghalaya Chief Minister in his speech reiterated the need for upstream dwellers to refrain from polluting and rendering rivers toxic in the interest of downstream dwellers. Side events such as exhibition of fabrics and dyes from Bangladesh, Assam and Meghalaya create a new kind of cross-learning.

LOOKING BACK

February 21, 1989

Non-Congress CMs flay Rajiv, Central Govt

National Front chairman and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Mr N T Rama Rao today appealed to the opposition leader to forget their "Prety differences and bickering and the clash of persona" ambition and rivalries" to present a viable alternative to the Congress (I) in the coming general front. He was addressing a rally organized at the Judges Field here by the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), a constituent of the national front. Mr Rama Rao appealed to all those who were critical of the Congress(I) to come together and support the National Front to inflict a "crushing defeat to the Congress(I) in the coming general elections. This kind

of opportunity comes rarely to a nation. Let not history condemn us for having failed to rise to the occasion", Mr Rama Rao said.

Harayana Chief Minister Devi Lal said the Prime Minister had lost his hold on the people because he was the most inaccessible Prime Minister that India ever had. The Prime Minister does not give time for appointments to his own Congress(I) Chief Minister. He is surrounded by a coterie of officers and sycophants who continue to misguide him on the affairs of the nation, he said. Mr Devi Lal said the recent elections in Tamil Nadu had established that the people had rejected Mr Rajiv Gandhi as their leader at the Centre.

Massive drive needed to double farm income Poor agriculturists must get maximum benefits

By K.R. Sudhaman

Once the then Principal Economic Adviser in Finance Ministry Dipak Dasgupta was asked what is the problem of Indian agriculture? He said in one word that Indian agriculture has to become "smart". Seventy years after independence, Indian agriculture has not taken off to the desired level despite over all development of Indian Economy. It is not that Indian agriculture has been ignored. A lot has been done but the cutting edge development has not happened. The reason has been that a holistic approach has not been taken so far for the development of agriculture. The holding is getting fragmented, Technology has been inadequately utilised still 60 per cent of the population dependent on agriculture is accounting for less than 15 per cent of GDP. Average farm productivity is one of the lowest in the World in most of the crops though India's yield of various farm products in pockets matched the best in the World. This is a dichotomy.

Indian agriculture has no doubt come a long way. We have had Green Revolution, White Revolution, blue revolution and so on. No one in India now dies of starvation as used to happen in the past during the British Colonial rule, the most well known being the Bengal Famine of 1942-43. These are things of the past but farmer's suicide is rampant and increasing day by day. This is because the development in agriculture is haphazard and topsy turvy. There is no integrated approach. Agriculture being a state subject, there is no single unified market. This explains the fact that seasonal vegetable like bottle gourd (Giya) is available for Re one a kilo just 50 kms away from Delhi but in Delhi it is never less than Rs 40 a kg. Where does this Rs 39 go? Neither the farmer is benefiting nor the consumers and some middlemen are making money day in day out to the detriment of farmers and consumers.

India has the largest irrigated area in the World, yet more than half of farm land is dependent on monsoon. Also because of geographic situation and

India being a peninsula, It is one of the few countries in the World, which has a monsoon season. India has much greater percentage of its land as arable. Even China and US do not have that large percentage of land as arable. Our Gangetic plains are one of the most fertile areas in the world with perennial river flow. Despite the country being endowed with all these positives, India's water management is one of the worst. Minor irrigations, rain water harvesting, interlinking of peninsular rivers, drip irrigation, have not received adequate attention.

Rice is grown in Punjab where it should not be grown, Sugarcane should not be cultivated in Maharashtra but it is cultivated there resulting in water table depleting and some areas resulting in water shortage.. There is shortage of dal, the main source of protein for vegetarians. All these are happening because soil testing is not taken seriously, water availability is not looked into before selection of crops. Extension work is not carried out in the manner it should be. Fruits and vegetables go waste in large quantities because proper markets have not been developed, poor cold storage facility and insufficient food processing industries too came in the way resulting in Rs 30,000 to Rs 40,000 crore loss to farmers due to wastage and rotting.

Timely credit is not available to poor farmers despite bank farm credit increasing year after year and stood at Rs 9 lakh crore annually. Multi-brand retail opening up to Foreign Direct Investment would have provided great opportunity to farmers, which would have not only helped in keeping a check on middlemen but also provided remunerative prices to farmers. 70 per cent of the sales in multi-brand stores on an average in the world are on food items. One welcome development lately is to allow 100 per cent FDI in food processing and food retail in this year's budget.

Because of higher MSP being provided to rice and wheat year after year, only rich farmers seem to benefit

as top 10 per cent of farmers have 60 per cent of the marketable surplus in rice and wheat, which are procured at high MSP contributing to food inflation. As a result rich farmers keep getting richer at the cost of exchequer and inflation. Also our FCI godowns are overflowing with rice and wheat which are rotting because of excess stocks, three times the buffer requirement. Rich farmers do not want to get into production of pulses as there is no easy money in it. Also poor farmers too are hit because of high MSP as they have to buy from open market at times at much higher price because of high MSP. This is the reality of Indian farming.

You also have Nilgai problem is the North where standing crops are damaged. Animal menace is a reality especially in fringe areas around forests as forests have been encroached upon. Besides weather god has not been kind to farmers in recent years. The country not only faced drought last two years but also unseasonal rains damaging standing crops or harvested crops. Herd mentality too has hit farmers. If sugarcane or cotton fetch good price this year, farmers cultivate more sugarcane or cotton subsequent years hurting them badly due to depressed prices arising out of excess supply. To top it all, sugarcane mills, mostly in the hands of politicians and rich businessmen do not release payments in time.

Under the garb of agriculture income, the rich farmers abuse the tax exemption provided to agriculture income to generate black money. The rich farmers have tremendous political clout and most of them are in politics. All of them claim to be humble farmers and in reality they are not. Rollout of Goods and Services Tax will ensure that single common market is created. This will also facilitate east movement of farm produce but along with it APMC act has to be dismantled totally. Adhoc import-export policy in farm produce too is hurting the farmers badly as it creates instability. A stable export-import policy would provide generous income to poor farmers. Exotic farm products from India fetch good price abroad but this

requires marketing, better packaging and improved preservation and cold storage.

Disguised unemployment is rampant in agriculture in India and it becomes more pronounced during difficult years. NREGA programme is a welcome development but has been abused badly by middlemen and money has been siphoned off by local politicians. The leakage is so much that it has not served the purpose it is meant for. This is the hard reality of Indian farming. Though it has come a long way since independence, the problems persists and genuine efforts have not yielded desired results so far.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi government has taken some positive initiatives lately. The union budget this year has made some honest attempts to reform Indian agriculture particularly after BJP got a drubbing in Bihar elections where people in rural India made it clear that India is not shining for them and the gap between India and Bharat is ever widening because of the efforts to promote chorny capitalism. It is a welcome development that Modi Government, which was dubbed as Suit-boot ki Sarkar has woken up and decided not to turn deaf year to the vows of farmers. The misery of poor farmers is real. Modi's announcement earlier this year that his government would strive to double the income of farmers by 2022 if implemented in all earnest, would bring about a sea change in rural India.

Now technology is there. In an era of internet, communication is so easy that government can achieve wonders through e-farming and e learning. Direct benefit transfer and Aadhaar will help in plugging leakages in the money being doled out to poor farmers, making the social schemes more effective. Modi has taken a good initiative in crop insurance to end the misery of farmers. Mechanisation and technological revolution have to take place taking into account the interests of common farmers. An all out drive to improve the conditions of Indian agriculture, has to be launched to make the sector smart. (IPA Service)

Netaji's Aircrash: Where is the doubt?

By Praveen Davar

It is a pity that some people and organizations have developed a vested interest in keeping alive the controversy of the death of Subhas Chandra Bose in an air crash over seventy years ago. In doing so they are also attempting to exaggerate differences between Pt Jawaharlal Nehru & Netaji who, more than any other two leaders, were closest to each other not only ideologically and politically but also personally. "Was Netaji in Russia till 68?" (TOI- July 11) is nothing but a flight of fancy based on untruth, hearsay and rumours.

As late as last year I visited the INA War Memorial at Moirang near Imphal. The museum is displaying pictures of survivors of Netaji's plane crash. The very fact that these photographs are being allowed to be displayed by a war memorial proves the fact of air crash is not disputed by any government since independence. The fact of Netaji's death in the plane crash is further confirmed in 'Soldier's Contribution to Indian Independence' by General Mohan Singh, the founder of INA. Very little is known about Gen. Mohan Singh today and it is a herculean task to convince people that it was this soldier of Punjab, a captain in the regular British Indian Army, and not Netaji, who was the original founder of the INA. In fact, Netaji was the third successor of INA's leadership, the second being Rash Behari Bose. However, it is beyond doubt that it was Netaji who, after taking over the reins, tuned the INA into a formidable fighting force. He also gave it a new name, Azad Hind Fauj, and became its supreme commander on August 26, 1943.

Two years later, on August 9, 1945, Russia declared war on Japan and the Japanese accepted the terms and conditions of surrender put forward to them by the Allied powers. Netaji, who had reached Singapore from Rangoon via Bangkok, was thoroughly shaken up when the news of Japanese surrender was conveyed to him. He was persuaded to leave Singapore immediately and, after consultation with his colleagues, decided to leave for an occupied Russian territory which he described as an "adventure into the unknown".

Having reached Saigon from Singapore, on August 17, 1945, Netaji's ill-fated plane, a Japanese heavy bomber, took off from Taipei on the afternoon of August 18. But soon after it was airborne there was a loud explosion. The plane tilted to the left, crushed headlong to the ground and caught fire.

Gen. Mohan Singh, who penned his memoir in 1973, writes on the controversy following the air crash: "The air-crash incident has become a highly controversial question in our country today. I have thought it proper to give a brief account of this

unfortunate incident, because I am strongly of the opinion that the accident did take place on August 18, 1945. I was in Sumatra when I first heard of it. I did not believe it and took the entire story as a fabrication with a view to keeping the whereabouts of Netaji a secret. I held these views firmly till I met Col. Habibur-Rehman during the Red Fort trials. I had long discussions with him wherein I put him many searching questions. He was forthright, honest and frank with me, and I felt that he was telling the truth and not concealing anything. After these discussions I felt convinced that the account of the air crash was a fact and not a fabrication."

The INA founder further writes: "Lt. Gen. Fujiwara, who had been deeply connected with the INA movement, visited India thrice during the last 25 years. During the course of our lengthy reminiscences, I had on many occasions told him that I did not believe the story of the air crash. He, too, convinced me that it was a fact. Gen. Fujiwara had served as a very important officer in the Japanese Military Intelligence department - I have no reason to disbelieve him."

If the INA, Japanese and British sources, who physically participated in Netaji's theatre of operations cannot be relied upon, how can you believe those who were far away from the scene, both in distance and time. Gen. Mohan Singh asked a very pertinent question in 1973: "Suppose the story of the accident is a concoction and Netaji is still alive, what on earth prevents him from returning to India, where he is almost worshipped? Those who are spreading the stories that he is hiding in some ashram as a yogi are not doing him justice."

Today we may or may not agree with what the General wrote 43 years ago, but there is no doubt that had Netaji not died in the plane crash he would have certainly come back. There was no reason for a leader so courageous and brave to go into hiding. Mahatma Gandhi, Pt. Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and the whole of India would have welcomed him with open arms. Perhaps, he could have prevailed upon Muhammad Ali Jinnah and prevented what Gandhiji could not - Partition of India. If not, he may have, like the Sardar, agreed to be Nehru's deputy. If Sardar Patel would be the Home Minister, Netaji would certainly have become the country's first Defence Minister. Instead of one independent India would have had two deputy Prime Ministers. History, however, is not based on 'ifs' and 'buts'.

(The writer, an ex Army officer, is Member, National Commission for Minorities. The views expressed by him are personal)

agricultural produce within the country in a systematic manner to keep the price of agricultural products high in the local markets to keep their profit output high. Indirectly, they often force the Governments to import the deficient agricultural produce to meet the internal market demands at the loss or precious foreign reserves for the nation. During this period of lower agri-productions and high price challenges within the nation, it is important for the State and Central Governments for serious introspection to significantly reduce wastage of agricultural productions within the nation. It is a great shame that the nation which regularly launches satellites into the space and releases new versions of cutting end missiles could not develop a proper chain of cold storages for storing agricultural produce and develop proper infrastructure and distribution channels for

agri-products. The poor maintenance of government storage centers like warehouses, godowns, sheds and the thriving corruption channels operating inside them with full or partial support of local administration is another important are of failure of Indian agriculture. Unless serious and concrete approaches are taken in a stepwise and highly focused objective for the next 5-6 years, India will significantly impact local, regional and international food security. The worst sufferers will be the poorest section of the Indian population. Better connectivity with the SAARC and ASEAN nations should help the local farmers to sell their surplus products fast at a reasonable profit. For this purpose, SAARC and ASEAN nations need to come closer in developing some Joint Agricultural Program (JAP).

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Lethbridge AB Canada

TO THE EDITOR

Unholy Alliance

Editor,

These days we have seen the attempt of BJP to rally regional parties together under the banner of NEDA (North east Democratic Alliance). Even our own UDP has fallen prey to this attractive ideology. In my opinion a regional party would be ideal for North-east India as a whole region but not an alliance led by a national party. That would be the most unholy, impractical political concoction. What is special about NEDA if the BJP is still inside playing a manipulative role? Such an alliance would soon die a natural death. NEDA in fact is an intelligent and shrewd strategy of the BJP to get its strong foothold in North-east India. The great success that they had in Assam in the last election (which many say was the result of money-power) has emboldened it to stretch its tentacles to other States as well. The BJP is copying the strategy of the RSS who are infiltrating into tribal communities using their indigenous religions. So the BJP is using the indigenous parties to get into tribal States. It is a foregone conclusion that

all the constituent regional parties in NEDA would have to follow the dictate of the BJP and toe its political agenda. What would happen to our regional parties is that they would degenerate into weak and fragile parties almost like toothless and clawless tigers. Joining NEDA in fact would spell the doom of regional parties.

NEDA in my opinion would turn out to be a North-East Disastrous Alliance. A North-east Regional Party should be constituted on its own strength and political ideology and not mentored or patronized by a national party. This would be no different from political colonization. Years ago we had one authentic regional party, the APHLC which was a formidable conglomerate of tribal regional parties. The fact that APHLC could bargain with the Central Government for the creation of autonomous states, was proof enough of its strength and influence not merely at the regional but at the national level as well. It is unfortunate that our regional party leaders are falling victims to the carrot stick strategy of the BJP. Our leaders should weigh the pros and cons of such an alliance before committing themselves to it. One thing is clear that the

BJP is dying to make a decisive entry into the tribal states of North-east India and it is using every possible tactic to achieve this goal. Our regional party leaders should not be blind to this scheming and make a foolish blunder of being a springboard of their leap to success. If they commit such a political blunder the people of this region will never forgive them. Let our regional leaders (whom I believe are intelligent, experienced and wise) emphasize on the common tribal identity and heritage that we have and come together to constitute one strong, formidable and influential party, one that can voice the concerns of our people even at the national forum. Imagine if 20 to 26 MPs from a Regional Party of North-East India are in the Lok Sabha, what a bargaining power they would have?

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie SDB,
Viaemail

Wastage of agricultural products

Editor,
India is a major agricultural producer in the globe, yet it is one of the most prominent nations along with Russia, China, Pakistan and other countries

in wastage of precious food and agricultural produce. Recently, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated that China and India, two giant economies from Asia together contribute wasting around 1.3 billion tonnes of food per annum. India ranks 7th in the total wastage of agri-produce, poultry, milk and milk products. Russia adorns the top of the list of wasteful nations of the world. The factors responsible for the rampart wastage of agricultural products in India is poor storage and transportation facilities, lack of infrastructure and modern harvest and storage facilities, old and outdated agri-technologies that are wasteful and counter-productive, lack of major foreign investments and technology innovations in the agriculture sector, lack of awareness and education among the various farming communities about modern agricultural harvest and storage techniques, poor distribution facilities as well as lack of initiatives of both State and Central Governments in modernizing agricultural industry.

A section of middlemen, dishonest businessmen and politicians carefully allow wastage of

"The life of man is the true romance, which when it is valiantly conduced, will yield the imagination a higher joy than any fiction."

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 18, 2016

May takes stance

IT is difficult to understand the implications of the changes in the British government following the referendum which went in favour of Britain's exit from the European Union. Both David Cameron leading the Conservatives and Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the Labour Party were against Brexit. There has been no fall of the Cameron government, only David Cameron had to quit. The Conservative government has got new faces. In the hobbling to 10 Downing Street, Theresa May proved the only one ready to take on the British challenge. The curious thing is that May was opposed to Brexit like David Cameron but following the referendum decision she has issued firm statements about bringing about Brexit as soon as possible and ruling out the possibility of a second referendum. She has also sprung a surprise by naming anti-Brexit Boris Johnson Foreign Secretary. The chips are down and the British Prime Minister has to pull the trigger on Article 50 to take the UK out of the European Union. The women of the country may welcome May as Prime Minister; the only woman on the hot seat before was the iron lady, Margaret Thatcher. May has been a feminist and a champion of gay rights.

Theresa May has also been stoutly anti-immigrants. That may bring her close to those who voted for Brexit. The majority of the British people especially in England and Wales voted for exit because of mounting apprehension about an exodus to the country by unwelcome Syrians and Europeans. Cameron in his last address as Prime Minister had to assure that the attack on Poles and ethnic immigrants will be crushed. But secession from the EU will no doubt cause various problems in the UK, with Scotland having consistently said 'nay' to it.

LOOKING BACK

February 21, 1989

Volvo tennis McEnroe upset

Brad Gilbert pulled off three service breaks with blistering passing shots and upset third seeded John McEnroe 6-4, 6-4 in the quarterfinals of the 350,000 dollar Volvo Chicago tennis tournament. Earlier, 16-year-old Michael Chang withdrew with tendinitis in his right leg, advancing Horatio De La Pena to the semifinals, and defending Ar-champion Tmi Mayotte, the fourth seeded, overpowered third seeded Andres Gomez 6-3, 6-1. Chang upset second-seeded Jimmy Connors on Thursday.

It was the second free pass for De La Pena in the six-day event, he won by default against Aaron Krickstein, who had to withdraw Wednesday due to tendinitis in the right elbow. Gilbert broke McEnroe in the third game of the opening set at love. McEnroe also lost his serve again to end the match. Gilbert, ranked 20th in the world will face De La Pena in one of today's semifinals.

McEnroe, who suffered only his second loss to Gilbert the first came in the Masters tournament in New York in January 1986, leading to McEnroe's self-imposed six month sabbatical from the sport had a chance to break Gilbert's serve in the sixth game. But Gilbert slammed one of his five aces and captivated on two bad McEnroe service returns. Gilbert ended the 75 minute match by breaking McEnroe in the ninth game at love. He won the first three points with crisp passing shots, then finished off the left hander by driving a ball at his feet. Mayotte needed 63 minutes to dispose of Gomez in the opening set. Gomez fell behind 1-2 losing

his serve at love on Mayotte's overpowering forehand drives. But, Gomez broke in the fourth game, only to lose his serve again in the fifth game.

Mayotte won the set when he broke Gomez again. In the second set, Mayotte raced to a 3-0 advantage before Gomez could hold serve in the fourth game. Mayotte then took over, blasting Gomez with his hard shots to advance to the semifinals.

Sporting XI subdue Class XI in thrilling finish

In a pulsating finish, sporting XI beat Classic XI by 10 runs to become the champions of the Shillong Second Division Cricket League for the current year. In the final match played on Saturday at the Polo Ground, the winners took the first strike and scored 197 all out in the allotted 40 overs. Afaque (31) and Bobby (30) were the top scorers, Raju picked up 3 wicket, Parminder and Danny captured 2 wickets each. The Class XI replied spiritedly and after a close fight they were all out at 198- eleven short of the target. Porminder was the highest scorer with 42. Both the final list teams have earned promotion to the first division.

Crowe steers Kiwis to safety

A sedate century by batsman Martin Crowe steered New Zealand to a safe position at the close of play on the second day on the second test against Pakistan today at the Basin Reserve Ground. At stumps, New Zealand was all out in its first innings for 447.

UCIL's tender for open cast mining to extract uranium from Mawthabab in South West Khasi hills and also for setting up of processing unit in the area has caught the citizens and even the Chief Minister of the state by surprise. Uranium Corporation of India Limited's (UCIL) July 2 tender is like a bolt from the blue for the people of the state who have for so long thought that the Corporation respects the sentiments of the local people and has done away with the idea of mining uranium in the state. But obviously UCIL has failed to gauge people's sentiment towards mining of uranium in Meghalaya.

The UCIL website mentions Kylleng-Pyndengsohiong, Mawthabab Uranium Project, or the KPM uranium project in Meghalaya and it also stated that the sandstone hosted ore body at Killung and Rangam in West Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya is the first of its kind to be discovered in the country (spellings as per UCIL website). The website also informed that UCIL has planned to construct open pit mines at this site and a processing plant at Mawthabab, which is in the South West Khasi hills district of Meghalaya.

I must admit at the very outset that I do not have much knowledge on issue of uranium mining and there are others who are better informed than me on the subject. But I have some knowledge with regards to impact of mining other minerals and can say with confidence that I have seen with my own eyes and have had many experiences of interacting with people affected by coal and limestone mining in the state. In my humble efforts of trying to understand their problems, I have learned a lot about this activity and more importantly about its detrimental impact on the environment and the people. So, when the news that UCIL is going ahead with its plan to start open pit mining of uranium from the area, a layman that I am, there are several questions which haunt me to which I have no

TO THE EDITOR

TUR and uranium mining

Editor,

The two-day exceptional river festival ended on an interesting note with the TUR taking their anti-uranium mining cause to the venue at Aurobindo Institute. They have alerted the visiting delegates from Bangladesh about the harmful effects that will drain down into the low lying plains of Bangladesh if at all uranium mining is carried out in South West Khasi Hills. But what is appalling here is to see that this organization can overtly foresee the evil effects that uranium mining may cause whereas there was none of its type among the plethora of pressure 'cooker' groups here who could see the destructive effects of the inhuman coal mining in Jaintia Hills district that not only affected its own ecology, environment, rivers et al beyond repair but also the adjacent Dima Hasao district (North Cachar Hills) in neighboring Assam. It took the All Dimasa Students' Union and Dima Hasao District Committee to petition the NGT - which has rightly banned all

answers.

Coal mining has killed all the aquatic lives in the three major rivers which pass through the mining areas of Jaintia hills and all the streams and rivulets in the area are dead and the loss of biodiversity is irreplaceable. The water in the area is not been used not even for washing of cloth and utensils. So the question is, if coal can do this to the rivers, what will happen to the rivers and water bodies in and around the uranium mining area? It is a well known fact that the acidic water from the coal mines of Jaintia hills has also had its impact on the machines used in the Kupli hydro electric project. So if coal can cause so much damage to the environment how can UCIL assure a layman like me that nothing of this sort will happen with mining of uranium.

To people or agencies from outside and even to many of us who have lost touch with our culture, rivers are just big drains and maybe for some other people a mode for waterways, but we all know that to the indigenous people of the area, rivers not only have names, but they have a persona. They even have stories which consider them as humans and in many cases, they were worshipped as deities. In many places of Meghalaya people consider rivers as their mothers or ancestresses and their entire lives revolve around the river. Sadly, we have also witnessed this unique culture of people having profound relationship with the rivers gradually disappearing from the those living near where the dead rivers flow. The young generation of these areas have lost their stories and also the traditions that go with them and when the tradition is lost, the relationship that their ancestors use to have with the rivers is also gone forever.

In limestone mining, the precious top soil is discarded like waste without any consideration for its future use and the same is being carried over by rain water to the plains of Bangladesh. Hence

forms of coal mining in the state, now.

Is it not opportunistic that a group that can see the harmful effects of uranium mining could not see the same in coal mining? Or for that matter the effluent infested streams and rivers in Shillong town? I don't take much from these jamborees decorative dialogues in seminars, conferences, symposiums etc. because time and again it is seen that the deliberations remain confined to the four walls of the venue alone. We have seen in the past how organizations went full-throated about the need to address the cause of single mothers, preserve environment, ecosystem, ethnic tribal culture, traditions and what have you only being talked about. Nonetheless, credit goes to the Asian Confluence, which has in all its effort tried to bring North East and its neighbours to address this vital issue on rivers. Now it is up to the respective stakeholders to act.

Yours etc.
A Lyngdoh
Shillong - 4

Challenges before May

Editor,
Kudos to 59-year-old Ms

Leave the Thlen alone

By H H Mohrmen

Bangladesh is not only getting our minerals but we gracefully supply them top soil form the limestone quarry along the borders. Limestone mining has not only destroyed forests in the area but even entire hills were removed to extract limestone from underneath the ground. Exotic caves, the biodiversity in and around the caves and the stories that people have about them have also gone.

The general public of the state should be very concerned with UCIL's plan of mining for the simple reason that we have witnessed the damage that has been done to the environment by coal and limestone mining and even stone quarrying. Do we even want to imagine the kind of impact uranium mining will have in the area? The other cause of concern is the government's attitude towards any form of mining in the state. Even after the NGT ban on coal mining, the state government is yet to come up with the policy to manage, control and monitor the mining of coal, limestone and other types of minerals. Now the question is even for mining these common minerals the government does not have any mechanism in place to manage and control the activity, how can we expect the same government to manage and control mining of rare and sophisticated minerals like uranium?

The reason that we cannot trust the state government with regard to environmental protection is because it has failed to protect and preserve our environment from being destroyed by coal and limestone mining and this itself is *raison d'être* that we should not allow mining of uranium in the state. If the state government has failed to protect the environment by not being able to control mining; it is also responsible for the crumbling of tribal culture and traditions, then we have a genuine and a strong ground to oppose mining of the big mineral from our state.

I am highlighting these issues because we still consider ourselves indigenous people and for the autochthons of the place our relationship with nature is very strong and vital to our

very existence. The reason is if we lose our culture, our traditions and our stories then can we still call ourselves the natives of the land?

In the Khasi-Pnar tradition we also have the folk story about u Thlen and in the local legend of u Thlen, the Khasi-Pnar believe that it originally lives in a cave, and is fed by its mother and her uncle. The serpent grew very big and became a threat to the community. The reason is because u Thlen which is a monster in the form of a snake has the characteristics of a vampire and can be appeased only when fed with human blood. In return U Thlen the Thlen blesses this family that looks after it with abundance, wealth and prosperity.

U Thlen is a symbol of greed of the humankind. Greed can make people do things which are even against the common good of the land and even their own will for the sake of wealth. The Khasi-Pnar believe that they had killed the beast and did away with greed from the heart of the people except from some of the rich families, but that is not so. Our ancestors may have killed the beast, but greed prevails in the hearts of people. It is difficult to satisfy greed because greed knows no bounds. We know this because our ancestors have lived with whatever is underneath the ground for ages and lived happily on these rolling hills till we started exploiting the minerals. Our forefathers and mothers had a profound relationship with nature and lived a life of peaceful co-existence with their fellow creations since time immemorial.

But once we start tearing down this connection, we start killing and destroying everything around us and even pollute our rivers which are our lifelines. Mining of uranium is like reviving the biggest of all the Thlens in the Khasi-Pnar world, which will again feed only on human blood and as the story goes' it only feeds on the native blood and not that of the outsiders. We should therefore leave the Thlen alone to save ourselves and our land.

to animals should be banned immediately but not slaughtering of cows. Not only does the prohibition on cow slaughter add insult to injury in the lives of the poor people of our country but it also jeopardizes the lives of the cows that can no longer produce milk. What needs to be done is to build slaughterhouses where animals can be slaughtered away from public glare and in a less painful way. It is time to protect animals from their being subjected to abject cruelty in the name of the traditional sports like Jaikattu (bull taming) or Dhuro (bull fight). Cruelty to animals whether it has been practiced in the name of traditional sports, callous practices or for fulfilling sadistic pleasures should, immediately, be banished whereas killing them for food or for saving human beings from their attack must not be prohibited. The former ban is necessary for the survival of humanity and the latter act is a compulsion for the survival of human beings.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

One God, One Humanity

By Ananya S Guha.

What happens if a preacher talks about his religion and apparently 'inspires' some youth to go and commit acts of terror? How do we account for the fact that his preaching, his sermons have aroused brutal atavistic passions? That is the exact allegation against Zakir Naik a preacher, activist of the Islamic faith in India. The controversy surrounding him rests on the conjecture that his preaching on television has influenced Muslim youth and prompted them to commit the dastardly Dhaka killings on the fateful day of 1st July 2016. Naik has of course stated that this was not the case and his speeches were not inflammatory. Incidentally he has been acknowledged for his erudition not only on Islamic faith, but Christian theology and Hinduism as

even if volatile could provoke some youth to murder? The intangibles in life remain intangibles, there is no tangible proof of inner feelings, intrinsic dislike or hatred. The cover up can be a direct denial, even if it is not the truth- but who assesses such ' truths ' which even I'm sure legal jurisprudence cannot grapple with.

In the midst of all the killings in the world, frenetic as they were in the last month or so a relatively ' unknown ' person passed away in Pakistan on the 9th July 2016. He was ' Maulana ' Abdul Sattar Edhi a humanitarian worker belonging to the Muslim faith. He was known in Pakistan and other parts of the world but he becomes unknown in the face of terror. Terror is talked about, the media almost

The world has been worked up in such a way today, that distorted ideologies on wrong premises are sully religious beliefs. Similarly doctrinaire creeds on racial superiority or inferiority rule the roost and signal killing, ghettoising people into the dreaded ' them ' and ' us ' syndromes ' . Zakir Naik's actions maybe dubbed as religious fanaticism, but how do we measure and on what basis that his preaching even if volatile could provoke some youth to murder? The intangibles in life remain intangibles, there is no tangible proof of inner feelings, intrinsic dislike or hatred. The cover up can be a direct denial, even if it is not the truth- but who assesses such ' truths ' which even I'm sure legal jurisprudence cannot grapple with.

well. He is known for his talks on TV channels like Peace TV which incidentally has been banned in some countries.

Legitimate legal action against him is not only debatable but complex as there is no tangible evidence to show that he had extremist or terrorist connections. I have used these two expressions ' extremist ' and ' terrorist ' because they suffer from a linguistic ambiguity especially in countries like India where the words ' militant ' ' extremist ' and ' terrorist ' are variants of people who kill to espouse a certain cause. So if the perpetrators of the ghastly Dhaka killings were terrorists, they were so, one supposes, because they singled out certain people only who were not conversant with Islamic faith or the Bengali language. That action can only spill fear in the denizens of the world. Zakir Hussain perhaps did not know that he could cause ' such ' terror ' in the minds of some fanatic youths or could as a result of the killings infuse a dreaded fear in the world. What then, about the killing of the policemen in Dallas in the US? Was the perpetrator a ' terrorist ' or a demented person? Who could have ' influenced ' him?

The world has been worked up in such a way today, that distorted ideologies on wrong premises are sully religious beliefs. Similarly doctrinaire creeds on racial superiority or inferiority rule the roost and signal killing, ghettoising people into the dreaded ' them ' and ' us ' syndromes ' . Zakir Naik's actions maybe dubbed as religious fanaticism, but how do we measure and on what basis that his preaching

rhapsodises on it, but his death goes unnoticed. To have a glimpse of his life is to know how he tended to the poor, the unwanted, such as single mothers, how he did relief work in earthquakes or went to Africa to tend to the those not cared for, how he set up hospitals and organised relief camps in centres all over Pakistan, with his base at Karachi. Yet his death went largely unnoticed. Few in India remember that he looked after an Indian deaf and mute girl, who had to stay back in Pakistan against her desire and finally repatriated her. No one will talk about such lights in the midst of a pervasive darkness. No, we love the darkness, it is adventurous and excites our little passions. His funeral was attended by the top political brass of Pakistan who cut across political lines to pay their last respects, in the midst of tight military security. The light has not been totally snuffed out from our lives. We can take solace on that. One Abul Sattar Edhi may not be enough but when there is a massive light off or fuse, one person dangling a lantern in the midst of darkness is a beacon of hope to the world. In his ambulances Abdul Sattar Edhi would carry not only ailing Muslims but Christians and Hindus as well.

We have; a category of people who desperately believe in one God only; we have also another- who uphold the virtue of one God in all humanity. Did he proselytise, was he a fanatic, perhaps yes of love and caring. Did he influence people, we do not know just as we do not know the extent of Zakir Naik's ' influence ' on the Bangladeshi youths.

"The measure of a master is his success in bringing all men around to his opinion twenty years later."

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

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Congress in UP

THE Congress has departed from its usual electoral mode in UP by naming Sheila Dikshit as its candidate for Chief Ministership. Dikshit has no doubt got the experience and the ability for the office. She was Chief Minister of Delhi three times running though rightly or wrongly tainted towards the end with enabled Arvind Kejriwal to romp in with a bang. She is not a dark horse in UP as she had won the Kanauj seat in the 1984 Lok Sabha poll. She belongs to a respected family in the state and her Brahmin lineage was once a political strong point there. The question is whether she will be able to live down the stink over her in the battle of Delhi and whether her party has any hope of success in a state where it had been virtually wiped out for years. Putting emphasis on her high-born social status seems a desperate attempt to pull in votes. In Delhi, on the contrary, she was not only projected as but also proved herself to be a cosmopolitan, casteless personality best suited to the cosmopolitan metropolis. A contradiction of her Delhi image in UP which has recently seen the emergence of the Dalit factor may not do any good.

What is more to the point is that the Congress has not only crashed in UP but also at a national level. Sheila Dikshit backed by the Sonia-Rahul combination, both commanding great popularity in the state, is not likely to rescue the grand old party from the morass. The only result may be an attrition of the vote bank of the BJP which, despite efforts to remove the communal stain under the baton of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah, is still on a very sticky wicket in UP. The Congress has also targeted it by putting up Imran Masood and Raj Babbar under its flag.

LOOKING BACK

February 21, 1989

Convergence of Nationalism and Globalism

A perceptive debate on the nature and dimension of nationalism and globalism has been set in motion by a series of break-throughs in science and technology. This is especially in the areas of supersonic travels, space and communication technologies and needs to be carried forward for facilitating the process of transition to the global society. The international security environment unfolds the symptoms of the dual situation the positive and the negative forces. While the positive forces are flashing the message of disarmament, development, oneness of the human race and global civilization, the divisive forces generated by narrow nationalism, fundamentalism and racialism are keeping the world in an explosive situation or on a razor's edge. This is the hinge of history on which we stand today and the climate is surcharged with hot blow and cold blow.

Living in Marshal MacLuhan's global village, one can not escape the progressive influence of mass media of communication that is cutting across the artificial barriers which have kept the humanity divided into races, religions, nationalities, castes, creeds and colours. A manipulated society either by religious Pundits or Maulvis, or Pope or authoritarian and totalitarian communism or capitalist's welfare state is not the answer and perhaps has lost much of fascination amongst its votaries. President Gorbachev who has emerged as new messiah of peace and human unity has given a call for a break with the existing outworn orthodoxies breeding the climate of cold war diplomacy. He is making a radical paradigm shift in the

Soviet philosophy, policies and programmes. Whether he succeeds in it or not is besides the point but the issue to be highlighted is that the Marxian paradigm of reality that has dominated the process of human thinking to such an extent that it was accepted as what Laski would call the major inarticulate premise' underlying our intellectual and conceptual world-view is virtually collapsing. This does not mean that the capitalist's world view is free from weakness of materialistic assumptions of life and is less mechanical model but the picture that emerges is that both the models either directly or indirectly flow from the Newtonian and Cartesian world view of reality. These models have been rejected by modern scientists and thinkers and are dying and a new model, a new philosophy of life and a new model of development are struggling for their rebirth. The transition is painful and there looms the reality of a crisis that is complex and cumulative.

The discoveries of physical and biological sciences especially of modern physics have no doubt given their own verdict of opposing alternatives; either the path of Buddha or the bomb and it is upto each one of us to decide which path to follow if history is to be something other than a tragedy of successive civilizations, a world civilization, and global consciousness seem the only way out.

If nuclear scientists and technologists have a sense of responsibility they must build a viable movement against the armament race on ethical and ecological considerations. It is our date with destiny and the ultimate challenge to wisdom and creativity.

NADI 2016-connecting people with rivers

By Ibu Sanjeeb Garg

BEATING THE RHETORIC

In 1981, Joseph Montville, while discussing foreign policy in the magazine "Foreign Policy" during the course of his article "Foreign Policy According to Freud" coined the phrases "Track 1" and "Track 2" diplomacies. Track 1 referred to the normal discussions that diplomats indulged in, while Track 2 took place through professional experts, industry leaders, among others. A Track 2 discussion was seen as a way of understanding each other's apprehensions and identifying common threads that would help establish a partnership. Since then, globally Track 2 discussions have become an important part of diffusing tensions and creating conducive atmosphere towards building a more meaningful partnership.

In this context the two day NADI festival-2016 organised by the Asian Confluence, India, East Asia Centre, Shillong, in collaboration with the Meghalaya Government and the Maulana Abul Kamal Azad Institute of Asian Studies assumes significance. It was a two day conference organised between 15 and 16 July 2016. Noted speakers and experts from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar and north eastern states of India sat together to discuss issues of connectivity and people. Rivers was the central theme of discussions, as besides serving as a means of transport, rivers stood as a connective narrative among people for centuries now.

A number of interesting ideas were presented during the course of the two day conference, which sought increased connectivity among India's Asian neighbours. This would indeed help India in its own quest as an emerging global power, and at the same time, giving the North East a firm footing in evolving diplomatic relations. It was Punjab and Tripura which first started power diplomacy with neighbouring countries and redefined how foreign relations evolved in India. Through initiatives such as the NADI festival, the north eastern states would

further diplomacy from a state perspective as well. All this, while staying on course on the firm ethos on which Indian diplomatic values and directions are embedded.

Representatives from Bangladesh sought to increase the number of flights between Bangladesh and North eastern region to further people-to-people connectivity. Basin management should also form a part of the joint initiative, the speakers opined. Speakers from India stressed on strengthening dialogue process and that including all stakeholders would pave the way for effective convergence and "actionable" points in using rivers for mutual benefit and prosperity in the region. Border haats (Border markets) as an important form of cross border trade was emphasised and stress was laid on increasing the number of border haats.

At the bedrock of the NADI confluence which seeks to leverage on rivers, both as a conduit of transportation as well as a people-to-people connector, it is important to understand why inland waterways are important to India. According to a World Bank study, when one compares Inland Water Transport (IWT) with Road and Rail connectivity, one sees a clear pattern. While energy efficiency (in terms of how much weight cargo one HP of energy can carry) for rail and road are 500 kg and 150 kg respectively; for IWT it is 4000 kgs! Similarly fuel efficiency of IWT is much more than traditional rail and road connectivity. While considering other factors such as land needed, capital invested and air pollution emitted, IWT scores favourably over other traditional forms of transport.

Northeastern India is a completely land locked region connected to the rest of the country by a thin chicken neck! As such, alternate connectivity to the rest of the country as well as reverse connectivity between India and its Asian

work wonders is opening a South Asian University centre in the North East, along the lines of the one established in New Delhi. Northeast India undoubtedly shares racial, cultural and historical ties with the Asian nations. A common university in North East would doubtless be attractive for students from other South Asian nations and increase people-to-people dynamics. Today, India and her neighbours jointly face new forms of challenges in the form of conventional and non conventional threats. As the deadly attack in Gulshan, Dhaka has proved no country is immune to the threat of global terrorism anymore. In such a crucial juncture, initiatives such as NADI-2016 would provide a great boost to confidence building measures among nations. At the same time threats are not limited to conventional arrays alone. Climate change is a major threat to nations today, especially low lying ones like Bangladesh. Experts predict, by the end of this century, a large part of Bangladesh would be under water. This would undoubtedly create pressure on the Northeastern states as migration is inevitable and the pressure would be on cross border migration as well. The Northeastern states already have a chequered history on the issue of migration from Bangladesh; hence opportunities such as these can also be used to discuss the question of livelihoods, cross border migration and climate change in the future.

In a global order, 21st century diplomacy has certainly moved from drawing rooms of diplomats to the people. This is a positive trend that encourages people participation and makes them stakeholders in their nation's future. As the world order moves towards greater connectivity initiatives such as NADI-2016, it would indeed foster greater people-to-people ties and at the same time helping India cement its position as a global leader in a new emerging multilateral world order. (The views expressed by the author are personal)

TO THE EDITOR

Sohra Marathon

Editor,
After missing out on the first two editions of the Sohra Cherrapunjee Marathon due to my absence from Shillong, I consider myself fortunate to have been part of the 3rd one. The buses started the pickups from various locations in Shillong at 4 am. The Late Lateef that I am, I arrived at 5 am to accord myself a trip in the last pickup bus. Phew! It was a bumpy ride to the race location as the driver seemed to be in a lot of haste. As some of my co-passengers commented, "The driver is more excited than we are!"

We reached quite early, courtesy the excited driver and had about an hour to resurrect ourselves for the run. The runners changed into athletic outfits, refreshed themselves with beverages and snacks, and not to forget indulged in the pioneered habit of our generation, "clicked memorabilia selfies!"

It was a memorable two hours I spent "running with the clouds". With each passing lap, the Rain Gods kept getting fiercer, but that only increased my momentum and pushed me to run faster. I acknowledge the fact that the volunteers not only refueled us time and again

with water, but also continually motivated us, "Cmon you can do it", "Yes, Yes, Go Go, Run Run!" I just cannot get over the moment I came across the Finish Line at a distance. Pure happiness, it signified. It was a moment I'm going to cherish all my life.

On hindsight I'd like to encourage the organisers to be more prudent with baggage custody, awarding of medals and systematic arrangements. Communication with various people made me aware that many have traveled from distant cities to relish this event and I'm sure with improvement in these areas, the Sohra Cherrapunjee Marathon can become a very renowned annual event across the nation. Thanks, organisers for granting us the "Abode of running in the Clouds" Cheers!

Yours etc.,
Karan Sharma,
Viaemail

When governors play politics

Editor,
The turnout and his new masters nearly pulled it off. Arunachal Pradesh is a border state with a hostile greedy neighbour. It doesn't need such misadventures and elected governments mustn't be destabilised. Such brazen

attempts at inorganic growth of a party that professes the heavens have come a cropper. The social media was overflowing with salivating followers and their foul mouths. Luckily we have a Supreme Court that delivers justice despite all odds. The castigation of such an upright bureaucrat turned unsuspecting bumbling Governor who was led up the garden path was inevitable. Many a governor have erred so in the past seven decades and let this be the last.

Yours etc.,
SP Deb,
Viaemail

Irrational parking in RR Colony

Editor,
The RR Colony is no longer a quiet residential area. It has become a thoroughfare for vehicles driving towards Umpling which has a huge population and beyond towards NEIGRIHMS. The tourist traffic is very high throughout the day yet Traffic Police personnel are only seen on the main Rynjah market area. Beyond that people are left to their elements. In the RR Colony area vehicles, including taxis are parked on both sides of the road leaving very little space for oncoming and outgoing vehicles to negotiate. The car drivers

who park there know that what they are doing is wrong but cock a snook at the system and continue breaking the law. The writing on the wall, "No Parking, Fine Rs 500" is never enforced. The situation is such that any day a major accident might happen considering that the big STPS buses ply up and down this road on their way to and from Umpling. Are we waiting for a disaster to happen? If not why is then why is Traffic Police turning a blind eye to this area?

But Rynjah is not the only casualty. The whole length of road from Nongthymmai to Pohkseh - Rynjah - Umpling, especially opposite the Children's Hospital (Pohkseh) has become a parking lot for taxis and private vehicles, leaving very little or no space for pedestrians and for passing vehicles. Once in a while the Traffic Police takes action but in the next two days it is back to business as usual. We Indians are congenial law breakers hence we needed to be dealt with more strictly. I request the Traffic Police to empower citizens to take action when they come across a situation where parking laws are violated. I am saying this because Traffic Police seem to have their hands full.

Yours etc.,
GR Lyngdoh,
Viaemail

NDA must change its mindset to tackle problems

Majoritarian behaviour and hype will not help

By S. Sethuraman

One would hope that the Modi Government would step back from its self-righteous posturings in governance, challenged as it is on all fronts - political, economic, a truculent neighbourhood, and alarming rise in terrorism across regions. All this in the midst of a global economic turbulence and a new bout of inflation at home, further dampening growth outlook.

Kashmir continues to be on boil taking a major toll of civilian lives, looking hardly controllable without a new Modi Initiative to launch a conciliatory political process, away from the sterile moves of the past or the Centre's ongoing strong arm methods. The sooner it is done the better for saving lives and instilling a new sense of confidence and hope in the misguided Kashmiris.

Democratic credentials of, and observance of constitutional norms on the part of Prime Minister Modi, who rode to power on a highly popular wave in 2014, have come into question repeatedly in the first two years of its regime. Stoicism or lip service to democracy would not do. It is only lately that tolerance and dissent are seen to becoming more secure. Government had, however, discredited itself, at the start of its third year, with naked attempts to usurp power first in Arunachal Pradesh and later in Uttarakhand through the actions of pliant governors. These must be seen as part of its strategy to accomplish a 'Congress-mukt-Bharat' in the run-up to national election 2019.

Hopefully, the Modi Government has drawn lessons from the Supreme Court intervention in these two states, especially its strictures on the way the Governor in Arunachal Pradesh functioned and exercised his "discretionary powers". In a landmark verdict, the apex court reinstated the earlier (Congress) Government in Arunachal Pradesh. The restored Congress Government, now in a new garb, commands a big majority and it has turned out to be a humiliating experience for BJP. The outcome was no different in Uttarakhand earlier where the ruling BJP's efforts to change the Congress regime through horse-trading were legally frustrated.

The Modi Government with self-proclaimed record of achievements "on all fronts" in its first two years has thus entered the third year in even more difficult environment, both at home and abroad. Has the Prime Minister, always in a poll campaign mode, sobered down or his senior Ministers begun calling the right shots for more orderly governance?

The first two years showed up the gross inadequacies, despite some of the path-breaking reforms (mainly fast-forwarding FDI liberalisation in many key sectors, ostensibly to create jobs) and slogan-charged initiatives in disaggregated areas. But all these do not add up to any coherent national development vision nor is there any growing sense of change visible for the populace at large.

It is apparent that the Centre is struggling to restore macro-economic stability and produce some jobs with the next cycle of state elections in 2017, especially Uttar Pradesh where Prime Minister Modi and BJP President Amit Shah would go all out to capture power so as to brighten up the prospects of retaining national mandate in 2019.

The Monsoon session on from July 18 with stormy days ahead must establish that the Modi Government has begun to reckon with the ground realities in every sphere and would seek a more consensual approach to tackling reforms, as is being belatedly exhibited in the case of GST, and for other national and centre-state issues as well.

Here again, on GST touted globally as the biggest reform of the Modi Government, the Finance Minister Mr Arun Jaitley was unrelenting to

accommodate at least a couple of concerns of the Congress opposition in Rajya Sabha so far, and tried to make a propaganda of Congress "obstructionism" to change and development in the Modi Government agenda.

Realising that GST would earn some credit, even if other globally anticipated structural reforms (Land and Labour) are ruled out due to political exigencies, Government leaders began making approaches to Congress opposition to secure its support for passage of the Constitution Amendment Bill on GST with which to convince foreign investors. It would involve some accommodation for the concerns of the Congress, as the majority party in Rajya Sabha. To what extent it has succeeded would be known early in the monsoon session. Whatever the Government's gloating of macro-economic stability and India acknowledged as the fastest-growing economy, it can hardly deny that overall, the economy is still in a morass, CPI (food inflation, in particular) has begun to soar, industry is yet to register a turnaround, and the stressed banking sector awaits the unfolding of ameliorative steps from Government/RBI for it to resume normal credit flows to productive sectors.

In this desperate situation and cautionary noises from credit rating agencies, Government realised that it should at any cost get the GST on the move and to what extent it has succeeded would be known early in the monsoon session. Not all states are on board yet for this tax which would unify India as a single market holding attraction for domestic industry as well as foreign businessmen.

The impact of GST on economic growth and jobs has to be gauged over time once it comes into force probably from April 2017. The Finance Ministry is confident that the tax at agreed rates would boost revenues and help the Centre in fiscal consolidation plan whatever the leeway it may have for other public spending programmes.

Tamil Nadu has serious reservations over the negative impact of GST on its revenue, being a manufacturing state and has also called for deletion of petroleum products from the purview of GST. The Prime Minister has promised Ms. Jayalalitha that a task force in PMO would look into issues raised and suggest ways to resolve them. The NDA Government is heavily banking on support of AIDMK with its 36 MPs, the third largest group in Parliament, for its reform and other legislative measures.

The Inter-State Council deliberations on July 16 must have demonstrated to the Prime Minister that States are yet to buy his version of "co-operative federalism". T N Chief Minister Ms. Jayalalitha heading a friendly AIADMK regime, asserted that the federal polity was getting more entrenched with hardly any dynamic change in the status of states. Mr Modi and his Government have been citing the higher transfers of tax revenues of Centre to states from 2015/16 as recommended by the 14th Finance Commission but the Modi Government has kept up the tradition of treating Finance Commission recommendations on devolution of centre's tax revenues to states as award. The Centre has virtually rejected the demand for special packages for financially distressed states which have to bear diversified responsibilities in social development not adequately funded by the Centre. (IPA Service)

“People seem not to see that their opinion of the world is also a confession of their character.”

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

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Grading creativity

THE Ministry of Culture has collected over 1 crore profiles of writers, artists and performers all over the country. The idea is to categorise them into Outstanding, Promising and Waiting so that the best can be sent to festivals abroad. It is a good effort to break the monopoly of some privileged ambassadors of Indian culture. India is the biggest patron of the arts and finances the needs of creative people. Such patronage however goes only to those who sing the praises of ruling parties. The ministry thinks that the bureaucrats are free from prejudice and are with malice towards no creative person. But this is hardly a sound approach. The best judges of the merit of creative people are their peers. These peers have the most mature ability to judge as they are themselves in the game. Appraisals should be left to experts and practitioners if the country wishes to project a really shining image of culture abroad.

It may be a good idea to arrive at a collective will of artistic communities. The states should fund autonomous bodies which have no truck with the government. The akademies are meant to serve this purpose. The Sahitya Akademy tops them. But those chosen to ‘make, know and judge’ by culture minister Mahesh Sharma can hardly be capable of performing the task. One is reminded of the cultural dictatorship during Indira Gandhi’s emergency. The new project will exercise a political sway in the cultural arena. Patronage is necessary but creativity should not be harnessed to political propaganda.

LOOKING BACK

February 22, 1989

Life limps back to normal after ABSU bandh

Life returned to normal in Kokrajhar and Udalguri, rocked by violence during the 120 hour Assam bandh which ended at five am today. Shops and markets opened their shutters and vehicles plied normally. People were seen engaged in their chores, Director General of Police Mr S.V. Subramanian said. Altogether 15 people including eight Bodo extremists were killed during the protracted bandh, called by All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) to press for a separate home land for the Bodos. Train services, suspended for the past three days following large-scale damage to tracks in Kokrajhar district, resumed today. The death toll since outbreak of violence on February 10 rose to 35. Thirty six people involved in extremist activities were arrested during the bandh. A large number of road bridges were set on fire by the extremists.

Mr. Subramanian said a mob attacked a police party at Goreswar in Kamrup district yesterday. When police returned the fire a women, caught in the cross fire, died. Meanwhile, the Assam Government suspended three class one officers and one class two officer on charges of dereliction of duty during the bandh, an official spokesman said. Yesterday, police arrested two miscreants at Tangla in Darrang district and recovered from them some bows and arrows.

The miscreants set fire to a school building at Kachugaon in Darrang district and a high school at Debargaon in Kokrajhar district besides a road bridge. Mr M. Zaman, secretary, PWD told UNI that a 5 member PWD team has left for Kokrajhar and Udalguri sub-division to supervise the restoration of communication which was disrupted in a number of places due to the agitation. Mr Zaman said that the financial restriction was exempted by the state government for the

communication restoration work in Kokrajhar district and Udalguri sub-division in Darrang district.

51.6 PC Pass NEHU LLB

Thirty two of the sixty two candidates who appeared for the NEHU LLB final Examinations this year have passed in second class and the first four positions have gone to Shillong Law College, according to the provisional results announced on Saturday.

M M. Das, M.S. Singh Jeyanta Debroy, and R.T Pillai secured first four position is that other. In the intermediate test 58 candidates were declared passed in second class out of 83 while 46 out of 198 candidates who appeared in the Preliminary examination were successful. In all three examinations on one secured a First Class.

Assam Bandh Affects Trains

The NF Railway has decided to regulate or terminate some trains in view of a 12 hour Assam bandh called by the United Reservation Movement Council of Assam (URMCA) from 5 am tomorrow, according to a railway release, here today.

The NF Railway, after a decided discussion with the state government decided to cancel or regulate the following trains on broad gauge line 51 up 52 down passenger train will terminate at and originate from Kamakhaguri station tomorrow. 156 Up Tinsukia Mail, 901 Up Trivandrum Express, 59 Up Kamrup express and 972 Up North East Express scheduled to arrive at Guwahati tomorrow may have to be re-regulated enroute if situation so warrants. The 921 Up North East Express, Kamrup Express 155 Dn Tinsukia Mail will, however, run as per schedule and will, however run as per schedule and will be escorted by state police force, the sources said.

Issues before the people

By Toki Blah

leadership have been identified. Money power and the ability to spout emotive nonsense are in the forefront. We are paying the price for this new found wisdom of fools.

Today the criteria for attaining a ticket has changed. The “winnability factor” has gained favour in political circles. The winnability factor simply ensures two things – the ability to win a constituency through purchase of votes and by so winning, help the party come to power. Politically they are the only things that count. Other aspects such as - individual and personal ability to deliver, competence, common sense, understanding, knowledge, moral and ethical integrity - crucial and non negotiable aspects of representative governance are overlooked and discarded. The winnability factor has in-turn introduced a new political creature – the constituency MLA – an elected representative who refuses to think beyond the periphery of his constituency. His only concern is nursing his constituency. Management of the state is something foreign to the Constituency MLA. Meghalaya can go to the dogs for all he cares. Political pundits of Meghalaya who introduced the winnability factor have a lot to answer for. The damage done to the political ethos of the state is irreparable.

If we take the above background into consideration, the dismal performance of our elected representatives will not be hard to understand. Now as the 2018 elections approach we need to establish what is the electoral agenda of our politicians. Election manifestoes can no longer be trusted. They are not worth the paper they are printed on. It’s becoming clearer by the day that political agendas have very little to do with the agenda of the common man. As we head for elections the need for a stable Government cannot be underscored. The common man sees political stability as a means to deliver good governance and well-being of society. For the political establishment, stability is an opportunity to enjoy power without interruption. The two as distant from each other as the Earth and the Moon. If past Assemblies and Governments are any indicators to go by, we see that attainment of power

seldom leads to good governance. The state and its people desperately need good quality education; effective healthcare for all; alternate and sustainable employment avenues for its youth; restoration of the environment and potable drinking water; control over rape and crime against women. Assembly debates seldom reflect these concerns of the public. Such issues don’t stand out on the political radar of politicians and they don’t form any part of the political agenda. Public good is never part of our political agenda. Its as simple as that!

Now as 2018 approaches one is left wondering as to what sort of electoral rubbish the electorate of Meghalaya is to be fed this time round? Watching the Jt address of Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders on TV, one is struck by the emphasis on issues of the masses, of the poor, of the middle class, of the down trodden. Theresa May, on her maiden address as the new British PM, specifically mentioned that the focus of her Govt will be the upliftment of the marginalised. Underlining everything is the promise that here is leadership capable of dealing with change by ushering in hope.

Meghalaya is in need of fresh leadership but will that leadership usher in hope? Or will they as usual continue to feed the electorate and the masses with a message of doom and gloom? Will fear of uranium mining; the 666 of adhar; the threat of influx; the dangers from proposed railheads or spill-overs from unresolved state boundaries continue to form the main menu for electioneering? These are time tested agenda items that force frightened people to vote for undeserving candidates. These are issues that have done little to raise Meghalaya out of the morass it finds itself. They are political agendas that have only brought in leaders with no vision; politicians who prefer to loot; opportunists who are blind to the real needs of the electorate. Time now to discard these outmoded ideas and their equally outmoded proponents. Time to bring in new leaders for the state!

Meghalaya has for the last 30 years focused on rich coal barons; Govt suppliers and contractors and successful rabble rousers as potential political leaders. The focus has been on an individual’s ability to win an election. Administrative Calibre was a non factor.

Only the winnability factor prevailed. The focus of past governments has been pro rich and politician centric. Governance was crudely defined as the ability to do what one pleases, the law be damn! Infrastructure building projects and pro poor schemes hijacked, in broad daylight, by a political system that patronised the rich and the powerful. To be honest, the general public has lost faith in the existing political leadership.

The bureaucracy, the only institution capable of stemming the rot, has apparently given up the ghost and discreetly joined the proverbial ‘three wise monkeys’. This has left the people of the state in a limbo. The public is on the lookout for ways and means; promises and assurances for capable and creditable leadership for the future. The demand is for a leadership that can lead. One that has a vision for the future! Question is do we have it? Is it available?

2018 is still some way off but anyone with an idea on how to improve governance and how to inspire hope, will definitely attract public attention. People are therefore tickled pink by PN Syiem’s call for a ‘People’s Platform’ to formulate a political agenda for the future. An intriguing concept especially as it speaks about the ‘possibility of forming a vision for the overall development of Meghalaya which can be translated into a political agenda in the long run!’ Of interest too is the call for new thoughts and capable persons to manage the proposed political agenda of the future. These are ideas that need to be fleshed out; dissected, analysed and mulled over to their fullest, but all the same, its out of the box thinking. Of interest is the fact that there are already people out there who recognise the need for change and of engaging the public as equal partners in the search for equitable and capable political leadership that can inspire and lead. There is total public consensus on that score. Neither is there any hesitation in emphasising that the call of 2018 is for change for the better. Whether the proponent of the proposal can carry through such political reforms is a million dollar question. For certain, however, is that the road to 2018 promises to be anything but dull.

Author is President of ICARE.

TO THE EDITOR

Internationalising the uranium debate

Editor,

The UCIL tender for mining of uranium without the consent of Constitutional institutions such as the District Council, the State Govt while also sidelining the consent of the land owners is illegal. The Govt of India might be desperate for regular uninterrupted domestic supply of the mineral and that is understandable, but to forcibly impose its diktat on the state and its people, especially in the face of fierce public opposition to uranium mining is not acceptable. UCIL needs a rethink on how it proposes to mine uranium deposits in Meghalaya as strong arm tactics in a democracy is anti-people. New Delhi needs to talk to the people of Meghalaya.

Whether UCIL can mine uranium or not is a domestic issue of India to be decided by its citizens and the TUR attempt to

drag third party Internationalise the issue (TUR pamphleteering to Bangladesh delegates who came to the NADI Festival to oppose mining) deserves condemnation from all sensible Indians. While we vehemently disagree with New Delhi’s attempts to forcibly mine a strategic mineral without the consent of the locals but to appeal for third country intervention on the matter in an attempt to browbeat India from mining a mineral within Indian territory is a cheap, dirty gimmick that is not only the by-product of a sick mind but is also anti-Indian and anti-national. Nothing can change this fact.

The attention of the reader is drawn to a similar attempt by anti Indian forces (read Pakistan) to debar India from becoming member of the NSG in a recent international meet is still fresh in our minds. Here too Pakistan and its ISI successfully used a third party, China, to block Indian attempts at NSG membership. A common trick used by the ISI, in

Kashmir for example, is to use its moles (local spies posing as Indian citizens but really working for Pakistan) to provoke misguided local elements in fomenting trouble for India. Is this also happening in Meghalaya? At this juncture a question that begs an answer is – who is TUR and who sponsors its anti-India activities? Will an RTI expose these hidden links? I learnt that one of its prominent members is a pastor. Is the church taking responsibility for all his political activities outside the church?

Yours etc.,
Yogesh Narain,
Via email

Politics of obstruction

Editor,

The underdeveloped and neglected West Khasi Hills and South West Khasi Hills are on the verge of losing the two-lane road from Nongstoin - Wakhaji - Mawthab thanks to the anti uranium mining groups particularly the KSU. Those of you who don’t know, will

be surprised that in the whole of West Khasi Hills and South West Khasi Hills there isn’t a single good road, except the recently built Shillong-Tura road that passes through West Khasi Hills. Such is the pathetic condition of the two districts. Worse, is the state of roads in the Wakhji-Mawthab area or what we call as Langrin area. One should visit the area to understand the zero development there. It is therefore, sacrilegious for groups to oppose construction of a two lane road in such a backward area. People in the area consider this as a blessing and have already parted with their land to pave way for this centrally sponsored road because they have had enough hardship to endure. A bus journey from Phlangdiloin to Shillong takes the whole day in the ever bumping and tiring road. Imagine the sick, the old and infirm! When roads like the Shillong- Guwahati, Shillong -Jowai road are afflicted with potholes there is a hue and cry. Even children write letters to the editor. But for sections of

How about ‘Kylli na u Mukul!’

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

Power and authority are diminishing as a luxury of the princely class. They are not as absolute as days past anymore. The literal days of ivory towers when the political leadership are a far cry from the masses are dying gradually. This is an era of open monitoring and evaluation of performance. It is the age of weighing responsibility and seeking accountability. To these ends, the ‘right to information’ is a powerful tool in the hands of the masses towards ensuring that governance does its assigned and trusted responsibilities in line with all the powers bestowed. Added to all this, it is also the age of communication and marketing of undertaken efforts and initiatives and resultant achievements. There is need to reach out and mingle more extensively with the people and accordingly makes policies and plans through the ‘bottom-up approach’. As such, an interactive platform can go a long way towards ensuring an open opportunity for the masses to appropriately interact with the political leadership. In relation, the following pointers can initiate thinking –

Firstly, contemporarily there are two leading examples of political leaders reaching out to the masses. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has his signature

Accordingly, the best person to handle the hot seat is the one who leads from the front. On the other hand and as intimidating as it might seem, this initiative will also provide an opportunity for highlighting and debating on the progress and achievements of the state. Needless to say and on the lighter side, questions can be as simple as ‘what do you take for breakfast’ to the more head-spinning one like ‘what is your stand on uranium mining?’

Thirdly, as demeaning and crass as ‘Kylli na u Mukul!’ might sound, it with all good intent that one is suggesting it. Importantly, it is not an indication of devaluing and tarnishing the value of the chair (read position/designation). In actuality, the phrase has a positive orientation. There is a lot of positive vibes to it and this makes it visible and catchy. To start with, it is always good to refer to people by their first name. That way there is an immediate connection. This helps in the entire interactive process. In the course of time, as and when the Chief Minister changes, so will the name in the phrase. Moreover, an A’chik version of the phrase (like ‘Mukul chising’bo!’) must also be placed so as to increase its marketability across all

The literal days of ivory towers when the political leadership are a far cry from the masses are dying gradually. This is an era of open monitoring and evaluation of performance. It is the age of weighing responsibility and seeking accountability.

platform called ‘Mann ki baat’. Recently, the Chief Minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal launched his module named ‘Talk to AK’. The objective of both and especially the latter is to provide an opportunity to the many that have questions to directly get answers from the horses’ mouth. In line with these developments, it would seem highly tenable for our state to have a similar platform for the people to ask their myriad questions on a multitude of issues. Conversely, it would be proper to ask the questions to the very echelon of political leadership, the Chief Minister. Hence, the thought on the name of the interactive platform – ‘Kylli na u Mukul!’ (‘Ask Mukul!’).

Secondly, why ‘Kylli’(ask) and not some other focus like say, ‘Kren’(talk). Overall, the reasons are inhibiting. In a nutshell, our state is in a situation where there are a plethora of questions. In this current situation, talking will not suffice. What is required is an interactive mechanism to directly and openly question (and maybe confront) on the pressing issues. More importantly, this asking must generate satisfying answers.

people in the state an un-motorable road is fine for all of their lives. They are condemned to live without good roads even after more than 40 years of statehood. Is it not shameful?

As mentioned the people of the area are eagerly awaiting this road. The only thing is they have no voice and are not empowered. Groups favouring construction of this kind of road like the West Khasi Hills Student Union (WKHSU) are now silenced. While groups like the JSU are becoming shriller and stronger the WKHSU have stopped speaking for the people and have now become defunct. The opposing pressure group like the KSU will come to conduct

sections. However, and in the midst of it all, this must not be taken as a panacea. It will not immediately solve the problems at hand. Nonetheless and most critically, it provides a base for deliberations on serious issues. As such, this has the potential to generate and assimilate vital information and feedback from the ground. This can go a long way in planning and policy making. Moreover, from the point of view of public relations, it highlights the seriousness of the government in meeting the aspirations of its people.

Lastly, specific issues like time slots and frequency of the interactive sessions (per week or monthly basis) can be devised accordingly. Apparently, the various local television channels can be used as a medium in addition to floating of the initiative through the various FM channels already available. Moreover, a mobile application for the purpose will go a long way towards actively attracting and involving the youth in the exercise.

(The author teaches at NEHU)

what they call the “public hearing” or public meeting which will be nothing but a monologue. Political parties that favour development too don’t dare to go against these powerful anti-development groups because they know the implications. More can be said but to me it is criminal to stop a road for such voiceless people.

Yours etc.,
Albert Thyriang,
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.

"Our knowledge is the amassed thought and experience of innumerable minds."

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LVIII No. 340 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JULY 21, 2016

SC verdict on Cricket

THE Supreme Court has become proactive with its rulings stretching from politics to cricket. The Board of Control of Cricket in India (BCCI) is the richest cricketing board in the world but has been the target of a spate of criticism from time to time. The Justice R M Lodha report made some welcome recommendations to change the face of cricket in the country. The BCCI had treated the Lodha report as a set of recommendations which were not binding. But the apex court has now asked it to implement the recommendations within 6 months. Cricket lovers in India will welcome the SC ruling. The BCCI will have to retire officials above 70. More former players will have greater saying in decision making. Besides, the Northeast will be better represented in national cricket. Of course that should be dictated by ability and not by regionalism. The BCCI will have some outsiders with penal powers enjoying high-sounding designations like ethic officers, the CAG nominee and ombudsman. The all-powerful ombudsman will be a retired judge. In these days, however, judicial impartiality may not be taken for granted. How will the ombudsman be selected?

While the SC does not aim to curtail the BCCI's autonomy but it holds that it is amenable to writ petitions as it discharges public functions. That cuts across the BCCI's constitutional protection. Its efforts to hold its own have failed. Cricket is a passion in India with proliferating corporate sponsorships. India is now more of a global cricketing hub than even England where the game was born. The Lodha recommendations will no doubt put a new spin in governing by the BCCI.

LOOKING BACK

February 22, 1989

Govt. firm on rooting out terrorism: President

President Mr Venkataraman today underscored the government's determination to root out terrorism in Punjab and reiterated that it was open to dialogue for a political solution to state's problem. The President, who was inaugurating the budget session of parliament in the high domed central hall of Parliament House said the government was also determined to separate religion from politics. "An act to prevent misuse of religious institutions was passed last year" he said adding, "other steps will follow."

All galleries were packed to capacity when the President ceremonially entered the central hall to deliver the traditional address to the joint sitting of members of the two houses. In his address, the President surveyed the national and international scene political and economic and noted that there was a greater appreciation abroad of the policies followed by India. He said the threat to contemporary India came from the forces of narrow minded chauvinism which manifested in too many forms religious, fundamentalists, communist casteist, regional and linguistism. It is most dangerous when these forces come together, the President said adding "fortunately the people of India have never been narrow in outlook. With the support of the people, the government is determined to fight these forces."

About Sino Indian relations, the president referred to Prime Minister Mr Rajiv Gandhi's recent visit to China and said the "cordial and constructive" discussions held with Chinese leaders had opened the way for a "stable, peaceful and mutually

beneficial" relationship between the two countries. Turning to Pakistan the President said India looked forward to working with the democratically elected new government there in reducing tension and expanding cooperation.

He recalled Mr Rajiv Gandhi's recent visit to Pakistan and his extensive discussions with Prime Minister Ms, Benazir Bhutto and three agreements signed between India and Pakistan should promote greater interaction between the peoples of the two countries. The President noted that significant progress had been made in implementing the Indo-Sri Lanka accord, meeting the legitimate aspirations of the Tamil within the framework of the island republic's unity and territorial integrity.

The President paid handsome tributes to Soviet President Mr Mikhail Gorbachev for his "bold and imaginative" initiatives which, he said, had contributed significantly to improving the international climate.

BSF asked to check Bangladeshi infiltration

The West Bengal Government has asked the Border Security Force to step up vigilance along the state's border with Bangladesh to check large scale infiltration from that country. The recent increase in infiltration from Bangladesh was discussed at a high level meeting of various security agencies operating in the state. The meeting was presided over by state Chief Secretary Mr Tarun Chandra Dutt.

Mr Dutt later told newsmen that the BSF and the Mobile Task Force had been asked to step up detection of unauthorized Bangladeshi nationals in the border areas.

South China Sea verdict casts shadow over G-20 Summit in September

By Nitya Chakraborty

China is hosting the G-20 Summit at Hangzhou on September 4 and 5, 2016 amidst widespread opposition by the G-20 members against its stand on the recent verdict by the UN Permanent Court of Arbitration nullifying China's "nine dash line" territorial claim over much of the South China Sea. This is a very embarrassing position for China as the Chinese President is expected to focus on the theme of the G-20 summit "Building An Innovative, Invigorated, Interconnected and Inclusive World Economy" but the wide differences between China and the majority of the G-20 members will be apparent at the Summit since the issue is of international importance and some Asian members, especially Philippines, will surely raise the issue unless a prior understanding is reached before the summit to avoid the issue.

Apart from this controversial South China issue, the Hangzhou summit in September is being held in the context of the Britain's decision to quit the European Union and the consequent impact on the global economy. The issue of terrorism has got wider dimensions and all the developed countries are threatened. The ISIS has become a far bigger menace in the last one year. The failed army coup in Turkey which hosted the last G-20 Summit has left many crucial issues of democracy and fight against terrorism unanswered. In this global perspective, the China hosted summit has to carry on discussions on building an inclusive world economy which will be interconnected.

China and India are among the least affected countries as a result of Brexit. For a long time, China has been a big contributor to global economic growth with its contribution rate once reaching 60 per cent. And even in the present reduced new normal economy, the figure still stands at 30 per cent, the highest in the world.

In setting the Hangzhou agenda, China has established "building

an innovative invigorated, interconnected and inclusive world economy" as the main theme. China has proposed four key priorities, namely "innovative growth modes", "more efficient global economic and financial governance", "robust international trade and investment" and inclusive and interconnected development". China aims to focus on the world economy and global environment which it sees as the G-20's job and the Chinese government does not want to mix up the global agenda with its private affairs. This makes the world's expectations for the G-20 summit hosted much clearer. China will show its leadership capability in helping out finding a solution to the Brexit hit global economy since the turmoil is expected to continue and further developments might take place in Europe by the time the summit is held in September.

At the 10th G-20 summit in Turkey last year, Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered an important speech entitled "Innovative Growth That Benefits All". He pointed out that China has the confidence and the ability to sustain a medium and high growth rate and continue to create opportunities for all countries to develop. He said that China's new growth momentum is accelerating and in the coming five years, will release a huge demand and become the world's new source of growth. This China Plan proposed at the 2015 summit was a signal that China has taken to become a big country in global economic governance within the G-20 framework. China as the host of Hangzhou summit this year, is determined to follow up the programme with the assurance to the G-20 leaders that China, will contribute its most to facilitate the process of ensuring stability to the global financial system by removing some of the distortions.

As regards India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will focus on the need for concrete action programme

by the G-20 members to deal with the latest volatility and turmoil in the global economy as a result of the Brexit. Mr Modi's emphasis will be that the turmoil is taking place as a result of the policies and conflicts among the rich countries and the emerging economies like India should not pay price for that. Indian PM will underline the need of following up the decisions taken at the 2015 summit along with chartering some urgent steps to ease the tensions in European Union.

India will push for poverty alleviation agenda and sustainable development besides trade and investment at the G-20 summit. As the Indian officials point out the emphasis is not on just trade and investment. Bot the issues have been there in G-20 and China is trying to take it to a higher level. India wants to connect this to the issues of poverty. India is equally determined to fight money laundering tax evasion and terror financing and wants that the tax havens must establish transparent norms and share information. India wants G-20 summit to take concrete action on this. India has pitched for more coordinated effort by G-20 to boost global growth. India's position is that the countries must avoid trade protectionist measures and refrain from competitive devaluations of currency as greater focus must be on public investment.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is of the view that the global economic growth remains weak with slowdown in several major economies, volatile financial markets and competitive devaluation of currencies and to stimulate growth, the need is there to stimulate public investments- not just reliance on monetary policy. PM feels that G-20's continued call to the central banks for careful communication on monetary policy actions, will be helpful in keeping financial and currency markets stable. That way, Indian position is that multilateral development banks should enlarge their capital base to support infrastructure needs of the developing countries. New institutions, such as the

New Development Bank are welcome additional sources of financing.

India is of the view that though there is a global consensus on the need to address climate change, multilateral institutions should not impose such difficult safeguards and conditions on loans that they become barriers to development in many countries and undermine sustainable development. India is expected to make the point that G-20 efforts must be aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals particularly the goal of elimination of all poverty by 2030. India is of the view that stable long term global economic growth requires not just capital flows but also efforts to facilitate labour mobility and skill portability.

India has a firm view on dealing with energy security. India has targeted additional 175GW of renewable energy by 2022, cut back on subsidies on fossil fuel and imposed carbon cess on coal India is working on clean coal technology. By 2030, India hopes to have 40 per cent of the country's energy through non-fossil fuel. At G-20, India is looking for concrete programmes to increase research and development in clean and renewable energy and reduce coal and make it affordable and accessible to all. Further, there should be increase in financial support and technology transfer to increase access and transition to clean energy and measures to develop proliferation-resistant nuclear energy technology. India also wants G-20 to promote an integrated global gas market and give greater voice to the emerging economies in the global governance structure for energy.

During the next six weeks, if the Chinese president through his diplomatic dexterity is able to keep the heat of South China Sea verdict out of the agenda, there is good scope for the summit to take some solid steps to deal with the ills of the global economy. China and India have to show their leadership capability to make it yield results. (IPA Service)

Operation Vijay Diwas - Remembering our war heroes

By K K Muktan

July 26, is celebrated as "Operation Vijay day" every year for India's victory in the historic Kargil War of 1999. This day bears a special significance to us, the Meghalayans, when Captain Keishing Clifford Nongrum of Shillong sacrificed his life for mother India. He gave the most heroic fight against the Pakistani intruders on July 1, 1999 and went down fighting at Batalik sector of Kargil. On this day we remember him with a sense of pride and joy and offer our respectful homage to him as well as to all those brave sons of India who fought heroically and laid down their precious lives. Captain Clifford Nongrum belonged to 12th Jammu and Kashmir Light Infantry and was instrumental in killing as many as six Pakistani soldiers and capturing Point No. 4012 of Batalik front. He was awarded MAHAVIR CHAKRA posthumously for his extreme bravery and e'lan.

Tiger hill, the main battle field of Kargil, being located only four kilometers away from the LOC was one of the most strategic posts held by the Pakistanis which had a dominating command over the Srinagar-Leh Highway, the life line of Indian defence. The Tiger hill being located on top of a high mountain ranging between 15000 to 18000 feet above the sea level, the topography of the enemy position gave them extra logistic advantage. It rose steeply ending in a conical shape with no spar or ridgelines on either side which rendered climbing most difficult for Indian troops. The enemy plan was, however, frustrated by powerful Indian air strikes which proved to be an effective encounter which the Pakistani army had never thought of. Side by side with air strikes the Indian land force started artillery shelling from below and our Indian troops advanced towards the enemy posts. Heavy fighting continued in all sectors. Indian jawans fought heroically inflicting heavy casualties on the intruders. On June 8, 1999, after a fierce gun battle in Kargil sector Indian troops achieved a major success by recapturing two main features in Batalik subsectors. The Indian jawans killed and captured a number of intruders and recovered from their possessions significant documents revealing them to be the regular Pakistani army in the guise of Mujahideens.

The nefarious game-plan of Pakistan vis-à-vis India's good intent did not remain unnoticed by the world community. Great Britain expressed deep concern over the Pakistani intrusion into Indian territory and urged Pakistan to withdraw immediately. The U.S asked Pakistan to vacate Kargil and stop indulging in terrorism. Even China, Pakistan's close ally, failed to appreciate Nawaz Sharif's action and asked him to resolve the dispute through peaceful means. The then Indian Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Bajpayee, however did not forget to discharge his neighbourly responsibility by conveying a message of peace to his counterpart in Islamabad which read - "Even now if good will is shown by the other side India will more than reciprocate". The reply was neither affirmative nor

negative as Mr Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister of Pakistan had virtually lost control over the situation.

In the mean time the war raged in its full fury in all sectors. By May, 31 1999 the valiant Indian jawans succeeded in pushing back the infiltrators from most of the posts except a few hill tops where intruders were strongly entrenched. The intruders were dislodged from the Tiger hill and Tololing sectors also. Major Ajay Singh Jasrotia and a jawan laid down their lives after fighting bravely and killing eight Pakistanis. A major success was achieved on June 20, when Indian jawans recaptured Peak No. 5140 under the able leadership of Captain Vikram Batra of 13th Jammu Kashmir Rifles. He however lost his life in another daring encounter for which he was awarded the country's highest gallantry award - PARAMVIR CHAKRA. By the end of June Indian troops had recaptured almost all the important positions and expelled the enemies.

Among the prominent forces of the Indian army which played crucial role in the operation Vijay were the Jammu and Kashmir Infantry, 2nd Rajput Rifles, Naga Regiment, 11th Gorkha Rifles, Garhwal Rifles, 7th Assam Regiment, 8th Grenadiers and the 8th Sikh Regiment. All these regiments fought bravely and earned their names at the cost of many precious lives. The Gorkha regiment contributed heavily by sacrificing as many as twenty-two lives of young Gorkha jawans. Incidentally, all the twenty-two Gorkha boys were the sons of Indian Gorkhas settled in Darjeeling, Dehra-Dun and North-Eastern states and most of them were army ex-servicemen. Other brave sons from the north-east India who made their names immortal by sacrificing their lives were - Captain Jintu Gogoi of 15 Garhwal Regiment (Assam), Captain Nukezhahua Kengurus (Nagaland), Lance Naik Kaleswar Kom, Rifleman C. Nicholai Moyon of Naga Regiment, Lance Naik Chinmoy Bhowmik, Grenadier Uddhab Das of Assam and Nandchand Singh of Manipur.

These brave soldiers left their homes with the promise to their wives, children and parents to come back after the end of the war, but alas, what really returned back were their mortal remains in coffins draped in the tricolor and wreathed with multi-colored summer flowers, reminiscent of the famous poem of Lord Alfred Tennyson - 'Home they brought her warrior dead'. The whole nation mourned their death and shared the grief with the near and dear ones of the great sons of the soil who covered themselves with extreme bravery and honor. The country salutes them and sings with tears - "Ae mere watan ke logon, zaraa aankh me bharlo paani. Jo shaheed huye hain unki, jaraa yaad karo qurbani". (The writer is a retired civil servant)

TO THE EDITOR

Spare the law students please!

Editor, Since The Shillong Times is the only medium by which I can communicate to NEHU I request the Controller of Examinations, NEHU that since the examinations for the 2nd semester Law which were due to be held on July 7, 12, and 21 this year have been postponed to July 26, 27 and 28 (because the original dates clashed with major religious and cultural events) to please give at least a one day gap between the papers. The reason for this request is that some students are staying very far from Shillong and it would be a huge burden for them and even for those who are staying in Shillong to prepare themselves for the next day's exams because by the time they reach home they are too tired to revise. I hope the Controller of Examinations would empathise with the Law students since ours is a very tough course.

Yours etc., MM Marwein, Nongstoin

Much ado about uranium

Editor, The TUR action of distributing pamphlets to the people of Bangladesh regarding uranium mining in South West Khasi Hills, at the recently concluded Nadi Festival at Sri Aurobindo Institute of Indian Culture was a laughing matter. The delegates who came to deliberate on how rivers can be turned into economic corridors besides tourism were caught by surprise by the sudden distribution of pamphlets. After all, uranium cannot be mined by local tribesmen in the state like the black diamond of Jaintia Hills as there are certain environmental norms which have to be abided by in letter and spirit. As someone had pointed out in these columns, TUR thought it a futile exercise to take on coal mining or other environmental issues like effluents being emptied into streams in the city. It seem that TUR thought it wise not to touch coal since its mining does not emanate radiation as uranium does. So the 'Einstein(s)' inside TUR

thought that if there is no radiation let the miners go on mining the land, rivers, lakes, hills, croplands, dales, public properties, their gardens, government establishments, markets and whatever they come across in Jaintia Hills and stop not till their neighbour from Dima Hasao shouted halt. This loot in Jaintia Hills could at best be compared to the Congress loot that we the people of India witnessed during the 'reign of terror' by the mother - son duo of Sonia and Rahul Gandhi. TUR's muteness on coal mining could perhaps be linked to some of its members being miners, too. After all, when the major rivers turning blue and killing all aquatic life or rivers running dry are nothing compared to the harmful radiation of uranium.

The most ridiculous mining instance that one can recollect from the grand old coal mining days was when miners in search of the black diamond holed out into a state government office in Jaintia Hills. This officer who was working in his cabin suddenly saw the earth coming out of a hole in his room as someone underneath was chiselling away for coal. Now the entire Jaintia Hills would have been holed out if the NGT

had not heeded the petition by All Dimasas Students' Union and Dima Hasao District Committee. So why blame the TUR? And by the way, this entity is also led by an award-wapasi film maker - the only one from Meghalaya.

Yours etc. PK Dwivedi Shillong - 1

Plight of commuters

Editor, Through these columns I wish to draw your attention to the plight of passengers residing in Bishnupur/Kench's Trace/Laban Last Stop areas. Every morning office goers who use public transport have a tough time finding a cab. We hurry towards the taxi stand in the morning only to find that there are no taxis to take us to our respective offices. Even empty moving taxis coming towards Bishnupur from Last Stop and Lawsohtun refuse to carry passengers going towards IGP side. Then there are some taxi drivers who make a separate stand and wait for passengers to hire the whole cab. This has really

affected all government employees and office goers, especially those of us working in the Meghalaya Secretariat since our attendance is monitored by Access Control System (Punching Machine). If we do not reach office on time, the machine records our attendance as late arrival. This morning my arrival to office got delayed since it took me 20 minutes just to get a taxi...that too after running and grabbing it. I therefore, request the concerned

authorities such as the Transport Department, MUDA etc., to look into the matter urgently for the welfare of the passengers residing in Bishnupur area.

Yours etc. M D Lalo, 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 foolish man wonders at the unusual, but the wise man at the usual."

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

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Health care in Meghalaya

THE much touted health insurance scheme is no substitute to proper health care and well equipped government hospitals, Community Health Centres (CHCs) and Primary Health Centres (PHCs), as they are the only health care institutions that the poor can afford. To mention the Health Sub-Centres which are closest to the rural habitats would be a travesty because they are very inadequately staffed and do not have the necessary medicines, even ordinary pain killers. Even emergency services cannot be provided by the Sub-Centres. That these issues fail to feature in the state assembly is because MLAs hardly do their homework or are too constituency centric. They would not even bother to find out the total number of health Sub-Centres in Meghalaya and their capacity to deliver. It is this lackadaisical attitude of public representatives that allows governments to get away with non-performance.

The report of the Estimates Committee of the Assembly that the Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machine kept for better diagnosis of ailments, which was procured in 2012 by the Shillong Civil Hospital has not been functioning and also not repaired due to the high cost is appalling. If a government hospital situated in the heart of the state capital is languishing without an important and modern diagnostic equipment then we can well imagine the kind of health care the rural population are getting. Insurance has pushed most BPL families to look for health care in the private sector. As a result government hospitals are languishing and lack even the basic health care equipments and human resources. Health insurance schemes are by design defective and usually profit the private health care sector. It is time to take a hard look at whether the health insurance scheme is truly an insurance against poor health or whether the public funded hospitals need to be injected with adequate funds and run on a more accountable model. Health care cannot be taken with a "business as usual" attitude.

LOOKING BACK

February 22, 1989

Central initiative needed

On the eve of the Bodo tribal's latest 120-hour bandh, Assam Chief Minister had a meeting in New Delhi with the Union Home Ministry, presumably to apprise him of the prevailing explosive situation in the Bodo areas of the State. We are not sure whether they reviewed the situation with an eye to the prospects of such a grim situation, landing a whole strategic area in the Brahmaputra plains on violent disorders leading to total chaos. All that Mr. Beta Singh advised the Chief Minister was to initiate a dialogue with the agitation leaders. He should have known, or be reminded, that had failed earlier to yield any fruitful result. Either there was a lack of sincerity on both sides and a faith in the competence of the State government to strike a deal for sorting out all the issues involved. Even for awarding a degree of local autonomy, not to speak of conceding a separate State or Union Territory, it is only the Centre which in the last analysis can deliver the goods.

The AGP government's credibility with the Bode leadership must have slumped further after all the latest phase of the band-just over. It will have to be for the Centre to come more in the picture and this before the situation worsens further yet. It is not enough for the Union Home Ministry to have responded promptly to the S.O.S. from Disport for providing extra security forces or allowing the army to be available to the State's command. Such show of force has a tendency to accentuate the situation rather than relieving it. The problem is basically political, and has to be tackled at that level as

we have repeatedly been saying. Not that the authorities either in Disport or New Delhi are not aware of this. What wants in them is ideas and also courage. The Bodes who inhabit a vast compact territory with a preponderant majority have already made out a case for autonomy through numerous memoranda backed by non-violent bands and other forms of popular support. If this has not worked, as indeed it has not, the other alternative is an invitation to violence which is already in evidence. The Centre must act now, take the initiative to draw the tribal leadership of all hues to the negotiating table along with the State government and its Opposition in the Assembly. Further delay may prove too costly for all concerned.

An Inevitable Rebuff

The newly-elected Nagaland Assembly met for a day last week, the House disposing of the election of the Speaker and his Deputy rather peacefully. The trouble started when the sizeable Opposition, as the Naga People's Council is, would not allow the Governor to "inaugurate" the session, the next item on the agenda. The members started chanting Governor, go back - the slogan-shouting being only an extortion of the Council's standing demand for the recall of the General who it said bungled all the way from an avoidable ministerial tangle to the President's Rule and a rigged election.

The Governor need not have been required to face this ugly situation. For one thing, it is not necessary that he should inaugurate every session of the legislature.

Our existential dilemmas

By Patricia Mukhim

Sometimes I wonder how the state of Meghalaya actually functions. We the people are actually left to our devices and cope with our day to day challenges pretty much by ourselves and despite the Government. And I am not just carping like a cantankerous spoilt citizen but with to make some serious points here.

One thing I am glad about is that the Assembly Committees are now functioning as per their mandates and those heading these committees are executing their duties in letter and spirit and not defending the wrongdoers. I was privy along with two others to the manner in which the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) headed by Paul Lyngdoh, MLA and co-chaired by Ronnie Lyngdoh grilled some of the departments. That was the day the Public Distribution System under the Food and Civil Supplies Department, the Education Department and the Forest Department were questioned for serious anomalies in the use of financial resources in their departments. Listening to the officers respond to the incisive questions posed by Messrs Paul and Ronnie Lyngdoh one got the sense that while the PAC members were fully prepared with their interrogation the departments were ill-prepared and floundered; they had to send their messengers running to get relevant documents sought for by the PAC.

In the Food and Civil Supplies Department the anomalies in processing tenders for procurement of sugar to be distributed by fair price shops was detected by CAG. By design or default the contract went to a tenderer whose bid was higher than two others. The two tenderers submitted their bids at Rs 37,850 and Rs 40,701 per MT but were compelled to withdraw after the process took almost a year to be finalised. This left only the tenderer who bid at a higher price of Rs 43,270 per MT. This in turn led to the Government having to incur an expenditure of Rs 24 crore more than what it would have, had the tender gone to the lowest bidder. And what is difficult to believe is that this was done through e-tendering. If e-tenders take so long to be decided upon then one wonders how long the paper tenders will

take. What cannot be established is who profited from the Rs 24 crore that went out of the state budget because punitive action is beyond the purview of the PAC.

Both Paul and Ronnie Lyngdoh very razor sharp in their questions and exposed the bungling that happens in the different government departments and how officers are not even in a position to give straight answers to straight questions. If schemes, projects and programmes are executed in a transparent manner why can't the answers be straight-forward? In the education department building funds were released to a particular institution without due diligence leading to litigation and sticky wickets. If things were to be dug any deeper than the annual CAG objections I am sure many more scams would be in the unearthing. However, it is also true that these scams are so well executed that even RTI queries fail to detect them. Also the RTI responses in most cases are so convoluted and technical that it would take some administrative expert to decipher them.

Interestingly, we now also learnt about the proceedings of the Estimates Committee headed by former chief minister DD Lapang with Ronnie Lyngdoh as member. The Committee found that the MRI machine costing Rs 5.17 crore in 2012 had gone kaput for several months but was not repaired as it would take 1.5 crore to do so. The machine was purchased with 90% funding from NEC and 10% from state government. Should the NEC not keep a tab on how its scarce resources are used for public benefit?

Most medical equipments are procured on turnkey project basis (turnkey is a complete project usually including many major units of a plant completed under one overall contract). Normally such contracts have a force majeure clause where the contractor takes the responsibility to repair the machine should it pack up within the guarantee period. The clause is also a guarantee against the failure of suppliers and subcontractors, to perform their obligations. A force majeure clause in a contract is important considering that any

number of reasons could cause an equipment to malfunction such as poor manufacturing or defective parts (especially since it is an assembled equipment using components manufactured by different companies). The clause would enable Government to invoke relevant sections for replacement of the equipment or free repair or some such way out, without landing itself with such a huge repair bill. However, since repair and maintenance are also ways of money making for some in Government, it is open to reason why they would not want a force majeure clause! This is where due diligence is necessary and expected but never carried out.

Having been around long enough one knows exactly how this equipment procurement system works and its subsequent use or disuse in Government hospitals. Procurement is not without strings attached. There is give and take especially when the equipment is worth crores. Then when the equipment is placed at the disposal of hospitals there are efforts to ensure that they malfunction so that patients are sent to private nursing homes for MRI or CT Scan. Diagnostics is big business today and health care a cut-throat commercial enterprise. The poor patient is sent for a series of tests most of them not required. Even before the actual treatment a patient and his/her relatives spend a packet in the diagnosis itself. This has become the subject of a book by a doctor from the US. So we can imagine the heartless health care system in place today. Now if a doctor from a government hospital refers a patient for MRI to a private health care institution, the former gets a cut out of the money paid by the patient. The oath of Hippocrates is trampled to death. This is a well-oiled machinery. Since patients never dare to question their doctors, they also dare not ask if the tests are related to their complaints. It's a really vicious system that privileges the rich and pulverises the poor for whom health care has become unaffordable.

Then we come to the next most important yet most neglected sector in our state today and that is roads. At no time in the past have the roads in and around Shillong been left unrepaired for years together. The less spoken about the peripheries such

as Nongstoin, et al the better! And to think that we have a contractor as our PWD Minister! Does he not travel around? Does he not see how terribly unkempt our roads have become. Take the case of the road leading to the well known UCC College. After several letters to the editor and representations by the local people of that area the road is now about to be repaired. But are roads better repaired at the height of the monsoons? Or is this just a slipshod attempt to cover up the sins of disrepair (what the Khasis call - tep eit miaw-the cat burying its smelly faeces under the earth).

Much was expected from the MUA-2 government headed by a chief minister who is fully aware of the problems that beset the state. But now that he is looking only for a survival lifeboat it is unlikely that he will reshuffle his cabinet and drop even those ministers who are a liability to his government, so long as they are loyal to him. Surely governance is more than just a game of remaining in the CM's chair indefinitely. But the CM should also be aware that if his government continues the way it is now he is creating several constituencies of disillusioned citizens ready to throw out his Government and all those associate with it.

Yes the CM knows exactly how his government is functioning and where the cancer lies. As a medical doctor he knows that a cancer should be quickly incised and the healing process should begin thereafter. Sadly as a politician struggling to survive he cannot even do that. So the cancer spreads and has created a dystopia because now people know that the CM does not have the moral fibre to drop those non-performing ministers and to induct fresh faces to his cabinet. This government will carry on with crutches until 2017 December after which time we will start thinking of replacing the MLAs and ministers who have failed the state. Hopefully by 2018 March there won't be much money around to splurge what with coal being banned and not much money pouring in from a once supine Centre. Let's see if we the voters have the courage of conviction to bring the change we all want to see in Meghalaya.

POLITICAL DELICACIES

By Nora Chopra

DIGVIJAY SINGH BARRED FROM CAMPAIGNING FOR CONGRESS IN UTTAR PRADESH

The Congress super secular general secretary Digvijay Singh may not campaign in Uttar Pradesh. This was one of the conditions put by Sanjay Singh before accepting the post of chairman of UP campaign committee. The UP campaign will be led by the Rajput leaders of the state, Arun Kumar Singh Munna and Santosh Singh. Both Munna, an ex UPCC chief and Santosh Singh are likely to be part of the campaign committee. The thinking in the party is that Digvijay Singh should be kept out of Uttar Pradesh or else he would spoil the party's strategy put forward by the party with great effort. There is apprehension in the party that an extremely pro Muslim Digvijay Singh will only communalise the UP situation. If he is allowed to campaign in the state, the UP leaders feel that the BJP and the RSS are sure to raise the issue of his stand on Zakir Naik which will provide life to the BJP which is groping for its strategy in Uttar Pradesh after the Congress unveiled its strategy. The Congress strategy to woo the upper caste Brahmins and Rajputs will be watched by the Muslims who will opt for only that party which will be able to defeat BJP in the coming assembly elections.

IMRAN MASOOD MAY GET SENIOR POSITION IN UTTAR PRADESH CONGRESS

While the Congress is busy these days wooing the 10 to 12 per cent Brahmins, it has just ignored the 18 to 20 per cent Muslim community for elections in Uttar Pradesh. The thinking in the party is that unless the Congress has the upper caste votes, the Muslims will not vote for the Congress. Except Imran Masood, there is no Muslim face in any of the Congress committees set up for Uttar Pradesh. Ghulam Nabi Azad, the general secretary in charge of the state is considered to be the only Muslim face. But realization has dawned upon the leadership that having Azad is just not enough. The party needs somebody who belongs to UP. Fazle Masood who was one of the top contenders for the UPCC chief's post is likely to be adjusted as the chairman of minority department of UP Congress.

DISGRUNTED CONGRESS LEADERS TO BE ACCOMMODATED IN UP CONGRESS

Fazle Masood is not the only one feeling left out. Jitin Prasad, RPN Singh and Mani Shankar Pandey all three were in the race for UPCC Chief's post. Jitin, a Brahmin was one of the most serious contenders. In fact he was the front runner till the last moment. But for the infighting amongst the Brahmin candidates Rajesh Mishra, the most low profile with a much bigger mass base was finally selected as the vice president of the UPCC. Pramod Tiwari and Tiwari's bete noire Rita Bahuguna were adjured the next day merely because of their nuisance value. Pramod Tiwari is a four time MLA and is now a Rajya Sabha MP elected with Mulayam Singh Yadav's support. Rita carries her father HN Bahuguna's name. But despite being the son of the political adviser of PV Narasimha Rao, Jitendra Prasad who even dared to challenge the Congress president Sonia Gandhi, Jitin lost out because he was considered too young and non serious candidate. He however is likely to be accommodated in the AICC team of Rahul Gandhi. As for Mani Shankar Pandey, another contender is likely to be made the UP Seva Dal chief. He is from

Varanasi. The last but not the least important contender was RPN Singh. But he must have known that he is a kurmi and the Congress was looking for a dynamic Brahmin leader like Sheila Dikshit and charismatic leader like Raj Babbar. He might be given the charge of the UP communications department.

DEMAND FOR SEPARATE VIDHARBA STATE GROWING IN CONGRESS

Having a separate Vidharba is likely to be a major issue in the Lok Sabha elections of 2019. The BJP has already declared the map of a separate Vidharba. The Vidharba leadership of the Congress too under pressure from its rival BJP, has passed a resolution demanding a separate Vidharba congress committee on the lines of Mumbai congress committee. On Wednesday last week when the Congress President Sonia Gandhi, accompanied by the erstwhile PM Manmohan Singh was in Nanded to unveil the statue of SB Chavan, the father of the MPCC chief Ashok Chavan, she had directed Ashok Chavan to have a meeting on the issue of Vidharba. Chavan held a meeting of all the Vidharba leaders in Nagpur where everyone except the AICC general secretary Mukul Wansnik and ex MPCC chief Manik Rao Thakre, all other leaders of Vidharba passed a one line resolution demanding the formation of a separate Vidharba Congress Committee. This week these Vidharba leaders will be coming to Delhi to meet the Congress president Sonia Gandhi under the leadership of Vilas Muttemvyar and put their demand to her.

BJP LEADERSHIP INDULGENT TO CORRUPTION OF ITS MINISTERS

The BJP which came to power on an anti corruption plank, is keeping a blind eye towards its own ministers and legislators. Sudhir Mungantiwar, the finance minister in the Fadnavis government in Maharashtra, has gifted a 17 acre farm house worth Rs. 50 crore plus in Chandrapur district to his wife. The farm house was built by violating all rules and regulation. He has not even mentioned it in the affidavit submitted to the election commission declaring his wealth. His explanation about not mentioning it in the affidavit to the EC is that it belongs to his father. But his opponents claim that his father's yearly tax return is only one lakh. Complaint has been lodged with the election commission who till date has not taken note of it.

MOHSINA KIDWAI RECOMMENDED SHEILA DIKSHIT TO SONIA GANDHI

Both Sheila Dikshit and Sanjay Singh should give credit to the Uttar Pradesh leader Mohsinha Kidwai for what they got. Sonia Gandhi had summoned Kidwai after Raj Babbar was made the UPCC chief for further advice. She is supposed to have pleaded the case of Sheila Dikshit and Sanjay Singh. Mohsinha is supposed to have told Sonia that unless you have a Brahmin, you cannot defeat the BJP. It was Mohsinha who suggested Dikshit's name. She is supposed to have told Sonia that Dikshit has ruled Delhi for fifteen years and she is the daughter in law of a veteran Congress leader Uma Shankar Dikshit. Besides she is a name in herself and she alone can bring the Brahmins in the Congress fold. (IPA)

TO THE EDITOR

NEHU Law exam

Editor,
The letter, 'Spare the law students please' by MM Marwein is disturbing. The decision to hold the 2nd Semester Law Exam sequentially on 26, 27 & 28 July has been done without considering the difficulties of the students concerned. The postponement earlier of the said exams is already stressful to the students and now holding the exams without a break will have a telling effect on the students. The concerned authorities must look into this matter.

Yours etc.,
VGK Kynta,
Sr Advocate.

Williamnagar Civil Hospital in shambles

Editor,
The people of Williamnagar face immense difficulties due to the non-availability of a Matron & Astd. Matron in the Williamnagar Civil Hospital. In this regard the Mother's Federation of

Williamnagar submitted a Memorandum to the Chief Minister on April 4, 2016 and the Chief Minister assured to fill up the vacuum within 3(three) months but till date no action has been taken to fill up the vacancies. Also the Federation would like to ask the Govt. why the Williamnagar Civil Hospital is so sorely neglected without providing even the basic amenities to the inmates? As per our understanding the 100-bedded hospital in Williamnagar was to be equipped with modern facilities and doctors from various specialty lists were to be posted there. Now we have doctors who don't know medical ethics and also don't know how to treat patients. Doctors and nurses should treat the ailing patients with care and caution, not with disdain. The hospital itself does not have 100 beds so Government seems to be fooling the citizens of Williamnagar.

The doctors posted for emergency duty never remain on duty at night so patients who are brought to the hospital for treatment during the night hours have to call the

doctors from their residence or quarters, thereby causing a lot of hardships to the people of Williamnagar. Hence the Mother's Federation along with the NGOs viz. Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo People(FKJGP), All A'chik Youth Federation(AAYF) of Williamnagar Town urges the Chief Minister, and the local MLA and present Social Welfare Minister Debora C. Marak to look into this matter take urgent steps to fill up the said vacancies immediately so that the people of Williamnagar do not continue to suffer. Williamnagar being the H.Q. of East Garo Hills deserves better health services than it is receiving now.

Your's etc.,
Rita K. Marak
President
Mothers Federation
East Garo Hills,
Williamnagar.

Senior citizens deserve respect

Editor,
Mr Winstone G Momin, President, Senior Citizen's Forum, Tura, had in a letter in the Salantini Janera lauded the steps taken by

the Deputy Commissioner, West Garo Hills to curb the burgeoning of IMFL (foreign liquor stores) in Tura. This is indeed commendable, but strangely enough, Mr Momin forgot to take up the cause of his fellow senior citizens. The Government of India (GoI) had, through the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment's circular enunciated a slew of concessions for senior citizens such as exemption from standing in queues at railway ticket counters, treasury counters etc., and directed that a separate counter be opened for them. Wherever there is a queue, senior citizens are made an exception to that rule. Even railway fares and air travel costs lesser for senior citizens. But in Garo Hills there is no awareness of such provisions of the GoI. Such directives are not adequately publicised and directives are flouted daily due to information gap.

I have now crossed 66 years but only yesterday (July 18) a tough looking guy in his mid 30s addressing me as "grandpops" told me to "queue up at the GHADC treasury counter. I retorted

that as a senior citizen I need not stand in a queue as guaranteed by the provisions of Senior Citizenship Rules announced by the GoI which clearly enunciates how senior citizens should be treated. I retired from service in January 2010 and I am also a senior citizen card holder issued by the D C, Tura in 2014. I request the DC Tura, Pravin Bakshi direct all local

heads of departments, heads of educational institutions etc. to adhere to the GoI directives. Senior citizens ought to be respected is what we learn from Prime Minister Narendra Modi who touched the feet of LK Advani.

Yours etc.,
Sonaram Sangma
Tura.

"The louder he talked of his honor, the faster we counted our spoons."

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LVIII No. 342 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JULY 23, 2016

Mayawati in the limelight

SOME BJP leaders undermine the party's cause and subsequent damage control measures do not undo the mischief. The BJP took strong measures against the party Vice President in UP, Dayashankar Singh, for calling Mayawati a prostitute among other things. Its upshot was that Mayawati was on the warpath in Parliament. She eloquently traced the long history of atrocities against Dalits and also pointed out, not without reason, that the Congress and the BJP pay only lip service to their belief in the Dalit cause. They hardly ever take steps against violence done to Dalits. She projected herself as a champion of the Dalits at a time when Dalit unrest is on the boil in Gujarat. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has got a shot in the arm despite recent defections. The BJP has suffered a setback to its effort to promote social engineering by professing to be with the Dalits. All this has assumed special importance because of the coming UP elections. Dalits constitute 20% of the population in UP and is a decisive factor in the state's electoral verdicts.

The BJP has gone down in most elections of late, most importantly in Bihar. It has to recast the mindset that lurks behind many of its political stances and provocative statements made by some of its leaders. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has sometimes taken action to cleanse his party of unhealthy elements. But more has to be done to shun alliances with divisive agencies and to be culturally more inclusive. The hold of the RSS should be minimised. Mayawati has seized the day to air Dalit concerns and put out the Dalit flag. She has asked for their physical safety and greater representation especially in the judiciary. She has a distinct edge over the BJP and the Congress in rallying Dalits to her banner.

LOOKING BACK

February 22, 1989

Success rate above 10% in middle and primary SLC exams

Two thousand eight hundred and forty three candidates passed in the Middle School Leaving Certificate Examination and six thousand and eight passed in the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination conducted by the Meghalaya Board of School Education. The first three candidates in order of merit are Master Diriangson Nongbat from Tyrsad ME School (first with 768 marks), Master Wallambok Kharsyntiew (second with 746) from Jaiaw Presbyterian ME, and Miss Merciful Dorphan, from St. Joseph's Girl's HS, (741, third). Of the 3882 pupils appearing for the examination, girls far outnumbered boys. There was 132 first divisioners, while 905 secured second divisions and 1760 were third divisioners.

In the PSCC examiantons, Ms Balahunlang Majaw of St Joseph Girls' High School Jaiaw, stood first with 571 marks, and Master Benison Suchiang stood second with 570 and Master Riswel Muruh stood third with 565 both are from Pohmusniang LP School in Jowai. Out of the 8230 candidates that appeared, there were 4607 girls, 381 first divisioners, 2152 in the Second division and 3424 in the third. Out of 109 non formal candidates 51 passed. There was 1 first division and 16 second divisioners. Among the non formal candidates appearing for MSLC only 40 out of 157 passed, four having scored a second division. All four were girls.

Certificate to tribal Homoeos

Tribal Homoeopaths were awarded certificates at a function held in the Civil Hospital Auditorium in Shillong recently. The

ceremony was specially allowed by the Central Council of Homoeopaths, and was presided over by Dr S P Bhattacharya, who is Chairman of the Board of Homoeopathic medicines.

Meghalaya Minister for Fisheries and Home Guards Dr D C Burman (Homoeopath) gave away certificates to the qualified members. Dr W Y H Dhar, Registrar of the Board was also present Dr H M Syien, Dr S Dey, and Dr JRH Diengdoh also spoke.

Jaintia Hills Primary

Teachers meet Lapang

A five member delegation of the Jaintia Hills Primary Teacher's Association (JHPTA) called on the Deputy Chief Minister Mr D D Lapang on Monday to present a memorandum demanding higher salaries and better service conditions. Mr Lapang, who is also Minister for Education, assured them that the Government is taking appropriate steps to revise their salary as per the recommendations of the second Meghalaya Pay Commission. He said that maintenance grants amounting to Rs. 72.28 lakhs have been released for Jaintia Hills Primary Schools and also certain areas totaling Rs. 23.86 lakhs.

Health Minister opens medicine seller's association

Meghalaya Health Minister Mrs Maysalin War has urged the people to fight the twin evils of drugs and alcohol. She was addressing the medicine sellers in Nongstoin last week. The occasion was the inauguration of "Ka Snyjuk Ki nongdie dawai, West Khasi Hills" medicine sellers' association.

India's Nuclear Security Group Conundrum

By T.P. Sreenivasan

the non-signatories to the NPT.

Certain US experts initiated an informal discussion in 2009 to revitalize the nuclear nonproliferation system by agreeing on a set of criteria governing responsible nuclear stewardship. The idea was to examine whether a country's concrete policy and behavior can serve as an indication of its commitment, rather than view the institutional nuclear system as a fixed set of treaties and agreements. Could a list of criteria be adopted as the main principle to be used in bringing responsible non-NPT countries into the international nonproliferation system? Furthermore, could a country meeting the criteria be considered equivalent to an NPT-designated nuclear weapon state and would that country be eligible for nuclear trade and qualify to join the NSG and other nonnuclear groups?

The hesitation about opening up NSG for nonsignatories of the NPT was seen as a problem because of the Group's close links with the Zangger Committee, which applies International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards on nuclear exports. Yet, the United States was clear that it wanted India to be part of the nonproliferation system rather than stay out and enjoy the benefits of the NSG waiver granted in 2008. Washington hinted that by being a member of these groups, India could advance its ambitions for a larger role in global governance.

The offer made by US President Barack Obama during his visit to New Delhi in November of 2010 was a part of the administration's strategy to bring India into the nonproliferation tent. The formulation in the joint statement was a unilateral offer, rather than an agreed measure by the two sides:

"In addition, the United States intends to support India's full membership in the four multilateral export control regimes [Nuclear

Suppliers Group, Missile Technology Control Regime, Australia Group, and Wassenaar Arrangement] in a phased manner, and to consult with regime members to encourage the evolution of regime membership criteria, consistent with maintaining the core principles of these regimes, as the Government of India takes steps towards the full adoption of the regimes' export control requirements to reflect its prospective membership, with both processes moving forward together. In the view of the United States, India should qualify for membership in the Australia Group and the Wassenaar Arrangement according to existing requirements once it imposes export controls over all items on these regimes' control lists." There was no mechanism envisaged to bring this about because India did not show any particular enthusiasm.

India's reaction to the proposal was positive, but not euphoric. It was left to the United States to take the lead in NSG and MTCR, but there was no apparent interest in joining the Wassenaar Arrangement and the Australia Group. Restraints on conventional weapons and the export of chemicals would not be in India's trading interests, and New Delhi did not even apply for them. India easily acquired MTCR membership since it was already following institutional guidelines. Washington did not have to lobby for India to receive MTCR status. Its timing was, however, a morale booster for India as it came in the wake of the disappointment over the NSG membership denial in Seoul in June.

Although India has explained that its formal application for NSG membership in May was part of an ongoing effort since the India-US nuclear deal struck in 2005, it appeared that India had suddenly discovered the value of being at the high table of the NSG. India's more important priorities, such as joining the UN Security Council and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) now

seemed to be downgraded because full-fledged NSG membership would make the Group's waiver more formal, India would be able to participate in decision-making within the NSG, and it was desirable to secure it during Obama's tenure. The overenthusiastic push by India caused some disquiet among the smaller members of the NSG, who suspected that there was a deal between India and the United States to dilute the NSG framework.

India's application was eventually sabotaged by China for political reasons rather than nonproliferation considerations. Having reluctantly agreed to the NSG waiver, China had no reason to block India's entry into the NSG except that India's negotiation into the bloc appeared to be a backroom deal between Washington and New Delhi. China broke solidarity with the other four permanent members of the UN Security Council because it saw the move as an effort to strengthen India-US ties and undermine Pakistan. India's determined effort to isolate China by wooing the smaller member states added fuel to the fire—resulting in a virtual veto by China of India's membership and the hyphenation of India and Pakistan in this matter. The waiver was unique to India itself; full membership would not materialize without Pakistan's inclusion.

India, having expressed interest in joining the NSG, should leave it to the dynamics of multilateral processes to find a solution instead of demanding immediate action. The eventual objective should be signing the NPT as a nuclear weapon state, and its joining the nonproliferation bodies should be calibrated and orchestrated to advance that objective and the position taken by the four nuclear weapon states on this issue should be welcomed.

(Courtesy Atlantic Council, Washington)

T.P. Sreenivasan is a former permanent representative of India to the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, Austria.

TO THE EDITOR

Uranium mining or development?

Editor,

Recently reading the news and multiple letters to the editor related to uranium mining in West Khasi Hills he only voices heard were that of NGOs, Government and a few individuals. It seems that democracy boils down to a few entities. This issue has become political and worse an anti-State/Government issue. What about the voiceless; the people in the immediate surrounding where uranium is prevalent and the people at the periphery who will directly and indirectly be affected by uranium mining. I feel that the following questions remain unanswered;

What is development? What kind of development do people want/need? What are the government views on development? What are the people views of development? If people in the area where uranium exist have a choice to choose between development (better facilities, basic amenities, schools, hospitals, roads and other forms of infrastructures and Uranium mining, what will they choose development or Uranium mining? Will only uranium mining bring

development? What about other forms of development? Stop using uranium mining as an equivalent of development. Why do we think, talk, debate, address and focus diligently and aggressively about West Khasi Hills only in relation to Uranium mining? There are many crucial issues of livelihood that needs to be addressed that have ravaged the West Khasi Hills since the timber ban in 1996.

The most crucial question is whether uranium mining will bring sustainable development? After all, the United Nations, scholars, experts of all hues have stressed that the need, relevance and multiplier effect of sustainable development. Are we as a State and the People going forward or backwards? In the long run who will benefit from uranium mining and at what cost? Look at what coal and limestone mining has done to the ecology of the areas. What will be the impact of uranium mining which is highly radioactive? And lastly, why not have road projects or other projects all over West Khasi Hills and take it as a Special Focus District? Why is the Nongstoin-Wahkaji-Mawthabab road a priority? Some might argue that nuclear power energy is eco-friendly and cost

effective, but uranium mining is not. After all, our State still has a plethora of alternative energy resources. The problem is that we want shortcuts; we are wary and lethargic about finding genuine and effective ways of development. Development has become cosmetic. It has also become a government departmental issue. There is no such thing as people-centred and integrated-development approach. We still need to learn more from Japan and other Scandinavian countries. Do we still have the capacity to learn? Is it still relevant to ask whether the future of the State lies in the hands of the people, the State or some vested interest(s)?

Yours etc,
UDTmar,
Shillong-6

Much ado about RG's forty winks

Editor,

This refers to your report "Rahul caught 'napping' in LS, Cong says he was resting" (ST- July 21, 2016). It is surprising that Congress Vice President Rahul Gandhi was caught 'dozing off' while the House was discussing the atrocities on Dalit youths in the past few days and subsequent Dalit protests. It reveals the Rahul's

disinterest in the parliament proceedings and has caused a major embarrassment to The Congress party when it was heatedly raising the anti-Dalit violence in Gujarat. It shows that he is not serious about issues related to Dalits and their welfare. The Union Home Minister has rightly commented, "It shows that his heart is not on providing justice to Dalit victims. He just wants to do politics. If he was really interested in ensuring justice, then he would not be sleeping." In other words, sleeping in Parliament is not a crime. Relaxing and dozing for a short period should never be considered as offensive and make to look harsh and rude. If one closes the eyes and sits in concentration it does not translate into sleeping. The timing for parliament should be changed to fit in a right atmosphere to stay awake and to have a healthy debate. To doze off is human. To ignore is divine.

Your etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad - 380 015

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.

Militants becoming role models of youth !

New Delhi acting like an Ostrich ?

By Raja Muzaffar Bhat

The ostrich buries its head in the sand whenever it faces threats especially during a sandstorm. The poor bird is so stupid that it thinks that if it can't see the problem it will be safe. A person who "acts like an ostrich" is in denial, pretending their problems aren't there, or trying to avoid dealing with the problem hoping it will just go away on its own. New Delhi too has been acting like an ostrich from last many decades in its dealings with Kashmir. When 120 people died during the 2010 Kashmir agitation an All Party delegation consisting of veteran Indian parliamentarians visited Srinagar in September 2010. Pertinently the then Home Minister P Chidambaram headed that delegation. Senior Hurriyat leader, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, who was spearheading the 2010 agitation had , rejected the invitation on the grounds the delegation wanted to treat Kashmir as India's internal problem. Moderate pro-freedom leaders Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and Yasin Malik had also turned down the invitations, but they sent a joint memorandum to the delegation reiterating their demands for restoration of normalcy and the initiation of dialogue. Their demands

address social, cultural and economic aspects of state. After submitting the report, the Manmohan Singh led UPA Government had more than two years to implement the same, but it was never done. After submission of this report the Govt of India felt that peace had returned to Kashmir and they felt it was useless to go ahead with the recommendations. The Congress leadership thought that discussing and implementing the Inter-locutors Report and recommendations would lead to their defeat in 2014 general elections. Congress still lost these elections miserably in spite of the fact that they even had hanged Afzal Guroo.

Kashmir continues to simmer in the aftermath of the death of a 22 year old Kashmiri militant commander Burhan Wani. For the ongoing crises , New Delhi cannot blame Pakistan because Burhan and his associates are neither Pakistani insurgents nor have been trained inside the terror camps in Pakistan. All this is being authenticated by all the security agencies working in J&K. The militant group headed by Burhan Wani never went to Pakistan for arms training;

The Committee was supposed to come out with its findings within six months. In addition, the report had recommended several other things which included appointment of Governor on the recommendation of J&K Government , non extension of article 370, separate Regional Councils for Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

included "demilitarization" along with the release of detainees and the "withdrawal of the draconian laws.

A section of the delegation, however, later called on Geelani and Mirwaiz at their residences, where both the leaders reiterated their position and conditions for restoration of normalcy and settlement of the long-pending dispute of Kashmir. Neither did New Delhi initiate the demilitarization process nor were the draconian laws revoked in spite of the fact that militancy had almost declined for more than a year or so post the 2010 agitation

Appointment of Interlocutors : Govt of India appointed Interlocutors on October 13, 2010. The Group which consisted of senior journalist Dileep Padgaonkar ,academician Radha Kumar and former Information Commissioner M M Ansari submitted a report to the Home Ministry around March 2012. The interlocutors had recommended several measures to be taken for addressing the Kashmir issue. These recommendations included setting up of Constitutional Committee (CC) to review all the Central Acts that have been extended to J&K since 1952. The Committee was supposed to come out with its findings within six months. In addition, the report had recommended several other things which included appointment of Governor on the recommendation of J&K Government , non extension of central laws, strengthening of article 370, separate Regional Councils for Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

There were other recommendations also to

instead they snatched large number of weapons from police and security officials. The group has been active on social media and because of this they attracted large number of youth to become their supporters. We must acknowledge the fact that Pakistan is not sending stones to Kashmir which are thrown on police personnel by young protestors for whom Burhan was like a Robinhood.

Most Kashmiri youth don't find their role models within Bollywood, Lollywood or Hollywood. Because of conflict, political uncertainty, the gun toting young militants like Burhan have become role models of Kashmir's younger generation and this is a very dangerous trend . If some political measures are not taken immediately by New Delhi, the situation will further worsen and very soon Kashmir will become another Waziristan or Syria . As Kashmiri's political discourse hasn't been addressed through democratic means by respecting the wishes of people, we have now reached to such a situation that Kashmiris are targeting fellow Kashmiris. On one side Kashmiri policemen are forced to target angry protestors and on other side these young protestors are attacking their own policemen. In nutshell Kashmiris are at the receiving end and New Delhi is watching this whole game as a mute spectator.

Dr Raja Muzaffar Bhat is a Social activist & Columnist based in Srinagar . Feedback : muzaffar.rti@gmail.com

In 1963, when Mubarak Begum Shaikh's soulful voice urged listeners "Mujhko apne gale laga lo..." few would have been able to resist the urge to hug their beloved.

The famous duet between Mubarak Begum and the late Mohammed Rafi has enthralled music aficionados even five decades after it hit the Indian musical charts.

Years later, in 2008 she gave a public performance at the Green Court Club at Mira Road in neighbouring Thane town and when she started the same number, the entire 2,000-plus audience stood up and gave her a thundering standing ovation for several minutes.

Late on last Monday, the mesmerizing voice of "Kabhi tanhaiyon me yun, hamari yaad aayegi" fell silent - forever - leaving behind a trail of sadness among generations of her fans.

since over a year with various health problems," Zarina Shaikh said.

Born in Sujangarh (Churu) in Rajasthan and proficient both in Hindi and Urdu, Mubarak Begum launched her career with All India Radio (AIR) with ghazals and light musical recitals.

After spending a few years in Gujarat, she migrated to Bombay (now Mumbai) in the late 1940s and got her first playback song break in 1949 for the film "Aaiye" for which the music was composed by the late music director Nashad (rpt Nashad).

That was the launch of a notable singing career spanning over 110 films over four decades till the early 1980s.

Besides Bollywood playback, she sang a few hundred other songs and ghazals in Gujarati, Urdu and Rajasthani -- and though always prominent could never



Ailing since the demise of her daughter Shafaqbanu last year, Mubarak Begum, a widow, also remained ill, in and out of hospitals, till her death.

Blessed with a rich and powerful voice, she died virtually unsung and in penury. Her funeral was performed in a quiet ceremony at the Oshiwara kabrastan on Tuesday.

She is survived by her son, Hussain, who drives a taxi, daughter-in-law Zarina and granddaughter Sana with whom she had been living for many years.

"She breathed her last around 10 pm last (Monday) night at her Jogeshwari home. She had been ailing and hospitalized frequently

attain the required heights.

Unlike many others of her era, Mubarak Begum lapsed into early retirement - by the late 1970s - only coming out of the shadows of poverty to render an occasional Bollywood song.

Nevertheless, she had the privilege of working with some of the topnotch music composers and directors of her era and though statistically few, her songs prominently stood out in the musical cacophony.

During the latter part of her life, she used to give regular stage performance and musical concerts -- but more for survival and paying her bills.

Several times, her frustra-

Legendary singer Mubarak Begum virtually died unsung, writes Quaid Najmi



Mesmerizing voice falls silent

tion and rage would seep out before the media and she accused certain singers of stifling her voice and sabotaging her career -- echoing what another legend, Shamsad Begum, had voiced on several occasions.

The politics in Bollywood music cost her dearly -- her career, her financial progress and even coveted awards or honours -- but she took it in her stride.

Mubarak Begum once recounted how her detractors and certain contemporaries blatantly told music composers not to give her singing assignments, or they would be banned by them (the singers).

As a result, though many wanted to use her melodious voice, few -- barring the big and established composers -- actually took the risk of antagonizing the other leading female singers, and gradually

Mubarak Begum was "unheard" of in the music world.

There were occasions in the past few years when her family had to appeal for financial help to take care of the medical expenses of her

Javed Akhtar, Shabana Azmi, Lata Mangeshkar and Bollywood superstar Salman Khan helped her out in times of dire need, while recently Education Minister Vinod Tawde sanctioned her hospitalization expenses.

apne gala laga lo, ai mere hamrahi," ("Hamrahi" -- 1963), "Neend udd jaye teri, chainse sone wale" ("Juaari" -- 1968), "Wo na aayegi palat ke," ("Devdas" - 1955) and "Wada humse kiya, dil kisiko diya"



daughter and then even herself.

Though largely forgotten by the current generation of Bollywood, a few, including

Among her most memorable numbers were "Kabhi tanhaiyon me, hamari yaad aayegi," ("Hamari Yaad Aayegi" -- 1961), "Mujhko

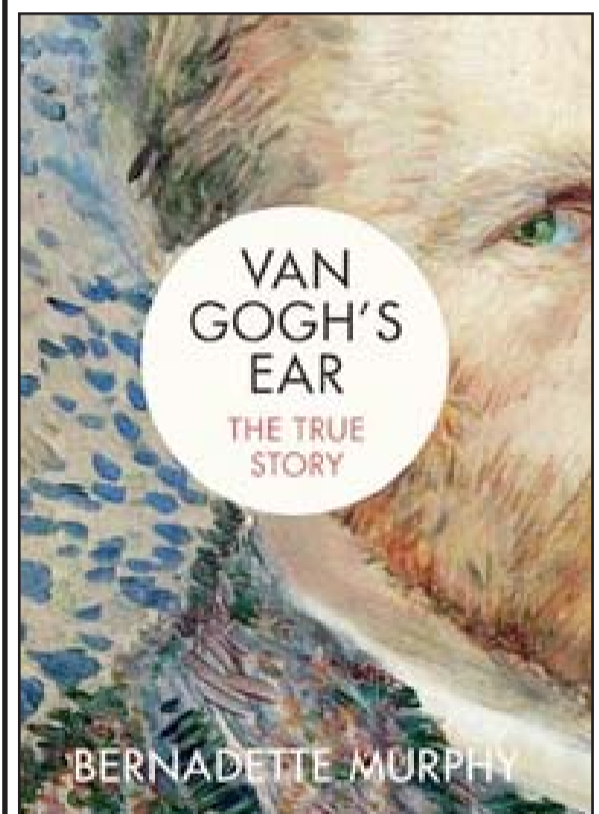
("Saraswatichandra" - 1968).

(The writer can be contacted at q.najmi@ians.in)

Mystery of Van Gogh's severed ear

Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh's infamous act of cutting off his ear is well documented but a new book has published definitive evidence and has for the first time identified the woman to whom he pre-

According to existing theories, the post-impressionist artist who painted the iconic "Starry Night," cut off his ear with a blade on a cold December night in 1888 and sent the severed organ to a prostitute



sented the "grisly" package.

"Van Gogh's Ear: The True Story", authored by UK-born writer Bernadette Murphy, "reveals previously unpublished evidence about the painter's notorious breakdown," publishers Penguin India said.

named Rachel, frequented by him and French colleague Paul Gauguin. However, Murphy debunks the 'Rachel Myth' in the book.

"Long presumed to be a prostitute, Murphy has discovered that Rachel was in fact (Contd on P-VII)

Trends are temporary while fashion is permanent, style experts remind. Take for instance, the footwear industry. From vintage classic to the contemporary -- shoes, sandals, boots and slippers, all have undergone massive changes in terms of their make, styling and appeal in the market. Like ethnicity, for example. From clothes, food, and even the shoes we slip our feet into, going back to the basics seems a frequent mantra these days.

"It prompts us to root for our originality and embrace indigenous items and services in our daily activity,"



says shoe designer Aprajita Toor. Thus mojaris, jutis,

Who says the humble shoes are poor cousins of fashionable ensembles? Shoes in many avatars are now stealing the limelight whether on the street on muggy monsoon days or high-end evening dos, finds Pramita Bose

Playing footsie

Kolhapuri sandals or chappals, plus nagrai shoes mostly occupy the footwear racks during wedding and festive seasons. Sherwanis and lehengas, saris and dhotis, salwar suits and kurta pajamas, all Indo-ethnic wear finds a perfect

lot of peep-toes and pumps can greatly go along with Indian attire. Toor recommends. Traditionally handcrafted by artisans, these Indian footwear are usually cut out of a single leather piece or a patch of textile and further embroidered and embellished with brass nails, cowry shells, mirrors, bells and ceramic beads.

Every fad leads to experimentation and the shoe fashion is no different as creative minds work out ways to beat the ordinary and walk that extra mile. "Noticeably, pom pom sandals and shoes are much in vogue now. And we were one of the early birds to catch this trend," shares a proud Toor, who had introduced her first line of pom pom-Kolhapuri collection back in 2012 and ever since, the trend has been in fashion.

Style becomes all the more fun when spun with an inventive twist. As footwear plays an important role in an ensemble, the task becomes all the more challenging to make it noticeable and yet comfortable to wear. "Themojaris and Kolhapuris have always been a preferred

choice by our customers while placing orders to team their traditional costumes and wedding outfits. So we took chances on this score and the results are showing! We simply attached the jutis and mojaris to heels and the Kolhapuris on high heels to induce that desired hat keelemment to a traditional tale," explains Toor.

For designer Neha Kumthekar (of accessible luxury brand 'Oceedee'), the domestic wardrobe is finely complimented when worn with "heel sandals, peep-toe wedges, a stylish double d'orsay (the side or 'vamp' of the shoe is cut very close to the sole in order to accommodate wider feet) pointed pump, customised



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in materials, namely metallic leathers, silk or satin textiles, besides glitter or in pastel colours". These options come handy as nowadays people are more forthcoming about adopting fusion fundas.

"Footloose and fancy-free youngsters can happily pair up an ethnic piece with casual slacks, palazzos, denim jeans and a T, long dresses or skirts. This lends a nice feel to one's look," she suggests.

The streets of Kolkata are always abuzz with an abundance of traditional

wares and their hawkers. Footwear is, of course, one such product to choose from a wide variety of shapes, sizes and shades on display over the crowded pavements or in plush stores. The roadsides of the long Esplanade stretch, shops in Chandni market or the famous Regal, Metro, Mochi outlets along the Grand Hotel arcade woo teeming customers from all spheres of life.

Other big cities and metros do not lag behind in catering to the rising demands of an upscale clientele base or managing the differing tastes of the middle class consumers. The streetside shoe bazaar at Bengaluru's Koramangala region or down the posh Commercial Street and Brigade Road markets, the conventional Lajpat Nagar market in Delhi, the busy hub of Crawford market and shops in the Colaba, Juhu, Khar, Chowpatty areas of Mumbai do brisk business with their eye-catching footwear stock.

Designer Pranay Baidya segregates the choices of footwear between men and women. "Every woman needs a classic pair of gold wedges that flatters most outfits. However, much of the good work depends upon bespoken-embroidered stilettoes to add glamour to the ethnic look," he says.

For men, he feels, "A few pairs of embroidered jutis or slip-ons in neutral tones of beige, burgundy and black would add sartorial elegance to even a simple kurta-dhoti look especially as home-grown (Contd on P-VII)

By Ranjan K Baruah

Career option in Statistics

Like many other subjects statistics happens to be one of the popular and common subject in senior secondary, graduate level and beyond. It is a subject that deals with the collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of masses of numerical data. An individual who study this subject is called as statisticians. They collect, verify and interpret data and use the same to solve problems in a wide variety of fields. There are opportunities in government sector as well as private sector for the statistician. Different areas of statistics are crime statistics, census statistics, ecological statistics, medical statistics, statistics on job-seekers, on education, film statistics, cricket statistics, oil statistics, market statistics, accident statistics, labour statistics, population statistics, election statistics, district-city-state statistics, tourism statistics etc. All these make it easy about the importance and opportunities of the statisticians.

In a country like India, there is always great demand for the aspirants as there are many things related to the field. There are various means of collecting information by means of surveys or questionnaire. They collect data from reliable sources, evaluate it using scientific methods, make use of statistical tools and present their findings in the form of graphs, charts, tables etc. On the basis of their findings they suggest potential applications of the results of their survey and help to find solutions to the problem at hand. With the development in technology there are different software which are used by them for the analysis.

Teaching and research field are open to candidates with a master's degree and doctorate. The apex body of the official statistical system in India is the Department of Statistics in the Ministry of Planning and Programme Implementation. Aspirants may appear in Indian Statistical Service (ISS). This is for those who are interested in having a career with the government. Every year the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) conducts an All India Level Competitive Examination to fill vacancies in the Indian Statistical Service (ISS). The academic eligibility is Post Graduate Degree from an Indian university in Statistics/Applied Statistics/Mathematical Statistics.

ISI: Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) is an academic institute of national importance as recognised by a 1959 act of the Indian parliament. Established in 1931, this public institute of India is one of the oldest and most prestigious institutions focused on statistics.

Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation: The Ministry has two wings, one relating to Statistics and the other Programme Implementation. The Statistics Wing is called the National Statistical Office (NSO) consists of the Central Statistical Office (CSO), the Computer Centre and the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).

With the progress of private sector it has more horizons then it was before. Students from north east

may take up this subject and build their career related to same. A successful statistician may be engaged in different sectors like government or private. Colleges and Universities employ statisticians for teaching, statistical research, etc. Aspirants should have a mathematical aptitude and be able to reason logically.

Updates:

Rhodes Scholarships:

The Rhodes Scholarships are postgraduate awards supporting outstanding all-round students at the University of Oxford, and providing transformative opportunities for exceptional individuals. A class of 95 Scholars is selected each year from different countries. Each year, there are five Scholarships available for India to enable outstanding students - chosen on the basis of exceptional intellect, character, leadership, and commitment to service - to study at the University of Oxford. Last date for applying is 31st July.

Mathematics Scholarship:

National Board for Higher Mathematics (NBHM) Post Graduate scholarships is offered to students for pursuing studies for M.A. /M.Sc degree in Mathematics. Aspirants may apply on or before 29th July and selection test would be held on 17th September.

(The writer is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjjan@gmail.com or 98640 55558 for any career related queries)

By Ajeyo Basu

Congratulating Indian athletes for enabling the country send its largest contingent to the upcoming Rio Olympics, former star athlete Anju Bobby George has asserted that she expects several of them to reach the finals of their respective events.

A total of 36 Indian athletes -- in the 121-member contingent -- have qualified for the Rio Games, including the 4x400 metres men's relay team that recently set a new national record on their way to earning qualification for the Olympics.

"Winning a medal is difficult in athletics. But I expect a lot of them to reach the finals of the events. I expect several of them to do so. I think by the 2024 Olympics, we can reach near to a medal," Anju said in an interview.

Anju, who clinched a bronze at the 2003 World Championships, asserted that she has high hopes of the 4x400m relay teams in both men's and women's categories as well as Dutee Chand, who became the first from the country to qualify for the women's 100 metre event in 36 years.

"The timings of the men's 4x400 metre relay team is only behind the US this season. I expect them to reach the final. If they give the same performance there, they will definitely be in the final. They are a great team and I am sure they will make the country very proud," Anju said.

Anju also had high praise for sprinter Dutee Chand. Banned by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) in 2014 for suspected hyperandrogenism (hirsutism), the Orissa girl has staged a spirited comeback and has become the first Indian woman athlete to qualify for the Olympics 100m sprint since the legendary P.T. Usha at the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

"Dutee is another athlete I have high hopes on. Qualifying for the 100 metres sprint is no mean

'Expect several athletes to reach Rio finals'



Anju Bobby George

feat. Both the men's and women's 100 metres event is extremely tough. But Dutee has now managed to put her troubles behind her and will surely do well in Rio," she added.

Lamenting the lack of world-class coaches in India, the 39-year-old stated that Indian athletes will struggle to fetch medals at the Olympics unless their training is at par with world standards.

"Winning a medal in any world level event is difficult in athletics, whether it is the Olympics or the World Championships. The Olympics require a totally different level of preparation altogether. Unfortunately in India, we still depend on outdated training concepts," Anju said.

She also pointed out that the attitude of Indian sportspersons has undergone a complete change since her playing days.

"Where once upon a time Indian athletes were content just with qualifying for the Olympics, they now strive to win medals. This is because the government supports them a lot nowadays. We can expect to see

a confident bunch and made them believe that they can take on the best in the world.

"In 2003, it was my first experience and also India's first experience of reaching that stage at the world level. Nobody ever expected a medal from me at the world stage. But we managed to do that. I can say that it changed our attitudes and made Indian athletes in general more comfortable," she reminisced.

"After that bronze at the 2003 World Championships, I got a gold in 2005. So slowly things changed. Now we are aiming for a medal at the Olympics. In athletics, there is no difference between Olympics and world championships. The same athletes are competing," she added.

"We are slowly emerging as a sports power. We are slowly developing infrastructure. We will see the change in the near future."

(The writer can be contacted at ajeyo.b@ians.in)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, July 24, 2016

Moon trine Mars on your solar return chart is good for money and realizing aims and objectives. A cheerful and buoyant outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation from others. You will be happy in what you do especially when done in tandem with others. You are likely to form new relationships or connections that further your financial growth. You create with a passion and express with brilliance and if looking for a job or a switchover it will now come your way. You socialize with a variety of people and this could open up new vistas and hobbies. Health of someone close could worry for a bit.

Aries : (March 21 - April 20)



You are committed, bold and adventurous right now. You are more effective in general, in attempts to express your creativity. You have a stronger ability to hold the attention of an audience. Love, love affairs, and other social activities help to enhance a healthy self-image. You may spend extra money on things that will make your life more comfortable and pleasant, and work that needs to be done in and around the home becomes a priority. You may find yourself in a position in which there is a blending of the financial with social or public affairs.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21)



By the present planetary combination you would focus on having fun, enjoying sports and expressing yourself efficiently. A love affair may become a little more serious now. Spending time with someone special is a focus. You are looking to expand your activities, and you may find that you have a lot of energy for higher studies, travel, or brand new subjects. It's a good time to work out money problems or other issues of sharing with a partner. You receive pleasure from anything that expands your horizons, both physically and mentally. You derive pleasure from your health regimen.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21)



This is an excellent time for travel, education, communications, and higher learning. You might consider furthering your education and hobbies; it is a fabulous time to do so or simply broadening your knowledge in a more informal manner. Career and vocational issues may benefit from the increased clarity you possess. Much of your energy will be applied to vocational achievement, professional success, and leadership during this period. Some form of pleasant results in your education or profession brings rewards and recognition.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22)



This phase brings fabulous results for domestic and work related matters. Sports person also benefit from this planetary alignment as they are infused with positive energy and gain recognition for their talents and hard work. You are more stimulated by all that is unconventional and your ideas are original and progressive now. This is a time to follow your dreams and ideas, and to plant a seed in the form of a wish for the future. People at work might be surprised by your ability to assert yourself and your needs. Speculation, as long as it's reasonable, may prove worthwhile. Your creativity is stronger than usual, and children can figure prominently in your life.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23)



This period enhances funds, brings monetary gains and you may earn from previous investments. You have more faith in general regarding your career and the direction in which you are headed. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for this placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits. You are far less inhibited when it comes to expressing yourself creatively, and you are a lot more fun to be around. Children, romantic trips, hobbies and other forms of communication and making connections would strongly appeal.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22)



You would enjoy making things that are beautiful and you succeed in areas that require an aesthetic sense as well as artistic ability. Matters concerning your career come to the fore. You are likely to enjoy a strong feeling of happiness

and solidarity in friendship and love. This is a good time for research and meditation; but do avoid being dragged down by issues that have outgrown their worth and purpose. Examining the past in order to improve the future is certainly worthwhile, as long as you don't get caught up in the past. You are physically fit and on top of things.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23)



This is a period of romance, creative activities, entertainment and children. There would be cooperation and harmony in relationships and this is the time in which you can work on resolving differences with loved ones. You are in a position to inspire others through your work. Income from foreign sources could also figure this time. You work on your effectiveness and examine exactly what has been holding you back from achieving the results you want. The challenge here is to capture the newly found and defined self-confidence you have gained. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities or a structured exercise routine.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22)



This phase brings responsibilities, seriousness and sensitivity in relations. The purpose of this combination is for you to make the connection between your own feelings of self-worth and what you produce in the real world or get back from the real world. Your career, reputation, and public life are influenced. Increased public recognition and professional success characterizes this time. Health issues will settle down as you get back into your normal rhythm.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21)



The planetary configuration brings financial gains and profits from business. This can be a time of achievement, career advancement, and success in business. Work-related travel is possible now. It is more about how you express yourself than the specifics of what you are saying that helps away others to your position. More contact with authority figures is likely at this time. Do what you feel is right, keeping in mind that you are in the forefront of things. Finding a balance between your public life and your private life is in focus.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20)



You pour more energy into self-promotion or business activities. It's a good time to work out money problems or other issues of sharing with a partner. You tend to be expansive and generous when it comes to love and relations. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in several aspects of your career. This is an especially spiritual time for you. You enjoy doing things with others at work and home, as synergy and cooperation are available to you now.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18)



Taking care of business is primary during this phase. You need the energies, companionship and support of other people, and they may also seek out your support and companionship. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. You are called upon to deal with the details and practicalities of everyday life, to become more organized, and to take charge of your routines. It's time to formulate some clear goals and plans. Circumstances are such that you need to develop some healthy habits, routines, and schedules.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20)



You may begin to take on more responsibilities on the job or at a place where you are a volunteer. Your job could become rather tedious and boring, or working conditions may be poor, demanding, or frustrating. Believing in a grand plan is fine, but practical concerns need to be dealt with as well. Recognizing your personal limitations in terms of just how much you can give to others and just how much compassion and understanding you can show is essential now. It's time to structure your life. Issues of guilt, worry, and anxiety could crowd your mind - relaxation techniques and drawing on your inner strength would be beneficial.

Interview

the difference," the former Kerala athlete added.

Anju created history by becoming the first Indian to take a medal at the world level when she clinched a bronze at the 2003 World Championships. The ace long jumper, who improved on that performance by winning a gold at the 2005 World Championships, asserted that her achievements made Indian athletes

Playing footsie

(Contd from P-VI) fabrics form a vital part of the special occasion-oriented outfits."

When it comes to pricing, there's no doubt about the prevalence of a high-end luxury segment in footwear department. Nevertheless, the buyers can take heart in those low cost plastic shoes at their disposal. It's the safest bet in muggy monsoons.

In this season, footwear in golds, yellow, purple and silver are in demand, Toor says and votes for materials like 'vulcanized rubber' to sport in the rains as that will "help protect your feet from getting damaged". True, maintenance is a big headache in moist conditions and her tips in this regard would be to clean the shoes on a regular basis. Shoe-cleaners come in as gels, sprays, liquids or creams. One can even use a soft brush to remove the sticky dirt, mud or soil from the surface of the shoe.

Designing footwear exclusively for women, Kumthekar proposes PVC or Polyvinyl chloride (third-most widely produced synthetic plastic polymer) as an in-thing for this year's monsoon. "There have been some really interesting design innovations, courtesy this material," she informs. Usually applied in the soles and upper layers of modern shoes, PVC footwear can certainly add that breezy spring to your step. From candy tones to translucent surfaces, PVC heels and pumps are already a superhit.

The footwear palette revs up the gloomy weather with pink, sea green, orchid blue, coffee browns, monochromes and metallics. Also add to this an exciting punch of prints for all finicky buyers to select from.

"Imagination is unlimited. The stretch it, the deeper you



more you can delve developing your ideas with uniqueness. So if fabrics of clothes can be embroidered, why can't shoes? Our bridal collection therefore offers our patrons an option to get embroidery done on their footwear and accordingly customize the same to complement their outfits," she says Kumthekar. While ethnic fashion is the current craze, bling and glitter grab attention enough to bring that shine to your shoes and take care of its essential glam-quotient. "Metallic colours and bling with shimmering sequins and crystals on your footwear can definitely amp up the overall get-up to chic and dressy," echoes Toor. (TWF)

Mystery of Van Gogh's severed ear

(Contd from P-VI) Gabrielle, a maid in the red-light district of Arles in France and working at the brothel Vincent went to that night," publishers said.

"After seven years of meticulous research, Murphy has reconstructed Van Gogh's time in Arles, and casts new light not only on why he committed such a brutal act but also on how we view him, his art and his madness," they said.

As part of the research, the author examined the lives of all the local prostitutes in Arles to uncover the story of this "mysterious girl, who was not a prostitute as has long been assumed, suggesting why the painter chose to give her his gruesome gift."

The book also brings to the readers a previously unpublished diagram showing exactly how much of his ear the artist really cut off.

The sketch by Dr Felix Rey, who treated Van Gogh the day after his breakdown is currently housed in the Bancroft Library of University of California in Berkeley.

"This investigation has been an incredible adventure and discovering the document was an extraordinary moment. From my

little house in Provence I couldn't believe I had found something new and important about Vincent van Gogh, but it was a vital detail in my complete re-examination of this most famous of artists, the key people he met in Arles and his tragic end," Murphy said.

After his breakdown, Van Gogh painted two self-portraits with a bandaged ear. One is in a private collection and the other - "Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear by Vincent van Gogh, 1889" - is held at the Courtauld Gallery in London. Both artworks were painted shortly after Van Gogh returned home from hospital.

"Through painstaking detective work, using her local knowledge and delving deep into Provençal archives, the author constructed a database of the inhabitants of Arles in the late 1880s, eventually building a record of dates and occupations for 15,000 people, many of whom Van Gogh would have known during his time there," publishers said.

A BBC documentary with the same name as the book is scheduled for broadcast in August this year, in which English journalist Jeremy Paxman is set to join Murphy as she solves one of the most perplexing art mysteries of all times. (PTI)

"Our chief want in life is somebody who shall make us do what we can."

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, MONDAY, JULY 25, 2016

Enough is enough!

SO far in the past, trading of allegations between India and Pakistan skirted around issues of relatively minor importance and did not hit the fundamentals of the crisis. There was a lull in the progress towards bilateral talks following the terrorist attack in Pathankot. But the wave of agitation in Kashmir in the wake of the death of the wanted Hizbul Mujahideen terrorist leader Burhan Wani has led to some intemperate observations by Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. He praised Burhan Wani as a martyr. What is more, statements have been made by Pakistani leaders, especially Nawaz Sharif, claiming that Kashmir will one day be part of Pakistan. Enough is enough! It is no longer skirmishes across the LoC or the Siachen glacier. It is just not possible for Delhi to put up with such an outrageous statement and in the circumstances prospects of bilateral talks have crashed to the ground. India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj has emphatically stated that Pakistan's dream will never be realised. Her stand is a far cry from her guftagu with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Islamabad where she put on a green sari to show her amicable attitude. She has said that behind Pakistan's unabashed encouragement of terrorism lies its delusional though dangerous dream. Kashmir will not be part of Pakistan till 'the end of eternity'.

The external affairs ministry has listed its accusations against Islamabad. Pakistan exports weapons to terrorists in J&K and infiltrates dirty money into India. This has destabilised the region. Pakistan's state machinery is in cahoots with the US designated terrorist Hafiz Saeed and others. About Islamabad's charge of violation of human rights by India in J&K, Swaraj pointed out that Pakistan was a fine one to talk as it has used artillery and fighter planes against militants on its own soil. She should be congratulated for her brave words. But more importance attaches to effective joint action by the PDP and the BJP under Mehbooba Mufti in Srinagar.

LOOKING BACK

February 22, 1989

Symbolic present from Mauritius Hindus

The Hindu Organisation in Mauritius will send a symbolic stone to India to be used in the foundation laying ceremony of the Ramayana Centre. The stone will be sent to Ayodhya, the holy birth place of Lord Rama, by the Mauritius Sanathan Dharma Temple Federation (MSDTF) on the invitation of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

Before being consigned to India, the stone will be sanctified next week at Ganga Talab, the sacred lake where Hindus in Mauritius converge for pilgrimage. MSDTF Secretary Suresh Ramburn told the press here. In it is historic event, to which the Hindus of Mauritius feel committed because when they came here as the first Indian immigrants, the Ramayana was among their few belongings, Ramburn said.

Mediamen form body to defend Rushdie

A group of writers, publishers, booksellers and journalists has set up an International committee for the defence of Salman Rushdie. The group has called for immediate action by world leaders and a "forceful denunciation of Ayatollah Khomeini's announcement that Rushdie be executed. It has called on all people, including Muslims to support the right of everyone to express his ideas without threat of censorship and violence. Meanwhile Iran is recalling its Ambassadors

from all European community countries in the continuing row over Salman Rushdie's book "Satanic Verses". The decision is in retaliation for a similar move announced yesterday by the EC after a meeting in Brussels.

No late night movie till mid-April

A British film, "The Elephant Man", will be the last late night film on Doordarshan this Friday before the satellite of Insat-IB goes into eclipse till mid April. The Satellite eclipse occurs twice a year, in late February and then in September lasting about eighty days. Commencing from February 27, the eclipse will continue till April 13, and the next late night film will be on April 4. Directorate by David Lynch, "the elephant man" stars Anthony Hopkins and John Hurt. Doordarshan will telecast a Telefilm on Saturday, February 25. The film "arti" directed by Shankar Bhan will telecast at 2150 hours.

Revised Pay-Scales For Agriculture Scientists

The Government today announced revised pay scales for agriculture scientists conceding their long drawn demand. The revised pay scales for the scientists of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), effective from January 1, 1986, are on the lines of the pay package of the University Grants Commission, Minister of Agricultural Research Mr. Sri Krishna Shastri told reporters here.

The world is coming; are we ready?

By H H Mohrmen

state which attracts visitors from the across the country and outside.

The Government has done almost nothing except for providing routine traffic arrangements throughout the four days-three nights festival; there are no signages to indicate where the important part of the festival is going to be held and there is no signage to even provide directions to 'ka Syiem Aitnar' where the penultimate event happens. Add to that the fact that Jowai town has very few places to stay, so even if people would like to stay overnight their choice is limited.

The Shillong Times had very recently carried a story which says that the numbers of foreign tourists visiting the state has increased manifold. This should be music to the ears of our leaders and policy makers, but unfortunately the Government is doing precious little other than to blow its own trumpet that Meghalaya has the potential to attract tourists. But the moot question is - what has been done by the Government to promote tourism in the state? The few new destinations that now attracts tourists like Sohra, Mawphlang, Mattilang Park, Mawlynnong, Shnongpdeng and others were started by local people with their own initiatives. The Government came in later and now places like Mawlynnong even find mention in the Prime Minister's regular broadcast to the nation - 'Man ki baat'.

Our leaders especially those who are at the policy making level would know that the threat to the state is the growing young educated population in both the urban and rural areas to whom the government has failed to provide gainful employment. This population is growing exponentially and if the government remains complacent about addressing this problem, it will not only hurt the economy of the state, but it could also be a threat to peace and harmony. While there is a threat, there is also an opportunity that is opening up in the state which has been recognized not only by organizations like Lonely Planet but have also been proved by records that there are increasing footfalls of tourists coming here from

other parts of the country and abroad.

It is the business of the state to do business, but we all know that the role of the government is to help improve the economy of the state and facilitate creation of livelihood opportunities for its people. Here the government can convert the threat to opportunity and by doing so help create employment opportunities in the tourism sector for this young educated population of the state.

The visitors are coming but do we have enough places for the tourists to stay? We have many hotels and guest houses in Shillong and there are an increasing numbers of Home-Stays and Bed and Breakfast facilities in the city, but there is great need of accommodations in the semi urban and rural areas of the state. Again Mawlynnong and Shnongpdeng are good models where villagers are setting up simple home-stay units to accommodate visitors. The occupancy rate is also quite high and in Shnongpdeng they even provide tents for those who wish to stay outdoors.

This same model can be replicated elsewhere where there are tourism potentials and even in places like Jowai too. The Deputy Commissioner WJH too has made this suggestion in the administration's Whatsapp and Facebook page encouraging youths who can avail rooms to start home-stay units or B&B in town. To cater to this growing need for accommodation and at the same time create employment for educated unemployed youth, the government can make use of the infrastructure that is already available in place.

In the entire state different government departments have their own inspection bungalows, guest houses, circuit houses or places for officials to stay in. These facilities are rarely used because officials hardly stay overnight during their official tours. One would not be surprised if the numbers of these government guest houses or inspection bungalows will be more than hundred in the entire state. The idea is that government can let these facilities out to young people who are interested in doing the business on PPP mode and surely thousands of young

people will gain employment if this mutually beneficial deal works out.

Accommodation is one aspect; there is need for transport too. Here again the government in collaboration with the banks can find out ways and means to finance young people who are interested in transporting tourists to and from the destinations. This will also create huge employment avenues for our young educated population.

Lonely Planet in its introduction of the state mentioned that if there were candidates for India's Lost World, it would be Meghalaya. Lonely Planet's online post clearly mentioned that the state is a destination for hiking and trekking, rock climbing, caving and rafting so clearly it is the state's potential eco and adventure tourism which is what attracts visitors. It concluded by saying that after decades of not finding mention in the tourist map, people are starting to notice the potential of the region with rolling hills, rivers with crystal clear water and cascading waterfalls. Tribal cultures and unique living root-bridges are some other unique attractions of the region. In short, the state has what it take to attract visitors, but what prevent visitors from visiting Meghalaya?

When people ask me what will be the best time to visit Meghalaya, I would suggest autumn or spring when the weather is pleasant, but now I realize how wrong I was. All along, people who are in the business of promoting tourism are of the opinion that these two seasons are ideal for promoting tourism in Meghalaya and the rest of the year is off-season. But if Meghalaya is promoted as a destination for adventure tourism, summer when it is raining hard and water in the rivers rise and the environment is all green is the best time. Besides that, for people looking for adventure summer is the most challenging time to visit the state.

The world is at our door step but is the state of Meghalaya ready? Are we prepared to welcome visitors to our caves, our forests and our canyons and like the Lonely Planet post concluded, are we ready to welcome visitors to India's adventure playground?

TUR on the warpath

By Roney Lyndem

I have been meaning to write a letter of appreciation for the OP-EDs and 'Letters' you choose to publish about Thma U Rangli-Juki (TUR) & its various irritable, ideologically motivated, leftist, progressive, even 'anti-national' activities. For a small progressive group, critical engagement with our ideas, intellectually low-grade name-calling, ad-hominem attacks and slander, gets our message and name across. These days our mailbox, although not overflowing, has had heartening mails from citizens inquiring about our ideology, ways to join TUR or simply asking for a copy of our three-year-old manifesto. So Thank You.

But in a typical TUR killjoy fashion, I cannot but add two caveats to this Thank You note because some of the letters and op-eds raise serious journalistic questions about facts, opinions and disclosures.

Some of the letters you have recently published, especially by A.Lyngdoh, Yogesh Narain & PK Dwivedi, muddy the waters between FACTS and OPINIONS. As a group which believes in going beyond the consensus - we are fully aware that our progressive politics may not be to everyone's liking but

available documents to help them make their challenge more venomous. If they don't respond within a week (which I will inform if they do - through your letters to the Editor Column), we can safely assume that these names are 'inventions of slanderous minds' that have been allowed a space in your paper contrary to its stated policy of not publishing anonymous/fake name letters.

On the issue of disclosures, unlike The Shillong Times, it is today a 'normal' journalistic practice to offer Full Disclosures about the involvement of writers in the issues which they write about. Like the one we encountered on theconversation.com:

"Ms/Mr. X does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the biographical information given"

The same applies for any OP-ED writer or Editorial writer in your paper. For example, if there is an essay on Solid Waste Management, Local Self

The maliciousness of the first allegation is not even worth a response. For the second, I can only assume that Mr. Dwivedi must be suffering a grand Brahminical/Vedic ignorance of local political history so as not to have noticed TUR's rather unpopular critique and opposition to Coal/Limestone mining.

this disagreement should not to be trolly name-calling and factually incorrect statements. I don't know who chooses the letters which are published in your daily, but that person has been responsible for allowing Opinions to masquerade as facts and in some cases allow the space to be used for outright slander.

Cursory readings of the recent letters reveal errors of fact and slander by association, for example, calling TUR 'moles' for Pakistan, provoking "misguided local elements" and "TUR's muteness on coal mining could perhaps be linked to some of its members being miners, too." The maliciousness of the first allegation is not even worth a response. For the second, I can only assume that Mr. Dwivedi must be suffering a grand Brahminical/Vedic ignorance of local political history so as not to have noticed TUR's rather unpopular critique and opposition to Coal/Limestone mining.

For any ethical newspaper, fact-checking is paramount to prevent OP-EDs & Letters to the Editor becoming platforms of unsubstantiated defamation. As Daniel Patrick Moynihan said, "You are entitled to your opinion. But you are not entitled to your OWN facts" meaning it is not right to make up facts or plainly to lie in order to confirm your prejudices.

Anyhow, rather than being peeved, TUR invites all three letter writers to meet us in our office in the coming week to collect copies of our manifesto and to quiz us on our interests and motivations so that they can criticize TUR in a slightly more informed and intelligent manner. They could write at thma.u.rangli.juki@gmail.com or call me on +91-8974573670 to get our office address so they can visit. They can email us their Postal Address (not post-box numbers) so that I can post them our publicly

Governance or Wahumkrah etc. and the writer is a member of a committee or a consultant, resource person or project implementer for those issues, that qualifies for a disclosure. Similarly any reference to MLCU or National Security, specific seminars, consortiums, films and other events which are written about, the Editor needs to make public her association with these institutions so that the pieces are not public relations exercises or embedded and paid journalism.

TUR has always defended Independent and free media. Whether it was in opposing the defamation case against one of your Columnist when he wrote about coal mining, or defending freedom of the press in light of the Meghalaya High Court judgment. TUR believes an adversarial press is healthy and needs to be defended, and that it is our duty to guard against hijacking of the fourth estate by embedded and paid interests. A press promoting civilised discourse based on facts will go a long way in creating a Democratic culture in our society where dissent can be contested not shut down and discussions made more meaningful rather than being mere gossip mongering. To that end, this letter is offered in a comradely spirit.

Lastly, TUR does not believe in leaders or prominent individuals which is why the "Award-Waapsi Filmmaker" and the "Pastor" or the "PhD scholars" have been shown their place in the organisation and that place is in the dark corner of our small, rented, pentagonal office.

The writer is Co-ordinator, Thma U Rangli-Juki (TUR) and can be contacted at thma.u.rangli.juki@gmail.com

TO THE EDITOR

Giving credit where due

Editor, A propos, the news item, 'Shillong College: 60 years of service to students.' (ST July 15, 2016), I was very happy to see the article because I was among the first batch of students in that college. However, I wish to point out that your report did not highlight the name of Late Mr. P. N. Chaudhuri among the Committee Members. Mr. Chaudhuri's contributions to the initial development of the college should not go unrecognised and deserves to be mentioned. Incidentally, I had shifted from Lady Keane College to the newly opened Shillong College because of persistent advocacy of Late Chaudhuri. Such was the level of commitment and dedication of founder members like him.

Yours etc.,
Ivy Endow,
Gurgaon.

Betrayal of public trust

Editor, The public should know the antecedents of a person before voting him to "power". Normally when one holds a position of power, the person usually tramples on his inner values. This is evident in our political leaders in India. The best example before us is the Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal who climbed the ladder of success on the strength of his holier than thou attitude. He seemed to be a man of principles who would not compromise on any unlawful activities. Corruption was what he vehemently condemned and promised to weed out if he came to power.

Kejriwal blasted all those leaders who were corrupt and looted the nation. His activities had certainly given sleepless nights to many a leading politician in this country. The public too were glad

to have a leader who identified with them, went around in an auto-rickshaw and spoke the language of austerity. He asserted that he would stop at nothing for the sake of the country. He convinced the public that he would leave no stone unturned to improve the living status of the underprivileged. This is how the AAP Chief became the darling of the masses.

A disillusioned populace tends to hang at a straw; they believe they are electing a leader with high ethical values. They want leaders who would genuinely work for the country and also can deal a mighty blow to those who are involved in corruption. Sadly, now we see just the opposite. After a few months of nautanki Kejriwal wilfully raised the salary of the MLAs by a whopping 400%, besides considerable hike in perks. Does this not go against his stated objectives? Is it not a total betrayal of the public trust? The Chief Minister of New Delhi never hesitated before hugging the notorious Lalu Yadav who

was involved in the fodder scam. Is it not an unethical U-turn? Well, Sheila Dixit's misdeeds are clearly erased from his memory now. He virtually made a clean break from the campaign against the Congress's misrules and its immeasurable corruption.

What's more he even lost his sanity the other day when his principal secretary and other officers were arrested, allegedly on charges of bribing and misuse of official powers. What's even more dangerous is Kejriwal's propensity to favour a section of NGOs/student bodies whose hysterics threaten the integrity of the nation. He speaks with a forked tongue if that could ensure political dividends for his party. Adding fuel to fire is his forte. So how did this self declared upright person and former RTI activist now turn into a self-centred villain after attaining power?

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong- 2

"Shallow men believe in luck. Strong men believe in cause and effect."

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LVIII No. 345

SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JULY 26, 2016

Uranium mining in Meghalaya

THE Uranium issue has come to haunt us yet again. Germane to the debate is that uranium as nuclear scientist Dr Gordon Edwards says is 'the deadliest metal on earth,' as is borne out by scientific evidence. Edwards says all uranium ends up as either nuclear weapons or highly radioactive waste from nuclear reactors. In the process of mining uranium naturally occurring radioactive substances, which are among the most harmful materials known to science are liberated. Scientists today believe that nuclear technology never was and never will be a solution to any human problem and that there are alternative ways of generating electricity through water power, wind power, geothermal power, etc. If uranium is to be used for power generation then is solar power not a better and safer option? Scientists who take a neutral position on the issue of uranium mining caution that the gravest danger arises from the tailings that remain after uranium ore is extracted from the ground. What is left behind is a finely pulverized material, like fine sand which is the uranium tailing. As the person who first discovered radioactivity - Marie Curie observed that 85 percent of the radioactivity in the ore remains behind in that crushed rock.

The effective half-life of this radioactivity is 80,000 years which means that in 80,000 years there will be half as much radioactivity in these tailings as there is today. Since these tailings are left on the surface of the earth, they are blown about by the wind and are washed by the rain into the water systems. As long as the tailings remain on the earth's surface, they are continually generating radon gas which is eight times heavier than air, so it stays close to the ground and can travel 1,000 miles in just a few days in a light breeze. This dust is deposited on the vegetation and is ingested by animals, fish and plants thousands of miles away from where the uranium mining is done. The tailing ponds are actually pumping radioactivity into the environment for millennia. This is the hidden danger or uranium mining. While many argue that humans are anyway exposed to radiation from different sources including from soil, construction materials etc., the point is that increasing radiation levels on this planet is exposing humans to grave risks. It is on this crucial point that the people of Meghalaya must resist the Central Government's attempts through UCIL to revive the uranium mining project here.

LOOKING BACK

February 22, 1989

Bill on Chakma autonomy

A Dhaka report says that a Bill has just been introduced in Bangladesh Parliament to grant limited autonomy to the tribal people in the three troubled hill districts in south-eastern Bangladesh, that is Chittagong Hill Tracts. Mr Maudud Ahmed, the Prime Minister, who introduced the Bill in the House, said this 'historic step'

would bring about a political solution to the outstanding problems facing the tribal people there. The report does not indicate details about the extent of autonomy to be granted or the structural formula for its enforcement. An earlier report a few weeks ago had stated that the tribal Chakma representatives rejected a scheme of District Councils proposed for them. If there has not since been any improvement on it as is the more likely the Bill should serve no purpose even if passed. It would fail also to create a political division among the tribals with the bait of such limited autonomy.

The District Council model in the adjoining Mizoram can hardly be of any use for the Chakmas since conditions in the two sides of the border are not identical nor the aspirations and demands of the people concerned the same either. And over the years of its working the Council model of the Sixth Schedule

variety has brought out its limitations and loop-holes to be acceptable any more to any new group of aspirants.

The Darjeeling model of local autonomy seems to have become more fashionable in India of late and a recent report had said that this was being dangled before the Jharkhandi tribals. For the Chakma tribals of Bangladesh the model evolved for the minority Tamils in Sri Lanka could probably be more appropriate, and hence welcome, since apart from a sizeable measure of autonomy, it also conceded amalgamation of that country's northern and eastern Tamil-majority areas into a single north-eastern Province. Separate

Councils for the three districts in the Chakma region would stand in the way of effective unification of the tribals and in the long run help a policy of divide-and-rule to break their solidarity which at present is the source of their strength. That also incidentally will weaken the other demand for restoring tribal lands from non-tribal muslims im-planted from the mainland on the Buddhist hill areas. Only a solution truly satisfactory to tribal interest can assure return of the huge number of Chakma refugees now imposed on the slender shoulders of tiny Tripura.

Healthy debate essential in a democracy

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

In a particular management institute, in one discussion session a query arose as to whether conflict is good or bad. Upon careful deliberation and discussion, a conclusion evolved that conflict does occur in every area of life both political, social and others and even in the field of studies and knowledge. Since it is a collision between enlightened minds, conflict should therefore be a healthy interaction of sound minds. It should never turn into a quarrel or a fight for supremacy. A healthy debate and discussion in a positive manner paves the way for sorting out loopholes and to develop a better alternative beneficial for both parties. It is like an operation room in a hospital trying to solve the problem of a patient.

For a Democracy to survive and flourish, a healthy debate is indispensable especially by those aspiring to become leaders of the society or state because it is on the basis of such debates that people get the chance to evaluate the potential of the person who has projected himself to be a leader. On the other hand, the state of affairs in our society are such that even while electing representatives to different bodies, we are overwhelmed by confusion. This is very sad. In the absence of a healthy debate, other methods like the use of money and emotional incitement have dominated the game unjustifiably. If anybody feels elevated and fit for higher position, he or she should pass through this process of an open debate and not by shouting from Motphran or any public rally. Further, this process should not be a one-time event but a continuous, consistent system till a fine individual emerges and passes the entire debating test.

HS Shylla and Ardent Basaiawmoit have agreed to sit for an open debate on matters concerning Meghalaya's development and politics. This is a good sign for democracy and our society as a whole for soon a time will come when people in our state will no longer depend on

The district administration should not be legalistic in this regard. Rather it should seize this opportunity to turn this exercise for a free and fair conduct of elections. It is high time that healthy debates should be strengthened by law or ordinance.

People shouting and booing will not lead to a healthy debate that builds societies but only to madness.

Those who come for the debate should listen and be informed about the real issues that confront our very existence and development and to logically evaluate things. The right to be an MLA or MDC is for everyone not only for political parties or their sister concerns, NGOs and pressure groups. My sincere request to Messrs HS Shylla and Ardent Basaiawmoit is that when they debate, they should not preach or canvass but explain coolly and calmly as they speak in the Assembly since both are experienced legislators. The tow gentleman should consider that they are debating issues inside the legislature without their supporters. However, if the supporters do come the two debaters should instruct them to behave well. That would be the mark of their maturity and they would be like warriors who are not afraid

to face defeat.

The debaters should not think that by winning the debate they can make the society better or reach the level where the feeling of insecurity and being alienated can no longer affect any section of the community but would be a thing of the past.

There have been debates in the past here but they cannot really be called debates. They were more like monologic lectures and a show of strength. This had happened in one of the constituencies in Shillong during the last assembly election where the supporters of a particular candidate unduly dominated the show just to target the incumbent. It was indeed a great

disappointment for the organizers and for those who attended to witness the debate. That should not be the case for any debate from now onwards. A fairly calm and decent debate was held once at Jaiauw under the initiative of the then KSU president Paul Lyngdoh but that too was purely from the KSU perspective where candidates were forced to respond and answer questions that favoured the KSU agenda and propaganda.

A healthy debate is not only about current issues propagated by a particular group. Anyone who has a genuine issue that concerns everyone can bring forth that issue to the platform for a debate and out of it a solution should emerge which will be for the good of the society. The burden to be the 'saviour' of the 'Jaitbynriew' is not on any person or organization but lies in the heart and mental alertness of the people. To my mind, 'jeit jaitbynriew or jeit ri' (to love one's nation or tribe)

Such acts also play havoc on the lives of students who prefer to study in the quiet of the night and prepare for their various academic exercises. What bothers me is that the concerned authorities are completely ignorant or oblivious to such arrogant acts of defiance. There is an order passed with regards to this dated 18.7.2005 by the Supreme Court of India vide C.A.NO.3735 of 2005 (arising out of SPL (C) NO.21851 12003) Forum, Prevention of Environment of Sound Pollution- versus - Union of India and other relevant laws as well which pertains to the use of PA Systems and the playing of musical instruments in public places beyond a certain decibel and time of day. It is high time that the authorities wake up and enforce this law in letter and spirit and save us from these acts of vandalism and hooliganism.

Yours etc.,
Phrangngi Majaw
Shillong -1

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Yours etc.,
Phrangngi Majaw
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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.

Cancer - a looming threat in the North East

By Preet Dhillon

Recently, ICMR's National Center for Disease and Informatics Research released the most recent cancer rates for India, based on data from 27 population-based cancer registries located across the country including all northeast states. The latest estimates predict 15 lakh new cases of cancer each year in India with breast, lung and cervical cancers topping the list. There are regional variations across the country that reflect the diversity of our customs, lifestyle habits and health care services; for example, stomach and liver cancer are more commonly occurring in Meghalaya and Tamilnadu, gall bladder in Lucknow, lung in Gujarat, prostate in Delhi and Kerala, and leukemia in Jammu and Kashmir. Some sites in India are amongst the highest in the world, such as oral and cervical cancers, due to the high prevalence of underlying risk factors such as tobacco and pan chewing, beedi smoking and the human papilloma virus. On the other hand, rates in India for some commonly occurring cancers such as breast and colo-rectal are much lower than the West, but they are approaching the global average, and that is without any large-scale screening programmes. This means that what we are observing in India, is an under-estimate of the true burden of these cancers in our population. In other words, the actual burden of cancer is much larger.

For many years, there were no registries in many parts of the country, such as the Northeast. In response to this lack of data, registries have now been established in all north eastern states - Assam (Guwahati, Cachar and Dibrugarh Districts), Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh (Naharlagun and Pasighat), as well as Sikkim. This is an important and welcome step. Unfortunately, the latest data show the highest age-adjusted cancer rates in India are in the Northeast, with Aizawl district in Mizoram for males (271 per 100,000) and Papumpare district in Arunachal Pradesh for females (249 per 100,000). In fact, the top 4-5 registries for men and women are in the northeast (East Khasi Hills ranks third at 211.5 per 100,000 for men). For certain cancer sites, the highest rates occur in Meghalaya, such as oesophageal cancer in East Khasi Hills for both men (71.2 per 100,000) and women (33.2 per 100,000) as well as hypopharynx (22.2 per 100,000) and larynx (10.8 per 100,000) in men. In the Northeast, tobacco-related cancers have the highest rates in the country (eg, tongue in males; lung, mouth, nasopharynx and oesophagus in both men and women). Other types of cancers with known infectious causes are also highest in the Northeast, for examples, cancers of the liver in men and cervix in females.

While the registries represent less than 5% of India's population, they do represent major urban metros as well as rural populations. Most cancer registries in countries around the world, such as India and the US, cover only a small proportion of a population, with the intent that the sample will provide representative data for the country overall. For India, accurate sampling remains a challenge due to the incredible diversity of our country. To address this challenge, the ICMR and the Public Health Foundation of India have initiated efforts to better understand the distribution of cancer (and all diseases) across all states, to better inform state-level decision-making and initiatives in health in the country.

Overall, the increasing cancer rates in India are due to reasons such as increasing life expectancy, infectious such as HPV (cervical), Hepatitis C (liver) and gastric H pylori (stomach), lifestyle risk factors such as tobacco, alcohol, diet (low fiber), higher body weight and lower physical activity, and reproductive risk factors

related to age at first pregnancy, number of children and breastfeeding. However, there may be other important environmental, lifestyle (eg, diet), occupational and genetic factors unique to our settings, which require further investigation. Moreover, in different parts of India, such as the Northeast, genetic and environmental influences may combine together to yield even greater risks. More well-designed epidemiological and genetic studies building on the registries in India, are required to increase our understanding of the causes and patterns of these cancers in various parts of the country.

Meanwhile, one worldwide initiative to quantify cancer - the Global Burden of Disease - suggests that for some countries such as the US and the UK, some cancer rates (eg, breast) are beginning to plateau or decline. Unfortunately, India's trends show no sign of abetting. In cancer prevention there are two strategies that are generally employed, primary prevention wherein we address the underlying causes to prevent the onset of cancer in the first place, and secondary prevention where we attempt screening for early detection in order to treat early and improve survival after diagnosis. India's 5-year survival rates are increasing for some cancer sites due to improved treatments and access, while China, on the other hand, showed improved cancer survival from 1995-2009 for nearly all cancer sites. In India, the majority of patients present with late stage of diagnosis, which limits treatment options for better survival, and patients who present at earlier stages, are not always informed about the risks, benefits and side effects of various treatment options.

The latest ICMR estimates are a reminder of the rising cancer burden in this country, which will continue to rise until we start controlling the underlying risk factors. If we eliminate tobacco use for example, we could reduce the cancer burden by at least 30% in this country. It is also a reminder of the need for effective early detection to improve cancer outcomes and survival in India, we are moving ahead but not fast enough or consistently enough across all sites. We individuals have the power of information, it's what we choose to do with that information that will make all the difference. As communities, our health systems are only partially geared for addressing the many challenges that an increasing cancer burden among our population will unleash. We need to improve and strengthen our health teams at community levels and in institutions while concurrently addressing preventive measures.

For more information on risk factors for each cancer, one can visit websites at various governmental such as the National Cancer Institute, US (<http://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk>), the World Cancer Research Fund (<http://www.wcrf-hk.org/hk-en/preventing-cancer/ways-to-reduce-cancer-risk>) and for information that is relevant to Indians, one can also visit ICMR's National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research which provides information on cancer treatment, symptoms, risk factors and financial aid (<http://cancerindia.org.in/cp/>). For cancer patients and their families, there are numerous organizations that are dedicated to improving awareness and the livelihood of cancer patients and their families (Indian Cancer Society, CanKids, Can Support, St. Jude Hospital are a few based in Delhi). (The writer is Epidemiologist Public Health Foundation of India)

TO THE EDITOR

Time to separate judiciary from executive

Editor,

With reference to your front page news item, 'HC unhappy over delay in separation of judiciary' (ST July 13, 2016) I express my happiness over the High Court's taking up the PIL and sending strong signals to make judiciary independent from the executive in the East Jaintia Hills District. As litigants our only hope lies in the higher judiciary to make the separation of judiciary from executive a reality. The separation will create a conducive atmosphere and make the justice delivery system effective. It would also ensure access to equal opportunities and justice and will facilitate expeditious administration of justice to the people. As of now the people of East Jaintia Hills do not enjoy the benefit of independent judiciary. The ADM (Judicial) to whom administration of justice has been entrusted is primarily engaged with other duties relating to law and order and administration whereas

judicial work is not given priority causing immense suffering to the litigants who have to wait endlessly to get orders into their hands.

It has been well said by Lord Acton, "Power corrupts and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely." Concentrating powers in a single body leads to absolutism.

Yours etc.,
Dr. K Phawa
East Jaintia Hills

Noise pollution is a crime!

Editor,

As civilized people living in the 21st century, we try very hard to appear modern in our behavior, conversation and our dealings with people. Modern society has brought us laws and their corresponding disciplinary actions in the event that they are violated. One such law is the one that deals with pollution of the air, water or the destruction of environment through mining and so on. So we have the Motor Vehicle Act, the Mining Act and the Water Pollution Act.

But I believe that it is high time for us - as 'modem' people to have one more Act passed in Parliament and that is the law that strictly prohibits 'Noise Pollution.' I have observed and have also been a victim of the crassness of people who in their attempt to appear 'modem' and 'western' violate every code of conduct that actually makes one a civilized human being.

Marriages, birthday celebrations and revelries of various kinds result in noise pollution emanating out of music systems that generate high decibel noise. Such callous and primitive display of insensitivity often continues into the wee hours of the morning. And then there are those who, not satisfied with just keeping the members of their locality awake the whole night, go about town with such earnestness to wake the members of other localities as well by travelling around in their 'music-system-on-four-wheels' blasting away loud and cacophonous sounds the whole night long. These barbaric acts must be dealt with a vengeance because they are a direct invasion of people's privacy and a violation of their right to a peaceful life devoid of unwanted stress.

"Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind."

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LVIII No. 346 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JULY 27, 2016

Disaster Management

HEAVY rain in Assam and other parts of the North East has caused loss of lives and destruction of property. It is a regular occurrence and the authorities invariably show a sleepy response. All this has led some MP's to push for several changes in the way India deals with natural disaster. They have suggested the formation of a separate ministry which may improve monitoring of natural calamities and speed up relief and rehabilitation. But that alone cannot improve relations between the Centre and the states. States ask for greater funds, improved capacity building of agencies, organization of rescue operations and greater autonomy in taking prompt decisions. The Centre should work shoulder to shoulder with the states in removing leaks in the relief network which prevents money from reaching the right people and its full utilization. Modern forecasting technologies are also not given proper emphasis.

India's disaster management machinery should come under strict review. Its performance has not yet been up to the mark. Reform of the apparatus is a must. Warnings from the meteorological departments often go unheeded. Communication systems collapse despite expensive equipment having been installed. There is need for regional mutual aid centres. These centres can coordinate multiple chains of command which result in delay. The link between disasters and climate change as well as the spoliation of the environment should be looked into. However, there are limits to the efficiency of disaster management systems. A Hollywood film on combating "Seismic swarm" has shown this.

LOOKING BACK

February 22, 1989

Bodoland movement: The militants take over

The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), following a joint sitting with the Bodo peoples' Action Committee (BPAC) a broad based organization, modeled on the lines of the Assam Gana Parisad (AGP) of the Assam agitation fame announced the resumption of their "Divide Assam fifty-fifty" agitation which had been temporarily suspended on October 30, last year. There are three ostensible possibilities as to what had brought about the suspension.

For one as the ABSU contends, "the suspension aimed at creating a congenial atmosphere in the State, conducive to holding fruitful dialogue between the agitator and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Government." This, the administration discounts as a mere "publicity stunt" pointing out that even during the period of suspension violence in the Kokrajhar district and the Udalguri sub division of Darrang district the two strongholds of the ABSU-continued unabated.

For another, November December being the harvesting months, the rural agriculturists, who constitute the bulk of ABSU's mass support", urged up-on the agitation leaders to suspend the agitation. The farmers, it is argued, hoped that consequent to the suspension of the agitation the "harassment" by the police would stop allowing them to gather their crop properly. The last possibility but not the least is that the ABSU was buying time to garner political support, get better organized, procure arms training before it embarked on a final offensive. It is this version that has gained acceptance of the State Intelligence wing the Special Branch (SB).

Whatever be the actual reason, the truth is that the fresh wave of the agitation differs in essence from the agitation of the pre suspension days

significantly. To begin with, the ABSU has abandoned all but three of its original 92 demands its existing demands are Creation of a separate state to be named Bodoland) on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, as against its earlier demand for the creation of a separate union territory; creation of an autonomous district council (to be styled the Nilachal Autonomous District Council) incorporating the tribal compact areas in the south bank of the Brahmaputra; and the inclusion of the Bodo Kacharis of Karbi Anglong into the sixth schedule or the Indian Constitution.

An Unpalatable Controversy

The French Children Welfare Agency has bought 72 Chakma tribal orphans from the Agartala refugee camps. The reports were based on allegations by 'relatives' of the orphans that they had not been getting any communication about them since the orphans were taken out to France. The Agency authorities have claimed that they did not 'buy' the orphans and that the children were being supervised by competent legal authorities who possess all necessary information about them. There should normally be no scope for suspecting the humanitarian intention of the Agency and the very fact that the Camp authorities had allowed the orphan boys to be taken out should give the benefit of doubt to the Agency authorities rather than to those making these wild accusations which is now denied. As a guide-line for the future, however, it may reduce chances of such unpalatable controversies if the government either (of the State concerned or the Centre or both, are directly involved in such transfer of orphans to foreign lands whatever the motive of the adopting families or the circumstances in which the orphans are handed out.

Flood Management in Assam

By *Ibu Sanjeeb Garg*

BEATING THE RHETORIC

A large number of people in India are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. In their quest for livelihoods every cropping season they look upwards to the sky for rain. Annual onset of rains in India has a major role in the socio political narrative of the country. A good monsoon for the country brings hope to the government and the policymakers and relief to the farmers. However, the same monsoon signals the onset of yearly troubles for Assam with lakhs of villages becoming victims of floods. According to experts, Assam loses almost Rs 200 crore annually due to floods. It has lost 7% of its agricultural land to flood-induced erosion since 1950. Nearly 40% of the total area of the state is flood prone.

In 2016 alone, within a few weeks of onset of monsoon, the effects are there for everyone to see. In a matter of days, almost one lakh people have been displaced from their homes. And this is a situation, when rains are expected to continue for some time more. The worst affected districts are the Upper Assam districts of Lakhimpur and Jorhat. Floods in Assam are not a consequence of any human activity. Assam has a large share of annual precipitation in the country. Records of the last century show the river Brahmaputra increasing in size. From about 4000 sq kms in the 1920's the Brahmaputra has widened to almost 6000 sq kms today which makes it one of the deadliest rivers during the monsoons. The heavy monsoon rains over the catchments of Himalayan and Patkai ranges pausing strength to gently sloping narrow valleys into the plains further compounds the problems of floods.

It is in this context that flood management must be seen as a major component towards bringing in better socio-economic development of Assam. This is because floods do not have an economic impact alone but impinges hugely on human development as

well. Thus flood management in Assam has to be seen as a continuous process and not as a fire fighting measure - an exercise to be replicated every year. This has three components immediate, short term and long term measures of managing floods which would thrive on the twin ethos of mitigation and adaptation.

The immediate and short term measures would encompass those that kick into place once the floods hit a particular area. The first step is of course providing relief to the people. The establishment of the National Disaster Response Force has created an effective tool towards first response once floods hit a particular area. Then health management becomes an important component of flood management. Very often in floods a large number of people succumb to water borne diseases as water resources become contaminated. Thus it is imperative that health management is given due priority while dealing with flood management.

Short term measures would include those which can be implemented just before the monsoons are scheduled to hit the country. They can include mock drills which would entail a particular pattern in which people movement must take place once floods hit a particular area. Local schools can act as a first response unit because often people are aware of the location of the local school in the vicinity. Any other high ground can also be identified which can act as the first response area once floods hit a particular place. A very important component of flood management today is technology and more specifically the power of geographical mapping. Today India has one of the best satellite mapping systems of the world. Using historical data that has been systematically stored for quite a number of years, flooding pattern can be drawn while incorporating

other variables such as rainfall. While such projects are already on, there is a need to systematically percolate this information downwards so that smaller units of administration can arm themselves effectively.

At the same time, accountability must be brought into the flood control narrative. In the past few years an innovative system of awarding road contracts has been in vogue. Contractors are often made responsible for the quality that they have delivered and those who fail the quality test are often blacklisted. Similar measures towards those who construct embankments can be taken as well, in the form of part payment till completion; one year performance review and black listing of a particular contractor in case an embankment fails the minimum quality test.

It is impossible to change either the course of Brahmaputra or regulate the amount of rainfall in Assam which makes it absolutely imperative that adaptation measures and mitigation which look at the long term timelines are perhaps most effective in flood management and control. In the past a number of innovative measures have been launched to streamline flood management in Assam. In Kamarkuchi area of Nalbari district Kiramat Tubular Sand Filled Mattress has been used to fight against the onslaught of River Pagladia (named so because it changes its course frequently like a madman!). Geo tubes are being used in construction of embankment in Dhakuakhana because the sand found in northern banks is basically sandy and lacks the stability and cohesion needed in an embankment. Vetiver Grass is now grown on an experimental basis in embankments of Morigaon district in middle Assam and they have yielded positive results. As a latest initiative, a team of experts is being sent to China to study its flood control measures which have been able to

rein in River Hwang Ho (Yellow River) which was once called China's sorrow.

Despite all this the most important component towards flood management and control has to be management of the water itself. The first step towards this is free flow of water. A lot of natural waterways which could act as natural reservoirs for the river water have been encroached upon; they need to be freed. The char areas where a large number of people have their homes, often fall victim to the floods. When they move to the narrow riverine areas they often settle in the natural embankments thus raising the level of threat to themselves as well as those areas in the years of subsequent floods. To ensure free movement of water, people from the char areas have to be relocated in a phased manner without disturbing the natural flow of the river. Inadequate countryside drainages must be rearranged into proper grid systems so that the flow of water is distributed and not concentrated on a particular area.

The ambitious North East Water Authority (NEWRA) could not see the light of the day because of differences between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. It had proposed to create one single authority that would look after irrigation, power and water resources in the NorthEast. Thereafter Brahmaputra Board was asked to don the mantle of flood control and management in Assam. However flood management and control cannot be achieved by the Brahmaputra board alone. It is a problem that affects each person of Assam as well and thus all stakeholders including the academia, premier institutions like IIT Guwahati, NIT Silchar, AEC as well as the people in the hinterlands have to come together to hem out a complete solution.

(The views expressed are personal)

Need to provincialise service of teachers in Govt-aided schools of Meghalaya

By *ED Nongsiang*

Meghalaya is the only State in the Country where schools are being classified into many categories with different pay structures and no uniform service rules.

The prevalent systems or categories are :

1. Pre-Primary Ad-hoc System (State Adopted Operation Black Board Schemes).
2. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Schemes (SSA) from Primary to Upper Primary levels.
3. Ad-hoc System from Lower Primary to Higher Secondary level.
4. Improved System in the Upper Primary level.
5. Deficit/ Non Government at the Primary level.
6. Deficit Pattern in the Upper Primary and Secondary level.
7. Deficit System in the Upper Primary, Secondary and Higher Secondary levels.
8. Government Schools.

The categorisation of schools must have been done for political convenience. As the Government was not willing to establish sufficient government schools or include more schools in the deficit systems, the political leaders in order to please the sponsoring bodies who often have strong influence on the electorate, introduced the other systems of schools which resulted in unequal pay for equal work.

Most of these schools receive financial support from the government in the form of grant-in-aid. The grant-in-aid varies from ? 3500/- per month to ? 12000/- per month per teacher, that too if there is no percentage cut by the management although these teachers put in the same workload and same work hours with those in the deficit system or government schools. Unlike their counterparts in government schools, the Deficit school teachers are not entitled to certain benefits such as medical reimbursement, pensionary benefits etc.

There are 4770 government aided schools from Pre-Primary to Higher Secondary level. And the number of teachers in these government aided schools in the State is 14473. Many of these government aided school do not strictly adhere to the State Adopted Amended Assam Aided High and Higher Secondary School Employees Rules 1965 which is obsolete, irrelevant and non inclusive, or the Meghalaya aided Higher, Secondary and Upper Primary Management rules 1997.

Some of the religious bodies running minority Government aided schools frame their own service rules, rules of conduct and discipline which are not uniform and in some cases do not conform to Government policy and regulations.

In order to bring uniformity in service rules, rules of conduct and discipline, Management rules, Pay structures, administration and most of all to provide SOCIAL SECURITY to the teachers, the State government should PROVINCIALISE the services of teachers and non teaching staff in all government aided schools from Pre-Primary to higher secondary level in the State.

If the services of teachers in government aided schools are provincialised then there would be only 3 categories of schools in the State.

1. Government schools.
2. Government aided or Provincialised schools.
3. Self financing or Private schools.

SSA Schools should also be regularised.

In the provincialised schools, the Management/

Sponsoring body shall own the infrastructures movable and immovable properties of the school. The administration or management of affairs and control of all teaching and non teaching staff shall vest in the Managing Committees. Managements may also frame sub rules as per requirements in conformity with the government policy and regulations. Recruitment, appointment of teaching and non teaching staff will also vest on the Management with a department representative in the selection Board for teaching staff to ensure transparency. The Managing Committees shall also exercise such functions as may be specified by the State government from time to time.

The State government should make rules to provide for the service conditions of the teachers such as :

- a) Rules of conduct and discipline.
- b) Leave rules.
- c) Age of retirement/ superannuation.
- d) Guidelines for recruitment and appointment of teachers.

And any other matter relating to the conditions of services of teachers.

The State government should also make rules for Managements or should revisit the Meghalaya Aided Higher Secondary, Secondary and Upper Primary Schools Management Rules 1997. All teachers and non teaching staff of provincialised schools should get such emoluments as salary and allowances, pensionary benefits at par with their corresponding teachers and non teaching staff in government schools.

The teachers in government aided schools of the state under the umbrella of Joint Action Committee of All Teachers Associations of Meghalaya (JACATAM) have made several representations and submitted Memoranda to the government more than three years now.

Under the direction from the Chief Minister, JACATAM met the Chief Secretary and other top officials of the Department on 30th September 2013, where it was agreed that the State Government would depute officials from the Department to make a comparative study on systems followed by other states in the country on Education.

The Directorate of School Education and Literacy submitted the report on the findings under the caption : Status of Action taken Report on the demands of teachers (JACATAM) on 16th June 2014. It also prepared a detailed project report and proposal to be implemented based on the Tamil Nadu Model which is in line with the demand of JACATAM and submitted it to the State Government on the 29th February 2016.

If State Governments in other parts of our country with much more number of schools and teachers can give priority to Education and have done away with many categories of Schools and provided social security and rightful status to teachers it is high time for our State Government to follow suit. What is needed is political will of the leaders of our State to make a bold decision so that standards of Education will improve and teaching will become the most attractive and desired profession in the society.

(The writer is Chairman, JACATAM)

TO THE EDITOR

Corruption and the Lokayukta

Editor,

In Barnes Mawrie's article "Why corruption thrives in Meghalaya" (ST July 14, 2016), he had written, "What I mean to say here is that in many cases where RTIs are filed or cases against corruption have been taken up either by individuals, groups or NGOs; all of them lack persistence. They are like red hot iron which grows cold in no time. Even our NGOs who initially display good will in exposing the corruption of Government or Institutions, sooner or later lose their stamina and the issue is put in cold storage"

Mr Mawrie is either ignorant of our arguments made many times through the media on why we need a strong Lokayukta Act in our State or he is deliberately trying to put us down for reasons best known to him. But may I repeat on behalf of all the NGOs, involved in campaigning for the Meghalaya Lokayukta

Act passed by the State Assembly in 2014 and also remind the general public on why we need a strong and an independent Lokayukta in our state.

The RTI as the name implies is only the right to get information. It has no executive powers to take action on the information provided/received through the RTI. Therefore after the RTI Act was passed by Parliament in 2005 the RTI movement of Meghalaya had taken up a few cases notably the CGI sheet housing scheme where we used the RTI to uncover the financial irregularities while implementing the scheme. In fact we had spent nearly one year using the RTI to bring out these irregularities which were then placed before the State Vigilance Commission (SVC) headed by the Chief Secretary to take action on the RTI findings.

However when the Chief Secretary who is also the Chairman of SVC failed to take any action because, as a bureaucrat he acts according to the directions/orders of the Govt., we took up the case directly with the State

Govt. However, it is most unfortunate that the Govt too literally 'swept the findings under the carpet'. That was when we realized that when the Government does not take action against malfeasance exposed through RTI findings, corruption will thrive as rightly headlined by Barnes Mawrie and therefore the importance to have another independent Institution to act and prosecute in a time bound framework, on the RTI findings when financial irregularities are uncovered.

Hence we started our campaign for a strong and independent Lokayukta Act in our State and after engaging with the State Government for many years, the State Assembly finally passed the Meghalaya Lokayukta Act in 2014. And for the information of Mawrie, the Institution of Lokayukta will be an independent body having its own investigation and prosecution wing with a special court and will act within a time frame of 2 years.

The recent announcement by the State Government that all Government employees from the Chief Minister downwards will have to

declare their and their family members assets together with their source of income, is one of the important provisions of the Lokayukta Act. The Lokayukta can also seize unaccounted assets. When the institution of the Lokayukta is finally in place in our State, it will strengthen and give more teeth to the RTI Act and further empower citizens to bring in transparency and accountability in governance.

The RTI movement of Meghalaya continue to engage with the State Govt to appoint the Chairperson and other members of the Lokayukta at the earliest and get it functioning, failing which we seek the support of the general public to put pressure on the Govt to act on what they have always proagated - accountability and transparency in governance.

Yours etc.,
Michael N.Syiem,
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.

“Believe in yourself! Have faith in your abilities! Without a humble but reasonable confidence in your own powers you cannot be successful or happy.”

--- Norman Vincent Peale

The Shillong Times

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Change in Nepal

NEPAL'S prime minister KP Oli resigned ahead of a no-confidence motion being brought against his government. Nepal has had twenty four Prime ministers in twenty six years showing the instability of Nepal politics. It has always been difficult to arrive at a consensus on key issues. The drafting of a Constitution missed many deadlines. The statute finally adopted did not meet the demands of Nepal's Madhesi. The Madhesi agitation came too ahead demanding fair representation in state bodies and re-organisation of Nepal's federal structure. Nepal's politicians put the blame on India for inciting the Madhesi. For nine months, Oli had been spearheading the anti-India offensive, especially for the five month long blockade in the Terai region. He visited China and tried to leverage Chinese influence to pressurize India. Oli had no serious intention of listening to Madhesi demands and he also faced internal rivalry in his Maoist party.

CPN (Maoist Centre) Chairman Pushpa Dahal Prachanda is likely to be Prime Minister again. He will have the backing of the Nepali Congress. The new leadership should address three main issues. First, genuine Madhesi grievances should be dealt with in a constitutional manner. Second, it should take the job of governance seriously and speed up reconstruction following the massive earthquake of April 2015. Third, it should mend its fences with India removing all doubts about India playing a Big Brotherly role interfering in Nepal politics

LOOKING BACK

February 22, 1989

Oil blockade continues for 2nd day

The sixty-hour oil blockade called by the Assam Students Union continued for the second day today preventing the flow of crude oil to three Public sector refineries - Guwahati, Bongaigaon and Barauni. The AASU activists have been picketing round the clock since five AM yesterday in front of all the oil pumping stations of the Oil India's Pipe line in the state which carries crude oil to refineries. Official reports received here said picketing has so far been peaceful and no un-toward incident was reported. The AASU, one of the signatories of the Assam Accord, called the blockade to protest the alleged fail-ure of the centre and the state Government to implement the accord. Meanwhile, the non withdrawal of the blockade by AASU even after repeated appeals had created an "embarrassing position" for the State Government. Acting on the State Government's suggestion, the Centre has agreed to amend the Illegal Migration (Determination by Tribunal) Act 1983 in the current session of the Parliament for speedy detection of foreign nationals in the State as per Assam Accord.

Rs 3000 Cr. credit for farmers next year: PM

Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi today said that financial institutions in the country providing credit to the agricultural sector have been asked to increase their rural credit by about Rs.3,000 crores in the next financial year. Mr. Gandhi who was addressing an adivasi rally at Faizpur in Jalgaon district to the state, said the Government was planning to provide at least one branch to a cluster of 15 to 20 villages. The proposed "Jaladhara" programme envisaged a provision of agricultural aid at nominal rates to nearly 50,000 villages in the drought prone areas, he added. The Prime Minister said tribals must be

granted rights over forest produce and be fully involved in forest management. He also suggested that the forest cover in the country be increased to one-third of the total land against ten percent at present. Mr. Gandhi said the Government is formulating a national policy for rehabilitating tribals ousted from project areas. He said the aim of the proposed policy was to ensure that the displaced tribals are able to engage in their traditional practices. Congratulating the Maharashtra Government, Mr. Gandhi said the state had made immense strides in the agricultural sector over the last forty years. This was essentially because the State Government had focused on the provision of irrigation, power, fertilizers, pesticides and rural credit to the people. Mr. Gandhi added. The Indian National Congress held a session in Faizpur in 1936 under the chairmanship of Jawaharlal.

Excise party held on charges of rape

Seven staff of the State Excise including a Deputy Superintendent were recently arrested by police on charges of raping a woman whose shop they had gone to raid in search of illicit liquor. According to reports, the excise team seized some local brew from her tea stall in Bhoi area and picked up the woman in their vehicle. They drove to a motel on the highway where they left these items and left for Khanapara. They returned to the motel after midnight and occupied a room. Police acted on the basis of a complaint from the woman. All the arrested persons were released after night's detention in the lockup. The woman was sent up for medical examination. According to reports, the medical report had confirmed the charge is not without basis.

An Education Policy for Inclusive Education?

By Walter Fernandes

After uploading a draft education policy on the website of the Ministry the former Union Minister for Human Resource Development held five one-hour Skype based consultations on its contents for different zones. That is a positive point. Also its objectives look good. It aims to revamp teacher education to improve their quality, encouraging new knowledge, pedagogy and approaches, enabling inclusive education and financing higher education. However, these objectives remain at the policy statements with no idea of how it is to be implemented. The measures it suggests seem to be geared to the needs of the upper classes and elite institutions not to those of the poor.

After expressing the intention of the Government to enable inclusive education the focus of the policy draft is to prepare teachers for the globalised world. It speaks of new techniques and international standards but does not say how it will enable inclusive education. The document speaks of the need to have good quality colleges, universities, medical and technical institutions of an international standard. That is a crying need in India because no Indian university is among the top 200 of the world. Hidden while focusing on international standards the document does not say how they will be inclusive i.e. how the poor will gain access to them. Prestigious medical colleges, management institutes and IITs are useful but very few persons from the region even from the middle class gain access to them. For example, I do not have recent data but in 2012 we were informed at a meeting that IIM Shillong had only two students from the region. The situation was slightly better in IIT Guwahati. It is true that some NE students go to other such institutes outside the region but their number is somewhat small. That puts the region at a disadvantage.

While it is true of the Northeast as a whole, the situation is worse when it concerns the poor. It means that, one has to go beyond building only high quality institutions in cities to making these services accessible to the rural areas and to the poor. The benefit of medical colleges and other institutions can remain with major cities and may exclude villages and small towns. That issue is crucial for the Northeast. For example, those who study the land issue know that much land alienation in the region today is within the tribe. In the absence of good colleges in their States parents send their wards to colleges in Guwahati and Shillong or outside the region. They sell some of their land to richer persons in their tribe to get money for their children's education. Of much greater

importance is the absence of good health care facilities. In a medical emergency people have no choice but to sell their land at a throwaway price in order to rush to the cities where such facilities are located. One does not have to repeat that land is central to most conflicts in the region. That is where one can question the focus of the draft policy. Inclusive education is much more than big institutions. The institutions have to respond to every citizen's right to a life with dignity which is how the Supreme Court has interpreted Article 21 of the Constitution on right to life. Education has to protect this right for example by changing the processes that cause land alienation, impoverishment and ethnic conflicts. One has certainly to build prestigious colleges in big cities but one has to go beyond them and shift focus to villages and small towns. Unless good colleges are built in each

district people will continue to sell their land in order to send their children to other States. Primary and high schools are as important as colleges. In this context one can accept the policy focus on public-private-partnership (PPP) but PPP cannot be limited to industries and big institutions. It should become real in villages and small towns. North Eastern States ensure free education only in government-run schools most of which are of poor quality. The voluntary sector provides good quality education also in villages and small towns but the State does not fund them. So their students have to pay for their education. It means that the children who cannot afford their fees are condemned to low quality

good quality education. The State should pay the salaries, ensure mid-day meals and pay for the buildings and other facilities run by voluntary bodies under the State education Board. Those who can afford to pay high fees have CBSE and ICSE schools. Children who do not have money to buy education have a right to good education in schools and it should be provided under PPP.

One can go beyond education to health services. The draft policy speaks of the need to build more medical colleges and of PPP in them. Such institutions in big cities can provide specialised services but priority has to go to the villages where most health centres exist only in name and rarely have medical persons to take care of them.

Many private agencies are providing good services but they get no assistance from the State. Health is a basic human right and the agencies providing such services deserve all support. Of equal importance is transport whose focus today is on six lane roads and Asian and National highways. They are required but they do not reach the poor because good transport is neglected in the rural areas. It is needed to transport agricultural produce to the market, for children to go to school and for patients to avail of health centres in the neighbouring towns. In other words, for education to be inclusive one has to go beyond the present form of development whose benefits tend to remain with "Shining India". The policy should steer education and its support mechanisms of health care and transport towards small towns and villages and to the needs of the poor. In order to respond to everyone's right to health, food and education the policy should move towards ensuring that its benefits become real to every Indian citizen particularly in the Northeast.

The author works at North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati.

This is not a dream because this system has been implemented in the Southern States, Maharashtra and a few others since the 1960s under the grant-in-aid scheme.

education in government schools.

To make Article 21 and the right to education real to the poor, PPP has to reach every public and private school. The State should pay the salaries and maintain all the schools coming under the State Board.

This is not a dream because this system has been implemented in the Southern States, Maharashtra and a few others since the 1960s under the grant-in-aid scheme. The State pays teacher salaries and pension and even maintains the buildings owned by private agencies. It has changed with liberalisation basic to which is privatisation of services. Private schools founded after 1992 are not entitled to the grants. If the North Eastern States believe in the Right to Education Act and in inclusive education and want to prevent land alienation and the conflicts caused by it, they should demand a policy in which the Government enters into PPP with the agencies that impart

TO THE EDITOR

Blatant extortion by STP

Editor,
The traffic police are openly extorting the public in the name of checking law breakers. My family was on Sunday held at 10:30 P.M. for trespassing a NO ENTRY sign kept in Rynjah Market. Daily commuters through Rynjah would testify that after 9:00 P.M., cars are usually allowed to go through Rynjah market as a bi-way. In any case, for the public to be sure, the traffic police must note the timing of no entry on the sign itself. On being held, we were told to pay a fine of Rs. 300. When we inquired under which section we were charged, the Officer-in-Charge cited Section 177 of the Motor Vehicle Act, 1988. When we further asked to be shown a written copy of the section, the officer slapped us with another fine of Rs.300 basing it on Section 179 of the Act. Thereafter we were taken to the police station and shown only a "menu-like" outline of the sections. We later paid the fine on the road where a policeman collected the same in a Gypsy. We were issued a receipt which did not bear the name of the Officer-in-

Charge, date, police station, etc. Thus, how valid is this receipt?

On checking the Sections online, we discovered that under Section 177 of the M.V. Act, 1988, the fine "may extend to one hundred rupees". Also under Section 179, a "fine which may extend to five hundred rupees" is made for "Disobedience of orders, obstruction and refusal of information". It is evident that the OC overcharged each offender on Sunday if he cited Section 177 to all. Furthermore, the OC charged us under Section 179 of which we were not guilty for we only asked to be shown a written copy of the section. We neither declined to pay the fine nor did we disrupt the function of the officer. The OC had wrongly charged us and taken our money. He suppressed our Right to Information by slapping us with the second fine. One question if India is truly a Democracy. Also, where does the excess fine go? How does the 'protectors of law' manipulate the receipts since the section cited and the amount charged would, in many cases, not tally?!

It is hoped that the Police Department take serious note of such blatant extortion by taking action against these erring officers and returning the ill-gotten money.

Yours etc.,
Mebaahun Blah,
Via email

Caste prejudices on the rise

Editor,
The recent inhumane act of publicly assaulting four Dalit youth in Una, Gujarat by "cow vigilantes" for skinning their much revered holy animal, inside which is believed to reside gods and goddesses is a dangerous trend. Strongly attached to this, is the growing tendency towards the caste division in this country, especially in a state like Gujarat, where Dalits are referred to as the lowest forms of human beings inhabiting the lowest sphere of society. An incident occurring once or twice may be a co-incidence. But similar incidents involving victims of the same community are akin to a pogrom against them and are motivated by sadistic impulses. The cow vigilantes camouflage their actions with the mask of "religion." True the four youth were found skinning cow carcasses as part of their profession. What were the assaulters expecting to get out of the carcasses anyway? Why were they so offended with the skinning of dead cows?

While I don't intend to offend this religious group, when I come across broken

and shattered idols thrown on the roadside or in river banks with discoloured faces and disfigured haysticks, I find the farcical parallelism of a dead cow and the broken idol quite disturbing. The idols that were once believed to contain within them the spirit of gods or goddesses were set up in temples, bathed with milk, garlanded and worshipped. So when did the spirit of the gods flee from the idols which then made the worshippers discard them so insensitively? If the idols carry the spirit of gods for only a time, it is logical to argue that the cow has a limited life span and hence may be revered only up to the time that it breathes. Cows die; their spirits relocate. If only the assaulters had understood that no holy god or goddess would like a dead stinking cow as its abode, they would have had second thoughts before publicly humiliating innocent people. And why are all these incidents happening now under the NDA rule and the BJP Government in Gujarat?

Yours etc.,
Silba Marak,
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.

Building Skilled India Look beyond jobs

By S Saraswathi

Last fortnight India celebrated the first anniversary the formation of the Ministry for Skill Development which was created on 15 July last year. Happily, the UN declared it as the World Youth Skills Day. Immediately thereafter the National Skills Development Mission (NSDM) was launched.

Undeniably, India, true to its nature, is an enthusiastic partner in this event despite holding a very low place in the international ranking for skilled human power. Yet, it also has a reason to nurture a sense of achievement for having created general awareness about the need for vocational education along with general education within a short time. Pertinently, the Day is observed to generate greater awareness about the importance of technical and vocational education and training and development of other skills relevant to local and global economies.

Wherein, the need for "marketable skills" is underscored through activities in six focus areas to show the importance of skills for achieving economic growth and personal success. These areas cover many crucial issues which plague present day work comprising promotion of skills, career building, skills competition, education and training, international cooperation, and research.

National statistics show India is currently facing a severe shortage of well-trained skilled workers. And Prime Minister Modi has drawn attention to the fact that hardly 23 per cent of workers undergone formal vocational training. Shockingly, compare this with skill attainment elsewhere --- 68 per cent in UK, Germany 75 per cent, US 52 per cent, Japan 80 per cent and 96 per cent in South Korea. Highlighting that the overwhelming majority of the employed workforce in India has no formal training for any particular work to be certified as qualified and suitable for employment. However, schools and colleges are increasing in number and turning out lakhs of certificate and degree holders. But, a large proportion of the educated are unemployable in the job market for lack of skills and application. Importantly, the situation demands immediate remedial action.

Remember, the National Policy on Skill Development was first adopted in 2009 and revised in 2015. It set an ambitious target of providing skills to 50 crores people by 2022.

But reaching this target is no easy task given our very hostile situation where the common education system is not oriented to imparting work skills required for employment. In fact, it is no exaggeration that prejudices rule the entire educational system. Appallingly, they are seen not just in the medium of instruction, popularized subjects, extra-curricular activities or the type of management of institutions. Besides, the vocational stream has all along been associated with manual work and looked down as the road meant for academically weaker students.

Certainly, the new policy has to fight this attitude as also strive to link general education and work skills.

Towards that end, the Mission NSDM was intended to create convergence across actors and States vis-à-vis skill training activities. The Ministry was responsible for coordinating all skill development efforts across the country. Along-with removing gaps between demand and supply of skilled manpower; building a vocational and technical training framework; upgrading skills; building new skills for existing jobs and creating new avenues.

Its mission? A "Skilled

India". True, the objects envisaged are lofty and in keeping with Goals 4 and 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals which follow the Millennium Development Goals and have to be achieved by 2030. This is as an international commitment.

Notably, Goal 4 is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Goal 8 is about promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Appreciably, the Government seems to be taking the job of skills development seriously. The National Skill Development Agency, National Skill Development Corporation, National Skill Development Fund, 33 Sector Skill Councils and 187 Training partners registered in the 14 NSDC constitute the functional units of the Ministry.

Moreover, the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) launched by the Ministry is designed to enable and mobilize a large number of youth to take up outcome based skill training to become employable and earn their livelihood. Alas, India is far behind many countries in imparting skill learning notwithstanding an established non-formal institution of occupational castes passing on all kinds of skills from generation to generation.

We have successfully destroyed the institution as a relic of an unequal social order with the opportunities of home learning of great many secrets making way for sophisticated arts and crafts. Consider, our traditional pattern of life was so informal that our knowledge produces results without explaining the process scientifically. Thus, knowledge itself becomes unscientific and unacceptable on the international platform. Wherein we are left to build new organizations and develop systematic processes to impart work related learning and training. This is but one part of the story. It is combined with great changes taking place in the industrial and commercial world which have totally altered our life and requirements along-with creating a demand for new skills. Interestingly, today Creating Skills India is expected to produce a workforce capable of taking full advantage of the technological revolution and global marketing taking place world-wide to attain personal and national growth in all sectors.

Scandalously, presently, only 10 per cent of the country's total workforce receives skill training although the concept of vocational and technical education is not new to India.

Thus, the demographic advantage the country has with a large working age population as against ageing population in many developed countries will become a liability unless the workforce is educated and employable.

Studies indicate that by 2020, Western countries will face acute shortage of skilled manpower due to decline in youth population. India must gear up to avail of this opportunity and embark on a massive programme of skill education.

Specially against the backdrop of foreign direct investment (FDI) opening for retail trade which is expected to usher tremendous job opportunities. Consequently, for this skilled manpower is imperative.

---- INFA (The writer is Former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

"Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm."

--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JULY 29, 2016

Irom Sharmila: the way forward

THE killing of ten civilians by the Assam Rifles personnel in her village, Malom led Irom Sharmila to start a hunger strike for the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). Though the Supreme Court has come down on the arbitrary nature of the AFSPA, it is still in force in parts of Manipur. On Tuesday, Irom decided to call off her hunger strike. It was a landmark decision in the annals of the North East. She now plans to enter electoral politics. She had so far been fighting a personal battle against the AFSPA. Even Mahatma Gandhi's fasting was related to mass movements. Irom had become a living icon, a goddess to the people but she was hostile to the state government. She will no doubt be requested now to reconsider her decision since the Manipur government is not willing to lift the AFSPA. Irom has made the right decision as she will undoubtedly be more effective in electoral politics.

Irom Sharmila's decision to go on hunger strike was a moral act. She had raised difficult questions about the state and statecraft. The AFSPA is already subject to severe criticism for being a draconian measure. Sharmila's fast decidedly played a role in the making of a decision against the Act by the Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee and the SC taking a dim view of the enactment. The state has so far ignored these judicial rulings. The Manipur government had also criminalized Sharmila's protest. Of course, that made her a kind of Mother Courage in Manipur. She was a magnet when on fast. She will continue to be a great force in Manipur politics.

LOOKING BACK

February 22, 1989

Rs 140 crore surplus Railway budget Hike in freights, passenger fares untouched

Railway Minister Madhavrao Scindia today presented in the Lok Sabha a Rs. 140 crore Surplus Budget for 1989-90 and proposed an 11 per cent increase in freight, parcel and luggage rates while rationalizing the freight structure by revised classification of low rated commodities. He did not propose any hike in passenger fares. Mr Scindia said his proposals were expected to yield an additional revenue of Rs. 876 crore and that estimated surplus of Rs. 140 crore took into account payment of full dividend of Rs. 805 crore to the general exchequer.

He said the projected surplus was just sufficient to execute works chargeable to the development fund, such as, passenger amenities, staff welfare and computerization of reservations. "In the first three years of the seventh plan, the Indian Railways paid their full dividend to the general revenues, aggregating to about Rs. 1725 crore and also recorded a surplus exceeding the estimates in each year." As regards the financial performance in 1988-89, Mr Scindia said the reduced offering of traffic due to floods had its effect on earning. However, every attempt is being made to bridge this gap by maximizing the revenue effort in other areas, he said.

Mr Scindia said the concessions announced by him during the last two years to various deserving and needy persons to the war widows, the deaf and the dumb, the kisans, teachers, children, sportspersons and the widows of policemen and the Indian peace keeping force personnel killed in action would continue. Mr Scindia estimated the gross

traffic receipts during 1989-90 at Rs. 9,757 crore which is Rs. 381 crore higher than the revised estimates for 1988-89 and the ordinary working expenses at Rs. 7,373 crore which is Rs. 698 crore more than the revised estimates.

Laldenga not to take to arms again

Mizo National Front Chief Mr Laldenga today vowed never to take to arms and dismissed as "totally incorrect" press reports that he would return to underground hideout. The MNF Chief was addressing a Press Conference to voice complaints of malpractices and rigging in the January 21 elections to the State Assembly. Regarding implementation of the Mizoram Accord, Mr Laldenga said the MNF had faithfully adhered to the accord, whereas the Centre is yet to implement many of the clauses including that on compensation due to those whose houses had been destroyed.

Replying to a question on his joining National Politics, Mr Laldenga said he was keeping his options open and refused to elaborate. He said that he had separate meetings with National Front leaders V P Singh, and Harayana Chief Minister Devi Lal as well as Prof Madhu Dandavate. He is awaiting an appointment with Mr Rajiv Gandhi. On the issue of rigging, Mr Laldenga said complaints citing several instances of malpractices would be submitted to the Chief Election Commissioner. He charged the State Governor with master minding the rigging since he "continues to be a hardcore Congressman." He also alleged that close relations of the Lalthanhawla were posed to key positions just before the elections.

Nation gripped by Schizophrenia

By Patricia Mukhim

Since May 2014 we are overwhelmed by news from across the country which create a sense of unease. The latest one about Dalits being beaten to death for skinning the carcasses of cows is numbing. All of a sudden these identity markers are sharpening. Then we have a hyperbolic media which is now divided between those suddenly imbued with a nationalistic fervor and others who believe their role is to critique the state's perverse actions or inaction in areas that it should be seen to be more audible. The Prime Minister believes he can communicate to citizens through a monologic Maan ki Baat. There is a profound unwillingness to engage with the media and answer some unsettling questions on a host of issues. How could a super-confident aspirant to the office of Prime Minister suddenly recoil into a cocoon except when it suits him? These are conflicting messages that Mr Modi is sending. No Prime Minister should be diffident about facing the media, but Modi obviously has a congenital distrust for the fourth estate.

Why has the Hindu identity suddenly become so assertive in these times? Who or what are the Hindus reacting to? Why have Hindu symbols such as the cow suddenly become sacrosanct and political? Where is this country headed? On the one hand we seem to have embraced the neo-liberal economic paradigms which are modeled on western consumerism patterns which constantly push us to believe that "greed is good," but do not show us the way forward on how to tackle the aftermath of a greedy lifestyle. On the other hand we have people who regularly dig up obscurantist ideas and peddle them around. But they don't stop there. They castigate "others" who are not in that same league. And then there are diabolical strategists on social media to shut you up whenever you say things that are not in sync with their politics.

Somebody once said that democracy is a

peaceful way of settling differences; it replaces physical with verbal diatribes and that these verbal combats are not confined to rational arguments. Gauging at what is happening in the country today and the confounding series of actions from the lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq to others that have strong communal overtones, one is pained to note that democracy has failed us. The prime minister of this country has not taken a definite position on contentious issues. He has shied away from stating upfront what the stand of his government is; he has prevaricated at a time when he should have sent a strong message to the disciples of the RSS and the BJP that India must continue to remain a country of diverse races, communities and religions and that there is no such thing as a Hindutva agenda being carefully orchestrated.

In his book 'Hindutva: Exploring the idea of Hindu nationalism,' Jyotirmaya Sharma says that when the search for a rigid, ossified and regimented Hindu identity manifests as Hindutva and takes on the garb of an inflamed hyper-nationalism, the moment to question pieties and well worn clichés arrives. Sharma studies four thinkers, namely Vivekananda, Dayananda, Aurobindo and Savarkar and believes that the last named followed a path that sought to transform Hinduism into a rigid, codified, monochromatic entity with little scope for diversity of opinions, practices, rituals, observances and individual choices. Sharma lists out six features of Hindutva that Savarkar and his ilk promoted. First, they frowned on myths and legends and local cultures as deviating from the grand ideal. Savarkar's dream was that the Hindu nation had to be founded on racial and doctrinal unity. Second was Savarkar's idea of Hinduism as a masculine, aggressive and violent faith and it stemmed from the perception that there was a loss of masculinity of the Hindus affected mainly by

the non-violent ethos of Buddhism and Jainism. The third characteristic is that every faith must define its relationship vis-à-vis other faiths. In this third classification the thoughts of all four philosophers seems to have converged. Christianity and Islam were viewed as faiths that combined religion with conquest and therefore it was felt that a militant form of Hinduism was desirable.

The fourth element is that of spreading a sense of victimhood, conspiracy theories and a never ending threat to Hinduism which is equated to nation. The fifth characteristic of this project was to bring theology to an end since the Vedas had answers to every question on modern life, science and technology. The Puranas were rejected as being superstitious and along with it the Bhakti movement. The idea is to recreate a Golden Age by returning to the Vedas. What surprised me most was the sixth and last point of the ideal which was the introduction of invectives, abuse and contempt as part of public discourse. Adversaries to this Hindutva project had to be strictly dealt and there was no place for reason or emotion. Are we not seeing this unfolding before our eyes? What are trolls if not abusive counterpoints to criticism of Mr Modi and his government?

These six features of the Hindutva project are scary to say the least because they are now being boldly unleashed and with greater frequency since May 2014. The signs are unmistakable, although there are many apologists for the present Modi regime. In this frenzied attempt to apply the Hindutva ideals across the country, Dalits and other minorities are facing the rough end of the stick. There are attempts to curtail our culinary rights and to enforce a diet that is alien to the tribal palate. Of course, the justification is that cow slaughter is something that the state should strive to ban is mentioned in the Constitution but when were tribals ever part of the Constitution making body? The only tribal was JJM Nichols Roy and he argued vehemently for greater

autonomy in governance for tribals. Little did Nichols Roy imagine that a day would come when the Congress Party would become so effete as to be unable to defend the rights of the minorities except for making some silly noises in parliament.

In one sense therefore, there can be no intellectual progression or free-thinking in this country today. The propensity to remind the nation that every scientific invention was first mentioned in the Vedas makes us look like characters in a science fiction movie. How do we reconcile modern science with myths and selective history? For those who are exposed to liberal education, this attempt to put back the clock is jarring. One is not denying that there are values and truths that are unchanging but when such truths become the spinning wheel on which a political ideology is woven and peddled as the only truth then we have a problem. If obscurantism becomes a bulwark for power then the BJP might find itself quite friendly beyond a point. I would like to believe that the majority of Hindus in this country do not find the Hindutva project of Savarkar interesting enough to embrace because it tends towards exclusivity and cultural arrogance. Large sections of Hindus in this country, including those who voted Narendra Modi in 2014 did so not because of ideological biases but because of his promise for growth and stability. If the NDA Government decides to feverishly push forward its Hindutva agenda then it might not be as popular as it started out to be when it first came to power.

The circumstances then might have also prompted both fence sitters and traditional Congress voters to shift loyalty after suffering ten years of decrepit governance under the UPA-2 Government. That government was virtually on cease-work. There was stasis and dystopia everywhere. The BJP should never forget these extraneous circumstances that pushed the voters to favour the Lotus over the Hand.

TO THE EDITOR

Police's repressive measures

Editor,

In the wake of the killing of Burham Wani, the Hizbul Mujahideen-Commander on July 8, by our security forces, there followed the biggest funeral procession seen in 26 years of insurgency in Kashmir. It is said that more than 2 lakh sympathizers attended that massive gathering in honour of the slain militant. This incident has decidedly proved that the spirit of attaining the goal of self-determination of the Kashmiris cannot be doubted by the Govt of India's uncompromising stand with all its formidable armed forces and state-of-the-art arsenal at its disposal applied with full force. I visualize that this struggle exemplified by the Kashmiris would long sustain them synchronized with an orgy of bloodshed and untimely death on either sides of the warring factions that is, between the militants and our security forces. No wonder, the ultimate sufferers would be the living relatives of all concerned who have but to grin and bear ad infinitum, unless New Delhi boldly comes out with far reaching acceptable formula on the

pestering issues of Kashmir which has been bedeviling this state since independence.

What pains me the most on the on-going unrest in Kashmir is the wanton use of pellets fired from the security forces' guns against the restive public. It is reported that such deadly pellets have not only disfigured the victims' faces but have made hundreds to go blind for life. I can't figure out how our well-trained forces didn't aim at the agitators' less fatal body parts, but targeted instead directly at the face to effect maximum casualties. I do believe that what I see on TV visuals is only the tip of the iceberg given the fact that even the Principal press foreman and two staff of Greater Kashmir, a leading English daily published from the valley were arrested, newspapers were prevented from hitting the stands, media houses were raided, cable TV services were disrupted and all telephone facilities like mobile and landlines networks went kaput. I dread to think how people are being ruthlessly dealt with by our armed forces, giving scant respect to sanctity of human rights. This is no naïve or simplistic statement I'm making but garnered from my very own personal experience when I experienced a similar fate in the late 1970s and early 1980s when Shillong was rocked by the anti-foreigners' movement and I was a helpless witness to so many of our youth and

even senior citizens being beaten black and blue by the Central Security forces at the slightest slip-up during curfew. It was virtually a reign of terror unleashed on Meghalaya's citizens. Meghalaya was then under the B.B. Lyngdoh dispensation. However, what outraged me and caused grief in those years and which lingers in me to-date was when I visited a close friend of mine at the Shillong Civil Hospital for being severely caned by the CRPF personnel. Owing to the excessive thrashing, he could scarcely recognize me as he was totally disoriented. Indeed, it was a heart-rending experience for me. Incidentally that victim was then a lecturer in English Department at the St. Anthony's College, Shillong, which also happens to be my Alma Mater. He is also a prominent Khasi literateur. Hence, what is currently taking place in the valley of Kashmir, reminds me of similar incident forty years ago in Shillong. I pray that I shall henceforth never witness such police brutalities.

Yours etc.,
Jerome Diengdoh
Shillong - 2

Turrified!

Editor,

Oooh yes, yes, now I remember that TUR had opposed coal and limestone mining in Jaintia Hills!!!

Regarding invitation to TUR's small, rented, pentagonal office to collect their legendary manifesto and quiz members, I thought

that the Pentagon existed only in USA but then we also have one here in remote Shillong. And dear Editor, the column (TUR on the warpath, ST, Jul 25, 2016) was aptly titled because 'pentagon' and 'warpath' are synonymous. The world disorder that we get to see in the form of wars, ISIS, ISIL, foreign invasions, mayhem, terror, Paris, Brussels, Munich, Dacca and everything else that makes this earth a dangerous place to live in is a creation of the Pentagon to a greater extent. The ghoulish minds that man the Pentagon in USA are there for all of us to see. The other day I was watching an interesting discussion in a news channel where a psychology expert observed that those who work in five-sided polygon sized buildings are more likely to make disastrous decisions and orders than their counterpart in circle, square, hexagonal or other sized buildings. This we saw in the Pentagon in USA and one fear we are just perhaps eyeing the risk of turning Meghalaya, 'Turrified'.

However, thanks to the author from whom we learnt lessons on ethical journalism, pseudonyms, freedom of press, hijacking of the fourth estate and what have they. The author also used the platform how to market their manifesto through postal addresses and what they would assume if the

Demystifying symbols

By Ananya S Guha

In India we have now a new group of monitoring agencies. They are known popularly (sic!) as "vigilantes". Their duty is to monitor carcasses notably that of the cow and inflict punishment on those who are skinning them for whatever reason, commercial or otherwise. The vigilantes have been notoriously known for in turn lynching such people and making them eat the dung and drink the urine, of the cow of course. This happened in Gujarat. Such atavism in the heart of the 21st century when we are talking of using technology to usher in revolution, when we are talking of make things in our country to export, is the height of animal behaviour. Even the cow I am sure would be ashamed.

And why is this happening? This is happening because for some reason or the other we are associating the cow with a myth, a pristine belief very much dissociated with fundamental economy, that people need to use it to sell, to eke out living; that the hide of it is an animal product; that its milk is used to produce butter which we all consume. Consumerism is understood only in clever terms of market and profit. That the poor man be it the Dalit or whosoever needs to subsist is a point not only glossed over, but these people are relegated to the backwaters of an intangible mass unwanted and uncared for. In fact castigated for existing!

So let us perpetuate the myth of holiness of an abstract sanctification and bludgeon people who consume the animal and use it for petty consumerist reasons. So teach them a lesson and we as a nation must expiate for their sins. Ever since the tragic killing of Mohammed Akhlaq there has been an increased perpetuation of this myth, to the extent that consumerist habits and economics have been put in a time warp of ancient religion and art of what is sacrosanct. People have been pushed into traditional beliefs of purification supposedly antithetical to animal slaughter. Do most people really believe in this image of cow holiness? And when there is man slaughter as a result of violating this belief, who remains inviolate, the people of India who are mostly Hindus?

This is 21st century India. The whipping up of an ancient past for purely 'historical' reasons and polluting the mind with combos of myth, religion and fanaticism is not only rightist tendencies but fascist as well. There is a split personality in the nation. Outwardly it projects a myopic internationalism,

but inside it protects those who are egregious fundamentalists. Not surprisingly there was violence in Gujarat and the Dalits resisted such perversity. Violence can only beget violence. Haven't we learnt this?

Vigilante groups are best left to self examination and introspection, instead of being unwanted conscience keepers. Too many in a country with little will not only derange the social fabric, but will be blatantly retrogressive, paradoxically in the demand for progress and marching ahead with the times.

To confound economics with politics is only limited to short sighted gains. To induce fanaticism in people can also be short lived in a country which has tasted all the nuances of pluralism, multi cultural ethos in terms of ethnicity and secularism. The idiosyncratic corrupt too knows in heart of hearts that he must profess secularism to remain corrupt. Ironically it is that pervasive corruption which unites the country even in the midst of unabated jingoism.

The cow then will continue to haunt us as an inchoate symbol, a myth which we will not be able to unravel. Perpetuating this myth of expediency will only lead to more turmoil, conflict and interecne strife. Declassification of society in terms of antediluvian laws will only spell anarchy. Let's decode these ominous signs of the times. Balancing these acts of justification with fables of a certain community in UP will only create divide between people on the basis of religion and antagonism. Is that what we want? The Central Government intervened tirelessly to rescue an Indian lady from Afghanistan. The lady is a Christian, that is some proof of the Centre's commitment to the notion of secularism, but ultras and mayhem creators should not be allowed to rule the roost.

For some time now we have been working on symbols: the cow, the sun, annihilation of history covered as 'dark periods' in the country's history; these are beheading the times with false sense of history, myths and time warp. It is time we get rid of them and address realities: cold and insidious 'war' with Pakistan, which remains as intractable as ever, the ineluctable separatist thinking in J & K, the uneasy 'quiet' in North East, the plight of slums and landless labourers, the labour work force, the burgeoning poverty, floods in different states and plight of the tribal India. It is time we demystify these arcane and meaningless symbols of bigotry.

letter writers don't respond within a week. For a moment it looked like a notice being served on a tax evader.

What is this invitation to meet you all in your office and email postal address etc? You will get both flowers and fire in your chosen line and in today's world you will have to face more fire than flowers. So why bicker? We want to see a gutsier TUR here perhaps the same amount of guts that you displayed during Amit Shah's visit to town when the beef ban was at its height and when you all protested with beef eating palates in far off hills targeting his entourage. It is another thing whether Shah saw your men eating from inside his vehicle.

The author also assumes that I am suffering from a grand Brahminical / Vedic ignorance to which I can see that the author is

almost 'Turrified' and looks to be suffering from a Christian hypocrisy by drawing conclusion about a person's faith and practice from his surname. Just imagine how many you would get correct if you start predicting your brethren's faith on the basis of their surnames. So why bring faith, religion, practices into a debate which is about black diamond, uranium, effluent infested streams and all the rest of it which is more about geology and geography than the subliminal matters, which are purely personal?

Yours etc.
PK Dwivedi
Shillong - I

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.

"There is nothing like dream to create the future. Utopia to-day, flesh and blood tomorrow."

--- Victor Hugo

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Beef issue again

IT is surprising that the movement against eating and trading in beef has not shown any signs of easing. Though Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not said anything against violence done to beef users, he does not seem to support it. But no action has been taken so far. Beef is not banned in the rest of the world including Asian countries. There are of course advocates of vegetarianism abroad but nothing is said specifically against beef eating. There is no medical opinion against it. In India, a large number of people, particularly among Muslims, Christians and Dalits consume beef. Many livelihoods are dependent on cattle trade. The battle against cattle trade hits the dairy economy. That goes against the benefits of the White Revolution. What is shocking is that cow politics has caused unrest in northern India even leading to murder. And now vigilante groups have been formed causing violence and death. Gujarat has witnessed unprecedented protests by Dalits after seven members of the community were accused of having skinned a dead cow every month. In Madhya Pradesh, two Muslim women were attacked for just carrying beef.

What is regrettable is that the vigilante groups are receiving support from the BJP government at the Centre. The Union Minister for Social Justice Thawar Chand Ghelot has defended them in Parliament. He said that these vigilante groups were social organizations and added that there was a law prohibiting cow slaughter. In the first place, there seems to be doubt about the veracity of the rumours. Second, such legislation is ultra-vires of the Constitution. Third, the police are in charge of the enforcement of the law, not vigilantes. Vigilantes called Salwa Judum set up to contain Maoists in Chhattisgarh were banned officially. Why should vigilantes in the anti-beef operation be encouraged? Social organizations can address much more important issues in other matters.

LOOKING BACK

February 22, 1989

Grammy Awards

Tracy Chapman, Bob McFerrin top in pop, U2 best rockers

Singer songwriter Tracy Chapman won three Grammy Awards last night for her debut album and singer Bobby Mc Ferrin's "Don't worry, be happy" won him best pop male vocal and song of the year. Irish rockers U2 won for Rock performance by group for the single "Desire" and music video performance for "where the streets have no name." "I want to thank my family my mother, who bought me my first guitars, my sister, who's always been my best audience best critic and best friend," Chapman said tearfully as she accepted the Award for best female pop vocalist.

She won the category for her No. 1 single "Fast car", which tells of a high school dropout who supports her alcoholic father and tries to escape in her boyfriend's fast car. She also was named Best New Artist and won the Best Contemporary Folk recording category. Grammy winners are determined by balloting among members of the Academy, who are recording artists, songwriters, musicians, producers and technician. The National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences gave award yesterday in 76 categories.

Jazz singer Anita Baker claimed two Rhythm and Blues trophies as the 1st Annual Grammy Awards pre-broadcast ceremonies got under way at the Shrine Auditorium. Mc Ferrin, who performed at the ceremonies as "The Grammy Symphony Orchestra," is already a Grammy veteran with five awards. Mc Ferrin performs with no instruments beyond his

voice and body.

In the Country Music category, Randy Travis won Best Male Vocal with "Old x 10" and 1. Oslin won the female award for "Hold me." Manhattan Transfer, the closely harmonizing jazz quartet won best pop performance by a duo or group for their single "Brasil." Singer Linda Ronstadt won in the Mexican American category for her album "Canciones De Mi Padre," dedicated to her father's heritage.

PM not to address NECCC(I) meet

Prime Minister Mr Rajiv Gandhi is unlikely to come to Shillong for addressing the general conference of the North Eastern Congress(I) Coordination Committee, according to NECCC(I) General Secretary Mr B B Dutta. He told this reporter on Thursday that the Prime Minister busy as he was with the Budget session of the parliament had wanted to come on February 27 for a brief stop over. The Chief Minister did not favour the idea since the general conference was stated for February 28. The Chief Minister requested the PM for finding sometime to come over to Shillong in the near future for at least a night's halt so that a cross-section of the people could meet him, Mr Dutta informed.

The NECCC(I) meeting will be attended by over a hundred delegates from the North East including Chief Minister, PCC(I) chiefs MPs, and Central Ministers from the region. The conference among others will elect a new chairman replacing Mr Hokise Sema.

Increasing Centralization: Let states hold the purse strings

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

Some Chief Ministers have alleged that the State Governments powers are being usurped by the Centre. This was made plain at the Inter-State Council meeting recently. Undeniably, there has been a trend towards centralization of the polity wherein States have very little say in matters concerning them, national level issues are a far cry.

In fact, its is alleged, and quite justified, that the Centre has been quietly shifting subjects from the 'State List' to the 'Concurrent List' and from the 'Concurrent List' to the 'Union List'.

True, Prime Minister Modi delved on the theme of cooperative federalism but in reality inter-action with States does not take place. Think. The meeting of the Inter-State Council was being held for the first time in 10 years.

Add to this, after the winding up of the Planning Commission, the Niti Aayog does not hold consultations with State Governments about their demands. This is not all. Not a few States pointed out that the Centre keeps disregarding the recommendations of the Aayog just as it ignores the States' views.

Importantly, as the Council meeting was held after the Supreme Court's verdict on the role of Governors, there was much dissatisfaction among the non-BJP ruled States.

Apart from the West Bengal Chief Minister, those from Bihar, Delhi and even the Punjab Dy Chief Minister (BJP ally) complained that States were being denied a say in the decision-making process. Scandalously, even the agenda for the meeting was not discussed with the States.

While Tamil Nadu and many others criticized the shortfall of funds for education, West Bengal underscored that any move for pushing certain kinds of ideologies and doctrines into the syllabus in the name of improvement would be stoutly resisted.

The Centre on its part highlighted the need for Sarva Siksha Abhiyan and

emphasized that there was no reason whatsoever for lesser funds in this very important sector.

However, the most contentious matter was the Puncti Commission recommendations. Wherein, Articles 355 and 356 are proposed to be amended to enable the Centre to bring specific trouble-torn areas under its rule for a limited period.

Along-with amending the Communal Violence Bill to allow deployment of Central forces without State consent for a short period. This again, not a few felt, was an attempt by the Centre to interfere in the functioning of the States.

Raising a moot point: Can these activities not be carried out by the States? Do they need the help from the Centre? Are the States incapable of looking after internal security?

Meanwhile, State Governments finances are quite critical whereby the "States may collapse under the weight of repayment dues and interest burden by 2016-17", warned Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Interestingly, she was supported by a few of her counter-parts. All stressed that in a federal polity, the Centre should find a way out of this impasse.

Alas, the federal character of the country remains only in theory. Realistically speaking, the most important financial powers remain in the hands of the Central Government. Even the recent episode in Arunachal Pradesh underlines the fact that if the judiciary was not strong, the Central Government would merrily continue to topple Governments in Opposition ruled States.

Undoubtedly, the current trend towards centralization is nothing new. It started with Indira Gandhi whose centralization not only unified the opposition but also denigrated the Congress Party's institutions, leading to its weakening over time.

In addition, during UPA-1 and II, the central Congress leadership constantly interfered in the

affairs of States, deputing both weak and strong central leaders, such as Prithviraj Chavan and Virbhadr Singh, to govern Maharashtra and Himachal.

Consequently, the High Command's interference not only disturbed political dynamics in the States, weakened Party unity and increased factionalism. Worse, bowing to the High Command culture even today keeps its central leadership disconnected from various local organizations. Predictably, this led to the weakening of the Party organization and was largely responsible for its failure in the 2014 general election.

Obversely, Modi too has followed the same strategy and some believe that the current centralization is in line with that of Indira Gandhi, possibly the first Prime Minister to concentrate power in the Prime Minister's Office.

But the centralization of power in the Executive is not unique to the Centre. In contemporary India, most States are governed by Chief Ministers who have centralized authority in their own offices.

The power exercised by Mamata Banerjee, Jayalalithaa, Badal family, Naveen Patnaik, and the Yadav Parivar in Uttar Pradesh is well known to need recounting. Control over patronage necessitates the accumulation of power in the offices of the Prime Minister and Chief Ministers.

Additionally, to subvert the arrangements in the Constitution, the Centre would often impose 'super tax' on top of income tax and appropriate the entire revenue collected therein on the ground that it was not part of income tax collection.

Similarly, it would often impose an additional or special excise duty and appropriate the entire collection from it on the plea that it came under the purview of the Finance Commission Award.

Besides, the trend towards centralization, as States have rightly pointed out, is only manifest in States which usurp powers of the panchayats and

municipalities and plan for projects.

This tendency is again manifest in the zilla parishads which rarely consult panchayats at the sub-divisional and village levels to ascertain the projects they need and want to be implemented in a particular year. Distressingly, economic decentralization has yet to become a reality in our country.

Sadly, decisions making in gram panchayats and other tiers of the State machinery which involve the community are not being followed. Gandhi's view of involving the people and ushering in a system of decentralization --- be it in the political or economic realm ---- is not being adhered to.

Clearly, our politicians plan according to their own perspectives, read their own interests on projects dear to them which take precedence, while others are ignored.

Appallingly, the Centre too is following this policy wherein it does not think it necessary to consult States in vital matters such as internal security, education, health etc. Whatever little consultation takes place is because of the pressure of Parties which are in the opposition in States but strong in Parliament.

Obviously, when the Congress has not adhered to Gandhi's philosophy of ushering in true decentralization, why expect it from the BJP-led NDA Government.

In sum, the course correction can only happen if there is a change in perception about the need for decentralization. India's leaders, from Prime Minister Modi to Chief Ministers must pay close attention to how they manage their tendencies to centralize.

They must tread a path wherein they maintain control over their respective administrations and organizations but at the same time provide room for political ambition to reside under their wings. --- INFA

Conflict Of Religions Stop conversions

By Eduardo Faleiro

Religion has emerged as a major source of conflict across the globe. Wherein, ideological strife has now given way to the "clash of civilizations and religion would be the cause of clashes within and among nations in the foreseeable future.

Besides, as famed historian Samuel Huntington points out, the possibilities of conflict are greater in what he calls the "fault lines of civilization", those areas like India where different cultures and religions do meet. Adding, such clashes could be prevented if appropriate strategies are formulated and implemented at an early stage so as to ensure religious harmony.

How many remember that Europe pioneered the modern concept of secular democracy. But today, whilst there is an effort to accept multiculturalism and respect for all religions, there is also another perceptive of growth of racism and xenophobia. This trend is primarily due to the rapidly changing cultural and political landscape in Europe resulting from increased immigration into European countries. Alongside, the end of the Cold War, reform of the welfare State and economic globalization are transforming European society thereby creating a climate of fear and uncertainty.

Pertinently, most Europeans want a solid and stable ground to stand on, and this, they feel, can be provided by traditional churches and religion as opposed to new cathedrals and faiths. Notwithstanding, this mindset is a step backwards in the cause of religious freedom. In fact, French law is the most sweeping rule on religious minorities which currently exists in Europe. It is feared that it might pave the way for religious intolerance in France as it pursues a restrictive legislation which stigmatizes minority religions and associates them with dangerous "sects".

Recall, in June 1995, the French National Assembly established a Parliamentary Inquiry Commission Gest nee Guyard Commission, named after its Chairman and rapporteur. The Commission's purpose was to study new religious groups appearing in France which were labelled as sects wherein 172 groups were identified. Interestingly, many of these were Christian groups originating mainly from the US but some like ISKCON, Association of Sri Satya Saibaba, Brahma Kumaris, Sri Ramakrishna Mission etc were organizations relating to the Indian cultural tradition.

Resulting in the French Justice Ministry issuing a directive to all Government offices to be vigilant against abuses by these "sects" and monitor abusive cult activities. The only redeeming feature was the widespread international condemnation this law received which might reflect in its actual implementation. Add to this, the Parliamentary Commission of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution in June 1999 giving priority to prevention of "dangerous sects" which stated that "major legislation in this direction is undesirable". Even as it pointed out that any such law might interfere with the freedom of conscience and religion guaranteed by the European Convention of Human Rights.

Further, a document "The challenge of proselytism and the calling to common witness" was formulated in September 1995 by the Joint Working Group of the World Council of Churches, which represents the major Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church. This refers to "serious concerns about tension and conflicts created by proselytism in nearly all parts of the world". Defining, proselytism as "a conscious effort with intention to win members of another church" and mentions "instances in the developing world in which proselytism takes advantage of people's misfortunes and situations of poverty in villages, to induce them to change their church affiliation".

Calling for awareness of "the reality of diversity rooted in theological traditions and in various geographical, historical and cultural contexts" it also denounced "the use of coercive or manipulative methods in evangelism". Thereby, rejecting "all violations of religious freedom and all forms of religious intolerance as well as every attempt to impose belief

and practices on others or to manipulate or coerce others in the name of religion". Consequently, "proselytism could violate or manipulate the rights of the individual and exacerbate tense and delicate relations between communities and thus destabilize society".

Elucidating on the nature and characteristics of proselytism, the essay talks of extending explicit or implicit education and health care offers, material inducements and using financial resources to convert people. Along-with manipulative attitudes and practices to exploit people's needs, weaknesses and lack of education especially in situations of distress whereby they fail to respect their freedom and human dignity. This is not all. It pointed out that "while the focus is on the relationship between Christians, it is important to seek the mutual application of these principles also in inter-faith relations.

As Christians and other faiths communities complain about unworthy methods of seeking converts from their respective communities. Undeniably, the increased cooperation and dialogue among people of different faiths could result in persons respecting one another along-with deference for human freedom and dignity, thus freeing all from negative activities. Notably, it warned of organized attempts at mass conversion and re-conversion backed by financial or political power having an explosive backlash to the point of undermining public order. In India, mainline Christian theologians see both the Sangh Parivar's Hindutva ideology and Christian campaigns for evangelization of India as having a fundamentalist attitude and an aggressive methodology to achieve their respective goals.

Most Indian Christian theologians disapprove of organized conversions, favour inter-religious dialogue and express the need to study other religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and even tribal faiths, so that Christianity learns from their many valuable spiritual insights. Clearly, organized drives for conversion and re-conversion should stop as they violate the Constitution. Yet, specific legislation such as anti-conversion laws would only promote religious intolerance and animosity, could be misused by executive authorities. Hence, it is not justified from the very limited positive results obtained. Indeed, the Government should subtly promote an agreement among religious heads of all major faiths in the country and stop proselytism. Given the positive mindset of theologians belonging to different religions in India, this is doable. In sum, it is vital to ensure religious peace and harmony. Towards that end we need to formulate a national policy and an action plan to combat religious intolerance, including proselytism by creating an independent national institution. Furthermore, the Government must formulate adequate training and awareness programmes about religion and religious harmony for young leaders at all levels and bureaucrats specially the police and other law enforcement agencies, judges, teachers and social workers.

The victims of religious intolerance should be assured adequate support and speedy administrative and judicial remedies. Also, we need to combat all forms of expression which incite sectarian hatred and take action against dissemination of such material in the print, electronic and social media.

Our leaders must pay specific attention to development of vulnerable groups such as tribals, those who are discriminated and other weaker sections by providing adequate access to all citizens to education, health and employment. As also protect the religious, ethnic and linguistic identity of persons belonging to minorities. All citizens should be made part of the decision making process. What gives? --- INFA

(The writers is Ex-Union Cabinet Minister)

TO THE EDITOR

TUR's one week ultimatum

Editor,

Apropos the column "TUR on the warpath" (ST July 25,2016) I would say that an organization which deals with issues concerning lives of the people will invite reactions naturally, both adverse and inverse. In this case I found TUR comparatively mute in case of the inhuman coal mining in Jaintia Hills than their take on uranium. I wonder in which world is TUR? The penetrating modern media with its trolls, slander, name calling and all that is mentioned at the outset of this column is, after all, a common part of this medium today. People and organizations have learnt to deal with it and there are many I can say who handle them with much ease and expertise. I agree with one of the letter writer on this issue who said that the attempt of TUR to drag third party intervention and to internationalize the issue (TUR pamphleteering to Bangladesh delegates who came to the NADI Festival to oppose mining) deserves condemnation from all sensible Indians. So, there will always be those who will make their opinions and comments. And kindly don't try to advise us with your ethics in

journalism. Around 70 percent of your column was a tutorial on journalistic ethics. It claimed as if we the letter writers are pseudo goons and TUR the holiest of all. You may tune in and educate yourself how to handle opinions, criticisms, trolls and comments from Google. There are enough instances there.

Yours etc.,
A. Lyngdoh
Shillong - 4

Irom's journey

Editor,

This refers to your editorial "Irom Sharmila: the way forward" (ST July 29, 2016). Sharmila is a symbol of courage, strength and determination. 17 years after starting her hunger strike, demanding the repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, Irom Sharmila has decided to end her fast on August 9 and contest the Manipur Assembly elections as an Independent candidate. Sharmila's decision took everyone by surprise. She is the one who is respected a lot among women leaders. She is born for a cause and she has a perennial power to do it. Her non-violent resistance inspired collective protests against the Act in the north eastern States. She could make foreign media and human rights activists to recognise the problem in Manipur and small states in the north east.

While the atrocities, rapes, murders, harassment

and illegal detentions may continue, her struggle has brought positive results. She has achieved much by her act though much remains still. India's journey to nationhood has not been painless or free from blemish, but the bar for public accountability must continuously be raised. Her fast was a shame to us. The fact that she is choosing to end her fast now is just the last straw, it means our failure. Sharmila is an inspiration for India. She is a great lady with huge fighting spirit. Let us hope her dream comes true.

Yours etc.,
Vinod C. Dixit
Ahmedabad - 15

Of caste discrimination

Editor,

Kudos to Silva Marak for her brilliant letter, "Caste prejudices on the rise" (ST, July 28, 2016). Recently, researchers from Jawaharlal Nehru University and University of Maryland have covered 42,152 households across the country. A whopping 27 per cent of the members of those households shamelessly declare that they practice untouchability. There must be some more people who cling to such inhuman prejudices without categorically declaring it to a study team for the fear of legal actions against them. This showcases modern Republic India almost seven decades after the

Constitution proscribed untouchability. Where is the political will to translate the words of the Constitution of India into reality? How long will the hatred against anything which is not in conformity with high-caste-Hindu and cow-belt-Hindustan keep on snowballing? Not only does this growing intolerance jeopardize our national unity and fraternity but it also tarnishes India's image abroad. It is a shame that Indians themselves who are Dalits or eat beef are facing escalating violent intolerance, hatred and untouchability in their very own land. If India is to remain united and to do well in her foreign policy, such myopia causing agents need to be quarantined. Further, India badly needs immediate political movement and monitoring to implement Article 17 of the constitution of India which says, "Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of 'Untouchability' shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law".

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

The death of famous journalist Sydney H. Schanberg whose accounts of Cambodia on throes of civil war was the core of the prize-winning 'The Killing Fields' makes Ranjita Biswas recall her visit to the infamous site

Sydney H. Schanberg, the Pulitzer Prize winning journalist has died at age 82. For generations of readers and newspaper hacks, his name stood for integrity, compassion and daring in the face of adversity. Forty years ago, his reports in the New York Times on the situation in Cambodia with a fast advancing Khmer Rouge army brought the world closer to what was happening in this corner of South East Asia. Even more remarkable was the way he stood by his assistant from Cambodia, Dith Pran, and saw to it that his family was flown out safely to the USA. Dith Pran was thrown into a hard labour camp, survived, escaped through the Thailand border, and could join his family after a couple of years.

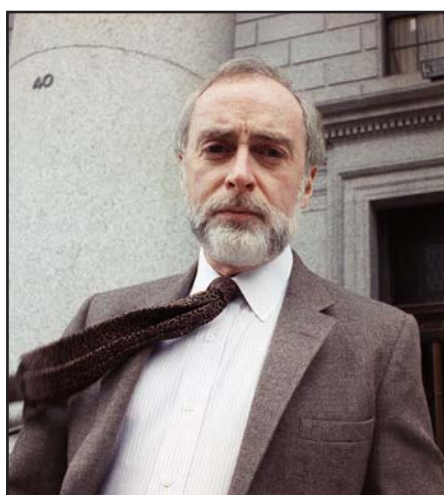
Schanberg's personal story of the days in Cambodia before it plunged into anarchy was later turned into the Oscar-winning film *The Killing Fields*.

Thinking of the demise of Schanberg brought me memories of visiting the location of the 'killing fields' at Choeng Ek, not far from Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital. Here the country keeps alive the memories of those horrific times, much like the Holocaust sites in Europe, as if to etch in human consciousness what can happen if a twisted ideology and a sadistic ruler combine to destroy one's own country. Pol Pot, the Khmer Rouge supreme had let loose a reign of terror seldom seen in post World War time anywhere in the globe.



PHNOM PENH AT ROYAL PALACE GROUND

Death and courage



Sydney H. Schanberg

Thousands died of starvation due to an experiment to turn the country into a Utopian agrarian economy at one stroke, execution for

perceived opposition to the regime or even for being 'educated'. Dith, in fact, survived the camp by pretending to be illiterate.

More than a million country men are estimated to have been killed during the Pol Pot regime between 1975-79 till the Vietnamese guerrillas took over.

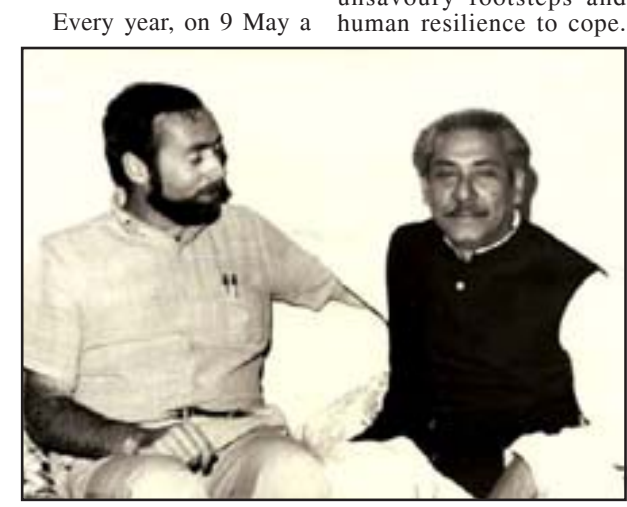
A memorial glass stupa built in 1988 at Choeng Ek displays some 8000 skulls of those who were condemned to death,

earning it the sobriquet 'Bone Museum'. In 1980, the remains of the dead, many of whom were bound and blindfolded, were exhumed from mass graves in



memorial ceremony is held at Choeng Ek. Not far from here is the Genocide Museum at Tuol

Every year, on 9 May a memorial ceremony is held at Choeng Ek. Not far from here is the Genocide Museum at Tuol



Sydney H. Schanberg with Banga Bandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1972.

memorial ceremony is held at Choeng Ek. Not far from here is the Genocide Museum at Tuol

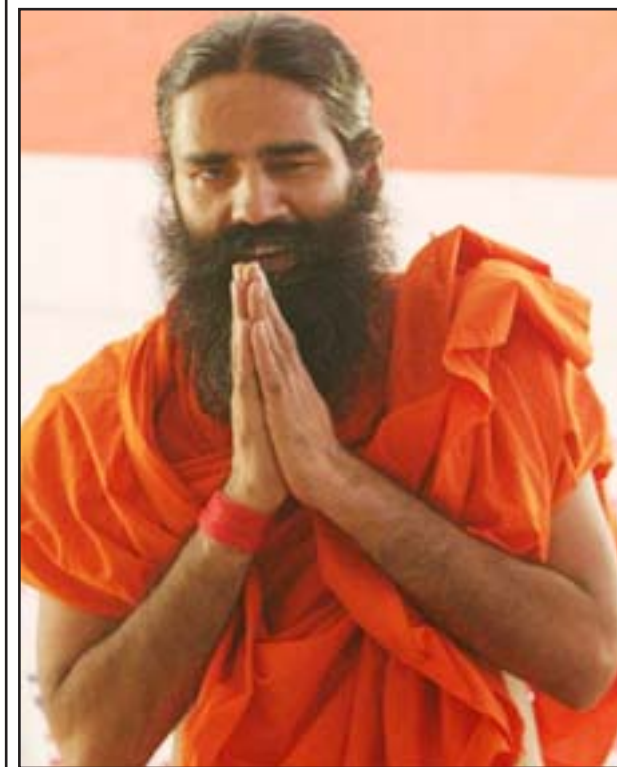
Sleng which was an infamous torture chamber of Pol Pot's security forces. Originally it was the Tuol Svay Prey High School which was turned into a prison known as Security Prison 21 (S-21). Between 1975 and 1978 more than 17,000 people were held at S-21 and then taken to Choeng Ek, for execution or burial. Like the Nazis the perpetrators kept meticulous account of the prisoners and the cruel interrogation methods which are now displayed in B&W pictures at the museum. Indeed, it needs mental fortification to encounter these pictures. Only seven had survived this prison out of the thousands.

Yet, while going around Cambodia with its gentlemanly people and swaying green fields, it's hard to believe that it had spouted a monstrosity like Pol Pot and his army of deviants.

In Phnom Penh, the Royal Palace with its white buildings with maroon and yellow panels, the Silver Pagoda and famed Emerald Buddha, temples with fluted roofs, graceful women dancers enacting the story of the Ramayana, denote a country of high culture. Not to forget, the vast complex at Angkor Wat of Khmer Rouge empire that never stops to astound.

The memorial at the killing fields, the limbless men, women and children paying the price of stepping on mines left behind by the defeated Khmer Rouge but now picking up the threads, playing music or learning to cope, remind of history's unsavoury footsteps and human resilience to cope.

Portrait of a Swami as superstar



Baba Ramdev is all you could hope for from a guru. An aggressively luxuriant beard frames his almost manically lopsided smile. Clad entirely in orange, he is fantastically charismatic, occasionally enigmatic and belches with authoritative ease while waxing lyrical on the wonders of yoga. So far, so cranky. But those under the illusion that swamis such as Baba Ramdev belong to bygone era-to an India of maharajahs and rope tricks, if one ever really existed-should think again. Baba Ramdev will pull in revenues of at least Rs.20 million this year. He represents a new generation of superstar lifestyle leaders, one that is gaining ever-greater traction both commercially and ideologically among the subcontinent's newly affluent middle classes.

It is an intriguing sales pitch. "I foresee nobody suffering from pain," Baba Ramdev tells at his 500-acre headquarters in Haridwar, a pilgrimage town built on an especially propitious spot where the Ganges emerges from the Himalayas.

Vegetarianism, breathing exercises and ayurvedic medicinal treatments (which range from having warm oil drizzled over one's body to the less-pleasant -sounding induced vomiting) are central to this vision—but so are population control, compulsory voting, and end to corruption and swadeshi (a kind of economic nationalism). "With this, perhaps India will be a superpower in 15 or 20 years," he says.

The blend of what many in the West will no doubt dismiss as new age mumbo jumbo-Baba Ramdev has claimed, for instance, that yoga can cure HIV/AIDs-with something more overtly rational encapsulates this swami's style. Baba Ramdev has popularised yoga across India over the past decade through a combination of plain speaking, fierce diatribes against Western lifestyles and cable TV channel. He spends part of each 18-hour working day in his laboratory, seeking empirical proof of yoga's worth.

Baba Ramdev's views on topics ranging from George Bush (Contd on P-VII)

I'm proud of my Indian heritage: Rachel Roy

Born to a Bengali father and Dutch mother, American fashion designer Rachel Roy, whose client list includes the likes of Michelle Obama and Penelope Cruz, is proud of her Indian heritage, and says India has influenced her work in many ways, especially the colours and prints in her designs.

"My father is Indian and I've been very fortunate to travel to India several times. This is my second trip in the last few years and I am bringing my daughter Ava again. She joined me on my last trip where we visited New Delhi, Agra, and Goa," Roy said during her recent visit to India to judge the 2016/17 International Woolmark Prize India, Pakistan and Middle East regional final held in Mumbai.

"It's always an emotional experience for me as I'm quite proud of my Indian heritage and also quite passionate about philanthropic causes I'm involved in, including Children's Hope India and World of Children," added the designer in an email interview.

The Rachel Roy brand debuted in 2004 and for over a decade. She has built her ready-to-wear and accessories business into a globally recognised brand with categories including jewellery and home products.

Talking about India has influenced her designs, Roy said: "It has influenced so many parts of my life from design to beauty to accessories. I have a



American designer Rachael Roy

love of colour and print... And that was definitely influenced by my Indian side of the family. I

remember my aunts putting on kohl on their eyes and loving the ritual and process -- it felt really special for me to watch them," she said.

"Fashion for me is very reflective of culture, a large part of that starts on the streets.

When I travel, I make it a point to spend a great deal of time people-watching - seeing what people are wearing as they are in the throws of their life. It's inspiration to me as I sit and pull together inspiration for collections," she added.

It's not just the country that fascinates her, but also the creations of some Indian designers.

"I always love what Bibhu (Mohapatra) and Waris

(Ahluwalia) do and have been watching people like Manish Malhotra, Payal Singhal and Priyanka Lama. India holds a special place in my heart, so I look for growth and success of designers and businesses with roots to the country," said Roy, who added that she would love to expand into India when the time is right.

"Everyone is so welcoming when I spend time here that it would be amazing to be able to establish a longer term relationship," added the designer, who also has Kate Hudson, Kim Kardashian and Sharon Stone as clients.



Rachel Roy with Kim Kardashian

In addition to running her successful brand, Roy is a sought after speaker on topics ranging from entrepreneurship to philanthropy and has shared her story and experiences at forums ranging from the White House to the Fortune Next Generation conference along with other various women's empowerment summits.

Also a member of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, Roy was one of the few judges at the regional round of 2016/17 International Woolmark Prize. She says supporting young talent is important for her.

"Design, like so many other disciplines, is about communicating your point of view and using your voice. Your voice strengthens and changes as you progress in your career and life, and I think it's critical to help young designers find their voice," she said.

Roy also says that funding has always been a struggle for those starting out as capital is needed to take a business to a new level.

"Fashion is a business, it is important to understand that from the very beginning. Designers are really taking control of the business side of things from Alexander Wang and Christopher Bailey being both the CEOs of their businesses and running the design side as well," she said.

By Jaideep Sarin

Punjab's teen singing sensation

She took to singing when she was just seven and has, just a decade later, turned into a star of sorts within her community as she dared to wear her caste on her sleeve.

Meet Ginni Mahi, a 17-year-old from Punjab's Jalandhar town who has no qualms about being from the lower stream of the caste divide in the country.

Through her music video 'Danger Chamar', which she released last year (2015) and has notched up thousands of likes on YouTube, Ginni says that she has tried to break the shackles of the caste system that has been prevalent in the country's society for centuries.

Ginni comes from the scheduled castes and is not shy to say that she is a 'chamar', a low caste that used to be looked down upon by the caste-divided society till the constitution put a ban on doing so. The 'Danger Chamar' title for the song, according to Ginni, came after one of her friends in college here asked about her caste.

"The thought of creating a song (on the caste divide) came when I was asked about my caste in college. When I said that I was a charmar, the girl said that chamars are quite dangerous," said Ginni, a devotee of 15th century saint Ravidas.

Ginni says that through her song, she has tried to point out that the chamars, a word considered derogatory under the law, are "dangerous to the extent that they can sacrifice anything to fight injustice".

She belongs to the Ravidassia community, which has a large following in Punjab's Doaba region

(the extremely fertile belt between the Sutlej and Beas rivers). The community is a part of the scheduled castes. Sant Ravidas is revered in Punjab as a Dalit icon. The video portrays her

Ambedkar is popularly known as "Baba Sahib".

Ginni's popularity through her songs has grown within Punjab's Dalit community and her bold endeavour has helped in its empowerment.

At 32 per cent of its nearly 28 million population, Punjab has the highest percentage of Dalits among all states. A majority of the community is based in the Doaba belt.

The teen-ager-singer hit the social media platforms through her first album, "Guruaan di Diwani" that came out in 2015. Her popularity can be gauged from the Rs 30,000-per performance she

attracts in the market. But Ginni does not want to sing community-based songs alone. Her ambition is to hit it big as a playback singer in Bollywood's music industry "so that I can reach out to a bigger audience". Her love is for devotional and Sufi songs.

Her parents, Rakesh and Paramjeet Kaur Mahi, are solidly behind Ginni in her pursuit of singing excellence.

(The writer can be contacted at jaideep.s@ians.in)



By Veturi Srivatsa

Mohammed Shahid: A gem of a 'partner'

Mohammed Shahid's stickwork defied description, it was sheer enjoyment. He knew by the time he left the hockey scene that the game did not need the skills he had so well exhibited out in the field with his truly breathtaking feints.

Everyone hoped the mercurial Shahid should and would live longer than mere 56 years. That was not to be and he breathed his last on Wednesday.

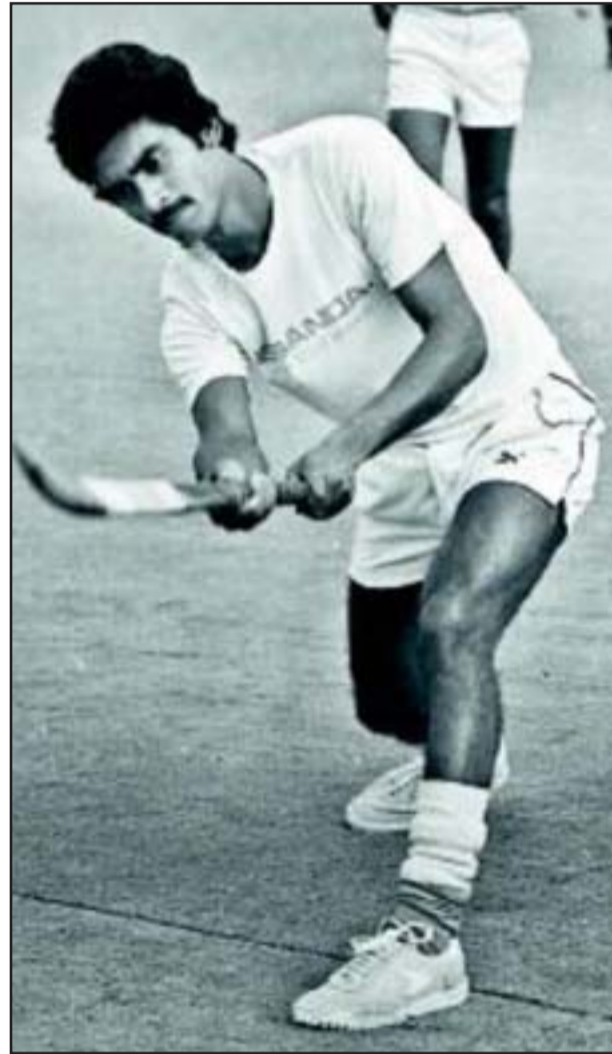
Shahid never wanted to leave his Varanasi and the Ganga and relocate to a bigger city where he would have had much better opportunities to showcase his game.

He was a man of small pleasures enjoying with his

When he had to leave his beloved Varanasi, he had to be airlifted to Delhi for specialised treatment at a major corporate hospital in Gurgaon. But, it was too late and only his mortal remains returned to his hometown.

It is always difficult to compare stalwarts of different eras. People who watched Dhyana Chand thought he was rightly called the wizard and then came the Balbirs, Gentles and Udams.

In the 1960s, Inamur



family and close friends.



Mohammed Shahid

imagine if only hockey continued to be played on natural grass how anyone would have coped with Shahid's brilliance. His stickwork would have been a great sight.

When people talk of India losing its hockey skills, they actually mean that there are no Shahids in the game. He would surely have been a great player to watch even in this hit-and-run era where they say the third touch with stick has to result in an attempt at the target.

When Shahid arrived, the debate got more exciting though most agreed that his splendid dribbling was something truly special. His contemporaries in the Indian team as well as his opponents watched him in awe trying to match his speed and skills.

Zafar Iqbal thinks no end of his pal. The two looked to be made for each other. They made hockey so simple and pleasurable pursuit -- they were a class act. It would be interesting to

chance for his teammates to

players, was humble and never spoke in anger. He would softly differ with the kind of hockey being played today. Unlike Inam, who refused to watch hockey even on television, Shahid watched it but expressed unhappiness with the style of play that is being passed off as hockey.

Yes, Shahid, perhaps, was the last of his tribe and as Dilip Tirkey, the former India defender and captain, said that it's time the authorities thought of every deserving sportsperson, not only cricketers.

Shahid addressed his teammates and friends as "partner" and all of them are today missing a gem of a partner both on and off the field.

(The writer is a senior journalist and the views expressed are personal. He can be reached at sveturi@gmail.com)



Mohammed Shahid with his first captain Vasudevan Bhaskaran

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, July 31, 2016

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon sextile Mercury on your solar return chart is indicative of some positive developments from which you can benefit. Your acumen will help you to understand the fast developing situation at various levels during this year. Professionally you would have an edge over rivals so make the most of this to drive your advantage home. You will gain from group dynamics as you step up your personal and professional interactions. A long awaited celebration in the family may take place. Romantic relationships intensify and you feel more secure emotionally. Some minor health ailment may crop up so take adequate care.

This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) You are likely to swing to extremes in this period, sometimes happy, celebratory and at other times heavy, serious and even low. Professional situations and personal relations are sensitive and tend to go through ups and downs. Finances and material effects need to be evaluated; do not make investments or speculate heavily. This would be the right time to concentrate on your career prospects and professional skills. A healthy body holds a healthy and positive mind - work towards this.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) The planetary configuration brings to the fore activities related to communications, competition and examinations. You feel touchy and sensitive but would be more accommodating and compassionate in relationships. You would create a work of art in your field of activity. This brings success and good fortune at work and opens new horizons for expansion. This is the right time to participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you. Sports and physical activities keep you fit and energetic.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) This week highlights friendship, love, romance, spirituality and children in your life. There would be positive results from written and oral communication. Short trips, shopping, and journey are on your agenda. This is a good time to promote harmony and good relations with people around you. You are also dealing with issues that force you to rid yourself of guilt about under-performing, and to develop faith and trust in a larger more spiritual plan. It's time to let go of some of your fears that you are not doing enough; to develop more compassion and understanding of others, and to be humble, feeling content in the knowledge that you are putting in your best.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) This week brings mixed results for you. After dealing with tough people and complicated issues you feel much stronger and clearer about your priorities. You are compassionate and generous with family, friends and relatives, drawing respect from them. It's also important to let go of some of your obsessions with rules, details, and fears of not doing things perfectly. The movement is towards a more balanced approach to dealing with practical, worldly matters and your own spiritual growth. Health needs extra care and old habits detrimental to your health need to be discarded.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) Mixed results are indicated this week. If you feel especially angry, frustrated or restless, it would be great to find a little more work and things to do so that you can channel excess energy constructively. Your heart and head pull you in different directions when domestic and family related decisions are to be addressed. Communications and business associates from overseas bring good news and offer lucrative opportunities. A marriage proposal is worth considering. Children may be a stronger focus as well. Sponsoring or supporting other people would be rewarding. New or changed responsibilities around the home or towards family also figure at this time.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) This phase indicates income and gain from investments and speculations. This is a time of increased psychological understanding, intimacy, and perhaps accumulation of wealth if you manage your

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

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) An intimate relationship develops or figures strongly in this period. Learning to share on a personal level brings you some measure of joy. Money matters make big headlines. A bigger drive for security is with you and re-organizing your home and domestic life comes into play. Other people's money may come your way or you might secure some real estate. You adopt new styles and invest in clothes, jewelry, perfumes and this brings color and glamour in your life. Your thoughts turn to children, pleasure and romance. You focus on having fun, enjoying sports and expressing yourself efficiently. You maintain a fitness routine and a healthy diet program.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) The planetary configuration brings mixed results for you. A partner's resources could have a significant impact on your home life. Finding joy in developing intimacy is featured, and this is a time where you develop and enhance your love on a deeper level. Work could be moving towards more research and development. The work you do could be supported by your spouse or other people's money in general, such as work in finance. You achieve success as you are brilliant and there is good fortune attending professional, personal and material aspects.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) This phase brings new associations and beginnings in work areas as new opportunities and changes may come about. You are likely to see benefits in the areas of finances, shared resources, personal transformation, research, investigation and emotional matters. An insurance settlement, tax rebate, could come your way, and this is an excellent time to work on financial planning and strategy. Financial gains may come through a partnership or there may be an increase in income. Benefit can come through jointly held resources, loans, or taxes. You need to be aware of the areas that could add value.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) You would enjoy making things that are beautiful and you succeed in areas that require an aesthetic sense as well as technical ability. You would compromise and adjust and take a softer approach while dealing with people at work and home. It's a passionate time, although you are unlikely to be displaying a whole lot of self-discipline. This is a time when you could get a mortgage or other property- and home-related financial backing. You would get serious about home, family, and domestic concerns. Health food, yoga and meditation would help to overcome from health problems.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) The ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on the cards. Sharing your interests and communication with your loved one may be especially appealing to you. Family obligations may get in the way of your experience of pleasure and of the achievement of your personal goals. There may be some emotional distancing as well in your home. Your current living conditions may feel restrictive, limiting, too small or cramped (physically and/or emotionally). Delays and slowdowns may be experienced in the areas of health, mobility, and career.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) This period brings wisdom, knowledge and creativity in your behavior and cooperation and harmony in personal relationships. Your drive for personal freedom and insistence on your rights is pressing, and a confrontation in which you have to stand up for yourself is likely. You certainly don't like to follow orders. Do your best to avoid impulsive decision-making that is built upon your desire to be a free spirit. You may recognize talents that you never knew you had, and this can be a sudden, exciting discovery. A health program finds favour with you.

Portrait of a Swami as superstar

(Contd from P-VI) (thumbs down) make national headlines. His 5-30 a.m. yoga TV show attracts 20 million viewers a day and his monthly magazine has a circulation of 1 million. Last month he shared a stage with the Dalai Lama and politicians clamour to be pictured with him. Besides the TV show, there are books, DVDs, CDs, medicines, soaps, oils, even a soft drink for sale on line. Baba Ramdev's organisation runs a dental clinic, an eye clinic, a surgery for minor operations and owns a large farm. A pathology lab boasts the latest machines imported from Germany and Japan. His open-air yoga classes regularly attract crowds in excess of 10,000 where all but poorest pay a mandatory "donation" of up to Rs. 100.

He has just held his first yoga cruise. About 1,000 devotees paid nearly Rs. 83,000 each to tour the high seas of South Asia for eight days. Devotees range from India's IT professionals to their maids, cooks and drivers. The only people whom it is hard to imagine as fans are India's ultra-rich and Western businessmen. "A Mukesh Ambani (India's richest man) cannot make a country great," Baba Ramdev says. "Rich business men snatch the wealth of the poor." Later, he accuses Western companies of

"looting" India. The thing is, Baba Ramdev's pronouncements often diverge only a shade from those made by seemingly more sober commentators. When he adds that

India could succumb to a civil war triggered by growing inequality, the prediction may sound outlandishly apocalyptic but the Mumbai head of equities trading for a leading Western bank shared the same thought.

This year Baba Ramdev is on course to turn over about Rs. 20 million, fund that will be ploughed into his Divya Mandir Yog Trust, a charity that offers subsidised medical services and carries out scientific research on the benefits of yoga. "I own not an inch of land, nor do I own a single rupee," he says.

One of the trust's projects involves a tie-up with the Indian Army, which wants to know whether practising yoga at boot camp makes for better soldiers. The findings should be heeded by those whom Baba Ramdev sets his sights against and anybody who thinks that yoga is for peaceniks, particularly if he is right about that civil war.

The early indications are that new recruits who do more yoga than regular military-style exercise have stronger grips and steadier hands: all the better to shoot their enemies. (By Swami Maheshcharyanand)

