*"Keep me away from the wisdom which does not cry, the philosophy which does not laugh, and the greatness which does not bow before children."*

**--- Theodore I. Rubin**

**The Shillong Times**

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## Beginning of instability?

NOW that the Congress has got 21 MLAs after clinching the Ampati seat, there will be machinations galore to try and topple the NPP- led MDA Government and to form a coalition government at whatever the cost. The opposition Congress is today the single largest party in Meghalaya following the victory of Miani D Shira, daughter of former Chief Minister, Mukul Sangma who defeated the. NPP candidate Clement G Momin by 3191 votes. It's not as if the results were unexpected. Mukul Sangma has nurtured Ampati since 1993 and the reason he vacated it and retained Songsak is because he was sure of winning it back for his daughter. It would take a while for the people to abandon a leader who has gone out of the way to bring development to Ampati often at the cost of other deserving constituencies.

Meghalaya has had a chequered history of political instability for several decades. It was the first to experiment with a coalition government. There has been infighting and leadership tussles in the Congress Party in the past which has led to change of chief ministers midstream. After what happened in Karnataka where the Congress and JD (S) have teamed up to form the Government after the BJP chief ministerial candidate Yeddyurappa resigned because he could not cobble up the numbers, the Meghalaya Congress too had started making noises that it would form the government if it wins the Ampati seat and becomes the party with the single largest majority. The MDA Government comprises 20 MLAs of the NPP, 7 of the United Democratic Party, 4 MLAs of the Peoples Democratic Front, 2 each from the HSPDP and the BJP besides an MLA each of the NCP and 1 Independent. The question is whether the UDP with the largest number of MLAs will agree to rock the MDA boat and jump ship which looks like a remote possibility at this juncture. But the MDA has to get a grip on the law and order situation which seems rather tenuous at this point. One achievement of the Mukul Government was its ability to keep riotous elements in check. This is critical to keep Meghalaya on an even keel.

**LOOKING BACK**

**May 24, 1989**

## 7 hard-core ultras among 18 killed

Seven hard-core terrorists, including two self-styled Lt. Generals of the "Khalistan Commando Force (KCF)", were among the eighteen people killed in Punjab during the past 24 hours. A KCF terrorist Paramajit Singh alias Pamma escaped from police custody while security forces nabbed 20 ultras including seven intruders from Pakistan.

Punjab police chief Mr K.P.S. Gill told UNI that security forces gunned down Darshan Singh alias Sushak in Desai village in the Mand area of Kapurthala district .

Mr Gill said Darshan Singh, who carried a reward of Rs. 25,000 was wanted in several terrorist cases.

# Why Meghalaya needs a better Citizen's Charter

***By Patricia Mukhim***

The basis of good governance is responsiveness of the administration, transparency and accountability. But these are mere words that don't actually translate into action. A very good example is the delay even in getting a Schedule Tribe certificate from the Office of the District Administration. While people can fill their forms online, they still need to get the signature of the official concerned because we have not graduated to electronic signatures. It is in fact a painful task to have to enter a government office to get any kind of work done. If you have no connections and don't know anyone be sure you will have a hard time getting even what is due to you. Such is the kind of government we are used to for decades. The reason is because there is no system of penalising officers for undue delay in discharging their public duties.

Good governance is still a far cry in Meghalaya yet good governance is the basis for sustainable economic and social development. Hence the need for a more robust Citizens' Charter. This is an initiative to push government to solve the problems which a citizen encounters day in and day out, while dealing with the organisations providing public services. The Citizens' Charter declares the standards for various services offered. If the services provided fall short of those standards the public can complain and get their grievances addressed. The Citizens' Charter was first implemented in the United Kingdom by the Conservative Government of John Major in 1991 as a national programme with aim of improving the quality of public services.

In India the Citizens' Charter was initiated in 1997. There was a directive that for the formulation of the Charters, the government agencies at the Centre and State levels should constitute a task force with representation from users, senior management and the cutting edge staff. Until April, 2006, 111 Citizens' Charters had been articulated by the Central Government Ministries/ Departments/ Organisations and 668 Charters by various agencies of State Governments & Administrations of Union Territories. The aim of the Citizens' Charter is to (a) to make administration accountable and citizen friendly (b) to ensure transparency (c) to improve customer service (d) to adopt a stakeholder approach. (d) To save time of both administration and the citizen.

The fundamental objectives of a Citizens' Charter are to empower the citizen in relation to public service delivery by adopting certain measures. The establishment of the Consumer Protection Forums in the districts and the State Consumer Disputes Redressal Forum at the State level to function as an appellate court has helped many aggrieved consumers to redress their grievances. However, lack of awareness about the function of these public institutions has resulted in a very dismal number of complaints coming to the Forums and much less to the State Commission. One deterrent for consumers is to have to employ legal counsels since the defaulting companies/ commercial establishments/ individuals use lawyers to fight their cases. While educated people represent their own grievances, the uneducated find that a huge challenge. And despite the fact that the adjudication process is tilted towards the consumers, the fear of a legal wrangle and injudicious delays puts consumers on the defensive. The Consumer Courts are just one example of providing relief to citizens. But there are several areas of governance where people just don't know which doors to knock and how to access government services.

Now what are the salient features of a Citizen's Charter? They comprise (a) Agreed and published standards for service delivery (b) Openness and information about service delivery (c) 'Choice' and Consultation with users (d) Courtesy and helpfulness in service delivery; and (d) Provision of redressal of grievances.

In terms of standards the Charter should lay out explicit standards of service delivery so that users understand what they can reasonably expect from service providers. These standards should be time-bound, relevant, accurate, measurable and specific. The actual performance vis-à-vis the standards adopted must be published and independently validated. The tendency among organizations to develop targets and standards based on their own convenience as opposed to the needs of the citizens is to be avoided.

Information and openness: A key attribute of good service is the availability of relevant and concise information to the users at the right time and at the right place. The Charters should contain, in plain language, full and accurate information about services available, levels and quality of service to be expected, available channels for grievance redressal etc. Handbooks, guides, posters, websites are some of the channels through which information can be provided to citizens.

Choice and consultation: The Charter should provide choice of services to users wherever practicable. There should be regular and systematic consultation with the users of the service to fix service standards and to ascertain quality of service delivery.

Courtesy and helpfulness: The Charter can help embed a culture of courteous and helpful service from public servants. In addition, small initiatives such as 'name badges', 'May I help you' counters etc. can go a long way in building customer confidence.

Grievance redressal and complaints handling: There is a strong link between the provision of quality service and effective handling of complaints. Firstly, by facilitating and responding to complaints, the causes for complaint can be reduced. Secondly, by identifying 'trends' in complaints, the service provider can resolve systemic and recurring problems.

The Meghalaya Citizen's Charter lists out 20 Departments which interestingly includes Printing and Stationery Department (as if this Department is of any great public welfare), the Home Police Department, and Health Department etc. The Citizens Charter for Health says (a) To maintain minimum (?) standards of service at all institutions (b) To upgrade the skills of doctors nurses, doctors and other cadres from time to time (c) to ensure preventive, promotive and curative services to all peoples (d) to tackle all kinds of communicable and non-communicable diseases (e) to tackle outbreaks of epidemics (f) to undertake construction and maintenance of the buildings of the Department (g) to oversee postings, transfers and deployment of staff in the Department (h) To procure and maintain logistic (medicines, equipments etc) hospital infrastructure at district level.

There is no Citizens' Charter on key Departments like Education, PHED, PWD and Power. Without a Citizens' Charter how do we know the objectives of Education in Meghalaya and how can citizens redress their grievances? Most of us are supplied contaminated water or no water at all. Where do we get our grievances redressed? And what about our roads? Has anyone travelled towards Union Christian College, Umbir and Mawlyndep? The road is or whatever is left of it is beyond any description and has caused many a slipped disc but who cares? And without a Citizens' Charter how can we address this outrageous Government apathy? Of course the previous government must take the blame for this. And then what about Power and the ridiculous outages? Short of taking the MeECL to the Consumer Court there is no other redressal forum.

The State has created a web-based application under the Meghalaya Public Grievance Redressal & Monitoring System (megPGRAMS) with the URL http://megpgrams.gov.in and seeks online registration of public grievances. The problem is that the last person in the villages who suffers the most can't access this service because she is not tech-savvy and there is no one at the BDO's office to register her complaints. Forget about registering complaints the villagers are considered intrusions into the even keel of life of the babus and they are treated with disdain for daring to lodge a complaint against them.

While crafting out the Citizens' Charter the Government of Meghalaya should have consulted members of the public who are at the receiving end. But obviously this exercise is yet another "sarkari" duty that needed to be completed because a compliance note has to be sent to the Central Government. Hence this is the weakness of the Meghalaya Citizens' Charter, whose existence I suspect many of us may not even be aware of. The Social Audit Act becomes meaningless if we don't have a robust Citizens' Charter.

Will civil society groups take up this matter and will the MDA Government go through the present Charter and bring the other important Departments in its ambit?

By-Poll results give big boost to opposition unity

# Modi magic has not worked at all

***By Amulya Ganguli***

The writing is on the wall. It is now obvious that a united opposition can defeat the BJP. As much is clear from the Kairana and Noorpur by-election results which are a continuation of the anti-BJP trends noted earlier in Gorakhpur and Phulpur.

These outcomes are of particular interest because they pertain to U.P. where the BJP won 71 of the 80 parliamentary seats in 2014. The party's dependence, therefore, on the need to put up a good show in the state is obvious if it wants to win the next general election. However, Kairana and Noorpur have been a dampener for the party. The results in these constituencies must also be disheartening for the U.P. chief minister, Yogi Adityanath, who is regarded as the BJP's poster boy.

It will not do for the BJP to describe the alliance between the RLD, the SP, the BSP and the Congress in Kairana as opportunist because it had constituted similar tie-ups in Goa, Manipur and Meghalaya. Surely, what is opportunism for the BJP's opponents cannot be deemed "principled" for the saffron party.

What the verdicts in U.P. have also highlighted is the failure of the BJP's communal agenda which again came to the fore during the sudden raising by the saffron cadres of the issue of a portrait of Mohammed Ali Jinnah which has been on display in Aligarh Muslim University since 1938. If the BJP's polarization tactic failed, so did the idea of Narendra Modi's charisma which could not influence the Kairana and Noorpur results despite the prime minister's rallies and roadshows in nearby areas.

Clearly, the promise of vikas is not working either because development is not taking place at least where the question of employment is concerned or that the claims about growth are seen as a jumla or a deceitful tactic since the saffron brotherhood's real focus is not on the economy but on creating Hindu-Muslim rifts as could be seen from BJP M.P. Vinay Katiyar's observation that the Muslims have no right to live in India and should go to Pakistan or Bangladesh.

If the Karnataka outcome showed that Modi's 21 rallies were not enough to swing an election in the BJP's favour, the U.P. verdict was a further confirmation of the possibility that the Modi magic is fading.

It is not only the BJP which appears to be in trouble, even its ally in Bihar, the Janata Dal (United), must be realizing the mistake it made when it switched its allegiance from the "secular" maha gathbandhan (grand alliance) to the BJP.

If Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar wanted to get away from the dominance of the RJD leader, Laloo Prasad Yadav, it was a miscalculation in the sense that he came under the BJP's domination instead which has apparently not gone down well with not only the minorities but also the people of the state in general who do not like to see their chief minister being at the BJP's beck and call. Hence, the RJD's success in Jokihat, which is the third successive victory of the RJD in recent months after its successes in Araria and Jehanabad.

There is little doubt that the Jokihat result will induce rethinking in the Nitish Kumar camp not only about the ties with the BJP but also about his favourite prohibition policy as it evidently hasn't enhanced his popularity.

The BJP, on its part, will draw some comfort from its success in Palghar over the Shiv Sena. But what it may be worried about is the possibility of the Shiv Sena joining the "secular" parties in an anti-BJP formation at least in Maharashtra if not in the rest of the country. The reason why there may be such an unlikely combination is that it will not be easy for the Shiv Sena to overturn its strident anti-BJP rhetoric of the past several years and make up with its senior partner in Maharashtra. With the NCP faring well in Bhandara-Gondia, it may not be entirely fanciful to see a formal or informal Congress-NCP-Shiv Sena alliance in the state.

If anti-incumbency saw the defeats suffered by Yogi Adityanath's government in U.P., it had no impact on the governments in West Bengal and Kerala where the Trinamool Congress and the CPI(M) have won in Maheshtala and Chengannur, respectively. The former's success shows that the countrywide outrage over the violence during the recent panchayat elections in West Bengal has had no effect on Mamata Banerjee's image. Similarly, the unfortunate CPI(M)-RSS clashes and murders in Kerala has left the Pinarayi Vijayan government unaffected.

The lesson which the opposition at the national level will have to learn is that the anti-BJP forces must swim together if they do not want to sink. It remains to be seen whether the Janata Dal (Secular)-Congress government in Karnataka will realize that it cannot give any impression of being an unstable combine even if the two parties do not appear to be natural allies.(IPA Service)

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**TO THE EDITOR**

## The MPSC Conundrum

Editor,

Taking a cue from the statement made by the MPSC Secretary (ST, 3rd May, 2018), I am very interested to know as to how the marks of candidates are being provided. My contemporaries and I had appeared in numerous MPSC screening exams and personal interviews as well. However, till date, there had never been a single time when any of us got to know the marks we secured even though we really wanted to know how we fared. Upon enquiring the MPSC staff informed us that the only way we'd get to see our marks and 'only our own' is through RTI applications. This raises many questions because knowing only my marks will not help me in any case, that also after going through the hassle of RTI application. The issue at hand is why do we have to file an RTI when the only thing we want to know is the marks of us the candidates? Isn't that our basic right?

The MPSC Chairman, in his letter, "From the Chairman's desk", mentioned that there are many who do not wish the public to view their marks even if it is displayed roll number wise. My question is, how true is this? Don't we all want to know of our performance? I am not trying to draw the exact comparisons, but the Staff Selection Commission publically displays the marks of all the candidates (along with names) despite having to conduct various exams (SSC CGL/CHSL/ Junior Engineers'/ Stenographers'/CAPF etc.,) involving lakhs of aspiring candidates. Also, in these days of employment crunch it may be noted that the same candidates are appearing in the various exams conducted by the MPSC. Adding to this, recently the NIT Meghalaya had conducted various recruitment exams whereby results were declared along with the marks of thousands of aspiring candidates of our State. Hence, it is hard to comprehend the actual reasons behind the statement.

At the same time, we the candidates do not even know the marks secured in the personal interviews. This also directly questions the integrity of the MPSC recruitments. Another problematic issue is the ratio of the number of vacancies to the number of successful-screened-candidates. Sometimes the number of vacant posts are few but far too many candidates are shortlisted for the interviews. On the other hand, there was an instance where for two vacant posts two candidates were shortlisted for the interview. If one takes keen interest on the result of the MPSC exams one would find far too many inconsistencies and discrepancies.

Nevertheless, we humbly request the Commission to take baby steps to at least make known the cut off marks of each exam and to display the marks of the successful candidates. We do understand that it may be difficult for the Commission to change the ways it has functioned all these years. However, times have changed and we expect the MPSC recruitment to be more transparent.

Yours etc.,
Batskhem Susngi,
Via email

## Honouring the Marathon Man

Editor,

Apropos the news item "CM welcomes world record creating marathon" (ST May 28, 2018), and "Sohra Marathon to resume on August 25" (ST May 29, 2018), I wish to point out that Shillong is home to the Marathon Man of India, Dr. Ashis Roy in the Record creating marathon. Though the name of Dr. Ashis Roy is not known to many but he was born on June 1, 1932 in Shillong and grew up here. Roy did his schooling at Govt Boy's High School and Intermediate Science at St. Edmund's College both at Shillong before pursuing Medical Studies (MBBS) at Assam Medical College, Dibrugarh and finally completing his MD (Medicine) at Pune University. He joined the Indian Air Force in 1957 and retired from the service as Wing Commander in 1978. Thereafter he practiced privately as consultant physician and cardiologist at Delhi where he is presently settled.

It may also be mentioned here that his father late Sudhasindhu Roy was one of the founder members of the undivided Assam Football Association, Shillong. He landed in this field as a runner for the first time at Shillong in the year 1949 when he was just 16. It was a one-mile race. At that time, perhaps the Shillong boy never thought that his first one-mile race would open the door of immense opportunity for the runner in him. His education and medical career helped him too to serve humanity. His sporting took him beyond where he could do the job more profoundly by making his body as a specimen. He completed 115 marathon races and the Mumbai Marathon, in January 20, 2013, which is a National record for men in India - "Limca Book of Records. The following records are yet to be broken:-

* Only Asian to have run the three Marathon Races in USA on three consecutive Sundays

* First man above 70 yrs to run two marathons on two consecutive Sundays at Prague and Vienna

* Only man above 70 (seventy) yrs to run three marathons within a span of six weeks.

I request the organizers of the forthcoming Rotary Sohra Marathon; School & College authorities of Govt. Boys School & St. Edmund's College and all well-wishers if they could arrange to invite Dr Ashish Roy here to his birth place on this occasion so that the Sohra Marathon is prominently featured in the national and local media and also to give due recognition to this esteemed runner.

Yours etc.,
Amit Gupta
Via email

*"It is now conventional wisdom that Americans do not care why we went to war in Iraq, that it is enough that the world is better off without Saddam Hussein."*

**--- Oliver Wendell Holmes**

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LX No.290 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, JUNE 2, 2018

## Kairana success

GORAKHPUR, Phulpur and Kairana. Little drops of water may not make a mighty ocean but repeated successes of the combined oppositions in the assembly by-poles in Uttar Pradesh should be a warning to Adityanath Yogi's BJP government. It may be an alarm signal for the 2019 General Elections. Of course, a single by-poll result is influenced by local factors, the choice of candidate, constituency-specific economic factors, chemistry of allies, alignment and movement of elites, etc. It does not fit in with the big picture. However, Kairana is not without significance. The opposition had ensured that its vote did not splinter. Its stakes were high. A large part of the BJP success was due to performance. It won 71 of 80 seats. The Kairana victory was based on the unity of the two communities – Jats and Muslims. The Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) is a party identified with the Jats. But they fielded a Muslim candidate dismissing communal polarization. The RLD was supported by the SP and the Congress and was unopposed by the BSP. It focused on agrarian distress in the UP. It highlighted the sorry plight of sugarcane growers. A sugarcane farmer committed suicide sometime before the polling. There is however, a school of thought which thinks an uneasy alliance can spell disaster. Sheila Dixit claimed that if the Congress had not joined hands with the SP, the Congress would have won the UP Assembly elections in UP.

The opposition which won the Kairana election should look to the big national picture. The opposition parties should have a shared agenda. Local grievances should be given a macro- dimension. A lesson may be drawn from Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress in West Bengal which thumbs its nose at the BJP offensive. Hardliners like Adityanath only harm the BJP national image.

**LOOKING BACK**

**May 24, 1989**

## Tripura govt clears Rs. 150 crore Methanol Plant

The Tripura Government has finalized the proposal to set up a 300 tonne capacity Methanol Plant in the joint sector with the Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilisers Limited. Chief Minister Mr Sudhir Ranjan Majumdar told newsmen that the state cabinet had cleared the proposal of the state owned Tripura Industrial Development Corporation.

The project would cost around Rs. 150 crore and would be based on natural gas.

Post-Poll Coalitions

# A variety entertainment

***By Dr S Saraswathi***

The unity between disparate groups of political parties united by common opposition to the BJP was beautifully exhibited by the typical gesture of holding hands after the swearing-in ceremony held at Bengaluru of the JD(S)-Congress government. It is a repeat performance enacted several times by parties aspiring for power at the Centre. To proclaim a sudden and spontaneous rise of top leaders of various parties to block the return of Modi next year, the magnificent Vidhan Soudha of Bengaluru provided an ideal venue.

Earlier in March, 20 Opposition leaders met at a dinner party hosted by Congress leader Sonia Gandhi in New Delhi, for informal chat on joining against the BJP. Such gatherings are going on simultaneously with the efforts of some regional leaders to revive the Third Front and form a federal front of non-Congress and non-BJP. Chief Ministers of Telangana and West Bengal are in the forefront of this effort and have discussed this with some regional leaders.

In the context of the approaching Lok Sabha election in 2019, it raises our curiosity to analyse the relative chances of pre-poll and post-poll alliances in the background of previous experiments and current aspirations of parties, to assess the individual strength of national parties, and to identify the major players in national government formation.

The General election of 2014 broke the prevailing myth of the inevitability of coalition governments in India at the Centre by giving individual majority to the BJP. That this party adhering to the unwritten coalition dharma chose to form a coalition government of the NDA is a different matter.

In the light of BJP's serial victories in many States along with the decline of the Congress in elections since 2014, it seems at the outset that BJP's defeat cannot be achieved in the near future without collecting together anti-BJP votes. But, the question whether it is enough is not asked. Nor any doubt regarding all anti-BJP votes going to any party in anti-BJP alliance is ever raised.

The CPM head remarked at the celebration in Bengaluru that only post-poll alliance would help formation of government at Delhi and shook hands even with the party's prime enemy, the head of TMC, who also echoed by stating that there are already set examples be it in 1996 or 2004 when fronts were formed after the polls. At this juncture, what is perceived as most important is an understanding among the Opposition (meaning today anti-BJP parties) ahead of polls.

Leaders are preparing the nation to accept post-poll alliance of any grouping without bothering about their compatibility and without even knowing about their core policies and programmes. Marriage of convenience is accepted in politics. No prior arrangement is required. A judgement of the Supreme Court in 2005 confirmed Sarkaria Commission's two options in allowing post-poll allies to form government – with all parties of the alliance joining the government or some joining and some providing "outside support".

Karnataka government is an example of post-poll alliance of two bitter pre-poll rivals. Our parliamentary system, legal position, and inter-party relations allow this. When a party is short of majority by a few seats and has presence spread across the country (or State), post-poll alliance may seem logical. But, Bengaluru festival witnessed a congregation of small parties -- literally pieces from a bigger party -- joining hands with the sole common aim of keeping a common enemy away. "Enemy's enemy is a friend" is the motto on display.

In a country with numerous kinds of diversities, multi-party system is natural and inevitable. Even in Britain, known for its strong two-party system, some have felt that 2017 elections have shown that we need not be locked in two-party politics.

BSP supremo has already stated that her party would enter into an alliance with other parties only if it was given a respectable number of seats or else it would contest the General elections alone. It is believed that the ground for an alliance of the BSP with Congress was set when the BSP announced support for Samajwadi Party in the Lok Sabha by-elections in Gorakhpur and Phulpur constituencies.

However, given the individual chances, aspirations of various leaders, and expectations of party cadres, SP-BSP-Congress-RLD alliance may be possible in some by-elections, but not for General election. To keep their flock intact, parties have to give opportunities to party loyalists and strong candidates. Hence, pre-poll alliance is hard to achieve while post-poll alliance seems probable.

Unity of parties in the name of "secularism" has lost its flavor with open exploitation of religious and caste sentiments. Still, motley groupings in the name of alliances and coalitions have formed governments. They have carried on orderly government as long as there is one dominant leader within and/or a broad understanding among the constituents.

In September 2016, 43 of 44 Congress MLAs including the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh resigned from the Congress and joined the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA), a part of North-East Democratic Alliance (NEDA -- a BJP front.

The grand Opposition coalition rally sponsored by RJD at Patna in August last drew in senior political leaders from at least 12 parties including TMC. It was expected to be the forerunner for the Mahagathbhandan (grand alliance) of secular parties for 2019 Lok Sabha polls. However, BSP chief stayed away from the rally indicating lack of consistency in the role of parties. It was the time when even secular credentials of some of these parties were under cloud. Banning of Durga idol immersions on Muharram day and opposing triple talaq ban for Ishrat Jehan by the TMC were out of place in a secular alliance against the BJP.

There is a tendency to bloat out of proportion small victories gained by alliance of small parties as indicator of successful electoral strategy. That there is something as wider and State level and national acceptability is overlooked. By-election victories do not signify which way the wind will blow in Lok Sabha election.

Election victories are not a matter of plain arithmetic in all places, at all times, but include acceptability to the people in particular place and time. There are instances when people have voted differently in Assembly and Lok Sabha elections in the same State.

In 1989, a strange combination known as the National Front consisting of the Janata Dal, TDP, DMK, AGP, Indian Congress (Socialist) supported by the Left Front and the BJP came to power. It had strong leaders like NT Rama Rao and VP Singh, but lasted hardly two years and saw two Prime Ministers.

In 1996, a post-poll alliance of 13 parties named the United Front consisting of JD, SP, DMK, TDP, AGP, All India Indira Congress (Tiwari), Left Front (4 parties), Tamil Maanila Congress, NC, and Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party formed government with outside support of the Congress and lasted until the support was available.

Regional parties must have realised that non-Congress, non-BJP pre-poll alliance is not feasible in the present scenario. Hence Bengaluru became the venue for "Congress-inclusive Third Front" against the BJP -- a post-poll coalition taking us back to 1996. Numbering of Fronts and serial order are disturbed in Bengaluru adding another scene to the variety entertainment provided on the political stage.---INFA

Assembly, LS Bypolls

# States say no to BJP

***By Insaf***

**Round The States**

United we stand, divided we fall, is a phrase obviously stirring the Opposition parties. Some of these sticking together have given the BJP and NDA a rude shock in the latest round of bypoll results in 11 States. Of the 14 Assembly and Lok Sabha byelections, results declared on Thursday last, the Opposition won a handsome 11. While the BJP would try to seek solace of retaining two of the four Lok Sabha seats—in Maharashtra and Nagaland (by its partner, the NDPP), it should have loud warning bells ringing specially in Uttar Pradesh, which gave it 71 of the 80 seats in 2014. The Kairana seat, which was billed the biggest battle, after Gorakhpur and Phulpur defeat, has reaffirmed that sticking together pays huge dividends. The RLD-BSP-Congress-SP combine's common candidate wrested the seat from the BJP, giving another hit to the Yogi Adityanath government. Likewise, the Congress-NCP combine snatched the Bhandara-Gondiya seat in Maharashtra. Of the nine Assembly seats, the BJP won only one! Importantly, the JD(U) got a beating from the RJD candidate in Bihar and in West Bengal, the TMC continued its sway. While the BJP may put up a brave front saying bypolls wouldn't have an implication in the 2019 General election, it should realise that its electoral reverses are becoming a reality. At the same time, the Opposition would need to burn the midnight oil if it wants to repeat its recent successes. There is no denying that coalition mantra can do wonders.

**Farmers' Strike**

At least, seven States are in the throes of farmers' strike, 'Gaon Band' (village shutdown). On Friday last, thousands of farmers in BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana and Punjab (Congress-ruled) started a 10-day nationwide strike for long-pending demands --waiver of loans, right MSP for their crops and implementation of Swaminathan Commission. Importantly, the strike is to mark the first anniversary of Mandsaur protest in MP, in which five farmers were killed in police firing on June 6. With over 130 farmers' organisations joining the strike, June 10 is slated to be observed as Bharat Bandh till 2 pm. Shopkeepers have been urged to participate as a mark of respect for farmers who lost have their lives. While there is high alert in the States, ordinary folk are bound to feel the brunt, for farmers have said 'no milk, vegetables and other commodities of daily use' will be supplied from villages to the cities! So other than petrol prices, be prepared for an additional pinch. Unless there is a miracle.

**Bihar Shenanigans**

Will Bihar go the Andhra way? Uncertain, but probability can't be ruled out, given simmering in the JD(U). Chief Minister Nitish Kumar is putting the pressure on partner BJP to deliver on its long-pending special status category demand as well as be included in decisions that the NDA takes. It's less than a year to the alliance, but Nitish's patience seems to be running out. Not only has he shot off a long note to Finance Commission seeking "differentiated needs of Bihar and Backward States with a special perspective," but is heard bad mouthing the note ban. Is it feeling the pinch of dumping RJD and going with the saffron brigade, which is giving it a cold shoulder? JD(U) leaders are selectively speaking to media saying the BJP got a lot more than it and claim that Congress and the Left haven't shut the doors on them. RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav too senses the JD(U) using pressure tactics. Says it is looking for an opportune time to betray the BJP and change sides again. Will BJP hear the warning or let Nitish take a walk like it did to ally Chandrababu Naidu? Time will tell.

**Assam Moves**

There's both good and bad news from Assam. In the midst of simmering over the Citizenship Bill and the NRC, the BJP-ruled is going all out to reassure its people. Fortunately for it, Bangladesh has for the first time agreed to take back 33 of its nationals, declared illegal migrants by the Foreigners' Tribunals. Further, Dhaka has identified 152 of its nationals lodged in detention camps and sent a proposal to South Block for their repatriation. North Block too has assured Chief Minister Sonowal that any future steps in regard to the Bill would be taken 'only after consulting all stakeholders.' The BJP ally the AGP, is particularly wary of the Bill as it seeks to grant citizenship to non-Muslims (Hindus) from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who came to India due to religious persecution. This, it says goes against the Assam accord, which provides for 'safeguards to protect, preserve and promote the culture, social, linguistic identity and heritage of Assamese people.' It's a tightrope walk for the State as well as the Centre. Nagging uncertainty will persist.

**Justice For Kashmir**

Over a decade later, people in Kashmir may find some solace. After a sex scandal rocked the Valley in 2006, the court has finally given its verdict. Five persons including former J&K DSP Mohammed Ashraf Mir and former DIG, BSF, KC Padhi, have been held guilty for sexually exploiting minors. The quantum of punishment, which could range from seven years in jail to life imprisonment, will be pronounced on June 4. Recall, the scandal hit the State after the J&K police discovered two video CDs showing Kashmiri minors being forced into sex trade, and that they were exploited sexually by politicians, bureaucrats, police officials and surrendered militants. The case was transferred to the CBI after names of two ministers and some MLAs were part of a list of 56 persons allegedly involved. The Supreme Court transferred the case to Chandigarh court. In 2009, then Chief Minister Omar Abdullah resigned after his name too was linked, but the Governor rejected it. The fact that top officers haven't been let off the hook should ring warning bells for others.

**Uttarakhand Govt 'Dishonest'**

Uttarakhand government is 'dishonest'. A serious charge, as this is an impression the National Green Tribunal has. It has slapped a fine of Rs 3 lakh on the government for not demolishing illegal structures inside the core area of the Corbett Tiger Reserve, as assured September last and has been resorting to delaying tactics. Its order is worth being quoted: "From the narration of facts as stated, the intention of the State appears not to be honest. The order hasn't been complied with on one pretext or another and now the ground created is about want of land for rehabilitation before the demolition could take place. In the circumstances, we are justified in concluding that unless a serious view is taken, the State will again frustrate the directions of the tribunal." It asked the authorities to submit an affidavit within a week and also pay the compensation amount. While the government may pay the fine, the big question is when and how will it restore its credibility. ---INFA

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Fake news and its implications

Editor,

Fake news also termed as 'hoax news' is something which is not unfamiliar on social media and people are not really aware what constitutes fake news or the real gospel truth news. Given the advancement of technology where some, if not most people, emphasize on social media as a source of free press rather than print media, the trend for spreading fake news had just increased. There being no regulations on social media and after Section 66A of the Information Technology Act 2000 became redundant; social media is now a platform that is free to raise any voice/ concern.

The fact that in today's society most of the youth depend on social media as an alternative news rather than the real print news, shows how people can easily be influenced as they want to believe whatever is in their newsfeed (social media platform). One of the main reasons of how fake news spreads is because of its consumer base. It is the consumer that drives the fake news especially on social media. It is the consumers who keep on sharing/ spreading such news, with the thought of doing a good deed. The consumer gets something to boast about among his friends, family and peers being the first one to spread such news only to realize such news is fake . The content of fake news is also very remarkable. Fake news always target at topics which would make people very gullible and want to accept such false facts.

The incident which occurred on the eve of June 2018, at Mothphran and the adjoining areas which resembled a battlefield, has left many residents sleepless. WhatsApp Forwards, Bright Facebook picture statuses with false propaganda were circulated all over social media with no source confirming legitimacy. Sparks of fear and outrage emerged as such false news spreads like wild fire around the sleepless town. Communal tensions over social media were on the rise, even though most was based on wrong information of what exactly happened at the incident. People were ready to accept any information received from such non-credible sources and spreading such false propaganda.

One needs to realize the legal implications involved when one spreads such propaganda. Section 153A of the Indian Penal Code makes people liable if they are involved in attacks on religion, race, and place of birth of a certain group of class or upon the founders or prophets of the religion.

If such fake news entails such ingredients, the publisher will be held liable and even person with the intention of spreading such news would come under Section 34(Common Intention) of the Indian Penal Code. If provision of 153 of the IPC is looked into, then the provision of 295 should also be read, to check on whether such speech/ publications leads or has the ingredients of a hate speech.

Hence, one needs to be wary before spreading such WhatsApp Forwards, Messages which are not based on credible sources especially in situations that could lead to incidences of communal chaos and havoc.

Yours etc.,
Rayner Dkhar,
Via email

## Unite against multiple taxation on oil & coal

Editor,

While the crude oil prices world over has gone down it is a crude and rude joke rather a sordid drama to declare 1 paisa reduction of petrol/diesel prices by Government of India. Continued hike of domestic petrol and diesel prices till the day of such declaration has already had an astronomical effect in the price index of all essential commodities and in a predominantly prevailing "Seller's Market" the buyers in the country with their gradually shrinking/limited purchase capacity will get lost. Therefore the policy of imposition of multiple/ various taxes on fuels - liquid or solid by the Centre and the states is unethical.

It is inexplicable as to how in addition to Royalty & Cess on coal being levied by the Government of West-Bengal, the Centre is also imposing 5% GST now. This is allowing a free-hand to private players in the power-generating sector to increase power tariff for domestic consumers almost every year in Kolkata and West-Bengal. Why there shall continue a differential system/rates of tariff levy against power supplied by CESC & WBSEB for domestic consumption - that too in the same City of Kolkata ?

The NDA Governments much hyped publicity and propaganda of "One Nation, One Tax" before imposition of GST (rates are Globally highest) is just a hollow drum-beating or a hoax to delude and mislead the countrymen?

Where has the good governance and transparency, as promised vanished? Does the NDA government preach something and practice something else?

It is, therefore, essential for the NDA government to withdraw multiple taxations imposed on all fuels with immediate effect and exercise strict control of spiralling fuel price rises if at all they wish to win the people in the General Elections of 2019 and get another opportunity to govern the country.

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay,
Via email

## Spiritual aspiration

Editor,

Abraham Lincoln had said, "Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other." It is important because our resolution is our aspiration to become a better human being for a better tomorrow. This is the driving force of evolution that has taken us from slave society to feudal society and from police states to welfare states. Our resolutions are not just confined to the New Year. As a matter of fact, we take resolutions on our birthday, on a special day or just on any other day on so many issues like we will replace negative thoughts with positive ones, intoxicants with fresh water, idle time with a pastime and so on. It is because of our aspiration to strive for the highest standards, we have been scaling new heights of Citius (swifter), Altius (higher), Fortius (stronger). It is more than Olympic motto - it is our endeavour to blossom over the years.

Researchers have produced new DNA evidence that almost certainly confirms "Out of Africa" theory of human evolution that all of us stem from a single group of Homo Sapiens. After originating in Africa 150,000 years ago, our ancestors began spreading throughout Eurasia 60,000 years ago to seek food after experiencing a "quantum leap in thinking".

We dare say that 2,000 generations ago, our ancestors could not help but to move out of Africa to satisfy their aspirations that they felt so strongly about after having experienced a "quantum leap in thinking". It had opened, as it were, a new horizon in their minds which can be described in the words of Rabindranath Tagore, ~ "Fountain awakened from its dream". The inner voice of our ancestors might have pushed them by saying in the Biblical words, "My zeal for the Lord has eaten me up."

Sri Aurobindo had once said, "The spiritual aspiration is innate in man; for he is, unlike the animal, aware of imperfection and limitation and feels that there is something to be attained beyond what he now is ..."

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.*

# Fighting the fault in their stars

*An American Indian doctor is using modern techniques to turn herbs used in ancient Indian cures into potentially life-saving medicine for breast and prostate cancer*

**By Madeline Jones, Cameron La Fontaine, Ranojoy Saha & Sudipto Maity**

Dr Kattesh V Katti combines two liquids in his laboratory at the University of Missouri Medical School, bringing the mixture to a boil on a hot plate.

The liquids, called "phytochemicals", are derived from plants such as green tea leaves, cranberry, soybean and mango. When he mixes them, he's also combining ancestral wisdom with Western medical technology.

Thousands of years ago in Katti's native India, doctors would grind herbs in a dish with a mortar and pestle and spread them on inflamed areas. Today, Katti is using modern techniques to turn these herbs into potentially life-saving medicine for breast and prostate cancer.

Katti, a UM medical school professor, calls his treatment "green" nanotechnology. Basically, it involves attaching concentrated particles from plants to tiny "nanoparticles" and then injecting them into a patient's body.

Katti has been working to identify the antioxidant properties of these plants and is now testing his cancer treatment on patients through a clinical trial in India.

Katti is one of a growing number of researchers testing alternative therapies inspired by ancient cures to help reshape modern medicine. Others reside at hospitals connected with Yale, Duke and Johns Hopkins universities.

Overall, the alternative medicine industry - defined as any form of medicine outside the Western mainstream - grew by almost $3 billion in revenue between 2011 and 2016, and is expected to generate a revenue of $196 billion dollars by 2025.

One thing ancient people knew about herbal medicine is "that it did work," Katti said. "What is the proof? The proof is a human civilization that thrived to be sitting here today and talking about it."

## 'Green' revolution

Katti's medical career began in 1990, when he was offered a research position at UM's School of Medicine. With a background in science research and education, Katti was assigned to apply principles of chemistry to developing new pharmaceuticals to treat and detect cancer and other diseases.

"In the back of my mind," he said, "I was always thinking the chemical molecules I was developing would one day have applications in medicine."

While continuing his cancer research at MU, Katti started thinking about how nanotechnology - the study and application of extremely small things - could be used in healing. Katti was sceptical about the extreme toxicity of certain chemicals in the chemotherapies used to treat cancer, which led him to research the disease-fighting properties of plants.

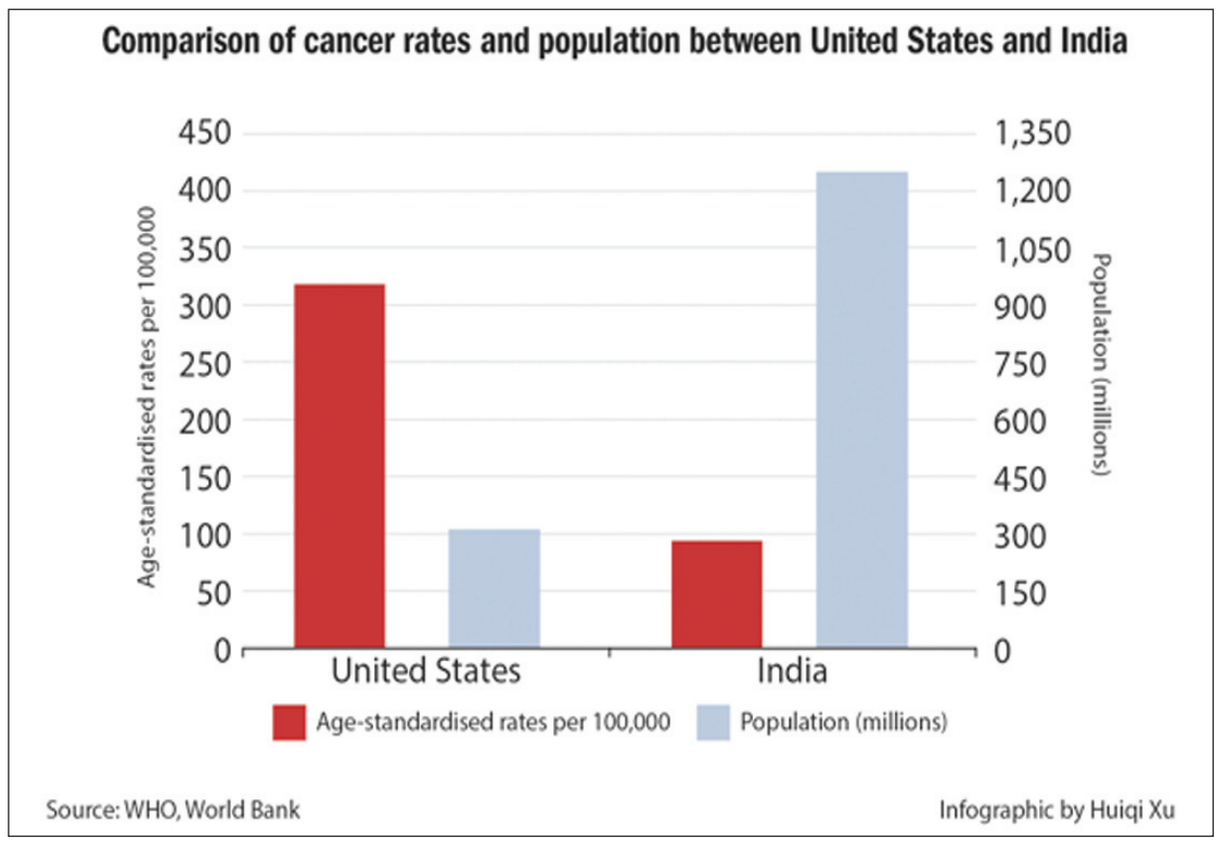
Eventually, Katti discovered he could attach particles from plants such as soybeans, turmeric and green tea leaves to gold nano-particles. And testing proved these compounds capable of killing cancer cells while also strengthening the patient's immune system to fight the disease.

"Many other sophisticated medicines go and kill as much of the cancer cells as possible, but they also attack the immune system of the body," Katti said, adding, "By killing the cancer cells, they kind of imbalance the immune system — the system that allows us to fight the disease."

Katti's herb-based treatment actually boosts a patient's immune system while killing cancer cells, and has a significantly less toxic effect on the human body than the usual chemo regimens.

Katti's treatment draws from an ancient practice of herbal medicine that has been used for almost 12,000 years in ancient civilisations such as Greece, Egypt, China and India.

"In our times, for the technology to be accepted in the Western world, there needs to be a scientific rationale for it," said Veli Thipe, a chemistry PhD student at MU and one of Katti's lab assistants. "Dr Katti has stepped in to add some scientific significance to what our ancient ancestors did."




## Success with trials

Katti is now starting to see first-hand how his medicine can help suffering cancer patients.

He is leading clinical trials in India through a pharmaceutical company called Dhanvantari Nano Ayushadi, or DNA, which is licensed to distribute herbal medicine.

Things look promising.

"Some patients had less than 3 months of survival. They have lived on. The quality of life has drastically improved," Katti said. "We are seeing fantastic results. No red flags."

One trial participant learned in April that the tumor in her breast decreased from 3.2 to 3 centimeters. Katti said a similar tumor in another patient undergoing chemotherapy doubled in size over the same time frame.

"You might say 3.2 to 3.0 is not a big deal. It is a huge deal; it is about a 6 percent decrease," Katti said "There is not (a) therapy that even stops breast tumor growth, so this not only stops it, but it takes it down...It sounds like a fairy tale but this is for real. That's why we are so excited."

Word has spread, and Katti has gotten requests for the medication in the US.

He recalls an email from the son of a woman suffering from terminal breast cancer who was asking whether she could use his medicine. Katti put her in touch with the pharmaceutical company in India, and she received it on compassionate grounds.

Katti hopes the treatment will be approved by the US Food and Drug Administration within the next year, and will be available by prescription in America soon.

## Scepticism

However, according to Dr V R Ramanan, Deputy Director — Medical, Tata Medical Center, one of the centres of excellence in cancer treatment in India (located in Kolkata), as a medical scientist he has no answer to an Ayurvedic cure of cancer.

"Ayurveda claims, homoeopathy claims. I have no comments, absolutely zero comments on this. As a medical scientist I have no answer to this," he said.

Asked if he has come across any case where Herbal treatment for cancer proved fruitful, Dr Ramanan said: "People tell a lot of things, miracles happen but then you don't know why a miracle happens. But modern medicine states that cancer kills fast if you don't take medicine."

"It is deadly and it keeps coming back but at the same time, it is curable. Today many cancers are fully curable. We have had blood cancer children who have become adults, got married and have children now."

However, Katti's work reflects a growing interest in ancient cures that were largely cast aside in the West more than a hundred years ago.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, he said, Western medicine became increasingly focused on isolating chemical compounds, abandoning traditional approaches such as herbal medicine.

According to Ayurveda experts in India, this oldest Indian indigenous medicine system of plant drugs is known from very early times for preventing or suppressing various tumours.

"Nowadays scientists [in India] are keener to research on complementary and alternative medicine for the management of cancer," said Dr Divya Sharad, an Ayurvedic physician in New Delhi.

She said: "Turmeric stands as one of the most extensively studied spices, with over 1,700 lab studies published over the last few decades."

Sharad, who works with Swami Parmanand Prakritik Chikitsalaya (SPPC) that offers to heal through Naturopathy, Yoga, Ayurveda, etc., said turmeric and other herbs have been used for centuries in India to treat ailments like skin conditions, pain and gastrointestinal problems — and now clinical trials are examining their role in reducing cancer risk.

According to Katti, "it is pretty amazing what those (traditional) modalities have done to humankind."

"In the Western world, we have kind of ignored that," Katti said. "In our schools, our colleges, we don't teach that. There's a disconnect, actually."

Katti's work builds on the principles of Ayurvedic medicine, which emphasize nutrition, herbal medicine, physical activity, meditation, and synchrony with the body's biological cycles.

Slowly, the divide between Eastern and Western medicine is narrowing. According to the National Institutes of Health, more Americans are becoming interested in alternative approaches such as herbs, diet and exercise.

Dr Caya Tanski, a practising naturopathic doctor in Columbia, Missouri, said she's had "great success" with herbal medicine.

"Rather than add toxicity to the body, we're trying to detox and rid the body of cancer," she said. "It's bringing the body back into balance so ideally, it can heal itself."

Across the United States, there are now more than 30 Ayurvedic training programs, the National Ayurvedic Medical Association says, and a growing number of American physicians and consumers are starting to embrace its principles.

"The herbal therapy — they need a strong science behind it for proof. I think that is the reason why some people lack trust in this," Katti said. "Now, we have that scientific backup. I think this will trigger lots of interest."

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

*Images and infographic by Huiqi Xu*

# Green education need of the hour

**By Parag Ranjan Dutta**

Environment sustains, and blesses us with life. It is not inert, but responds to every action of human beings. So in a sense, environment follows Newton's third law of motion that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

We should love and respect nature for sustenance of life. Since most of earth's resources are limited, we should utilise them judiciously. Over-exploitation or abuse of environment spells doomsday for mankind.

From the early sixties, concerns over environment were aired by different groups, mostly the UN. The first UN conference on environment was held at Stockholm in1972, followed by Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, both which highlighted major global environmental issues. The importance and need for conservation of biodiversity was felt at the Earth Summit when 170 representative nations signed the convention of biodiversity.

Unprecedented rise in human population has created demand for larger space for development activities. Destruction of natural habitats to accommodate more space for settlements has led to large scale deforestation. Large scale deforestation reduces survival of animals. Passenger pigeon which once adorned skies of the USA in millions became extinct in1894 due to destruction of forests.

Soon after the Stockholm conference, important legislations were introduced in the Indian Parliament and environmental laws were enacted to safeguard environment.

Public participation is key in bringing forth change. The classic example of community participation in India can be seen in contemporary movements like Bishnoi movement of Rajasthan, Chipko movement of the Tehri- Garhwal, Silent Valley movement of Kerala and Narmada Valley movement of Madhya Pradesh.

When the central government decided to build a large dam for hydropower generation in the Silent Valley of Kerala, Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad, an NGO, spearheaded a social movement in1973 aimed at protection of primeval and unspoiled tropical forests. Mass uprising by common people compelled the union and the state governments to stall construction of the dam, which would otherwise have submerged huge areas of virgin rainforests with flora and fauna.

Pixabay

In the early seventies, resentment brewed up in Garhwal Himalayas to protest against indiscriminate and senseless felling of trees along Himalayan slopes. Though Sundarlal Bahuguna took the Chipko movement to the world stage and for which he earned laurels, it was heartening that the movement was originally initiated by few illiterate village womenfolk to voice their concern.

The movement gradually gathered momentum. During a short span of five years there were series of agitations which drew spontaneous participation of the villagers, especially the women. Womenfolk faced police firing. They tied sacred threads around the trees, embraced them to save from the axe of contractors.

Late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru once said that dams are the temples of modern India. But the idea of building such temples was unaccepted by tribal populace of central India and there were mass uprising. Narmada Valley Movement had seen similar protests and agitations by locals to save thousand acres of agricultural land.

The agitation was against construction of two large dams across the river Narmada. Despite large scale protests, the Government planned to fill the depression. When the water was planned for release into the dam, the entire community of Manibeli shut themselves indoors raising the slogan dubenge par hatenge nehi, or we will be drowned but shall not move. Ultimately police force broke open the doors and rescued the villagers.

These stories tell us how community participation helps in preserving the environment. Environmental problems are also created due to lack of awareness. Value based environmental education provide us guidelines for action. To inspire spirit of environmental education, certain clear cut objectives are important, like awareness, skills, knowledge, attitude and participation.

Value means something precious and worthwhile. Values are desirable as guiding principles of behavior. Environmental Ethics, a term coined by a Norwegian ecologist, studies moral relationships of human beings vis-a-vis the environment.

The term ethics is derived from the Greek 'ethos' (character), which means characteristic spirit or attitude of a person or community. The spirit of transforming every person and environment literate may aptly be found in an old Chinese proverb by teacher, politician and thinker Confucius which says 'If your plan is for one year, plant rice. If your plan is for ten years, plant tress. If your plan is for one hundred years, educate children'.

*(The author is a retired professor of St Edmund's College)*

# The shortest marriages

THE FUNNY SIDE

Nury Vittachi

I have been alive for several decades now but STILL don't know whether I like broccoli. Not my fault! Guys have "commitment issues".

The topic of difficult decisions was triggered by a recent news report sent to me by reader Shaan Alwi. It said that a man in Dubai got married a few days ago — and then started divorce proceedings on the way out of his own wedding. The groom was so annoyed by his in-laws that he started to have the marriage dissolved 15 minutes after signing on the dotted line.

In the comments under this news report were many references to pop singer Britney Spears, who was married for 55 hours. Western TV channels are full of shows where strangers are urged to try married life and then asked if they like it, the same technique parents use to get their kids to eat vegetables. In fact, many liberal-minded US people seem to interpret the "till death do us apart" bit of the marriage ceremony as "for a week or two".

But the truth is that this columnist can look in his files and prove there are marriages in Asia and the Middle East that make Britney's 55 hours seem interminably lengthy. In Mumbai in 2010, a woman stormed out of her groom's house and went back to her father after just four hours of marriage, talking darkly about an argument in the bedroom. (It was probably whether or not to have the air-conditioner on.)

In 2012, a Dubai man had a quarrel with his bride while they were signing marriage documents. He marched out of that court and into the one next door to demand a divorce. "How long have you been married," the judge asked. The groom replied: "The ink on my marriage certificate has not dried yet." That meant the marriage lasted minutes or seconds. Distraught friends and family members snapped into action — getting out their camera phones and phoning the Guinness World Records.

Meanwhile, Google and Amazon have both announced that a large number of guys have been proposing marriage to the female AI personalities in their gadgets. In April this year, a Google executive said that 450,000 men had proposed to Google Assistant in India alone. If you ask Siri on the iPhone to marry you, she says: "I sure have been receiving a lot of marriage proposals recently."

A colleague reading over my shoulder (GO AWAY) said she was not surprised that men found it easier to propose to robots because they wouldn't get upset if the guys kept changing their minds.

"But one thing I totally don't understand is how men can get excited about female cartoon characters," she said. I pretended to share her puzzlement, although Daphne from the Scooby Doo cartoon flashed into my head.

Anyway, here's a useful bit of philosophy for readers who are hesitating about doing something: "If the human society of the future doesn't send a terminator back in time to stop you doing whatever you want to do, then it can't be that bad, right?"

I need to stop here to see if Scooby Doo is on YouTube.

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

# Cyber policing in India

**By BK Mishra**

In this age of technology advancement, computer and IT have not only brought convenience to citizens in modern life but also encouraged lawbreakers to take advantage of advanced technology to commit crimes through various modus operandi.

The cyber security awareness for police personnel has been dedicated to fighting technology crime, striving to maintain law and order in cyberspace so as to ensure that citizens of India remain digitally safe.

Given the fact that majority of Indians are today using mobile devices for the purposes of accessing the internet, it is high time that legal approaches to electronic evidence with specific reference to mobile evidence need to have a relook. India has emerged as a favourite hub for cybercriminals, mostly hackers, and other malicious users who use the internet for committing crimes.

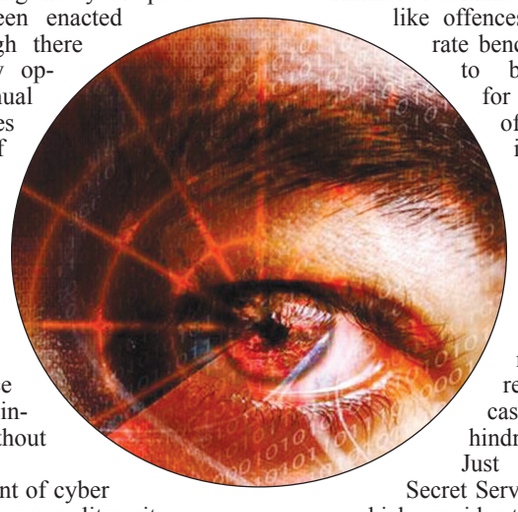
As per a study conducted by Assocham-Mahindra SSG, total number of cyber crimes registered during 2011-14 stood from 13,301 and 1,49,254, respectively, and rising at an alarming rate. In 2015, the number of cyber crimes in the country has doubled up to 3 lakh and could pose serious economic and national security challenges.

Emerging trends of cyber crimes include hacking, identity theft, spamming, phishing and cyber stalking. With these emerging trends in crime, it is high time for the Indian police to revamp and reform investigating methodology for a successful prosecution of such cyber case. The Indian system of policing and criminal investigation is still stuck in the old ways of information gathering and beating out a confession from the suspects. The police force is completely untrained on modern methods of criminal investigation, which requires skills for managing and operating highly sophisticated technologies.

Several loopholes exist within the system due to which a gap continues between reporting of crime, arresting a criminal and finally ensuring successful prosecution. Jurisdiction remains highly debatable as to the maintainability of any suits till date. Today with the growing arms of cyber space the territorial boundaries seem to disappear and the concept of territorial jurisdiction as envisaged under S16 of Criminal Procedure Code and S2 of the Indian Penal Code will have to give way to alternative methods of dispute resolution.

Police are facing this particular problem as there remains a sense of confusion as to whose jurisdiction the case will fall. Let us take an example; a school teacher finds out that Rs 30,000 was withdrawn from his savings account without his knowledge and permission. The amount withdrawn was from ATM located outside the city limits and some outside the state limits. In these situations, the complainant is faced with a problem of filing the complaint at which jurisdiction. Though S75 of the IT Act provides extra-territorial operations of this law but they could be meaningful only when backed with provision recognising orders and warrants for information issued by competent authorities outside their jurisdiction and measure for cooperation for exchange of material and evidence of computer crimes between law enforcement agencies.

A law regulating the cyber-space has already been enacted by India though there is lack of any operational manual which describes the methods of conducting an investigation relating to cybercrimes. A SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) has to be set so that the present force can conduct its investigation without any ambiguity.



With the advent of cyber cells at various cosmopolitan cities in India, there is also an imperative need to build a high technology crime & investigation infrastructure, with highly technical staff at the other end. The current staff of cyber cells comprises of a mixture of police officers and IT experts. While additional recruitment is welcome, the effort should be to improve the technical capabilities of the police department as a whole, rather than only the cybercrime cells. Police are quite often handicapped in undertaking effective investigation for want of modern gadgets such as high-capacity data-transfer tools, software's, designed for analysis of phones, tools for recovering passwords using brute force, etc. Forensic science laboratories are scarce at the district level, which can render timely assistance to the investigating Police.

The result is that Police heavily lean towards oral evidence, instead of concentrating on scientific and circumstantial evidence. Though various governments have taken this issue into account in the recent years, but still a lots needs to be done.

In many cases the servers used are located abroad. "Rarely do they provide necessary trails immediately," poor detection is due to lack of infrastructure, investigation tools and delay/refusal by online service providers to give information. "Easy access and use of fake identities, international IPs, proxies and offshore scene of crime are leading to poor detection

## Suggestive measures

There is a need to ensure specialized procedures associated with expertise manpower for prosecution of cybercrime cases so as to tackle them on a war footing. It must be ensured that the system provides for stringent punishment of cyber-crime and cyber criminals so that the same acts as a deterrent for others. Presently, most of the offences committed under the Information Technology Act are Bailable with punishment up to 3 years imprisonment. This punishment should be increased to a term which would change the mindset of a cyber-criminal of committing similar and like offences again. Separate bench are required to be constituted for fast tracking of Cyber cases in an effective manner. With the constitution of cyber judges, the law enforcement agencies can prove the merits of their respective cyber cases without any hindrance

Just like the U.S. Secret Service or the FBI, which provides training to state and local law enforcement officials in cybercrime forensics and related topics, similar programmes can be conducted by CBI, which has its separate cyber cell and a manual for conducting investigation. The methods of the CBI can be used by the Police include close supervision of investigation of the important cases by senior officers and evolving a mechanism so that the investigating officers and other senior police officers can get legal advice during the investigation

Cyber projects like National Cyber Coordination Centre (NCCC) of India, Cyber Attacks Crisis Management Plan of India, Internet Spy System Network and Traffic Analysis System (NETRA) of India, etc. have still not been implemented successfully and fully and there is an urgent need to implement these projects

Quick response to the Interpol references and bilateral requests, liberal sharing of forensic technology and more cross-country training exchange programmes besides timely alert can be a major step to curb the cyber menace.

Cyber crime can only be effectively countered when there is a proper coordination and guidance available from various stakeholders, such as industries, local police as well as the state and central governments. To facilitate such cooperation as well as to give impetus and to govern the effective implementation of various initiatives, we need to have adequately tasked and staffed agencies working at various levels. Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) is the national nodal agency set up to respond to computer security incidents as and when they occur. Some of the activities undertaken by CERT-In toward cyber security include coordination of responses to security incidents and timely advice regarding imminent threats, conduct trainings on specialized topics of cyber security and development of security guidelines on major technology platforms.

There should be an e-filing system for filing of FIR keeping in mind the digitalization of many government bodies and also to reduce the burden on the victims to approach physically at the police station. Process re-engineering is required to ensure that the current cumbersome procedure of a complainant having to go to a police station to file an FIR is replaced with a single emergency response interface, which can bring the police to the doorstep of the victim in distress.

There is a need of a centralized online cybercrime reporting mechanism in India, which provides victims of cybercrime, a convenient and easy reporting mechanism that alerts authorities of suspected criminal or civil violations. Also for law enforcement agencies at the national, state, and local level, there should be a central referral mechanism for complaints involving cybercrime.

In many cases, private corporations have more experience with cybercrime investigations than local police agencies and henceforth, the Police can seek cooperation with private corporations without compromising the security. For example in the United States, a privately-led Identity Ecosystem Steering group (IDES) has been established to support the National Strategy for Trusted Identities in Cyberspace (NSTIC).

A number of police agencies in the country have formed partnerships with computer science departments at local universities. These partnerships not only provide expertise to the police, but also serve as a recruiting tool for students who have an interest in cybercrime and policing. A knowledge hub thus can be established which can also attract students to pursue a career as cyber investigators.

Police Personnel should have a Good Understanding of the Technology, the working of the devises, how internet works, how the citizens are targeted for online fraud and tools and techniques to investigate and bring the culprits to Justice by understanding the different IT laws

Awareness for the police is very much important to understand the various issues related to cyber world and safety guidelines which help them to save themselves and promote/share them with general public to participate securely while using internet.

*(The author can be contacted at mishrabasant24@yahoo.in)*

# 'Star - Gazing'

***By Pt. Ajai Bhambi*** ***Sunday, JUNE 3, 2018***

A good year with encouraging developments gives you the decent nerve and energy as Sun Vertical Venus on your solar return chart. Being malleable and willing to try something new will aid you make the most of the developments. You will be more emphatic and bold in your transactions and in the decision making process. New openings are in store; whether this means a renewed start in existing relationships or new ones all in all once you invest time and other resources in those relationships that matter. This is a year that will offer opportunities for financial advances. Your image will get some sort of boost and you can garner support whenever needed. Your family would be more helpful.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

This phase brings excellent results towards personal growth. A personal relationship has the qualities of love, balance and freedom something that you have been searching for. You do not need to over analyze personal relationships but rather respond with your heart; as a new understanding blended with maturity develops around you at home and at work. It is time to express your feelings and ideas and share what you have learned through experience. Those in sports, law and justice would benefit from this planetary alignment as they are infused with positive energy and gain recognition for their talents and hard work.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

This phase promises communication and intimacy with loved ones and family. You focus on enjoying romance, and having fun, as you express yourself creatively. Your attention turns to domestic matters and towards building, renovation, decorating and purchase of household goods for your home which figures strongly now. Personal relationships are warm and comfortable as you spend wonderful time with your family. Social, romantic or financial opportunities arise this week. Avoid arguments and confrontations with senior colleagues and those in authority. A sudden job opportunity or money and property matters could be part of the financial gains. You feel fresh and re-energized after a long walk or light exercises

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

Favorable results in communications, finances, and family and investments related matters are on the cards. You successfully perform tasks that involve cooperation and team harmony with people around you. Creative self-expression of any kind is favored. You instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others. Take advantage of the smooth, magnetic energy by surrounding yourself with like-minded people. Your career matters come to the fore. Feeling secure and comfortable on the job is important to you now and you try to stick to the work schedule to complete the work in hand. You come across as especially agreeable and your good nature is bound to attract some attention.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

You would attend to children, family and loved ones with devotion and care. You feel emotionally attached with loved ones and family members. It's time to get in touch with exactly what pleasures and comforts you. Short romantic trips elevate you and you enjoy the company of your loved ones this week. Your efforts have paid off as you strike a balance with love and harmony at home. Attending an important social occasion or festival may put you in the public eye as well. This is a very significant period, when you are inspired creatively and emotionally.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

This is going to be an adventurous phase for you. It is the time to turn your attention to your creations, love affair, children, and hobbies. Pleasure and amusement play an important role in your search for freedom of self-expression now. An overseas trip brings new opportunities and chances are you may find yourself in a new atmosphere or a new environment than usual. You take overseas projects in hand and enhance your funds from them. You exhibit individualism and brilliance in handling business ventures and collaborations. You need to drop comparison and rivalry in personal relations and competition in professional aspects as they lead to a feeling of inadequacy and stress. You may feel restless at times.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**

This period brings joy, understanding and harmony in personal and professional relationships. It's a good time to travel, learn and do things that you normally don't do. It is a favorable time to air your ideas and apply them in your profession as they will be well received. Financial gains are stronger. It's a time of creativity, drama, and passion. You are more communicative and busy than usual and this boosts your confidence level too. Remember, domestic relations cannot be resolved through discussion and analysis alone but through love, acceptance and freedom. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

The planetary configuration brings a pleasant atmosphere at work and you enjoy the company of your loved ones. You express yourself with charm and grace, whether it's through what you say or what you write. You instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others. This benefits you at your workplace. On the domestic front you might particularly enjoy discussions with your loved ones. In fact, it's a great time to open up conversations, as you are more rational when it comes to personal matters now. Your mind often wanders to domestic concerns, and issues surrounding your home, family, and personal life.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

This period would bring favorable results in domestic and professional life. You might make short frequent trips and visiting religious places. Communications too is highlighted. Your beloved one would be supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You would change your priorities and support your family with love and affection and make them more secure. This is the best time to use your technical skills as this promotes your business and career prospects. There are strong chances of relocation and a few more responsibilities at the work place.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

This period augments your professional prospects as you communicate cleverly and interact in more positive way with people around. Your romantic affair gives you a big boost of confidence, and your personal magnetism runs high. You express true feelings, ideas and plans without being afraid of consequences and try to please your loved one. You enjoy every moment, whatever it brings and follow your truth and intuition to feel more integrated with your loved one. Take care of family members as the health of a family member may suffer. You tend to get mentally stressed and anxious causing health problems; detach yourself from problems and view them from a different perspective.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

People notice and admire you for your pleasant and cheerful personality and this brings financial growth. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for the planetary placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits. Problems in your life may be overcome by bravery, self-assertion, and directness. You will have the ability to build on financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on the cards. You have to be very careful and try to be friendly, cooperative and helpful to resolve the issues related to your married life. You need to conserve health and energy to meet domestic responsibility.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

This period may put on lot of pressure on you. A positive and creative approach brings gain and resolution in old conflicts and work situations. You need to view professional and business problems from a balanced perspective. Draw from past experience and get on with your life rather than getting in the quagmire of repeating old patterns. Emotive issues can crop up. However later on the dust will settle down and you will look ahead with a lot of hope. This is a time to do what you can to build trust in your family life and a strong foundation within yourself. It's a great time to open up conversations with loved ones, when it comes to matters related to love, family and romance.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

In this phase money and domestic issues will take centre stage. Your main concentration would to make domestic relationships and the home environment harmonious and peaceful. You tend to entertain them with your conversation and your sense of humor. There is strength in your feelings of love and the power of attraction, which may open the door to a new romantic relationship. You are feeling inspired creatively and romantically and you express your love quite openly now. You are more stimulated by all that is unconventional and your ideas are original and progressive when it comes to professional growth. You are more likely to pay closer attention to your physical appearance and mannerisms, aiming to improve and enhance your image.

# *Remembering Rituporno*

After making his debut as director in Esha Deol Takhtani starrer *Cakewalk*, now author turned filmmaker Ram Kamal Mukherjee announced his second venture *Season's Greetings* under the banner of Assorted Motion Pictures and S S 1 Entertainments. The film will be co-directed by Abhra Chakraborty. The story has been penned by Ranjib Mazumdar, while screenplay and dialogue will be written by Chandrodoy Pal. This short Hindi feature film will be produced by Aritra Das and Shailendra Kumar, and the film is based on a mother and daughter relationship.

On May 30 when Kolkata remembered the iconic filmmaker Rituparno Ghosh's fifth death anniversary, the first teaser poster of *Season's Greetings* was launched to mark the death anniversary of the legendary filmmaker. Producer Aritra Das from Assorted Motion Pictures said, "It's an honour to give tribute to someone who single handedly revived the dying film industry in Kolkata. He got sensible audience back to the theaters. Ritu da is a legend, and I know that people will have a lot of expectation from us, after *Cakewalk*. I think Ram Kamal and Abhra make a lovely team and we are looking forward to start the film at the earliest."

Winner of 12 national awards and many international awards, Ghosh was known for his simple yet socially relevant content. Mukherjee's film will deal with something similar. "It's not a biopic," said Mukherjee. "I have interacted with Ritu*da* on several occasions, in Kolkata and in Mumbai. Later we worked closely on his bilingual film *Naukadubi*, produced by Subhash Ghai. As a journalist, I shared a love-hate relationship with him, but whenever we met we connected immediately, purely on cinema. His sense of humour and eye for detail would inspire me. I always wanted to tell a story on screen, and after *Cakewalk*, I decided to make a film that would reflect Ritu*da*'s sense and sensibility," he added. The film will be shot across various parts of Kolkata.

Incidentally, when Mukherjee started his career as a reporter in *Stardust*, his first article was on Rituparno Ghosh. "Yes," he recollected.

"Years later during my tenure with *Mumbai Mirror*, I had interviewed him a couple of times, and that's when he would share his thoughts and ideas of making different kinds of cinema. He worked with the best and finest actors we have in Bengal and Bollywood. Most of his actors and technicians would interact with me, and would tell me stories about his life. He went away too early," sighed Mukherjee.

Abhra worked with noted filmmaker Bappaditya Bandhopadhyaya and have recently finished his first Bengali film *Jibon Mrityu* based on Tagore's short story. "Ritu*da* is an enigma, he was no less than a star. He was so inspired by Satyajit Ray, that he would just follow his way of storytelling. When we decided to work on this project after Cakewalk, I was very excited and nervous at the same time, simply because people will have huge expectation the moment you call it a tribute,"says Abhra Chakraborty.

The film will be shot during the monsoon, and will have two eminent faces from the film industry. "Talks are on with two leading ladies, I am waiting for their formal signing, thereafter I shall be able to reveal the names," said the director. The film will have music by Shailendra Sayanti, and will also include one of Rabindranath Tagore's famous track in the film. "Ram Kamal has been working on this subject since past couple of months, he would often share references from Rituparno Ghosh movies, and that's when I realized that Rituda had a very sharp ear for music. Most of his films had music by Dibyojyoti Mishra, and I am totally in love with his composition," said music director Shailendra Sayanti.

Mukherjee worked with Ranjib Mazundar as colleagues, and they have been planning to collaborate on a project that would be close to their heart. "Ranjib is a brilliant story teller, and he is full of ideas. Chanrodoy is yet another talented guy, who worked earlier with AIB in Mumbai and now working on a couple of interesting projects in Kolkata. I think we need to bring in fresh perspective along with different content. This film will be a tribute to Ritu*da*, not in terms of his body of work, but the soul of his entire repertoire," says Mukherjee.

*"It is the province of knowledge to speak, and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen."*

**--- Mahatma Gandhi**

**The Shillong Times**

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## Tourism takes a plunge

FOLLOWING Thursday's incident, tourism in Meghalaya has taken a dip. The much touted Scotland of the East is now under night curfew – a situation that most tourists would want to avoid. Tourism in rural Meghalaya is booming with home-stays doing brisk business but since Thursday there have been cancellations galore. A city will always have its share of problems but that needs to be contained through effective policing and administrative insights based on experience. The altercation on Thursday between two communities need not have escalated into a law and order problem affecting the whole city, nay the entire state. That Meghalaya's biggest commercial hub – Iewduh - had to go under curfew is a huge loss for those who subsist on the meagre earnings, selling their wares on a daily basis.

Rapid and unplanned urbanisation has turned Shillong into a city of ghettos. These are impenetrable spaces where people of one community reside and have no opportunities for socialising with the larger world outside. That lack of exposure makes them inward looking, prejudiced and incapable of embracing new ideas and least of all, of co-existing with others who don't think and behave like them. A ghetto is defined as a poor area with high crime rate and poor educational levels. People populate ghettos because of safety in numbers, more so when they experience a sense of insecurity. In Shillong, whenever a communal outrage breaks out the elders retreat into safe spaces and mobs take over. A mob is irrational and obeys no law. Hence even a curfew is violated with impunity. Mobs are fuelled by their own anger at perceived injustices they have nursed for a long time. It takes a small spark to fuel full scale violence. What makes it worse is when elected representatives join this mob fury instead of calming the storm. Meghalaya does not seem to have learnt lessons from the past – a dark past that has crippled its development for decades and nearly destroyed its educational status. The less said about religious heads the better. Is this not a time to appeal for peace across all communities and religions?

**LOOKING BACK**

**May 24, 1989**

## Plea for setting up Railhead at Raliang

The members of Raliang Block Congress Committee (I), in a meeting held at Raliang in the Jaintia Hills, supported the statement made by their president Mr Herbert Suchiang MLA on the floor of the Legislative Assembly, recently and suggested that the railway head be brought to Raliang.

The Raliang BCC (I) unanimously endorsed the Government's decision to have a railway within the state and urged the Government of Meghalaya to ensure job opportunities as engine drivers for local Meghalaya tribals so that the proposed railhead could be manned by local people.

# Beating Plastic Pollution: Yes we can!

***By H H Mohrmen***

Once again June 5 is here and we are all preparing to observe World Environment Day which has become more of an annual event to showcase how much we care about the environment which ultimately ends up being a one day affair. In all probability even the organisers of the different World Environment Day celebration forget the theme of the yearly celebration just few days after June 5 each year. The theme of this year's celebration is 'End plastic pollution,' so can we afford to mke light of this theme and ignore the enormous plastic problem that we are facing?

How serious is the threat of plastic pollution one may ask? And if we are still not aware of its dangers, then we should be aware that by 2050 there will be more plastic in the oceans than fishes and consider the impact of this on the main food item that we eat. We have to say this because we have become so selfish a being that we only thinks when it hits us hard in what is of interest to us and in this case – our own food.

It is said that the Urban Indian citizen generates nearly 700 gram of solid waste per person per day which will come to almost 250 kg in a year. This is how much waste we produce. Are we even aware of this? Or are we becoming oblivious of what we produce which in the end will only affect the planet that we will hand over to our children and grandchildren? Of the 700 grams we produce, part of it is wet waste that can be easily turned into compost using a very simple procedure, but the sad part is in India the Municipality area is currently able to compost only 0.21% of the wet waste we throw away. However, the major threat of the waste we produce on a daily basis is plastic and of this 8 million tonnes of plastic ends up in the ocean each year.

Plastics make up 10% of all the waste we generate and out of 700 grams which means that 10 grams of every waste we generate daily is plastics. Plastic has been part of our life and sometime it is even difficult to think if we can live without plastic because it has become an integral part of our lives. And because plastic is part of our life we are not even aware that we contribute to the selling of 500 billion plastic bags each year in the world. We cannot blame others but ourselves for the problem that we are in now.

Sometimes blinded by desire to quench our thirst we buy water bottles and cold drinks which again contributes to wasting a million plastic bottles every minute. Yes the same plastic bottles that we inadvertently buy when we get a bottle of water or a bottle of cold drinks or the same plastic water bottle that we love to line-up on the table even when we celebrate World Environment Day because it is convenient is one of the major threats to the environment of the world we live in.

**The government can also force the corporations which produce cold drinks or other products to buy back the bottles from the consumer and reuse the same. This will help reduce the waste and add to the plastic problem that is already piling which will also intimately end in the ocean.**

Now the question is whether a one day celebration which this year is also going to be hosted by India Stop Plastic Pollution? In Meghalaya we have experienced failure in the effort of banning the use of plastics. The government had even prohibited the use of plastics by shops and other commercial institutes but where are we now in Meghalaya with regards to plastic use? It looks like it is devil that we find difficult to beat because our efforts to ban plastic has met with dismal failure even when we have the law on our side. Is there no way to beat plastics? If the government has failed how can we even think of beating the plastic pollution?

Like everything else the fight against plastic pollution should start from oneself. There is no point in the government promulgating stringent laws against plastic use if the people themselves are still using it. We can start beating plastic pollution by voluntarily giving up the using of plastics! I know this is difficult and wonder if it is even possible but the point is we should at least make an effort to achieve that goal. If we want to beat plastic we should start from some point. There should be a beginning or else we will go nowhere. Again with regards to our fight against plastic, we can start with the famous '3Rs', if we cannot Refuse the use of plastic, then we can at least make an effort to Reuse. We see many families taking the trouble to wash plastic so that they can reuse it. We have been saving our plastic for our relative who own grocery shops to reuse it. And lastly those that we cannot reuse we can at least get it Recycled.

I make refusing plastic a rule for myself. A church I visited last Sunday celebrated the 125th anniversary since it was first established, and when we were offered tea in a plastic cup I respectfully refused the offer. I politely told them don't worry about me because I carry water in my bottle and will rather not use plastic cups. Again I say it is possible to beat plastic because we are currently doing it in our house. Even if there is no effort from the Jowai Municipal Board to manage the waste that the people generate, we have already started segregating our waste at source on our own. We put plastic bottles and other items that can be recycled in a separate bag and hand it over to the collectors because we know they can sell it to the vendors who can get it to a recycling unit. So we don't have to wait for the government to start waste management process in our town and cities to segregate our waste. Likewise wet waste can be easily converted to compost especially by those who have kitchen gardens and the internet is full of videos on different composting methods which are also easy to replicate.

I was on a personal visit to a very reputed institution in Guwahati last Friday and saw a flyer posted on the notice board which says, 'Give up to give back!' So yes if we want to give back we have to give up some of our wasteful practices, habits and lifestyles which are harmful to the environment. We saw a report about an IAS officer who cycles to his work. Yes sometimes taking a car to our work is but a status symbol which is hard to give up. Refusing to send our kids to school on a school bus or on a vehicle sharing basis is also a status symbol which can be achieved only if they travel to school in a private vehicle and of course the more expensive the car the better.

The way we fall prey to the market tricks and compete in buying new products, even if we don't really need them but we buy them just because it is stylish to have one, is also an attitude which only helps in generating more waste to pollute the environment. My youngest daughter came home one day wearing a fancy T-Shirt which says, 'I'm not shopaholic; I'm just helping the economy.' You now know what I mean. This is what they want us to believe.

On the other hand the government can impose fines on companies and business entities which wrap or bottle their product in plastic containers. The government can also force the corporations which produce cold drinks or other products to buy back the bottles from the consumer and reuse the same. This will help reduce the waste and add to the plastic problem that is already piling which will also intimately end in the ocean.

The key to a clean, garbage free city and to ultimately beat plastic lies in citizens doing their civic duties. We should stop pointing fingers at the government and the municipalities for the mess that we are in, because we generate the waste in the first place. The world can beat plastic if everybody stops using plastic or reducing the use of plastic. So let us ensure that our children celebrate a clean environment every day. (IANS)

Foolhardiness or living in a fool's paradise?

# Govt tries to pull the wool over people's eyes

***By K Raveendran***

Apparently it has taken nothing less than a BJP rout in the latest round of by-elections for the petroleum ministry to realise that the petrol and diesel price situation in the country was untenable. On the day the results were announced Oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan is reported to have called a midnight meeting of senior officials and top executives of oil companies to figure out how to reduce fuel prices. One does not know whether the timing was prompted by a discovery during the day about the high prices or he was really hard-pressed for a more respectable time.

Pradhan had cut a sorry figure, appearing on television channels to justify the farce of the 1-paisa price cut, arrived at after extensive calculations of all the relevant issues, including international crude prices, the burden on oil marketing companies due to the sacrifices they make in various ways, such as giving up a certain amount in the price of regulated products. With humiliation written all over his appearance, he explained for the benefit of his countrymen how petrol and diesel prices were not based on crude prices alone and had a lot to do with the exchange value of rupee as well.

This was preceded by the most farcical discovery of a mistake in the calculations of the oil marketing companies, beginning with the announcement of a 60 paise cut per litre. Within a couple of hours, however, came the amendment that the price reduction was by a solid 1 paisa. The companies seemed to be least bothered about the ecological disaster it could cause by way of higher demand as a consumer had to buy 100 litres to make one rupee!

When it comes to maths and calculations, it is an accepted norm that if one calculation is wrong, all other calculations are also suspect. And this is particularly true of oil companies, which have attained a certain notoriety for their wrong calculations, especially when computing the losses they suffer from what is fondly referred to as 'under-recovery'. It is most unlikely that they would have revised the decision if the wrong calculation had been in their favour. How can one be sure that their calculations had not gone wrong on the previous occasions? There is absolutely no transparency in whatever they do.

Curiously, the one-paisa cut came when the international benchmark crude prices had fallen 2 percent for the week after reaching several years' high. Now let's come back to Pradhan's claim of complications brought in by the exchange value of rupee. When crude oil reached its historical peak of $132.5 in 2008, the exchange value of rupee was around 40 to the dollar. That made an effective crude price of Rs5,300 per barrel. According to the current rate of crude and the prevailing exchange value of rupee, the price would be around 4,550 rupees per barrel. How will Mr Pradhan explain the series of price increases for petrol and diesel recently when the peak crude price for the past one year was only $80? The prices have since been reduced by 6 paise and so on, but such cuts are only an eye wash meant to hoodwink the public. If it is dynamic pricing, the cost has to reflect even minor fluctuations. But what we have is regulated dynamism.

Oil marketing companies are crying foul that an Increase of every dollar in the price of the Indian basket of crude oil raises their under-recovery by around Rs. 4,500 crore, estimated on the basis of the refinery gate price as of 2013. Similarly, they claim that every one-rupee depreciation in the rupee-dollar exchange rate causes an under-recovery of around Rs. 8,000 crore. But they are not talking about what happens when the crude price falls by 1 dollar or the rupee makes a gain of 100 paise against the dollar.

**The problem with high retail prices is due to the fact that the government treats petrol and diesel as cash cows to make money. The retail price of petrol, for instance, carries a tax component of more than half the price of the crude oil and this does not come down when the crude prices fall. The levies are marginally lower in the case of diesel. As long as retail petroleum products are used to raise resources to run the government, the consumers cannot expect the real benefit of any price declines in the international market.**

The fact of the matter is petrol and diesel prices are what they are today not because of the high price of imported crude. Having entered into term contracts, the prices could even work out cheaper than those quoted on a daily basis. The problem with high retail prices is due to the fact that the government treats petrol and diesel as cash cows to make money. The retail price of petrol, for instance, carries a tax component of more than half the price of the crude oil and this does not come down when the crude prices fall. The levies are marginally lower in the case of diesel. As long as retail petroleum products are used to raise resources to run the government, the consumers cannot expect the real benefit of any price declines in the international market.

Under-recovery is a catch that helps the oil companies to force consumers to pay for their inefficiencies and backwardness. It provides protection to the companies to offset issues related to their old and less sophisticated refineries, excess manpower, and location of the refineries on the basis of political considerations rather than economic criteria. Even if they deserve protection, it should be on a transparent basis rather than being subsumed through higher prices using the pricing mechanism. (IPA Service)

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Let's bring back communal harmony

Editor,

The recent flare-up in Shillong emanating from a street brawl is a matter of grave concern to all the peace loving citizens. The unfortunate turn of events along communal lines is highly condemnable. In every society there is possibility of some skirmishes between majority and minority communities but such incidents should not be made an occasion to demonize the entire minority community. It is the responsibility of majority community to handle such situations in a mature way in co-ordination with law enforcing agencies to bring the actual culprits to book and also to ensure that no innocent person from the minority community is subjected to violence, intimidation and threat. Minority community is always in need of protection by the majority community as has been the tradition of this great country. The tribal people of Meghalaya are enjoying constitutional protection like 6th schedule etc given by the majority community of India. The majority community of India thought it right to give special protections to the tribal so that their rights and privileges are protected. In a similar manner, it is incumbent on the majority community of Meghalaya to protect the depleting minority community of the state by enacting suitable laws. I do not think since formation of the state whether any specific scheme/law has been made to protect the minorities.

Minorities who are settled in Meghalaya for generations had not come here on their own volition. Ethnic communities who are referred to as non tribals have been brought here by the British for various purposes and the minority community who is in the eye of the storm is no exception. I have not found any single non-tribal person who has come voluntarily from any other part of our country to settle in Shillong. It is an established fact that persons always migrate from a less developed area to a more developed area and not the other way round. After independence, at no point of time has there been any inflow of non tribals to Shillong to settle here permanently. Rather, there is steady 'out flux' of non tribals from the state to other parts of the country. It is unfortunate that some NGOs of the state are openly branding the community who is now at the receiving end as "illegal settlers and criminals". I urge upon them to read history and ponder over the contribution of this particular community in the overall well being of the city.

I sincerely hope that the right thinking populace of majority community will rise to the occasion and not allow the so called NGOs to fan communal passions and highjack the present situation to their advantage and take effective and concrete steps to protect the minority communities of the state. Similarly, I urge the legislators to start discussions with the minority communities for enacting suitable laws to protect them in the same manner that the majority community of the state is being protected under the Constitution of India.

Yours etc.,
N K Kehar
Shillong-6

## Observance of world no tobacco day in Shillong

Editor

I am sure that many people who pass through Jeep Stand (Outskirts of Barabazar) must have observed the roadside vendors selling heaps of raw tobacco leaves and tobacco flakes with impunity. There are two three such vendors in Barabazar in the last row of shops. I do not think the tobacco products sold by these local vendors, who require no trading license, do not contain the poisonous substance nicotine. I wonder why no authority so far has taken notice of this fact and why nothing is done to curb this menace. This could be one of the contributing factors for Meghalaya to rank third among cancer stricken states in India.

On 31 May 2018 after going through your editorial on World No Tobacco Day (WNTD) and also Dr. Caleb Harris's write – up entitled 'Tobacco Breaks Hearts' I purposely visited Jeep Stand. I was thinking at least on this Day some authority or NGO must have intervened and stopped these roadside vendors from selling their tobacco products. But no, I actually counted twelve such vendors selling heaps of tobacco right on the footpath, all within a span of about 50 meters of each other. It was the same in Barabazar too, where I saw two shop keepers selling tobacco in the open. Oh! What a mockery of WNTD.

I request our Health Department particularly the minister in charge, who hails from Shillong, to take notice of the above fact. Otherwise our intended pledge 'Choose Health, not Tobacco' will just be on paper and items discussed on our local TV Channels.

Yours etc.,
Krishna Chettri
Shillong – 2

## Shillong running dry

Editor,

Severe water scarcity is inevitable in the slow-moving bus of development. Regardless of the prodigious amount of rainfall which enables us to celebrate Cherrapunji as well as Shillong as one of the wettest places on earth, these two places face a severe water crisis. The absence of water conservation practices, lack of proper storage infrastructure, sketchy implementation of rainwater harvesting systems, and unplanned use of this indispensable natural resource has been consistently threatening us. This high population growth and deforestation are other concerning factors which affect the availability of water.

An example of one such situation is the ongoing water crisis in one of India's favourite tourist destinations, Shimla. The scarcity of water in Himachal Pradesh has become a catastrophe for its booming tourism industry. In places like Shillong with hilly topography, most of the rain water flows down the hilly terrains to the flat-lands since there is scarcely any endeavour to restrict such callous waste of an invaluable blessing of nature. It is high time we adopt remedial measures to achieve adequate levels of water security considering we are a state of such high rainfall..

Yours etc.,
Saurav Thapa,(student).
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.*

*" Violence as a way of achieving racial justice is both impractical and immoral. I am not unmindful of the fact that violence often brings about momentary results. Nations have frequently won their independence in battle. But in spite of temporary victories, violence never brings permanent peace. "*

**--- Martin Luther King, Jr.**

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## Zoning for Shillong city

WHEN a small town envisaged for twenty five thousand people suddenly morphs into an unplanned city, bursting at the seams there are bound to be problems. The location of the Them Iew Mawlong – an erstwhile residential complex for workers in the Shillong Municipality and Khasi Hills District Council (KHDC) - adjacent to the Iew Mawlong (a hardware market adjacent to Meghalaya's biggest and busiest market – Iewduh) was a ticking time bomb. The incident of May 31, sparked off an agitation that carried on until June 4. Since then Shillong has been under curfew. The Them Iew Mawlong was located there when Iew Mawlong was not the busy, congested and chaotic slum that it is today. The population then was manageable. But four or five decades down the line the number of settlers have grown exponentially and if their antecedents are checked then not all are employees of the KHDC or the Shillong Municipality. Moreover, in recent years commercial adjuncts have also sprung up ostensibly as a means of livelihood. The crowding is also a health hazard.

On Monday a body of hawkers met Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma and his team to put forward their demands for relocating this Colony to avoid future clashes. It is a matter of concern that in Meghalaya there is no land use planning. Everything is everywhere. The Meghalaya Urban Development Authority (MUDA) in its years of existence has not divided this city into zones in which various uses are permitted and others are not permitted. Hence residential areas cannot transform themselves into commercial areas or markets. The zoning of an area is to provide maximum comfort and convenience to people and to improve public health, safety and welfare. Granted that Shillong is not a planned city but MUDA has within its set-up qualified town planners who should have ignited this thought. That is their primary task and not just to check out building plans. But none of that happened in so many decades. It took a flashpoint of Thursday last for the Government to deal with an issue that successive governments have pushed to the backburner despite its potential for conflict. The MDA Government has now formed a High Level Committee to study this contentious issue and arrive at a solution.

# Mob mentality led to lawlessness

***By Albert Thyrniang***

Benjamin Franklin said, "If everyone is thinking alike, then no one is thinking." Everyone thinking alike is a mob mentality. Mob mentality is also called 'herd mentality' or more degradingly, 'gang mentality'. It is a term to describe how people are influenced by peers to act based largely on emotion rather than on reason. Often used in a negative sense, it refers to a 'thinking' that leads to a behaviour which emerges from a crowd that is aggressive, chaotic and even hysteric. Therefore, mob mentality and subsequently mob behaviour is influenced by peer pressure, the need to conform, the need for acceptance and the desire for a sense of belonging.

Obviously the term 'herd mentality' is derived from the study of groups of animals or herds which is applied to humans. Group behaviour of flocks, herds, pods and other assortments is a common sight but scientific studies have applied herd behaviour to humans. Like animals people too tend to do what others around them do.

Sociologists and psychologists say that herd mentality and herd behavior have been prevalent ever since people began to 'form tribes, migrate in groups, and perform cooperative marketing and agricultural functions'. Put forward by the 19th-century French social psychologists Gabriel Tarde, the idea of a "group mind" or "mob behavior" has been studied by Sigmund Freud, Wilfred Trotter, Thorstein Veblen, Malcolm Gladwell, James Suroweicki and others. Though studies vary the common element is that humans seem to lose their rationality when in a crowd or a mob.

Herd mentality and more aptly mob mentality was in full display in Shillong in the last three days or so. To the shock of many, the state capital turned lawless suddenly. The genesis of the violence was a rumour. A skirmish took place in Punjabi lane on 31st May afternoon. The cause of the altercation is unclear. The bus driver of an SPTS bus said his two sons and nephew were beaten up by a group of ladies and later by a group of boys in Punjabi Lane as the ladies were on the path of buses while the headman of Punjabi Lane or Harijan colony said the ladies were eve teased by the bus driver and conductors. Both sides are right and wrong at the same time. The truth has to lie somewhere in the middle.

Whatever happened on that crowed lane on the last day of May, the incident can be described as minor till the rumour that the minor boy who was injured in the clash succumbed to his injuries spread thick and fast through the social media. The result was that in the evening of the same day the situation flared up when a crowd gathered in Motphran with the intention to attack Punjabi Lane and started pelting stones at the security forces deployed in the area. The unfortunate incident had turned communal. Obviously, the reality of the matter was not verified. The injured boy in hospital did not die. Confirmation could have been easily obtained. Clearly the social media has gone crazy. It has enabled us to stop thinking.

Since that fateful day/night the city plunged into lawlessness. Stone pelting, clashes with the police, tear gas, arsons, torching of show rooms, shops and vehicles in vulnerable localities of the city were the order of the day. People had to flee their homes. Curfew had to be imposed. On standby, the army had to conduct flag march. Internet connection had to be suspended. Literally wild fire spread quickly. Crack down on and arrests of miscreants followed. The hill city was gripped with tension.

The culprit of the sorry state of affairs is the social media. Photographs of 'victims of police excesses', live video clips of police lathi-charge, young men clashing with security forces, were posted on Facebook and WhatsApp and other social platforms. Plans for violence, invitations for a fight back, calls to protect 'the Jaitbynriew' were explicitly made in these media. And hundreds of youngsters responded to invitations to damage property and harm lives. Evidently the mob mentality has taken over their brains and the ability to think critically or normally is lost. Self thinking is surrendered to a mob. What works is emotion, no longer reason. The term 'Jaitbynriew' is often maligned to evoke passion and emotion, sentiments and sensationalism.

Neuro-biologists say that when people break off into groups, their brain produces chemicals that diminishes their normal thought pattern to a more primitive state which literally means people tend to stop thinking when they are amalgamated into groups. A writer controversially argued that what happened in Nazi Germany could largely be blamed on ordinary people conforming to "mass opinion without a critical evaluation of the consequences of their actions." The turns of events in the state capital should remind us that we can fall prey to mob mentality.

However, each of us has the ability to think independently for ourselves even in a group or even while belonging to a group. We need not conform to norms of a group. We need not subscribe to the beliefs and views of a group. We need not be stereotyped. We need not act like the rest in a crowd. We need not feel compelled to follow the crowd. We can think differently. We can decide for ourselves. We can fight peer pressure. Mob mentality has to be avoided. Mob mentality, most often than not, leads to violence and undesirable consequences. Mob mentality kills critical thinking and creativity and can be a curse and a bane. Modern technology has also enabled fake news to spread with every blink of an eye. Fake news of large scale violence against a community and non-tribals shuttered the good name of 'Scotland of the East,'regionally and nationally. Sadly even the mainstream news houses, electronic and print, fell prey to fake news and sourced their news from social media posts and shares. A Punjabi minister from the Centre who visited ground zero testified that Punjabis are safe in the Meghalaya capital. The police and the security forces did a great job to prevent potential large scale violence.

Now, who are those involved in breaking the law? Do they represent 'the Jaidbynriew'? On whose behalf are they acting? Do they have a face? Do they act on their own? Do they represent NGOs and pressure groups? Do we just dismiss them as miscreants? Do we brand them as 'people from West Khasi Hills'? What is the objective is labelling them so? Was there no Shillongite involved? Is a message sought to be conveyed that Shillong citizens are noble and don't get themselves involved in such mean behaviour? Is it just a divisive tactic? By the way, who are Shillong people? Are/were they not migrants from villages at some point of time in history? Do pressure groups exploit and make use of them for their self interests? The Chief Minister said protesters have been bought? Who bought them? Inferences are too obvious to state.

Now politics over Punjabi Lane/Harijan Colony/Sweeper Colony have already started. Groups and politicians have demanded the eviction of the occupants of this slum dwelling. The residents who consist of employees of the District Council and Municipality, insist the locality is their own home. Will we see a forceful eviction? Or will we see the matter in court?

Returning to the point we began, perhaps mob mentality is what we have inherited. As kids we are told to keep our mouths shut. We are told never to ask questions. We are told to conform to the norms of a family or community. Even in school we learn through choral recitation. We answer as a class as loudly as possible, 'yes' when a teacher asks, "Do you understand". Questions papers up to degree level test only memory. They do not assess students' language, thinking, analysing, synthesising, problem solving, life and social skills. From reliable sources marks in MBOSE examinations are rewarded on the students' ability to write verbatim. If the answer scripts of toppers are open to scrutiny, you might find accurate answers as in the text books or notes. That's how you have a rank holder who is still confused with English. I am yet to reconcile to how the one subject, Mathematics, that forces a student to think, analyse and solve problems is made optional at the SSLC level.

Our social upbringing and formal education promotes mob mentality. No wonder, the monster raises its ugly head regularly.

Gossip, rumour and test-tube sita

# Guessing game over Pranabda or Mamatadi

*By Sushil Kutty*

'Gossip dies when it hits a wise person's ears', the Buddhist told the journalist who slapped a sneer and shot back, "What about rumour?" The Buddhist shifted to a different asana: "That, my friend, I'm afraid, will move on unless the wise one opens his mouth and scotches it dead right there and then." Wonderful talking to a Buddhist except that all Buddhists are now communists and some of them in India don't mind water-boarding to death a Dalit Christian who dared to be Romeo to an upper caste Christian Juliet!

Sad commentary, indeed, and not all of it gossip, because gossip is one part truth and one part 'bitching' whereas rumour is a brand of lie that feeds fake news to circulate unchecked. Unless fact-checkers like bloom-bloom-da (cover for a cover) kill rumours and fake news with facts and figures. The fact-checkers are Buddhists in a way that the commies will embrace them so long as the right rules and left over-rules. End of Modi-001 and fact-checkers will throw themselves under the bus, willingly, happily!

That being said, one definition of 'left' and 'right' getting noticed these days is in the difference: The 'right' see in the 'left' everything wrong; the 'left' see in the 'right' evil-incarnated. To actor Prakash Raj – to whom the 'right' is 'Kuchbhi evil' – those going after Rajinikanth's 'Kaala' is not the right alone but fringe of a larger denomination, one which cuts into profit, 'Sabse Bada Rupaiya! To Kamal Haasan what's happening to Kaala is quite okay; after all, it's not his Vishwaroopam! Rumour and gossip abound in the categorizing of the 'other.' Ask Gautama Buddha and he will say 'get over the cycle of birth and rebirth, friend'.

But that is nirvana, philosophy. Not politics. In Tibetan Buddhism the Dalai is reborn even before the Dalai is dead! So it's with the Panchem. That is politics! Which brings us to the question: Do politicians really care who dies and who lives? Ask the Thoothukudi-dead, killed because they protested too much; or the 'braves' taking the bullet on the International Border and the Line of Control because Modi dithered?

All that the braves get is a 'fitting salute' and a televised funeral. The politicians, if they fell like the braves on the border, it'll be so much more celebratory for the masses. But no, politicians, they get to live to tell the tale any which way they want. Witness the Uttar Pradesh Bharatiya Janata Party MLA, who's dead-sure that Sita was cultured in a test-tube! Is that why Rama had to string a great bow to win her hand and Ravana strung her along – with a mayawi deer to distract Lakshmana – to Lanka, only for Hanuman to find her?

Mind you, it was gossip that Sita two-timed Rama in Ravana's Ashoka Vatika that lost Rama his Sita. She, with the Sati-Savitri repute, preferring to split the ground to lose herself in racist Edgar Rice Burrough's 'Centre of the Earth' rather than live in humiliation with Lord Rama on Earth. The real loss was to Luva and Kusha, twins born to the test-tube-born.

Point is, there's no limit to the cycle of birth and rebirth; to rumour and gossip. Mamata Didi's post-mortem of the BJP in Purulia after leaving to the vultures the carcass of the Left Front; Rahul Gandhi's consignment of the judiciary to Pakistan's gallimohalla after finding the Congress relegated to second spot in Karnataka; Mayawati's promise to the grand alliance to stand firm with Akhilesh Yadav shoulder-to-shoulder come caste-killings or social reaffirmation; Chandrababu organizing a Safari to carve a third front; Narendra Modi stealing a digital leaf out of the Veda (which one?) to hug Mark Zuckerberg and Google's Sundar Pichai to internet-India!

All gossip that keep us glued to Batpora Chowk in Srinagar where a grenade attack killed 7 this morning (June 4, 2018), and mired in the ambiguity of whether 82-year-old Citizen Pranab's going to teach the RSS a lesson or two in 'nationalism', his subject of choice, Ramesh Chennitalla and Jairam Ramesh be damned. The two wouldn't know nationalism from Congressism, both are so similar!

India Gandhi, if she were alive, would have told Mehbooba Mufti to button up and put a halt to her 'talk to Pakistan' refrain. That is nationalism that Pranab should remember and not fail to remind the RSS. Tell the RSS to its saffron-face and khaki-base that it was Indira who the RSS hailed as Durga! That, after she taught Pakistan a lesson in division and subtraction.

The RSS, like Mehbooba Mufti, needs to be told where the lead is flying from and who are the ones bleeding iron! Television channels are awash with video showing "how Indian forces are giving it back to them and bringing Pakistan on its knees" but that is gossip that doesn't see eye to eye with the coffins unloaded in places afar from the border.

Ask the Buddhist and he'll say that, dear friend, is half the story told. As election 2019 closes in, more and more "forces giving it back to Pakistan" video clips will be fare for television news. And 'nationalism' will become willy-nilly an election issue to bind the Hindu together. The prospect of a grand alliance tripping Narendra Modi to defeat has become very real, so an effort is on to build a good pitch to bat on against the opposition's googly!

Pranab Mukherjee, probably, more than any Congressman, understands that "nationalism" is more emotive than any emoticon available on the Internet. To the two Ramesh – Jairam and Chennitalla – who want him to tell the RSS to go take a hike, Pranab's told them hold their thoughts till they hear what he's got to tell the RSS on what's "nationalism" on June 7, a nice Gemini date: Empty talk from the Lal Qila or loaded guns from the border.

Meantime, will somebody get to Gautama Buddha (mission impossible, considering that he's done with birth and rebirth) and ask him: "How to put a halt to the cycle of birth and rebirth when there's the test-tube still around? Will a bottle of scotch kill the gossip that come 2019 it will either be Pranab Da or Mamata Di! (IPA Service)

**TO THE EDITOR**

## O Shillong!!

Editor,

The incident that happened on Thursday was really unfortunate. But thanks be to God there were no deaths otherwise heavens knows what the outcome would be as it can't get any more worse than this. Prior to this incident, the past 2-3weeks I read in your esteemed daily that the law and order situation in this State had improved tremendously. Insurgency has dropped and the tourist inflows have increased. Yes in comparison with many states we are doing well and improving in all sectors. People are living in peace and harmony and respecting each other. We have grown and become broadminded knowing for the fact that we are inter-dependent on each other and one cannot live in isolation. The ugly turn of events of this fateful day caught us unawares especially the police department who were unprepared to handle such a situation which occur to an otherwise peaceful hill station.

The grave concern here is the aftermath of this issue which raises serious questions. Why is the situation going from bad to worse? Force is not the solution as it leads to more aggression. Why are the residents in the curfew bound areas held captive for 3 days and now still continuing? What about their basic amenities like food, medicines etc., especially families with children, toddlers and elderly? What is the Government doing? In fact when one recalls of similar situations that happened in the past, curfew never used to be continuous. It used to be relaxed for initially 2-4 hours and gradually increased as the situation gets better. However the irony is that, despite us being educated, modern and advanced, our authorities show their incapability to handle a situation.

It is time for the newly formed government to prove its metal. This issue poses serious consequences if it is not dealt with immediately. It is affecting all people-high and low. The economy and education is hit hard. People are feeling insecure. In fact the whole State is facing an uneasy calm for fear of what will happen next. It is time to act. The chair is not a comfort zone. Starting from the top, the Chief Minister should personally address the public to maintain calm and not resort to violence while assuring them of positive measures taken by his Government to bring back normalcy in the region. This will help a great deal to get back the confidence of the people and gradually calm the situation. The Home Minister as was shown in the media cannot be laid back and just simply talk on the backfoot at this time considering the gravity of the situation. He should be dynamic, talk boldly and show his capability to handle the law and order situation of the State effectively. Keeping all this in mind, MLA's, bureaucrats, police, pressure groups, student leaders also have a vital role to play at this hour for they have a voice and an influence to curtail its members from resorting to violence. When all the big heads come into dialogue and discussion, no doubt a lasting positive solution will be arrived at and the region will experience peace once again.

Having said all that, such kind of instances happen, nobody can predict the future as are all humans. However, it should be nipped right at the bud and not allowed to be blown out of proportion as it has done today. We learn from our mistakes. Anywhere in the world, when the local populace is touched, things spiral. We are attached to the region and community we are born into. However, one must understand also that the world is becoming global. We all have our members' working/studying/settled elsewhere outside our State. Keeping this in mind, a wise and clever decision should be taken for the welfare of the society as a whole.

Yours etc.,
Dr F Diengdoh,
Via email

## Please relax mobile services

Editor,

Modern technologies like mobile phone services have become a necessity today. While the Digital India initiatives in our state are taking a boost especially in all the major sectors like banking, FMCG market, etc. As we all know, internet services including SMS in mobile networks were blocked by the Government since its speculates fake news material through social media at a lightning speed which may lead to further deterioration of law and order situation. As an android mobile user I am having three options of services available from the Mobile Service Providers; i.e. the mobile phone calls, the internet connectivity where I can browse the net including use of social media and the SMS facility. Of the three services, two had been blocked except mobile phone calls where everybody can make calls. I have no issue when the shopkeeper tells me that I cannot swipe my credit/debit card while paying the bills since ATM outlets are available vis-à-vis the non-availability of mobile internet services as they are all secondary needs to me. But what I am concerned about and which is also for the general interest of the public is the internet banking as most of the payment gateways insist on OTP (One Time Password) for the successful completion of the transaction.

In view of the above, may I request the authorities concerned through your esteemed daily to exempt the SMS facility in a single way only i.e. to receive messages such as OTP and others short message service sent by registered corporate vendors through their SMS server.

Yours etc.,
Anvil Lyngdoh.
Shillong – 4.

*"This is the great fault of wine; it first trips up the feet: it is a cunning wrestler."*
**--- Plautus**

**The Shillong Times**
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## Prejudice has lasting impacts

PREJUDICE begins at home and spreads among peer groups. Prejudice resides where the space for dissent is shrunken and conformity is the norm. Prejudices are dissolved when there are conversations among elders, youth and children and not when elders only talk because no one learns from monologues. Conversations open up minds and clarify doubts. But community conversations are rare. Most conversations take place between and among elders; the youth talk to their peers and hence don't learn from their elders. Similarly elders don't know what their youth think and the opinions they have of issues in society. The fresh air of diversity and dissent is not allowed to circulate. Prejudice is nurtured particularly among insular groups. Those living in rural Meghalaya have little or no opportunities for cultural interface with others who are the ethnic other. That interface happens when they step out of their safe enclaves and come to the state capital of Shillong with its huge diversity and plural set-up. This is the first cultural shock for many who have not been prepared in their educational institutions to accept that the world beyond their home is not a homogenous space. This is where social skills come in. Those without the social skills to cope with differences tend to feel threatened and withdraw or become aggressive. It is here that prejudices develop as a safety mechanism. The tendency then is to fight and establish one's territory lest someone else usurps it. If such behaviour is left unchecked and corrected through counseling it will have lasting impacts and produce little monsters that have the potential to create conflicts in society.

Prejudice is belittling; prejudiced people don't see others as persons. They see them as a stereotype and don't see others as their equals. Prejudice makes general assumptions of a person or a community based on limited understanding. This creates ignorance about a community and a generalization of a larger demographic. Prejudiced people rely on stereotypes to inform themselves about what they think they need to know about a person or member of a group or community other than theirs. Sadly those who experience prejudice are always denied a chance to explain who they are and share their story. They might be experiencing shame, anger, sadness, or a feeling of aggression. Psychologists aver that prejudice not only impacts the victims but it also affects the perpetrators. Above all prejudice deprives the person of a chance to learn about a community from that community's perspective. Subsequently it can lead to harassment, abuse and violence. Does this sound familiar? Perhaps some introspection is called for..

# Conciliation: Is it possible?

***By Avner Pariat***

Here we go again! Yet another flare-up, yet another state of emergency in Shillong. And these are set to increase, in my opinion, as our economy continues to shrink. The work-force is increasing while employment opportunities remain stagnant. People are clamouring for every scrap and fighting for it tooth and nail. Unless there are radical changes we are doomed. Some friends of the slightly Right Wing persuasion seem enthused by these events of the past week in Shillong. They see it as a sort of expression of the anxieties and frustrations of the people. They are happy in a way because it seems to indicate, to them at least, that the erstwhile sheepish and complacent Khasi people have been fired up to address an old pending issue. They are delighted to see the crowd snub old political forces and personalities in a bid to exert a new form of activism/ politics. While this does offer some satisfaction to those of us who are jaded we must not forget that this crowd of stone-pelters is essentially headless and therefore easily swayed and manipulated. This is the danger and that presents a great opportunity for many little Machiavellis to arise.

There is the emergence of a new type of hardliner these days and I think it is directly connected to the ineptitude of government to redress anything assigned to them. This new breed is quite vociferous and doesn't care for KSU, FKJGP and others if those get in their way. When they smell blood, they go for the kill. This directness is also the problem. Over the last three years, I have come in contact with more and more of this type of "angry, young man". They are often from very poor circumstances. Now that I think about it not much material benefits separate them from the Harijans in Punjabi Lane (Them Metor). It is just that they can purchase land here (well that is the hope anyway). In addition, many of them attempt to throw off all manners of socially conditioned control. So it should not be a surprise to learn that many of these men don't really care too much about Church authority either. They question things much more than their predecessors, but the only problem is that they are getting the wrong answers. These cloud their minds more instead of allowing them to view things clearly and with calmness.

I read in the Shillong Times that it is assumed many of the trouble-makers are from West Khasi Hills. This is not a surprise statement because the Maharam/Maram people have always been accused of these types of activities from the earliest days. They are a good scape-goat to heap the blame on. I don't see them as a threat to peace and order to be honest. There are a thousand ways of dealing with them without resorting to violence. What disturbs me most is the blind hatred that they thrive on and that is not from West Khasi Hills but located smack-dab in the middle of our own indigenous selves. We simply import these people to do the dirty work while we egg them on. There is a fear and a loathing in our Khasi community today which is toxic and it has been brewing for a long, long time. What was supposed to be a simple case of assault has snowballed into this putrid communal mess. No one wants to admit that they have done something wrong. Everyone claims to be a victim. Indeed being 'victims' has become a vital feature of our very identity. The sense of victimhood is not only confined to the Khasi people of course. But for our own sakes, we must interrogate its origins and try to attempt a new way forward.

Many people are upset that such things can still happen in Shillong but the truth is we have deep resentment towards dkhars. The people allegedly shipped in from West Khasi Hills can be bought to hate anyone but the hatred within the mind of the average middle-class Khasi is the most troubling. It is not drawn out of need (they don't work in the bazaar, they don't come into direct conflict with dkhars) but out of pure ignorance. They are purely jingoistic. They can afford to suffer the ill-effects of a curfew because they will get a pay-check at the end of the month regardless of what happens. They are also the most religiously conservative. Like many Khasis today, they have little or no personal interaction with people from different ethnic/cultural backgrounds and this is basically true for the whole state. If Conrad Sangma and his government are serious about the proposed Peace Panel then it should not be another boring old bureaucratic committee but should be vested with funding to sponsor "exchange" programs between the different peoples of the state. It is easy to hate the others, if we don't see them as humans like ourselves. It is easy to hate that which we don't know. These sorts of inter-cultural bridging programs have shown favourable results in foreign countries like Germany where immigrant Turks have become more integrated into greater German society. They have also been deployed quite successfully in places like Karbi-Anglong in spite of many issues. I think this is an important step if we are to avoid this sort of outburst in future. Think about it.

The Sindhis might tell us that they have been in Shillong since its beginning but I don't know what they are like as a community. What about the Muslims of Shillong? What are they all about? What do the Mizos know about the Khasis aside from the occasional Halleluiah song and dance? This is not how we should live. We do not need false liberal tolerance, we need in-depth engagements.

There were so many stupid things that came together that faithful day: the police for not arresting the perpetrators sooner, the Punjabi attackers for their brutality, the Khasi racists for their, well, racism. The Public has had to endure all this inconvenience because of these lovely bunch of morons. This has been yet another event which has convinced me that the Meghalaya Police really need re-skilling especially with regards to their interactions with people. You are police officers, please act like it. Patience, kindness and action go a long way in building public trust.

As for the Harijans of Punjabi Lane, their apprehension is that they will lose out if that area is redeveloped after their relocation. A sensible government would involve them as partners. By giving them a percentage/stake in the final outcome/product (mall, parking lot etc) it would not only ensure that they are satisfied but it would also allow them to lift themselves out of abject poverty. It's called humanitarianism (try it out sometimes!). None of us should support the redevelopment if it means that some contractor/ businessman, close to the ruling coalition, gets all the benefits. It would mean that all this struggle we are going through right now was for nothing.

Four Years of NDA

# 'Acche din' an illusion?

***By Dhurjati Mukherjee***

The BJP-led NDA is celebrating its four years in power. Ministry after ministry is going all out to highlight its achievements. However, for the common man, the reality on the ground may not match the claims. The big question is whether the people have got a feel of 'acche din' as promised by the Modi government? Karnataka and recent by-elections results suggest that people are not convinced and perhaps disillusionment is setting in.

The Government's performance in several fronts leaves much to be desired. Despite being an agricultural economy, the farm hands have a sorry tale to tell. The farming community continues to be up in arms against the government for non-compliance of its demands and that the various schemes announced or underway are of little consequence to small and marginal farmers. In the list of protests, another one has been added. 'Gaon Bandh' launched by 172 organisations under the banner of Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangh and Kisan Ekta Manch on June 1 across States, will culminate into Bharat Bandh on June 10.

Undeniably, farmers are really facing a critical problem, fighting against selling their produce at non-profitable rates so as the repay their debts. Pictures of farmers throwing their produce on the roads is becoming quiet common, making the experts question whether, in spite of all claims of being the fastest growing economy, this is the most anti-famer government in the country. The fact is that in the past four years, the share of agriculture growth stands at around 2.4 per cent. This is half of what it was during the previous four years of UPA government. Thus, the possibility of doubling farmers' income in real terms, as per Modi's promise, even by 2025 appears remote, if not impossible.

A recent problem that has further complicated matters is the high price of petrol and diesel which has sky-rocketed in the last three months or so. While international prices may have increased, the high Central and State duties are affecting the middle income sections of the population. Neither side is ready to make minor cuts in their duties and blame each other. The result of this will have a cascading effect on daily necessities as most of the goods are transported through surface transport. In fact, prices have already started rising and the Centre remains a silent spectator.

While a commentator of a leading national daily talked about innovations being promoted by the Government with the increase in the use of mobile phones and the recharge rates coming down, one fails to understand what actually has happened to the poorer segments of the population in rural areas. Toilets are being built, most of which do not have water connections or are not suitable for use, while food storage facilities is grossly inadequate. Moreover, the health sector in the rural areas is in a mess.

According to recent study and that too by an official agency, about a quarter of all rural households and one in five urban households in India are forced into debt or sale of assets to meet hospitalisation costs. This is true across income levels, revealed by the National Health Profile 2007 published by the Central Bureau of Health Intelligence. In rural India, about two-thirds -- ranging from 65.6 per cent in the poorest to 68 per cent for the richest – depend on household income or savings while 27 per cent of the poorest households and 23 per cent of the richest households depend on borrowings to meet hospitalisation costs.

Moreover, the condition of health centres and hospitals in the Blocks are pitiable with very few doctors and support staff and virtually no medicines. The poor and the economically weaker sections, who cannot afford to go to nursing homes, are faced with severe problems when they are referred to district hospitals which are overcrowded and no bed is available. Is there any country, comparable with India, where the state of health care is in such a bad shape? Possibly not as another recent study, published in The Lancet, pointed out that India ranked 145 among 195 countries and lower than China, Bangladesh and Sudan on health care access and quality, measured through their capacities to prevent premature deaths from 32 diseases.

As regards education, the state of affairs is far from better. Though the government has been talking of giving more autonomy to certain institutions and giving crores to universities of excellence, higher education in rural and semi-urban areas is appalling. Teachers are not qualified enough to teach innovative subjects and guide students in the proper manner while infrastructure of most of these institutions are in a pretty bad shape.

The poor state of governance has not even spared the nationalised banks. Most of these are in the red due to inordinately high non-performing assets. The results in the last quarter indicate a net loss of around Rs 45,000 crores, the highest in recorded history of banks. The huge loans being granted to business houses, some of whom are reportedly close to the powers-that-be, would not have been possible without the involvement of the political class. While the Finance Ministry blames the Reserve Bank of India, the latter transfers the blame to the top management of the respective banks.

The entire country is in a mess, whether it be the economic, political or social front. The strategy being followed has led to jobless growth which has severe adverse repercussions in society. Many hear of schemes and slogans, which have little value for the common man who continues to struggle for his existence.

It matters very little which party or coalition would form the government at the Centre in the next elections. 'Inclusive' development remains a slogan. Over the years and even now big talk and new schemes and promises are being made without actually seeing how much of these are benefitting the masses. How long will this continue? How long will the government laud GDP growth, without calculating the damages incurred every year due to various environmental phenomenon, to show how efficiently the government functions?

When Modi came to power, he made tall promises, but many are yet to be realised. There are also no indications whether the situation may change in the coming years as those in power or authority-- political or economic – don't profess communitarian feelings. However, this must change. While, good and efficient governance is always a priority for any government, values need to change and a sense of concern and empathy with the aam aadmi and the community needs to be nurtured.

To start with those in power and authority, specially the political leadership, need to gain the confidence of the people and that every scheme announced has their welfare in mind. Unless this happens, social transformation cannot be achieved and the reforms contemplated by the government will not be able to ensure real development for the people at the grass-root levels.---INFA

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Spill-over of administrative failure

Editor,

It is unfortunate to see our peaceful city of Shillong going back to those days of turmoil. Curfew is here again to remind us of those years of pain and violence. The recent incident should not have happened had appropriate legal measures been taken by the state authorities. As they say in English "a stitch in time saves nine." Governments in the past have failed to address the issue of relocating the sweepers from Iew Mawlong to another place outside the city. In fact, the sweepers' lane in Iew Mawlong has become literally a slum area and an eyesore to any passer-by. It is definitely unbecoming for any city to harbour sweepers in the centre of the market. When this colony was established way back in the past, Shillong was a small town and so it was acceptable. But Shillong today has grown into a metropolitan city and Iew Mawlong has become the business hub of the city. The relocation should have been done years ago. It is therefore right and legal for the government to relocate the sweepers to another location. However, different governments in the distant and recent past have all similarly failed to resolve the issue. What is evident is the lack of political will and perhaps the domination of personal interests of some politicians.

A similar situation exists with regard to illegal settlements along the bank of Wah Umkhrah in Polo region. I remember, many orders had been passed against such illegal constructions and lately the one passed by the NGT. But whenever the district authorities have tried to implement the orders, some politicians or some other interested groups enter the fray and all efforts go in vain. This is another example of political ambition at the cost of public good. I foresee similar trouble which may crop up in the future in the Polo area all because the government has not been decisive in addressing the issue in time. I hope the present government with all its good will, will sincerely seek to resolve all these issues as soon as possible so as to avoid such unfortunate incidents.

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie sdb,
Via email

## Present SMB office meant for quarters

Editor,

The present Shillong Municipal Office buildings in the European Ward are meant for the quarters of the Board employees residing in Iew Mawlong. In early 2006 during my tenure as CEO, Shillong Municipality, many of the employees of the Board residing in the present conflict point at Iew Mawlong had agreed to shift to the quarters constructed for them in the European ward except some of them who were reluctant. The said quarters in European ward remain unoccupied for some years and were in a dilapidated condition. They are now used to park the garbage trucks and cesspools till the shifting of the Board office to the said SMB quarters from Jail Road most probably in the year 2010 after my retirement.

My personal suggestion is to shift all the families of the employees of SMB to the present temporary office of the Board. SMB office may be shifted to any temporary rented building pending handing over of the SMB office at Jail Road. In view of the prevailing situation in the city and to diffuse the tension between law and order personnel and the agitators, a note on the above personal proposal already submitted to the Hon'ble Home Minister and the Hon'ble Urban Affairs Minister, Meghalaya for information and action by the office. Hopefully the notes sent to them are not dumped in the waste paper basket.

Yours etc.,
W.L.Lyngdoh
Former CEO Municipal Board.
Via email

## Of waste pickers !

Editor,

This refers to the article, "Beating plastic pollution :Yes we can!" by H H Mohrmen (ST, June 4, 2018). Millions of our waste - pickers help India achieve the highest PET (Polyethylene terephthalate) recycling rates in the world! A report says that India recycles or reuses over 90 per cent of all the PET that is manufactured in our country and the waste - pickers in India are the largest driving force behind this. We can achieve almost 100 per cent PET recycling rates if we can use the service of adult waste - pickers in a methodical manner. Waste - pickers have been rendering great service to the cause of India's garbage disposal and world's environment, risking their own lives. While trying to keep the environment clean, they run the risk of allergy, skin rashes, tuberculosis and several other infections. They dispose of the garbage in the most scientific way by taking the recyclable materials from the garbage to where it can be recycled. Without their service, those materials would have been burnt, resulting in air pollution and warming of the environment or would have been dumped resulting in soil/ water pollution. They also prevent the scattered garbage from choking our drains. The waste - pickers deserve to be rewarded for their services and engaged in the Swachh Bharat Abihiyan (SBA). It will certainly help the Swachh Bharat Abihiyan to have more teeth.

The need of the hour is to entrust local self governments to register all adult waste pickers in their respective areas and make them engage in garbage recycling, compost creation and management. Corporations, municipalities and panchayats are to provide each of them under their jurisdiction with an identity card, a uniform, a sack and a stick (to shoo away street dogs and to rummage through garbage). They should also be given money, food, soap, hand - gloves and pollution - masks every week. These items will give them recognition, prestige and protection which they really deserve. Moreover, better look waste - pickers with clean uniform and sack will make our country look better.

There is however no question of disturbing the exclusive job of the cleaning staff to dispose of the non-recyclable garbage. Child waste - pickers must be encouraged to go to school and provided with food packets and other incentives, apart from the midday meal.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

## Refuse plastic!

Editor

On June 5, every year the world celebrates, 'World Environment Day' and fortunately this year India happened to be the host. 'World Environment Day' was established in 1972 by the United Nations General Assembly at 'Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment'. World Environment Day is a flagship campaign for the awakening of individuals regarding environmental issues from marine pollution to growing global footprints and global warming.

The theme for 2018 is 'Beat Plastic Pollution'. Plastic is one of the major concerns of environmental bodies as it has an imperishable degradation process, hence its introduction to the environment has been rampantly polluting it. Large quantities of plastic wastes generated and the lack of its proper disposal have been consistently threatening marine life, posing threat to human health and choking the natural environment.

Over 1 lakh marine animals are killed every year due to the imprudent disposal of plastic waste into water bodies. Presence of plastic micro-particles in air and water is hazardous to the health of all living creatures. Understanding the extremity of plastic usage in our daily life is difficult as plastic has become ineluctable.

Despite plastic being unhealthy for our environment, nothing much has been done to limit its use and for its proper disposal. Hence 'World Environment Day' is not a mere celebration but an ambitious effort to awaken governments, industries, communities, and people to realize the severity of plastic usage and how it has been a concerning factor, which is unattended. At this moment we are expected to meticulously and attentively understand the insignificant usage of plastic and conserve the natural environment from its life-threatening consequences. The existence of a healthy natural environment is our existence.

Yours etc.,
Saurav Thapa
Shillong -2

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

*" What has violence ever accomplished? What has it ever created? No martyr's cause has ever been stilled by an assassin's bullet. No wrongs have ever been righted by riots and civil disorders. A sniper is only a coward, not a hero; and an uncontrolled or uncontrollable mob is only the voice of madness, not the voice of the people. "*

**--- Robert Kennedy**

**The Shillong Times**

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## Sugarcane Economy

THE mess in the sugarcane economy can lead to electoral defeat. The sugarcane ecosystem shows the worst side of India's agricultural policy. It has two layers of price fixing. The Centre fixes a minimum price. Then the state government takes a hand imposing state advised price (SAP). SAP often does not take into account the market price of sugar and is largely responsible for agrarian distress in the sector. The states which are the worst offenders are UP, Uttarakhand and Tamil Nadu. There are two aspects of a bailout package under consideration. Additional demand for sugarcane by-products may be created by further encouraging the use of ethanol blended petrol. Besides, a price support measure may be introduced through the mechanism of buffer stocks. But neither solution is likely to address the crisis. Additional sources of stress may be generated. Sugarcane making is a water intensive process. India has 7% of world population but only 4% of fresh water supply globally. The problem may be aggravated by the application of ethanol petrol which may affect water availability.

A buffer stock which does not take into consideration the adverse impact of SAPs is not a healthy solution. SAP ahead of elections has been seen to be irrational. A bailout package with banks passing through reforms may also cause repetition of mistakes in handling the sugarcane industry. Pricing should be freed from distortions and sugar mills need protection. Cane area reservation should be abolished. Otherwise the steps taken will only cost money without having any good effect.

**LOOKING BACK**

**May 15, 1989**

## Naga accord in the offing?

It IS about two decades after the Shillong accord that the Union Home Ministry is set again to thrash out another on the long-pending issue of a Naga settlement. The earlier one proved a virtual non- starter, some of the influential groups among the insurgents not being a party to it. Naturally the current initiative for renewed talks has been preceded by an understanding among these factions in the first place on the urgency of an accord. If reports leaking out by bits are to be believed, the Army and more particularly its intelligence agencies had a quiet role to play in winning over the leading men among the insurgents to come to New Delhi. The latter are lately divided to such an extent that violent clashes among themselves recently took a toll of more than a hundred lives at the Burmese end of the rebel hideouts.

# Haunted by the Punjabi Lane Violence

***By Benjamin Lyngdoh***

Does violence define a person or even a community? Does it shape the psychological structure and image of a people? At this crucial time, this is the point of discourse. As such, I think this article will not be a pleasant reading if we are not willing to be reasonable. To some it might seem as communal and at times as traitor-like. However, to the extent possible (if at all possible) let us cool our tempers and try to look at this entire issue in a level-headed manner. The sad fact is that we as a community are starting to fit the essence of 'chaos theory' which basically says that 'a small change/incident will result in a massive perceptive difference on our behaviour'. The crux of this behaviour is manifested in the form of violence. Even worse, this violence will haunt us like a ghost for many years to come. Accordingly, I place the following pointers –

Firstly, it is important that we realize 'why' this violence started. This is the pivotal issue. As strange as this might sound, the fact is, we can understand this better by turning a bit to the incidents revolving on 'acts of violence against the northeast India tribals in Delhi'. Point being, if a Marathi or Bengali gets beaten up in Delhi it is not much of an issue. However, if a Khasi is assaulted it turns into a storm of protest (or even aggression). What is the underlying reason for this? The answer is numbers; it is in demographics. Since we are a small population being beaten up in Delhi is a serious insurmountable threat to our very existence. Now let us bring this to the context of Shillong. That the 'sons of the soil' get beaten up by outsiders in the very heart of Khasi-land is something that can never ever be accepted. It is what we Khasis call 'ka jinglong mraw ha la Ri' (being slaves in our own land). It is an indication of weakness, helplessness and fear. It is a spectacle that is ridiculed by others; 'being laughed at? This is something which cannot be tolerated. Thus, the violence! This is the crux of the matter; and even more, this violence is about sending a message to the other non-tribal communities ('ki bar jylla') residing in our state. Thus, it is important for the government to realize the fault lines for this violence. It is not only about Punjabi lane; rather it is about entire Shillong and the state of Meghalaya. If we fail to factor this, then the next rounds of violence (in other parts) will not be far off.

Secondly, could this issue have been nipped in the bud? Actually, this is the question many are trying to answer right now. This hindsight discourse in many quarters has brought up many interesting conjectures. One of them is that this is the making and brain child of the Congress party in the backdrop of the win in Ampati, to destabilize and topple the current government. Further, it becomes even more interesting if you factor the presence of the BJP in the current government. It is an attempt of the Congress to win over the regional parties nd form a new government. Be that as it may, one thing is for certain; mob mentality can either lead to violence or the wildest/interesting theories. Either way, we end up having a blast.

Critically speaking, this is not the first time that we have had instances of tussle at Punjabi lane. In fact, that lane has become so notorious that most of the parents vehemently warn their children from passing through it. I too was warned by my mother many years ago. Hence, at best, it is better to declare that area as a sensitive zone. This would imply a constant watch on the area against the activities of both the residents and the passers-by. This would ensure no undue tension arises amongst the people thereby avoiding large scale violence. In addition, such sort of a system must be applied in all localities of Shillong where there is a mass mixture of different communities.

Thirdly, the violence that broke out was undeniably breaking news. Here comes the role of the media. In the heated desire to get the first byte on things, media houses will go to any length to cover a story. In the process of doing so there is always a chance of misquoting a person or misreporting a story. However, that does not imply burning of a newspaper and condemnation of a media house; rather a chance must be given to the newspaper/channel to correct/apologize in the following edition. If they fail to do so, then only the genuine need for condemnation arises. Accordingly, if some quarters of our community are not agreeable to this; let us look at the other side of the same coin. During the course of the violence, our vernacular dailies were all reporting only one side of the story; the Khasi side. Their headlines and the news content were all showing the violence in good light. Point being, is this also not misquoting and misreporting? Hence, does this also not call for burning of the vernacular dailies?

In addition, the national mainstream media (in particular NDTV) were all misreporting the story in the first instance. It was bereft of facts and absolutely consistent with 'journalistic blunder'. Of course, in their subsequent reports they verified the facts and corrected their reporting. All in all, we must recognize the power of the print and electronic media. If they can quell violence; if abused, they can create/aggravate violence. Even more importantly, we as readers/viewers must be responsible enough to reason while coming across such sensitive news coverage and think a hundred times before reacting (be it in words and/or action).

Fourthly, it's about our dearly beloved social media. As beloved as it is, it is tricky as well. This is because its ban has split Shillong right down the middle. While some see the ban as a necessity, others find it counterproductive. Yes it is true that social media was responsible for the escalation of violence through the circulation of the fake news that one of the assaulted has succumbed to his injuries. However, we must also factor in the rarely appreciated fact that this very social media can be responsible for bringing in peace and calm through the messages of the right thinking masses. Clearly, when it comes to social media it's about weighing the good and the bad. Most times we give in to the bad too easily. As such, if this continues it will not be long before we resemble Jammu and Kashmir as far as internet availability for social media usage is concerned.

In addition, this violence has split the Khasi community into two sets. One is the 'violence hit aggressive part' also called the macho part and the other is the 'benign part' also called the sissy part of Shillong. In fact, the word sissy in classifying Shillong is not new. I can recall my growing up days as a student of Government Boy's Higher Secondary School. Our friends from Jaiaw, Mawkhar, Mawlai etc., call us sissies for not joining in the aggressive stances during times of tension and violence in Shillong in the 1990s. Be that as it may, the answer is twofold. Firstly, it's about the demographic make-up of the other parts of Shillong and secondly, this time think twice before using the term 'sissy,' as in this instance there are many who have collectively joined the struggle (just as there are many from the macho side who have not joined).

Lastly, NEHU campus has turned into a camping place for the army personnel. This is unbecoming of an educational organization. For sure there are other places for them to camp. In this cause, I agree with the NEHU Students' Union and the KSU NEHU Unit that they need to be moved. Seeing them in campus, gives a feel of some military operation wherein army personnel freely move around with arms. For sure, we do not want to see our campus become as such. On the other hand, the restraint and control practiced by Meghalaya police while dealing with the protestors is highly commendable. They have been trained pretty well in PR skills and this is not the first time we are witnessing this. Of course, when you are attacked by a mass of stones then you have every right to protect yourselves through tear gas; but indeed they did that when and only when needed.

To close, now it seems as though the mining ban will be lifted from our state. This means that the hullabaloo over the New Shillong Township shall happen again. However, we must ensure that the same mistake that has occurred in the case of Shillong does not repeat itself over there. We may not be able to save old Shillong from its congestion, population, environmental and traffic woes but we must ensure all these are effectively managed in the new one. In the current context, the governance must be strict; wherein no over staying and overcrowding of residential localities must be allowed over and above the allotted ones (like in the case of Punjabi lane).

(The Author teaches at NEHU)

# A cultural vacuum in Khasi society

*By Barnes Mawrie*

Nature does not permit a vacuum. Does this apply to human nature as well? I personally believe so. That is the reason why we say that a person who does not have something constructive to do, will end up doing something destructive. So too when good elements are missing in society, evil elements will fill in the gap. This leads to degeneration of a community and a threat to its own identity and survival.

Critically examining the Khasi society today, we witness a sort of "cultural vacuum" which is posing a great danger to the community. Khasi society is in a period of transition and this transition has been accelerated by the advent of Christianity and Modernization. The onset of modernization has been much anticipated that a community finds itself unable to cope with the changes that are coming about. Apart from the great contributions that Christianity has brought about to Khasi society especially in the area of education, health care and social empowerment, there are certain loose ends which have developed since the time the Khasi people embraced the new religion. One very glaring negative impact of Christianity is the weakening of the traditional institution of kñiship (maternal uncle). Traditionally, the kñi (maternal uncle) used to be the ultimate authority in the kur (clan). He embodied in himself the role of a father, an elder, a priest, a disciplinarian, a judge and a representative of the kur or the kpoh. So it can be said that the traditional Khasi society is matrilineal by lineage (tracing origin from the female) but patriarchal by function (governed by the male).

By accepting Christianity the Khasis have delimited the power of the kñi. First of all, Christian faith lays emphasis on the role of the father as it is quite alien to the tribal concept of clan. Christianity as a religion has its own set of priests or pastors who consequently have replaced the kñi in religious matters. For example, in traditional Khasi marriage, it used to be the kñis of both contracting parties who accompanied their nephews and nieces and who presided over the wedding ceremonies. But in Christian marriage today, it is the parents who accompany their sons or daughters to the altar. The kñis in most cases become only passive spectators since Christian marriage rituals do not have provisions for the kñi's role. This phenomenon has tremendously weakened the position of the kñi in his own kur or kpoh. Over this, the kñi who is also a father in his children's family, if he is already a Christian by faith, becomes more conscious of his duties as a father than as a kñi. Consequently, a Christian kñi today spends most of his time with his children than with his nephews and nieces. His visits to his maternal home become less frequent and in some cases, he reaches them only on unavoidable occasions.

Unfortunately, the fading role of the kñi has not been equally complemented by the role of the father. The Khasi father today is still in a state of ambiguity. He is not yet empowered as the head of a family (father) since no customary law exists to that effect. At the same time, his traditional status as a kñi is fast disappearing. Thus the gradual fading of kñiship as an institution has not been compensated by another institution. This is what we call a cultural vacuum in Khasi society which is leading to many negative consequences. Ambiguity regarding authority both in the kur and in the family has led Khasi men to feel a sense of social insecurity. Deprived of legitimate authority he easily slips into disillusionment and discouragement. These in turn result in irresponsible behaviours like alcoholism, drug addiction and divorce.

**"Apart from the great contributions that Christianity has brought about to Khasi society especially in the area of education, health care and social empowerment, there are certain loose ends which have developed since the time the Khasi people embraced the new religion. One very glaring negative impact of Christianity is the weakening of the traditional institution of kñiship (maternal uncle)."**

Perhaps another traditional institution which might have escaped our attention for long and which we have lost forever due to the advent of Christianity and modernization, is the institution of Ïngkhynraw (bachelors' dormitory). This was a common institution among the tribal communities of North-east India. The Ïngkhynraw was a very valuable cultural institution where young men and women who have reached the age of puberty, were brought up as a community within a larger community in a special house known as ïngkhynraw. Usually an elder of good repute took care of these youth in matters of culture, tradition, ethics, martial arts, folk art, social manners and above all personal discipline and communitarian virtues. Thus society was assured of quality youth to carry forward the rich cultural heritage of the community. Today however, with the disappearance of Ïngkhynraw, Khasi youth are deprived of such holistic formation.

Schools and hostels of modern days do not come up to the level of this traditional institution in matters related to cultural and ethical training. Many Khasi youth today lack self discipline and human virtues like diligence, honesty, confidence and social etiquettes. They continue to grow in ignorance about one's culture and traditions. This cultural vacuum is being filled in with alien cultures which they copy from the media etc. This is posing a great threat to the identity and integrity of the Khasi community. Perhaps it is time that we recuperate some values of the past and revive some of these important traditional institutions. Traditional institutions are the pillars of any society and they must not be lost or else some other unwanted elements will enter in to fill the vacuum.

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Shakuntala inspired Goethe and now SCC

Editor,

It interesting but not surprising that the president and artistic director of Vienna Boys Choir Mr. Gerald Wirth is going to a guide our proud Shillong Chamber Choir (SCC). But what is another proud fact is that their new project this time is the performance of an opera based on Shakuntala. Needless to say, this play proclaims itself to be one of the literary brilliance of the East. Probably authored between 4th and 5th century CE by Mahakavi Kalidasa, this Sanskrit drama, soon after its translation into Latin by Sir William Jones in 1789, had fascinated most of the European scholars. Based on the story of a fraction part of Mahabharata it bears the rare attributes less known to the western world. So much so that many critics stood up challenging Aristotelian dramatic theory as they discovered the eastern literature with more literary adornments and philosophy.

To what extent Sir William Jones had been able to render this play from the language which he had just learned from a person who did not know English is astonishing. However, the avid scholar linguist, Sir Jones learned the oldest language of the world. And, many believed this opened the doorway to hitherto less known Eastern wisdom. True, when he had first begun to study this play by Kalidasa it occurred to Sir William Jones that this drama might dwarf other literary works of the European scholars. The conviction instantaneously inspired the British linguist to translate the work first into Latin. Without further ado he had taken upon himself the challenge of the translation. Not very long after the publication the book captivated the imagination of many top scholars of Germany, Britain, Italy and France. The rational romantic thinkers who had not been fettered by the shackles of prejudice and prevailing dogmas had burst out their passionate applause. Immediately after, in 1791, another noted scholar George Forster translated this play into the German language. Forster hastened himself to present his translation to a prominent philosopher and critic of the time Johann Gottfried Herder. After having immersed in the play Herder finally concluded that the philosophy of the West seems "narrow and cold" in comparison to India literature. He quipped in praise of Shakuntala "I cannot easily find a product of the human mind more pleasant than this, a real blossom of the Orient, the first and the most beautiful of its kind…, something like that, of course, appears once every two thousand years…". So, Herder was impelled to introduce the book to the literary giant of the era – Johann Goethe. The father of German literature was so spellbound that he decided to learn Sanskrit himself.

There is a very significant disclosure made by Goethe when another French Scholar Antoine Leonard de Chezy presented Goethe with his French edition of Shakuntala. In a letter of gratitude to Antoine Chezy, Goethe opened up himself before the European world : "The first time I came upon this inexhaustible work, [Shakuntala] it aroused such enthusiasm in me and so held me that I could not stop studying it. I even felt impelled to make the impossible attempt to bring it in some form to the German stage. These efforts were fruitless but they made me so thoroughly acquainted with this most valuable work, it represented such an "epoch in my life", I so absorbed it, that for thirty years I did not look at either the English or the German version. It is only now that I understand the enormous impression that work made on me at an earlier age."

While intellectuals like Goethe, Herder, Heinrich Heine, Schiller… passionately lauded Indian drama, even by writing poems, Friedrich Schlegel exclaimed with conviction " India is superior in everything – intellectually, religiously…, even Greek heritage seems pale in comparison".

Best of luck to Shillong Chamber Choir! Hope this musical project will be instrumental in inspiring the people across the country to shed their past prejudices and seriously go deeper into the literature of the home country too as they study Odyssey, Macbeth, Paradise Lost, David Copperfield, Harry Potter,...

Yours etc.;
Salil Gewali,
Shillong-2

## Our future in the hands of NEHU

Editor,

As the first batch undergraduate student of the new Semester System of NEHU who appeared in the 6th and final semester examination, I would like to voice some common concerns of students belonging to my batch.

Firstly, the above examination only concluded in the last week of May2018 and based on our experience of the previous 5(five) semesters, we expect our results to be declared after a long gap of 4(four) to 5(five) months. For example, our 5th semester examination concluded in October 2017 while the results were declared in March 2018.

Secondly, as many of us have also appeared in the Entrance Examinations of several universities, we are apprehensive that if NEHU takes as much time as it did in declaring the results of our previous 5(five) semesters, then our chances of continuing with our studies would be futile. There is every likelihood of us losing one year of our academic lives. This is because many of the universities outside our state usually undertake counseling and admission exercises for Post Graduate studies from the last week of June till the end of the second week or third week (at the latest) of July and if NEHU declares its results after this time window, then our worst fears would come true. If what we fear really comes to pass, then it would be a sad repetition of what the parents and students of MBSOSE Class 12 students of previous years had to go through when several of them had to endure the pain of seeing their careers derailed.

I have one humble suggestion which I hope is realistic. In this regard, I venture to suggest that NEHU requisitions the services of more examiners/evaluators and ensure that these examiners devote maximum time in evaluating the answer scripts of the 6th semester students only, so that the future of these students is not put in jeopardy.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

*"A government which robs Peter to pay Paul can always depend on the support of Paul."*

**--- George Bernard Shaw**

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LX No.296 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JUNE 8, 2018

## Punjabi Lane is a collective responsibility

SUDDENLY the genesis of how Mazhabi Sikhs came to reside in the area which has different nomenclatures, one of which is Punjabi Lane is becoming clearer. The area, like those around it including Iewduh, falls under the Mylliem Syiemship. Relocating the entire population of three hundred fifty families to a single area turns that area into a ghetto. The present area of 9800 sq metres is just not feasible for housing 1750 people (taking an average family of 5 members). The children growing up in this ghetto must feel claustrophobic. They have no playground and no greenery around and no fresh air to breathe. They are subjected to the vehicle fumes through the day. The moment they step out of their homes they land on the streets. Indeed the street is their only playground. So the resistance to move away from the area because of emotional reasons is not a tenable one. However, the problem is in locating a new place for their hutments.

Finding an alternative location is not a problem of only the Government but should be a collective responsibility of the Hima Mylliem, the Khasi Hills District Council, the Government, the Dorbar Shnong of Greater Shillong, the pressure groups and even the Hawkers' Association. The Government cannot be held accountable if different Dorbars are unwilling to locate the housing colony within their areas. Perhaps what makes the problem look insurmountable is the idea of so many families of a single community residing at one place. It might be a good idea to spread the community into different areas. This might reduce the pressure on the different Dorbar Shnong. That the services of this community are indispensible can be garnered from the fact that in the last few days the garbage from different areas of the Shillong Municipality remained untouched. There was no one to collect it. The garbage collection started only on Thursday. It is time to recognise that the Government is not an entity separate from the people. It is the people who have elected the Government and it is incumbent upon the people to find solutions to societal problems. Government must be broad-based to include citizens in discussions on all matters related to public welfare. We have played the blame game to our own detriment for far too long. Time to change the rules of the game!

# When the periphery strikes

*By Patricia Mukhim*

When a quarrel among individuals is converted into a group conflict, communal violence is the outcome. The altercation between young women of one community and the youth of another should not have conflagrated had the police booked the wrongdoer. In any society people don't normally assault and injure others, no matter what the provocation. If they do assault and injure others they are booked for that under relevant sections of the law. This is where the law enforcers come in. Had those who assaulted the tribal youth been booked the situation would not have spiralled out of control. But it wasn't. After that it was easy for other alibis to converge and turn the whole episode into a, "us versus them, tug of war. And once that feeling spreads, communities take intransigent stances. It is in such occasions that those involved in the business of preaching peace and other noble human values should step in to diffuse the tensions. That has not happened or it happened several days later. One saving grace was the women of Mawkhar who came out to pray for peace in that battleground.

This incident has also been aggravated by social media which travels quick and fast. Some news channel calling itself 'Uncensored Akaal Channel' reported that a Sikh girl was assaulted in 'Shillong, Mangolia.' That such illiterate news channels, ignorant of a part of their country, even exist in a country of such diversity where wrong reportage could result in a conflagration is something that should be taken seriously by the Union Ministry for Information and Public Relations. But while we might blame one group for sending out fake news to different parts of the country we should also not condone the fake news that was circulated via WhatsApp here, which categorically stated that one of the boys who was assaulted had succumbed to his injuries. That triggered the frenzy. Another news channel live-streamed the Motphran clash and allowed incendiary comments to flow like bile. That channel would have made name and fame but at what cost? For the sake of justice, the cyber crime department of the police needs to get to the root of this issue or else a similar social tension might arise and the same chain of events will follow. The person who started the WhatsApp message had only one motive - to turn the incident into a full-fledged communal riot. And he/she succeeded to throw this entire city out of gear. The reputation of the Meghalaya Police rests on finding this person's WhatsApp number and booking him/her under relevant sections of the IT Act because not doing so will only encourage other trouble mongers from creating a similar panic. There are today young tech-savvy professionals who could get to the root of such crimes. The state should invest in hiring such professionals.

Barring internet connectivity for a week shows poor management skills because it disrupts the country's foremost programme, 'Digital India.' Most points of sale (POS) transactions are disrupted and that is causing a huge loss of business for young entrepreneurs across communities. None of us are able to carry out online banking transactions this whole week. We were waiting to hear that the rumour monger has been zeroed in and arrested but we are disappointed. If that person is arrested it might prevent another fake news from originating. So is the District Administration going to bar the internet for a month if the situation remains volatile? Are we expected to put up with this? There are ways of tackling social media agent provocateurs which the State Police have miserably failed to do. Hate mails do the rounds regularly and no suo-moto FIRs are filed. Even FIRs filed on social media transgressions are hardly ever resolved. How safe are citizens expected to feel in such despondent situations? Having said that, we must place on record our appreciation for the foot soldiers of the Meghalaya Police and those officers who took of the brunt of the Motphran stone pelting. The police were castigated for shooting tear gas shells but is that worse than a lathi-charge? It was not easy to face a crowd gripped by irrational anger and hate. That those youth were inebriated as was attested by those who were arrested suggests a new form of aggression. Former Home Minister RG Lyngdoh says these youths were mercenaries who are paid to throw stones a la Kashmir. This was borne out by one of the Rangbah Shnong of the area who said that in the morning when he and others took a walk in the troubled spots they found food packets strewn about and Bisleri bottles by the cartons. A mob does not bring food and other essentials with it. This is a group that is paid to create trouble and they were imported from West Khasi Hills - one of the most backward districts of Meghalaya with no revenue generation. Will the Meghalaya Police have the courage of conviction to find the agent provocateurs? Or will we have to live with ugly assumptions?

West Khasi Hills was most affected by the denudation of forests and when the timber ban was imposed by the apex court in 1996, again it was West Khasi Hills that was most affected with some families reportedly starving. Connectivity within West Khasi Hills is still a huge challenge but the highway connecting Shillong with Nongstoin and Tura has also created new aspirations with woefully inadequate opportunities to fulfil those. The former Deputy Commissioner, West Khasi Hills tried his best to promote tourism and other livelihood opportunities but came up against a wall of resistance and was finally pushed out. Evidently there is a vested interest group that wants to keep the people there at subsistence level so they become easy game during elections. That people are unable to see beyond these short electoral stratagems and continue to vote those who manipulate their minds also shows that the level of interrogation in society has not even begun.

And this is alarming. Every so often one attends seminars at local universities. At the end of even the most contentious presentations when the time is allowed for questioning, there is pin drop silence. You realise over time that this is a society that is not used to questioning and therefore not used to dissenting. And this happens because early in life our youth are asked to conform and not have other views other than what the majority subscribes to, because to differ from this converged viewpoint is to be a traitor to your society. Unity (ka jingiatylli/ jingiamir jingmut) in our society is defined by the society's ability to make everyone agree to one common worldview. The young who are trained in one-dimensional thinking at home, in colleges and even universities become the convenient repositories of prejudices and narrowly constructed narratives. And this young population is growing. I am appalled by Facebook posts from one who shows her residence as Philadelphia, USA, spewing out so much communal hatred during the recent crises. So while a person's residence may change, her mindset has remained abhorrently static.

Then there is another aspect to this whole issue that also needs greater interrogation. Some of the Rangbah Shnong said they did not come forward during the present crises because their legitimacy to do so stands revoked and the Village Administration Bill (VAB) is still in limbo. It is incumbent for the MDA Government to rewrite the Bill and make it inclusive, participatory and democratic and to remove from it all ambiguities. The Dorbar Shnong is the first court of appeal for residents of the localities (shnongs). They need to be strengthened but that strength will only emerge if the VAB becomes a modern progressive instrument. No society can be struck in a time warp without serious consequences. And I believe we have come to a point especially in urban centres where permanent and genuine non-tribals cannot be passive members of the Dorbar Shnong. They are equal stakeholders in the system. If there are suspicions these should be dealt with and not allowed to fester.

Lastly, this recent flashpoint also serves as a learning curve that the hawkers have come of age and know their power to manage politics. This is a huge constituency that can no longer be ignored. And interestingly, most of them are not from Shillong but have come here to earn their livelihoods. Shillong can deny them that space at its peril.

Ghettos of utmost happiness

# A book fit to be the ministry of nonsense

*By Sushil Kutty*

Arundhati Roy's first book God of Small Things won the Man Booker in 1997. Second book Ministry of Utmost Happiness made it to the list but sank in its own sea of utmost unhappiness. Not surprising. For, it is like "beyond the flyover, the city got less sure of itself."

That's a quotable quote from The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, in which "weevils learn to stand upright" and "dams light up cities". Read Arundhati Roy if only for the quotes! But Arundhati falls off the writing block when she says Muslims ghettoized only in the last four years. Roy told that to the BBC when asked: "Has he (Modi) been as bad as you would have feared?"

"Yes," replied Roy, "because today you're looking at a situation where the Muslim community has been ghettoized. You're looking at people being lynched on the streets. You're looking at them pushed out of economic activity they participated in earlier, you know, meat shops, leather work, handicrafts (sic), all of this is under assault."

Really? Maybe, Arundhati was speaking in the abstract, that Muslims have been forced to ghettoize in the mind. By the policies of the Modi Government. By the acts and utterances of rabid Hindus. But part of the reason for the ghettoized mind could be that Muslims have opted to live in ghettos from Partition on.

Maybe, from much earlier. From the Mughal and Sultanate days. But the Muslim ghettos of those times were elite-Muslim enclaves. Partition turned everything upside down. Muslims "left behind" got together in ghettos. Fortified in unity and the Muslim Personal Law. Integration into the mainstream was slow, a personal choice of Muslims who landed jobs outside of the ghetto. Ask the average Muslim and he will say Muslim ghettos are places of utmost happiness.

The reality is Muslim-ghettos are not a Modi/BJP-construct. Not even an RSS or Congress one. An exception could be the ghettos of Ahmedabad post-2002 riots. Those are real examples of neglect and fear.

But there are Muslim ghettos world-over – in London. Paris. Belgium. United States. Canada, too.

There are also the Muslim-dominated areas, different from ghettos. Malappuram and large tracts of Kozhikode and Kannur in Kerala. Jammu & Kashmir is Muslim-majority. In fact, that is Roy's raison d'tere for J&K not being integral to India.

Kashmiri Pandits (KP) were driven out of the Valley where a wave of Wahabism and a virulent form of Islamism now threatens with guns and grenades. Arundhati Roy doesn't mind that. The Ministry of Utmost Happiness has no files on the KP. Maybe, because the KP outdate the KM (Kashmiri Muslim) by centuries. Forgotten.

As for economic activity like "meat shops, leatherwork and handicraft under assault", maybe, there is a difference of opinion on how to run them, not on who to run them. Some regulations governing these economic activities have been dropped. Illegal slaughterhouses in UP have been banned. Some trading practices regarding cattle have been tweaked. But the changes affect the Hindu cattle trader as well.

Arundhati Roy told the BBC that the India of today is a "terrifying place". Yes, true to an extent. The run of cow vigilantism was "terrifying". And "the rape of the little girl in Kashmir (Kathua is in Jammu)" with Hindus "marching in support of the rapists" is preposterous. But to say that "in India we are looking at the violence of a community trying to form itself into a nation, a Hindu nation, and somehow everyone else a second-class citizen" is too much to digest.

Violence of a community? That is so wrong. Millions upon millions of Hindus are going about trying to live their ornery lives. Lost in their smartphones. Pissed off by "call-drops". Examination paper leaks. Cash shortages in the ATM. Some of them even pervert, raping minors and abetting suicide. But to say that the entire lot is out on the streets to cull up a nation – "a Hindu nation" – is right out of the book of the ministry of nonsense.

**The reality is Muslim-ghettos are not a Modi/BJP-construct. Not even an RSS or Congress one. An exception could be the ghettos of Ahmedabad post-2002 riots. Those are real examples of neglect and fear. But there are Muslim ghettos world-over – in London. Paris. Belgium. United States. Canada, too.**

The "polarization" that supposedly pervades India is stark only in Arundhati's head, where the "traffic of words seemed to have stopped believing in traffic lights" and the "result was incessant noise, a few bad crashes and eventually gridlock." More prose from The Ministry of Utmost Happiness.

Arundhati Roy like Priya Warrier winked. But Roy's wink has left her blind-sided. She always sees only half the picture. She told the BBC, "One of the great irony (sic) is that people like myself are constantly accused of being anti-India or anti-national." She said she loved the "place (India)" and was forced to fight for the "things that make the place beautiful… things that you love – the music, poetry, rivers and valleys, diversity, the people… "

Roy once rode pillion to a 14-year-old Maoist to his jungle hideout in central India. She has been to Pakistan several times. She has never said "Kashmir is not an integral part of Pakistan." So, you wonder for whom is Arundhati fighting for? To her accusation that the majority Indians are communal weevils who are learning to stand upright to carve up a Hindu nation, the answer, in her own prose is: "We have our troubles, our terrible moments, yes, but these are only aberration."

Arundhati Roy should take time off and go watch Rajinikanth's Kaala. It is about Dharawi, the largest human slum of Asia, a ghetto! But a ghetto of a different sprawl, intent, mix, happiness, unhappiness. (IPA Service)

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Sweeper lane imbroglio

Editor,

The recent incident which led to communal tension in Shillong for the past one week and which disrupted normal life is very unfortunate. Social media is to be blamed for spreading rumours to trouble mongers. The incident at Punjabi Lane on May 31, could have been avoided had the police team swooped into action to arrest those person (s) involved. Stone pelting is another dangerous trend that the youths have borrowed from the separatists in Jammu and Kashmir and needs to be seriously introspected. As expected, greedy politicians are so quick to take advantage of the situation to gain mileage. Paul Lyngdoh and Mukul Sangma are already sparring on the issue. As law abiding citizens let us ponder what these so-called leaders have done on this burning issue which is in fact the crux of the matter. Firstly, Paul Lyngdoh has become popular as a student leader of a particular organization by listing "removal of Punjabi Lane (Them Metor) from Mawlonghat as one of his main demands and gained his political mileage out of it. After becoming an MLA, an astute DD Lapang invited Paul to join his government along with his party colleague Lambor Malngiang to test if he could really deliver the promise to his people. Paul Lyngdoh has been awarded with Urban Affairs Department then but to our utter surprise though he was so vocal about the issue he could not move even an inch for its relocation. So, Lapang had the last laugh!

On the other hand, Mukul Sangma who has been at the receiving end after being dethroned from the hot seat is trying to make his presence felt by pinching the Conrad- led government for being inept to deal with the situation and even stated that if he has a mandate to form a government he would relocate Punjabi Lane instantly. His statement after the Tuesday CLP meeting is so childish, ridiculous and contradictory to the statement made by Process T Sawkmie, his party chief whip a day earlier. Power-monger Mukul shows his true colours by making such sweeping statements. What has he done in his eight year tenure as Chief Minister? Or was he sleeping on the files during that period? Why is Mukul Sangma trying to foment trouble now? In fact everyone knows that the Congress party dare not relocate the Punjabi Lane as it is its vote bank. God knows, had it been the previous government many souls would have perished during the turmoil. Kudos to the Conrad led government for exercising its utmost restraint in using force to deal with the protestors, as Lt Gen DS Ahuja GoC 101 had also stated. Therefore let us all rise above party politics to help the Government to relocate "Punjabi Lane" expeditiously.

Yours etc.
Sanlangki Mylliengap
Shillong- 12

## On MUDA bye-laws

Editor,

Recently much has been debated about the applicability of the Meghalaya Urban Development Authority's building bye-laws in the autonomous areas or areas falling under the administrative jurisdiction of the Autonomous District Councils. Many conflicting news reports have appeared in the print media. What appeared in your paper on May 16, 2018 under the headlines "MUDA bylaws not in district council areas" reads " ..... The government said on Tuesday the MUDA building bylaws will not be applicable to areas under the jurisdiction of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) ..... " and on May 18, 2018, you carried another headline, "HC order prevails over state claim on MUDA exemption" which reads, "In the absence of any appeal either by the state government or the KHADC, the order of the Division Bench of the High Court of Meghalaya will make it difficult for the government to exempt scheduled areas from the purview of the MUDA building bylaws approved in 2011..... " and yet again your paper on May 28, 2018 carried another headline, "MDA to bring ordinance to exempt MUDA bye-laws" which reads, "The state government will bring an ordinance to exempt areas under the jurisdiction of the district councils from the purview of MUDA building bylaws ..... "

All these contradictory headlines and news reports are confusing. Are the MUDA bye-laws now applicable or not in the areas under the jurisdiction of the Autonomous District Councils. To answer this question we are to go back and examine the origin of the MUDA byelaws. Under what law or act has the MUDA bye-laws been framed? After a few consultations and a short study on the subject it appears that the Meghalaya Urban Development Authority (MUDA) and its power to frame bye-laws has been empowered by or under the provision of the Meghalaya Town And Country Planning Act, 1973, an Act, "To provide for the development of the Towns and Country sides of the State of Meghalaya ..... " In other words it maybe stated that the MUDA and its byelaws are created and framed under the provisions of this Act.

Let us take another step and go to an abstract from Chapter I of the said Act which reads as follows:-

1. Short title, extent and commencement - (1) This Act maybe called the Meghalaya Town and Country Planning Act, 1973.

(2) It shall extend to the whole of Meghalaya excluding the Autonomous District:

Provided that if any District Council desires that all or any of the provisions of this Act should apply to the Autonomous District concerned, a notification may be issued to that effect and this Act shall then extend to that Autonomous District subject to such exceptions or modifications as may be specified in the notification." On reading of the above there is a pertinent question that needs to be answered:

Under the provisions of the existing law, can the MUDA bye-laws be extended to areas under the autonomous district, without the express desire or consent of the respective Autonomous District Councils?

As a citizen of the state, may I request the authorities concerned to please give an answer to this question and enlighten us and clear the confusion.

Yours etc.,
Wallamphang Roy
Shillong-1

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

*"A broken heart is a very pleasant complaint for a man in London if he has a comfortable income."*

**--- George Bernard Shaw**

**The Shillong Times**

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## Afghan Ceasefire

AFGHAN president Ashraf Ghani announced for the first time an unconditional ceasefire with the Taliban with the ending of the Ramzan. But it excludes other militant groups such as Islamic State. The decision came out of a meeting of Islamic clerics who issued a fatwa against suicide bombings which killed 14 people. The clerics also recommended a ceasefire with the Taliban who are seeking to re-impose strict Islamic law after their ouster in 2001. Ghani approved the recommendation of the clerics. Arms will be laid down by Kabul after June 20.

Ghani had urged a ceasefire earlier but this is the first time it has been effected after his election in 2014. It has been said that it would give the Taliban an opportunity to introspect and realise that their violence is not appealing to the people of the country. No immediate reaction has so far been received from the Taliban. An international analyst has said, "it's a one-sided love story". US forces in Afghanistan have said that they would honour the ceasefire. General John Nicholson, US Forces- Afghanistan and NATO-led Resolute Support Commander has taken a pacifist stand. This ceasefire would not however include US counter terrorism efforts against IS and Al-Qaida. NATO Secretary General Gens Stoltenberg has welcomed the Afghan government's move. He along with the UN have urged the Taliban to reciprocate the gesture. Russia has also praised the decision. It however does not generate much optimism as talks with the Taliban in the recent past have failed. The ceasefire may in fact give them an opportunity to regroup.

**LOOKING BACK**

**May 25, 1989**

## B'desh wants to import minerals from Meghalaya

Bangladesh has expressed its interest in important coal, limestone and other minerals from Meghalaya. This indication was recently given by the Bangaldesh authorities to the Union Commerce Ministry. Disclosing this at a public meeting at Balat, a township on Indo-Bangla border in East Khasi Hills on Tuesday, Meghalaya Chief Minister said that State Govt has already indicated to the External Affairs Ministry and the commerce Ministry about Meghalay's approval of the move.

Mr Sangma, who was inaugurating a primary health center at Balat and Ranikor said that such a step would bring economic benefit to the private mine owners.

# Sweeping the sweepers of the city

***By Sonie Kharduit***

"Peace is not absence of conflict; it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means," said Ronald Reagan. This statement and its relevance in our modern multi-ethnic societal setup cannot be overemphasized. Our state is not exempt from ethnic conflict. The anti-Bengali movement (1979), the anti- Nepalese (1987) are all ethnic cleansing campaigns, but, unfortunately, none had a conclusive end. The reasons might be attributed to their violent nature. Had the campaigns been peaceful they would have put more onus on the government to focus on particular issues rather than being engaged in fire fighting mission. After all, the final decision will only come from a political framework. It's worth recollecting the peaceful protest by farmers recently in Maharashtra. It was such a good example of how an agitation is to be organised without affecting the daily lives of citizens.

Critically examining the Them Mawlong issue, one sees two versions emerging; each one blaming the other. What really happened at the site no one knows. Newspapers just report from random sources, hence no conclusion can be derived except the assault part which is evidence in itself. Police should have acted on that account and brought the perpetrator to book. Had the arrest been made from day one against all those who involved in the assault, irrespective of gender, followed by a swift investigation for the causal factor, the story would have been different. By not doing so, when the violence erupted, the whole focus diverted to maintaining law and order. It was a knee-jerk reaction while the real issues were inadequately addressed.

This is no stereotyping but the Harijan lane is well known for anti-social activities. Passers-by do feel insecure while negotiating through this place especially at night. But I must say those who committed such acts are usually the few spoiled brats; the whole community cannot be blamed as such. The Harijan community is known its contribution in sweeping the city roads for ages. Some of them are in Shillong for four to five generations Shillong and the city has become part of their history. In fact, sending them back to Punjab could fill the void of being attached to this city. The laxity on the part of administration in removing such anti-social elements for years only results in a full blown out anger channelize from the opportunity given by such incident.

Agitations and protests are necessary tools in a democratic process but violence had never been a successful tool to achieve any target. Moreover, it only causes delay and loss of focus. Understandably under frustration the citizens might ultimately resort to violent means, but this happens only because our political leaders were never sincere enough to represent the aspirations of people. The issue of relocating the Harijan community could have been resolved quite early had our leaders pursued it years ago when they were quite new in Shillong. Two centuries later when they are all settled, to ask them to shift somewhere else becomes a daunting task.

I just wonder if the demand for relocating these people implicitly means relocating the crimes. Will the newly allotted space be safe? Will the receiving locality take them in good spirit? Anti-social elements are ubiquitous and borderless. We cannot pin-point a particular community for a particular crime. Our tribes are no strangers from crimes either, but then the whole tribe cannot be held accountable for such acts conducted by a few sleazy people.

Administrative lapses now give room for opportunistic politics. The same people who neglected the issue during their tenure in government are the same persons who splash mud and start the defaming game. Citizens should be smart enough to analyse the different dimensions of political movements so as not to become instruments of the selfish motives of our political masters. In fact the public anger needs to be channelized towards them for their inactivity, lies and tall promises.

Another angle that people tend to overlook is the behaviour of our boys too. It's no pride to claim that our boys are always well mannered. Various derogatory and obscene sexual comments on young girls either verbally or with gestures are quite common. This is no secret. The increasing number of women-centric crimes gives a hint that all is not well in our so called well-cultured society. The point of raising this angle is not to protect the perpetrator who committed the assault but it gives a different insight in understanding the crux of the problem. I believe if any such cheap advances are made on our girls definitely we would have reacted violently at that moment without thinking of the consequences.

Shillong city is cosmopolitan in character; it's an extension of India's diversity. Ushering this fact as our pride or curse is hard to say when this type of trouble appears. Problems which could be resolved through dialogues are instead sought to be settled by violence because we have never tried to understand the root cause in detail but suddenly jump on the bandwagon created by the prevailing sentiments insinuated through fake news. Today we have problems with the Harijans; tomorrow it may extend to another community as well. There are no guarantees as such that no ethnic conflict will happen in the future. Incidents like these can reappear suddenly at any time but allowing them to develop into violent mass movements is not only an administrative failure but people too are equally responsible.

Every section of the society is badly affected with curfew and sadly the poor are the worst hit. Prices of essential commodities have suddenly sky- rocketed and gone beyond the reach of many. Schools, colleges, public transportation are all affected. But more importantly a sense of fear engulfs the whole state. People residing outside the state too feel the heat for they might become the subject of 'reverse racism'. Hence as responsible citizens it would be wise to take a conscious decision before participating in any mass agitations. Violent routes need to be obviated at any cost because peaceful ones can also yield results if our intentions and mode are clear and incorruptible.

The absence of religious leaders in the whole episode is quite astonishing; organizing prayers for political stability during elections is not worthwhile when they can't come forward during such difficult times. Prayer in action is what people desire. Pledging for calmness, tolerance and restraint from violence could have shortened the sufferings. But then we can't expect much from church either because they too have political inclinations. The coming to power of a non-Congress regime is equated with saffronisation from the church's perspective.

Heterogeneity and diversity are the bare truths of Indian society. Likewise in Shillong city too we need to accept it and live with it. Our wants, desires, grievances and anger need to be well directed through our political leaders and they should be held accountable for that. Numerous governments have come and gone and none took any concrete steps in relocating the Sweeper's Colony and as citizens too we might have forgotten the problem until it resurfaces.

How successful the High Level Committee will be in resolving this present crisis is a wait and watch game. No doubt it's a nightmarish task for the members, considering the legal tangles involved. The government needs to present strong reasons for such moves, because the defendant will not allow a cake walk over this issue. Whatever the outcome, one thing is for sure; all these complications could have been avoided had successive governments taken adequate steps to remove the insecurity of people while passing through this congested slum. If people did not feel insecure, the demand for relocating this squalid alley would have not arisen either and the government would not have had to break its heads looking for solutions.

# Round the States

***By Insaf***

**Maharashtra Sermon**

The BJP must be smarting under the rebuff in Maharashtra. Former President and Congress veteran Pranab Mukherjee's address to the RSS Shiksha Varg, an annual training camp, meant for swayamsevaks in their third year in the organisation in Nagpur had a cutting edge and gave the BJP and its ideological mentor the RSS a lesson in nationalism. At the same time, in Mumbai Shiv Sena's Uddhav Thackeray turned down party chief Amit Shah's olive branch. It seems the Opposition's coalition bug has bitten the mighty BJP too, and it has launched its Sampark for Samarthan (contact for support) programme. However, Uddhav rubbished it and reaffirmed that his party will go it alone in 2019 and all future elections. The BJP may be red in the face with the sermon delivered by Mukherjee to the swayamsevaks. The criticism by many Congress leaders and his daughter too that former President faced initially has changed into a glee. BJP's hindutava, though not mentioned, took a severe beating. Mukherjee minced no words and advised: "Any attempt at defining our nationhood in terms of dogma and identities or religion, region, hatred and intolerance will only lead to dilution of our identity." Far from giving credibility to the RSS, as was hoped by the organisers, the Congressman has put a bigger question mark on its brand of nationalism. Time to change for a 'happy India'?

**The criticism by many Congress leaders and his daughter too that former President faced initially has changed into a glee. BJP's hindutava, though not mentioned, took a severe beating. Mukherjee minced no words and advised: "Any attempt at defining our nationhood in terms of dogma and identities or religion, region, hatred and intolerance will only lead to dilution of our identity."**

**Telangana Policing**

Telangana is policing the police. The bribes or protection money-- hafta (weekly) or mamools (monthly) that cops pocket, is under the scanner. On Thursday last, DGP Reddy admitted to corruption by his men and sent a list of 395 along with numbers to all district SPs/police commissioners, who were reportedly collecting 'mamools' from businessmen in the State. These 395 included Police and Head Constables and Assistant SIs at various police stations. A firm warning was out: dishonesty won't be tolerated, reassign the incorrigible to the nearest Armed Reserve headquarters without any powers. Reddy got information and evidence from the Intelligence department and victims. Further, an appeal was made to all owners of hotels, restaurants, wine shops, bars, lodges, business establishments, gaming zones, pubs, parlours, cafes, petty shops "not to give 'mamools' to any police officer/ staff. And anyone asking for bribe, tell us. Indeed a trend-setter if others too show the danda (stick).

**Bengali Ambition**

West Bengal is eyeing New Delhi. That's the buzz in the corridors of Writers Building. Having made her mark and that impressively in State politics, Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee is looking at the bigger picture and of course greener pastures. Planning for 2019 General election is much underway and Didi needs to utilize her time and skills to the maximum. Thus, the grapewine has it that she has rearranged political responsibilities within the party. No more of every day administration for her. Cabinet colleagues, her party MPs and trusted lieutenants have been put into three brackets-- national politics, State administration, and State-level party organisation to shoulder the responsibility. Her time will be devoted solely to strengthening and making new alliances with the anti-BJP forces. And it goes without saying selling the idea that she is the best bet to give Prime Minister Modi a run for his money. The big worry would be she doesn't end up rubbing the other regional satraps the wrong way. Unpredictably, is what defines Didi.

**UP Saves Big Loss?**

All is not well between the saffron-clad Baba and the Yogi. And Uttar Pradesh may turn out to be the looser. Baba Ramdev has been doing a flip flop with the proposed Rs 6,000-crore mega food processing project -- 'Patanjali Food & Herbal Park' along the Yamuna Expressway. One day his team says project cancelled and a day later there is a rethink. Has the threat of pulling out given the Yogi Adityanath government jitters? And will it start cooperating and give the requisite clearances, "after sitting on these", is the big question. More so, as Baba walking out would mean a big loss to the State's exchequer and the people as Ramdev claims the plant would have produced Rs 25,000 crore worth goods annually and created 10,000 direct jobs! Yogi too is dithering as his team says Baba has already sought extension four times and is yet to fulfill a few conditions, including land and bank loans. But in the same breath it is willing to give a month more to Ramdev. While it's anybody's guess what's the real issue, Yogi would have realized that UP's loss could soon be another State's gain!

**States Plastic-Free Pledge**

As the country played host to 2018 World Environment Day on Tuesday last, number of States did the expected – take a pledge. Thus, Nagaland, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Haryana and Maharashtra vowed to become plastic-free in line with this year's theme "Beat Plastic Pollution". While Uttarakhand has banned the use of polythene from July 31, the others were looking at next year. Tamil Nadu will ban use of plastic items like plates, cups, water packets, straws and non-biodegradable carry bags, from January 2019; Jharkhand is aiming at June 5 next year wherein 'from office to house to bazaar to village, plastic should not be seen'; Nagaland eyes this December; Bengal simply pledges "make every day World Environment Day; Haryana will ban single-use plastic water bottles in all government offices; and Maharashtra is serious about its notification banning manufacture, use, sale, distribution and storage of plastic materials such as one-time-use bags in future. Time will tell, but they would do well to take a cue from Sikkim, which was the 1st State to ban disposable plastic bags in 1998! INFA

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Justice must be administered

Editor,

There are a couple of passages from the Bible which come to mind as I reflect on what has happened in the last few days. The book of Proverbs states, "It is a joy for the just to do justice, but destruction will come to the workers of iniquity." Another passage states, "You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness." And finally another passage says, "You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice." I would like to propose some suggestions, that I hope would help bring normalcy in the state. Firstly, I believe that the government cannot succumb to any external pressure, whether socio-political or religious in the administration of justice. The government should not look at the present situation simply as a challenge but also have the courage to consider it as an opportunity to bring about long term solutions.

People from outside who live in Shillong, or other parts of Meghalaya have a right to feel safe and secure to live within the boundaries of this state. However, the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo people also have a right to not feel threatened and insecure about the future of their future generation. Laws have to be in place to ensure that this land, geographically speaking will always remain with the indigenous peoples who have inhabited this state for the past few centuries. The government, time and again has simply failed at maintaining the boundaries of this state. Secondly the Khasi and Jaintia community have to seriously deal with the elephant in the room that nobody likes to talk about.

A lot of insecurities that have surfaced in the past few days are simply a manifestation of how we as a community and especially men feel. It's about time that the fathers and the elders of our community start really giving due worth to their sons, even as they continue to do so with their daughters. Some might not see this as an injustice, but it is about time that we evaluate and analyze elements of the tradition we practice. It is important that we take time to think, and not simply join the crowd. Thirdly, it is also important for outsiders who live in this state, to honour and appreciate the land and people. They should not give the impression that they are here simply to make money. Fourthly, the church has a big problem if this is the way our people react each time something like this happens. I am saying this not because we call ourselves a Christian state, but simply because of the number of people who profess themselves to be Christians. This just indicates how good or how bad a job as a church we have done in the past few centuries. It is the job of the government to administer justice, but it is the job of the church to administer mercy.

Yours etc.,
Pyndapbha Warjri,
Via email

## Give police their due

Editor,

Police forces throughout the country have been doing a yeoman's service to the society having to discharge their duties for long hours without a break. When employees of all other govt departments enjoy holidays with their families on weekends and during festivals, police personnel have to be on duty. In fact, on holidays on account of festivals, instead of spending time with their families to celebrate festivals, police personnel have to be out on the streets discharging their duties round the clock without any respite. They hardly get enough time to spend with their families. The nature of their duties is extremely exacting and rigorous having to deal with criminal elements most of the time. Often, while discharging their duties, they face risk to their lives and, sometimes, even have to sacrifice their precious lives. Their working and living conditions are often quite deplorable. Yet they discharge their onerous duties without ever complaining. It is true that a few corrupt elements bring bad name to the entire police force. A policeman who takes bribe wearing full uniform is easily noticed by the public and it spoils the whole image of the police force. Good work done by the police in terms of the cases solved, the accused persons arrested and charge-sheeted after painstaking investigation, crimes and even terrorist attacks pre-empted by collecting actionable intelligence in time are hardly ever appreciated. A few instances of police failure are often blown out of proportion in the media. In fact, the police forces with the help of central police armed forces have been contributing a great deal towards holding the country together and even towards the march of the nation on the path of progress and prosperity given the fact that peace and progress go hand in hand. Developmental activities can take place and the nation can progress only when there is peace in society and it is the state police forces with the help of central police armed forces who create peaceful environment in the society.

In spite of having to work for long hours stretching way beyond normal working hours, often, without holidays and in spite of strenuous duties and difficult working and living conditions and in spite of risks inherent in the very nature of their job, the policemen discharge their duties with sincerity except for occasional aberrations. One can narrate several instances of excellent job done by the police personnel. One such instance that readily comes to mind is the manner in which the Shillong police with the help of CRPF were able to contain large-scale violence that rocked parts of Shillong recently. Even though large number of policemen were injured in stone-pelting, some of them seriously, they showed utmost restraint in the face of grave provocation and were able to bring back normalcy without opening fire.

Yours etc.,
Prem Singh (IPS Retd),
Via email

## Please lift ban on internet service

Editor,

The recent incident which led to communal tension and unrest in Shillong has disrupted the lives of common people. The worst sufferers are the local vendors, daily wage earners etc. The students of NEHU, particularly those appearing in post-graduate semester examinations starting from June 11 are hit hard due to the ban on internet services, clamped to stop the misuse of social media. Besides the students of NEHU, the candidates who have applied for bank jobs are also affected. They are unable to receive first hand information of their online preliminary exams study materials. The absence of internet and the prolonged curfew are rendering them handicapped taking away their sole source of information. Being a student myself, I would like to request the concerned authorities to lift this ban on internet service taking into account the future of thousands of innocent students.

Yours etc.,
A NEHU student
(Name withheld on request)

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

# ‘NE potential not much explored’

**Sanjib Dey** *is one daunting filmmaker who does not give up easily, even if he is going through trying times. The 42-year-old award winning director says he struggled for months in Mumbai to get into the industry and sold holiday packages for a living. “I was a crazy young guy,” he says to describe his passion for filmmaking. His latest film,* III Smoking Barrels*, which narrates three stories set in the North East, was “extensively shot in Meghalaya”. Critics have compared the film with Alejandro González Iñárritu’s masterpiece* Babel. III Smoking Barrels *was screened at the 38th Durban International Film Festival last year.*

*Dey’s “blissful childhood” was spent in Assam’s Golaghat where he studied in Sacred Heart School. “I mostly played with children in the neighbourhood in a century-old British graveyard next to my house. I remember our goal posts were two beautiful marble graves,” the director reminisces. Amit Malpani, Dey’s producer, is his childhood friend from the same school.*

*After completing high school from Debraj Roy College in Golaghat, Dey shifted to Delhi University. Later he started his career as an intern for* Business Weekend*, a weekly business news on Doordarshan. “I soon realised that I wanted to work in movies so I moved to Mumbai. I knew no one in Mumbai and I had no money. Today, whatever little I have achieved in life is because of this magical city,” says Dey who has explored big screen, television and advertising for over a decade now and is an official member of both the director’s and writer’s associations in the Mumbai film industry.*

*Besides directing and producing some award-winning short films, Dey was also part of two international projects — a Dutch feature film called* I Object *that was filmed in India and an international TV series called* Eagle Four *that was filmed in the rough and beautiful terrains of Afghanistan where he worked with Hollywood and European crew. “In brief, the journey has been very challenging yet very beautiful,” he tells* **The Shillong Times**.

*In an email interview, Dey talks about his inspiration, the film, the potential of the northeastern region and life in Mumbai. Excerpts:*

**What/who inspired you to come into filmmaking?**

Being brought up in a small town was not at all a disadvantage for me. During my school days, I had a circle of friends who loved international cinema and music. We didn’t spare a single video parlour in the town. It was during those days that I saw films like *Rambo, Rocky* and those Hong Kong martial art films, which left strong imprints on me. But I think it was those films I saw on Doordarshan that inspired me into filmmaking — films of Satyajit Ray, Charlie Chaplin and Akira Kurosawa and of course films like *Jaws* and *ET* by Steven Spielberg or *Umberto D* by De Sica.

**How did you come into the industry?**

I didn’t get the opportunity to go to a film school and after struggling for months in Mumbai, I still didn’t get a job in the film and television industry here. So to run my kitchen, I took a marketing job where I was required to sell holiday packages. But I was a crazy young guy. I went to all filmmakers to sell those holiday packages. Eventually my idea clicked, I got to work as an apprentice under senior ad filmmaker Sunil Ghosh, who was planning to make a film in Assam titled *Brahmaputra* with Ajay Devgan, Tabu and Nana Patekar in lead roles. The film was a Hindi adaptation of Sahitya Academy Award winning Assamese novel *Patal Bhairavi* written by Lakhi Nandan Bora. Unfortunately due to the violent political situation prevailing in Assam at that time, the film couldn’t go on floor. And Sunil sir was adamant not to shoot it in any other state. The film never happened but my career definitely got a kick start from there onwards. I started working in various ad films with him.

## TALKING POINT

### SANJIB DEY

***III Smoking Barrels* is your first feature. How did you get the idea of bringing the three stories together?**

*III Smoking Barrels* is my first feature film. My producer, Amit Malpani, and I were both highly inspired to make a film on the North East and we quickly realised that an anthology of stories will give us better opportunity to explore the land, the culture and her people.

The idea has definitely helped us to showcase an intricate synthesis of various indigenous elements of the region, making the film look grand without really losing the vitals of good storytelling. It also helped exploring few socio-political issues like children in armed conflicts, drugs, animal poaching and illegal immigrants — all in a single film. It definitely gave us the surface to explore more locations and characters.

**How much do you think the potential of NE has been explored?**

Very less! The world hasn’t yet seen even an iota of North East India’s potential.

**You have used six languages in the film. How did you manage the script? What were the difficulties in the process of making the film?**

The credit for seamless blending of six languages in the script goes to my dialogue writer team. Both my co-dialogue writers, Tasadduk Ahmed and Dev Gupta, were instrumental and we three had a very re-fined collaboration. Although all three of us work and live in Mumbai, we belong to the North East and we are very much attached to our roots. That really helped.

The process of making the film was very difficult because of the demanding nature of the script. It’s a very edgy and different kind of a film and it required lots of research and hard work. We filmed for two years across the North East. Moreover, there are around 90 visual effects shots in the film, including an elephant chasing sequence. These all cumulatively tested both our patience and passion.

**The film has been compared with Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel*. What do you have to say?**

*Babel* is a masterwork of a master filmmaker. I think the comparison has been in the language aspect — the seamless use of so many languages in both the films.

**Which directors are your inspiration?**

Difficult to answer. There are many directors who have inspired me. Among the contemporary lot, I would say Andrey Zvyagintsev, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Damien Chazell, Guillermo del Toro among many others. In the older lots — Sam Peckinpah, Mario Bava, Steven Spielberg, Sergio Leone, Clint Eastwood — a lot of them — Akira Kurosawa, Satyajit Ray, Masaki Kobayashi, Ritwik Ghatak , Fritz Lang. I also admire Bimal Roy, Ramesh Sippy, Vijay Anand, Hrishikesh Mukherjee, Shekhar Kapur. The list is too long. All these giants collectively must have been my influence. Bruce Lee and Charlie Chaplin have also been a great influence. Watching Tarkovsky, Bergman or Ozu always gives me a feeling that cinema can be a spiritual journey too.

**You have worked with Govind Nihalani on which project? You have also worked with foreign directors. What, according to you, is lacking in India film industry today?**

I assisted Govind Nihalani sir for a big budget music video made for Rajasthan Govt. The song was written by Javed Akhtar, sung by Sukhwinder and composed by Late Aadesh Srivastava. As far as foreign collaborations are concerned, I have assisted Australian director Sean Lynch and Dutch director Henk B de Ukies. I also collaborated with Italian and Hollywood music composer Michele Josia along with our local favourite Anurag Saikia for III Smoking Barrels.

I feel fortunate to be part of the Indian film industry. I guess we have far more liberty than in many other countries. But I think we definitely need more theatres across India. Let’s make it like China. And our mainstream films need better content and form to compete in the growing foreign film market. In our 100 years of cinema history, how many technical inventions have we really made? High time, we need to give importance to the science of filmmaking too.

**What do you think about films and the movie industry in the North East (barring Assam that has produced great filmmakers)?**

Unfortunately there are very less films coming from the North East. There is no dearth of talent in this region, but we need better motivation. Local government has to come forward to support the local film industry.

Apart from Assam, Manipur has been producing some good films although they lack infrastructure. They should be role model for other NE states. And language shouldn’t be a barrier, a Khasi or a Bodo film should have all the qualities required to get released with subtitles in entire Assam and other North Eastern states and vice versa. This way, NE films will get wider audience and the film industry can thrive.

**What will be your message for the young directors from this region?**

North East is a warehouse of amazing stories. Who on earth is going to make a feature film on one of the fiercest battle of Second World War — The Battle of Kohima? So many untold stories! All aspiring directors should continuously keep making both short and full length films. I think our younger generation is a bit lucky. They have a huge digital platform like YouTube at their disposal. They have the biggest distributor for free. So what’s stopping them? Go and pick your camera guys!!!

**What is your next project?**

Working on a love story in Hindi language. Too early to reveal though.

*III Smoking Barrels* was extensively filmed in Meghalaya along with other parts of NE. Famous death metal band Plague Throat has performed in the film.

## Bollywood & TV journey

Worked as an assistant director in *Sooper Se Ooper* (starring Vir Das, Deepak Dobriyal), *The Desire* (starring Shilpa Shetty, Jaya Prada, Anupam Kher), *Black Forest* (starring Richa Chaddha)

Directed non-fiction TV shows like *Houzee* with Rohit Roy as a host for ZEE TV. Worked for popular soap called *Kareena Kareena*

# *Your chicken may have steroids, party drugs*

**By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi**

The medical use of Ketamine Hydrochloride is as an anaesthetic used in medical procedures, or surgery. It is a white crystal that can be used as a recreational hallucinogenic anaesthetic (and is used for date rape). It is banned in this country for open sale as it is a party drug. Unfortunately, the veterinary hospitals have suffered as a result of this recent ban because we now have to use more expensive anaesthetics when we operate on animals.

Like all drugs it has major side effects. An allergy to it may result in tightness in the chest or throat, trouble in breathing, swallowing, or talking, hoarseness or swelling of the mouth, face, lips, tongue or throat. Sometimes it can cause a loss of appetite and nausea. It can cause urinary tract damage from the kidney to the bladder.

It induces a dream-like feeling, jerky muscle movements, drowsiness, confusion, unusual thoughts. The effects don’t last long but until they wear off, ketamine can cause a loss of feeling in the body and paralysis of the muscles.

It can also lead you to experiencing a distortion of reality, giving you a floating or detached feeling, as if the mind and body have been separated, with some people feeling incapable of moving. It causes headaches, confusion, agitation, panic attacks and impairment in short and long term memory.

Frequent use is sometimes associated with the development of depression. Studies show that frequent anaesthesia drugs in young children may lead to long-term brain problems. This may also happen in unborn babies if the mother ingests ketamine during the third trimester of pregnancy.

Ketamine can be injected, mixed into a drink, or snorted up the nose. And now you can eat it in your chicken as well.

Consumer groups in America have filed a case against the third largest chicken company (with a sale of more than 2.8 billion dollars), after the US Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) scrutinised 69 poultries and found 82 “unconfirmed residues” in the chicken, including ketamine, antibiotics, pesticides and growth hormones in the chicken. The company sold its chicken — as most poultries do — as 100 per cent natural.

The company not only sells chicken under its own label but supplies to different distributors who sell under different labels, and thousands of standalone restaurants. And now India is allowing the import of this chicken.

No one knows why the poultries were using ketamine. Was it to sedate the animals before slaughter or before live transport? Was it to make the consumer feel “high” or “satiated” after eating the chicken?

These are the same poultries that refused to reduce antibiotic use because “raising chickens without antibiotics would lead to a high number of chicken deaths”. So they admit that their chickens are so badly kept in filthy, inhumane, factory farm conditions that they are in a permanent state of illness that needs antibiotics.

All over the world consumers are becoming resistant to antibiotics. Normal infections have escalated into a new world of superbugs that doctors have no tools to fight. All investigations show antibiotics, used on animals bred for slaughter, as the main culprits.

The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention’s 2013’s report links two of 18 antibiotic-resistant bacteria to the use of antibiotics in animals.

Ketamine wasn’t the only problematic substance found in the chicken: What were the other 82 “unconfirmed residues”?

Eleven antibiotics were found. Chloramphenicol, a powerful antibiotic that can trigger bone marrow suppression in humans, prohibited for use in animals that will become food; amoxicillin, known as a “medically important for humans” not approved in poultry.

Desethylene ciprofloxacin, a “medically important antibiotic for humans”; Prednisone, a steroid; Ketoprofen, an anti–inflammatory drug; Butorphanol, an opioid analgesic, pesticides Abamectin and Emamectin were also detected.

Two substances, banned in chicken production, included the synthetic growth hormones Melengestrol acetate and Ractopamine. Three instances of penicillin residue were detected, for which the residue regulatory limit is zero. Consumers eating the chickens are also eating steroids, recreational and anti inflammatory drugs and prohibited antibiotics. All these can make people very sick.

In 2013 the FDA issued new antibiotic regulations. Has it made any difference to the use of antibiotics in chickens?

No. Antibiotic use is on the rise. They are simply relabelled. “Growth promoters” (meaning antibiotics and hormones) has been removed from labels, but the drugs are still routinely used for the new indication of “disease prevention”.

Even after the guidance was published, a Reuters investigation found all the poultry factory farm companies using antibiotics, hormones and pesticides pervasively, completely ignoring the regulators.

But antibiotics are the least of the unlabelled drugs and chemicals lurking in chicken. According to the Associated Press, US chickens continue to be fed with inorganic arsenic to produce quicker weight gain with less food and enhanced colour. This arsenic goes into the human body.

The effects of ketamine are more pronounced when eaten with alcohol. So people who eat chicken nuggets while drinking may have a trance like confused reaction that is not caused by the alcohol alone.

Most people do not realise that big pharmaceutical companies all have a veterinary division in which they make hormones, antibiotics etc. for animals raised for food. They never advertise this. And until a crisis happens the media do not report it. But the danger to human beings is acute.

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

# Tough job for today's parents

THE FUNNY SIDE

Nury Vittachi

The Chinese government recently decided that all spermatozoa donated to Beijing's main sperm bank must be loyal to the communist party.

Good idea! But how do you check? You can't interview them.

Sperm bank staff make it clear that sperm donors must be card-carrying party members with Correct Political Attitudes, which means atheists who "love the party". This will prevent fertilised eggs growing into offspring with Dangerously Wrong Ideas, such as "maybe the world is not actually on the cusp of being taken over by the glorious rising sun of Communism".

There are similar concerns around the world. If a gay couple from the United States wants a baby carried by a surrogate mother in Asia, the Medical Tourism Corporation promises to scour India to try to find one of a particular belief group, so they can make sure the initial cells of their child-to-be are Jewish or atheist or whatever — but the company points out that most available mothers are Hindu or Muslim.

Yet maybe the main culture of the next generation will be something else altogether. A baby in the UK recently spoke his first word, the Caters News Agency reported. Instead of "mama" or "dada", little Joe Brady said "Alexa".

May be "digital assistant" gadgets like Alexa will take over all parental duties? Fine with me. They can raise the kids until they are old enough to understand vital commands such as "Go get me a beer."

Parents are becoming more flexible. Several news sites recently carried the story of a mother who asked a tattooist to permanently write the name of her son Kevin on her arm. The tattooist misspelled it as "Kelvin". So Johanna Sandstrom of Sweden changed her child's name to Kelvin to match her tat.

People criticised her for this. But raising children is all about thinking on your feet, plus, of course: Bribery, corruption, cheating and lying.

Here are two Evil Dad Tricks that worked for this columnist: 1) Tell your children that the display of chocolate next to the supermarket checkout queue is special "dogs only" candy. 2) Instead of buying expensive tickets to the aquarium, show the children the fish display in the window of your local fishmonger shop and say: "Shh! They're sleeping."

Oh, you start off imagining that you are going to raise an angelic child who wears only natural fibres. Pretty soon, you're happy enough if you can keep the little monster from running naked out of the house. One father recently wrote on Twitter that he asked his six-year-old son to get dressed for school and the boy snapped back: "OMG, why are you so obsessed with clothes?"

A TV presenter recently admitted that she and her husband sometimes travel first class in aircraft while putting their children in economy. First class should be "a huge treat that you have earned", explained Kirstie Allsopp of the UK. I like this idea. I wonder if her children live in a small hut in the yard of the family mansion, not having earned a house?

Meanwhile, non-parents should practise their acting skills by ordering a whole fish whenever they are dining with children. "Shh! It's sleeping."

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

# Tasty treasures in Miami

## *South Beach Food & Art Deco Tour is hard to miss*

**By Sujoy Dhar**

Ashley, a smart, lithe looking young woman, was right there with the sign "Miami Culinary Tours" when I reached Bolivar Restaurant on Washington Avenue, South Beach, in the historic Art Deco district of this south Florida gem.

"Miami is a wonderful place," lobbed a passerby near the ear of our pretty guide Ashley as she introduced us to the tour and herself right outside the Boliviar. "Yes, it is a wonderful place," she responded back to the stranger and at the same time assuring all of us that coming ahead is a not-to-be-missed Miami food and architecture experience.

Our tour started from Boliviar and I soon realised that this food joint, which boasts of its exotic fusion of South American cuisine with a rustic and chic vibe, is perhaps the ideal place to start a culinary tour in the Art Deco hub that comprises avenues between 5th Street and 23rd Street, along Ocean Drive, Collins Avenue and Washington Avenue.

This is a tour to savour tasty treasures inside the beating heart of Miami Beach with the engaging heritage walk through the Art Deco district.

As you walk you enjoy delicious cuisine at a diverse range of food halts; from swanky, starry gourmet to hole in the wall ethnic eateries.

Well, our tour began with a taste of Colombian empanada at Boliviar. They are golden corn-crust pies filled with your choice tender pulled beef or chicken or cheese.

We then headed for the iconic Ocean Drive to learn about the famous movie locations and the history of the Art Deco architecture, which is marked by the 1920s style of buildings with simple, clean shapes, often with a "streamlined" look.

Well, not to be missed in Ocean Drive is also the mansion of Gianni Versace. The Villa, Casa Casuarina, which is popularly known as Versace Mansion, is a property which is now a boutique hotel but was once owned by the Italian fashion impresario till he was assassinated right at the front gate of the building by a serial killer in 1997.

Ocean Drive is also lined with some of the awesome food joints of Miami.

After Boliviar, we checked in a restaurant owned by none other than Cuban-American musician couple Gloria and Emilio Estefan. The celebrity power couple's award-winning restaurant Larios on the Beach- painted white and blue in the exterior- is Miami Beach's go-to destination for authentic Cuban cuisine and mojitos.

We were told that the joint recently underwent a complete renovation to its interiors.

The Estefans say they have created "a tempting new menu featuring traditional favourites as well as Cuban-inspired specialities." New menu offerings run the gamut, from sweet and salty bacon-wrapped maduros, black bean hummus served with crisp plantain chips, to a fresh tropical ceviche and a sizzling chicken vaca frita.

The signature dishes are lechón(roasted pork), house-made pork tamales and the classic arroz con pollo. Decadent desserts include traditional flan, arroz con leche (rice pudding), natilla (vanilla custard) and chocolate tres leches.

The Estefans proudly commissioned a three-dimensional site-specific sculpture by Miami-based, multi-disciplinary artist Carlos Betancourt. The sculpture consists of over 100 three-dimensional objects that include a microphone used by Ricky Martin and Gloria Estefan (Mi Terra), Shakira's harmonica, drumsticks from Shelia E, Tito Puente and Emily Estefan to elements from Betancourt's iconic artworks.

At the bar, along with hand-crafted cocktails and premium wines, you can nosh on appetizing bites such as fire-grilled skewers and baked Cuban empanadas.

Now the food apart, a walk along the Ocean Drive is a walk through Miami's famous Art Deco quarter.

So after having some delicious bites at Larion on the Beach, you can take a walk to the intersection of 5th Street and Ocean Drive. You have to walk north, to see the district's minimalistic buildings with porthole windows, curved metal rails and duplicated flags from popular ocean liners that once anchored at the Port of Miami in the 1930s.

In particular, look for The Celino South Beach hotel, between 6th and 7th Street. This Art Deco masterpiece was once a popular hangout for Hollywood glitterati like Clark Gable, Carole Lombard and Rita Hayworth.

Nearby, the 1936 Beacon Hotel and the 1935 Colony Hotel have neon accents and giant signs that are hard to miss.

Continue north to 23rd Street, and you'll notice other prominent Art Deco spots like the popular party place, the Clevelander Hotel, on Ocean Drive; Villa Casa Casaurina, the 1930s Spanish-style mansion where Gianni Versace famously lived and died from an assassin's bullets; and the restored National Hotel.

We stood across the street right in front of The Breakwater building which is a 1936 resort hotel and a beautiful product of the Art Deco style with the strong line and the attention to symmetry.

Well, our next food stop was Miami Mediterranean Cuisine at 209 11th St (11th St And Collins Ct). Here you have a good choice of Mediterranean food available for delivery or takeout.

We went for some small bites and chose Cigar Roll which is a cigar-shaped crispy pastry stuffed with feta cheese and parsley served with tzatziki sauce.

Hummus, which is a blend of pureed chickpeas delicately flavoured with sesame puree, fresh lemon juice, olive oil and med spices and served with pita bread is a good choice too.

Or a Mixed Appetizer perhaps, which includes Hummus, babagonoush, tabouli, sauced eggplant, stuffed grape leaves, falafel, served with hot pita bread.

We then headed Lincoln Road on the outer edges of the Art Deco Historic District. This is a pedestrian-only promenade and outdoor mall and is lined by restaurants, shops, bars and more, all with Art Deco nuances on their façade.

Our tour ended with two more mouth-watering experiences at the Española Way, where you are transported to the old world Europe as you stroll down the palm tree-lined pedestrian street with rows of food joints on either side.

Conceived as a "historic Spanish village" by NBT Roney in 1925, the two-block corridor between Washington and Pennsylvania Avenues was designed to resemble the romantic Mediterranean villages of Spain and France. Here, buildings are made of chalky pink stucco with Spanish tile roofs while sidewalk cafes are shaded by striped awnings.

Española Way is all about art galleries, boutiques and gelaterias, as well as restaurants. Take your pick from Mexican, Cuban, Japanese and Italian cuisines here.

We chose Tapas y Tintos for some Spanish cuisine sitting in one of the tables that spill out onto the streets filled with tapas, paella and boards of jamon Iberico and manchego cheese. The menu included albondigas (meatballs), piquillo peppers stuffed with cod, garlic shrimp, Spanish tortilla made with potatoes and onions and Gallega octopus.

This joint also hosts live flamenco shows with tapas.

And finally, we wrapped up the walk with a yummy gelato taste in the mouth at Milani Gelateria on the Española Way. This is a place to savour the authentic, handcrafted Italian gelato made with the highest quality natural ingredients directly from distinct regions of Italy. If you are in Miami and not taking a culinary tour in the Art Deco district, then you really miss the flavour of this vibrant, voluptuary American city on the Atlantic coast.

*(Notintown.net/IBNS/TWF)*
*Image by author*

# 'Star - Gazing'

***By Pt. Ajai Bhambi*** ***Sunday, JUNE 10, 2018***

Good opportunities would come your way as Venus Parallel Sun on your solar return chart. There would also be a time to enhance your skills. Your gift of communications allows you to fortify existing bonds and broaden your social circle. Your positive and hands-on attitude comes in handy when odds and opportunities come up. You need to be ready to utilize the information that comes your way through numerous interactions and utilize it to your advantage. Be all set to pack your bags for some of you it could be for a foreign trip this trip will prove fortunate. You are cheerful and remain in a positive frame of mind. Avoid over consumption of anything especially food and take care of your diet.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

A lot of excitement, pleasure and romance are on the cards. You focus on having fun, and expressing yourself creatively. Your romantic affair gives you a big boost of confidence. Moreover your personal magnetism runs high to be admired and adored. You express true feelings, ideas and plans without being afraid of consequences. You enjoy every moment, whatever it brings and follow your intuition to feel more integrated. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with unapproachable people in authority. You achieve great success in competitive situations. Domestic relationships and the home environment tend to be harmonious and peaceful. Strong chances of finalization of a property related matter. Monetary transactions are beneficial in land related matters.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

This phase may put on lot of pressure on you. A positive and creative approach brings gain and resolution in old conflicts and work situations. You need to view professional and business problems from a balanced perspective. Learn from past experience and get on with your life rather than repeat old patterns. Emotive issues can crop up. However later on the dust will settle down and you will look up with a lot of hope. This is a time to do what you can to build trust in your family life and a strong foundation within yourself. You are most likely to express your social, romantic, and artistic qualities through an intellectual appreciation of art and cultural pursuits. You might make short trips, visiting friends and relatives. It's a great time to open up conversations with loved ones, when it comes to matters related to love and romance.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

The planetary configuration promises an excellent period. You can charm many with your strong personality and soft approach. With inner strength and hard work, you can transform a breakdown at work into a breakthrough. You gain the trust and confidence of people in authority. It's time to let go of obsolete patterns and routines and have a new vision for the future. Your mystical and enigmatic personality attracts some interesting people around you. You will spend a lot on clothes, furniture, and entertainment. The areas of life where you are most likely to express your social, romantic, and artistic qualities are through an intellectual appreciation of art, cultural pursuits, and literature.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

Money and domestic issues will take centre stage as you grapple with these issues. Your main concentration will be to make domestic relationships and the home environment harmonious and peaceful. You are proud of your ideas, and very good at expressing them with ease. This will enable you to make progress at work. You make face a setback or face some obstacles as far as finances are concerned. This is a time when you need to act with prudence and focus on your priorities. There is strength in your feelings of love and the power of attraction, which may open the door to new romantic relationships. You are more likely to pay closer attention to your physical appearance and mannerisms, aiming to improve and enhance your attractiveness.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

Your courage and confidence will keep your hopes alive. You will need to attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with unapproachable people at work. On the other hand enhanced energy and a renewed feeling of confidence favors you. Take advantage of this and utilize your energy prudently. Problems may be overcome by self-assertion, and directness. There's nothing wrong with a bit of self-centeredness. You are highly motivated to make money this enhances much energy for new money-making projects. Romantic matters come to the fore and the single will find that they are drawn towards someone in their social circle. Activities related to communication such as journalism, literature and fine arts are prominent.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**

There is increased creative energy within you which provides the necessary dynamism to complete your projects with élan. You might play with various ways to increase personal funds, resulting in more than one source for monetary gain this time however make sure that you read the fine print. However, financial pressure will be there as you spend huge amount of money on homemaking, house repairs, re-decorating and family activities. Your communication abilities will largely be applied to professional worldly ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued in order to enhance career prospects or social standing. Relationships take on a fun tone now. Friends and lovers take priority for most of the time. Health reads fine.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

Travel, contacts and communications are the keywords at this time. Opportunities and invitations from overseas take you on an unplanned journey. Visitors, friends and family make this a happy time as an event in the family is celebrated. You are full of hope and enthusiasm as you make new beginnings at work and home. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. Activities related to communication such as journalism, literature and fine arts are prominent. The desire for some form of recognition and financial success is stronger. You express your feelings to your beloved and will be happy to find that they are reciprocated. Your health or that of someone close will cause some anxious moments.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

An action oriented phase keeps you busy throughout. Public relations work, interpersonal relations and other such endeavors are highlighted now. There will be a multitude of tasks for you to handle both at work and at home. It is more about how you express yourself than the specifics of what you are saying that helps sway others to your point of view. This is a good time to do some financial planning and strategizing. You will also show aggression in your dealings but make sure that this does not get out of hand. As such, this is a great time to open up conversations about topics such as those revolving around the sharing of power, intimacy, and finances. Your friends and well wishers would be supportive.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

This is a period of mixed results for you where you will have to deal with emotional disturbances. There is likely to be more activity, movement, contact, and communications with co-workers now. It is best to go ahead with your work and avoid confrontations or arguments. Think twice before you speak. Financial prosperity or social success may come through your business associate at this time. You are inclined to learn new work skills, or to improve your skills and output in terms of work. Your family and friends will support you and you will find solace in their company. You will be able to enjoy personal relationships with love and affection. Children will bring joy and happiness. Pay attention to your health and do not neglect or overlook minor ailments.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

This is an excellent phase where communications, affair and fun activities flourish. You can expect something new. You would be able to make good use of your talent and communication skills and impress people around you. This brings some new opportunities. Your career prospects also improve as you bring about changes in your work style and interact in more positive way with your colleagues. You make great strides in your career as you win accolades and gain recognition for your work. You may have a desire to redecorate your home. Your charm makes you the center of attraction as you find yourself back on the social whirl. Family life will be very harmonious. Romance is in the air and you enjoy the time spent with your beloved. For the unattached a roaring affair is in the offing.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

New associations will boost your career in a big way. You plan in an unorthodox way and get appreciation from your business associates. At the work place your continuous efforts will bring fruitful results. You have many overseas opportunities to boost your security and comfort. You may find yourself in a position in which there is a blending of the financial with social or public affairs. You are likely to travel and engage in a variety of activities and meet new people. You may be assigned to complete a task and travel overseas. A lot of travel, meeting with influential people will boost your moral also. Your family also cheers you up and you have a holiday together or spend time with them. You extend your hospitality to family and friends.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

A change or betterment in career is strongly indicated this also brings better financial prospects. Your style of communication boosts your magnetic powers. Let others know they can depend on you. People notice and admire you for your pleasant and cheerful personality and this brings new job opportunities or assignments. 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. Obstacles in your life may be overcome by bravery, self-assertion, and directness. You get good financial returns from investments and insurance. Monetary transactions would be beneficial if you research and focus. Romance is very much on the cards.

# *Independent medicine*

**By Ranjan K Baruah**

It is quite encouraging to know that in many of the western countries, naturopathy is given due recognition. There are several colleges in various parts of the US, Germany, Britain like National College of Naturopathic Medicine, Oregon and British College of Naturopathy and Osteopathy, London. Aspirants may collect information related to naturopathy from the website of the Ministry of Ayush.

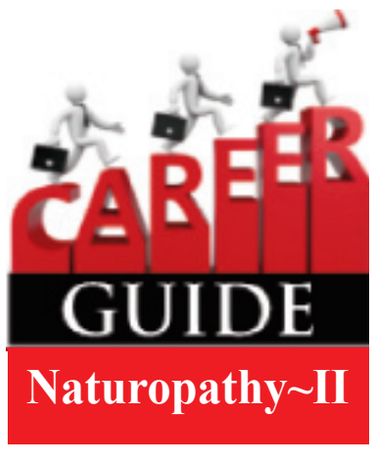
Indian Naturopathy movement started mainly in Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Gujarat. It may also be mentioned that modern Naturopathy movement was started in Germany and other western countries with Water Cure (Hydrotherapy).

Naturopathy is recognised and well accepted as an independent system of medicine. The development and promotion of Yoga and Naturopathy could not be attained as expected due to dearth of qualified manpower. However, in the recent years, many NGOs and voluntary organisations have come up to establish Yoga and Naturopathy Health Homes as well as degree colleges.

At present, there are 12 such colleges in India, three in Karnataka affiliated to Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences, Bengaluru; four in Tamil Nadu MGR Medical University, Chennai, two in Andhra Pradesh, University of Health Sciences, Vijayawada; one in AYUSH University, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, one in Bharkatulla University, Bhopal and Ayurveda University, Jamnagar, Gujarat.

It is quite interesting that many of the modern medical institutes of the country took a serious effort to prove the efficacy of Yoga and its various aspects. In the past, this was a four-year course leading to Diploma in Naturopathy (ND) including Yoga, in Hyderabad — 1970 to 1990.

At present this is a five-and-a-half-year (including 1 year internship) degree course leading to Bachelor of Naturopathy and Yogic Sciences (BNYS) since 1989. This area brings more opportunity as people are looking for alternative medicine. Our




students may plan up their career in the field too.

As we have already mentioned that development and promotion of Yoga and Naturopathy could not be attained due to shortage for qualified manpower but now it brings opportunities as wellness industry is increasing in India. Different reports say there would be more demand for trained people and hence young people from our region may also try to get involved in this field of career.

There are 18 universities which impart certificate, diploma and degree courses in Yoga. UGC is also promoting Yoga by financing the universities to start the Yoga courses in the universities. Some universities are imparting Yoga education ranging from certificate to PhD level courses. Many universities are likely to start Yoga Department in the years to come.

**Updates:**

**Japanese Government (MEXT) Scholarships:** Japanese Government Scholarships for Undergraduates 2018-19 invites applications from Class XII pass-out students. The scholarship aims to provide fully funded education to deserving candidates in the universities of Japan. The scholarship is been provided by the Government of Japan. An applicant must-have passed Class XII and willing to pursue a bachelor's degree from a University in Japan in the fields of Social Sciences, Humanities and Natural Science. Aspirants may apply before June 15.

**Fulbright Nehru Master's Fellowships 2019-20:** The United States-India Educational Foundation invites applications for Fulbright Nehru Master's Fellowships 2019-20 from highly motivated graduates and post-graduates who have at least three years of professional work experience, to study at selected the US colleges and universities. Aspirants may apply before June 15.

*(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)*

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

**--- George Bernard Shaw**

**The Shillong Times**

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## Mob justice everywhere

THE lynching of two musicians in Karbi Anglong district of Assam on Friday June 8, on suspicion that they were child lifters is a painful saga of modern India. What is even more shocking is that the whole barbaric incident was captured on mobile phone and circulated via WhatsApp. Nilotpal Das a sound engineer based in Mumbai and his artiste friend Abhijeet Nath had gone to Kangthilangso to capture the sounds of the waterfall there but their casual attire set rumours afloat that they were child lifters. The rumours gained ground and the mob got into action. The duo pleaded with the mob and even gave their antecedents but mob fury knows no bounds. The two succumbed to their injuries. In the India of today mob justice has become commonplace even while the law takes a backseat. The mob knows its strength. Police normally register a case or cases against unknown persons whenever a mob is at work. Those cases will never come up for hearing and even if they do the amorphous nature of the mob makes it impossible for them to zero in on specific individuals.

In the present case a video clip of the incident is available with many people since it has gone viral. But whether it would be possible for the law enforcers to identify the culprits is debatable. So where does mob fury originate? Why are people ready to do violence on mere suspicion? These days rumours travel fast through social media and WhatsApp in particular. While democracy guarantees freedom of speech it never foresaw the dangers of this post-truth era where unmediated and even fake news passes off as truth, until much damage is done and the news is proven false. Fake news is a phenomenon troubling the world's oldest democracy – the USA - where a President was elected through careful manipulation of minds via social media. In India we have trolls that are paid by interested parties and who are working at a frenetic pace to discount truth and spread lies. A counter to fake news and the process of deconstructing such fake news by conscientious citizens has only just started in India. Does the state have the wherewithal to tackle this dangerous instrument of destruction of 21st century India?

# Lessons from the recent Shillong Imbroglio

***By H H Mohrmen***

Now that the fire is doused out and those who live in the area under the Lum Diengjri police station - the ground zero of unlawful protests - can breathe easy and sleep peacefully, it is time for the government and the concerned citizens of Shillong to reflect and analyse on the factors which sparked the trouble and created mayhem in the city which in turn affected the state. If we do not want this to repeat it is imperative that we learn from the imbroglio otherwise as the saying goes; those who do not learn from History are bound to repeat it.

There were only two incidents in the recent past which put Shillong in the spotlight, the death of the former President, APJ Abdul Kalam and the last week's clash between the protestors and the police. The skirmish between a few people has unfortunately escalated and taken a different turn and later became a serious law and order situation for the state. The clash between the police and the mob has also brought a bad name to Shillong which was known as the Scotland of the East, the rock capital of India and once upon a time the education hub of the northeast. In one fell swoop the city lost its honour and glory when part of the city almost bore resemblance to Srinagar during the confrontation between the armed forces and the public.

The first question that comes to the mind is - who are these trouble makers? Former Home Minister of Meghalaya RG Lyngdoh called those who disrupted peace and violated curfew as 'mercenary agitators' (ST June 6, 2018 )who were hired to create trouble in the city. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma claimed that since most of the protestors arrested were from West Khasi Hills then it is conclusive that the protesters were not only brought from other places but that they were paid and fed by some unscrupulous elements. But the point is that even if they were being fed and paid to create chaos in the city, they are still our young people.

If the protestors were hired, then the next question that needs asking is: why did they fall prey to such evil designs? What compelled them to take on the police? Is it economic constraints? Is it for the cause of the jaidbynriew or did they even know why they protested? Reliable sources informed that most of the drivers and the helpers of the red buses hail from the area, so we cannot rule out the fact that they can also be red bus drivers and helpers. It will of course help the government immensely if we know the area the protesters originate from but it is equally important to understand their mind too.

Unlike in the past, the protest this time was bizarre. This has compelled writers of columns in the Shillong Times to come up with their own description to define the protesters. Avner Pariat in his article 'Conciliation: is it possible?' (ST June 6, 2018) said: This new breed of protesters is quite vociferous and doesn't care for the KSU, the FKJGP or the HYC and they don't really care too much about the Church authorities either. The mob which does not represent any pressure group has taken over the protest and indulged in stone pelting and even engaged in causing sporadic violence across the city and its adjacent areas. The danger is not only that this time we have a faceless mob which does not represent anybody, but also that the protest was unpredictable and it has replaced the democratic protest that the pressure groups like the KSU, the FKJGP used to organise.

Benjamin Lyngdoh in his article (ST June 7, 2018) suggested the trouble stems from the tribal mentality that we still harbour at the back of our minds which sees people as 'them' and 'us,' the outsiders against the sons of the soils. This mindset not only divides people into two or more factions but it creates the perception that we are becoming slaves in our own land. This also stirs up in the local residents of the city the idea that this is my land my country and I can do whatever I like in the country and the outsiders have no right whatsoever in the land, even that which is legal.

Albert Thyrniang in the Shillong Times Editorial page (June 5, 2018) aptly called those who took to the streets and violated curfew as people who were led by herd mentality or mob mentality. These people were driven by emotions and they do not ask questions but move along with the mob. They get carried away with this fear that the locals are under attack. They swayed like reeds to whichever direction the wind blows. In such situations they can be easily manipulated by whoever is holding the end of the rope. Descartes' famous saying, 'I think therefore I am,' is obviously not at play in the mind of the mob, because they had refused to think.

Barnes Mawrie in his article 'A Cultural Vacuum in the Khasi Society' (ST June 7, 2018) looks at a more profound cause of the conflict. He is of the opinion that the reason we have youths who are easily misguided is because we are losing some important part of our tradition to Christianity and modern way of life. Christianity and modern way of life had had a negative impact on some of the traditional institutions and one such institution is the kñiship (the status and position of the maternal uncle in the family). The modern way of life and Christian culture has only helped weaken this very important institution in the community. The maternal uncle who used to be the family priest, a provider and a disciplinarian in the family has lost his respect and a clan-based family is giving way to nuclear family.

If we want to prevent this kind of incident from happening again the police and other government agencies need to look into these issues and put their heads together to come up with a permanent solution to solve the problem once and for all. If the reason that people violated the curfew and attacked the police is because of the pent up anger, then we need know who are they angry at and what the cause of their anger is. We can come up with solutions only if we have answers to these questions.

If we look at the incident using the global prism we realise that the world is really becoming a global village thanks to the media and social media in particular. The news about the incident in Shillong reached every nook and corner of the country and the world at large almost instantly. This is one thing that we cannot avoid so we have to live with the technology available and we only need to come up with strategies on how we can use the same technology to counter the anti-social elements which had made the best use of the same technology to disseminate misinformation and create more mayhem.

Fortunately or rather unfortunately the media reports compelled the Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh to send few Congress MLAs to meet the Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma on June 4, and on June 6 Manjit Singh Rai, member of the National Commission for Minorities visited the state to assess the situation. The previous day Mohinderjit Singh member of the United Sikh Organisation led a five member delegation to meet the Home Minister James Sangma. The point is we are no longer an island and we must realise that everything we do has its own repercussions and we must not take this lightly. We must make the trouble makers realise that their illegal activity can also put the government in a tight spot because they are answerable to the central government and the other state governments. It also puts our people who live outside the state in danger.

The Shillong incident not only makes us realise that we indeed live in a global village, but like the rest of the world we also have our own share of post-truth and fake news phenomenon. Post-truth and fake news is a postmodern thought perception that there is no such thing as truth, or that truth is simply a matter of interpretation of power. This mindset leads to the phenomenon of fake news and the complete rejection of facts which has had an impact on the people of Shillong in the recent protest.

The government has the onus to not only solve the Punjabi lane or Them Iewmawlong issue, but more importantly to see that such incidents do not happen again. (IANS)

Gaon *Bandh*

# Life between strikes

***By Poonam I Kaushish***

In this season of civic apathy and economic disgruntlement, clearly strikes are the flavour of the season. Over the decades, India has trudged the treacherous protest road bringing things to such a pass that life is about living between strikes. Curse all you want, it's for a cause, remember. Wherein a person's freedom ends at the tip of the others nose!

Think. From June 1 to 10 farmers from 172 organisations across the country led by the Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangh and the Kisan Ekta Manch held a 10-day 'Gaon Bandh' to draw attention to the ongoing agrarian crisis. As part of the protest farmers decided not to sell their produce to cities primarily as they wanted urban folks to understand their misery and make the Government realise the kisans' importance.

Their major demands include complete loan waiver, minimum support price that is 50% higher than all input costs and income assurance. However, what makes their case strikingly apart from other *bandhs* is that it's for the first time that farmer organizations across the board have resorted to what is the favourite tool of their blue-collared brethren.

And they seem to have struck gold with Parties falling over each other to pander to farmers demands. Recently, Karnataka has promised a waiver of all farm loans up to Rs 50,000. Ditto the case in Rajasthan, Punjab, Maharashtra, UP etc. Paradoxically, the loan waivers have opened a Pandora's Box for other States with many like Raje prowling for a shortfall of Rs 6500 crores.

Consider. The *kisans* are a large vote-bank as over 65% of the population lives and works in agriculture or activities thereof. But, over the last 25 years the share of farming in the economy has shrunk from over 33% to 15% resulting in crippling high indebtedness with over 346,538 farmers committing suicide in 20 years, an average of 16,500 deaths annually or 45 deaths every day, according to the National Crime Records Bureau. But the actual number is treble aver agriculturists. In Maharashtra suicides are the norm and in Punjab almost 6,926 farmers and farm labourers in 11 districts committed suicide till two years back. Not only farmers but turn North- South, East-West, any *mohalla*, city or State on any given day, the story is the same. Some disgruntled group is on strike to protest some grievance or failure impairing life and bringing the country to a grinding halt. Call it a *bandh, hartal, rasta roko, chakka* jam what you may matters little, India thrives on protests. The word strike instills a sense of dread perfecting the saying *"jiski laathi uski bhains"!*

A sure give away of a free India out of control thereby raising a moot point: Are strikes actually expression of freedom or are they means of suppressing fundamental rights in a democracy? What drives unions to strike? Is it to keep its flock together or ignominy of becoming irrelevant? Guided by workers interest, commitment for a better wages and quality of life or political considerations?

Arguably, not a few simply shrug it off with *"sab chalta hai* attitude, this is *Mera Bharat Mahan* at its rudest and crassest best." Many assert *"ki pharak painda hai"*. But the fact is that these strikes have exposed how dangerous this game has become replete with violence, mayhem, deaths etc.

Tragically, India has travelled a long way from Tilak's *"swaraj* is my birth right" to "strikes is my birth right." Today, every other section of society plans strikes as a matter of routine. The National Capital *numero uno* road --- Parliament Street resembles a battle ground. Heavily barricaded with baton-wielding policemen, fire engines and police vans, it stands vandalized every other day by slogan-shouting masses protesting about something. The cause is immaterial. It is all about registering ones protest, the louder the better. Success is measured through the prism of causing maximum dislocation and discomfiture to people bringing work to a standstill.

Scandalously, India lost 11.73 lakhs man days to strikes in 2017 which cost the country Rs 1,4350 crores according to the Labour Bureau. Compared to 2016, the number of man days lost increased by 44% resulting in 57% more production loss last year. Textile workers in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, IT employees in Karnataka, multiple workers' agitations in Kerala, defence employees cross country including outside Parliament and Government employees in different States.

Tamil Nadu lost the highest number of strike days 5.74 lakhs in 2017, followed by Kerala 1.37 lakhs and Gujarat 99,880. Gujarat reported the highest production loss at Rs 286 crores, West Bengal followed with Rs 181 crores, 4,683 man-days. While industry leaders assert strikes are indications of changing policies, labour unions argue the situation is worsening with India's future threatened, notwithstanding the Centre's and States boast of the best ecosystem for investment and entrepreneurship.

Clearly, part of the current paradox is explained by the changed notion of strikes aka hartal aka bandh as a form of protest. The original concept was centred on the logic the only way for a disempowered people group to shake the system was agitate, from a gherao for more wages to a voluntary hartal against policy decisions. But slowly perversion set in. A strike could be effective only if stoppage of work could not be overcome easily by the system. Therefore, strikers use their power base, including violence, to stall anything that spells change from the routine.

Look at the irony. On one hand we talk of India as the next super power with a strong economy on par with countries like Japan, Korea and China. On the other, we fail to realize that strikes are a hindrance to achieving this goal. In no civilised nations do Parties or trade unions dare to justify deaths and severe citizens distress as necessary to voice protest. Any call for a *bandh* should come from the suffering *aam aadmi* not from netas or corporate fat cats.

Undoubtedly, people are fed-up of *bandhs* each time some *neta* gets a headache. According to a recent survey, three out of four people want a legal ban, 8 out of 10 favour severe punishment or hefty fines for leaders. Surprisingly, only 15% believe in strikes, 10% in voluntary participation and 60% support Gandhi's form of civil disobedience, peaceful *dharnas* and candle lighting in genuine cases of injustice.

In sum, in a milieu wherein adoption of strong-arm tactics to extract one's pound of flesh has become second nature, it is time to cry a halt to strikes. Remember, paralysing the State, black-mailing corporates to get attention and policy reversals only exasperates the public, cuts off money flow, shoos investors and endangers jobs.

Time to stop giving into strong-arm tactics, change a *bandh's* dynamics replacing it with a new social contract. A referendum should be held for people to decide what is right or wrong. This gives higher bargaining power to citizens against Parties or unions who strike, holding the State hostage to achieve their selfish interests.

India needs good governance and economic growth where the citizen's right is paramount. Questionably, can we afford strikes? No. At some point we have to stand up and bellow, *"Bandh karo ye natak!"*--- INFA

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Shhh! Don't tell anyone

Editor,

Rumours, as often said, are carried by haters, spread by fools and accepted by idiots. On this line, the Government of Meghalaya, through the ban on internet and messaging service has unknowingly issued every resident of the state, a character certificate which smartly shows that half the populace still needs to understand that the 1.4GB daily quota of internet can be used to maybe watch a riot video but definitely not create one! But why do rumours have a life of their own? Its essential characteristics of being an information statement, being in circulation, being largely unverifiable and of course being instrumentally relevant could be why people are drawn to unlocking phones, opening apps and taking time off their busy schedule to "send to all".

A key insight about human psychology is that we want to feel good about ourselves and spreading rumours help us do that. Putting down other groups can make us feel good about our group and 'wedge rumours' enable one to achieve just that. For all the people vigorously doling out Whatsapp messages and Facebook posts faster that a live coverage of BBC on an international issue, let's agree to disagree that it was all about 'social status'. We want to show just how wide our 'contact base' is and who gets the information first but forgetting that the trusted contact is not the Superintendent of Police but rather a neighbourhood aunty who heard it from an uncle who heard it from a friend.

Whatsapp is more like a 'mutating virus' and the end-to-end encryption makes it impossible to track the source of rumours. The only way it can be addressed is by not forwarding the forward which was a forward forwarded to someone. Rumours are more likely to spread if they evoke an identifiable emotion such as anger or disgust. People gossip. People are insecure, so they talk about other people so that they won't be talked about. They point out flaws in other people to make them feel good about themselves.

The thin line between gossiping and networking was breached in Shillong and we all faced the aftermath. The worst hit were customers recharging their internet quota and watching it expire before their very eyes. In such precarious positions, it becomes debatable whether the sentence, "one-sided biased reporting" can be used for a media house whose every paragraph starts with "as per reports" and "as per other reports" or for the hundreds of self-styled Whatsapp journalists who were occupied with fantasy killing fake people and evoking a sense of heightened patriotism towards the state. Can we for a change, put up a black flag as our profile picture for the prolific display of immaturity at handling reality?

The following line is however not a rumour. If you don't tell people about this letter to the editor, many will never know that it was published!

Yours etc.,
Nawaz Yasin Islam
Via email.

## Respect the Sikh Community

Editor,

The recent violence of May 31, 2018 over a trivial issue that started from Harijan Colony (Punjabi Lane, Iew Mawlong) turned communal and disturbed the law and order situation in Shillong and other parts of the districts of Khasi Hills. This situation reminds us those days in the late 70's and 80's when people of Shillong had to remain indoors due to protracted curfew. Now the situation has completely changed with modern technology. The swift and smart steps taken by Meghalaya Police and the District Administration put a lid on the troubled situation very tactfully in the affected areas and ensured that people living in Harijan Colony and other parts of the Shillong city were given adequate security cover. I salute the security personnel for performing their duties through sleepless nights. They became the casualty while the public remained unhurt.

The statements and comments of political leaders and media houses published in the print and electronic media about the "Shillong Turmoil" was quite satisfactory but the use of the English word "Sweeper" Colony sounded harsh in a country where the Gandhian principles are still followed. Before solving the "Shillong Turmoil," we first need to change our mindsets. The English word "Sweeper" should be changed to "Swaccha Karyakarta." Secondly, the place where they reside in should be " Swaccha Colony" or Harijan Colony which sounds much better. The Sikh Community is a broad minded and peace loving community wherever they live in this beautiful world following principle of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (The World is one family). Their contribution to the world and especially to India is immense. In every crisis the Sikh's have stood fearlessly and given their lives for the nation in emergencies and disasters like war, natural clamaties etc. Punjab state is the largest producer of rice, wheat, sugar in India and these constitute our daily meal. We use woolen items in winter season which are also produced in Punjab. Sikhs are well known in the world for their bravery, honesty, diligence and dignity. If we go back to history, in the 1971 war with Pakistan Sikh officers and jawans were part of the war that enabled Bangladesh to become Independent from Pakistan. The Sikh community is living peacefully in India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and other parts of world. I wish and pray that the glory of Shillong returns and things are back to normal soon.

I request all the stakeholders, protesters and pressure groups to chalk out a peaceful solution to end the "Shillong Turmoil". I also request the government and the district administration to provide adequate security to the minority communities of Shillong and other parts of Meghalaya who are living in fear since the turmoil started. Last but not the least I would like to remind the protesters that due to this turmoil Shillong tourism industry which is the only promising industry of Meghalaya has already got a serious setback. The local people in the rural areas are now earning from this industry. To recover this lost glory will take time.

Yours etc.,
Sandeep Ghosh
Via email

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

*" Learn to get in touch with the silence within yourself, and know that everything in life has purpose. There are no mistakes, no coincidences, all events are blessings given to us to learn from. "*

**--- Elisabeth Kubler-Ross**

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LX No.301 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JUNE 12, 2018

## Pranab and RSS

WHY Pranab Mukherjee, a veteran Congressman, went to speak at an RSS meet at Nagpur is a mystery. Some of the things he said are unexceptionable. He stressed Constitutional patriotism which is fine. But he did not condemn the challenges to the constitutional and civilizational values in India today. He did not mention such divisive campaigns as "Ghar Wapsi" and "Love Jihad". Did he address the RSS to exercise a chastening influence on them? That did not seem to be his intention. Did he wish to be at the footlights of an obscurantist body now powerful for being the force behind the ruling party at the Centre? Did he support power without accountability?

The RSS has reasons to be gung-ho. It had the former President and seasoned Congress leader enjoying its hospitality. Pranab Mukherjee paid tribute to RSS founder KB Hedgewar. RSS President Mohan Bhagwat seemed on the same page as Mukherjee on diversity in unity. No questions were asked about Jawaharlal Nehru's concept of unity in diversity. The Congress may well wonder as to who gained from Mukherjee's address and what the former President's take is on the fundamental constitutional principle of secularism. The present President Ram Kovind is more articulate on it. Mukherjee's acceptance of the invitation to speak at the RSS event seems to suggest he believes in a dialogue between the two extremes-RSS Hindutva and the secularism of the Opposition. The RSS is not to be equated with the BJP as it was under Atal Behari Vajpayee . Dialogue is a healthy exercise. But there are cases where the twain can never meet.

**LOOKING BACK**

**May 15, 1989**

## Bandaranaike escapes attempt

Former Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mrs. Sirimsvo Bandaranaike this morning escaped an attempt on her life the second in less than two months when unidentified men threw bombs at her party election campaign meeting in eastern Sri Lanka, police and party sources said. Meanwhile, continuing violence involving extremists elsewhere in the island left 22 people dead, security officials said. SLFP sources said that at least four bombs were hurled at the dais where Mrs. Bandaranaike and other party leaders were seated at the inaugural parliamentary election campaign meeting of the party at Hingurak goda in Polonnaruwa district. They said three of her personal bodyguards, who kicked away two of the bombs, a woman escort and her drive were among the wounded. "It was a clear assassination on my life," Mrs Bandaranaike, who was immediately whisked away from the site in a car and later helicoptered to Anuradhapura, told reporters. The Hingurakgoda police said the wounded were being treated at Hingurakgoda, Matale, Kandy and Anuradhapura hospitals. Their exact number was not available, but the condition of 14 of those admitted to Matale base hospital was serious, they said. They said the attackers had burst a smoke bomb apparently to conceal their position, before hurling the bombs at the meeting.

# Do we own Mother Earth!!!

***By Carmo Noronha***

"Humans do not weave the web of life, they are merely a strand in it……." so said a wise Red Indian Chief over a century ago. Undoubtedly, he knew a thing or two about the environment and how to manage natural resources very much like our own local communities. Today the rate at which we are exploiting our natural resources - ever ready to cut down our forests, dig deep down into the earth looking for coal, limestone, uranium; put at risk our water resources - foolishly believing that we are the weavers of life……one would imagine there is no tomorrow!! It's quite ironic that come "World Environment Day" I will be mouthing pious platitudes, talking about Sustainable Development Goals, Climate Change, banning of plastic bags and referring to nature as "Mother Earth"!!! After 66 years of existence on "Mother Earth", it's finally dawned on me that "Mother Nature" doesn't care a dam for humans, and it doesn't matter to him/her!!! whether humans survive for one year or a hundred years or a thousand years……!

In a relationship of two unequal's, it's actually foolhardy to try and take on the, stronger partner and although I consider myself evolved and intelligent (after all I am a human being), as part of the human race I've merrily joined the crowd in taking on the earth and then looking for solutions for the problems we've collectively created - pollution, climate change, garbage, plastic bags, rivers changing colors, fish dying, coal mining, stone quarrying……Maybe I should reflect on the lives of the wise Chief and our own local communities in search of answers. Our first challenge however is…….. we have too many Chiefs and too few Indians!!! Let's acknowledge very humbly that Nature is stronger and the sooner we accept this, the longer we will live!!

We have recently elected a new Government in our State and quite rightly they are looking seriously at two major sectors that need immediate solutions…education and waste. So, before we destroy the only place where we can find a solution to both these challenges, I take the liberty of sharing a few thoughts…I am referring to forests as teachers!

I've never heard of any forest having a Municipality! Doesn't a forest generate waste? Ofcourse it does! But unlike clever humans it doesn't give it such smart names as "waste" or "garbage". When we have waste we need to throw it away, or bury it, or burn it, or throw it in the local water bodies! Where is "away"? For most of us it is a landfill, far away from the urban elite and in the rural hinterlands for the benefit of the poor rural folk. We practice environmental racism without batting an eyelid!!!

What happens in the forest? There is a wonderful system in place where what is not needed by one part of the system is used by another element of the system and there is a very delicate balance. If this balance does get disturbed through natural phenomena, the elements constantly adjust to ensure that the balance is restored. Does our education system reflect this balance? Can't we design our education system on these lines where the values of inter-dependence, collaborative problem-solving, networking, community are paramount? However, if humans, with greed and competition as their motive invade the forests then the balance is permanently destroyed and we suffer the consequences - death, landslides, lack of water, silting, death of rivers……and then we plead with the Supreme Court to lift the ban on coal mining and cutting of forests so that people can reap the benefits of sustainable livelihoods!!

Across the world indigenous people have from time immemorial practiced the culture of "slash and burn"/ "jhum". Again, a wonderful sustainable system where balance, interdependence, collaboration,is the key. I had the privilege of living with some of the local communities in the Garo Hills and observed this system. In one village, we noticed a family sowing 18 different crop seeds at the same time, using well preserved local seeds and knowing very well that they would be reaping a regular harvest and would have enough to eat. They walked the forests knowing what roots, mushrooms, leaves and herbs could be eaten. We the experts, condemned this system as being unsustainable and are trying to teach the masters of sustainability with centuries of experience and sustainability ingrained in their culture, the meaning of sustainability!! For them "jhum" is not a system - it is life, it is culture, it is a celebration of diversity and the generosity of nature.Their teacher has been the forest! The system is unsustainable not because of "jhum", but because of others who have either destroyed forests or promoted forms of farming to cater to the so called "market economy."

And what about "garbage"? Walk on a well preserved forest floor and one walks on a cushion. Layers of twigs, leaves, dead animals, moisture, fungi, bacteria and millions of micro-organisms…a natural soil making factory is working 24x7, 365 days year after year. Instead of making landfills can't we build mini-forest floors? A small team of colleagues started this pilot in Bethany Society, Shillong in January this year. We dug a piece of land 12 feet x 20 feet two feet deep and constructed a shed. In the excavated space we put layers of twigs, charcoal dust, dried leaves, wood chips (Don Bosco Technical School were delighted to give us this), whatever "kwai" husks we could collect from the hundreds of Kongs dotting the streets of Shillong. We then infused the flooring with micro-organisms and some leaves collected from the jungle and kept the floor moistened. We had a living jungle floor. In Shillong where space is at a premium, we designed vertical compost heaps (4ft x 4ft x 4ft) and filled these with segregated kitchen material, layering every one foot of organic matter with the material from the floor. And now the fun part!! We employed 1 rooster and 10 hens bought from local villages and let them lose in the shed!!They went berserk. They had never seen so much food in all their lives!! They were doing gymnastics on the floor, they could hunt for worms and scratch the soft floor. They jumped on to the compost towers and scratched and turned the food and thus did the work that humans would do. One might ask what is role of humans in all this?

*" Undoubtedly, he knew a thing or two about the environment and how to manage natural resources very much like our own local communities."*

I am reminded of a story told about a monkey and a human being sent to the moon. Before the rocket was launched the human was handed two envelopes, each with instructions. When the human opened the envelope of the monkey there were hundreds of instructions regarding the controls, which buttons to press when……the human was quite impressed by the skills the monkey had and he said to himself .." if the monkey has so many instructions, I must be having 100 times more to do." However, when the human opened his own envelope, the instruction was " Feed the monkey four times a day!!" That's our role!! Our work force are the chickens, they don't need salary, PF, Pension, 5th Pay Commission….only segregated organic matter and a shot of our natural antibiotic every morning!! No smell, no flies. You can actually sit on the floor and enjoy the company of chickens!! God Bless the rooster. If all goes well, in a year we will have 200 local chickens!! The system can handle 5 tons of organic matter in a week which converts to about 3 tons of compost. Of course we can also feast on 100% natural local chickens and eggs. You don't need to be an MBA to decide if this is a good proposition. We do this following the principles of "Zero Waste" because it is Ethical, Efficient, and Economic and the most wonderful thing is that Nature does all the work and humans are requested not to interfere. The even more amazing thing is that in the same space, 10 pigs can handle 10 times what chickens can, without any smell or flies.

If we still insist on calling it "Solid Waste Management", then you can guess why humans were instructed to "feed the monkey" ! Welcome to Bethany Society, Laitumkhrah, Shillong to see this in action. Our aim is to make Meghalaya the cleanest State in India by 2024....why don't we collaborate.

And as far as plastic bags are concerned .." If you can't reuse it, REFUSE IT!

The writer can be contacted at bethanyngo@rediffmail.com

# Need for peaceful co-existence

*By Gary Marbaniang*

The turn of events in the past few days after the scuffle in Punjabi Lane on the 31st of May 2018 has taken everyone by surprise. There are no two ways about the need to find a permanent solution to a problem that has remained in the spotlight for many years now. In the first place, the population in that small piece of land has literally burst at the seams. Secondly Punjabi Lane is situated adjacent to one of the biggest indigenous tribal market in the whole of Asia and there is an immediate need to build a market complex to decongest lewduh and to accommodate all the hawkers belonging to the indigenous community. Thirdly since Iewmawlong and Motphran are the starting points for the traffic jams in the city of Shillong, building a flyover in that area will go a long way to help ease the commotion and the traffic congestion in the city.

At the end of the day, the public will have to put their good faith on the wisdom of the present government to take the final call on this matter and hope that the decision taken will be in the general interest of the people of Shillong and Meghalaya at large. We should not, however, paint a whole community in a negative light just because of one small incident, especially when the community in question is a religious minority. In the past few days, the city of Shillong has been in the national spotlight for all the wrong reasons. Thank God nothing untoward happened as this would have left an indelible scar and created a lasting rift between the two communities. This would have also created a bad impression of our community in the rest of the country. Our State is at an important juncture on its path to economic growth and development and communal violence is the last thing that we need.

Communal violence has played spoilsport to the economic growth and development of many countries. Zimbabwe is a prime example of a country suffered tremendously due to communal disharmony between two communities. The communal tension between the two main communities in that country severely impaired its economy and was partly responsible for the worst inflation crisis in modern times. The hyper-inflation in Zimbabwe is notorious for its similarities with the hyper-inflation crisis in Germany in the early 1920's and lest we forget one man managed to take political mileage out of this unwarranted economic crisis and stirred an entire nation to accept him as their saviour. The same person single handedly started the mother of all wars in modem history. Contrasting the situation in Zimbabwe with the Nordic countries should be the eye opener to make us realise the world of possibilities that a peaceful environment can create. After the end of the Second World War, good governance and peace has reigned supreme in the Nordic countries. These are the two main reasons for the impressive economic prosperity and equitable distribution of income that the people of these countries are blessed with. When my sister broke the fake news that was widely circulated on social media about the death of a Khasi boy on the fateful evening of 31st May'2018 it literally re-ignited my inborn hatred for the others. I didn't realize it all these years but I was like a dormant volcano erupting and emitting all that feeling of hate. When this newspaper published the report stating that the Chief Minister said that most stone pelters had been brought in from West Khasi Hills, it incensed many people for varied reasons. Even if the report is false, a large number of Khasi families settled in Shillong can still trace their roots to that particular district. When that lava of hate erupted in my heart and in the hearts of many Shillongites that day, I guess it is our Maram roots that triggered that response. My mother hails from a village in East Khasi Hills but her mother tongue is a variation of the Maram dialect. Rather than brushing aside the incident and sweeping it under the carpet and blaming the youth of West Khasi Hills for sustaining the fracas, the people of Shillong need to do some soul searching and address the real issues at hand.

If we draw parallels between the stone pelters in Kashmir and the Khasi youths today, the one thing that stands out is the deep levels of frustration and anger at the whole system! I bet that most of the stone pelters who took to the streets recently and instigated the worst violence that our town has seen in years have a bleak future and a deep resentment not only against the others but against those in authority. This is a very dangerous trend! The disgruntled youths were waiting for the perfect storm to vent their pent-up frustration and anger. My humble suggestion to the people in power is to reach out to these youths by providing an avenue for them to channel their energies in a positive way. If the government can start a Skills Development Programme or open world class sports facilities in the predominantly Khasi localities of Shillong and enable them to earn a livelihood and stand on their own two feet by honing their skills and equipping them with the necessary skill sets to succeed in life, it will go a long way in transforming the lives of the youths and the localities they live in.

Rather than diagnosing the symptoms we need to take preventive measures to prevent the disease of hate in the first place. When I was growing up in Riatsamthiah in the 1990's and 2000's the level of hate against the others was at its peak, but, luckily our neighbourhood had an avenue to channel that energy. There was ample space in our neighbourhood to play all kinds of sports and this was the perfect distraction for us to stay on the right path.

We also need to take a giant leap of faith and eradicate this feeling of hate from our society once and for all. A collective effort is needed from the entire citizenry of Shillong to root out this evil that has afflicted an entire generation. The first thing we can do is to admit that there is a serious problem in the first place. It is not just the Khasi people that need to introspect; the non-tribal population in Shillong also need find out the real reasons for the simmering tensions that still persist 46 years after statehood. It is a shame on the city of Shillong that even after hundreds of years of living together we have still not learnt to peacefully co-exist. If we really want economic growth and development, the three main indigenous communities in the State need to work closely with the genuine non-tribals here to create a strong mechanism to check illegal immigration. There is also a need to create a positive environment so that we will not view each other with disdain and hatred but with love and mutual respect. The three main indigenous communities should take their rightful place in society and we should reciprocate the love by treating the genuine non- tribals who have been part and parcel of our State well before its inception with genuine love and affection.

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Why so much bias?

Editor,

Apropos the article, "A book fit to be the ministry of nonsense" by Sushil Kutty (ST, dated, 8th of June, 2018), it makes me wonder what is the force behind renowned writers like Arundhati Roy that prompts them to express their views with such bias. This unethical and shamefully biased group of writers are up in arms against the present dispensation at the centre for reasons best known to them. While it is true that the present government at the Centre has failed on many counts but it is equally unfair to forcibly paint it as villain for everything wrong under the sun. This group of writers are deaf and dumb when it comes to acknowledging any of the present government's good moves/measures. I wish to stress that one needs to be balanced even while criticizing somebody. Unfortunately, this army of writers, in their attempt to malign the present government at the centre, has shamefully abandoned justice and righteousness. But, fortunately for the people of this country, their main agenda as well as the covert reasons of their pushy undertakings is not very difficult to comprehend.

Yours etc.,
Partha Sarathy Gupta,
Via email

## Test tube baby?

Editor,

The reported statement of UP Deputy CM, Dinesh Sharma, that Sita was a test-tube baby is hilarious and somewhat shocking. Equally shocking is his statement that journalism existed during Mahabharata and that Narada Muni acted like Google! This falls in parody with another series of such utterances by Tripura CM, Biplab Deb, who is recorded to have said that Internet and Satellites existed since the days of Mahabharata! Of late it has become a matter of pride for our legislators to connect every modern scientific innovation with ancient Indian civilisation. This trend is dangerous for Indian democracy for it shows the low IQ of our legislators and their narrow parochial outlook. When the Govt conducts tests and examinations to appoint chowkidars upwards to bureaucrats, isn't it high time that we put in a system of conducting 'IQ Tests' to determine the eligiblity of our legislators, so that democracy as defined by Aristotle, doesn't actually turn into a Govt. of Fools?

Yours etc.,
Sadiq Hussain Laskar,
Guwahati

## Harmful effects of pornography

Editor,

It is heartening to note that the Government of India has created a helpline to check the circulation of pornography, "State creates helpline.." (ST, 7 June, 2018). Credit for this goes to an NGO - Prajwala of Telengana, which had taken the matter to the Supreme Court. Consequently the apex court has directed the Central Government to act on this.

Pornography is corrupting our society beyond imagination. But this is being hushed up. Modernity and personal freedom are two sides of the same coin where sex has transgressed the boundaries of decency. This is due to our easy acceptance of the flood of sexually explicit advertisements, services, visual entertainment and vulgar representation of females. Social media has made everything easier. The exponential increase in pornography viewing in the last few years is a pointer to that. This has totally changed the social ethos, convention and the general behavioural trend. But many still believe such changes and personal self-indulgences are no big deal.

The devastating effects of pornography and abuse of sex will be noticeable after few years. Marital relationship will receive a violent jolt. Let us note that when this sex ceases to be a private affair it will also destroy all values attached to a healthy society. The LOVE bond between the two sexes will become weak. Promiscuity, extra-marital sex, adultery will thus strangle the very throat of marital LOVE relations where the cry for divorce and depression will get worse.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong

## End child labour

Editor,

Nobel laureate, Kailash Satyarthi has put up an arithmetic of child labour. If we employ a child, it means we are denying an adult his right to work. It is as simple as that. Moreover, a child can get midday meal if he happens to go to a school instead of discharging his duty as a child labourer. But if an adult remains unemployed, he will not get anything. Some market players prefer child labour because it is cheap. But even they will be benefited if they pay heed to Kailash Satyarthi. If the market players stop hiring say one million children then it will create one million job opportunities. And when employable persons get the job, they will obviously earn more than those children. As a result, it will increase the purchasing power of the masses and therefore boost the market.

As most of those "unemployed" children have to go back to school to fend for their midday meal, they will be better educated, better skilled to earn more in future than if they would have to work as child labourers and surrender their right to education and right to midday meal. So, it will help the market players to get more skilled labour in future.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

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

*"A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing."*
**--- George Bernard Shaw**

**The Shillong Times**
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## Historic end to hostility

HISTORY has been created and the ice broken – true, but some 27 years past the end of the Cold War that set nations apart in an ideological fight between the Communists and the Capitalists. When US president Donald Trump and North Korea's new-age ruler Kim Jong Un met at a historic summit in Singapore Tuesday, the word that spread from the two horses' own mouths was that they have set aside the grim past marked by intense hostility. They also promised to work for a new future to promote amity and peace. This, truly, is the calling of the times and both the leaders have shown commendable maturity to rise to the occasion.

The joint declaration that Trump and Kim signed after their meet at the historic Sentosa resort island was just a start; but this is a start with high potential and higher hopes for peace and reconciliation. This is also a guarantee to better times ahead for the world where several walls have collapsed by way of initiatives from leaders of high calibre. Note in specific the visit of Richard Nixon to China in 1972, the fall of the German Wall in 1989, the reconciliation between the US and Russia three years later, and the restoration of US-Cuba diplomatic relations in 2015. Donald Trump, as a businessman-turned US President proved that his open- minded approach helped in breaking the ice. Trump's words that the two nations would in future have a "terrific relationship" underpinned the optimism that enveloped the summit. Kim's response was equally gratifying; that the two sides have overcome the past that had placed many obstacles in the way of a reconciliation between the two hostile nations.

The choosing of Signapore as a meeting point for the two nations that were set poles apart was most appropriate. The island nation with a modern outlook is a close ally of the US and the West, even as its leadership consisted mainly of Chinese settlers. China certainly played the midwife, and President Xi Jinping can be trusted to have played a role meaningfully from behind the curtains. Serious issues need be sorted out, discussed and solutions found in the months and years ahead. Denuclearisation, as is promised by Kim, could likely happen, but over a period of time. Confidence-building is of prime importance as of now, and the two sides have succeeded in this. Hats off to Trump and Kim!

# Lessons from Motphran

***By Toki Blah***

This author has been under tremendous pressure right from the second day of the recent Motphran troubles, to come up with his views and comments on the issue. The pressure was resisted simply because of the prevailing confusion and the inability to understand the situation in its correct perspective. It would have been foolish and simply adding fuel to the fire to make public comments on something one didn't properly understand. There is no shame in admitting that a haze still shrouds the mind as to what really happened in and around Motphran; how it happened and what really caused it to suddenly fizzle out as it did. Rumours by the dozen, suspicion by the hundred and doubts galore exist over the existence of agent provocateurs; paid agitators and of a failed coup attempt. These exist and simply add to the prevailing confusion, gossip and bewilderment that now grips each and every household of this city and Meghalaya as a whole. To tell the truth what happened is something that we have never encountered before. It would take time and some serious inquiry to fully comprehend what befell Shillong from the 31st of May. What we do have with us however is the wisdom of hindsight. Hopefully, introspection can help throw light on the gloom and darkness that prevails.

The Government came out with the claim that the stone pelters at Motphran were paid mercenaries and that the trouble makers were hired and then directed by unnamed provocateurs to come and create mayhem. This author cannot confirm nor deny the veracity of such statement but be that as it may, the negative and sordid contribution of social media to the troubles is simply too obvious to be glossed over. Mobile WhatsApp and text messages flew thick and fast that fateful evening. Rumours, heresay, unconfirmed gossip, fake news, unfounded cries for help, made up information simply spread like wild fire to all over the place. The news that one of the local boys had died and that the local indigenous community was under attack went viral. Whether the false alarm was raised by design or by default is yet to be determined. It however caused hordes and droves of young Khasi men to rise to the rescue of the Jaitbynriew. To me the issue here is not the agent provocateurs, as vested interests will always be there to cause social upheaval whenever the opportunity arises. Of concern is the inability of people; recipients of social media messages, to distinguish fake news from real news; the absence of logical thinking; the readiness to share without verification; not caring whether such sharing could result in tragic consequences for one and all; the gullibility in believing all and any message from friends and acquaintances without taking the trouble of verifying the same. The people of Shillong suffered because of this implicit faith in the veracity of social media. Chinese whispers can hurt but unreliable Motphran messages can be lethal! One of the lessons to be learnt!

There is all round praise for the restraint shown by the police and the willingness of the force to take upon itself the brunt of the attack by the stone pelters. This prevented a communal clash at Them Iewmawlong and the Meghalaya police deserve praise for this. This however should not blind us to the fact that some critical lapses occurred which could have been avoided. First was the tardiness of the law and order machinery to respond effectively to the initial build up of mob violence at Motphran on the May 31st evening. Apparently the administration was caught completely by surprise. Police intelligence failed to anticipate the turn of events that fateful day. In the initial phases the deployment of forces was insufficient for the task at hand. By the time adequate forces were brought into play, fake news had already played its devilish role and it was too late to break up the mob. The rest is history! Second was the indiscriminate lobbing of teargas shells into the residential areas of Mawkhar, Mission Compound, Umsohsun and Wahingdoh. Innocent inhabitants suffered and in next to no time it was the police who were seen as aggressors rather than the unruly mob that invaded the localities and wreaked such havoc. The image of the police needlessly took a hit! Third and the most unforgivable was the ability of the agitators to breach the inner most sanctum of the Government – the Meghalaya Secretariat. How in God's name was this allowed to happen? Imagine if a petrol bomb had been lobbed into any of the secretariat rooms or if the mob had entered and run amock inside the building? Thank God nothing of the sort happened but a serious security lapse had occurred. Again a failure to anticipate and check the intention and direction of a mob! Apparently timely intelligence and appropriate tactical deployment are the weak points of the police force and these need immediate and urgent toning up.

While introspecting, the role of the traditional institutions, especially the Urban Dorbar Shnong in preserving peace and tranquillity, needs to be re-examined. The primary role of the Dorbar Shnong is to provide security and protection to its inhabitants. This concept was shattered when agitated youths from outside made a determined onslaught into the shnongs starting the evening of May 31. The concerned shnongs in and around Motphran quickly turned into battlefields between the agitators and the police. The Dorbars, initiated as they are by the traditional concept of insular governance, found themselves singularly out of depth to handle the situation. Agitators who were from outside the locality refused to heed the Rangbah Shnongs. That was when the women of the area decided enough was enough. Ignoring mundane male formalities; discarding Shnong boundaries and area of jusrisdiction, the women of all affected shnongs simply got together. They started off with a joint prayer. Next they told the police in no uncertain terms that use of teargas in residential areas was unacceptable and that the police should restrict themselves to Motphran Square and not enter residential areas. They then formed night patrols with their men folk and chased away the slinking stone pelters, preventing them from assembling and creating more mischief. Their joint action won the day and peace finally descended on the area. It just goes to show that empowered women do have a definite role to play in dorbar affairs. The incident also illustrated in no uncertain terms that in an urban setup, contiguous Dorbars working in tandem and towards a common objective, are more effective than a singular Dorbar struggling vainly on its own. Another lesson to be taken note of!

Now that normalcy has returned to the city, what do we do next? I sincerely believe the entire matter needs a closure and now is the time to do it. Shillong is no longer the sleepy village it was 100 years ago. It is a throbbing metropolis but still a thoroughly unplanned city at that. We need to clean up some of the urban mess we have inherited from the past. Them Iewmawlong and the slum that has been allowed to grow there needs restructuring. At present it is not only unhygienic and unfit to be termed as a residential area but has unfortunately also gained the reputation of being a highly unsafe, dangerous and insecure locality for commuters and passersby. A similar situation prevailed at Polo Bazar once but a determined Government and an enlightened citizenry changed all that and now a well planned multipurpose marketing complex is about to come up in its stead. The residents of the area were relocated elsewhere. It was slum clearance at its best. It adds to the beauty of Shillong. Why can't the same thing happen at Them Iewmawlong? Why should the terms ethnic cleansing and eviction be used for an utterly legitimate action of the Government? The jobs and economic interest of all displaced legal residents need protection and Govt should provide the same while relocating them. We have inherited this problem from the past but as citizens of Shillong we need to put our heads together and come up with the best viable solution for all concerned. The view of concerned outsiders is noted but the plea is kindly leave us alone to sort out our own mess. An elected Government is already on the job towards an amicable settlement of the issue. Let's give Peace a chance!

Trump sees light in 'very talented' Kim's eyes

# Historic summit secures big changes for the world

***By Sushil Kutty***

The summit of the century and all over the world it's 'We are live in Singapore', TV news channels streaming pictures of Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump. Images of Kim and Trump shaking hands and sitting side by side, priceless additions to the world picture library. The only grouse some have is that Kim shouldn't be treated like a celebrity, a rock-star! Of the two, Trump is the established celeb, a TV star who became President.

Every life-story starts with mum's love, treads the middle with pop giving long or short rope and then its takeoff on a quest to the top. The 'top' described each to his/her own. Kim can certainly count this 'Historic Summit' as his life's top. Donald's will be when he gets CNN's Jim Acousta to speak in respectable terms of him.

Kim and Jim! Kim must have changed his assessment of Trump but not Jim Acousta, who even on a historic day would not give Trump an inch. The setting was Singapore but Acousta looked like he was in the White House Press Briefing Room, refusing to give Trump anything other than skepticism and distrust.

Analysts on BBC gave Trump his due but those on CNN said there was not much "meat on the bone". The 'expert' who said that had no hair on his head! Leave that moment of levity behind and we had in Kim's words the "world will see major changes" moment. Trump was effusive with praise for the 'Little Rocket Man' who did not look all that "little", more like a mountain of change, for change!

'Donald and Kim' doesn't come so easy on the tongue but 'Kim and Trump' sounds like a cinch. The two men's life stories intersected at this moment in time and it was historical, for both sides, no matter how much Jim Acousta may disagree. "We both wanted to do something, we both are doing something and I'll say that it worked for the both of us," said Trump.

The two sides had six hours of talks and President Donald Trump "25 hours of no sleep". Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un even sat down for lunch. Jim Acousta's big story will be if he can get his hands on the menu that Trump and Kim shared at the lunch table, the tidbits that he could pick up from the leftovers.

Maybe Jim Acousta will surprise the world with a story headlined 'Kim Jong Un is Not A Cannibal, After All'. Acousta will then be able to say that he is no less a "journalist" than the late Antony Bourdain, CNN's celebrity chef-journalist, who killed himself in Europe a week ago.

"It's my honour to address the people of the world as an emissary of the American people," Trump said at a press conference. Trump thanked Singapore's Lee, Japan's Abe, South Korea's Moon and China's Xi. "My meeting with Chairman Kim was honest, direct; we are prepared to start a new history. The war never ended but now we can say it will end… There's no limit to what North Korea can accomplish."

Kim Jong Un and Trump signed a joint declaration in which Kim made a commitment to total denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. "Anyone can make war but only the most courageous can make peace," Trump told the media. "People thought this could never take place but it is taking place."

About 'Kim the Man' the journalists in Singapore had nothing much to reveal other than that he was a dictator who killed his uncle and his brother and will probably kill many more North Koreans. Trump on the other hand was more forthright. "Kim," Trump said, is a "very talented young man" who has committed to do all that North Korea has promised to do in the joint-declaration, and "which he'll do right after he lands in Pyongyang."

Kim has accepted an invite to visit Washington DC and Trump said that, contrary to what he has been hearing and reading about the summit, "we have secured" what we set out for".

**The two sides had six hours of talks and President Donald Trump "25 hours of no sleep". Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un even sat down for lunch. Jim Acousta's big story will be if he can get his hands on the menu that Trump and Kim shared at the lunch table, the tidbits that he could pick up from the leftovers.**

"I agreeing to take some hours off to come here, that itself is an achievement…I showed up because we really wanted to something and he showed up because he wanted to do something."

According one journalist at the Trump presser, what came out of the summit was that Trump was treating "historical enemies as friends" and "historical friends as enemies"; calling Kim Jong Un "talented" and Canada's Justin Trudeau "weak." To that Trump said that he had a "very good relationship with Justin Trudeau" and "we have good relationship with Angela Merkel, and now we have a very good relationship with Chairman Kim."

President Donald Trump said the "process started" with the Olympics and that till North Korea agreed to attend the Olympics there was the feeling that "nobody wanted to be bombed out of the opening ceremony."

Ultimately, Trump, being the world's most (self-styled) accomplished deal-maker, the summit was all about deals and the "right deals were struck" with Kim Jong Un and for that the "world will be a better place."

Finally, Trump said this of the Historic Summit, "We can't say 'O! Gee, we have done it, it will take a long time, but it will be done, and after a point, say 20%, there will be no going back... that document (the joint-declaration) is far down the line, far down…the timing will go very quickly…"

Like said, everybody's life-story takes a certain line, starting with mum's love and getting along with pop's long and short rope and then the take-off for the final quest… Trump has shown Kim a video of what North Korea can be – a development model with fast trains and that sort of things – and "Kim looked at that i-pad" and there was a light in Kim's eyes! (IPA Service)

**TO THE EDITOR**

## More on NEHU malfunction

Editor,

Following my earlier letter captioned, "Our Future in the Hands of NEHU"(ST June 7, 2018) I am compelled to highlight another act of colossal insensitivity of NEHU towards its primary stakeholders- its students. In the previous letter I mentioned that I am a 6th Semester student and also lamented that NEHU by deciding to conclude the 6th and Final Semester Undergraduate exams in the last week of May 2018, (the results of which are expected to be declared in 4-5 months as happened with the previous 5(five) semesters),would be depriving its students the opportunity to pursue their post-graduate studies in the universities outside the state as these universities start to undertake counselling and admission exercises from the last week of June till the middle of July at the latest.

Some weeks ago I went to enquire about the admission procedure for the B.Ed Programme of some colleges affiliated to NEHU. To my utter shock, I was informed that the last date of submission of application is June 9, 2018 in one college and June 15, 2018 in another. What further shocked me is that these colleges had one common condition which stipulates that only those who can produce the mark-sheets of all semester exams "INCLUDING THE MARKSHEET OF THE 6th SEMESTER EXAMS" would be provided with application forms, Pray, how do I provide the mark-sheet of my 6th Semester exam when the results will be declared in September or October? Is this not callousness of the highest degree?

After this experience, I have no doubt in my mind that NEHU exists for itself only, though undoubtedly there must be a few sincere persons working in the University who unfortunately have not been able to make any visible impact in its functioning.

Having stated the above, I also feel despondent when I realise that the silence of my elders - especially our fathers who lose no opportunity to boast and brag in their private spaces - is also partly responsible for the present state of affairs in NEHU for they have failed to say "NO MORE" and rise to the occasion by acting to protect and promote the legitimate interests of their sons and daughters.

Lastly, I think that it is futile to expect anything from those organizations which profess to represent our interests but whose focus is directed on other matters not even remotely connected to the students' welfare.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

## When youth are misguided!

Editor,

The recent unfortunate incident has been disastrous for both peace-loving communities. My empathy is with those families in Umsohsun, Mawkhar, Jaiaw and adjoining areas of Mothphran. The Khasi youth of Shillong never endorse violence; they have been living a cheerful life despite the limited sources for earning their livelihood. All they long for is a life of equal opportunities. The current scenario of Shillong has been favourable to youth from the business class and a Khasi by nature relates to people beyond financial transaction. The word "business-class" doesn't exist in the Dictionary of Khasis.

In a situation of acute unemployment our youth can be easily misguided by lobby- makers. I just can't forget the year 2000 of Shillong, when insurgency was at its peak. Teenagers were being brain-washed to join the outfits in the name of patriotism. Most of these teenagers are from families where a single parent is the sole bread winner. In case of single mothers, it is indeed difficult to spend time with her children when she is exhausted from her day's work, given the nature of unorganised employment that dominates Shillong. By the time she reaches home, she would find her children asleep. If the children are lucky to have an elder sister or brother, they would, at least, not go to bed on an empty stomach.

The actual Khasi youth are forced to fend for themselves at a very young age especially when they are raised by single parents. It is not surprising to see Khasi youth being more mature and exemplary in terms of leadership and natural management skills despite the limitations they face. The future of our misguided youth is challenging but interesting if they can keep on learning from mistakes. They just need to understand that they have an upper hand than most our educated youth because whatever the latter read or learn is secondary information. However, when our misguided youth tread their own unknown path, they need to know that they have the primary knowledge and experience.

Khublei & Jai Hind!

Yours etc.,
Andrew Chyne,
Via email

## What is the future we want

Editor,

What sort of future are we heading into? It is heartbreaking to hear of nerve wracking incidents that are happening around us. Small incidents escalate into communal violence, innocent young boys are beaten to death in neighbouring Assam and people living in the same city are fighting one another. Why don't we realize that we have much more to think about than small incidents disrupting the peace and social order of a state. People provoking people to hate different communities and races. Situations like these leave a negative impact on a state's economy. Prices of commodities shoot up thereby creating problems for the people. Small, avoidable problems are dealt with utter immaturity and create havoc around the place for a long time.

The world needs our time and attention for things that are much more important. Global warming for instance, is on the rise increasing the overall temperature of the earth's atmosphere. We as global citizens should be more concerned about preserving nature. Countries should combine to come up with ideas to reduce carbon footprints leading to global warming. On the other hand, there are countries going through a civil war and thousands of people are either killed or dislocated from their homes. There is massive human destruction going on. There are countries like Yemen affected with worst famine and still several war affected countries requiring aid and volunteers. Everyday there is news of conflict between two countries, communities or people belonging to different races. I believe these are the actual issues we need to deal with at this moment.

There are people who politicize issues for their own benefit. People whom we look up to, should talk more often about the actual problem that the world is facing and come up with solutions on how to deal with them. The world needs kindness and compassion as we have had enough of war and conflicts and I would like to conclude with a popular quote,

"Only after the last tree has been cut down/Only after the last river has been poisoned/Only after the last fish has been caught/ Only then will you realize that money cannot be eaten."

Yours etc.,
Ankita Joshi,
Via email

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

*" We are all now connected by the Internet, like neurons in a giant brain. "*

**--- Stephen Hawking**

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LX No.302 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JUNE 14, 2018

## Well done, SC

THE Supreme Court's order to the Centre this week review the management systems of top religious institutions in the country is significant. This step was long overdue and the intervention of the apex court, based on a PIL, was most appropriate. What prompted the PIL were two shameful developments in the Puri Jagannath temple, where the keys of the Ratna Bhandar (treasury, vault) containing the wealth of the temple have been missing for a long time. The inner chambers of the temple have not been opened since 1985. What happened from then till now is not known. The district collector is the custodian of the keys, but several collectors have come and gone.

No responsibility can possibly be fixed on anyone; not even the present collector who reported the matter to the authorities and the police. Someone has spirited the keys away for misuse and plunder of the wealth-diamonds, precious gems etc. No one has a clear understanding of the extent of wealth stored there, over generations. Add to this the fact that other unholy happenings were going on in the Puri temple where no proper registry is being made for receipt of valuables on a daily basis. Clearly, the state government was found amiss. Muscle-flexing men acting as Servitors in the temple virtually robbed pilgrims in the name of conducting special rituals and services. When the pilgrims protested -- as was done by a Mumbai-based couple a fortnight ago -- they are physically attacked, humiliated and even robbed of money and valuables.

In the Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanams (TTD) recently, a chief priest was denied extension of service. He spilled the beans and made serious allegations against those manning the temple administration, saying the valuables in the storehouse are being looted and there has been no proper recording of what is received there. The Tirupati Balaji temple is one of the richest shrines in the world, and valuables or money in billions are received there in a steady stream. A truck-load of currency seized in Chennai a month after the demonetization, in a highway raid, led to reports that the money belonged to a prominent functionary of the TTD, close to a politician, and the currency was clandestinely sent for parking at some secret vaults or for changing hands.

Notable is also the predicament of one of the richest temple in the world, the Shree Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Kerala's capital city. Against these backdrops, the apex court is fully justified in asking the Centre to set up a panel to review how the shrines are managed. If properly probed, this will open up a can of worms in the holiest shrines in the country.

# Misinterpretation of the Khasi Law of Inheritance

***By FabianLyngdoh***

In the past, the Khasi society was a web of social relationships among the matrilineal clans called the 'ki Kur', and not a web of social relationships of individuals as understood in Western societies. Each Kur is a basic social unit, an independent religious institution, a primary political institution, and an independent economy within one political community called the 'Raid.'Land in the form of the 'Ri-Raid' (commune land) belongs to the people as members of society.Individual families can establish homesteads, own settled farm lands, and cultivate crops in the Ri-Raid. Large stretches of lands called 'Ri-Kur' or 'Ri-Khain are also owned by particular Kurs as trustees. However, all lands are basically part of the Ri-Raid. If a section of the Kur migrates to another Raid, it loses right over the Ri-Kur; and, if the whole Kur migrates to another Raid, its Ri-Kur stands dissolved and becomes part of the Ri-Raid. Ownership right over land in Khasi tradition extends only to occupation and use, and not in the context of inalienable private right as understood in Western societies. Hence, the Kur owns the Ri-Kur only as along as it occupies land within the territory of the Raid and is a part of the political body in the Raid.

The concept of economy starts and ends with the Kur only; and there is no concept of 'state economy' whether in the Raid or the Hima. Therefore, every Kur strives to be competent and self-sufficient as an economy, and every member contributes something to the total wealth of the Kur. That is expressed as' kamai ia ka hok' (to earn righteous means of survival, either materially or spiritually). Land as the main source of economy was the joint property of the Kur. In turn, the Kur as a whole was responsible for the economic and social security of all its members, men and women equally.

In the strictest sense of Khasi tradition, the spirits of the departed members of the Kur who had laboured to build and maintain the Kur economy are the joint-holders of all ancestral properties and of all honour and dignity of the Kur. It was on this account that exchange of wealth between the Kurs was a very strict affair. Every economic transaction pertaining to exchange of wealth or transfer of property has to be communicated to the ancestors, and it was necessary that their approval be sought for through various forms of divination.

The natal household of the Kur which is supposed to be under the day-to-day care of the youngest daughter is the custodian of wealth, but under the control of the maternal uncles for the benefits of all Kur members. This is so, because in the past it was the maternal uncles who built the Kur economy, such as labouring in toil and sweat to convert marshy lands into paddy fields for settled cultivation. So, in Khasi tradition, maternal uncles are the directors of the Kur economy and the youngest household is the custodian of wealth. Khasi elders say that the youngest daughter is the custodian of the Kur property because she is expected to be the one who is "ban ri ïing ri sem, ri blei, ri Syiem," meaning that she is expected to manage the natal household, as the head quarters of the Kur, and to hold in her personal responsibility the rites of pacification of all the deities of the clan as well as all the spirits of ancestors. Hence, the youngest daughter would have no right even as a custodian of Kur property if she is not in management of the natal household of the Kur; and, maternal uncles who contribute nothing to the Kur economy have no right to meddle in its management.

Some scholars opine that the Kur has no structural or functional relevance beyond the strictly defined domestic group called the 'Ïing' which is the only important functional unit of the Kur, while the Kur is not a corporate property group. These scholars had observed the Khasi society only when it had already undergone drastic changes under the influence of the British rule. Hence, their views could be true only in the context of the modern period, but it was not so in the traditional Kur system of the Khasis. In the traditional set up, within one Raid (political community), where a kin group,whether it is the whole Kur, or ka Kpoh (lineage section), or only ka Ïing (family), has established its 'Mawbah' (religious stone cairn),that kin group, is bound to be a functional and corporate body with one economy, and all Kur members living within the same Raid, regardless of ki Kpoh or ki Ïing, have equal right to the security provided by the Kur economy. If two lineages of a Kur reside within the same Raid but stand as separate religious institutions by having separate Mawbah and separate economy, then they no longer belong to the same Kur. So, the structural and functional unit of a Kur is not determined on the basis of ka Kpoh or ka Ïing, but on the basis of the Raid in which they reside.

All forms of property belong to the whole Kur, religiously and legally. The properties of all ki Kpoh and ki Ïing of the Kur within one political community, though under the care of each individual Ïing or Kpoh, are considered parts of the Kur economy. Even 'ka khihnongkhynraw' (self-acquired property), in the ultimate sense, belongs to the Kur as a component wealth of its economy. A man's children can enjoy the interests and profits accrued on his self-acquired property, but the property itself as the capital belongs to his Kur.

As the Kur is conceived of as a corporate social institution with perpetual succession and common seal, strictly speaking, there is no concept of inheritance of Kur property in the Khasi thought and practice. Inheritance of land ownership as a private property is a concept borrowed from individualistic societies, where land is not seen as a natural source of economy, but as a commercial commodity which can be bought and sold. In the Khasi traditional society, land cannot be bought or sold; it can only be left to nature for others to use. Even the division of the clan land between the various Kpohs of the Kur is not amounting to bequeathing as individualistic inheritance, but is only a way of allocation or allotment of land for occupation and use. And, land can only be gifted or exchanged between political communities by way of political transactions, but not as economic or commercial transactions.

The new individualistic concept of law of inheritance was introduced to the Khasis by the British colonial rulers in 1918 through a court ruling, declaring that according to Khasi tradition, the youngest daughter as an individual is the rightful heiress to inherit ancestral property. How can the property of a body corporate with perpetual succession and common seal be inherited by an individual?Moreover, by this British ruling, the youngest daughter of a Kur living comfortably in Shillong within Hima Mylliem, can claim inheritance right to ancestral land in Hima Sohra. That is unimaginable in Khasi tradition!

In societies, where the idea of individual ownership of property exists, an individual or group of individuals can inherit property when the owner of the property dies. It has even been reported that a certain woman in a Western Country who was a millionaire bequeathed her whole property to a cat because she had no human relations. Western individualism can go to that extent! But in the Khasi thought, the Kur as the owner of property is an institution with perpetual succession, and the property of whatsoever nature belongs to the Kur as a whole. The Kur does not die, but it can only become extinct. Hence, Kur property is thought of as continually owned by the Kur from generation to generation and can never be inherited by any individual. What is inherited is the position and responsibility to multiply wealth and maintain the steady growth of the Kur economy (like the growth of national economy), and the right to enjoy it as a corollary; but there is no inheritance of ancestral property as private ownership by any Kpoh, Ïing or individual, to the exclusion of other Kur members.

Alas! Today few individuals have become crorepatis overnight by the sale of Ri-Kur, and most of the land in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills is owned by few rich individuals while the majority own only homesteads, or are landless. Within the scope of this article, I end the discourse at this point, and leave to other thinkers and economists, social reformers and policy makers to dwell upon the issue and look into the past, examine the present, and speculate the future of the tribe vis-a-vis the rest of the world.

# Need for Civic Engagement

*By D. V. Kumar*

Every incident tells us a story. The incident which has happened on the 31 of May in Shillong at Punjabi lane, too, wishes to tell us one. It is a story of how a long-standing issue, if it is not conclusively resolved , would continue to flare up passions at the slightest provocation. The incident that happened between members of two different groups was the spark that was needed to set in motion a series of violent activities since the deeper underlying issue of the 'ownership' of the physical space called Punjabi lane remains unresolved till today. The residents of the lane argue that they have been living there for many years and hence they have a moral (possibly legal one too) right over the space while the people living in the neighbourhood express their deep sense of displeasure over the fact that the Punjabi lane remains a potentially dangerous place for them as they cannot use the road freely because many anti-social activities happen there. It has been their long-standing demand that residents living there should be evicted and relocated elsewhere. So long as such long-standing issues remain unresolved, even small incidents such as the one which happened at Punjabi lane could trigger off a cycle of violence. However, it must be said to the credit of all the stakeholders-government, headmen, women's groups- who have played an appreciable role in ensuring that violence did not become worse than what it was. The security personnel (Meghalaya police, CRPF etc.) deserve special applause for exercising maximum restraint in the face of unending provocation from the protesters. Perhaps the police from other states could take a lesson or two from them. Efforts are currently underway to find a solution to the Punjabi lane issue and hopefully a mutually amicable one would be found soon.

A little conceptual clarification is required regarding the use of the expression communal violence. Whenever any violence takes place between two different groups in Shillong, it is described as communal violence, which in my understanding, is a conceptual error. Every concept needs contextualisation. Otherwise it could possibly distort reality. In the context of India, historically, communal violence refers to that violence which takes place between members of two different religious groups. Religion is a defining characteristic of the people involved in violence. The identity of the people is expressed in terms of the religion they belong to in that particular context of violence. But in the recent incidents in Shillong it was not religion per se which constituted the identity of the participants. Rather it was the larger question of ethnicity which was implicated in the collective violence. People were defined by the ethnic group they belonged to. Therefore communal violence would not be an appropriate expression to describe what happened recently.

Be that as it may, the larger question that this article seeks to engage with is : Why is it that in some cities/places, people do not resort to violence despite provocations and even if they do so, it is contained without much of a difficulty whereas in some other cities/places, violence is easily resorted to and it is that much more difficult to contain it? The question is not merely theoretical in nature. It has practical relevance for us in Shillong. The answer may be found in the pre-existing ties of civic engagement. Wherever there are strong ties of civic engagement between different groups, collective violence is a rare phenomenon. Even if it occurs, it is possible to contain it much more easily because of such ties.

In this context, one can draw useful insights from the study conducted by Ashutosh Varshney, a well-known political theorist, whose book Ethnic Conflict and Civic life: Hindus and Muslims in India (2002), engages with an important question as to why communal violence is such a recurrent feature in some cities in India and not in others. He compares three pairs of cities-one city in each pair known for communal tension and violence and the other for communal peace. His main thesis is that wherever there are strong ties of civic engagement, communal violence does not happen easily and even if it does it is contained without much of a problem. He explains this difference in terms of civic engagement between Muslims and Hindus in some cities. He talks about two forms of civic engagement i.e. associational (membership and participation in common business associations, professional organisations etc. ) and everyday civic engagement (routine interactions of life, joint participation in festivals, permitting children of different groups to play together etc. ). For example, he compares Aligarh, a city known for communal tensions with Calicut, which is a city relatively known for communal peace. He argues that in Calicut well-established forms of civic engagement have played a huge role in terms of preventing communal clashes. Even if there were some scattered incidents of communal violence, they were not widespread due to the presence of pre-existing ties of engagement between Muslims and Hindus there. Vested interests would find it that much more difficult to spread tensions and polarise communities when there are already some strong ties of engagement between members of different communities. In Shillong, too, perhaps there is a strong need to establish such ties of civic engagement among the members of different communities in order to ensure that healthy relations are maintained among them and small incidents do not lead to large-scale violence.

Here it must also be recognised that the majority community, wherever it is located, has a major moral responsibility towards the minorities with whom it is in constant interaction in terms of protecting the life and property of their members. That is why the increased attacks on Muslims, Dalits, people of the north-east elsewhere in India, apart from being crimes, are also absolutely morally indefensible. Such attacks, it must be realised, only undermine the moral strength of the majority community. The logic of majoritarianism is inherently a dangerous logic and goes against the foundational principles of constitutionalism. When Delhi's Archbishop (followed by Goa's Archbishop) recently spoke about the growing fears among the minorities about their safety, he was clearly pointing fingers at the members of the Hindutva brigade who wish to construct hindu rashtra based on precisely that kind of majoritarian logic. Physical attacks on minorities wherever they are located are morally reprehensible and need to be stopped. Right to life is a fundamental right and every citizen of the country, even if one happens to be a member of the minority community is entitled to that right.

(The writer teaches Sociology at NEHU, Shillong)

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Genesis of the recent brawl

Editor,

Apropos the recent violence in Shillong, if one looks at it with a neutral eye, there are three things which are very evident, but everybody - including the government and the police, seems to have overlooked. Firstly, the woman who was instrumental in instigating her fellow community members is missing in the entire episode. Why has she not been questioned and arrested?

Secondly, the conductor of the bus who was not behind the wheels. Why has he not been arrested along with for allowing an under-aged person, who does not have a driving licence, to drive a heavy vehicle? This is the genesis of the brawl.

Thirdly, and most importantly, why have all these STPS bus drivers / conductors / helpers who instigated the entire episode gone scot free? How have they used government property i.e. the buses and the maxi-cabs, to further their own parochial interests? How can they, being government servants, go without being answerable for the flare-up? All of them should be questioned, and the culprits should be taken to task as per law and should be removed from their jobs, for they will be wont to carry out this same type of activity in the future too, if it is not nipped in the bud.

Nobody, but nobody, is above law and the law makers / police should not succumb to pressure from interested NGOs, but take appropriate action against all the people involved.

Yours etc.,
Lambok Dkhar,
Via email

## Shillongites sans Internet Services

Editor,

The SMS and the mobile internet services were restricted and banned from early morning of June 1, 2018 to quell rumours after clashes broke out in the capital city of Shillong on Thursday, May 31, afternoon. Although the SMS was restored on June 7, the restrictions on the Mobile Internet services continued until the afternoon of June 13 after which it was lifted. Sudden suspension and disconnection of Mobile Internet connectivity for about a fortnight now is a display of poor management skills because it disrupts the country's foremost programme, "Digital India" .

Suspension of Internet services has hit the admission process of students, who want to pursue their studies in colleges and universities outside Meghalaya since all transactions are now done online and this includes filling up application forms and payment of fees. Students who are doing internship in the city, are facing several problems in carrying out the task assigned to them by the university where they study for lack of communication as most of the assignments are shared through e-mails.Internet shutdown has also affected businesses with companies outside the state. It has hit job aspirants too as certain applications are done on line. The situation has also affected the flow of tourists to the state's capital, thereby hugely affecting the hotels as most of the bookings are being cancelled. May, June and July being peak seasons for tourists, the tourism industry of the state has been adversely affected.

Due to prolonged suspension of internet services all professionals and consultants associated with various priority industries in the state were debarred from rendering services online to their clients. The self-employed and young entrepreneurs suffered most and incurred a huge loss of business because most points of sale transactions were disrupted across communities. Arising out of professional needs/engagement/pre-occupation people who are based at Shillong from other districts and endemic parts of the State and also from other states could not carry out online banking transactions for almost a fortnight. People, from other states and serving in Meghalaya, have suffered immensely due to the delayed admission of their wards to Engineering/Medical Colleges or for an emergency operation/medical treatment of their nearest of kin in their home state or native place where their families reside as they are unable to remit money in time.

Even TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India) is mooting introduction of mobile network connectivity and internet services during flights as extension of benefits of a Digital India in the coming months. Is it not a paradox that we in Shillong had to be plunged into the darkness of internet non-connectivity causing unbearable sufferings on innumerable fronts for almost a fortnight now in this tech-savvy era? What about the rumour-mongers and those spreading fake news using local BSNL broadband connections or operating from beyond the state boundary at Khanapara to add fuel to mob-fury? How do we plug these larger holes in the bucket of the state administration? Was the recent situation much worse and scarier than that prevailing in Kashmir? Certainly not!

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata High Court,
Via email

## Hima Mylliem up for sale?

Editor,

After much consternation and mumblings about the genesis of the recent riots and violence between the local community and the Harijans relating to land dispute in the heart of the city, what actually transpires is that the said land was systematically sold at a price by the previous Syiem (Chieftain) of Hima Mylliem. Since the matter went to Court and was ultimately stayed by the High Court it shows that the Syiem of Hima Mylliem and the KHADC should ultimately be held accountable as per records available. The absence of clarity has only blowing the matter out of proportions. This tells us that our so-called " Defenders" of the ' Jaidbynriew ' have failed to uphold the aspirations and social values of their people and above all have gradually put the community up on sale to the highest bidder which is shameful and unexpected. From forests to land to rivers everything is being eroded away in the name of the Hima and greed. Just how far we allow such things to continue should become the subject of debate in society.

Yours etc...
Dominic S. Wankhar,
Via email

*"A powerful idea communicates some of its strength to him who challenges it."*

**--- Marcel Proust**

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LX No.303 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, JUNE 15, 2018

## India and NSG

WITH the thaw in India's relations with China at the recent summits at Wuhan and Qingdao, India has renewed its bio to apply for membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) at its plenary meeting in Jourmala in Latvia. China has so far been the stumbling block. Membership of the NSG, the top club of 48 countries, which control access to technology and guards against non-proliferation is important for India to secure cutting edge high nuclear technology. Delhi had reached out to China in April and tried to convince interlocutors in Beijing to lift their objections at the NSG. But China had maintained silence on the issue. In April, joint secretary (Disarmament and International Security) Pankaj Sharma had met Beijing's top interlocutor Wang Xun, head of the Disarmament division of the Chinese Government. Two years ago, in 2016, Wang had blocked a proposal to include India in the NSG. The then foreign secretary of India, S. Jaishankar visited Seoul to lobby with the other NSG countries. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has requested Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit to reconsider his decision. Modi had then approached the four export control regimes.

China had clubbed India and Pakistan together on the basis of both being non-signatories to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. According to China, neither meets the criteria for membership of the NSG. Why India has not joined the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and refused to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear Disarmament Treaty may be globally debatable. Whether or not China will relent on the issue is open to question. It was for de-nuclearisation of a fellow communist country, North Korea.

**LOOKING BACK**

**May 25, 1989**

## Laloo opens 3 LP School buildings near Mairang

Three lower primary school buildings at Pyndengumiong, Mawshut and Nongrmai Village under the Mairang sub-division in the West Khasi Hills were inaugurated by the Meghalaya Community and Rural Development Minister, Dr R C Laloo on Monday.

The three schools are the first of the 806 to be constructed under the govt's recent decision to construct 1000 LP School. The State Community & Rural Development Deptt are constructing 806 buildings and the rest by the Meghalaya Government Construction Corporation.

Speaking on the occasion Dr. Laloo lauded the people of the areas for their active participation in governmental schemes and impressed upon them the need for such cooperation. Complimenting the people of Nongrmai Village, for having raised Rs.35,000 for the school building, Dr Laloo remarked that the first preference any special developmental scheme of the govt should be given to the village.

# Lessons not learnt from past conflicts

***By Patricia Mukhim***

The Shillong Times has been barred from circulation in West Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya since Saturday last because of an article by this writer mentioning that the youth involved in the current stone pelting at Motphran were mostly from West Khasi Hills. This was the Government's view after the preliminary investigations of those arrested. There was no contestation about the Government report, hence one is perplexed that it should agitate the people of West Khasi Hills when this is cited in an article. This writer spoke of the economic backwardness of the district, not of the people, which was why the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) project launched its poverty alleviation programme there in 1999 and the programme continues now under the NEC.

In a democracy, if certain individuals or groups have grievances about certain news reports or articles in a particular newspaper/ newspapers, the right response is to send a rejoinder to correct the perception. Burning of newspapers is undemocratic and ultra-vires as it violates Article 19 (1) (a) of the Indian Constitution.

A free and open press? is what sustains democracy. If the media is accused of being biased then so is every history book we have read. It's our job to have the critical thinking skills and historical context to notice, engage, and respond. That's what an educated citizenry does in a democracy. That's why freedom of the press and free speech go together.

Coming back to the recent unfortunate incident of May 31 that could have escalated into an ethnic conflict, let us admit that such flare-ups are not new to Meghalaya; hence the State should have a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of first response which should involve the Dorbar Shnong and the general citizenry. This implies a close-knit, working relationship between the district administration and police, the Dorbar Shnong and the community of residents in the respective localities. The fact that the Dorbar Shnong operates in isolation and is not recognized as urban/ rural local administrative bodies is problematic. The Government needs the Dorbar Shnong to maintain order and discipline in localities apart from the developmental work they undertake. The Dorbars also know exactly who the potential trouble makers in their localities are. Hence they are best placed to bring order amid chaos.

When a Motphran type of incident occurs the first response is to quell rumours by activating the public address systems. Rumours were the cause of conflict even in the past when social media was not in currency. When people don't know what is happening they tend to panic and to believe the worst. That's human nature. Getting to work to prevent "fake news" from taking wings on social media is today a critical response mechanism. The quick arrests made by Assam Police of the criminals responsible for spreading fake news on social media about child lifters in the area which ultimately led to the gruesome lynching of two artistes in the States's Karbi Anglong district is a lesson that needs to be imbibed by Meghalaya Police.

The recent incident has also triggered some academics from local colleges to write articles to various news portals based on their perceptions of the incident. Sadly, one saw no academic rigour or objectivity in any of the writings except a 'confirmation bias' which is what most research suffers from. Scholars don't approach a problem with pre-conceived notions/ assumptions and draw conclusions based on those. One would expect scholars to speak to the Mazhabi Sikh community as well, to be able to draw correct conclusions about what really happened. Scholarship demands a completely non-partisan, distanced approach so that one does not identify with one group while distancing oneself from the other.

There are problems in Khasi society today that we have put the lid on for the time being. But it is simmering and its manifests in acts of stone pelting. There is unresolved anger in the youth. What is causing that anger? One expects scholars to interrogate whether the Khasi society today is still cohesive, homogenous and classless; whether the Society is inclusive and whether all members of the community own adequate land for a homestead and for farming. If not, why not? Where is the community owned land? Why is the thorny question of landlessness in rural Meghalaya such a neglected topic of research? Who is the academia defending or trying to defend? We all know that land is alienated everyday in rural Meghalaya, not to non-Khasis but to the tribal elite that can afford to invest in real estate which can later be alienated for industrial purposes, where the rural Meghalayan will be just a labourer earning a measly daily wage. Does anyone care to dig deeper into this malaise? I wonder why the plethora of organisations with grand sounding acronyms don't engage with this crucial issue. Whose interests are they protecting and why?

Also questions you expect scholars to answer are: (a) Are all citizens equal in Meghalaya? (b) Are some more equal than others? (c) Is the "community" still standing for one another and for the homeless? We may live in denial but the slip is showing.

It's interesting too that we refuse to acknowledge the elephant in the room but are quick to converge around a common enemy. Indeed, that common enemy is the most solidifying thing that welds the people into an aggrieved mass that can vent out its past perceived grievances. Again, it is the duty of social and political scientists to ferret out these societal realities with evidence. That is the role of a liberal thinker which we expect academics should be. The value of the liberal in any democracy is not that he is logical but that he is inquisitive. The independent liberal whether walking alone or in a pack is a critical ingredient of a republic. Alas! These days it is fashionable to belittle the thought in the individual and to glorify the thought in the crowd.

An editorial in The New York Times dated February 26, 1949, says, "To pursue truth one should not be too deeply entrenched in any hole. It is best to have strong curiosity and weak affiliations." When scholars are affiliated to their social class and have group loyalties, their scholarship suffers and free thinking is arrested.

Coming to the allegation that this newspaper published "fake news' on June 1, 2018, I would like to ask if any of those making the allegations were present at the scene of the skirmish or did they listen to hearsay? In the book 'Journalism and Truth: Strange Bedfellows', noted scholar, Tom Goldstein says the complaint from readers is all too common: "I know something about that, and the news got it wrong." Goldstein avers that while other disciplines have clear protocols for gathering evidence and searching for truth, journalism has some curious conventions that may actually work against such a goal since journalists have to rely on the views of witnesses who cannot be credited to be devoid of their own prejudices. While the fact checking needs to be as accurate as possible, subjectivity does creep in even in the best of newspapers.

Paul Dughi writing on public perception of the truth says, "Not only do we get anger when we report something that's wrong (and we should), but we often get criticized for NOT reporting things?—?whether they are true or not. I would ask those who point fingers at us these questions: Were you there when the incident happened? Did anyone who objected to the word "eve teasing" speak to the girls concerned? Did the girls from that colony react without provocation? What if it was the other way round? Our only fault was that we could not get the views of the driver of the SPTS despite trying our best, because of the melee that ensued. The next option was to get the views from the mob and that is not journalism. The next day we clarified matters and interviewed Mr Marbaniang the driver to get his side of the story.

Making sure fake news isn't reported sometimes means not allowing items to creep in that a majority of people think are true, even if they are not. Truth is not always easy to find. Often, we don't know the truth. The real truth is that often the answer is in shades of gray and there may not be agreement. But people want definitive answers. In journalism it's not always a simple 'yes-it-is' or 'no-it-isn't.' And sometimes, we just don't know. Reporters work on tight deadlines and don't always have enough time to check every statement especially if it involves a question that's not easily resolved through a quick Google search.

Our endeavour has been to tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so. But even if we have failed somewhere, a conscientious reader will help us with his/her version in a letter or article. That is civility.

# West Khasi Hills not a backward District

***By Aiborlang Nongsiej***

Apropos to the Patricia Mukhim's article 'When Periphery strikes' (ST June 8, 2018), being an educated person from the District I would like to pen down the feelings of the people after reading the article. Certainly I don't deny that people from West are materially poor but to say that West Khasi Hills (WKH) district is the most backward district in Meghalaya is totally wrong and unacceptable. According to the 2011 census the literacy rate of West Khasi Hills is second only to East Khasi Hills district at 78.5 and 84.15 respectively. In my conversation with some of the staff of the Shillong secretariat, they say that most Heads of Departments are from WKH. The reason is that people from rural areas work harder and achieve their dreams in life. In terms of sports, Beningstar Lyngkhoi from South West Khasi Hills is recognized as one of the star runners in the state and in the National level. He represents the country even internationally. Thus, I wonder what the writer meant by saying that West Khasi Hills is the most backward district in Meghalaya.

Having said that, I do agree with the writer that most of the young boys who participated in the stone pelting are from WKH. However, I do not agree with the abusive vocabulary used in the heading of the article like the term 'Periphery' which according to the Oxford Dictionary means 'less important.' The question here is, whether West Khasi Hills contributes nothing to the state? Are people from West Khasi Hills less intelligent than the others? Why people from West are periphery? On the other hand, if West Khasi Hills is the most backward district as stated in the article, why not the writer advise or suggest the Conrad government to send more educational schemes and many other developmental schemes in order to help the district not to remain backward perpetually and to progress as like other districts in the state. At the same time I am happy to know that Ranikor block which is in South West is going to be upgraded to Civil-sub division in the coming days as was announced by the Conrad government recently. But again the question whether this is only a political game or for genuinely developing the district? Therefore, I request the Government that if West Khasi Hills is the most backward district in the state then the MLAs from the district must stand united to fight for the growth and development of the district in most of the fields such as education, sports, and tourism.

For the benefit of readers, WKH is one of the blessed districts with good tourist spots such as Hot spring in Jakrem, Nongkhnum in Nongstoin, Wah Rilang in Mawranglang, Kyllang Rock in Mawchut (Mairang) and Mawtynhiang cave in Nongnah South West (which was recently opened by the DC of South West Khasi Hills). However, sad to say that the Government paid no attention to develop these tourist spots in West and South West districts and as a result tourists are not attracted to visit such places. Personally I feel that though the area is blessed with natural beauty but due to lack of interest of the Government and the Tourism Department the gift of nature is wasted and the people in the district remained poor materially. Again I do agree that people of WKH are poor but I don't agree with the word backwardness. In fact, in one of the report by the local news channel of Meghalaya, Nongnah village in South West is known as the most beautiful tableland in Meghalaya. On the other hand, neither the Government nor the Tourism Department is interested in developing this beautiful village. This is the simple example why people in the WKH suffer from poverty. Hence, in order to fight against poverty the government must develop those tourist centres to attract more tourists in to these places. Only then can people from the region be gainfully employed and those with business acumen can benefit if tourist centres are well maintained by the Government and the Tourism Department.

Having stated that, people from WKH are suffering from poverty, yet I do not agree with the writer that those youngsters from the West are paid in order to take part in stone pelting in the city. It might be for a few, but not to all. Therefore to generalize that all youngsters from the West are paid to create chaos in the city is totally wrong and unacceptable. According to the SP of East Khasi Hills, most of the people caught in this incident are paid, but sad to say that because of a few all are accused of being paid. First and foremost, the writer and the government must know why people from the WKH participated in stone pelting and created chaos in the city. According to my information the Them Metor of Shillong is the thoroughfare for the people of WKH. Most of the buses and Sumo stations are located in this particular commercial place. As a result, I have heard from several individuals that few years back people from WKH are afraid of walking alone through this place especially when it is early morning or late in the evening. The area is not safe and secure since the residents are not local.

Added to that, most of the bus drivers and handymen of the government buses in Shillong (known as Red Bus) are from WKH and as a show of solidarity with the Bus driver and the handyman who were beaten up by the non-local at Them Metor all of them called for a strike. However, to say that they are paid for stone pelting, to create chaos in the city, and they are coming from the backward district of Meghalaya is totally wrong and baseless. Therefore, all these problems added more fuel to the fire and provoked the people of WKH to fight for their rights in their own land and personally I believe that this is the main cause why people of WKH were involved in protests in those crucial days.

Lastly, I have written this article not to pinpoint at anyone but to convey the views of the people of my district. Also to clarify the wrong information that people from WKH are paid to create problems in the city. Moreover, the writer had wrongly affirmed that West Khasi Hills is the most backward district in Meghalaya which it is not. I request the writer who is probably unaware of the problems faced by the people from WKH while passing through Them Metor especially in the early morning and late evening hours in order to know the reality and not simply pen down whatever information comes from the media and the District authorities, particularly the Police.

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Let's restore peace in the abide of clouds

Editor,

The terrible state of affair since May 31 has been a lesson worth learning for Meghalaya. With the effort of the Meghalaya Police and responsible handling of the situation by the Government the mayhem seems to have calmed down but the fake news and rumours spreading across social media has led to the suffering of thousands of internet users dwelling in the state. Besides denying us the Right to Information, the agitation has dicrupted examinations and classes of many youths especially the students from NEHU who are in great need of study material. The incident has diverted from politics to communal violence leading to unnecessary sense of insecurity. Another striking phenomena is the fear of tourists who want to visit the mesmerising Scotland of the East but had to cancel their trip on learning about the situation. Through all these we witnessed how the communication channel is immensely strong and influential and this particular incident has been captured by news channels nationwide but the reportage comprised both truth and half truth. It is imperative to restore things to their rightful place. The Government ought to pressurize the Telecommunication Department to amend policies that could filter such hideous crimes committed by trouble makers out fo WhatsApp or Facebook

Yours etc., .
Bracy Nongrum,
Via email

## Whither ethics

Editor,

Ethics has several definitions but essentially it means a set of principles that a man ought to follow. Are ethics applicable today? Do we still need to remind ourselves and others what to do and what not to do? I am in dilemma about the present situation. Be it the workplace, schools and overall social life, if we look at today's era, there is a huge gap in understanding what ethics is. An employee would say, "This is not my part of the job," because he does not want to do anything extra. I have noticed that at the workplace, co-workers do not follow the moral structures and values that they ought to. We learn and talk a lot about ethics but who cares about practising it? Look at the present situation in our state and country as a whole. There is insurgency, harassment, sexual offences, stereotypes, injustices and the overall insecurity of women. These are destroying the workplace environment. The word ethics includes many social elements that we as humans need to pay careful attention to. There are norms, principles, policies, rules and laws. But these are all violated. In turn we suffer from fear, anxiety, no self reliance, depression and other behavioral problems which are harmful to our social life. There is a saying, " Your own mind is a sacred enclosure into which nothing harmful can enter, except with your permission".

All religions preach ethics and morals but people don't really imbibe them. I request the government to direct all schools, colleges and other institutions to take "ETHICS" as a major subject and not just make it an add-on subject.

Yours etc.,
Alert Archie Rymbai
Shillong -14

## Child labour myths

Editor,

June 12 being the World Day Against Child Labour was for me a trip down memory lane to the eatery of Bimalda (name changed). Once Bimalda was asked why he had employed so many children. Pat came his reply in the form of a question, "Then who'll give these poor children bread? Will you?" I thought Bimalda was right and I told my friend, "You know, we can't solve the problem of child labour until we can eradicate poverty."

After that with clear conscience, we had our lunch promptly served by a pair of small hands of a child waiter. I asked him his name and he softly said, "Bilu" without shifting his focus from the tray full of steaming hot dishes that he had been carrying with utmost care to unload them from one table to another. After giving Bilu some tips and cleaning by a toothpick every possible residue of guilt that might leave a bad taste in the mouth, we happily headed for a movie.

Then one day, I read in a newspaper that Nobel laureate, Kailash Satyarthi had said, ~ "Poverty does not breed child labour but it is the child labour that perpetuates poverty." He again reiterated that child labour perpetuated poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and population growth. "How can it be possible?" I asked myself as I had the the theory ~ child labour must be a corollary of poverty ~ deeply embedded in me. Nevertheless, I could not dismiss Kailash Satyarthi's view as an utopian sermon as I had a profound respect for the man who had been struggling all his life to stop children being exploited as labour instead of attending school.

So, I started thinking about what would have been the outcome had Bimalda failed to employ child workers for his eatery. Then I realized that he would not have any other option in that case but to employ adult workers! Also, he would have to pay more for those adult workers. Indeed, his engaging Bilu and others was nothing but to extract more profit! Moreover, if Bilu happened to become "unemployed", his parents might not let him stay idle at home; rather they would in all probability send him to a school to fend for his midday meal! I jumped from my seat and said to myself, "I made a complete fool of myself having believed in Bimalda's logic and spreading it all along!"

Kailash Satyarthi has broken a long standing myth that poverty causes child labour. The truth is ~ among other things, child labour causes poverty and unemployment. As a matter of fact, every child's entry into the job market actually closes the job opportunity of an adult. This is the reason why Kailash Satyarthi forbids us from employing a child as it will accelerate the vicious cycle of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy. I must be thankful to Kailash Satyarthi for helping me unlearn such a dangerous myth.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

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

*"A change in the weather is sufficient to recreate the world and ourselves."*
**--- Marcel Proust**

**The Shillong Times**
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## Another voice silenced

SYED Shujaat Bukhari one of troubled Kashmir's enduring scribe known to hold his ground amidst pressures of reporting in a veritable conflict zone, was killed on Thursday outside his office. Two of his bodyguards died with him. Bukhari the editor of Rising Kashmir, cut his teeth with The Hindu was known to be a journalist with 'spunk, courage and a keen sense of his calling.' In a situation where taking a stand was potentially hazardous, Bukhari discharged his duty as a true journalist, never taking sides and always a peace broker. Writing in The Indian Express (June 15, 2018) Seema Chisti says, " It was his bounden duty to jump fences between holders of different truths and come to his own conclusions." That indeed is the true calling of a journalist - to listen to contesting voices and cull out what we believe to be the best version of truth. Bukhari, a widely travelled journalist is a voice trusted by international media houses and diplomats. As someone rightly remarked, 'he liked being in many worlds at the same time.' Deeply rooted to the Kashmir cause, Shujaat Bukhari welcomed the peace process at the risk of offending the radicals who believe in Azaad Kashmir. However, Bukhari also castigated the security forces for their acts of omission and commission and was vocal about it. An academic with stints in foreign universities, Shujaat Bukhari was more than a journalist. He was a man of many attributes. He started 'Rising Kashmir' ten years ago with the express purpose of making it a newspaper that stood firm in its journalistic principles. He gave it his all until the very end.

It must have been tough for Shujaat Bukhari to hold his own considering that his brother is a minister in the present PDP-BJP coalition government. But he spared no pains to rise above partisan politics. Bukhari used his twitter handle effectively to express the problems of Kashmir constantly until the very end. A great proponent of art and literature Bukhari pushed for a literature festival in 2011, much to the chagrin of his influential colleagues and fellow writers. While Bukhari welcomed the Ramzan ceasefire, he sensed that things were not going right and expressed this very vociferously at a conference in Delhi. Perhaps he had a premonition of what would happen. With the departure of yet another courageous journalist the world of journalism and free speech is poorer and ever more under threat today than ever before.

**LOOKING BACK**

**May 25, 1989**

## Panchayat elections

Arunachal Pradesh is the only tribal State in the country boasting of having Panchayats, which are not in vogue in any other tribal area. It at least has borrowed the name of the institution to be in line with the rest of the country, if not the form also in entirety from the other models available. The Chief Minister, Mr Gegong Apang, has gone to the length of claiming that the Arunachal variety should serve as the model for the entire country. His claim is based on the simple truth he vouchsafes that it is performing efficiently. This may be so, and may not be disputed by even the other States which may lay similar claims for themselves too. The fact is that each state has its distinctive features and characteristics, physical, political and all the rest, and hence cannot fall in to an uniform pattern which the proposed Part IX of the Constitution may not be able to achieve. All its details may not uniformly be applicable in even all those States which are run by the same political party or with approximately similar broad ideological beliefs. Panchayat administrations in West Bengal, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, for instance, are not on exactly the same boat in this respect.

Mr Apang favours a five-year term for his Panchayati bodies instead of the existing three-year term. This may well be conceded, since it thus would make it uniform with the rest of the country. His view, disfavouring holding of Panchayati elections under the auspices of the Election Commission of India, as proposed in the new 64th Constitution Amendment Bill however, brings him to the forefront of a major controversy which currently is raging in the country with the Congress(I) and the major national Opposition parties ranged in rival camps on this point, a major one in the Opposition stand against the Constitutional amendment. Arunachal Pradesh being one of the most loyal of the Congress(I) States it is doubtful whether Mr Apang would be able to stick to his view until the very end. But even this initial opposition from a tiny State, and a tribal State at that, may persuade the policy-makers in the Congress High Command to relax its stand on the issue and concede to the national Opposition demand. Mr Rajiv Gandhi, even while introducing the bill, has already conceded some vital points, e.g., concession on dissolution of Panchayats by Governor.

# Cannibals, editors and zealots

***By Avner Pariat***

There are a lot of groups these days that run around trying to spread hate while professing love. This is as true for many political outfits as it is for the zealots within organised religions (these are intertwined in this country, mind you). They make me sad. I don't know about you but I personally have no time for these hate games. They are pointless and never productive. No one gains from them. All that we will have left in the end is bitterness and "black" hearts. One of the main purveyors of this sort of ware in our time and place is the Right Wing zealot. There are so many things wrong with this type of person I do not know where to start. They claim all of Christianity as their own. They claim that theirs is the definitive answer to all of the questions of the world. They decry anyone who questions them as having a "perverted mindset". I don't know where this type of person has come from because I do not remember them being so popular and brazen in the years of my childhood. Maybe something new has slipped in between the floor-boards of our Church. Maybe they were always there, who knows.

In light of the troubles of the past weeks, many Right Wing zealots have taken to Facebook to defend the people who took part in the fight. I cannot defend or condemn anyone completely because none of the parties involved were entirely in the right. There is a line of compromise which is acceptable to all and that is what we must aim for. But this might not be good enough for the hardliners. My main issue of contention is how many of these people misuse the words of the Bible and Christ to justify their bigotry. That is unacceptable. They seem to forget that, firstly, Christ was non-violent because he used Love as a weapon. He was never a bigot. Also he was a great believer in dialogue (Jesus is always portrayed as a great talker) which is why he never had the need to cast stones (or tear gas) upon people. I only need press forward these points.

Everyone seems to take so much pride in their ability to attend Sunday service or their contributions towards Church work but there is something very important that is missing: the responsibility of a Christian. The Bible and in particular Christ's teachings insist that Christian help others even if they belong to a different group (from the Good Samaritan), that the Christian condemns violence (Simon Peter was chastised for cutting Malchus' ear), that the Christian is calm and collected in spite of raging storms. I do not think that having these qualities will diminish us in any way. In fact, as a "tribe" facing the Modern world, these are absolutely vital if we are to continue into the future from strength to strength. We need not be scared of anything, we can be the masters of our own destinies. Sitting down and resolving issues over the table, with purpose and aim, is the only way out of this and other maelstroms. Then I am quite sure that we will see problems as clear as the light of day, we will see solutions and not abstractions. We will be able to look deeply into the eyes of the hiding politicians and businessmen who are the ones responsible for sowing discontent and they will tremble at the calm and cool countenance we face them with.

That we need dialogue is very clear now more than ever. No one is listening to each other. "Dkhars" do not listen to Khasis, government does not listen to people and so on. We need to stop this downward spiral and in this situation it is the role of Authority to step in and lead the way. A good example of this is the recent incident in Jowai on the 5th of June. An altercation between a local person and a non-tribal brought Iawmusiang to a halt for a few hours. Tempers were running high after the tense situation involving Them Metor and it could have led to a disastrous series of events. But thankfully, the authorities (police) within the marketplace were quick to dispel with the problem. Kudos. This is positive interaction, this is how matters should be resolved. The case was investigated properly, the culprit accosted, life went back to normal. Why must it take curfews and brutality to teach us this?

Government and traditional institutions need to be more pro-active on all fronts. Programmes need to be designed that can further the goal of prosperity through peace because one cannot live without the other. I recently argued for the government to channel money into "bridging" programmes between communities. Some might fear that these will lead to come sort of erosion of own distinct identity. I beg to differ. If we empower our own communities, no amount of exchange will degrade our bonds. We must take, as we have taken in the past, certain aspects (skills, knowledge) from the non-tribal. We need to also teach them a thing or two for sure. We are all in this together in spite of what hardliners say. In the end, it is we as a tribe that will benefit. But we must be rational; we must deal with issues through policy not petrol (cocktails). Equipping all our people for the 21st century is the main task now because whether we want it or not the world is coming through to us in a myriad of ways. "Dkhars" are just a more visible and perhaps more immediate concern. But our task as young people is to ensure that our own enterprises, businesses, even ideas and writing can withstand the crucible of domestic and (later on) international competitive rigour. The world, my dear friends, is much, much, much bigger than Them Metor.

In closing, I must write a few words with regards to the constant stream of messages and forwards I have got in the last few days vilifying Patricia Mukhim. Now I might expose myself in resisting these as a "liberal pervert" but I don't care frankly. It is alright if we disagree with Patricia Mukhim, it is fine if we are offended by her apparent lack of empathy for the Khasi people, or if we are annoyed that she has certain perspectives which we do not share. That is fine. But why must we attack her on a personal level for them? Patricia Mukhim and I have disagreed on a thousand and one things, we have even lost our tempers a number of times. I accuse her of being too Liberal, she accuses me of being a renegade. We do not share the same beliefs (how boring would that be) but I have never called her a "cannibal" (I hope not!), a "whore" or other derogatory terms. I have critiqued her words but never went after her character or conduct. Some people have written long boring rants about why she is wrong and that is nice to see but they tarnish their own reputation and work by lowering themselves, time and again, to personal assaults. Again I must insist: be rational, stay calm, write, edit. It is well and good to have your work shared on Facebook and be gloated by it. However 'likes' and 'shares' are trendy, they disappear over a day or two. If we are serious about our craft, we work at and aim for a higher standard!

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Need to relocate Sweeper Lane

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily, I wish to add my observations regarding the problems/obstacles regarding the relocation of the residents of Sweeper Lane at Mawlong Hat, Shillong. We are aware that the Mazhabi Sikhs were brought here over 200 years ago by the British to serve the people of Shillong as their services were required then when there was no better and hygienic waste disposal facility. Besides, they also cater to the cleanliness of the town. For that they were provided residential accommodation in the heart of the town. Shillong was then a small town with a small population. Now Shillong has become very congested and the town has undergone rapid transition. As such, the presence of the Sweeper Colony in the heart of the town and in the vicinity of the most crowded and largest market of the state is no longer conducive. For decades, this place has been an eyesore because of its inorganic growth. Hence it is imperative to relocate the residents there in order to extend the market and develop the area for the benefit of all.

There is no denying that every citizen of India enjoys constitutional rights to stay anywhere within the country. But here we are talking of relocation not eviction. The residents of this place must cooperate and understand that they need to relocate to another place for their own welfare as well as for the common good. However, the government is responsible for the rehabilitation of only those people who are employed by it in different departments. It is for the government to study and identify the genuine employees and rehabilitate those only. Any illegal inhabitant must be dealt with accordingly.

As to the question of the Syiem of Mylliem giving patta to the Mazhabi Sikh community and building permission on humanitarian grounds (which I doubt to the core), in every patta given by the Syiem to individuals having shops in the market, there is a clause which says that the land (khyndew) belongs to the Syiem and the Syiemship can exercise its rights of taking back the land at any point. The shop-owners can do whatever they will with the buildings. In other words it means the buildings can be bulldozed if the Syiem so desires to rescind the lease and take back his land (khyndew). The Syiem can execute this clause after due consultation with the District Council and legal experts. At this juncture it is important for the High Level Committee to verify the true picture and the legal aspects of the case.

Echoing the sentiments of many, this area has become a cause of distress for passers-by. Without wanting to stereotype any community, I know that many passers-by have experienced high-handedness and brawls while passing through the area. And this is not the first time that the relocation issue has been discussed. But successive governments either failed or were not interested in bringing a permanent solution.

The present government should put its foot down and close this matter once and for all. If the present government too dilly-dallies then there might be serious consequences because all that it needs is one small spark to throw Shillong city out of gear and this might result in loss of lives and livelihoods and crores of public money and public/ private property. Add to that the fear psychosis among the people. And always the worst affected are students, the poor and daily wage earners! Can the Conrad government bring about a judicious solution to this matter? It is about time!

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar
Shillong -4

## Celebrities should be more responsible

Editor,

If one's mother is insulted then her children will definitely feel hurt. This phenomenon has existed from the beginning of the civilization. I don't consider it as chauvinism. If children don't love their mother and a mother doesn't love her children then it leads to decadence. So is the case with the country of one's birth. But I'm afraid the reverse is happening in India of late One who professes love for the country is considered nerdy and belittled by the use of certain vocabulary while those who doubt the sovereignty of India is defended and honored. I think such developments are disastrous. We have witnessed how certain media has gloated when Arundhati Roy aggressively spoke against the country in her recent interview with BBC.

Yet another bold example is that of the recently launched episode of Priyanka Chopra in the US-based TV serial -- 'Quantico.' Priyanka has earned the displeasure of her fans within the country and NRIs abroad. She is criticized on social media for agreeing to act in a serial which depicts an Indian planning to bomb Manhattan (USA) and then blame Pakistan for such a hateful act. Though it's not proper to harp on this but one can be sure that no conscious American will ever act in a film where his American fellow brother is shown as a "beggar" on the streets of Bangladesh. No sensible Japanese will tolerate being shown as a lazy- bone leeching on people from other nations. A Japanese will not tolerate this depiction because Japanese are inherently active and self-reliant. One wonders why Priyanka Chopra agreed to act in a serial where her native brother is depicted in bad light.

What message does this actress want to send out to the citizens who admire her? Well, a country could be a dead piece of land for such celebrities but they should be considerate not to hurt their countless fans who are sensible living beings and who keep track of their every move. We can all agree that our celebrities should show more responsibility towards their fans and their country. Let our actors' acts and their spoken words be inspiring, not misleading.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Via email

# A Perpetual Complexity: Real and Virtual

***By Ananya Guha***

The news of rumours on social media sites creating havoc in the social order and disrupting normal life, with underpinnings of social and ethnic tension is depressing to say the least. Over and above, the story of an international company worming its way into privacy and private data of individuals through Facebook, and its unholy nexus with politics is also alarming. It has resulted in public spats between political groups and, of course unending media discussions. Social networking sites ostensibly began with reconnecting old friends, and developing a network of personal, social, business, professional and academic relationships. At least that is what one thought Face Book had embarked upon with a flourish. But sharing ceased to become caring, and the act of sharing degenerated into spouting venom and hatred against people and communities one did not like. So we have the phenomena of hate messages and campaigns. What purpose do they serve? By propaganda of hate and counter hate, with malevolence ruling the roost what do such perpetrators achieve? Of course they create sharp cleavages of discord and divisiveness within society. But what is alarming is that there is a total disruption of healthy community consciousness.

The paradox of the internet and the virtual world is this vicious double edged sword. Making, or breaking. On the one hand there is information explosion, on the other misinformation explosion, traducing all norms of an ethical conduct and code of living. Globalization becomes a myth and an antithesis, because rumours spread are local, and mishaps take place in the local world. Rumours of child kidnapping have led to vile murders in Assam in North East India and fomented community clashes in Shillong. The child kidnapping stories had deleterious impact in Jharkhand, Karnataka and some other states of India.

The question is the vicious cycle of fake news, which can spread in minutes cutting across region, time and space. If internet connectivity through the mobile phone can create wider spaces of information and knowledge, it can even shrink those spaces in the most harmful of ways. This is the crux. The problem is in believing, or what to believe. The choice lies in personal jurisprudence. What is the ' law ' to follow?

And again no matter how much we talk about education abetted by technology, or e- learning or online learning, the point is that the vast online experience that people are gathering nowadays must be ' educational ' in intent and content. Technology is the artifact upon which such education must hinge. However its misuse in the form of fake news and malefic intentions is criminality.

The real world and the world of simulation are interacting in bizarre ways. To be connected with friends on social networking sites is both real and virtual. But where does the virtual end, and the real begin and vice versa. So, how does false news become real? What are these magnetic pulls of the internet which carries the seeds of destruction? Is it due to lack of education and literacy? If so this must be critically addressed. Alas! Even educated people forward false information, mindlessly.

We are in the midst of a social catastrophe. The parallel media of networking sites, the FB, WhatsApp and Twitter are merged with the mainstream media in ways which are reconciled or not. Tweets splatter news headlines. Such tweets are opinionated. The other networking sites apart from expressing opinion spread the message of hate through vilification, rumour mongering and falsehoods. Expressions such as fake news, hate messages are in currency. Is there no space or place for love in the expanse of technology? Or are shrinking spaces our new ontology only to go berserk and revisit human atavism?

The fallacy is that we are ALL caught in this technology propaganda dialogue, being one up, culminating in vicious bouts of animosity and brigand like hostility. Who is spared of it? Individuals, politicians, the media are entrapped in its vortex of propaganda and false excitement. Technology cannot excite base passions. What we should look out for are the finer instincts of well being, sharing information, highlighting human virtues, and not becoming prey to ends in themselves.

The dangerous trend is the coalescing of the traditional media, especially the digital media with the new media of social networking sites. Everyone is a citizen journalist! Yes everyone is, a responsible citizen, or should be, but the mantle of news journalism may not fall upon everyone! There are people who are doing that and, competently. The excitement of technology, distinct from passion is an anathema to this crisis of human-technology interface. The moment excitement builds up, irrationality drives in and open spaces of the world wide web instead of fostering innovation, lead to its unbridled misuse - hate campaigns, slander, abuse and vilification. Dialogue between minds takes the worst beating. Dialogue becomes monologue, an impasse of ideas, a one-way traffic to malign, impugn and hate. Where exactly are cyber laws then? Once again, the dilemma resides in this perennial complexity of the real and the virtual.

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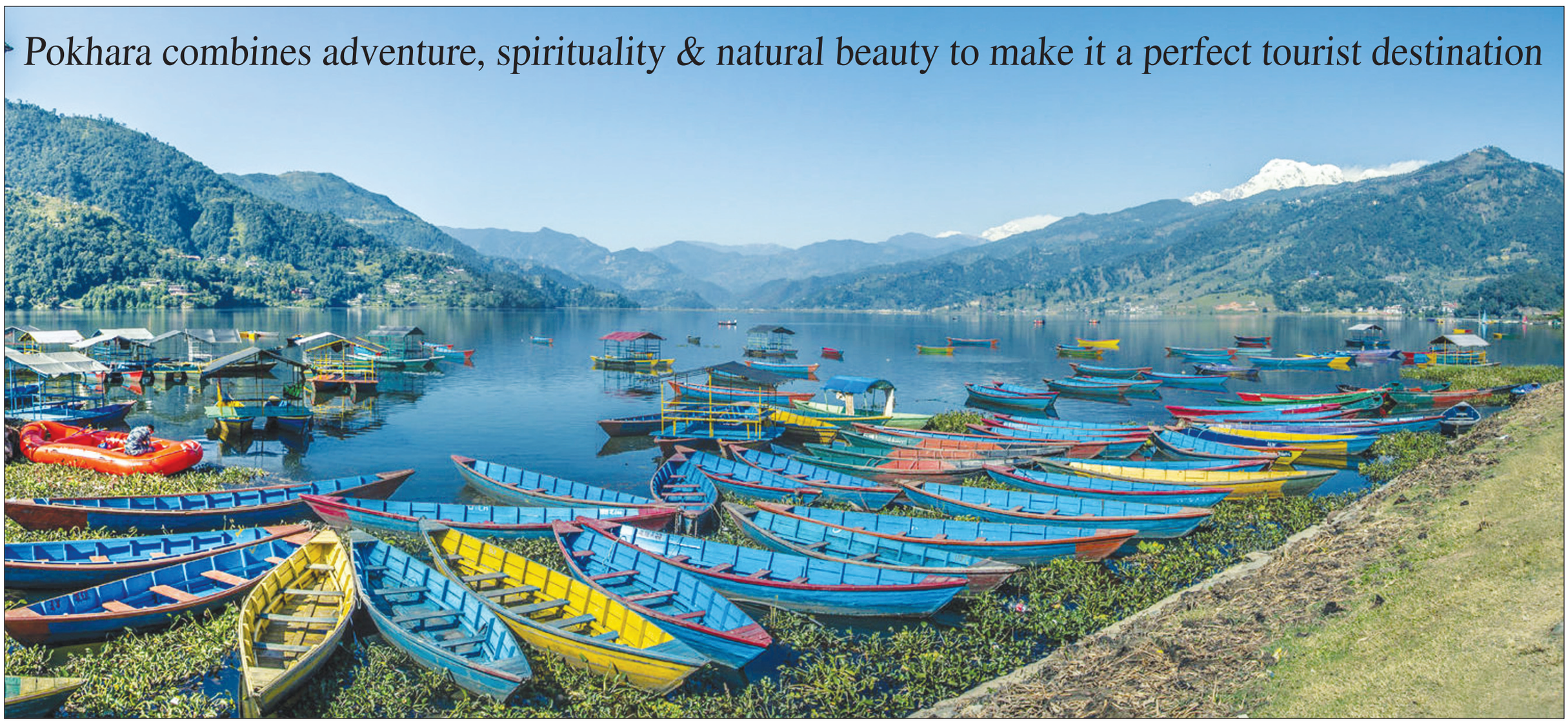
# Heaven in Himalayan foothills

## Pokhara combines adventure, spirituality & natural beauty to make it a perfect tourist destination



**By CK Nayak**

With the world becoming smaller and smaller tourism, adventuring and spiritualism is developing by leaps and bounds. And all the three can be found in a rare combination in Pokhara in western Nepal that can be described as the Switzerland of Asia.

Like the Alps of landlocked Switzerland, Pokhara, with its breathtaking beauty, is in the foothills of Annapurna mountain range. And you name the adventure sports and the tourist town of Nepal has it from land to water and sky.

Pokhara is known as Nepal's number one adventure and leisure city, a trekking gateway to the Annapurna with plenty of entertainment for individual travellers as well as families with kids. Here one can experience the best in trekking, boating, hiking, paragliding and pony rides or simply relaxing at one of the lakes near the city with the stunning Annapurna range in the background.

Pokhara is well-known as a starting point for various trekking trail and expeditions in the Annapurna. Most of the hikers and trekkers for Annapurna and Ghandruk, respectively, consider Pokhara as their first stop, or as relaxing station before they head out for serious walking. This correspondent found a number of white-skinned children riding hiking bicycles on roads. The city has a number of shops which provide cycles and other such things on rent to tourist.

Interestingly, the porous underground of the Pokhara valley also favours the formation of caves and several caves can be found within city limits. In the south of the city, a tributary of the Seti flowing out of the Phewa Lake disappears at Patale Chhango, Nepali for Hell's Falls, also called Davis Falls after someone who supposedly fell into an underground gorge, to reappear 500 metres (1,600 feet) further south.

Pokhara will overwhelm anyone with one of the greatest post card photo spots in the world. A walk along the shores of the Fewa will be surrounded by a panoramic view of the Himalayan peaks of the Annapurna Massif that reflect in this lake. A beautiful colour combination that is created by the colourful boats and paragliders which are sailing on and flying over the lake is one of the highlights of a traveller's experience in Nepal.

The city has recently been adorned with a bungee jumping site known as Water Touch Bunjee Jumping. A cable car service has begun construction joining the Fewa Lake with World Peace Stupa led by the government of Nepal, which is expected to boost the tourism exponentially.

There are many activities in the city itself like short hike to Sarangkot, which offers the magnificent sight of the sunset, sunrise and of the whole city beneath.

Davis Waterfall, a sublime waterfall in the city is another excursion spot. Pokhara has also developed as an adventure destination in the last decade, offering everything from ultralight flying to paragliding and from skydiving and ziplining to bungee jumping.

But there's more to Pokhara than its laid-back charm and booming adventure-sports industry with one of the best paragliding venue on the globe surrounded by white-water rivers. There's a fascinating museum dedicated to the world-famous Gurkha soldiers. There are numerous temples and gumbas in and around pokhara valley. Many temples serve as combined places of worship for Hindus and Buddhists. Many medieval era temples — Barahi temple, Bindhyabasini, Bhadrakali, Talbarahi, Guheshwori, Sitaldevi, Gita mandir temple, Bhimsen temple and Bhairab temple.

Pokhara is also the largest city of Nepal in terms of area and the second largest in terms of population. It is located 200 km west of the capital Kathmandu and its altitude varies from 827 metres (2,713 feet) in the southern part to 1,740 metres (5,710 feet) in the north. The famous Annapurna Range with three of the 10 highest mountains in the world — Dhaulagiri, Annapurna I and Manaslu — is within about 40 km miles of the valley.

In this Himalayan region the mountains rise very quickly. The Seti Gandaki (White River) is the main river flowing through the city. The river and its tributaries have created several gorges and canyons in and around Pokhara that give intriguingly long sections of terrace features to the city and surrounding areas.

Pokhara s the city of lakes and the southeast of it is the municipality of Lekhnath, which is now merged with the city of Pokhara forming the Pokhara Lekhnath Metropolitan City and here lies the Begnas Lake. The city has a humid subtropical climate; however, the elevation keeps temperatures moderate.

As far as history is concerned many of the hills around Pokhara still have medieval ruins from branch of Shah dynasty time. In 1786 Prithvi Narayan Shah added Pokhara to his kingdom. It had by then become an important trading place on the routes from Kathmandu to Jumla and from India to Tibet. It was envisioned as a commercial centre by the King of Kaski in the mid 18th century AD. The establishment of a British recruitment camp brought larger Magar and Gurung communities to Pokhara.

From 1959 to 1962, approximately thousands of exiles entered Nepal from neighbouring Tibet following its annexation by China. Most of the Tibetan exiles then sought asylum in Dharamshala and other Tibetan exile communities in India. According to UNHCR, since 1989, approximately 2,500 Tibetans cross the border into Nepal each year, many of whom arrive in Pokhara typically as a transit to Tibetan exile communities in India.

After the occupation of Tibet by China in 1950 and the Indo-China war in 1962, the old trading route to India from Tibet through Pokhara became defunct. Today only a few caravans from Mustang arrive in Bagar.

Good air connectivity has also contributed to the local economy. Besides large and good hotels, the city also boasts of modern commercial centres.

The city promotes two major hilltops as viewpoints to see the city and surrounding panorama. International Mountain Museum (IMM) was opened to the public at Ratopahiro to boost the city's tourism attractions. Other museums are Pokhara Regional Museum; an ethnographic museum; Annapurna Natural History Museum that houses preserved specimens of flora and fauna, and contains particularly extensive collection of the butterflies, found in the Western and ACAP region of Nepal; and Gurkha Museum featuring history of the Gurkha soldiers.

Since the 1990s, Pokhara has experienced rapid urbanisation. As a result, service-sector industries have increasingly contributed to the local economy overtaking the traditional agriculture. An effect of urbanisation is seen in high real estate prices, among the highest in the country. The major contributors to the economy of Pokhara are manufacturing and service sector including tourism; agriculture and the foreign and domestic remittances. There are also local handloom, handicrafts and art and culture centres in the city.

But surprisingly, this beautiful city until the end of the 1960s was only accessible by foot and it was considered even more a mystical place than Kathmandu. The Siddhartha Highway, first road was completed in 1968 after which tourism set in and the city grew rapidly. Now besides good roads, it has a fleet of air services. A local guide said air fare to anywhere in Nepal is much cheaper for the citizens of all SAARC countries!

**Himalayan beauty:** *(Top) Colourful boats on the Fewa Lake in Pokhara add to the picturesque beauty of the valley; and the Buddhist stupa in the city in Nepal*

# *Examples India can follow to stop animal cruelty*

**By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi**

Every country is replete with innovations in policy. If we had a team in NITI Aayog, whose only job was to look through the Net and find these new strategies, then they could pass them on to the ministries.

Perhaps the most important decision that was made in any country in 2017 was that the British government made CCTVs mandatory in all slaughter houses. Millions of animals are treated terribly before they are killed. I made a film on the way animals were treated in the Idgah slaughterhouse in Delhi. The judge fainted and the slaughterhouse closed down.

But there are 15,000 more that behave as badly. Animals are kicked, punched, beaten, burnt with cigarettes, given electric shocks, even sexually molested before they are cut. Thousands of lactating mother buffaloes are cut illegally. And before they are cut, their teats are cut first so that there is evidence for the importer that the meat came from a pregnant, or lactating, animal.

Little babies are cut, dragged by their tails and jumped on so that their ribs and legs break. Human children aged 4 cut goats with razor blades, letting them bleed to death in piles. Pigs are beaten to death routinely as the sellers believe this makes the meat softer.

Under new rules, CCTV will be mandatory in abattoirs in the UK — a good first step to prevent the very worst cases of abuse. This should be made mandatory in India as well.

Here is a new way of dealing with the overflow of dogs and cats on the street. We have a law that orders sterilisation of all dogs. Few municipalities do it – even the ones that do it , do it in fits and starts, allowing litters to be born and starting the process over and over again. In the meantime, the breeding of dogs has been made illegal, but pedigreed dogs are sold in the thousands by illegal breeders and are found in every pet shop . If we could get rid of the foreign pedigreed dog market, we could find all our Indian dogs homes.

In 2017, California passed a law, A.B.485, that pet stores will only sell puppies, kittens and rabbits from shelters and rescue centres. Violators will be fined $ 500 and shut down. This effectively puts an end to commercial animal breeders and brokers, and to the terrible practice of puppy mills which house animals in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions without adequate food, water, socialization or veterinary care.

California is the first state to pass such legislation, though it is following dozens of its own cities and jurisdictions, which have passed similar measures on a smaller scale. The pet trade has predictably protested, saying that " it would jeopardise jobs". But since here it does not employ anyone, and is a messy business which operates by a person buying a few dogs and multiplying them in his own house without any standards being adhered to and then putting them in illegal pet shops, it will put no one out of business.

In any case, how will it make a difference whether the dogs come from breeders or shelters? People who like paying money for buying dogs, because they think they get "better" animals, will do it anyway. The shops will continue to be in business.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals had this to say "By cutting off the puppy mill pipeline that moves cruelly bred animals from across the country into California pet stores, A.B. 485 will also help prevent California consumers from being duped into purchases that contribute to unconscionable animal 'production' and suffering."

In another development, Trip Advisor, which is one of the largest travel sites in the world and its booking service Viator, will no longer sell tickets to hundreds of attractions where travellers come into contact with wild animals, or endangered species, held in captivity. The decision has been applauded by all wildlife preservation groups, which say dolphins and elephants held in captivity for entertainment purposes suffer severe physical and psychological damage.

Last October, Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit released a study on wildlife tourism. Among its many findings was that between two million and four million tourists per year pay visit attractions that are considered harmful to animal welfare. Animal welfare groups are hoping these changes – TripAdvisor has 350 million visitors a month -create a ripple effect throughout the travel booking industry. TripAdvisor and Expedia already do not allow bookings that involve killing or injuring captive animals for blood sport.

Scotland, Ireland, Romania and Guatemala have banned circuses with animal acts. India had banned most in 1990 when I was Minister for Environment but, even now, several circuses are using elephants and others use horses, dogs and birds. The Central Zoo Authority is closing them down one after another.

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

# Mother's Rule for motivation

**By Imitoshi Ao**

**To motivate it's easy, to get motivated it's easy, to implement it's difficult or easy, it's your choice. How, When, Why and Where?"**

**In my previous articles I have discussed about self-motivation, how to succeed as well as never to quit, but this time I'll talk about my take on motivation in an organisation and how an employer or manager can motivate his or her employees.**

**As a leader or manager what do you think you can do to motivate your employees to perform better? Here are a few suggestions that I think will help an employee to perform better — firstly do not think that your employees or team are machines, think of them as individuals. Meet them face to face and listen to what they have to say. Talk straight and give clear instructions and always weigh the suggestions for the pros and cons. If you promise something to an employee make sure that it is kept and if that person or persons makes a mistake tolerate it. Give examples of how you became a manager or head of that organization.**

**What you had to go through to achieve them? As you have learnt from your mistakes let others learn too but be there to correct them. Take the rap for mistakes the team has made. "The glory is yours if the team succeeds; the failure is yours if the team fails."**

**Here is a story by RK Laxman: A well-dressed chimpanzee is sitting in an office, wearing spectacles and pouring into a file in all seriousness. Two persons stand at some distance away. One of them, probably an insider, to the other: "Prospects here are very good. Just 20 years back he was brought here for experiments. By seniority he has become the head of the department now."**

**What I mean to say is not all employees or employers are alike, nor are situations. As an employer you could always provide an environment from which he or she can grow and as an employee try to understand what he or she is going through. As they say…put yourself in the other person's shoes… As an employer you should allow your employee to develop their job, to continually improve. Empower them and let them control over what they do. If they make mistakes or do the right thing then give regular feedback and praise, show appreciation for "People do what they do because of what happens to them when they do it."**

**Know the extent up to which to give detailed instructions. Set targets in such a way that it can be achieved. Unnecessary high targets will only demotivate your employees and then the productivity level will go down.**

**Achieving goals is a motivating force in itself and when they are realistic, they enhance performance due to less anxiety and more motivation. I don't know how many of you may have heard or experienced of the Mother's Rule: if you do your homework or do this work then I will give you an ice-cream or I will give you sweets, etc. I'm sure all of us have experienced this but we did not realize that this is also a type of motivation which made us do things which we did not want to do. Let us think back to those childhood days and bring that experience back into our work and implement it. After all who does not want to go back to our childhood days? Let's all implement the Mother's Rule and see how success happens in our work place.**

***(The author is a motivational speaker)***

# Defined by dance

## *Swarnamalya Ganesh highlights the importance of combining art with education and research*

**By Paromita Pain**

She was only three when her mother took her to her guru, KJ Sarasa. Swarnamalya Ganesh believes that's what set her on the creative trajectory of dance. "Dance is a natural extension of my identity," she says. "It defines who I am."

Ganesh's engagement with the art goes beyond the stage. She is involved in researching different dance forms of India, primarily Bharatanatyam and its origins in Sadir Natyam. After her doctorate from the University of Madras in Chennai, she had the opportunity to be a part of the Fulbright Program at the University of California, Los Angeles, minoring in world arts, cultures and dance.

### Dance and education

Studying the art of dance in India, centered around Bharatanatyam, has always been a very conscious decision for Ganesh. "In fact, many people, including other dancers, are often aghast that I chose to study the art instead of just remaining with the performance aspect of it," she says. Ganesh's mother insisted she further her education, believing that, as a woman, nothing would empower her more than being a consummate artist with good educational credentials. "Besides K.J. Sarasa, my mother has had the most nurturing influence on my life and growth as a performer," says Ganesh.

In addition to dance, Ganesh has a diploma in acting for camera from San Jose State University, California. "This happened quite by chance," she says. Her dance had brought her offers to act in television shows. Films followed soon after. Alaipayuthey, her first Tamil movie, with renowned director Mani Ratnam, made her a household name. "I was very young, and it was all rather exciting," she says. It had opened up cinema as an area of interest. So, when she got the chance to study acting at the university in California, she was more than glad to accept it.

### Dance and research

Research, for Ganesh, is a chance to think in depth about dance forms, patterns and the different cultures related to them. "I have a spirit of inquiry," she says. "During my M.A., I was drawn toward history and archaeology, so I started studying epigraphy." Her multidisciplinary interests paved the way for further study.

After her Ph.D., she decided to apply for a teaching fellowship and reached out to previous Fulbrighters, wanting to better understand the application process and the overall experience. "Being interdisciplinary helped," she says. "I had a very clear vision of what I wanted to do."

Ganesh's doctoral research focused on the lost dance forms of India. She created a series of lectures and performances around the topic. But, she acknowledges that a great many issues and ideas still lie unexplored.

### Lessons learned

Ganesh's interests expanded to the connections between social change, political activism and the arts. At the University of California, her work focused on the inherently inclusive and secular nature of Bharatanatyam, one of the oldest dance forms of South India, and how it has re-globalised itself.

At the university, Ganesh saw, firsthand, the deep influence of Indian philosophy and art on the academic community.

"I also realised how important it is to be able to look at the broader picture," she says. "Understanding the nuances of intersectionality is important since, as an art, dance isn't restricted to one type or style of performance."

The care and autonomy with which courses and classes were designed at the university inspired her.

She came back with many ideas she could implement as a faculty member at Ranga Mandira Academy of World Dance/Performance and Indic Studies, the academic wing of the Chennai-based Ranga Mandira Trust, which works in the areas of performing arts, arts education and community bonding through the arts. "The larger audience connects best to the historicity and social change these art forms offer," says Ganesh. "My main thrust today lies in understanding how art can be a legitimate intervention in the daily politics of life and living." *(SPAN-TWF)*

*Photo credit: Facebook*

# 'Star - Gazing'

***By Pt. Ajai Bhambi*** ***Sunday, JUNE 17, 2018***

A good year is in store for you as Moon square Jupiter on your solar return chart. Carefully pick and choose your challenges during this period. There may be more than one correct answer, so do not worry too much about meeting rigid anticipations to the letter. Change is shown and staying flexible will pay off bonuses. Financially you will feel steadier and are probable to look at investments; however you would need to put a restraint on your extravagant tendencies. You may have to undertake some vital travel which will prove tremendously beneficial to you. Family and friends will be a foundation of strength.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

Though mixed results are indicated it will be an overall happy one. Try to keep harmony and patience in all communications and dealings in family. Although you will remain extremely busy still you will keep pace with personal and professional life. Take things one step at a time. Promotion or betterment will also take place. If looking for a change then that too shall materialize. There will be gains both material and in terms of stature too. Financially you will do quite well and can also find an additional source of income. Keep a distance from those with negative thoughts otherwise you will not be at ease. An affair also awaits the unattached. You enjoy romantic outings with your beloved.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

Works relating to the arts and fashion work will take priority and you may decide to expand your profession in these areas. You will have good personal and professional relations as your interpersonal skills shine. By engaging in the activities that you enjoy the most, you will most certainly create new bonds with the people that you meet in these arenas of your life. The atmosphere around you will boost your emotional feelings. Relations among friends will be amiable. Luck will favour you in family relations and you will enjoy a stronger bonding. You may get a chance for an overseas trip. You are in a more positive frame of mind and your efforts towards a brighter future are gaining momentum. There are chances that some events may cause stress but this too is a temporary phase.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

You will have good chances of professional and monetary gains as you get more involved in the work at hand. Your career will improve your position and you will be expected to use your skills to the best of your ability so bring forth your experience and knowledge to make the best of this opportunity. News of possible profits through investments could come your way. Fuse together your desire for new friends with your passion for familiar activities. Things take a turn in respect to your romance and love related matters. You will enjoy a happy family relationship and your children too will do you proud. You may plan to go for an outing or a short trip for pleasure. Issues related to property and assets may crop up so take care that your money does not get held up. You will enjoy good health during this period.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

The burden of work continues so do not let your mind wander in other directions and new projects and areas as this will dissipate your resources. With the requisite concentration you will achieve your goals and also earn accolades from seniors and peers alike. Your spontaneity and ability to take decisions on the spur of the moment will take you up the ladder. There is no need to hesitate, simply take action. Your discerning thinking will help you resolve some financial problems. Do not try to speculate in any way as it may not prove to be good. You will resolve some pending domestic issues with support from family members. You may also contemplate marriage as you are drawn towards your beloved. Your health related problems will disturb you and your daily routine may get affected so take care. Simply let things go at normal speed and do not push matters or exhibit your haste at this time.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

The position of stars is indicating mixed results. Some unusual circumstances may draw your attention. Unattended dues may demand your time and energy. Some of you may also consider taking loans. If there is something you need to achieve go ahead and take the initiative and stop waiting for others to catch up. You will find people to support you wherever you go. You will take up a cause which is close to your heart but at this time you may not get a good response. Your thoughts and ideas will waver as you jump from one idea to another and you will feel an element of uncertainty. Your family and children may need your affection try to give them quality time and work for a sound and healthy environment. You should take care that someone does not interfere in your domestic life. Yoga and meditation will be of help. Travel during this period will prove beneficial.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**

Look at all pros and cons before you reach a decision in any situation as there may be misunderstandings which will affect your working. Once you avoid confrontations things will pick up speed. You are then ready to put your novel ideas into practice and they then gain acceptance too. No doubt a lot of efforts will be required to be put in but they will not go unrewarded. You take considered and wise steps to maintain harmony and affection in your family relations. Your children will prove to be helpful in taking away your stress and strain of mind. You may be in a state of mind where religion and matters of spiritual interest pique your interest and draw you. You will be keen to go on a pilgrimage or to a place of worship.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

The planetary configuration indicates that your thoughts and courage will lead you to adventure. Your confidence will be high and you may believe that you can achieve anything and everything. You may also make some changes in the existing business. Your ideas and creations will help you in making professional relations better. You will discover some new ways to boost your income. Your luck may give you some sudden profits and monetary gains. You may finalize some new contracts and may renovate your existing home or office. A property deal now may be profitable in the near future. You may have to undertake a journey in connection with your work and the results will be fantastic. Your health may give some trouble so keep a close watch on it.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

Financial and other monetary matters will get solved and you may expect a rise in your career. You will also enjoy a phase that gives you plenty of good money making ideas. There are strong chances of financial gains. If you go for a new big project then you will have a better chance in the near future. You will be feeling more expansive than usual and your imagination and intuition are operating at a high level. This is a good time to look within and make use of untapped abilities; this will change your attitude towards many things. Expansive communication abilities and your innate ability to see things objectively will enable you to see things clearly and not coloured by prejudices. Romance is delightful as a long awaited affair is very much on the cards. At the end of the day you will realize that it was worth waiting for.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

You may have some mixed results so it is best to avoid deals and investments during this period. You could be beset with negative emotions and a pessimistic outlook. You need to be extra careful while getting into new associations or taking up new assignments. People can exert undue pressure on you. However your courage and strength will help you in your professional life. New contacts made during this period will provide a springboard to further your career and social life. Romance is in the air and it will bring increased bonding with your loved ones. Express your love, personal contact with your beloved and close friends is invaluable, so make sure you nurture these relationships. Your health will require attention keep your thoughts positive and focus on your inner self to get rid of stress. This is a good period to rejuvenate and regroup your thoughts and energy.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

You will put your efforts on in the matters of your career and profession and these efforts will pay off. Just as you are full of dynamism there is a positive energy around you and this will further help your efforts and take you to new heights in your career and related matters. Your stamina and courage will go a long way for you to do the needful in achieving your goal. You may plan to have some foreign trip as part of career growth and enhancement. The environment at home and your relations with family members remain amiable. There are good chances to have dealings in property matters and or in real estate business. A long pending matter will get settled. With good health on your side you take a step ahead in all types of successful events.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

During this period you will be in the need of some peaceful environment at home and at work so take measures to have the same. You do not want to appear to be too ruthless in the way you handle a particular issue, but you do want to achieve your goal. Your profits may be higher than expected giving you the much awaited financial stability. Career related matters may get sorted out soon as you prove your capability. You are wise enough to settle matters in your favour and there are chances for improvement in your business or professional life. The family environment will be harmonious and will give you happiness and joy. Long distance journey will be there and it will also prove quite helpful. There may be some unexpected expenditure so think wisely.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

Your stars indicate that you will enjoy good results in fields related to finance, profession and health. This configuration also indicates a powerful and magnetic personality with which you shine at public gatherings. You will get good financial returns. You may get involved in some real estate related activities. Romance is also indicated for the unattached as you strike an immediate chord with someone you meet. Those in a relationship will find a closer bonding with their beloved. Family and domestic relations will improve if you listen and take a softer stand. You will also gain the affection of children. Your wits will be sharp as also your humour and this will help you gain popularity in your social circles.

# Options in traditional medicine

**By Ranjan K Baruah**

Last time, I had told you about naturopathy, which is an integral part of Indian medicine or alternate healing. Another alternate system of medicine in India is Sowa-Rigpa.

Our students have less information or awareness about this system. I am writing more about Sowa-Rigpa so that some of our students may think of making their career in this field. Most of the inputs are directly from the website of Central Council of Indian Medicine which is under the Ministry of Ayush.

"Sowa-Rigpa", commonly known as Tibetan system of medicine, is one of the oldest, living and well documented medical traditions in the world. It originated in Tibet and is popularly practised in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia and Russia. The majority of theory and practice of Sowa-Rigpa is similar to "Ayurveda".

The first Ayurvedic influence came to Tibet during the 3rd century AD but it became popular only after 7th centuries with the advent of Buddhism in Tibet. Thereafter this trend of exportation of Indian medical literature, along with Buddhism and other Indian art and sciences, were continued till early 19th century.

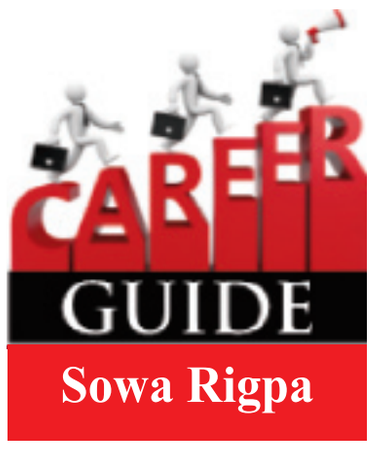
India being the birth place of Buddha and Buddhism has always been a favourite place for learning Buddhist art and culture for Tibetan students; many Indian scholars were also invited to Tibet for prorogation of Buddhism and other Indian art and sciences.

This long association with India had resulted in translation and preservation of thousands of Indian literature on various subjects like religion, sciences, arts, culture and language etc in Tibetan. Out of these around 25 texts related to medicine are also preserved in both canonical and non-canonical forms of Tibetan literatures. The knowledge was further enriched in Tibet with the knowledge and skills of neighbouring countries and their own ethnic knowledge.

"Sowa-Rigpa" (Science of healing) is one of the classic examples of it.

In India, this system is widely practised in Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Darjeeling (West Bengal), Dharamsala, Lahaul and Spiti (Himachal Pradesh) and Ladakh region of Jammu & Kashmir.

The basic theory of Sowa-Rigpa may be adumbrated in terms of the following five points: the body in disease as the locus of treatment; antidote, i.e., the treatment; the method of treatment through antidote; medicine that cures




the disease; Materia Medica, Pharmacy and Pharmacology.

Traditionally, the sMenpa are trained under the traditional educational system either under private guru-shishya tradition or under gyud-pa (lineage) system in families in which the knowledge is passed down from father to son through generations. It takes several years to become a skilful sMenpa, which requires hard theoretical and practical training. After finishing his/her training the trainee sMenpa has to give an examination in front of the entire community in the presence of a few expert sMenpa in a ceremony to confer the designation of sMenpa on him/her.

For higher training, those from the Indian Himalayan region as well used to go to study under reputed scholars or to any of the medical colleges in Tibet in the past. Some from these regions preferred to go to Tibet to begin their education of Sowa-Rigpa.

**Updates:**

**Development Leadership Programme:** ISDM's one-year full-time PGP in Development Leadership seeks to develop professional, passionate and committed leaders & entrepreneurs for the development sector (NGO's, CSR, Social and Corporate Foundations, Social Enterprises, Social Consulting etc). With a unique focus on praxis (Classroom+Field), this programme provides students the rare opportunity to understand development and learn how to build world-class social organizations and drive collaboration to deliver sustainable social impact at scale. Full scholarships are also available and interested may apply before June 25.

*(Ranjan K Baruah is a career mentor and North East and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734 for any career related queries)*

*"A work of art that contains theories is like an object on which the price tag has been left."*

**--- Marcel Proust**

**The Shillong Times**

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## Moles in the Meghalaya Home Department ?

ON Saturday, June 16, a Meghalaya Government classified document from the Home Department marked, "Top Secret" and giving details of why internet ban for another 48 hours was necessitated apropos the DGP of Meghalaya's report, was leaked over social media. This is unprecedented and alarmingly suggests the presence of a mole or moles within the Government system – and that in the sensitive Home Department at a very trying time when the city of Shillong is still under curfew. Will the Government ever find out who leaked this document or will there be silence on this too as there is on many ticklish issues.

The power of social media for good seems to have been eclipsed by its power for hate-mongering and for creating the lynch mob mentality. Truly social media is a tool that defies reason and logic because it allows for free play of narcissism and vulgarity. No invention is totally good or bad. There are equal measures of both. Many young professionals preparing for different examinations or doing research etc., are upset with the ban on internet. Their contention is that those who use the internet for professional growth and business cannot be punished because of a few wrongdoers. Perhaps they are correct. The ban on internet presupposes that every citizen in Meghalaya is untrustworthy and must pay the price for the police ineffectiveness to get hold of the few agent provocateurs and rumour-mongers who use social media with dexterity for their narrow ends. It's time for the Meghalaya Police to invest heavily on cyber crime management, but for now their immediate target should be to zero in on the mole who leaked a Top Secret document for, the enemy within is more dangerous than the enemy without.

Recently, a young lady had to call a press conference here to clear her name vis-a-vis an intimate picture of hers that was circulated over social media without her consent. The damage that this has caused to her immediate family is immeasurable. There are many such reputations that have been destroyed by morphed pictures of persons in compromising poses. But today the greatest danger to a country of such great diversities as India is, is the potential of social media to ignite social tensions leading to large scale conflicts or the several cases of lynching ignited by hate messages circulated over social media. For the young Home Minister of Meghalaya, who has a relatively fresh mind unpolluted by the rigours of politics in the corridors of power, it's an opportunity to prove himself by taking decisive steps to purge the system of the presence of moles.

**LOOKING BACK**

**May 25, 1989**

## 15 killed in Bodo violence

At least 15 people have died in Bodo violence since the 300 hour Assam bandh. Reports of violence from the Bodo dominated areas were, however, not available today as the Government has ordered a `news blackout." Six, people, including three Bodo extremists, were killed between May 20 and 22 while three extremists were shot dead in an encounter with the police at Dihira village under Kokrajhar district on May 20. Two Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) supporters were killed by Bodo extremists at Dakshinkuchi and Uttarkuchi villages respectively on the same day. Another PTCA supporter was stabbed to death at Patkijuli on May 22.

Meanwhile, the week long Assam bandh called by the Plains Tribal Council of Assam to press its demand for a separate "Udayachal" state entered its second day today." A Tezpur report said the bandh was observed in PTCA dominated tribal areas of Dhekiajuli, Rangapara, Charduar, Missamari and Neamati areas of Sonitpur district. NO reports were available from other PTCA dominated district.

## 480 million voters in next poll

An estimated 480 million voters across the country are expected to be enlisted as voters for the next general elections compared to 399 million the last such elections. Election Commission sources here said today that these projected 480 million voters including about 36 million newly eligible 18 year old. According to the projected increase in the number of voters, the sources said there had been an annual increase of 2.5 per cent and a total increase of more than twelve percent in the last five years.

Besides, the number of new voters between 18 and 21 years electorate, as on April one, 1989, was estimated around 36 million the total, the sources said.

# Simple Policing Issues To Maintain Law and Order

***By H H Mohrmen***

To maintain peace and prevent fallout of law and order in Meghalaya and particularly in Shillong; there are some issues that the government and its people need to look into. Meghalaya and its people are beginning to see progress so we cannot afford to see Shillong or any part of the state being disrupted again. In fact, for the common people the daily labourers, the hawkers and the street vendors, bandhs and curfew are too costly a price to pay for problems they did not create.

Issues that the government can think of are as simple as making certain facilities available to the public. The immediate need is for the police or the government to install emergency numbers for people to call when they are in trouble. If the government has common complaint numbers like the ones they have in the western countries, the recent scuffle which triggered the prolonged curfew could have been avoided. For example, if there is a common complaint number, the lady (as alleged) would not have had to call the youths in her community to teach the young men a lesson for eve-teasing her. She would have to just call the common complaint number to know that the police will take action against the culprit/culprits. Similarly, if we have a common complaint number, the young men who were attacked would have just called the number and know the police will come to rescue them and that they will be safe.

In Jowai too the skirmish between the customer and the salesman would not have escalated to a violent assault if there was an emergency number in place. The salesman who had unsuccessfully tried to convince the customer to refrain from smoking inside the shop would have just made sure that the act was recorded on a CCTV and then call the police to lodge a complaint against the errant customer and leave the rest to the police. Many of the clashes which have escalated to fist fights could have been avoided if we had been able to make this one simple arrangement.

As of now none of us know whom or where to contact if we witness a crime being committed right before our eyes. We should take a leaf from the policing manuals of other countries and install a common three digit complaint number which should be easy to remember, so that that even a five year old kid could easily access the facility. We already have 108 an emergency number to inform whenever one encounters an accident or needs immediate medical help which works very well and we all know that this simple three digit number has saved innumerable lives.

Now everybody carries a phone and some even have two or three phones with them so we would be able to prevent many crimes and avoid law and order situations in the future if we can only make this simple facility available to the public at large. And with the advent of technology maybe the police can even provide a WhatsApp number in which people can lodge a complaint if they see a crime being committed and also send photographs or video clippings. This will go a long way in helping the police arrest criminals and even prevent crimes from being committed.

In Jowai similar arrangements were made available to people of the district to make complaints against unsatisfactory and faulty government services when Arun Kumar Kembhavi was the DC of West Jaintia Hills District; it of course vanished with him being transferred from the district. This platform was very popular and the government was also able to address much of the public grievances using this simple technology.

The point is we are talking about Digital India but we are not using technology to our advantage; instead we see unscrupulous elements having a field day making the best use or abuse of the same technology to achieve their malevolent goals. The police know very well that now a large number of crimes are also being committed on cyber space and crime also originates in this same virtual space therefore the need of the hour is for the police to have a large presence in this space too. In fact now the challenging part of policing is to police the internet. The police know this very well and thank goodness it is not an impossible task either, because policemen and women can easily access these apps and sites.

I only frequent two social media platforms (Facebook and WhatsApp) and I can see the hatred, the venom spewing but of course I also see many good things in those platforms too. When I come to think of what I saw in these social media in the very recent past I cannot but appreciate Patricia Mukhim, the Editor of the Shillong Times for being able to gracefully take the attack that was lobbed against her in some of the social media platforms. She was called names and of course this is not the first time that she was called a traitor of the Jaidbynriew just because she has views and opinion which are not to her opponent's liking.

We are also against disrupting peace and creating a law and order situation in the state and at times I have had disagreements with the Editor too, but we always agreed to disagree. It is only natural to have different views and opinions for the simple fact that no two humans are the same, not even twins. Sadly in Kong Patricia's case it did not end there. Her opponents engaged in hitting below the belt and attacking her personally in the debate which is uncalled for and unbecoming of her opponents. We call ourselves defenders of the Jaidbynriew but we do not even want to engage in healthy and democratic debates (ka nia ka khot) not to speak of respect for our opponents which is a hallmark of the Khasi-Pnar warrior who would never in a duel hit his opponent in the back.

The very reason that the government has to ban internet access is also based on the fact that the internet can start or help create more incidents which also create law and order situations and disrupt peace in the area which is already in conflict. But we all have experienced that this is a double edged sword; it no doubt help quelled the disruption but it also has its adverse impact on those who use the internet for other purposes. One cannot deny the fact that many online transactions; be it for admission or other purposes which need OTP (one time pin) for verification were affected because of the ban on SMSes and the internet.

Therefore the other important issue in policing is the cyber space. The recent cases of innocent people being assaulted and even killed based on a simple WhatsApp message that child lifters are lurking in area is a case in point which should make the police look into this issue carefully. A lot of crime is already happening in the cyber space and the criminals can only be defeated by using the same technology that they use.

The police should rethink the way policing is done on the internet and should not also feel shy to take people's help in trying to maintain law and order and peace in the state. We should not assume that everybody is a potential criminal; there are many law abiding citizens too who would like to help and they only need easy access to the police to help the police in their job and vide a common complaint number and WhattsApp number which will go a long way in helping the police to improve policing in the state.

One will not be able to imagine the confidence and the comfort that this simple complaint and the WhatsApp number will give to the citizens of the state because they know that they are just one call or one WhatsApp text away from the police or that the police are only one call or one WhatsApp text away from them. If this can be arranged which I think is possible; it will not only help people feel safe and secure but it will also improve police public relationship.

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Is internet banning a solution?

Editor

The Conrad Sangma government has again banned internet data in our state. We all thought that normalcy had returned to Shillong until Saturday when internet was clamped down yet again. Internet is now part and parcel of every citizen's life including the different departments of the government like MPSC where application for jobs is now done online. Internet has its merits and demerits. You can do wonderful stuff like online banking transactions, job application, research studies, read news, watch the FIFA world cup (by the way many villagers are watching this tournament on their cell phones due to the interrupted supply of electricity at night), sell assets (cars, house, land etc) through OLX but also sell lies through social media. However, the merits outweigh the demerits. Just because a few mischievous scoundrels sell lies and spread fake news through the internet it doesn't necessarily mean the government should ban internet every time there are signs of social unrest. For example if someone lobs a petrol bomb at the Secretariat, the government need not cut the supply of petrol but instead should apprehend the culprit so that the crime is not repeated and this same logic should also apply to the internet fiasco in Shillong.

By banning the internet every time the Conrad Sangma Government automatically sends a wrong signal to the public and it will put the government in a bad spot. It also creates a fear psychosis in the state and also for people from outside the state who plan to visit Meghalaya. Tourists who are scheduled to stay for a week in Shnongpdeng decides to Assam the same day since they assume that something is not right and hence the government is banning internet. I was not aware about the internet ban until I reached the petrol pump to pay for the fuel using my debit card, then signals went up my brain that trouble is brewing somewhere in Shillong. So Mr CM you can imagine what kind of impression your Government is giving about the state and the country ever time you ban the internet. Few days ago we were laughing at Mukul Sangma when he demanded that this government should hand over the reins of power to him if they do not have ideas on how to govern. We thought, "Oh Mukul you're such a power monger." But by Saturday June16, those thoughts have changed and Mukul might be right after all Though I am not a fan of Mukul Sangma's style of functioning but I have to agree that he always had an upper hand when it comes to dealing with anti-social elements. I don't remember even once such banning of internet during his stint as Chief Minister though there were many instances of law and order problems during the ILP agitation, VAB protest, agitation against railways etc., during his tenure. I'm a big fan of Mr Conrad Sangma. He looks like a breath of fresh air and a very promising leader. However, unlike his predecessor he looks shaky when dealing with law and order problems. Mr Conrad should know that for anti-social elements must be dealt with an iron-fist and blocking the internet is not one of them. It is in fact a knee-jerk reaction. Therefore Mr Conrad Sangma please wake up and smell the coffee. Deal with the anti- social elements with a firm hand and not in a cowardly manner by banning the internet and putting many young professionals, students entrepreneurs and job seekers in a quandary.

Yours etc.,
Manuel Carey Lymba,
Via email

## Alternative to internet shutdown

Editor,

Today most of people use smart-phones, but a smart-phone without internet is like a car without gas. Already the internet ban has affected many and then another 48 hours makes it even worse. The Government should come up with strong laws to deal with social media and stop punishing the entire netizens.

The Government should know that one does not use the internet only to access Facebook or WhatsApp. Many people make a living with it. Internet ban has greatly impacted their income. Also, many people using internet are students who despite recharging internet with their pocket money, don't get to avail it's benefits. The Government should team up with Facebook, WhatApp and others and book the rumour mongers and get their IDs blocked. They should also zero in and deal strictly with those inciting violence through social media. They should find an alternative way of dealing with the situation rather than just imposing a ban on the internet.

For the service provider it does not matter whether the user is a wealthy person or a student. For them its business that matters. These are things which the Government should really consider and not just sit idle by banning internet.

Yours etc.,
Genia. Dohling
Shillong-3

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

# Can this generation of leaders turn things around for Meghalayans?

***By Yona Nonglang***

As a middle-aged Shillong born and raised citizen, I, like many fellow Meghalayans of my generation, saw with our own eyes how our state came into being. Even though we were very young at the time, we all felt a sense of pride at the idea of our very own "hill" state, even as the grown-ups among us did their best to explain what it all meant. Our leaders of that generation deserve our applause, respect and gratitude for ensuring that we were granted self-determination in the quasi-federal system of the broader Indian polity. Our collective memory of those men and women should be kept alive and they should be given pride of place in our state's history books.

That freedom to decide and fulfil our common destiny by pursuing local policies that would take us all forward into the 21st century was a golden opportunity. But, alas, after the euphoria of the birth of our state died down, there has been very little to cheer about and be proud of in terms of sound policy formulation and implementation. The lack of far-sighted, credible and dynamic leadership, and continued systemic failures to lift our state to its rightful potential, by those at the helm have been disappointing in many different ways.

For far too long, Meghalaya has been an underperforming state in key areas that should have laid the groundwork for realistic development and social progress. What's painful to observe has been the blatant display of ingenuity in the profiteering from high office and the misrule with impunity that goes along with it. There has been absolute generosity towards one's own interests by the powers that be and a highly embarrassing level of stinginess in how schemes for the welfare of the general public are being executed. One only has to look at the pathetic conditions of our roads, the sanitation, and the water and power supplies to prove this point.

We older Shillongites have been lamenting our beloved hometown's gradual descent into a place so different from the idyllic and unsoiled place of our childhood. The absence of sound planning and the resultant messy and chaotic growth have turned our urban landscape into an eyesore, for a long time now. In an age of well-planned and well-maintained city centres, pity that our younger generations only get to know the malodorous and ramshackle space that ours has become. To add more to this would feel like insulting the very place we love and where we were born and brought up.

There should have been concrete measures to ensure that our city's roads are able to deal with the ever increasing vehicular traffic and our commercial spaces have enough room and amenities to facilitate relaxing shopping trips for our population. Right now, the opposite is true. Our experiences in such public places have been agonizingly dehumanizing and distressing to our dignity.

And what are we to say of the squandering away of the precious youth energy that should have been instrumental in helping us march along with the times? Barring a handful of educational institutions that are like islets of comparative quality in our vast sea of educational mediocrity, even our college and university graduates are being thrown into the wasteland of non-employability because of the lack of necessary skills and proficiency in the languages that drive local, national and international engines of economic and social growth.

If that happens to those with higher education, what hope is there for those with lesser paper qualifications? Where are the concrete initiatives to support skills and personality development? Why has a section of our youth been, to borrow a line from the acclaimed author Marilynne Robinson, "turning away from the future," and heading for, magic realism-like, some over-romanticised insular existence where love for one's own roots has come to mean hating and victimizing those more vulnerable than themselves?

As it is, a whole generation is now trapped in a rather bizarre sociopathic state of mind. Time and again, our cities and towns have had to bear the brunt of that belligerent and self-defeating mind-set. "Unhappy the land that is in need of heroes," as Bertolt Brecht's Galileo famously said.

But it would be fundamentally dishonest to blame our boys and girls for falling prey to the siren call of that brand of heroism. After all, the dream of all children is to be "somebody" when they grow up. And the idea of being that somebody very much depends on who shapes their existential worldview and what opportunities life offers them. Where are the leaders who inspire our struggling young to embark on the path of hope, hard work, civility and the fulfilment of their individual potential? Was it John F. Kennedy who said, "Those who can't help their poor can't protect their rich?"

**In an age of well-planned and well-maintained city centres, pity that our younger generations only get to know the malodorous and ramshackle space that ours has become. To add more to this would feel like insulting the very place we love and where we were born and brought up.**

At the risk of sounding naive, I'd venture to say most of our misinformed youth really think that bigotry is the only way to express their "patriotism" because they don't know better. If given the necessary awareness, they'd probably channel their energy into something more constructive.

These days, as our badly-in-need-of-infrastructural-overhaul state capital is witnessing another "limping back to normal" from another fallout from the absence of a blueprint for good governance, the question is, will there be the much needed political will to redress the maladies and the apathy that have been plaguing our state's executive branch?

What gives me hope is the fact that our current generation of political leadership consists of men and women who are, more or less, really in their prime. A number of them have travelled widely, are well-educated, articulate and exhibiting admirable composure even when they're being tested by the current spate of unrest.

If their reason to join politics is a noble one, then, it's really high time for them to go all out in steering the ship of government into more favourable directions. It takes a visionary generation of leaders to rise above petty jealousies and politicking to turn things around and command the respect and co-operation of their peers, the young, and the old, too.

*" I always thought I wanted to play professionally, and I always knew that to do that I'd have to make a lot of sacrifices. I made sacrifices by leaving Argentina, leaving my family to start a new life. I changed my friends, my people. Everything. But everything I did, I did for football, to achieve my dream. "*

**--- Lionel Messi**

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LX No.309 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JUNE 19, 2018

## Battle for survival

A new front has been opened by the Opposition against the Narendra Modi government with open support to Delhi Chief Minister, Arvin Kejriwal from a group of four chief ministers. Kejriwal is fighting for survival in the capital. While the Congress is not part of the attempt to save Kejriwal from a difficult situation, it's notable that a reinforcement of the unity against the BJP and PM Narendra Modi was evident in Delhi in the past two days. It strengthens the mood for a united fight against the Saffron side in the General Elections a year ahead.

Arvind Kejriwal is understandably a harried leader. The odd man out in politics has been through a difficult grind ever since he assumed power four years ago. Clearly, enough of cooperation is not coming from the Union Government, mainly for the reason that Kejriwal often asserted his rights as CM or rubbed the rival BJP the wrong way. He has now been on a sit-in at the Lt Governor's residence in the capital, seeking steps to end a virtual non-cooperation from senior officials. So grave is the situation that they are boycotting meetings

called by the Delhi state ministers. The promise by the Lt Governor that he would sort out matters soon had not materialized. It is likely the officials have tacit support from those at the helm of the central government. These officials being essentially part of the central service seem to gather courage to breach discipline and get away with it. Kejriwal's recent support to the anti-BJP opposition and his presence at the swearing in of HD Kumaraswamy as

Karnataka Chief Minister, alongside other Opposition stalwarts, might have added to the already strained ties between the Delhi government and the Centre. The confrontation between Kejriwal and the Centre might only worsen in the months ahead. It however is premature to judge whether Kejriwal's fight, backed by the Opposition, will help him retain power in Delhi. He has done a good job as CM by pushing several people-friendly steps. These included among other things the affordable electricity charges,promptness in several civic services and control over corruption. Yet, allegations are also that he has not measured up to the mark in running a city as huge as the capital. The coming months are crucial for him as also for the main rivals, the BJP and the Congress, in the national capital.

# Mercenary protesters: Who are the merchants?

***By Albert Thyrniang***

The post Punjabi Lane (Them Iew Mawlong) incident/violence debate continues to hog the limelight. Naturally one of the questions is, "Who were the protesters or agitators who created havoc in the city for nearly a week?" For whatever reasons, till date no clear answer has emerged, at least officially, as to who the violent agitators were. The few who were arrested are identified but the hundreds of others are unknown.

The Rangbah Shnong (headmen) of the affected localities informed the government and police that the mostly masked protesters who consisted mainly of youngsters do not belong to their locality (dong). They ignored repeated orders by the headmen and elders to leave the locality and engaged in mob or gang fights with the police night after night. Adopting the Kashmir style of protest by pelting stones at security personnel they went berserk destroying public and private properties. The standoff could have lasted longer if not for the women who took upon themselves the responsibility to free their localities from the 'foreign' goons.

So then the protesters are from outside Shillong. RG Lyngdoh coined the term 'mercenary agitators.' According to the former home minister, who can't find a suitable constituency to once again get elected to the Legislative Assembly, the protesters were non-Shillong residents who were paid by individuals with vested interests or groups to create mayhem in the cosmopolitan city. He viewed the unprecedented and alien practice of protests as a dangerous development. The government agreed with the former Congressman who took an uncompromising stand against the rich businessmen who funded the HNLC a decade ago and stated that the agitators were paid money and supplied liquor too. The violence and riots were funded. The now famous 'mercenary agitators' may even become legendary as future generations could refer to them as such when they remember the Shillong violence of May-June 2018.

Now the worrisome facts! Some of those who were involved in the clashes with police were minors aged between 14 - 17 years. Most are below 20 years of age. 'The innocent' have been released. 'The guilty' are still in jail or in juvenile homes. They are school children and college students. They could be drop outs. They could be unemployed. They could be disgruntled. They could be anti- establishment. They could be at the periphery. But one thing is sure, the majority of the agitating mobs are our younger generation, no matter what part of the state they hail from.

I personally don't buy the view that money was the motive behind the rather sustained violence. You don't risk your life for money. You don't risk getting bullets, or being arrested or being beaten up by the police because you are paid. This is not to say that protesters were not given money and liquor. But certainly it has to be more than cash. What is that compelling force which prompted the hot blooded youth to risk everything?

It has been pointed out by many that what aroused the youngsters was the call to fight for and defend the 'Jaitbynriew'. It is the love of the Khasi race that made them risk their lives. There is nothing wrong with love for the 'Jaitbynriew' (nationalism). However, what they don't realise is their nationalism is misplaced. It can be called hyper-nationalism. No doubt the Khasi-Jaintia tribe has every right to exist and flourish. But so do others. The indigenous tribe need space to reside. So do others. More importantly, the means are absolutely wrong. Violence and rioting are not the correct means to fight for and defend the 'Jaitbynriew'. Revenge is not the right emotion to exhibit one's love for one's race.

Perception is being created and opinion is being built that the 'mercenary agitators' are from West Khasi Hills. The editor of this paper is facing a lot of flak for stating so. She says her views were based on the report that many of those who were arrested are from the socio-economically 'backward' district. She cites poverty and lack of revenue generation opportunities as one of the reasons why the people of the western part of Khasi-Jaintia Hills might have fallen prey to the 'money for protest' deal.

There is no issue if the protesters are from West Khasi Hills (though this writer has sources stating that the protesters were also from outskirts of Shillong). There is no issue with 'mercenary agitators'. However, the question no one is asking is, "Who are the individuals who paid the protesters?" From where are they? Are they from West Khasi Hills? Or East Khasi Hills? Are they from Jaintia Hills or Ri Bhoi District? Are they politicians? If yes are they from the Opposition? Were they out to destabilise and embarrass the MDA government? Are they rich businessmen? What interests do they have in funding the agitation?

The government is on record stating that the agitation was indeed funded. It has promised to go after the funders. It said it has the names from those who were arrested. The police too have the names. Then why has the government not released the names? After accusing the people of a district the government has the moral and constitutional obligation to reveal the names of the persons who funded the agitation. If it does not do so it could be attributed to timidity. Or the reason could be that this government is trying to protect its own interests. Whatever be the case, the scapegoats are identified while the real culprits are going scot free. Not a positive commentary of good governance! Having blamed a certain section of people to have received money in exchange for agitation the media persons too have the obligation to put pressure on the government to reveal the name of the sources of that money. They need to investigate the matter to its depth.

All the more reason for catching the conspirators is because minors were exploited by individuals with vested interests. For their own selfish gains teenagers were made to run riot, to attack the police, to cause destruction, create havoc, to be violent, to instil passion, to arouse emotions, to provoke a false nationalism. Therefore, the government should not spare the real culprits. Anything less will not instil confidence.

The government can easily expose the name of those who funded the agitation. Effortlessly it can zero down on the vehicles that were used for transporting the agitators. With ease it can unearth the whole conspiracy. It can pin point the place or places of the conspiracy. It can even reveal the amount of money a protester got from the sponsors. If it wishes it can uncover the whole chain of events. Will that happen? We may be in for a huge disappointment.

As in other past conflicts, the church's alleged silence has once again come under scrutiny. As Christians are the majority in the state, it is only logical to deduce that most of those who were involved in the recent violence are Christians. Therefore, the expectation that church leaders should use their influence to appeal for peace is natural. That they once again failed to rise to the occasion has baffled many. However, it is informed that the government did meet the various church leaders on one of the first days of violence. The Church leaders supported the government's actions and its endeavour to restore normalcy.

There is an overwhelming support in favour of relocating residents of Punjabi Lane/Sweepers' Colony/Them Iew Mawlong. A high level committee headed by the Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong, has been instituted to study the possibility of relocation of the sweeper residents. It will be interesting to see the suggestions that the HLC, which includes Home Minister, James P K Sangma, Urban Affairs Minister Hamlet Dohling, Health and Family Welfare Minister A L Hek, Agriculture Minister Banteidor Lyngdoh and the CEM of KHADC, PN Syiem, will come up with. But anticipation of legal and human rights hurdles will be a huge challenge for the government.

Can people who have been residing in the area for 200 years be ordered to shift to another place? Will they be willing? Where will they be shifted? Will the chosen village/locality welcome them with open arms? Will there be resistance? It is a complex issue that successive governments have failed to resolve. Will the present government succeed?

Everyone wants to see the residents of Them Iew Mawlong relocated. It requires more than political will for it to come true. Prior to it may I expect political will from the government to tell the citizens of this state who funded the mercenary protesters?

# Mature Government & Strong Opposition makes democracy sustainable

*By Aristotle Lyngdoh*

In a country like India and particularly Meghalaya where democracy has not fully matured, the art of statecraft is indeed a complex issue and lends itself to uncertainties. Simply by winning elections and securing a mandate does not mean that the entire tenure will be a bed of roses. While governance is caught between the aggressive public and the reluctant-cum-static administrative mechanism, the art and wisdom of governance lies in the quality of leadership where integrity, maturity and sincerity are integral. These are the defining skills and strength that will ensure effectiveness to deliver good governance. Democracy on the other hand is the opportunity for the common citizens to raise their voices against governance when it fails to deliver the intended justice. A mature government together with strong and constructive opposition ensures prompt action where needed and establishes a system of checks and balances. There is a saying, 'Grey hair is a symbol of wisdom.' This implies that knowledge and information can converge into wise decisions only after certain period of maturity. Hence the tradition of a grey wig worn by English judges reflects experience and wise judgment believed to be associated with age.

In Meghalaya, the political scenario during the last few decades has seen many dramatic twists and turns and frequent change of governments despite having a top heavy cabinet. But even in such a situation, the Government is still ruled by elected representatives. The Council of Ministers comprises few Cabinet Ministers along with the Ministers with Independent Charge and Ministers of State. While the former were mostly senior people with reputation and long experiences in public life, the latter have been newly elected into the legislature and freshly inducted into the government. By common sense it is understood that the Cabinet as the highest and crucial body in the government holds the key and responsibility for every matter concerning appropriate action for peace, progress and social justice in the state and country. Therefore, it is of vital importance that the composition to this highest appellate authority should comprise seasoned mindsets in order to command the respect and functionality of those in the line of duty. But the electorates themselves have failed to understand this and over the years the essence of electing those with politically mature minds who can be in the cabinet which takes crucial decisions on governance issues has gradually diminished. Those holding cabinet berths at present are young and inexperienced and their proficiency to affect changes to the administrative mechanism is a matter of debate. In my understanding, the current state cabinet is not as strong as it should be and the discussions in its sittings are perhaps dominated by few frontline leaders. The recent flare-up in the city and how our cabinet ministers handled the matter is one occasion that has exposed their immaturity. For instance, ministers holding cabinet rank and coming out openly to address the protesting mob is at best a hare-brained decision. This shows they have been directed to do this job. When the ministers who have been empowered to issue directives on matters of governance have instead become agents and messengers of goodwill then what else can we say! These things have never happened in the past and perhaps for the bureaucracy this is an ideal situation to exercise control over the government indirectly. It is here that the servants can become masters of governance.

The recent law and order breakdown in the city has somehow tested the efficiency and sensibility of the present Government to handle law and order. Thank God the situation has improved much but all that can be said is that the government has neither failed to handle the issue nor has it succeeded. Maximum appreciation should be given to the courageous group of men and women from the adjoining localities of Mawkhar areas who dared to confront protestors and calm their anger down. It is this act of boldness by these responsible residents of Mawkhar Dorbar Shnong and its adjoining localities that has restrained protestors and reduced tension to a great extent. On one hand the District administration and the government are lucky because such violence was not from an organized group/s as in the previous years. Here the protest was leaderless and faceless and had no specific goals and objectives. It is more like disgruntled fans of a particular team during a football or cricket match.

The tension is now waning but it is not easy for the government to move forward. There is 'the devil and deep blue sea' like situation. On one side there is the angry public who want relocation of the Harijan colony. On the other side there is a litigation pending in the court of law as well as an appeal to stay any relocation move and a desire to rebuild the colony by the Sikh community. As of now any wrong move taken by the government in this regard may trigger a different type of conflict. Therefore, what is best for the government and administration is to monitor the developments in the colony very closely, including verifying the antecedents of the residents regularly. Allow the residents of the colony to work for better atmosphere conducive for community building and other welfare activities. The colony, as it is, has been sorely neglected with no one to oversee its welfare. If this trend continues, it will one day become a transaction hub of many illegal activities which are beyond the control of the state. In this regard our Dorbar Shnong are better equipped since strangers cannot freely organize any activities without the consent of the local authority.

The colony is like a sheep without a shepherd and for this the Dorbar of U Syiem Mylliem is responsible and accountable to the public. Since it is this traditional authority that has issued land documents, by common sense it should have also ensured certain rules and regulations for the beneficiaries of this colony to follow and abide. This is the greatest blunder that has been committed where the entire community has to bear the brunt. Therefore, I strongly feel that the solution for this lies at the Office of U Syiem Mylliem together with the logistic support of the state government.

In the past we often heard of the concept of strong and constructive opposition. When the Opposition party in the legislature is weak just as in the previous Congress-led alliance, then Government tends to be arbitrary in nature. The proactive and constructive role of the Opposition is fading away day by day. No one is interested to be in the Opposition and even if they are pushed to that bench, they would make an effort to find space in the treasury bench. A strong Opposition will make the government shaky and cautious in their action and not allow it to bend to bureaucratic suggestions.

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Internet not the enemy; the App is!

Editor,

Apropos the on and off ban on internet, it seems that the Government does not know the difference between 'Internet', 'websites' and 'applications'. For example, Facebook and WhatsApp are websites and applications respectively. It is not the whole Internet. The whole Internet consists of websites like MIT Open Courseware, Edx., Udacity, The Shillong Times website, and billion others. I want to tell the Government that there exist, people who learn, read and earn from various other websites on the Internet; they do not scroll through Facebook/WhatsApp the whole day. A lot of universities/colleges enroll students on the basis of an application filed online. What it means is that one needs to visit the website of a particular institution (again, not Facebook/WhatsApp) and follow the on-screen instruction to file an application. While many people know of this, I am not sure if Meghalaya Government does. The Internet also includes serious activities like Train/Flight booking, which do not happen on Facebook/WhatsApp/Twitter, they happen on IRCTC website for trains and respective carrier website for flights. Hence blocking the Internet is not really an option. The Government can think of taking some lessons on Digital India from other states, perhaps that will help the student community of the state to a great extent.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

## Climate Change

Editor,

Since the industrial revolution humans have engaged in undertakings which threaten planet earth. Industrialization has been glorified as wonderful and progressive, but the fact that it is largely responsible for climate change has been disregarded. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change carrying out its research on Global Warming has reported a considerable rise in global temperatures, due to the rise of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The greenhouse gases which include water vapours, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, CFC's, and HFC's, traps heat that the earth receives through a process called the greenhouse effect.

Though, a significant amount of naturally occurring greenhouse gas is essential for a 'livable temperature' of the planet, its unbridled and rampant rise beyond its naturally occurring levels traps excess of infrared radiation originating from the sun which then is kept confined in the atmosphere. Incorporation of these gases, aerosols like 'soot' from forest fires or from coal-fired power plants are present in the atmosphere, which are dark coloured and they also tend to absorb solar radiation. These trigger an unwelcome imbalance in the diverse natural processes, making the planet more vulnerable and inhospitable for future generations.

The burning of fossil fuels, household exercises, deforestation, energy production, industrialization, and also processes like calcination of limestone to form clinkers in cement production have been the major sources of greenhouse gas emission. Meghalaya a limestone abundant state attracts cement industries, like flowers that attract bees. These cement industries are flourishing in the state and depleting the natural environment. Though industrialization brings employment opportunities and economic growth, its potential to push the natural environment to the verge of collapse is not being addressed.

Earth's mounting temperature is ceaselessly fueling frequent droughts, extreme weather conditions, the rise in the sea level, changes in terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, undernutrition due to crop failures, negative health impacts, civil unrest and much more. Hence, diverse environmental, biological as well as social processes get affected adversely by none other than ' the human activities'. The irreversible damage that we have done to the planet represents an existential dread as the Earth is increasingly becoming less hospitable at the basic level.

Curbing this dangerous change of earth's climate system requires very deep cuts in emissions as well as the promotion and financing of climate engineering, alternatives to carbon energy technologies, reforestation, and adaptation to climate change.

Yours etc.,
Saurav Thapa
Via email

## Of plastic waste

Editor,

Recyclable plastic which was taxed 5.5 per cent before, has now been bracketed in the 18 per cent GST. As a result, plastic recyclers have drastically slashed the price of waste plastic ~ as for example the price of empty milk packets has suffered a 50 per cent reduction. This has sharply reduced the income of poor rag-pickers. It can have an adverse effect on the rate of recycling and thus on the environment. We must not forget that it is mainly because of more than four million of our brothers and sisters who are engaged in rag picking that India has achieved the highest PET (Polyethylene terephthalate) recycling rates (90 per cent) in the world! Recycling is undoubtedly the best way to manage waste plastic menace.

Hence recyclable plastic needs to be put in the five per cent GST category to protect poor rag-pickers and our environment as well. Moreover, adult rag-pickers should be made stakeholders in garbage recycling. It will help achieve 100 per cent PET recycling and end the marginalization of the rag-pickers who are, as it were, the silent soldiers against pollution.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
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.***

*"Democracy substitutes election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few."*

**--- George Bernard Shaw**

**The Shillong Times**

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## BJP Rethink

THE Bharatiya Janata Party is going through a reappraisal after successive defeats in UP by polls, especially at Kairana. Data based on votes polled in 2017 assembly elections show that if the Opposition parties form a solid phalanx, the BJP may lose nearly 50 seats in 2019. The NDA had won 71 out of 80 Lok Sabha seats in 2014. Chief Minister Adityanath has been told to give importance to party leaders with solid organisational background in the ensuing cabinet reshuffle. The party leadership has been asked to strengthen its coordination with the Sangh Parivar. The bureaucracy should be involved less and made to work closely with party leaders. The network of Vistaraks and Panna Pramukhs should play a key role in scripting the party's strategy. The electoral performance of the Adityanath government has disappointed the BJP high command. The CM and other leaders will now travel to all districts of UP and coordinate with National Joint General Secretary (organisation) Shivprakash Sunil Bansal who has been playing the most significant role in the state organisation. But Bansal has been asked to take two steps back.

What is weakening the party in UP is internal squabbles. Several leaders have approached the national leadership with grievances against Bansal's style of functioning. The BJP's national leadership has issued a warning to the party's state leaders to end factionalism and work together before the 2019 elections. However, indications are that internal strife is intensifying. The party's UP affairs in charge OP Mathur is also said to be having differences with Bansal. Adityanath himself should not aggravate polarisation. Statements like the Taj Mahal is not part of Indian culture and that Akbar was not great does not boost the BJP's image. Indeed, these and other statements pertaining to heritage buildings like the Taj Mahal and the verbal assaults on this wonder of the world have made even those with goodwill towards the Modi Government rethink their stances. Yogi Adityanath is busy polarizing voters instead of governing. At the end of the day people want a good government, not one that is continually provoking one section against another.

**LOOKING BACK**

**May 25, 1989**

## Miraculous escape for Airbus

All 270 passengers on board a Calcutta bound Indian Airlines airbus had a miraculous escape today when a vulture hit the aircraft at a height of four thousand feet over Delhi Airport. The bird hit damaged the nose portion of the aircraft, its radome, pressure bulk head and the radar and antenna, causing extensive damage, an Indian Airlines release said. The pilot, however, managed to land the aircraft safely at Delhi airport. Repairing the aircraft would cost about Rs. 25 lakh, the release said. Normal operations from Delhi airport were disrupted for about three hours due to the mishap.

# Rehabilitation vs Relocation conundrum

***By Sonie Kharduit***

The Mawlong Hat episode opens up a wide spectrum of thought provoking issues with regards to urban planning and management as well as overall socio-economic temper of the citizens of the city. This particular incident was more of a crack or fissure, oozing out the molten magma composed of accumulated distrust and incertitude of the native over time. The tension subsided eventually and we must thank the World Cup Football fervour for diverting the temperature from our city to Russia. But nevertheless the damage is done for sure, staining the image of a so called peace loving- Christian dominated state!

The question of rehabilitation vs relocation is highly debatable. These two terms imply two different approaches and render two different results; hence we need to understand this in depth. A macroscopic view of this incident beyond the boundaries of Mawlong Hat, will inform us how grave the problems is. The deplorable condition of Iewduh, the dirt, the feckless structural growth which violate inherent safety clauses, the rampant growth of roadside vendors is a problem waiting to explode. The whole ecosystem is full of risks and devoid of any concept of sustainability. Can we carry forward these two problems to the relocation issue as well?

The abject remark on sweeper colony as 'slum ghettos' is indeed the myopic vision of the mass disregarding the bigger bitter truth. The whole radius surrounding the Iewduh area is no exception from the definition of slum. No effective measures for redevelopment or retrofitting either in the form of Brownfield or Greenfield projects have been considered. Trade license are sold for a price to non-tribals, there are exorbitant user charges, so where does all the money go? The institutions, claiming the proprietorship of these areas whether they are the tribal institutions (Syiemship, Dorbar), the Autonomous Council and other urban local bodies (ULBs) have little or no commitment to maintain the glory of Iewduh. They have allowed this mess to be compounded. It has aggravated with time only to create more opportunities for multivariate conflicts. More so any righteous, leader who dares to shake these institutions got ejected in no time. This tells us how vitiated the system is. The point of jotting down this fact is to bring out the distinction between rehabilitation and relocation. I wonder if anyone would demand the relocation of Iewduh, to cure the mess. Or should we better understand the underlying loopholes and fix the problem in a rehabilitative manner, so as that the livelihoods of people are not affected and the issues are resolved peacefully and sustainably.

Another critical topic which can be subsumed within this debate is the issue of hawkers in our city. The issue has become a white elephant in the room, too big to ignore but difficult to address. Few decades ago the hawker's issue was never perceived as a problem, but today pedestrians have a hard time finding space to walk. The whole concept of public footpath is now sub-ducted. Since the authorities took no preventive steps from the beginning, now the problems have escalated into a livelihoods issue. As witnessed earlier the tentacles of the Iew Mawlong crisis eventually extended to the hawkers because their earning got affected with the curfew and ultimately they became one separate chapter in the whole crisis when they barged into the State Secretariat. The struggle for a meaningful existence often pushes a person to initiate a business start-up even on the roadside. The intention is noble but the platform might not be appropriate. However the manner and pace at which public space got hijacked by this group, points to the laxity of our Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and the rampant corruption, because I'm sure these hawkers could sustain their respective roadside stalls only by making periodic payment to the workers of the ULBs. Why did the authorities allow this to happen in front of their noses? Don't they have the responsibility of maintaining the dignity of being the Scotland of the East or the pride of owning the cleanest village in Asia? In any case if the authorities wake up to undo the mess, will relocation serve the purpose? Will someone even dare to put out such statements? I suppose only the wisdom and integrity of that entity will determine the next move.

A social scientist or city planner would always prefer the rehabilitation formula. If in any case relocation is the last resort, rehabilitation measures must follow suit otherwise the outcome is futile. For example, in many metropolitan cities several relocation projects for slum dwellers have backfired because of one main problem i.e., deprivation of livelihood. The new allocated houses are too distant from their source of livelihood. These groups are mostly associated with informal jobs (domestic servants, artisans, owning small shops etc) hence their survival is intricately linked with the previous locality. Sometimes the newly allotted flat ends up being rented out to a third party while the beneficiary returns to the same spot. In simple words we can conclude that shifting of households without factoring in the livelihood aspect is bound to face resistance. Eventually it defeats the whole resettlement project. The same principles work behind the several failures in the relocating efforts of our government, whether of the tourist taxi stand or the hawkers. Ultimately the economics of the market govern peoples' behaviours and the policy makers might have forgotten to anticipate this fact. Moreover ones need to understand the dynamics of political games in the form of vote banks. Such moves are politically unfavourable, hence no one like to pursue them after coming to power.

One fact which acts as a common denominator or the underlying factors in which the rehabilitation- relocation dilemma arise is the reality of economic hardships. This fact has close ties with the sweeper lane crisis. Since long, the natives have nursed the feeling of being economic sidelined by the outsiders in trade and craftsmanship. The accumulated anger and frustration of losing the importance of being the sons of the soil ultimately got exposed through such sparks and eventually transformed into a violent movement, since this is the easiest route to release the pent- up frustrations.

The next question is who is responsible for the economic hardships of our people. Is it the geography? Is it the failure of government policies or its half-hearted commitment? Is it the self-centred attitude of our people, the jealousy, and non-competitive character? Is it the inherent divisive propagation of church's role or the evil of tainted politics? It's hard to pin point one single cause because all factors act in unison to complement each other to break and fragment the aspirations towards progress and collective well-being. Even within this small tribal population, the disparity is apparent; the rich are getting richer and the poor getting poorer. It's no secret that the wealth of our political leaders have increased manifold after assuming power. Various pressure groups use issues as the staircase towards the power game. A smart aspirant starts his journey as the torch-bearer of so called welfare unions only to reach the apex of power but with zero passion and commitment toward the people.

As to the causes of socio-economic disability of our tribes, we could do with self- introspection. What kind of attitude and morality are we our cultivating and integrating. When the disparity and inequality is evident, then the blame must be directed inwards rather than outwards. God has given us both heart and mind, equipping human beings to take conscious and responsible decisions. When we can steal away a poor man's share, or when we lack the conscience to help a person in distress then this is a crisis of morality rather than of law. Law is ineffective when the moral compass of the society points south.

Coming back to the conundrum between the two R's, it's worth exploring more on the rehabilitative aspect because it assures greater acceptance and it supports the sustainability aspect as well. For example relocating the sweeper lane will be a legal nightmare for all the stakeholders and once it enters the court premises then seeing the light of the day for the final verdict will take a lifetime. So why not explore the rehabilitative approach? If we can transform the slum image of the area into a well planned colony, it would please all the parties and give scope for healing the bad blood between the two communities. The pro-activeness of law enforcers to bridge the security gap will also bridge the trust deficit gap. We need to realise that relocation is not a magic wand for every problem. Besides, the add-ons in the form of distrust generated in the process are worth considering. Relocation might end up just relocating the problems with no real solutions.

Kashmir: Elusive Peace

# Where is the political will?

***By Poonam I Kaushish***

The travails of picturesque Kashmir continue. Political India is in the midst of loud cantankerous cackle on Kashmir. All busy dissecting, debating and deliberating on the ceasefire and elusive calm in the Valley amidst rising anger, notwithstanding the 'visible' signs of normalcy which at the best of times, mean the absence of 'abnormalcy', as the fragile status quo translates to a state of no war, no peace!

Over two months there were 65 militant deaths in Anantnag, Pulwama, Shopian and Kulgam districts, 28 security personnel and 78 Pakistan violations along the LoC. Despite the one month long unilateral ceasefire during Ramzan declared by the Centre, the dance of death and destruction continues unabated. All this while both the Centre and State use the olive branch-coercion-curfew paradigm to quell incidents of stone pelting, intermittent bloodshed and killings.

In fact, the recent violence once again highlights the Centre's inability or should one say myopic limitations of total dependence on force to deal with the Kashmiri sense of alienation. From the security point of view, this is a big success but the bad news is that ground reports suggest local youth are still joining the militant ranks. Of course, one cannot expect miracles overnight as the K problem was not created in a day and nor will it end by applying populist balm to extract an extra mile! No matter if it creates more problems than it solves!

Undeniably, permanent peace remains a distant dream for the people of beleaguered Jammu and Kashmir. This raises a moot point: Can the olive branch of ceasefire address the sense of alienation? Can the Government muster the political will of taking hard decisions? Does it have any long term plan to deal with the situation? Can it tackle the emotional outburst? Put a rest to the pro-Azadi slogans?

No, not in today's scenario. Sadly New Delhi has treated Kashmir as a problem of real estate and experimented with various permutations and combinations by wielding the big stick against trigger-happy militants and stone pelters in the hope that its policy of more of the same, more Rashtriya Rifles, more BSF, CRPF, money and material would somehow yield dividends. However, little effort is being made to see whether the policy is getting us anywhere.

We can keep the land. But, importantly, how are we going to keep the people? Or prevent innocents caught in this conflict from being killed? The crux of the issue is that while not a few Kashmiris seek exclusion from the Indian State, New Delhi believes in inclusion leading to violence.

Remember, Kashmir is not a law and order problem of a few miscreants holding the population to ransom through terror. Nor is it merely a territorial dispute with Pakistan that can be resolved by enforcing draconian laws. Essentially, the problem is political and mainly of a people who feel estranged from the Administration.

No effort is made to instill a sense of security among the people. Alongside, the money meant for public development finds its way into private pockets and the material is used for individual betterment. A vicious circle resulting in disillusionment! Worse, New Delhi and Srinagar continue to take knee-jerk actions instead of learning the art of firm management and containment.

Alas, Kashmir's awaaz gets lost in the din of our netas rhetorical speeches. Prospects of peace have been marred by mutual mistrust by mainstream and separatist politicians. Till both realize and acknowledge each others' role in State policy, a consensus on peace and the way forward will continue to elude us.

New Delhi would be foolish not to realize that economics is no guarantor of peace or to win people's hearts. Till a political solution is found, there is no hope in hell for a return to normalcy as deep distrust runs through the complex strands of the Kashmir imbroglio.

What next? True, the ceasefire has put trouble mongers on the back foot as they are finding it difficult to create an anti-India hype and attract more youths to its fold. Whether the peace tune plays out or not, a start of a political process is desirable which cannot take off without preparing a political-socio-economic pitch. As it stands whether the "return" efforts to misguided youth and amnesty for stone-pelters succeeds in motivating them to shun violence and lead a normal life, needs to be watched.

With Kashmir in its present flux, the Centre and State have to walk a tight-rope. The State Government and politicians have to stop passing the buck to the Centre and take responsibility for their actions. By continuously blaming New Delhi for all that is wrong in the State the polity is only harming the people, a fruitless exercise.

High time all concerned address the "trust and Government deficit" in the Valley. Indeed, the deficit is so enormous that innumerable measures seem to be negated even before they can be initiated or have little impact on the ground in normalising the situation.

Simultaneously, the Centre and Hurriyat need to walk the talk which should be without any pre-condition, albeit talks only within the ambit of Indian Constitution or solely on independence. Both need to win back confidence. This is the only way to bring a lasting solution to Kashmir as imposing conditions has stalled chances of peace for over three decades.

Asserted Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh, "There is overall improvement in the law and order … there is no problem in any dialogue with Pakistan but it has to stop promoting terrorism first." Certainly, he addressed the internal and external dimension of the 'K' dispute by reaching out to Islamabad and separatists. The question however remains: Is the reach enough to be productive?

The Centre needs to think out-of-the-box, a fresh approach and embark on a new track of a concrete hard-nosed comprehensive long-term policy. Less of political romanticism and more of practical calculations! The sooner we realise this, the easier it will be for finding a panacea to the Kashmir imbroglio. Simultaneously, wounds need healing as promises by successive Governments offering peace remain unfulfilled and the only hope these people have is hoping for the impossible. Granted, one cannot expect dramatic success overnight. Also, granted that winning the minds and heart of the people is not easy.

The need of the hour is imagination, innovation and impetus. Remember, Kashmir is not a place where destiny seems to shadow events like a madman with a razor in his hand. Nor is it a toy to be frittered, twisted, discarded or dumped. It is a national issue, which transcends political planks, ideology, philosophy and thesis.

New Delhi has to leave no 'stone' unturned to further its national interests and make Kashmiris' truly feel they belong to India. The Kashmiris' too need to rise to the occasion. The Prime Minister needs to take the leap of faith and connect with Kashmiris. The question NaMo needs to answer: Does he have the political will to cut through the welter of vested interests that arrest purposeful action? Ultimately, since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed. INFA

**TO THE EDITOR**

## What a change!

Editor,

Prior to the recent Assembly Election in our State umpteen SMS and Video Clips bombarded the cell-phones to vote for a particular Party to make the state a utopia of Development.With the formation of the new Government came the ear piercing hooters of the VIP vehicles which were not heard of in this State since the Modi Government came to power in Delhi. The Supreme Court Ruling permits only the Governor, the Chief Minister of the State and the Chief Justice of the High Court to enjoy the VIP privileges apart from an Ambulance on Emergency and the Police also only on Emergency.

The present dispensation in the State is certainly disregarding the SC Ruling. Is this the 'Change' we voted for? By the way, the Supreme Court does not even recognise the Central Ministers as VIPs apart from the President, the Prime Minister and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Yours etc,
Sajjad M. Ali,
Via email

## Is food processing a viable proposition?

Editor,

It is amusing to hear that the Directorate of Food Processing is approved by the new government to start functioning in our state. The main aim of the new department according to the government is to encourage private parties and entrepreneurs to set up food processing units in the state. One such factory was already established at Amlarem Sub-Division almost two decades back by a private party (individual) perhaps with the assistance from the Department of Industries. But till date, only the factory is there without functioning. The main reason for it remaining non-functional is due to the unavailability of fruits.

It may be mentioned that for setting up of any factory (Preservation Factory) there should be surplus production of fruits, vegetables, etc. As of now, we don't have any surplus of any fruits or vegetables when compared to other parts of the country. In our State oranges, pineapples etc., are sold at not less than Rs 10 apiece for oranges and Rs 20 Rupees for a pineapple. So the question of preserving fruits does not arise and is not economically viable. Further, potatoes and tomatoes are sold at not less than Rs 10 and Rs 30 per kilogram respectively, while in other parts of India these vegetables are sold at less than a rupee per kilogram and their production is always in surplus.

However, the government may help or assist the private entrepreneurs to establish few factories in Garo Hills to process cashew nut which could be consumed raw. Fifty years back, production of maize in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills was very significant and may be considered surplus. But during those days maize had to be transported outside the state because local people cannot consume the same. It is for the present Government to find out the reason why there is a decline in the production of maize today where at present the factories producing animal feed have to depend on maize from outside the state.

Yours etc.,
Mr L. Marbaniang
Umtong, Khyrim
Syiemship

## What do genes have to do with crime?

Editor,

It is an irony that when we try to evaluate a person's quality, good or bad, with the help of gene theory, we tend to forget that we have a very powerful mind of our own and the game of permutations and combinations that genes always play. In our way of oversimplifying and limiting everything to casteist inheritance, we have been doing those honest ones a grave injustice whose ancestors resorted to criminal acts. An estimated one in five Australians has a convict ancestry. The figure is even higher in Tasmania as 74 per cent of Tasmania's population are estimated to be descended from convicts. Now, what is the outcome of this? What is it about the level of corrupt and criminal inheritance in Australia in general and Tasmania in particular?

Victoria Parliamentary Report 2001 on crime in Australia found that Tasmania with highest proportion of convict descendants had the second - lowest crime rate in Australia. And Australia ranked as the 13th least - corrupt nation in the corruption perceptions index in a study of 180 countries conducted by Transparency International in 2018. Unfortunately, India is perhaps the only country that has been following the British raj legacy of tagging tribes as hereditary criminals. Many tribes helped freedom fighters with information, food and arms during the1857 mutiny. As a result, many tribes were branded as criminals after the mutiny. Eventually, 237 castes and tribes were given criminal - by - birth tag under the Criminal Tribes Act, 1931.

After independence, the government of India had replaced this Act with the Habitual Offenders Act, 1952. This Act makes many tribes live in fear and they have been made easy scapegoats and sometimes even replacements for criminals who the police fails to arrest. The National Human Rights Commission has recommended the repeal of this Act. The need of the hour is to immediately scrap such a vindictive and irrational Act.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

*"There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning."*

**--- Jiddu Krishnamurti**

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LX No.309 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JUNE 21, 2018

## Break-up in J&K

THE coalition of the PDP and the BJP was an uneasy alliance from the start. The BJP has at last severed ties with the PDP unseating the Mehbooba Mufti government. The alliance lasted for three years despite many contradictions. The BJP wished to play tough with militants and separatist in the valley. The PDP on the other hand wanted a conciliatory approach to these bodies though the alliance with the BJP toned down the approach. Kashmir Valley as a result drew away from Jammu. Burhan Wani's funeral climaxed the anger. Daily protests followed and normalcy vanished from the Kashmir Valley. The Kathua gang-rape and murder of a Muslim girl earlier this year caused indignation all over the state especially because of the apathy and defence of the gang-rape by some BJP leaders of the state. The rift was wide open and division in the coalition widened over the Ramzan ceasefire. Shujaat Bukhari's assassination for fighting against attack on freedom of the press proved the last straw.

Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti has resigned. There are no contenders for forming an alternative government. The inevitable solution is Governor's rule which has been a frequent occurrence in Jammu & Kashmir. With that, security operations may be further stepped up thereby antagonizing local people. Kashmir's militancy is no longer prompted by sub-nationalism but by an Islamic identity in recent times. Pakistan's support to terrorism in J&K shows no signs of abating in spite of feeble attempts by the two countries to promote bi-lateralism. The BJP has its eyes on the 2019 Lok Sabha polls with an emphasis on nationalist pro-Hindutva plank. The alliance with the PDP did not go well with the mission. J&K assembly polls will probably be held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha elections. Prolonged Governor's rule will only cause resentment among Kashmiri people.

# MBOSE Question Papers and Critical Thinking

***By Iwamon Laloo and Glenn Kharkongor***

According to a news item that appeared in this newspaper on May 28, 2018, MBOSE is "planning to review the pattern of question papers for the board examinations". Mr. Pravin Bakshi, the then executive chairman of MBOSE told The Shillong Times "that a move has already been made to set question papers that will evoke the creativity of the students". According to him, "education is not memorizing lessons, but it should spark critical thinking".

Bravo to MrBakshi! I do not recall any MBOSE administrator speak about improvements in the school education system and these comments come as a breath of fresh air. Surely this will spark much needed reform in the examination pattern and provide a more meaningful education for our children in the state.

In this article we will first analyse the quality of the 2018 SSLC question papers of MBOSE. Secondly we will compare the pattern of MBOSE question papers with the 2017 CBSE Class X, and also the 2017examination papers of the General Certificate for Secondary Education (GCSE) of the UK.

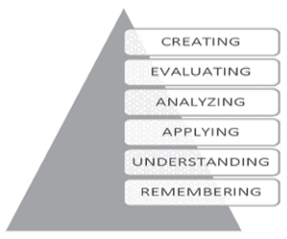
MrBakshi has used two important adjectives for the word 'thinking': creative and critical. Creative thinking implies imagination, idea generation and inventiveness.Critical thinking means the ability to reflect, analyse and critique. While these qualities are different, both require elaboration, integration and synthesis. For both to be useful, they must lead to application and innovation, so that new ideas and tools can be developed.

But do school children have these intellectual abilities. According to Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development, a theory that all academicians are familiar with, the fourth and final stage is the development of 'formal operations'. During this stage, which begins at age 11 years and continues into adolescence and adulthood, the young individual can form abstract concepts, use multiple variables in systematic ways and connect thoughts and ideas in critical and creative ways. Apart from abstract thinking they can also integrate their visual, auditory, kinesthetic senses and also comprehend the importance of attitudes, values and morality. In other words, children that appear for the matric examination had developed higher order mental abilities several years earlier.

The problem is that the educational system is not challenging enough and conventional examinations do not measure children's ability or achievement in a valid and meaningful way.

**Pyramid of Cognitive Skills**

A useful framework that captures levels of cognitive ability is Bloom's Taxonomy, a tool that perhaps all teachers know about. It can be depicted as an ascending order of cognitive skills from simple recall to creativity.




Bloom's Taxonomy is a useful tool to guide teachers in designing approaches to teaching-learning that develop higher order mental skills. It is also a tool that can guide the construction of question papers. If a student has higher order thinking skills then the examination papers must include questions that measure these higher abilities.

**Mostly recall questions**

Unfortunately MBOSE question papers seem to mainly measure recall ability, forcing students to memorise large amounts of material to pass the examination. A very small proportion of questions require the understanding of concepts and principles and only rarely are questions that need analysis, application, synthesis or creativity, included in the question papers.

We looked at MBOSE examination papers in the subjects of English, Social Sciences and Science to measure the proportion of questions that required recall, comprehension, or higher order thinking skills. See Table below. It was difficult to break up the marks in the table because Bloom's levels were different between the Eitherand Or options, another deficiency of the question paper.

Table I Type of questions in MBOSE

| Subject (marks) | Recall | Comprehension | Critical thinking |
|---|---|---|---|
| English (80) | 64 | 6 | 10 |
| Social studies: Geography (28) | 16 | 12 | 0 |
| Science: Chemistry (28) | 22 | 6 | 0 |

In the question paper for English, which includes language and literature, the vast majority of marks was given to recall questions. Most of these recall questions required the memorisation of passages and facts from the prescribed texts. In this section, one question was: "Maria Sharapova reached the world number one position in women's tennis on: (i) Monday, 22 August, 2005 (ii) Monday, 26 September, 2005 (iii) Friday, 22 August, 2004. It is difficult to understand the importance of this memorisedpiece of trivia, that too in an English examination.

In MBOSE, compared to the CBSE and GCSE, only a small fraction of the questions required comprehension and higher order skills. In the GCSE, the majority of questions tested higher skills. See the table below:

Table II Higher order questions %

| Subject | MBOSE | CBSE | GCSE |
|---|---|---|---|
| English | 20% | 69% | na |
| Social studies: Geography | 11% | 33% | 69% |
| Science:Chemistry | 21% | 52% | 72% |

Here is an example of a good question from the CBSE science paper: Water is an elixir of life, a very important natural resource. Your Science teacher wants you to prepare a plan for a formative assessment activity, "How to save water, the vital natural resource''. Write any two ways that you will suggest to bring awareness in your neighbourhood, on 'how to save water'. In a GCSE paper, a picture was shown of a crowded beach and the student was asked to write an essay on how the beach could be protected from environmental damage.

The CBSE question papers use tables and diagrams and the GCSE papers also include pictures. In contrast none of the MBOSE papers have tables, graphs or diagrams. The chemistry paper does not even have a one line chemical equation, nor do the physics or biology sections have any graphics at all.It seems that the paper setters are neither serious nor inventive. This is reflective of a systematic malaise.

**So what now?**

A workshop should be conducted for paper setters to improve the mix of questions. This is an important first step and seeing the new pattern of questions, schools and teachers will be influenced to change the manner of teaching and preparation of students for the board exams. In anticipation of these changes, schools could be sent samples of model question papers before next year's examinations.

An NCERT expert group on education of tribal students, has observed that the "school curriculum fails to take account of tribal cultures as autonomous knowledge systems with their own epistemology, transmission, innovation and power. The cognitively ethnocentric demands of concentration on and memorisation of the content of the text by `rote', all prove problematic for SC/ ST children. Testing procedures too are based on urban middle class values - the competitiveness and system of rewards that examinations represent is often culturally anomalous to Scheduled Tribe children who are brought up in an atmosphere of sharing."

Board examinations aim to measure one-time performance. The main usefulness of this is to compare the result of one student with a large cohort in a cross-section manner. It would be better to profile the achievements of individual students by listing the competencies they have achieved, such as numeracy, problem solving and social ability. Perhaps MBOSE could pioneer these radical but relevant concepts.

With an education policy being finalized for the State, this is a timely opportunity for MBOSE to make long-overdue reforms in its factory approach to school education and examinations.Operation New Hope in Ladakh is a successful example of an indigenous approach to relevant education. Instead of the three 'R's, they have three 'H's: Bright Head, Skillful Hand and Kind Heart.

*(The authors are from Martin Luther Christian University)*

# SMART City, Un-Smart Planning?

*By Shashi Shikha*

Focus on technology and private-public partnership model as innovations in building infrastructure for our cities is not "smart". Innovation in city planning and infrastructure development cannot just be technology enabled solutions, says Shashi Shikha, Senior Program Officer. City planners need to take the lead in building citizen-engaged, innovative planning for our cities.

For the past two months, every morning on my way work, I have noticed overflowing drain water on a broad stretch of National Highway. The drain is clogged, though some portion of it looks as if the stones have been moved to open it up. Since the puddle is right on the highway, it is hard to believe this overflowing sewage water has gone unnoticed by the municipal authorities. But, seemingly, no corrective action has been taken. It's been less than three years since this stretch of the highway was widened. Construction debris remains. Every now and then sewage water overflows, collecting in puddles.

What will happen when the monsoon rains arrive? Another Gurujam? The nightmare of 2016 when a particularly heavy downpour gridlocked traffic on MG Road and the NH8 for nearly 24 hours because of waterlogging and two road cave-ins. This brought the realization that Millennium City could just as easily "drown" because of its poorly designed and ill maintained civic infrastructure.

On the one hand, our current government has been promoting SMART cities, innovative solutions and use of technology to improve urban living. On the other, Indian cities remain plagued by lack of infrastructure such as drainage and quick response to emergency situations. It is evident that our city authorities are not prepared to provide basic services to the millions that make their home in urban India.

Is this because we have lost sight of the fundamental, integrative principles of city planning? When we plan the layout of roads, do we think of rainwater harvesting? When constructing sewers, do we plan what will happen to the debris and waste construction material? Are the systems and mechanisms for repair and maintenance of roads charted out when planning a highway? Are these things difficult to do, or do we ignore them because they are expensive? Is it just lack of foresight? Or even worse, sheer negligence?

Recently, I attended a consultation on 'Innovative solutions for scaling up sanitation services' in Jaipur. The principal secretary, urban housing and development, of the Rajasthan government raised a very valid issue for the future planning of our cities: before we can even begin to talk about innovation in planning, we need to be clear that the fundamentals are in place. Citing the example of upgrading sewerage systems in a city, he explained that for a sewer to be constructed, three different contracts are awarded - one for constructing outfall drains, one for lateral drains and a third for constructing the Sewerage Treatment Plant (STP). Tendering to multiple contractors complicates coordination at different stages of construction, because of which delivery suffers. Moreover, the contracts do nothing to ensure that citizens are made aware and enabled to take individual sewerage connections for their houses. The fact that any infrastructure remains defunct without human response towards its acceptance, usage and maintenance is overlooked.

Construction of drains should be undertaken in a manner that day-to-day life in the city remains unaffected, or is at least managed with least disruption, and the job is considered complete only when the road has been re-laid. Moreover, every city has unique psychographic patterns and geographical limitations. Innovative solutions for sewerage systems require availability of water.

*" On the one hand, our current government has been promoting SMART cities, innovative solutions and use of technology to improve urban living. On the other, Indian cities remain plagued by lack of infrastructure such as drainage and quick response to emergency situations. It is evident that our city authorities are not prepared to provide basic services to the millions that make their home in urban India."*

A well-functioning STP needs 135 litres of water per person in the city. In cities which lack water availability owing to depleted water tables, the STP sanitation model will not be successful. However, in the name of innovative solutions, international infrastructure funding agencies and consultants recommend STPs as the best sanitation model. Such recommendations sadly remain undisputed. Nowadays, an alternative sanitation model that is being discussed is on-site Faecal Sludge and Septage Management (FSSM).

How a city chooses to develop its infrastructure and the "innovative solutions" it picks must be contextual, based on a city's resources and be inclusive of people's participation. Planners must focus on the nuances of huge infrastructure investment decisions, such as leveling of roads across patches when roads are constructed, covering drains after construction, and providing for rainwater harvesting or outlets when building concrete roads. Lack of foresight has resulted in underpasses in Chennai and Mumbai during the rainy season becoming ponds so deep that they submerge cars. Are we really such poor planners?

Focus on technology and private-public partnership model as innovations in building infrastructure for our cities is not "smart". Innovation in city planning and infrastructure development cannot just be technology enabled solutions. It requires new ways of thinking, processing and building people's participation in the planning process. City planners must take on this responsibility, of demystifying planning and enabling citizen participation, if our cities are to become genuinely SMART.

(Courtesy blog on Engaged Citizens, Responsive City, Participatory Research In Asia (PRIA))

**TO THE EDITOR**

## SMB & Relocation of Punjabi lane

Editor,

Shillong Municipal Board (SMB) dates back to 1878 when Shillong was constituted into a Station under the Bengal Municipal Act, 1876. The Shillong Station comprised of (1) Mawkhar village which included Jaiaw, Jhalupara and Mawprem and (2) Laban village comprising Lumparing, Madan Laban, Kench's Trace and Rilbong. Mawkhar and Laban were included within Shillong Station vide the seal of agreement signed on 15th November, 1878 by the then Syiem of Mylliem, (L) Haiñ Manik Syiem. On March 10, 1909, the Shillong Station was upgraded and converted into a Municipality under the Bengal Act, 1884 with the inclusion of Haneng Umkhrah (now Lower Laitumkhrah and Jail Road). Shillong was the summer headquarters of the British Government of Assam Province and Lt. Governor was bestowed with powers to head the Shillong Municipality for sanitation management, etc.

Shillong was well maintained in cleanliness and was named the cleanest hill station of India. It gained in fame and became the most coveted hill station where the British rulers and their families settled. Shillong and its forested canopy then earned the sobriquet of 'Scotland of the East'. For proper management of solid and liquid waste, ten Municipal Wards were organized on November 15, 1910 namely Laitumkhrah, European Quarters, Jail Road & Haneng Umkhrah, Police Bazar, Mawkhar, Mission Compound & Jaiaw, Qualapatty & Southern Mawkhar, Jhalupara & Mawprem, Laban and Mali. The Chairman of the different Municipal Wards were senior British Officers. In 1924, the Vice-Chairman was elected by the local people to assist the then Chairman and to be in charge of certain wards of the SMB. During the British rule, the elected Vice-Chairman were Rai Saheb Siva Nath Dutta (1924-27), P.S. Guha (1928-30), W. Reade (first Khasi ; 1930-34), Handerson G. Philip Shabong (1935-37), R.C. Das Gupta (1938-41), Theodore Cajee (1942-44), and A.C. Sen (1.7.1944 to 10.3.1948). On attaining Independence a member of the Constituent Assembly of the Country, (L) J.J.M. Nichols Roy advocated for protection of tribal lands under Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Further expansion of the Shillong Municipal area was opposed by the then Chief of Hima Mylliem, i.e. the Syiem of Mylliem as per provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. On attaining Statehood and in 1974, the Government of Meghalaya reorganized the 10 Municipal Wards by division of the existing big wards into 27 Wards within the specified area of about 25 sq. km.

Shillong Municipal Board has its own office building in Jail Road covering an area of about 70,000 sq. ft. (land documents available with SMB) which includes the Jail Road Petrol Pump (on lease). In 2005, it was decided to construct a 4-storied building permissible under the then MUDA Buildings bye-law. The Plan and Design was prepared with the help of the Structural Engineers and Architects of the Directorate of Urban Affairs, Meghalaya. The plan is as per G+3 specifications:

o Basement & Ground floor - Parking lot

o1st, 2nd& 3rd floor - Shopping Mall

o 4th (top) floor - SMB Office

The plan and design is to generate monthly income of 40 lakh approximately under the public-private-partnership mode with 50-50 share of the profits as per agreement to be formulated between SMB and the Private Partner.

Now about the relocation of the SMB employees and their families in Punjabi Lane. Besides the SMB Office complex at Jail Road, the Shillong Municipality has 5 staff quarter buildings located at Lower Ïewmawlong (later known as Sweepers line). No RCC building was constructed by SMB, European Ward (European quarters - Bishop Cotton Road), Crinoline (near the swimming pool), Laitumkhrah Beat House (adjacent to Police Station), Polo (near Hotel Polo Towers). Some of the quarters are in dilapidated. Improvement and extension of quarter buildings in Bishop Cotton Road and Polo are urgently needed for required relocation of Punjabi Lane. State Government may expedite the work and relocation of the employees of SMB along with their families within a month. The families include the aged retired employees who no longer have close relatives in Punjab or anywhere else. These elderly persons (retired employees) have expressed their readiness to stay anywhere in Shillong in the SMB quarters as long as they are alive.

Yours etc.,
W. LiningstarLyngdoh, (IAS Retd)
Former Secretary,
Urban Affairs Deptt. &
CEO,SMB

## Pathetic road condition

Editor,

The road leading from Pynursla down towards Nongjri, Nongshken and other adjoining villages near the international border with Bangladesh is small, narrow and in dilapidated. The recent landslide along that road had caused losses in terms of human capacity and economic growth, though the area produces varieties of horticulture and forest products but there is no market development. The VIPs who were stuck in that landslide stretch have at least come to understand the difficulties that their constituents continue to face. The VIPs appear like comets once in five years. The present Central Government led by the BJP has pledged to bring development in all forms and at all levels in rural places. Hope that the NPP-led Govt being an ally will bring transformation in these villages.

Yours etc..
Dominic S.Wankhar
Shillong

## Cut off marks in top colleges

Editor,

The results of the secondary and the higher secondary exams of all the states across the country have been declared and the successful candidate who are aspiring to join the reputed institutions of the country are at loss as they could not make through the cut off percentages of those institutions. Delhi University has announced the first cut off percentage and for all the streams. In all the departments the cut off marks are over 95%. The students who scored more than 85% but less than 90% feel that admission in the reputed institutions of the country should be based on entrance for all the subjects like JEE for engineering and NEET for medical studies. Some students might be excellent but due to one or the other reason may not have been able to give his/ her best in the examinations. Such candidates should also get a chance to study the course of their choice in those reputed institutions. Keeping all these factors in mind the government must instruct those educational institutions to increase the number of seats or set up more educational institutions to meet the demand of ever increasing population. Otherwise, higher studies in good institution will only be for few toppers.

Yours etc.,
Anil Singh Roka,
Via email

*"The regularity of a habit is generally in proportion to its absurdity."*
**--- Marcel Proust**

**The Shillong Times**
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## Failure of Trilateral Dialogue

IT may not have been judicious for India to promptly turn down the proposal for a trilateral dialogue between Delhi, Islamabad and Beijing initiated by Chinese ambassador Luo Zhaohui. Beijing had suggested last year that it could rename the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to overcome Delhi's objections to the Belt and Road initiative. Envoys do not express personal views and their suggestions may be treated as their governments'. Perhaps the Chinese ambassador was testing the waters. Delhi calls Luo's views personal. But there is no denying that Beijing is showing interest in improving relations between India and Pakistan. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is to sponsor the move.

India normally gets cold feet about third party mediation between India and Pakistan. Both the US and the UK had all along advocated a bilateral approach. But for decades it has proved abortive. Delhi is apprehensive that big powers could impose a Kashmir solution on India. That, of course, will not be acceptable by either India or Pakistan. But, in today's political context, India's reluctance to third party mediation may be a little unwise. This has only compounded the problem and turned it into a hot potato. Third party intervention has now become a common approach. Mongolia sat down with Russia and China. The USA which is now called Unreliable States of America is sending envoys to Korea and China with Russia stepping in to solve the problems of the Korean peninsula. Afghanistan seeks a trilateral resolution of the Taliban Crisis. Delhi should propose a threefold agenda to Beijing. There is no point in going to the table unless what is on the table makes sense.

**LOOKING BACK**

**May 25, 1989**

## Structural, functional issues to the fore

Panchayati Raj institutions have been in bad shape in most parts of the country - either stagnating of non-functional for the most part. In State where they have been working, controversies have submerged much of their gains as bodies reflecting grassroots democracy. The most staggering aspect of Panchayati institutions is that 30 years after initiation there is no uniformity of structure, nor a well-accepted format of role, functions and powers of Panchayati Raj bodies.

There is urgent need to settle these major aspects of PRIs through a national consensus, for the issues being dealt with are of vital concern for the political structure of Indian democracy at the district and village levels, as also economic planning at the district level. These questions cannot obviously be resolved by making the panchayati set-up and electoral plank, or by giving it a Centre-versus -State tilt. That would only confound the issues and be a of disservice to strengthening the panchayati system in the country.

# Social Media: Anti-social engagement and conformity

***By Patricia Mukhim***

So we all have a smart-phone even if we might not have "education," which supposedly helps us understand the complicity of spreading fake news. After all, who cares about boring, old mainstream journalism with its propensity to claim a sacro-sanctity that's no longer kosher. This is a bright, young generation of millennials used to instant coffee and instant gratification. They can write the Queen's English with a dash of American irreverence and there are no elders or juniors in that world; only peers! The world to them is hot, flat, and crowded to borrow Thomas Friedman's words but it is also equal. The elders are called old hags; cannibals, ugly witches or bitches. But mind you this generation is also conscious of gender. Swear words are reserved for bitches. Men are respected for maintaining a respectful silence in front of the millennials. So welcome to that world. If you don't like it, go kill yourself. That's the rule of the game. The millennials call the shots now. And shut up those who still believe that life means playing by the rules. In this game of thrones, even the Church is far behind and has very little influence on the minds and behaviour of the millennials. Only the Church will not admit it for fear of having to wind up their business of acting the middle-men between God up there in his heaven and us sinful, remorseless souls biding time on this hot, flat and crowded earth.

The Orwellian euphemisms are back with a bang today. 'War is Peace, Violence is Safety, Censorship is Comfort. Then there is the war on history and the denial or demolition of ugly or inconvenient historical facts. So everything is plunged down the memory hole. No wonder today there is a race for renaming roads, parks and what have you. Our world today is replete with intolerant culture warriors. This is not dystopia; rather it's a world peopled by authoritarian brutalists. In this world you don't use words to illuminate the complexity of reality but to eradicate the complexity of the real world where jobs are hard to come by, but, expenses for recharging the smart-phone must be met. So too the expense of sitting in ritzy cafes where a cup of coffee is nothing less than a solid one hundred bucks; an amount that is not easy to come by as those of us who slog their butts off know. But who cares? There is need to meet peers to craft up Che Guevera sort of messages and dash them to the conformist group that waits with bated breath for that message that they can forward with pride to their friends and friends of friends and friends of their friends. The call for retributive violence begins! That's life as it is lived by the millennials today who believe the world owes them a living and parents owe them regular pocket money because it is their fault for sending them to school, college and university and then not being able to land them a job worth the certificate on which the qualification is neatly written in calligraphy. So social media is the new anti-social platform for crowd sourcing of a different kind!

What schools, colleges and universities do not teach the millennials is dissent which is a non-negotiable attribute and which is the only thing that leads to intellectual progress. Without dissent life is like a stagnant, murky pond where even lotuses refuse to grow. Thomas Kuhn the revolutionary American physicist historian and philosopher correctly commented that competing scientific theories proposed by intellectual dissidents are often rejected by the established scientific elite until they are no longer deniable. There are many examples but how can we not name Galileo Galilei and Nicolas Copernicus. However, it is not only in science that intellectual dissidence is imperative. Much of John Locke's thinking was counter to the prevailing thought of the time, as was Edmund Burke's. As someone rightly remarked, "The history of ideas is unimaginable without dissent." Often we believe we live in an ideal world where political and social dissent is in full play and is accepted as the only means to bring about change. We tend to believe that activism and public discussions would provoke people to want change and work towards it. But does our world encourage public discussions where people can freely air their views without being shouted down. Perhaps this is possible in very, very few spaces. But such spaces are dwindling because we no longer live in a free world today. Our thoughts expressed publicly over social media are brutalised and pulverised. According to Freedom House - an independent watchdog organization dedicated to the expansion of freedom and democracy around the world, over half the world lives 'un-free' or only 'partially free' lives, and even in more free societies, freedoms are often under pressure.

The pressure to conform is becoming real. "If you don't think like us, you are against us," is the code of honour today. But what conformity kills is critical, free thinking. Alas the need to clings to our groups is so dominant that we miss discovering what we, ourselves, truly think and truly want. The only good news yet is that the real "us" is trying its best to come out and assert independence from the claustrophobia of group thinking. It is important to set that real "us" free to live the passionate, authentic, inspired life for which we were created, simply because conforming squelches our truth.

It was John Kenneth Galbraith who said, "Humanity's most valuable assets have been the non-conformists. Were it not for the non-conformists, he who refuses to be satisfied to go along with the continuance of things as they are, and insists upon attempting to find new ways of bettering things, the world would have known little progress." We have often encountered families that all vote for one person, not because he/she is the best candidate but because the head of the family demands conformity. The question to ask is, "Can everyone in the family agree to vote for one political party/candidate? Isn't that conformist thinking? Do families debate the purpose of voting and the credentials of the candidates?

Similarly, very often we have little choice in deciding our professions because the elders have decided it for us. And we are the typical square pegs in round holes! So too with religion! We are born into a particular religion and don't know better. We are uncritical and simply conform. Well, this herd mentality is dangerous. Indeed, conformity is dangerous for society. Psychologists say that to be truly happy we have to think for ourselves and not allow our views to be appropriated. We must be allowed to choose our own battles and to think and say what we believe is right, even when we are alone. So what?

Conformity drives away every vestige of critical thinking and logic takes leave. Many of us don't stop and think why we do what we do just because everyone else is doing it. We even forget to question whether it is right or wrong; we follow the other sheep. Religious extremism spreads because people unquestioningly conform to a particular view out of fear or blind faith. Such people are open to negative influences and often follow instructions without questioning. They can carry out acts of violence and terror. That is how terrorists are brainwashed and so too many of us in different ways.

Today much of the religious sectarianism, racism, political hatred, violence and even war could be avoided if people decide not to allow themselves to be brainwashed by any single idea or ideology or hatred. It is time to question the world around us; question our own lives and question why we do what we do. If we find ourselves conforming to one viewpoint because the society we live and operate in desires that we do so, then we have lost the purpose of our lives. Conformity has never brought anything good but yes it breeds mediocrity and populates the world with dangerous people blinded by a single idea/ideology. It is the anti-thesis to diversity which is the essence of life.

My question today is: Where is the counterpoint in Meghalaya society today? Are contrarian views discussed in universities and colleges? Is free-thinking allowed? Do we respect all history or only some of it? What part of history do we reject and why?

# Why celebrate Thomas Jones Day?

***By Rev. Lyndan Syiem***

Who exactly is Thomas Jones? And why has the Government of Meghalaya declared the date of his arrival at Sohra a public holiday in the six districts of East Khasi, West Khasi, South-West Khasi, Ri Bhoi, West Jaiñtia and East Jaiñtia? More pertinently, why accord official recognition one hundred and seventy seven years after his arrival? These are three questions that the Presbyterian Church, as the direct inheritor of Thomas Jones' legacy, must address.

1.The basic details of the life and times of the pioneer Welsh missionary to the Khasi-Jaintia Hills are clear and conventional. The details of his later, post-missionary days though are somewhat unconventional, which accounts for his belated recognition by church, society and the government.Thomas Jones was born in the village of Tanyffridd, North Wales, on 24 January, 1810. Like nearly everyone in Wales at that time, his family was poor; his father was a carpenter and young Thomas served as his apprentice. Like other poor Welsh lads, he did not have any formal education and was largely self-taught. He was very active in his local church and started preaching at the age of twenty five. In 1837,Thomas Jones enrolled in the Theological College at Bala, Wales, and also received basic health-care training at the Medical College at Glasgow, Scotland.

It was Bala, with its then revivalist atmosphere,that crystallized his desire to serve as a missionary in India. Rejected by the London Missionary Society on whimsical grounds, his aggrieved fellow Welshmen formed the Welsh Calvinistic-Methodists' Foreign Missionary Society in 1840 to support him. While considering several options for a mission field, there came the offer of a free passage worth Rs 650 for the newly-ordained, newly-married Rev. Thomas and Anne Jones to the great port of Calcutta. This was what eventually decided the Khasi Hills as the mission field.

The British East India Company had defeated Burma in 1826 and opened up the Barak and Brahmaputra valley to trade. The "Khassias" who lived in the intervening Hills were highly recommended and so the Jones' braved the summer heat of the Sylhet plains and the torrential monsoon rains to arrive at Sohra, the British headquarters, on 22 June, 1841.The Company officially discouraged missionaries in its domains, but officials like Captain Lewinin their individual capacity helped Jones establish his work among the Khasis.

It was from Sohra that the legend of Thomas Jones began and quickly spread throughout these hills. While contemporaneous 19thcentury missionaries stuck to preaching,planting churches and primary medical aid, Jones also ventured into teaching the Khasis basic carpentry, lime-mortar masonry, black-smithy, coal-fuelled lime kilns and agricultural innovations.

His most significant contribution though was the Khasi alphabet in the Roman script which, with few minor modifications, remains till today. He also greatly contributed to the establishment of the Sohra variety (dialect) as the common language throughout the Khasi-Jaiñtia Hills. Besides these, he was untiring in the traditional missionary activities of schools, writing catechisms (Rhodd Mam, YrHyfforddwr), opening new mission stations, and sending detailed reports back home. His greatest literary success was the Gospel of Matthew in Khasi, in the Roman script. This would become the template for the translation and writing style of all the sixty six books of Scripture.

2. The above is of course just a summary of Thomas Jones' momentous achievements, on which basis the State Government has declared 22 June as an annual holiday in six districts. Following this pioneer, the Welsh Calvinistic-Methodist (or Presbyterian) Church sent a steady flow of missionaries who established churches, schools, dispensaries and hospitals all over the Khasi-Jaiñtia Hills. Foremost among them was Rev. Dr. John Roberts, widely acknowledged as the 'Father of Khasi Literature' and founder of the Cherra Theological College at Sohra, and Dr. H. Gordon Roberts, founder of the hospital that bears his name.

These missionaries, together with others from various other denominations, brought about the social, literary and economic renaissance of the Khasi-Jaiñtia people. In a larger sense therefore, Thomas Jones Day is tribute not just to one man but to others who followed him, all of whom have sacrificially contributed to the overall development of the Khasis. One hopes therefore that this day will be spent in meaningful reflection; not just within the Presbyterian Church but by everyone who values our common history and recognizes those who have helped shape it.

3. Finally, to the question of his belated recognition by church, society and government. The reason is that his later life took a diversion from the usual missionary career. By 1846, with the first batch of baptisms, Thomas Jones was outwardly a successful missionary;but inwardly, he was hurting. Anne Jones had lost her first child at Calcutta and the second at Sohra; she herself was sickly and unable to support her husband. Poor Anne Jones passed away on 22 August, 1845. The many problems, tropical illnesses and dangers exacted their toll on Thomas Jones' body, mind and spirit.

The directors of the mission in faraway Liverpool failed to comprehend the trials their pioneer missionary was facing. The details are hazy but Jones apparently entered into an injudicious - albeit legal- second marriage. The directors demanded puritan conformity when their battered missionary needed understanding and support. There was no option for Thomas Jones but to leave the mission and support himself through trading. Hence the half-hearted, apologetic treatment his later life received in official church chronicles. Since the Sesquicentennial Jubilee in 1991 however, many scholars have worked hard to rehabilitate his name, which has finally resulted in official recognition by church, society and now, by the government.

Despite having left, Jones continued to help the Welsh Mission especially in translating and printing books at Calcutta.Unfortunately, in the course of his trading he came into conflict with the infamous Harry Inglis, who together with his father in law and Political Agent, Captain Lister, dominated the coal, limestone and orange trade along Sohra-Shella-Sylhet-Calcutta. I have not read the primary historical sources but Thomas Jones apparently also sided with some Khasi traders against the two monopolists. The result was that Inglis and Lister persecuted the Welsh upstart and he had to flee from place to place till he reached Calcutta in 1849, a broken, fever-stricken man.

Thomas Jones died on 16 September, 1849, at the young age of thirty nine; he was buried at the Scottish Church Cemetery at Calcutta. The grave remained forgottenfor a century and four decades until it was discovered by the eminent historian, Dr. David R. Syiemlieh and renovated by the KJP Synod in 1989. The earthly life of Thomas Jones was undoubtedly tragic but the legacy he left behind is also undoubtedly prodigious. In the eight years he spent among the Khasis, he packed a lifetime's worth of service and may I add, an eternity of blessings. These are some of the reasons why we celebrate Thomas Jones Day.

**TO THE EDITOR**

## NEIGHRIMS OT Vacation

Editor,

Apropos the denial by NEIGRIHMS ("NEIGRIHMS denies doctors vacation affecting service" ST, 29th March, 2018") in response I had written a letter to editor, 'Of arbitrary rules in NEIGRIHMS', (ST, April 2nd 2018), and explained in details about the troubles encountered by a friend of mine who had gone to get a relative operated in NEIGRIHMS and had trouble due to the vacation of Anaesthesiologists. The administration of NEIGRIHMS denied that this vacation affected routine services.

But it is sad that this practice continues, even for the Summer vacation- June 2018. I could get a copy of the circular issued by the HOD Anaesthesiology, with a copy to the Director, NEIGRIHMS showing the reduction in the routine Operation Theatre Schedule to the tune of 30 to 50% reduction. I am not against doctors going on vacation, but this should not affect patient care. I am told that most of the doctors are not happy with this vacation schedule thrust on them by the present Director. Will the Director, NEIGRIHMS, who falsely refuted this in the above mentioned press release, answer now? Or is it still a case of less patients turning up for surgery, as purported by him earlier? I am sending you copies of the OT roster from June 1-20 for your perusal.

Yours etc.,
Megha B. Mahendra
RTI Activist
via email,
Mumbai -6

## No law and order on Shillong streets

Editor,

These days taxis and red buses have started breaking all the rules of the road by stopping anywhere they like, including in the middle of the road so they can pick up passengers. In a city that is choc-a-bloc with traffic it is important that all drivers of private or commercial vehicles maintain strict discipline. But this is not happening and we wonder where are the Enforcement officers of the District Transport Office? Are they not supposed to check overcrowding of taxis which violate the upper limit as far as carrying passengers is concerned? Also I have noticed that quite a good number of the big SPTS buses are driven by young rookies. You wonder how these adolescents got their licenses for heavy vehicles from the DTO and whether they were taken for a test drive.

Another point I have noted is that drivers in Shillong speak on mobile phones while driving despite the rules which say driving and speaking on mobile is punishable. At such times the driver who is speaking on the mobile phone tends to slow down and in turn slows down the pace of other vehicles behind too. Disciplining taxis and all drivers is within the purview of the District Administration. The DC East Khasi Hills should come out on the streets to witness the chaos created by local taxis and buses that don't obey the rules.

Yours etc.,
Anton Nongkynrih,
Via email

## Shillong, smart city!

Editor,

It is indeed really very good news that at last the name of Shillong has been included in the list of Smart Cities of the country. Now it will depend upon the State Government machinery to implement the guidelines which will be provided by the Central Government. The basic issues according to me will be to decongest the roads, better waste management practices, regular supply of electricity, regular water supply, regular cleaning of the drains and roads and footpaths, lanes , bye lanes etc. Police Bazar being the focal point of the tourists will need special attention in view of the encroachment of the hawkers and vendors who give the area a bad look and make it dirty and full of garbage.

Shillong as we all know is respected for its hospitality towards the tourists visiting the state and they go with accolades of the people of the area. It will be duty of each and every one of us to live up to glory and honour of Shillong which is regarded as ''Scotland of the East.''

Yours etc.,
S.L Singhania
Via email

## Shillong smart at last!

Editor,

I was just reading an article in your paper, Smart Cities, Unsmart Planning by Shashi Shikha who writes that more than the digital network cities need basic drainage and sewerage that are well planned and can be relied upon to carry the waste water to its destination. In Shillong, it is common to see roads constructed without drains. Hence the storm water carries off the back topping of roads and they have to be repaired every six months. And by the way do any other smart cities have as many speed breakers as this soon-to-be smart city has. Go round the city and you will see speed breakers of all shapes and sizes and they seem to be put up without any specification. Is this allowed anywhere else? Is there no rule or guideline as to why speed breakers are required and hat their size and shape should be? Many of them cannot be seen because they are narrow and jut out of nowhere very suddenly. People who have visited here find the speed breakers crazy and wonder why the public allows it. Perhaps visitors are not aware that every locality here is a law unto itself.

A smart city cannot have a road like the one reported in your paper (Goralane to Spead Eagle Falls) which is likely to cause a fatal accident if the repair work is not taken up soon. That such a road can be part of Laitumkhrah constituency makes us dumbfounded. It should be decided forthwith as to who has the responsibility to repair and maintain this road. That the matter lies unresolved shows poor governance.

There are many things that make a smart city. I hope this Government is equal to the task and that the Smart City project will not be just a slogan.

Yours etc.,
JS Mawlong,
Via email

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

*"All our final decisions are made in a state of mind that is not going to last."*
**--- Marcel Proust**

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## Banks at breaking point

WHAT looks like a dangerous scenario is steadily building up in India's banking sector. The arrest of the head of Bank of Maharashtra, one of the leading public sector banks, this week comes on top of several such grim situations. The massive defrauding of Punjab National Bank by a firm of diamond merchants, among others, is already a matter of serious concern. The main brain behind it is seeking refuge in destinations abroad to escape the Indian law. Similar cases have also started unfolding in respect of institutions like the ICICI Bank. The astounding PNB fraud, of the order of Rs 110 billion happened with the collusion of over 50 executives. An alleged quid pro quo involving the CEO of the ICICI bank and a well-heeled borrower is suspected. The extent of fraud in the Bank of Maharashtra is Rs 3,000 crore; and this could just be the tip of the ice berg. More banking scams are set to surface sooner than later.

Several banks are now experiencing strain due to huge non-performing assets (NPAs) – a euphemism for default in loan repayment midway through the process by big sharks, leading also to difficulties in sales of assets at stake to recover the amounts. Several of these are business houses like the Kingfisher head Vijay Mallya, and some of the perpetrators of the fraud have quit the country for good. Worse, many of these are certified as wilful defaulters, meaning that they have the capacity to pay but are exploring the loopholes of law, allegedly with help from politicians running governments, so as to go scot-free. The gross NPAs of Indian banks, or unrecoverable loan liabilities, is pegged at Rs 8.41trillon at the end of 2017. Where this will take India's banking sector is anybody's guess, and a disturbing thought. If India's banking sector eventually collapses under the weight of these huge banking frauds, it would also mean India's economy collapses. The filing of bankruptcy plea by a top banking institution - the Lehman Brothers 10 years ago in the United States led to a major financial crisis not just to the US but also to the West as a whole, and its adverse impact was felt across the world. In the minimum, we have lessons to learn from this, but corrective efforts are still not visible. Some investigations or arrests will not help. More needs to be done to address the rot in the banking sector.

Banking Crisis

# Privatisation no answer

***By Moin Qazi***

Famous investment leader Warren Buffett said, "It's only when the tide goes out that you realise who has been swimming naked". When the banking system hit rocks, the tide turned and the naked were caught disrobed.

Similarly, sometimes it takes a pitch-black economy to reveal who and what in the financial firmament shines. It is only when darkness falls that one can see stars twinkle. The moonlight coming from an otherwise bleak financial world has been made possible thanks to honest taxpayers, who are transfusing precious blood to bleeding banks.

Undeniably, the current crisis in India's banking sector has led to calls for privatisation of public sector banks (PSB). However, private banks are no paragons of great virtue. Moreover, faithful advocates of privatization are ill-informed of the real issues. The huge crowds that throng PSBs and put-up with various inconveniences indicate the enormous faith the public has in them.

Consequently, the challenge today does not involve providing ultra-sophisticated banking to 10% upper crust, instead to offer basic financial services to 90% who might not be a great revenue source to banks. Consider, almost all Government pensioners bank exclusively with PSBs.

Pertinently, PSBs have played a big role in financial inclusion and been the Government's backbone of its socio-economic agenda. Particularly in rural areas, where its role is not confined only to banking, instead it encompasses a holistic developmental agenda being the one-stop shop for the local rural populace's financial needs including insurance, financial literacy, remittance and receipt of welfare subsidies and grants etc.

The Government's socio-economic programmes have to use this banking conduit for funds movement. Those who talk of privatisation should visit remote branches of public banks, where managers live at great risk to personal lives, mentoring the locals in financial literacy, technical, business and agricultural literacy.

Remember, PSBs revolutionised rural India during the social banking 1970 era wherein expansion of bank branches was particularly noteworthy. It rose from 8,261 in 1969 to a whopping 65,521 in 2000 and households accessing institutional credit rose from 32% to 61.2% between 1971-1981.

It was this emphasis on those excluded from the formal financial stream which resulted in a slew of measures in finance driving bankers into the battle against poverty. Alas, as we grapple with massive problems confronting struggling masses, ignoble billionaires regularly ride to public troughs.

Politicians are equally guilty of undermining banks integrity. They stack decks with populist sops using banks as spigots for burnishing their election credentials. This is apart from huge loans they forced banks to shovel to their buddies. Shockingly, the proportion of dodgy loans, involving borrowers not making interest payments or repaying principals has surged to highest levels among the world's largest economies.

Questionably, why should ordinary people bear the burden of fat cats who are gleefully and remorselessly winnowing scarce bank capital? Wherein, the Government gooses these banks with spruced balanced sheets to make them lend again. Ironically, instead of being chastised, industrialists are lauded as captains of industry and adorn glorified positions in industry associations.

India's pile of soured loans, whose value degrades like an unstable isotope, is a classic example of how powerful and politically influential tycoons undermine rules to secure credit and then default on it. The huge losses posted by banks and desperate attempts by Government to detoxify balance sheets shows how difficult it is for rescue plans to deliver. When borrowers become insolvent, their loans are added to an existing mountain of debt.

Each time this happens, banks have to make heavy write-downs, ploughing dud loans like rotten potatoes, ultimately choking the credit line. To keep these going, the Government regularly keeps injecting capital. Scandalously, 13 PSBs reported combined losses of $8.6 billion this March including $6.5 billion during the last quarter while non-performing loans have surged nearly a fifth from end-December levels.

Most big defaulters have money to employ legal experts who play the judicial system --- it is here where law flounders notwithstanding draconian laws which are ineffective against powerful dodgers. New laws are made when existing ones are adequate, needing more teeth for results. We promptly condemn waivers for poor farmers but lack courage to tame big fishes because they have enormous clout.

Banks are aggressive in turning mortgage defaulters on the road whereby indebted farmers commit suicide out of humiliation, salaried class rarely default but are chased for small unpaid debts. But bankers are helpless towards malfeasant promoters of big businesses with scammers and swindlers outfoxing the system.

Bank's safeguard systems are buttressed by State institutions like regulators, bankruptcy procedures and courts. But what finally underpins security of the whole ecosystem is trust. The RBI no longer is the financial seer it was lionised for insulating the economy from the Lehman 2008 turmoil.

Scams are products of greed and immorality. But abuse of the financial system is because of system's weaknesses. In an age which heralds technology as the silver bullet, we shouldn't overlook the most important source of competitive advantage: People as compliance and controls are dependent on them running it. A process is only as good as the people managing it. Consequently, agile auditors will have to struggle to stop managers who are determined to hide their dirty laundry.

The reason for protecting borrowers against creditors is much-reviled moneylenders who loom large on our collective psyche. The scenario is now different: Big borrowers are unlike helpless farmers and lenders not cruel sahukars but public banks. When businessmen default, they rob each one of us taxpayers. In many cases, precious and scarce bank funds are used to finance opulent lifestyles of the rich.

This turmoil calls for improvising risk management models which create an illusory security sense. However, models and machines cannot act as surrogate for human expertise. Money management is no more a genteel world. Bankers will have to bring hard-boiled traders' instincts to make it secure. Prophetically John Keynes wrote in 1913: "In a country dangerous for banking as India, (it) should be conducted on the safest possible principles". Our departure from time-honoured metrics has come at a heavy cost.

Today the financial sector is at crossroads wherein its leaders will have to use their financial alchemy to overcome its most challenging moment. Perhaps, Rudyard Kipling's advice can be guide: "If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you, make allowance for their doubting too." Of course, in the long run, PSBs are not an answer unless there is drastic change in accountability. Else, the people will keep paying for its blunders.

Asserted ex-RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan, "A crisis offers us a rare window of opportunity to implement reforms --- it is a terrible thing to waste. The temptation will be to over-regulate as we have done in the past. This creates its own perverse dynamic… Perhaps rather than swinging maniacally between too much and too little regulation, it would be better to think of cycle-proof regulation. " ----- INFA

Exit of CEA

# Politics vs Economists

***By Shivaji Sarkar***

The third high profile departure, now of Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) Arvind Subramanian coming shortly after the decision to withdraw support to the PDP government in Jammu and Kashmir is a bit of a surprise. The exit of Raghuram Rajan, an appointee of the UPA government from the Reserve Bank of India was expected and Arvind Panagariya from the NITI Ayog was less of a surprise.

The common thread in the exit of the three Tamilians, is another south Indian leader Subramaniam Swamy, and sections of the people who were opposed to "western imports". They all came from institutions in the US and have gone back there.

Indeed there was opposition within the folds when Arvind Subramanian was named for his job. It was not for his economic belief but for his sharp views on the Gujarat model and even Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He had debunked the Gujarat model in July 2013 and in a column on April 5, 2014 wrote: "Prime Minister Modi will expose a paradoxical tension between his mandate and mission". It was a big surprise that with such sharp views he was appointed the CEA in October 2014. His predecessor Raghuram Rajan had moved to the RBI and the post lay vacant for 13 months.

Subramanian's major contribution was in the presentation of the annual Economic Survey. He made it an immensely readable document. There was open discussion on critical issues that also marked the path for the economy. The Survey itself brought out how 50 big houses were responsible for large PSU bank NPAs.

One could get from the Survey an analysis of the twin balance sheet problems affecting the banking sector's credibility, disparate agricultural patterns and productivity stressing on different irrigation strategies, impact of gender inequality and ineffective export subsidies for textiles. He is the creator of JAM – jan dhan, aadhar and mobile – for direct transfer of public benefits. But he also came under criticism for promoting aadhar for banking and other services, as many consider it to be risky, throwing millions to an unsecured system, where privacy is compromised. To this effect a legal battle is on. Further, he is accused perhaps inappropriately for the manifold increases in bank charges on withdrawals and taxes on interest accrual.

Since June 2016, Swamy has been targeting him by even doubting his patriotic credentials. However, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had stood by him and while Subramanian hailed Jaitley as a "dream boss", Jaitley too returned the compliment saying he came out with new ideas. "He participated in every meeting of GST, gave his independent views and was heard in rapt attention by almost every finance minister", said Jaitley, appreciating his early diagnosis of the twin balance sheet problem as it had led the government to adopt macro-economic strategy of higher public investment in the 2015-16 Budget.

Despite such appreciation, his say in policy-making possibly was limited. The Economic survey denotes how a Rs 6,000 crore government package did not boost exports of readymade garments. His recommendations for a simplistic GST were also not heard and one reason may have been because he suggested a minimum rate of 18 per cent.

Apparently, Panagariya had cautioned against the fiscal spending spree and he too was not heard. Similarly, Raghuram Rajan's views on demonetisation were ignored. Such high profile economists and political pragmatists always have differences. Finally, the political players have the last say as they also have to care for their vote banks. Subramanian obliquely says in an interview: "Politicians have their reasons for not doing things. And one has to understand that".

The three -- Rajan, Panagariya and Subramanian -- are considered fine economists. Despite apprehensions of some hard cores like Swamy and others they wittingly are not known to have given inappropriate advice. But having come from the US they were all at the butt of criticism. Rajan was a hardliner in the RBI and Subramanian ensured transparency in understanding the government functioning, though possibly at a cost.

Subramanian was a critic of RBI's failure to assess inflation and openly demanding interest rate cut. This later did not prove beneficial for the economy and Subramanian was found a bit off the mark. Moreover, RBI was found to be on track on inflation. A rate rise that has ensued now following the US rate revisions is being considered as the appropriate move to save the banks and prevent many undesirable borrowers from accessing bank funds.

The latest monetary policy committee meeting is unanimous on growth and inflation. An MPC member Ravindra Dholakia justifying decision for rate hike said that inflation at 4.8- 4.9 per cent is a concern and needs to be addressed at a time when economic growth is on a path to recovery. This is in contrast to the view of Subramanian. So economists stationed at different places can have different perceptions and the chief's view need not always be correct. But Subramanian has sanguine advice in not "risking the hard-earned macro-economic stability."

The recent four-year high profit margin of 50 per cent of companies in the last four quarters is an indicator perhaps of the turnaround, even though it's just the beginning of the process after a long recess. The time for a let-up has yet to arrive. Whether the economists contribute or can do so, remains a matter of discussion, however, their advice has importance for framing up the policy. But no politician goes fully by the advice of either an economist or any expert. Politics has its own grammar and every player tries to stick to that.

Now the challenge is how to create more jobs, a critical economic and political necessity. It requires a far higher pace of growth, says Subramanian and "the global economic situation is lot less favourable. There is no magic wand to solve the job crisis and it is linked to investment, growth and exports". These are all not easy solutions.

Politically too, job growth is crucial. Economists so far have not been able to solve it. With the exit of another economist, it is only expected that there would be more political decisions to solve some of the critical issues. Some crash programmes to create jobs in the next few months as also solve some of the volatile problems like Jammu and Kashmir may be on the cards.—INFA

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Say "Yes" to "No"

Editor,

Kudos to the Chief Minister for walking the talk and taking pro-active measures regarding the environment. I would however bring to the attention of all that the theme for World Environment Day 2018 was perhaps the most direct in many years. Ban Single Use Plastic Bags and the slogan "If you can't REUSE it REFUSE it!" I find this missing in the Meghalaya Campaign which only talks of Reduce, Reuse, Recycle! The first RE must be REFUSE!! In fact more than 25 State Governments and many more cities aren't giving citizens an option to REFUSE, they are simply banning the use of single use plastic bags and imposing hefty fines on the offenders. Why are we not taking this up?? If within seconds, access to internet and social media can be cut, are we in Meghalaya so inefficient that it takes us more than 25 years to enforce the ban on plastic bags. This campaign started that many years ago with organisations such as MEWS and Shillong We Care and many more. In fact, the use of single use plastic bags seems to be increasing exponentially in Shillong. Everything is sold in such bags, including our beloved "kwai" and it's become our right! PLEASE can we put the REFUSE before REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE.

Honorable CM Sir, may I humbly suggest that together with your innovative "Walk With Me" PLEASEEEEEE add "Say NO with ME!" Could you ban the use of single use plastic bags in the Secretariat for a start!

Yours etc.,
Carmo Noronha,
Shillong -1

## Minority communalism

Editor,

After a Muslim cleric from Karnataka caused a fracas by stating cows would be slaughtered during Bakrid, popular lyricist and activist Javed Akhtar slammed the comments as "irresponsible and outrageous." The noted writer very appropriately maintained, "Secularism doesn't mean ignoring or tolerating minority communalism". The lyricist suggested that this irresponsible and outrageous cleric Tanveer Hashim should immediately be arrested for trying to create communal tension in Bengaluru.

The cleric, Tanveer Peera Hashim, reportedly made his remarks during his sermon on the occasion of a Ramzan prayer meeting held in Vijayapura in North Karnataka. He stated, "Let me bring to your notice, in two months time there will be Bakrid. In the name of cow, this satan (devil) will do a mischief. I am telling you (the minister) this beforehand so as to ensure that with the cow another sacrifice does not happen," Hashim said, while addressing the crowd in Urdu. Ironically, Health and Family Welfare Minister Shivanand Patil was also present among the listeners. The volatile remarks sparked a row as cow slaughter is banned in Karnataka. The cleric heads the Hashim Pir Dargah at Vijayapura.

It is inexplicable as to why the advocates of pluralism like social activist and writer Arundhati Roy and many other ambassadors of tolerance in the country are maintaining a stoic silence on this issue. Why is the secular Congress party and its allies in Karnataka as well as elsewhere in the country dumb, mute and speechless?

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata High Court

## Potential for organic farming

Editor,

Way back in 2003, "Sikkim Organic Mission" was initiated by the Government of Sikkim, with the grand ambition of becoming a hundred percent organic state. The Government of Sikkim sensed the unhealthy use of chemical pesticides, insecticides and fertilizers in agricultural and its negative influence on people's health as well as the environment. Accordingly, the government set out to adopt the organic method of farming based on ecologically balanced agricultural principles.

Organic farming does not demand the use of chemically prepared supplements and for pest control but promotes the use of biological materials for growing and nurturing the crops. This landlocked Himalayan state with comparatively less land available for cultivation has earned the honour of being the only organic state in India, setting an example for the other 'prosperous' and 'favoured' states in India.

Meghalaya, a biologically rich and naturally blessed state, has the potential to adopt the organic way of farming. A number of farmers have been for generations practising various traditional farming methods which involve minimal or no use of chemicals. These farming methods are not just limited to influencing positive health among people, but, also help in maintaining a healthy, natural environment. As Meghalaya is well known for its commendable contribution to conserving the environment by using various traditional and scientific methods, hence adoption of organic farming throughout the state will add up to its ecological health. Meghalaya's ecotourism along with organic farming will make a perfect blend that will accelerate the state's growth and development, as people will get to experience the mesmeric natural environment as well as consume natural, healthy and chemical free agricultural produce.

Now, it's for the government and the relevant divisions to decide upon the introduction of a flagship mission to promote and finance organic farming throughout the state, believing that Meghalaya has the potential to be an Organic State.

Let us make "Meghalaya Organic Mission" a reality.

Yours etc.,
Saurav Thapa,
Shillong- 2

## Needed strong cyber crime laws!

Editor,

Your editorial, "Another voice silenced" (ST, June 16, 2018) has rightly observed that with the brutal killing of another courageous journalist, Syed Shujaat Bukhari the world of journalism and free speech is poorer and is even more under threat today than ever before. It is a shame that some people have been abusing the social/ electronic media. They are largely responsible for pushing India backwards in press freedom from 133 in 2016 to 136 in 2017 to 138 this year in World Press Freedom Index.

Some of those who use social media can go to the extreme of celebrating a brutal killing of a courageous lady editor, Gauri Lankesh! They can spit unprintable filthy abuse whenever an opinion does not tally with their own. Social media has even been made a place for uploading caste/ gender atrocities to create a reign of terror. It is even being used to manufacture a riot or to lynch people after giving them a bad name like child lifters etc.!

The need of the hour is to strictly implement cyber crime laws.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

# Insects in food? So what

**By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi**

When I bite into a bar of chocolate, I think of calories. I don't think of rat hair and faeces. But perhaps I should.

The American Food and Drug Authority, the regulatory body for food standards in the US, publishes something called the Defect Levels Handbook. This sets permissible limits for "natural or unavoidable defects in foods that present no health hazards for humans". The contents of these 'natural and unavoidable' defects are probably to protect manufacturers from being sued.

The FDA Handbook allows the average chocolate bar (about 100 gm) to have one rodent hair in it. This 100 gm is also allowed to contain up to 60 insect fragments. Legally.

Insects, either whole, body parts, larvae or mites, are the most common permissible defect, allowed in 71 foods. You will find them in peanut butter, paprika, oregano, cinnamon, bay leaves and many more foods. Oregano can have up to 300 insect fragments, with ground oregano allowed up to 1250 fragments. Tomato juice is allowed to have 10 fruit fly eggs or one maggot for every 100 gm. About 20 maggots or 75 mites are permissible in 15 gm of dried mushrooms. Five per cent of a can of cherries can also contain maggots.

In figs, interestingly, the FDA specifically only allows insect heads — up to 13 heads for every 100 gm of fig paste. Why only heads? God knows! (Because the FDA probably doesn't).

However, what the FDA does know quite clearly, is the number of insects and rodent hairs that would make the perfect combination in food. It allows every 100 gm of peanut butter to have up to 30 insect fragments and one rodent hair. 50 grams of cinnamon is allowed 400 insect fragments and 10 rodent hairs. Paprika can contain 75 insect fragments and 11 rodents hairs for every 25 gm.

Cinnamon, paprika, oregano, thyme, sesame seeds (til), fennel seeds (saunf), ginger and other spices often contain another ingredient — animal or mammal excreta. FDA allows about 20 milligrams of this in 1 kilogram of cocoa beans. 'Mammalian excreta' is another name for mouse faeces. Every kg of wheat is allowed to have an average of 9 faeces pellets. Even popcorn can have 1 pellet per subsample (the FDA handbook does not define the size of the subsample).

Mould, a type of fungus is also a commonly permitted contaminant in most fruit, vegetables, butters and jams. Up to 20 per cent of paprika is allowed to be mouldy. Five per cent of a packet of bay leaves (tej patta) and 3% of a can of frozen peaches is also allowed to have mould in it. Blackcurrant jam is high on the list, with 74 per cent of it permissibly mouldy. Low levels of mould are also allowed in tomato ketchup, tomato juice and canned tomatoes.

If all this weren't enough, the FDA handbook also has a provision for the presence of 'foreign matter' in select foods. This includes objects such as stones, sticks, jute bags and even cigarette butts! This, strangely enough, fits into "natural or unavoidable defects in foods that present no health hazards for humans".

If you are appalled by the low quality demanded of American packaged food, let us shift the focus to our own country. The Indian version of the FDA is the FSSAI — Food Safety and Standards Authority of India. It follows similar standards but makes them so confusing that no one bothers to read them. Instead of putting them out clearly in one handbook, it hides them in different rules for different foods.

When describing permissible food defects, FSSAI uses a term called 'extraneous matter'. This is defined as "any matter contained in an article of food which may be carried from the raw materials, packaging materials or process systems used for its manufacture or which is added to it, but such matter does not render such article of food unsafe".

FSSAI does not clearly define permitted contaminants in one handbook or document. It is, however, hidden in the fine print of their numerous rules and regulations.

For instance, FSSAI requires de-shelled peanuts to only be 'practically' free from matter such as stones, dirt, clay etc. Further, 5 per cent of the total packet is permitted to be damaged. 2 per cent of most dry fruits and nuts can permissibly be 'damaged or discoloured' which includes damage by insects.

With dry apricots, FSSAI states that they should be free from living insects, but goes on to allow a 'reasonable' amount of insect debris, vegetable matter and other objectionable matter. Up to 3 per cent of supari can also be damaged by mould and insects.

A packet of wheat flour (atta) can contain up to 2 per cet ash. Paushtik atta (which means healthy or nourishing) can have a little more ash — 2.75 per cent.

Whole grains of wheat, maize, jawar, bajra, rice and most lentils including chana, rajma, moong, masur, urad etc. are permitted 1 per cent extraneous matter, which includes 0.1 per cent impurities of animal origin. These essentials, which every household in our country consumes on a daily basis, is allowed to contain metallic pieces, sand, gravel, dirt, pebbles, stones, lumps of earth, clay, mud and animal faeces and hair.

Sugar, refined sugar, bura and misri are permitted to have 0.1 per cent extraneous matter, while this is permitted up to 2 per cent in the case of jaggery. If you were impressed by this accuracy, honey, on the other hand, only needs to be visually inspected to ensure that it is free from mould, dirt, scum, the fragments of bees and other insects etc.

Similarly, one of India's favourites – tea – is required by FSSAI to only be free from living insects, moulds, dead insects, insect fragments and rodent contamination which are "visible to the naked eye."

FSSAI also allows most types of salt and spices, such as jeera, elaichi, laung, dalchini, red chillies, haldi, black pepper, dhania, methi etc., to contain 1-2 per cent extraneous matter. This includes dust, dirt, stones and lumps of earth. One official told me that some years ago, when India needed dals immediately, they imported them from Burma. The dal came full of stones. Instead of making a fuss, the FSAAI checked with their ministry and simply changed the rules to allow more stones.

So the quality of food is decided by corporations and regulatory bodies created to protect them. Who protects the consumer?

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

# Freedom in education

## An innovatory bridge school in UP's Hardoi is helping girls between 10-16 years of age to prepare for the next step of learning

**By Umer Rashid**

Inside a dimly-lit classroom in Hardoi district in Uttar Pradesh, with its walls decorated with drawings and paintings made by children, Seema Yadav, 36, is teaching a group of 25 girls who are sitting in a circle in one corner. These are girls who were either never enrolled in school or had to drop out due to various reasons. They are now way behind academically compared to other students of their age.

At the Udaan innovatory bridge school of Care India, almost 125 km away from state capital Lucknow, such girls of 10 to 16 years age are taught for 11 months so they could catch up.

Every year, nearly 100 girls cover the syllabus of six years within 11 months. These girls then appear for the 5th grade annual examination, which ensures their admission in any formal school in the state.

Almost 1,800 girls have been taught in this preparatory school set up by the Care India project in collaboration with Sarvodaya Ashram in 1999.

High dropout rate among girls is a serious concern in India. As per the 2017 Annual Survey of Education Report (ASER), once the eight years of elementary schooling are completed, girls begin to abandon schools in far greater numbers than boys.

According to the report, while at the primary level, 5.7 per cent girls are not enrolled in schools compared to 4.7 per cent boys, the enrollment gap widens steadily as they grow. At the secondary level, by the time they turn 18, over 32 per cent girls are not enrolled in schools compared to 28 per cent boys.

The survey suggests that the predominant reason for girls dropping out is family constraints. The study also reveals that over 70 per cent out-of-school youth have mothers who have never been to school.

Seema, a resident of Mirzapur district, was just 17 when she first started teaching here to help support her own education. She has been now associated with this residential school for the past 18 years.

Almost every girl in this school has a tragic tale to share: Of domestic violence, poverty, untouchability, discrimination and maginalisation which is prevalent in most districts of Uttar Pradesh. Seema is no exception.

As a child, she helplessly witnessed the horror of domestic violence for years. She would cower in a corner of her room and watch her jobless father go on a rampage in the house and take out his frustration on her mother.

She struggled to get away from that environment and eventually eloped with a man of another caste. However, her struggles were magnified when her husband, Hariram Singh, died of cancer a few years after the couple were married in a Sitarampur court.

"My father told me to forget everything and pretend as if I had never married. I told him I would marry again only when he gave me assurance that no domestic violence would happen. He gave me no answer," she said.

"Some incidents you experience as a child leave you shattered throughout your life. I saw terrible things happening at my home that shattered my spirit," Seema said.

When she was a child, there was pressure on her to quit her education and take up odd jobs but she toiled hard, often trapped between discrimination and poverty. Her resolve eventually prevailed over adversity and she finally managed to graduate and become one of the handful of girls from her village to do so.

Seema went on to complete her post-graduation, finished her BEd and also cleared the eligibility examination that qualified her to teach in government schools.

Now she teaches mathematics and life skills to girls who face similar adversities and tries to change their fate just as education changed hers.

According to Sangita 14, and Reetu, 16, two students at Udaan school, "Seema didi is an inspiration."

"When we were admitted in this school some months ago, we knew nothing. We feared to hold a pen; we could not read, write or speak properly for we lacked motivation and confidence. We are reading story books now, do ganit (mathematics), and enjoy doing extra-curriculum activities," said Reetu, who has seen her share of domestic violence, especially when her father gets drunk.

She wants to become a police officer and prevent drunkards from committing crimes in her village.

According to the programme coordinator of the school, Urmila Srivastava, the Udaan project has inspired the entire state education system in Uttar Pradesh.

"The module of preparatory education has now been adopted by almost all preparatory schools across Uttar Pradesh which shows how influential our curriculum has been," she said.

"We don't just teach girls here, we educate them about the processes that are essential for their life such as leadership skill, behaviour and personal hygiene. To bring reforms in the predominant casteist and illiteracy-riven state with child marriage issues, only focused education can bring long-term social changes," added Vandana Mishra, the programme manager.

In a survey conducted by a team of Udaan teachers, 460 out of the 1,567 girls who graduated from this school were found still unmarried, suggesting that education helped them to negotiate their marriage. The survey also found that those girls were able to support themselves and helped with the education of their younger siblings as well. "Most of the girls, after spending 11 months in this school, inspire their siblings at home to develop interest in studies and learn to maintain personal hygiene," Vandana added.

However, the major problem the girl-students face is overall poverty in their homes and the lack of resources to continue their studies once they clear the fifth-class examination.

In 2017, Seema adopted a nine-year-old boy, Anirudh, from a relative. She says the satisfaction of nurturing children from marginalised backgrounds gives her more comfort than she can express in words.

"I see myself in their eyes. I relate my struggle with their life. I often cry with them... This inspires me to make more efforts to change their lives," she says and breaks down.

*(The weekly feature series is part of a positive-journalism project of IANS and the Frank Islam Foundation)*
*Images: IANS*

# *Work together to protect children*

Children are the ones who are vital for deciding how the world is going to be after some years. So if one can do some good in the life of a child then there can be a change, at least a slightest change, in the world to come. If most of us think on the same lines, then we can hope of more changes and a little better future for our children. However, as of now this is a dream as millions of children are not fully protected.

Many of them are suffering from violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, exclusion and are being discriminated every day. Such violations of their rights limit their chances of surviving, growing, developing and pursuing their dreams. Hence it is our duty to ensure that every child is given the right to survive, to be safe, to be heard, to receive adequate care and to grow up in a protective environment.

Each day brings more chilling, gruesome tales of violence, neglect, exploitation from almost all parts of our country, including our own state. Is there no end? We wonder, to the variety of ways in which we choose to torture, maim, violate and inflict cruelty on our children?

Physical abuse is a common and frequently noticed form of abuse. Parents, teachers, care givers, guardians should be careful not to throw out frustration, tensions and their anger on a child which may result in extensive damage to a child's overall development. Not to forget the children involved in domestic works who are being illegally confined by their masters and have suffered physical abuse in their hands because they were not able to work up to their expectation. This has resulted in low self-esteem, psychological problems and feeling of rejection.

Children experienced neglect and abuse in their own families but parents don't realise this because for them, it is a part of discipline. Emotional abuse includes the failure to provide a developmentally appropriate, supportive environment, so that the child can develop a stable and full range of emotional and social competencies. There can also be acts which cause harm to a child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

It may also include acts like threatening, scaring, discriminating or other non-physical forms of rejecting treatment in which it was found that they show signs of apathy, depression, hostility, lack of concentration and eating disorders.

We feel that the need for child protection is really high in our state. People here often tell their children not to talk to strangers but often fail to realise that most abuse happens by people who know the child. We forget to teach our children how to be safe at home. With small children it is helpful when we say "good touch" and "bad touch" because it is simpler and children understand it better than saying "appropriate" and "inappropriate". Thus it is very important for parents, teachers and care takers to teach children not to trust anybody even though they are related to them in one way or the other. Parents may use charts, drawings while teaching their children about the parts of the body which should not be touch by anyone. Also it is important to teach children to raise an alarm if someone attempts to touch those parts of the body.

For grown up children it is important for parents to talk to them about love relationship at an early age and the consequences thereafter. Parents should update themselves with information and teachings which will help their children to choose between what is good for them and what is not good for them. Sexual abuse can take place through Social Networking which happens more so with teenage children.

The Protection of Children against sexual offences Act 2012 protects children from Offences of Sexual assault, Sexual harassment and pornography. It safeguards the interest of the child at every stage of the judicial process by incorporating child-friendly mechanisms for reporting, recording of evidence, investigation and speedy trial of offences through designated Special Courts.

Besides, physical and sexual abuse, it is also important to understand that parents, care givers, guardians and teachers have an important role to shape and mould lives of children. Parents may provide luxurious lifestyle to their children but may fail to provide love and care for them.

Strong bonding between a child and his parents and family members is required. Parents have the right to scold them when they are wrong but at the same time they should understand that they also have a responsibility not to neglect them.

Neglected children are children who experienced loneliness, suicidal tendency, depression and other forms of unwanted behavioural problems. They are not bad, but situations compel them to exhibit different forms of behavioural problems and become slaves to different forms of addiction. A home should be very conducive for a child's growth and development, if there is no love and support from the family members, the child is likely to look for it from outside which resulted to the child's vulnerability to many social problems.

Teachers have a role to identify children who comes from broken or abusive families and should create an atmosphere of love and compassion for such children. A teacher is a second mother to a child. In this, the teacher may call the attention of the parents on issues which need to be taken up seriously by them.

At times there are reports of teachers abusing students. This is another form of child rights violation which should not be taken lightly.

We have found out that children depict behaviour of their parents. Parents who often use abusive language at home fail to understand that their children are collecting everything in their mind. When there is misunderstanding and fights at home, they fail to believe that their children are tender human beings and the damage they inflict on them is huge. Since peer pressure is very strong it is also important for parents to focus on this important issue. It is not safe to underestimate peer pressure until and unless there is a high value of moral teaching. Parents need to give quality time to their children. This will help boost their morality and encourage strong bonding with their parents.

Teachers often complain that parents fail to turn up during parent-teacher meetings. It becomes difficult for them to work together for the welfare of their children. If parents want to see that their children succeed in academic life, they should be involve in their academic life to prove that they are concerned for their development. They should not only pin point their wrong doing but they should also learn to praise and acknowledge them for their good works.

Parents are artists who have a role to shape and design the life of their children. It depends more on them, if they want their children to grow up successfully in life.

*(Contributed by CHILD LINE Shillong)*

# REDEFINING DENIMS IN INDIA

**By Nivedita**

## Denims have been witnessing an upward trend & are expected to grow at double-digit rate

The ever-growing denim market in India is on a roll, feel leading jeans manufacturers who credit evolved Indian customers and the influence of global style trends for this change. An organised retail sector, young population, online penetration of denims and increasing popularity of engineered or distressed pieces will continue to fuel the growth of this segment.

"Denims have been clearly witnessing an upward trend in terms of consumer preference over the years. Originally a product for the youth, it has grown to cut across geographies, gender and age groups," Aamir Akhtar, CEO — Denims, Arvind Ltd, said.

Parag Dani, Business Head of Gap India, feels the denim market in India and around the world has grown consistently, irrespective of macro or micro trends in the fashion world.

"Given the average age of the Indian consumer today, and influence of global style trends in the country, the industry can be expected to grow at a double-digit rate since more people are finding comfort in this evergreen product," Dani said.

Right from celebrities in the 1980s and 1990s sporting an indigo pair of denim, which was considered more of a fashion statement, to its evolution today — where CEOs and others feel comfortable wearing this product in more formal settings — the product has grown to fit into people's lives.

Govind Shrikhande, Customer Care Associate and Managing Director, Shoppers Stop Ltd, agrees.

"Today, denim is considered a multipurpose fabric with it being used as casual wear, everyday wear, and is also gaining popularity in leisure form owing to the comfort provided by stretch denims. New-age companies and start-ups are relaxing the norms with introduction of Friday dressings and casual dressings to work, denims are increasingly becoming an acceptable attire at work," Shrikhande said.

Shoppers Stop has come up with a 'Denim to Work' campaign, an initiative that encourages working professionals to include denims in their work wear wardrobes.

According to a study published on India Retailing, the market size of Indian denim wear was estimated to be Rs 20,205 crore in 2016. The market is now projected to grow at a CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) of 14.5 per cent and reach Rs 39,651 crore by 2021, and Rs 77,999-crore market by 2026.

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> From celebrities in the 1980s & 1990s sporting an indigo pair of denim, which was considered more of a fashion statement, to its evolution today, where even CEOs feel comfortable wearing it in formal settings, — the product has grown to fit into people's lives

Ravi Sharma, country manager, Promod, feels India is a big market with a lot of untapped potential for the denim industry despite the fact that the industry has been growing robustly over the past few years.

"Currently, Asia enjoys a market share of 22 per cent out of which India contributes to nearly half of that market. I see a lot of influence of India in jeans wear in the coming years as the demand is increasing in all segments," he said.

A wide range of consumer segments consider denim as an apparel of choice owing to its comfort and style. Also, increasing usage of denim products by women and youth are some of the most significant and noticeable changes we are seeing the world over in jeans wear," he added.

Many brands are coming with lines focusing on denim.

"Brands have increased the number of jeans wear in their lines. A lot of brands which earlier were not involved in jeans wear have also added them as a part of their offerings," said Akhtar, who also feels there is greater focus on value addition such as finish, hand-feel and fits.

"The amalgamation of science and technology with denims has created a space for smart clothing. Arvind has been the fabric partner for Google Jacquard project which saw Levi's creating smart denims for its consumers," he added.

Even Gap as a brand is noticing changes in the denim wear market.

"Among the most noticeable changes are how lightweight that can be worn all-year-round, irrespective of the weather. Given that jeans play such an important role in our brand, we measured the environmental impact of a pair of both men's and women's jeans. Using these results, we increased our efforts in areas where we have direct influence: raw materials selection, fabric development, garment production and finishing.

"Another key trend is the personalisation of your pair of denim," said Dani.

Shrikhande feels the comfort of wearing denims, coupled with a variety of styles and prints in jeans, shorts and dresses which are available in the market has made denims the apt choice for consumers. "Styles such as boyfriend jeans, flare or distressed denims are preferred by consumers in the country, especially during the summer season," he said. *(IANS)*

*(Nivedita can be contacted at nivedita.s@ians.in)*

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## 'Star - Gazing'

***By Pt. Ajai Bhambi*** ***Sunday, JUNE 24, 2018***

Moon trine Neptune on your solar return chart and this configuration will create a good and delightful environment all around you. Success in endeavors is on the cards as you bring in a fresh viewpoint. Significant deals and contracts come through. A much awaited opportunity for furtherance will come your way. Overseas travel will arrive and bring in lucrative results. You can also shape on your image in keeping with your work with original communications and demonstrations. A family celebration will improve the domestic front. New starts are in store, whether this means a fresh venture in existing relationships or new ones all in all so be prepared to fall in love.

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)**

This is a favorable time for you and will provide a boost to your career and professional life; a phase that gives you fame. Now you have courage and vitality to activate your plans to take advantage. Your influence among people and in gatherings is remarkable you will enjoy good relationships with professional associates and in your circle of close friends. Your business proposals will get highlighted and you will have new contracts at your doorstep. A better deal is ahead to give you financial gains. Family relations will be amiable as you will have heightened communication skills. Health will improve if you take requisite care.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)**

You may be able to draw attention to yourself in the progress of your career during this phase. If looking for betterment or a job switch, you may get a chance in the first half of the week. Your financial requirements may soon be solved. Chances of social interaction and family gatherings among family and loved ones will give happiness and joy. You may go for a short personal journey or professional trip. There are indications of renovation or purchase of a new home or work place. Sudden expenditure may not be ruled out. Your family members may be a bit demanding.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)**

Being intensely perceptive you are able to make the most of opportunities that come your way. You may get better chances of improvement in money matters in the second half of this week. You will be able to present your views convincingly and hold your own in group discussions moreover these ideas will be well received. You may purchase some artifacts for your home or jewelry. Your attention will be focused on matters related to family, entertainment or children's career. You are more expressive and forthcoming in personal relationships. If you are going to purchase a home, make financial enquiries and relook at your budget first. Avoid taking loans for some consumer item.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)**

The planetary position reveals that monetary matters and financial situation need basic care. You may get engaged in some unusual deal that may not be profitable for you. Some mischievous person may deceive you in some dealings related to money matters so exercise due care. If you play your cards right you can work on projects that are already in progress, and finish these with a flourish at your work place. There are balanced energies within you which are reflected in personal relationships and creative ventures. Your special skills bring appreciation. Take care in family relations take a soft stand to keep away the conflict raised by misunderstandings in family and avoid hasty decisions. Self care will do wonders in tackling health problems.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)**

Your prospects in fields related to education, research work and admission in professional courses is better. Your imagination is ignited and those in films, sports or music will do very well. Your creativity gives impetus at your work place and you are spurred to redecorate your home. Research your financial options, think long term and plan accordingly. Your friends and well wishers will extend a helping hand towards you. You make romantic gestures and draw your beloved closer to you. There are good chances of a marriage proposal materializing if unmarried. You may have to undertake travel connected with some concern or issue and you will be happy to know that things are working as per your plans.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)**

Be prepared for a complete change in matters related to your profession, residence or career. You may think of purchasing some property and you will consult this issue with your family, it will help you in getting financial aid from there. You may have some sudden unforeseen expenditure. There may be chances of minor conflicts at work place with colleagues try to keep away from indulging in any conflict. Relations with family members and loved ones remain stable. You find love in a friendship and this friendship flowers into a beautiful affair. Your health needs care so exercise due caution and focus on your dietary habits.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)**

Some good opportunities come across in your professional life and the planetary configuration will be quite inspiring which will enable you to mark fulfilling achievements in many areas. Futuristic plans will be made and financially you will do well. Being intensely perceptive you are able to make the most of opportunities that come your way. You may get sudden chances of improvement in your career. It is time to let your hair down, relax and also let your impulsive side come forth. Take care of your relations with your siblings and keep your communications open and loving. Real estate dealings are on the cards at this time. You may experience a state of self enlightenment and it will be useful in achieving peace of mind. Health will remain good.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)**

A phase for monetary gains is ahead and you will land a deal with lucrative financial gains with ease. Professional and career goals may be achieved if you take timely action and avoid inopportune delay. You may benefit from some long term investment. You are individualistic and not ready to make any compromises as you make inspired decisions. Your social contacts grow to become more dynamic. You are spiritual and religious and you might find someone with a similar nature to accompany you towards a new goal and you will feel inner satisfaction. You will find solace with your family or at home and you will want to devote some time with children to rejuvenate. A hectic schedule will keep you on your toes. Health will be good.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)**

There is a great opportunity for you to find stabilization drawing from the strength of the people around you. New dimensions are waiting to be discovered. You are decisive in closing business deals and get gains in financial transactions. Your dynamism and positive outlook help you deal with a heavy work schedule. You intuitively understand the working of colleagues at your work place however do not over estimate your powers to control others as it may lead to an unfriendly atmosphere so take care in dealings. Health of children should be looked after. In the hustle and bustle of activity do not ignore signals sent out by your body; give it due attention and care.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)**

The combination of stars indicates mixed results for you. This is likely to give you some unusual circumstances in your professional life. Matters relating to finances will give you delayed results and the projects at your disposal may not be completed in time. Those in the creative field will find that their creativity is peaking all of a sudden and they will prove their mettle convincingly. An affair is also indicated for the unattached and those in a relationship will strengthen their bonds with their beloved taking the relationship to the next level. Travel will provide you with excitement and fill you with new hope as you see new developments unfold. Health will remain stable.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)**

You may have good chances of promotion in your career during this period and a congenial environment will prevail all around you. As a creative person you will find a way to do the things that you have been planning for some time. Financially you will do well but your extravagant nature will not allow you to save much. Some sudden expenditure may be required on the domestic front. Some property deal may give you profits in the near future. You will feel slightly tense in your dealings due to the volume and intensity of work. You may plan a foreign tour and you would get a chance to move further ahead. Children will do you proud. Health problems if any will get sorted out.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)**

It may seem as if all eyes are focused on you. Take note that others are going to be more appreciative of all that you do, and even openly acknowledge this. You will find that matters you your way as you have your say. Your friends and well wishers will provide you tremendous support. New associations will be profitable and pave the way into new spheres. Your imagination would be flying high. Financially you will do well but your extravagant nature will not allow you to save much. If you've been thinking about sprucing up your home a little bit, this is the time to do it. Your sense of aesthetics is also high, and you might work wonders with your decorating. Romance is in the air and you will find yourself in the midst of an exciting affair. Travel undertaken during this period will benefit you in the long run.

# Perfect mix of science & arts

**By Kobita Deka Choudhury**

Home science is both a science as well as an arts-related field of study. It is the art of using available resources efficiently and science of achieving a happy and healthy home that aims to accomplish the wellbeing of a family in an ever changing society.

From a secondary school subject to college/university, Home Science has a huge scope in modern times. Home Science is an interdisciplinary course covering five major subjects — Foods and Nutrition, Human Development, Family Resource Management, Textiles and Clothing and Extension Education and Community Science.

Apart from these core subjects, Home Science is a combination of Biochemistry, Physiology, Family Life Education, Family Dynamics and Personality Development, Child and Adolescent Psychology, Child Guidance and Family Counselling, Fabric and Apparel Designing, Fashion Designing, Textile Designing, Home Furnishing, Interior Decoration and Designing, Consumer Education, Housing and Equipment, Dietetics, Food Service Management, Food Processing, Preservation and Quality Control, Food Safety and Microbiology, Health and Hygiene, Home Economics, Extension and Rural Development.

Home Science is now out of the shell of the misconception that it is just confined to the four walls of the home and is only related to cooking and serving, cleaning of home, baby care, laundry, stitching, cutting and tailoring or just training of girls to become good housewives.

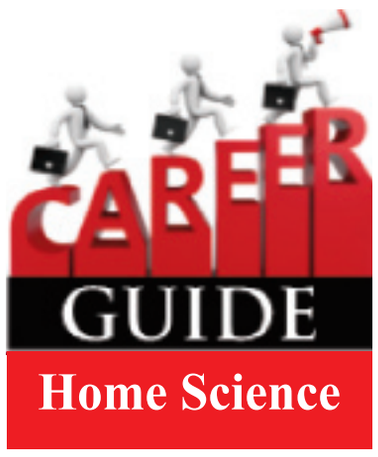
Home Science is the only subject that has recreated itself radically so as to suit the changing trends of the modern society.

To select Home Science as career option, students should have 10+2 qualification either in Science or Arts so as to enrol in the degree for Bachelor of Home Science. After the completion of the under graduate programme, they can opt for Post Graduate courses and PhD programme in any of the above mentioned core subjects of Home Science.

Along with all the other states of India, there are other institutions offering Home Science courses in the North East as well. The College of Community Science in Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat, is one of the premier institutes offering both under graduate and post graduate courses (www.aau.ac.in).

Pinterest

A few other institutions offering Home Science in the NE region are




Handique Girl's College, Guwahati (www.hgcollege.org), Sibsagar Girl's College, Sibsagar, Assam (www.sibsagargirlscollege.edu.in), College of Home Science in Central Agricultural University, Tura, Meghalaya (www.westgarohills.gov.in/college_home_sc.html), St Mary's College, Shillong, Meghalaya (www.smcs.ac.in), Government Zirtiri Residential Science College, Aizawl, Mizoram (www.gzrsc.edu.in) and Himalayan University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh (www.himalayanuniversity.com).

Home Science offers many career opportunities like dieticians in hospitals and health care centres, nutrition consultant, nutritionist, food scientist/evaluator/analyst in food industries, microbiologist and biochemist in laboratories and industries, fitness consultant, textile merchandiser, fashion designer, interior designer, furniture designer, art and craft designer, children/adolescents/family counsellors, child development project officer, social welfare officer, communication and development consultant, public relation officer, research assistant in research organizations, and teaching as a profession.

If for any reason any Home Science graduate is unable to find a job, he/she can create a job for his/her own and employ others as well. By being an entrepreneur for a baking and confectionary unit, food processing and preservation unit, catering in hotels, resorts, airlines, hospitals and maternity homes, training and capacity building unit, by setting up a boutique, a home-based production service, day care centres, old aged homes, rehabilitation centres, crèches, nursery schools, play schools, hobby classes, etc, he/she can become self-sufficient.

These courses are available at both under graduate and post graduate levels. One can conduct doctoral and post doctoral research in the field of Home Science too. These courses are also offered by Indira Gandhi National Open University through distance education mode.

*(The author can be contacted at dekakobita13@gmail.com)*

*"A woman one loves rarely suffices for all our needs, so we deceive her with another whom we do not love."*
**--- Marcel Proust**

**The Shillong Times**
Vol No: LX No.313 SHILLONG, MONDAY, JUNE 25, 2018

## Danggo's flip flop drama

WAS Martin Danggo under coercion to resign from the Congress Party? If so what were the compulsions? Is the promise of a civil sub-division to the people of Ranikor the only bait that the National Peoples' Party (NPP) held out? Chief Minister Conrad Sangma visited Ranikor on June12. The same day the Ranikor Block Congress was dissolved as all or most of its members joined the NPP. Later attempts were made to revamp the Ranikor BCC but the remaining Congress members expressed difficulties in doing so, immediately, as most of the prominent members had left the Party and the Block would have had to start from scratch. Interestingly, the Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee and other Congress leaders continued to deny the crisis within the Ranikor Block Congress. The Party leaders repeatedly refuted allegations that there are cracks in the Party which if not mended were likely to lead to further attrition and spread to other constituencies as well.

Martin M Danggo a former Speaker of the Meghalaya Assembly is a seasoned political player and must have taken the recent steps with an eye on maximum concessions from the present NPP-led coalition government. He is another of those Congressmen who is not used to being out of power and sitting out in the cold in the Opposition chairs in the State Assembly and doing his homework like any ordinary MLA. This is the problem with democracy not just in Meghalaya but across the country. Candidates fight elections basically because they want to be in the government. Anything other than that is not acceptable. Hence those in the Opposition spend their time in trying to pull the rug from under the ruling party's feet. That's what made successive governments in Meghalaya unstable and lacklustre. Chief Ministers had to constantly look behind their backs and guard their space lest it be usurped by a competitor. Mukul Sangma was dexterous enough to manage to run his government undisturbed for the last five years. He kept dissidents under check and he could do it because the AICC had full faith in him. Now that internal squabbles in the Congress have surfaced after the defeat of Deborah Marak from Williamnagar the Congress looks set to disintegrate mainly because of internal dissensions!

**LOOKING BACK**

**May 25, 1989**

## Opposition on the defensive

The introduction of the 64th Constitution Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha on the last day of the budget session by the Prime Minister to give the panchayat system a well defined constitutional base has put the opposition totally on the defensive. None of the opposition parties can afford to g against the Bill as such and their earlier fear that the Bill would give overriding powers to the Governors over the head of the State Government has also been belied.

To remedy the irregularity and uncertainty of panchaya elections, the Bill proposes to enshrine in the constitution regular, periodic elections to these institutions and also proposes to end other sicknesses unending suspensions and dissolutions. While the Bill leaves it to the States to determine the grounds and conditions on which panchayats may be suspended or dissolved, it seeks to ensure that panchayats are reconstituted within a reasonable period of time, that is, six months. It thus also knocks the bottom out of the opposition criticism that the Bill is aimed at undercutting the powers of the State Governments by establishing a direct link between the Centre and the panchayat institutions.

In fact, the proposed amendments should strengthen the hands of the State Governments irrespective of the party in power and ensure that the so-called power brokers and vested interests are eliminated. The only argument the opposition has been drumming up was that the Amendment Bill was an election gimmick of the ruling party to attract votes of the rural poor, the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes and women all of whom have been given reservation in all panchayats. It is certainly not a mere election slogan as the opposition would have liked to believe. It is a calculated move of the Prime Minister to raise the present opposition politics from non-issues, abuse and character assassination to basic issues affecting the socio-economic life of the people. For once the opposition which had been building up its campaign on non issues finds itself in a position where it can neither disagree or fight back with an equally potent public issue. There is nothing wrong if the Congress(I) is making the panchayat Bill an election issue with the slogan "power to the people" because as a political party it is within its right to use such an issue to make political mileage to remain in power.

# The ADCs: Making History Again

***By H H Mohrmen***

It is not often that the major political parties which are always at each other's throats would all of a sudden decide to bury their hatchet and join hands in strengthening the Executive Committee of the Council. It was claimed that the Congress' decision to join the People Democratic Front led Executive Committee of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council is because the prevailing situation demands that the MDCs forego all their allegiances and forget the differences they have to save the "Jaidbynriew." It is said that the MDCs need to come together to work as one unit because the Jaidbynriew is in a grave danger.

The reasons given by the MDCs that the aligning and realigning of their allegiance to protect the interests of the tribal community in the prevailing situation sounds convincing but is hard to believe. The question is: why is this sudden surge of love for the Jaidbynriew among the MDCs? If there indeed is a genuine love for the Jaidbynriew why wait till the fag end of the council's term to unite? What can the PN Syiem-led EC do in seven months that it has not been able to do in the last four years? Is it not true that Syiem spent most of the last four years confronting his bête noire Dr Mukul Sangma and this ultimately cost him his membership to the legislative assembly?

In a democracy a system is considered to be healthy if we have a strong government and an equally strong opposition, yet the question is what change can a one-sided EC bring? What, if in spite of having a united KHADC, the prevailing problem persists? If in spite of all the efforts made by united KHAD Council to protect the Jaidbynriew, it fails to protect the interests of the community, then can we then conclude that ADCs are irrelevant? The truth is the arrangement arrived at was for the interest of the MDCs and not the public per-se. The reason is that all of a sudden it has dawned on the MDCs that they have only seven months left until the elections so they need to make hay while the sun shines. There's no time to quarrel anymore and within this limited time they must come up with something to prove to the voters that they have done something for the interests of the people.

The other very important question is whether the Congress under the leadership of Dr Mukul Sangma would allow this arrangement to happen. How can the party support the same person it has suspended and who later started his own party and became a strong opponent of the Congress? Is it because like they say, in politics; there are no permanent friends and permanent enemies, or are they cooking something else; the outcome of which, the public will have to wait and see?

In Jaintia Hills in spite of the fact that there is no perceived threat to the tribals in the district yet, the Chief Executive Member was removed and a new EC of the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council was formed. The same MDCs have only elected a new EC in March of this year and Moonlight Pariat was installed as the new CEM but even before the lapse of four months the same MDCs have switched sides and a new EC was cobbled up to create a new EC and new CEM.

**The fact is the threat to the Jaidbynriew is not from outside but rather from within the system and the most dangerous threat is of having unprincipled leaders and MDCs in the District Councils in particular.**

In the case of the JHADC, the Comptroller and Auditor General's report has many a time raised questions on the way the Council handles its finances but the same was not even thoroughly or seriously discussed in the House. The Council spends most of its meagre resources in paying salaries to its employees. It is an open secret that JHADC is over-staff and this has hampered the productivity of the employees. JHADC is a sinking ship (jhad) and the fact of the matter is the MDCs should use every available time and energy to save it but that is the least of their concerns.

The Department of District Council Affairs should also be blamed for the way the ADCs function in the state. Take this recent example as a case in point. After Moonlight Pariat had formed his EC and forwarded the file to the DCA for recommendation, for reasons best known only to the DCA, the same took many weeks to do the needful. On the other hand, when Moonlight Pariat resigned as the CEM of the Council, the DCA immediately recommended to the Governor the need to summon the Council and lo and behold within one day the deed was executed. A new CEM was installed and a National Peoples' Party (NPP) led EC was formed in a jiffy. We will have to wait and see how many days it will take for the same DCA to formalise the newly constituted EC. The DCA is not only playing around with the Councils but it is claimed that the Department keeps in abeyance many pending Bills passed by the Council which only need the Governor's assent.

About the new CEM, it is known to all that there are at least two pending cases against him but the NPP did not even wait for the outcome of the cases and allowed the same person to lead the EC in the Council. This act of the NPP will also be like a dark spot in its otherwise 'clean' image as the Party which is leading the MDA government now.

Moonlight Pariat is also to be blamed for his leadership style and for not being able to keep his flock together not even for six months. He may be the only CEM in the history of the JHADC to hold a record of holding the post of CEM for the shortest term in the JHADC. Why was his term as the CEM short-circuited? Is it because the MDCs in the JHADC, like their contemporaries in the Khasi hills all of a sudden realise that they need to make hay while the sun shines and Moonlight, being the ugly duckling of the MDA government is seen as a stumbling block than a solution for solving the complex problems of the JHADC? The question again is whether his downfall in barely three months is because he does not have the blessings of the DCA or it is because of his own doing?

The fact is the threat to the Jaidbynriew is not from outside but rather from within the system and the most dangerous threat is of having unprincipled leaders and MDCs in the District Councils in particular. We find MDCs not only switching sides at regular intervals but we even have cases of MDCs joining two parties within six months especially during the elections. In the current situation it is difficult to find an MDC who is not a defector because in the last four years, most of them had defected at least once from the original party that they were elected to in the first place.

Even the political parties both regional and national play different games at the ADC level. They align and realign their coalitions despite the fact that the parties have ideological differences which are starkly at odds with each other. And despite being opponents at the state and the national level, in the ADCs it is altogether a different ball game. At the ADC level Congress can work with the NPP which is not possible in the state and Congress by joining the NPP led alliance in the ADC is inadvertently working alongside the BJP which is their enemy number one.

Obviously the only interest of the MDCs or the parties is to hold power in the ADCs for their own vested interests and to ensure that they win the next election. The interest of the Jaidbynriew is not their top priority and this will come to light when the voters ask the MDCs questions in the ensuing District Council elections which will happen in seven months time.

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Biased mindsets

Editor,

I was shocked beyond belief when I saw the life size painting of Bollywood superstar of yesteryear, Mithun Chakravarty being disfigured in one of the government buildings in Lower Lachumiere. The painting on the wall is an expression of artistic fervour and may have been sponsored by the Government of Meghalaya to promote Tourism, If a Pakistani actor can work in Bollywood and became an idol for some fans here and Indian artistes are working in Hollywood and have earned name and fame internationally, then why object to Mithun's portrait? These days even local talented artistes are making inroads into Bollywood and artists from Bollywood are taking keen interest in the development of the Khasi Film Industry and further with the global economy the world has become a global village and we are interdependent on each other for peace and progress.

If Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson and Bob Dylan can be idolized here why is there a problem if a life size painting of Mithun Chakraborty a well known celebrity of Bollywood is painted? There is love and respect for his acting by fans all over India, Bangladesh, Nepal and other parts of the world, therefore it is very sad to see such hooliganism taking place in this beautiful city. Time has came to rise above this bigotry.

Yours etc.,
DP Joshi,
Shillong-2

## Repair of Goralane Road

Editor,

Apropos of my letter to the editor dated May 25, '2018 on the pathetic condition of the Goralane Road, I must say kudos to the PWD (Roads), Government of Meghalaya for taking up the repair works of this road on a war footing from June 22, 2018. I hope the dispute between MES and PWD (Road) regarding the said portion of the road has been resolved, and maintenance of the road will be taken care of by PWD(Roads) in future, A big thank you!

Yours etc.,
Mohan Kumar Rai,
Shillong -3

## Taming the ego!

Editor,

Having seen a "no signal" notice on my TV screen, I phoned our cable service provider. He informed me that an object had fallen inside the dish antenna which interfered with satellite signals and it would be removed in a while. After that I went to the veranda and tried to understand the nature of the problem. The problem occurred not owing to lack of satellite signals. They were all around the dish antenna itself! The only problem was that the antenna could not receive them! It raised an important question in my inner self ~ must not I also clean my ego to receive the cosmic force?

Rainer Maria Rilke gave us a very important lesson when he said, "Make your ego porous. Will is of little importance, complaining is nothing. Openness, patience, receptivity, solitude is everything." It is indeed everything as it connects us with the whole universe ~ with the One. As a matter of fact, this is the only way to receive the cosmic force. It is central to our development as it places us at the centre of the whole universe.

In our moments of solitude ~ when we have an uncluttered receptivity ~ when all the windows of our minds are open, the horizon makes us feel like ~ we are the universe! The vastness and beauty of natural surroundings sometimes give us a feeling of dancing with the music of infinity. It is, as it were, living the universe. It enlarges us and helps us overcome greed and have empathy for other people's situations, for the moment though.

"This opening", said Sri Aurobindo, "is a throwing wide of all nature at all its levels and in all its parts to receive unto itself without limits the greater divine Consciousness which is there already above and behind and englobing this mortal half-conscious existence."

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

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

Two Finance Ministers in chorus to quell concerns

# PM's diversionary call for a double-digit growth

***By S Sethuraman***

It takes two finance ministers, original Arun Jaitley, convalescing after surgery, and "interim" minister Piyush Goyal (who is digging deeper and taking total command), rivalling each other to tell us that the economy is growing nicely, fiscal targets would be met and the crisis in banking system is getting disentangled. The reality is otherwise.

Whatever Jaitley may think of, Goyal has also talked of setting up of a bad bank mechanism to take over part of the non-performing assets of over-stressed public sector banks, totalling over Rs.one lakh crore and also promoting some mergers among them. These may be old ideas brought to the fore again and likely, as before, deferred for future.

Jaitley had himself authored the bankruptcy code and provided sizeable funds for part recapitalisation of select banks. But Goyal must be wanting to be seen as pro-active and trying out new ideas, given the low morale of the Modi Government at present on a wide front.

Meanwhile, for his part, Jaitley in his Facebook post announced the impending resignation of Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian. There were highly laudatory references on both sides. The suddenness of the move by CEA makes for a murky background. Economists have rated high Subramanian's annual economic surveys and he also coined the 'twin payments problem' involving the banks and the highly leveraged corporate sector.

The circumstances surrounding Subramanian's decision to quit and the manner of its being announced have led to questions on stewardship of the Finance Ministry at present, Politics apart, after the series of bypoll losses, the Prime Minister's anxiety to remain in the saddle post-2019 is palpable, given the failed job and other expectations of the aspirant sections and the added-on distress of farmers and ill-treatment of Dalits at the hands of the Sangh Parivar in many BJP-ruled states.

But Prime Minister Narendra Modi is not the one to give in, in any confrontation, though he may also be at his wit's end.

India has run into systemic problems in securing macro-economic stability. On the banking front, there are no quick fixes. The government and the RBI are groping for durable solutions which would help stabilise the functioning of public sector banks and it may take several months before the banking system can resume its traditional role of lending for productive purposes.

The Prime Minister had declared himself a 'vikas purush' and has maintained whatever he says or does is for development. But the four-year record of the Modi government has not added lustre to governance, which had remained focused more on seeking popularity for combating corruption and ending black money.

The blitzkrieg in nationwide advertisements of achievements has had no visible positive impact for the Modi government, with little to show in terms of outcomes of welfare-oriented programmes in the name of the Prime Minister.

No wonder, at the recent Niti Aayog meeting with chief ministers of states, Modi changing track preferred to get ideas on holding simultaneous elections to Lok Sabha and state Assemblies as well as on what it takes to achieve double digit growth. India's growth record under the Modi government has been relatively modest, going down to below 7 per cent for two years as the economy had to recover from the shock of demonetisation and the hurried introduction of VAT.

India's economy had the promise of fastest-growing one but it had been performing below its potential and over the last four years, private investment did not revive. As the economy enters fiscal 2019, with the first quarter ending in June, there is a sudden shift in the global economic momentum.

World oil and metal prices have already risen, US Federal Reserve has revised its fund rate to around two per cent and further hikes are scheduled later in 2018. The dollar has been rising and there has been large outflow of foreign funds from emerging market and other developing countries, including India and Argentina.

**India's economy had the promise of fastest-growing one but it had been performing below its potential and over the last four years, private investment did not revive.**

A robust growth, globally forecast at around 3.5 per cent, could see a reversal as trade wars are breaking out among major economies (including G-20 nations), triggered by the Trump Administration levying huge tariffs on Chinese goods entering the American market.

China, the world's second largest economy, is retaliating. The US Administration has also levied enhanced tariffs applicable to specific shipments from India and the European Union itself.

World trade growth, which had recovered impressively over the past two years well ahead of output growth, would again falter as leading exporters and importers sort out the consequences of the upsurge in protectionism, the unilateral moves deleterious to the survival of the multilateral trading system.

Although India was projected to recover and record 7.4 per cent growth in 2018/19, oil price rise (given our dependence on imports up to 80 per cent of needs) would not only impinge on domestic prices already on the rise but also affect the external payments position, though currently looking manageable. Without a strong revival in domestic consumption and new investments by corporates, achieving a targeted 7.4 per cent growth may prove difficult.

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has noted output revival in recent quarters with investment activity beginning to recover, and says it could receive a further boost from "swift resolution" of distressed sectors of the economy under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code. Geo-political risks, global financial market volatility and the threat of trade protectionism pose headwinds to the domestic recovery. (IPA Service)

*"Develop an attitude of gratitude, and give thanks for everything that happens to you, knowing that every step forward is a step toward achieving something bigger and better than your current situation. "*

**--- Brian Tracy**

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No: LX No.314 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JUNE 26, 2018

## Saudi women to the fore

WOMEN'S emancipation, a dream dear to many, found new expression - this time in the most unlikely of places - Saudi Arabia - where women in the extremely conservative oil kingdom have won the right to drive vehicles. Past the midnight of Saturday, women are reportedly taking vehicles out in small numbers to start with. What is expected is that the newly churned driving schools in the kingdom will train millions of women to drive vehicles in the coming three to four years, effecting a major change in the scenario there.

This comes as a victory especially to the small band of women who broke the rules and dared to ride vehicles as far back as 1990, only to be hauled up by police and brought before law. Notably, two situations apparently led to the present relaxation in driving rules. One is the assumption to authority of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and his introduction of reforms in the past one year, which included a little more freedom to individuals - like lifting a ban on cinemas and mixed gender concerts. Last year he also issued an order allowing women to drive vehicles. The religious zealots are not comfortable with these changes though. They argue that more such freedom for women in public spheres would lead to promiscuity and sin, and they cite theories that say women in driving seats would lead to problems for them in conceiving and childbirth

The second aspect is the attempt at saving the nation's economy hit by the slump in oil prices in recent years. The kingdom could now progressively save huge amounts that go into the hands of expatriates who work as drivers and remit money to their homes in India, Pakistan and elsewhere. Saudi Arabia has not come a long way in reforms, considering the extensive controls that it imposes on citizens in general, and not just women. The Gulf nations as a whole adopt dictatorial ways to govern their peoples. The pro-democracy initiative for the Arab world initiated by former US President George Bush, Junior had led only to peripheral changes, including overthrow of a couple of governments and installation of new dispensations. Saudi Arabia, a close ally of the US, mostly ignored attempts at reforms. Nevertheless, the small changes introduced in Saudi Arabia should hopefully lead to more progressive times for its citizenry.

# Vox Populi - Ka Sur U Paidbhur ?

***By Toki Blah***

If today one were to ask, 'What is it that Meghalaya needs most ?', there should be no surprise that the answer from a majority of the population would be 'Let peace, tranquillity and normalcy reign once more!'. The word 'Majority' denotes that perhaps there is a minority that wishes to keep the pot boiling. The Govt and its agencies claim that there are those who are out to foment trouble and the Govt with all the intelligence agencies and resources at its disposal should know better. So who am I to question the stand of the Government but I do have the right to ask that how is it possible for peace and tranquility to return when passion, suspicion and mistrust continue to run amok? Social composure can once again prevail only if rumours and hearsay are kept at bay. Social calm can only come back when reason, rationality, logic and common sense are allowed to re-enter and take charge of our day to day thinking process. It is not possible for peace to return as long as belief, community conviction, confidence and public trust relies solely on the temper and frame of mind of the mob at Motphran. Where are the institutions and leaders who used to mould, guide and form public opinion in Khasi society? Where are they? In our hour of need we cry out for leadership that can clear the mist of doubts from our minds but the only response we get is from social media with all its rancorous, bitter and often venomous messages and posts. Society has allowed itself to be roused by rumours, gossip, fake news and opportunistic rabble rousers. The roar of the mob takes precedence. The calamity of this generation of Khasis is that there are simply no leaders to lead the people. It's as simple and tragic as that !

A community in a permanent crisis mode is how someone chose to describe contemporary Khasi society. Personally I feel it is an unfair assessment. We are as good or as bad as any other human society. Relevant question however is do we, right now, really have a major crisis in our hands? There are two issues of priority we have to address. Firstly law and order has to be maintained, at all costs, to bring back amity and calm within the city. Secondly, it is only when normalcy returns that the High Level Committee set up by the Government to find a solution to the crisis can really do what is expected of it. As someone said a crisis has two sides, depending on how we look at it. A crisis can be seen as a threat but at the same time it can also be perceived as an opportunity. So far, we as a society, have preferred to see only the threat - the threat of a communal face off; the threat of further clashes with the security forces. The threat of confrontation flickers continuously on our radar screens! We fail to see the opportunity that hovers in the background. The opportunity of engaging with each other; of all stakeholders coming together on the negotiating table; of engaging with the Government; the opportunity of coming up with an amicable solution to the festering problem of Them Iewmawlong; the opportunity of giving Shillong the facelift it so badly needs. This is where the issue of visionary leadership within our society assumes such critical dimension. Question is - Does such leadership exist within Khasi society?

How does leadership emerge and from where? In days gone by, through the sword; by lineage or perhaps from religious demagogues. Today in a democratic setup like ours, leadership supposedly emerges from the ballot box. In a participatory democracy, governance is expected to be carried out through the active and constant engagement of the political class with other forms of social organisations, be they cultural, economic or religious in nature. Engaging socially through discussions, debates and social interfacing is a recognised way of defusing social tensions and conflict. Engaging with each other eliminates potential misunderstandings; helps in the assimilation of different perspectives; it brings out fresh ideas and most importantly it encourages the emergence and identification of future leaders committed to the concepts of democratic leadership. Sadly such practices are shunned in Meghalaya. In our society we identify leadership solely by its ability to challenge and confront Government; say the most idiotic rubbish; testify to the highest level of nonsense; advocate for the most ludicrous policy, as long as Government is challenged and confronted, we have a leader! It's a stupid notion but its practiced all the same. Government is composed of representatives we ourselves elected but the minute a Government is formed, it will be instantly suspected of foul play, accused of treachery, charged with corruption, of betrayal, of being anti people! Opportunistic rogues surface with 'Ka sur u paidbah'( the voice of the people) as their mantra while in reality it is 'ka sur u paidbhur' ( the senseless roar of the mob) that they advocate. Are these leaders?

Within the ambit of a Parliamentary Democracy, we claim we live in, Party politics has assumed upon itself the mandate of providing the state and society with the leaders it desires. Come elections and everyone enthusiastically participates in this major exercise of leadership identification. Pertinent question is the background of such leaders. In the early days of statehood, lawyers, academicians and eminent respected social figures contested and governed Meghalaya. In the previous Assembly there were two doctorates from NEHU. Their contribution to the welfare and upliftment of society is unquestionable and impeccable. Today the pool from which we draw leadership has changed. As mentioned above the ability to confront the establishment forms the main criteria and leaders of Pressure groups lead the pack. Members of the Autonomous District Councils are not far behind as our ADCs, all led by desperate wannabe MLAs, have found it electorally more profitable to challenge the Government of the day rather than to cooperate and work with it. The next rung of political leadership is then composed of Government contractors and suppliers together with barons of the coal mafia. If the truth be said, it is a group of rich people more comfortable with manipulating and dodging Government dues than collecting them. Dislike, loathe and abhor it as much as we like, the fact remains that the above form the majority of the leaders we have imposed upon ourselves. When mediocrity governs can dissatisfaction be far behind?

In the final analysis we suddenly realise that it is not Them Iewmawlong, nor Langpih, nor the dread of unregulated influx, nor the sky falling on our heads that are the real threats we face. The real threat lies in society's inability to produce the leaders that it really needs. The leaders of today are there for the power only and nothing else. The ability to lead, to govern, to rule has been given short shrift. It is the biggest crisis of Meghalaya especially of the Hynniewtrep people- the acute crisis of leadership identification. The Khasi Pnars have lost the art of identifying creditable leaders. Period! If we accept this fact then its time to act! Here is where the voice of the people ought to make itself heard. With one voice we must demand for the emergence of visionary and capable leaders who will lead the society for the next 100 years. We have the institutions to spearhead such a movement. We have the clans. Clans should unite and with one loud voice call for sensible leadership to emerge. Not selfishly for the clan alone but for the community as a whole. We have the Church. Nothing wrong if the definition and quality of leadership becomes the sermon from the pulpit. We also have our Hima and Dorbar shnong, the traditional Institutions we respect and listen to. Can these time honoured establishments also add the wisdom of tradition in the call and search for viable leadership? We have already lost precious time but we can still recover. I sincerely believe it's time to start thinking out of the box; for the community to do pre- screening leadership identifying exercises before political candidates are let loose on a gullible and credulous electorate. The qualities of leadership need to be pre-determined and our political parties have miserably failed us on this score. 'Ka sur u paidbah' needs to trumpet this socio-political need of the hour. We can ill afford to allow 'ka sur u paidbhur' to take over our daily lives.

Cyber risks for financial sector aggravate

# India among the most exposed countries

*By Gyan Pathak*

Cyber risk has emerged as a key threat to financial stability around the world. The recent trend of attacks on financial institutions indicates that aggregate losses for the financial sector across a variety of scenarios may be ranging from 10 to 30 per cent of the net income.

It is the gist of the analysis done in an IMF working paper titled "Cyber Risk for the Financial Sector: A Framework for Quantitative Assessment" by Antoine Bouveret. The paper analyzed the different types of cyber incidents like data breaches, fraud, and business disruption etc.

The share of cyber attacks by countries shows that India is the fifth most seriously affected country in the world which shares around 3 per cent of cyber attacks on its financial institutions. The highest number of attacks (around 39 per cent) was reported from the United States. The second most vulnerable country was UK, but much less than the US. Only around 7 per cent of attacks were reported from that country. The share of attacks on the financial institutions of Russia is around 6 per cent.

Among financial institutions, banks account for the bulk of the attacks (91 per cent), followed by insurance companies (7 per cent). Among banks, retail banking activities (39 per cent of the total) and credit cards services (25 per cent) were the main business lines targeted.

The International Telecommunication Unit (ITU)- an agency of the United Nations- provides a global cyber security index for the world. Their index (2017) shows the cross-country heterogeneity regarding cyber security, with most Advanced Economies and Emerging Markets having a high value of the cyber security index (above the median), while middle income and low-income countries tend to have lower values. India figures in the index among the countries with highest level of vulnerabilities.

Since there is no quantitative measure of cyber risk by country for the financial sector, the working paper has built an indirect measure using media coverage. An index is computed using the number of articles published between January 2014 and September 2017 referring to cyber risk by country, divided by the number of articles referring to risk in the financial sector. Almost all countries are covered. The index is highest in countries that recently suffered from cyber-attacks such as Bangladesh and the Baltic states having risk factor of above 5 per cent. The risk calculated for India ranges in between 1 to 2 per cent.

ORX News data on cyber events is the main source used in this paper. The data cover 341 cyber risk events that impacted financial institutions and reported over 2009-2017. Around one-third of the events provide loss data which amounts to USD 6.5 billion. Based on the limited dataset, advanced economies are the main targets of cyber-attacks but emerging and developing economies are also exposed to cyber risk. Five advanced economies account for 80 percent of successful attacks, mainly in the U.S. (39 per cent) and UK (7 per cent). Among emerging economies, the BRICS account for most of the attacks (17 per cent), mainly in Russia (6 per cent), China (4 per cent) and India (3 per cent). India has been classified among most vulnerable countries on the basis of number of attacks. Overall, financial institutions in more than 50 countries have been victims of cyber-attacks over the last few years, according to reports in the public media. The paper also mentions under reporting of cyber attack incidents.

Central banks in advanced and emerging economies have also been the victims of cyber-attacks. In advanced economies, attacks were either data breaches (U.S., Italy) or business disruptions (Norway, Sweden), while in emerging economies, most attacks were related to fraud, resulting in losses of USD 117 million.

Among cyber-attacks, fraud and data breaches are more prevalent, yet business disruption is also significant. In the ORX News dataset, fraud accounts for 43 percent of events, data breaches 34 percent and disruption 23 percent. While business disruptions are known immediately, the other types of cyber-attacks can take place for months or years before being noticed and reported, which could lead to a downward bias in the dataset.

Business disruption is associated with DDoS attacks, which typically impact the website of the target- when a very large number of requests are sent to the targeted servers, overloading the system and making it unable to operate. Data breaches are linked with credit card information, and fraud is associated with money transfers, and a loss amount - since around 80 percent of the events with loss data are cyber-related fraud.

Financial institutions are particularly exposed due to their reliance on critical infrastructures and their dependence on highly interconnected networks. A business disruption of a financial market infrastructure or a set of large financial institutions could have a significant impact due to risk concentration and the lack of substitutes in the case of Financial Market Infrastructures (FMIs). The disruption of material infrastructures such as power grids and IT infrastructures (Cloud providers or operating systems) could also have a large macroeconomic impact. Recent studies estimate that a disruption of part of the U.S power grid could lead to up to USD 1 trillion in losses and a disruption of IT infrastructures up to USD 53 billion. Lloyd's 2018 report estimates that a disruption of the top cloud provider in the U.S. for 3 to 6 days could lead to losses of around USD 24 billion, with most losses occurring in the manufacturing and trade sectors, while losses for the financial sector would be limited to USD 450 million.

Cyber-attacks can also be used to undermine customers' confidence in an institution, and can target multiple financial institutions to disrupt the financial sector. Several countries have been exposed to coordinated cyber-attacks on the banking sector using DDoS. Cyber criminals are increasingly indulging in frauds using SWIFT and other methods, such as committed on Union Bank of India in July 2016 with initial loss of USD 171 million, and City Union Bank (India) in January 2018 with initial loss of USD 2 million.

The increased level of sophistication of cyber criminals, along with the decline in the cost of launching cyber-attacks, makes institutions with legacy systems all the more vulnerable.

(IPA Service)

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Critical thinking should begin early

Editor,

Apropos the article " MBOSE question paper and critical thinking" (ST June 21, 2018) by Iwamon Laloo and Glenn Kharkongor, I agree with the writers that the question papers of MBOSE don't give students the opportunity for creative and critical thinking as most of the questions are recall types which focus only on the knowledge of the students and their ability to learn by rote. Teaching is a goal- oriented activity which facilitates learning. Learning can be assessed by using appropriate assessment tools. Question papers are one such assessment tools which must be effective and efficient for the assessment of students in all the cognitive domains of learning. The questions must be valid, reliable and must have objectivity and usability. The Government of Meghalaya has taken a good step by prescribing NCERT text books for the HSSLC students of the state. However, it must organise some workshops for the school teachers to capacitate them on the manner of framing question papers after giving due importance to all the cognitive domains of learning starting from the lowest level of Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and most importantly Evaluation. Question paper is not just a random assemblage of questions but it's a highly developed technique. So it should be framed in such a way that the low achievers can be differentiated from high achievers. In fact, not only in the Board exams but in school exams too the teachers must frame the questions in such a way that the students can apply their reasoning ability and application of the topic so that they are not forced to just memorize the topics. These days students score good percentages in their Board exams just by committing to memory the answers to the previous years' question papers, but when it comes to questions which demands their reasoning and critical thinking ability then they fail miserably. This is because they have not been trained that way. They are just regarded as an information accepting machine and their thinking and reasoning ability has been disabled. Hence students must be given proper space and the opportunity right from the junior level to develop all the areas of the cognitive domains of learning.

Yours etc.,
Anil Singh Roka
Via email

## CM's official residence!

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily, I would like to highlight certain situations that should be made known to the public. It is already past three months that Mr. Conrad K Sangma has been Chief Minister of Meghalaya but I am saddened to learn that he is yet to occupy his official bungalow. When I tried visiting him on the 23rd June, I was really taken aback to learn that Dr Mukul Sangma is still occupying the CM's Bungalow which is highly unethical considering the fact that Akhilesh Yadav had to vacate his residence as per Supreme Court ruling, which specifies that only two months is the permissible time limit that an ex-chief minister can occupy the official residence after he demits office. After seeing the location and situation of Mr Conrad K Sangma's residence I must say proudly, that we have a Chief Minister who is too tolerant of the egoistic predecessor. It is highly unbecoming of Dr Mukul Sangma to hold on to something that he has no right over and especially when he has been allotted an alternative residence. Moreover it is a well known fact that he has a private residence at Nongrim Hills.

I pray that common sense will guide Dr Mukul Sangma to be a gentleman and not invite unnecessary application of law, which will not stand in his stead. The CM's Bungalow is for the CM, not for anything else. I hope good sense prevails.

Yours etc,
Wallam Khongji,
Via email

## Illegal sand mining

Editor,

I was appalled to read the report, "Tourists call for end to illegal sand mining at Nongkhnum," (ST June 25, 2018). It is well known that the National Green Tribunal has banned sand mining due to its deleterious effects on river systems. The argument that Government has no say over private land is no longer tenable. Meghalaya cannot live with two sets of laws - one leaning on the Indian Constitution and another on the traditional governance systems. And it is a dereliction of duty of the district administration not to be able to take necessary action on such law breakers by using sections of the Environment Protection Act. Public good must always supersede private profit but this has been violated time and again in the state with Government being a mere spectator. It is incumbent upon conscious citizens to approach the law courts in such matters vide a public interest litigation. Let the judiciary push the apathetic executive to its duty according to the Constitution. It has been noticed that administrators tend to appease the powerful sand, coal and limestone mining mafia rather than protecting the interest of the larger population who are affected by such destructive practices. Leave alone the fact that Nongkhnum is one of the biggest river islands; the road leading to this tourist destination has been intentionally left dilapidated so that the sand mining lobby can operate with impunity. It is my observation that Meghalaya is a state where the rule of law has been rendered weak and vacillating because wrongdoers are never arrested. The least that the Deputy Commissioners past and present should have done is to take action against those violating the NGT ruling. Otherwise what are they sitting in office for?

Yours etc.,
RM Marwein,
Via email

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

*"A pessimist is a man who thinks everybody is as nasty as himself."*
**--- George Bernard Shaw**

**The Shillong Times**
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## Recollections of the Emergency

INDIA remembered the Emergency as a routine annual observance Monday, with the BJP advertising the ills of the 1975 defensive step by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. On the other hand, is also a small segment of the population that feels it was the right prescription for the ills of the time. The 21 months that followed were, by popular perception, a dark era in Independent India's history of democracy. Public freedom was curtailed, many Opposition politicians were jailed, and curbs imposed on the media with a rare flourish. But through it all, Indians survived and the nation carried forward. At the time every self respecting Indian opposed the alleged draconian measures, which also included forced clearance of slums in Delhi to make way for public space and herding the poor for family planning - Nasbandi - operations, and the like at the extreme end. Those, no doubt, were grim experiences.

Today, considering the chaotic situations in the country, there are those who feel occasional clamping of Emergency would perhaps help restore a semblance of order. Indira Gandhi herself survived the odds and returned to power, a proof that the Indian society had not written her off completely or to view her controversial decision with much disdain. The scene in India today is one of licentiousness, spiraling corruption in the bureaucracy and politics, and projects failing to materialize due to pressures being exerted by organized groups. Trains do not start or reach in time, while the hallmark of the Emergency was punctuality. Today, there is no guarantee that even flights will take off on time even when the sky is clear. The freedom that democracy guarantees is the freedom to rebel and resist. It has its advantages as this acts as a safety valve to let out societal pressure. No doubt, safeguarding the tenets of democracy is a matter of priority for every Indian. It is nobody's case that there should be more restraint on individual freedom and expression as was seen during the Emergency. The rule of law must be upheld. But, it is also imperative that we as a society conduct ourselves in more orderly ways, and with a greater sense of responsibility, so that the need for Emergency-like situations does not arise in future.

**LOOKING BACK**

**May 25, 1989**

## CM exhorts students to inculcate spirit of competition

The present reservation system is no substitute for hard work and competition since even "within reservation there is stiff completion". This point was emphasized by the Meghalaya Chief Minister Mr P A Sangma while addressing the students and pos pupils of the Shillong Govt Boys' High School at Jaiaw in Shillong .

Calling upon the students to "study hard, be disciplined and compete", Mr Sangma regretted that even though many good schools and colleges were located in Shillong, the level of literacy in the State was much below the national average and also the lowest in this region next to that of Arunachal Pradesh. Mr Sangma elaborated on his govt's plans to give more emphasis to education in the State. He said the budget allocation for education was raised to Rs. 63 crore from Rs. 2.8 crore even eight years back and in this year alone 68 schools were brought under the deficit system as compared to 148 in the last 17 years Mr Sangma further stated that "whatever, the govt may do to bring up education", it has a very "minor role to play. The govt he said, can only provide "facilities and support" but the "real role has to be played by the students themselves and the parents."

He expressed the hope that educational levels and standards in the State would be at par and even ahead of that of the nation if the govt, students and parents combine their efforts. Mr Sangma clarified that the govt's role does not end "by simply providing for the education of the children" but has to provide them with job opportunities also. He reiterated that job opportunities are limited in the govt sector and the state "has reached a saturation point. He said the only solution was to generate economic activity which will in turn generate employment. Development programmes, he said are very essential in this respect.

Earlier Mr Sangma eulogised the teaching profession and termed the years of his life as a teacher as "the most satisfying work" he did in this life, much more satisfying, he said than when he was a lawyer, a journalist, and his present profession as a politician. The Chief Minister ended his address with an appeal to all concerned "to work hard not only for themselves, but in a manner where the future of the children can be safeguarded. Later, scholarships and commendation certificates were presented by the Chief Minister to four meritorious former students of the school. Prizes were also given away to other student of the school.

# Danggo's decision ridiculous

***By Albert Thyrniang***

Another political development has taken place. The suspense has ended. Martin M Danggo resigned from the Legislative Assembly and primary membership of the Congress Party, late night of June 2. Quite out of character, the resignation letter was handed over to the Deputy Speaker, Timothy D Shira by a minister of the NPP at his official residence in the absence of the Speaker, Donkupar Roy who was away in Kolkata. Adding more spice to the drama and showing an urgency as if it was a matter of life and death, an Assembly official was rushed to the 'City of Joy' with the resignation letter to which the Speaker, obligingly, hurriedly and unhesitatingly accepted. More drama in the coming days will follow. The bad blood, battle and war of words and the poaching game between the NPP and the Congress will only intensify.

Danggo, a former Speaker and multiple-time Ranikor legislator took the decision to quit following the assurance by the NPP led MDA government that Ranikor would be granted a new Civil Sub-Division; the date for its inauguration is already scheduled for July 10. As a result of his resignation the picturesque Ranikor will have go in for by-election as and when the Election Commission fixes the date. The long serving Congressman will contest on NPP ticket.

No doubt Ranikor with 158 villages, situated in the economically backward district of South West Khasi Hills district, deserves to be upgraded into a Civil Sub-Division. The former MLA made a genuine demand. He got what he wanted. But why has he to resign? He resigned because the NPP top leadership granted his desire. In other words, because he promised to join the NPP he was given what he wished. Is that not ridiculous? It is even childish. If Danggo was unwilling to join the NPP would Ranikor C&RD Block be converted into a civil sub-division? Had he not decided to change his political colour would Ranikor be preparing its Red Letter Day? Is Ranikor reduced to party politics? Administration and governance must be beyond party politics. Otherwise we are in for serious trouble.

It must be made clear that the MDA government has not granted a favour to Danggo or to the people of Ranikor by setting up the new Civil Sub-Division. It is the duty of the government to do so. What the former legislator thinks is that the present government is doing him and the people of his constituency an act of kindness. Therefore, change your loyalty.

Now the Mawlai and Mawsynram MLAs, PT Sawkmie and HM Shangpliang respectively have placed their demand to upgrade their towns (constituencies) into full-fledged Civil Sub-Divisions. Will the two Congress representatives pledge to join the NPP if their demands are met? Or will the NPP top brass insist that they resign from the Congress and join the NPP to consider their demands? If the two INC legislators refuse to resign and contest as NPP candidates will Mawlai and Mawsynram be denied their 'rightful' dues? If Sawkmie and Shangpliang turn down the suggestion of joining the NPP will their demands be treated as not genuine? How will the government deal with the flurry of similar demands? Will they be looked at from the party perspective? Will developmental works and policy implementation be done on the basis of party affiliation? Danggo and the NPP have set a bad precedence.

Repercussions aside, by-election has to be forced on the people of Ranikor in less than six months for no fault of theirs. Election means huge expenditure. The state has to incur this absolutely unnecessary spending. The amount could have been spent for the establishment of the youngest Civil Sub-Division. Therefore, an amendment to the anti-defection law is required. A sitting law maker must bear the expenses of the whole election process if he or she resigns to contest from another party. Or if the legislator resigns, he or she should be barred from contesting in the following election. Otherwise, in the name of people's welfare opportunists will continue to take advantage of this loophole in the law for their own selfish interests. Anyway, there is good news too as huge sums of white and black cash from the two rival parties will be flown in to the constituency of Ranikor. Party workers and the voters can look forward to benefit from the free flowing largesse.

The State has had to hold two avoidable by-elections already - Williamnagar because the government did not go hard enough on the GNLA and Ampati because the former Chief Minister contested from two constituencies in the last Assembly elections. Besides affecting the state exchequer, the elections took away the focus of the government. Williamnagar and Ampati were made to be prestigious elections. There were high voltage campaigns, especially in Ampati. The Chief Minister and almost the entire cabinet either camped in loco or travelled to and fro either from Shillong or Tura to campaign for their candidate/s for at least two weeks. Precious time, energy and resources were wasted in more ways than one. The impending Ranikor by-election will be even more prestigious. The Government of the day will do all it can to win the seat. The priority will be on the by-election while governance, administration, framing of policies and developmental works will take a back seat.

Ranikor will not be the last by-election. With Agatha expecting to resign soon to give way for her elder brother, Conrad Sangma, the South Tura seat will see another election unless the Election Commission decides to hold the two by-elections simultaneously. Then there is the Tura Parliamentary by-election unless the EC puts it off till 2019 when the nation goes to the Lok Sabha polls. Regardless of the Tura Parliamentary by-election, 2018 is truly an election year for Meghalaya. We began with the February General Election. We are now in June but we are still in election mode. Election fever could continue if we are to believe that more Congress MLAs are to follow Danggo's path.

Right from its initiation the MDA government had pledged to prepare a draft on education policy in three months. Five months have almost elapsed but we are yet to see the policy that will focus on quality education at all levels and revamp the deteriorating education scenario in the state. Similar policies on economic development, youth development, women empowerment and mining were also on the priority list. But they are still to see the light of day.

As the recent Shillong violence (now extended to relocation of Sweeper Colony) proves, thorny issues in the state can take away the entire attention of the government to just maintaining law and order. There are other similar issues like ILP, uranium mining, border dispute with Assam, railway construction which can explode any time. Therefore, government cannot afford to be distracted by elections, especially if they happen by design.

The Congress has accused the BJP and the NPP of poaching its MLAs. It may be true but the blame is also on the oldest party in the country. Irritatingly, on and off, it is predicting the fall of the Conrad-led MDA government. It is inviting the public to perceive it as a party that is incapable of being in the opposition. The party was in power for more than ten years. It is advised that it should give a chance to others to rule the State. For the sake of the State and its people the government should focus on governance and development. The Opposition too should perform its democratic duties. Changing of parties in between elections may strengthen the recipient parties but will weaken the State. No doubt a mature government and a strong Opposition are essential in a democracy. Let there be no more Danggos!

**TO THE EDITOR**

## "Legalized defection"

Editor,

Dr. Donkupar Roy, Speaker of Meghalaya Legislative Assembly has raised a very pertinent point by terming the resignation of elected legislators from a particular political party to join another and contest from the same constituency, as "legalized defection". The statement from a seasoned and among the senior most leader and statesman of not only our state but the entire north east, brings into focus the need for a re-look at provisions of the 10th schedule of the Constitution, commonly known as Anti Defection Law. This particular phenomenon though, has no legal barrier and is not widespread as of date; being localized hitherto, mostly in the north east, is definitely reflecting ominous portends of spreading all over the country.

In light of the above, it is imperative that the constitution experts consider a review of the entire issue. In fact the Supreme Court has also observed in a number of cases related to tenth schedule that what is constitutionally permissible and what is outside is marked by a 'hazy gray line' and it is the Court's duty to identify, 'darken and deepen' the demarcating line of constitutionality.

The statement of Dr. Roy therefore assumes significance and calls for a national debate on the necessity of whether further amendment/ addendum in relevant paragraph/s of the tenth schedule is necessary, to subvert this growing trend, which today may appear as an exception but has the potential to become an established norm, however compelling the circumstances may be to elicit such an action. There seems to be considerable scope for judicial interpretation, one that may give further clarity on the law and may bring in a wider range of cases, defying the mandate of the electorate like contesting from multiple seats et al, within the umbrella of this legislation.

Yours etc
Naba Bhattacharjee
Shillong - 4.

## Security versus public convenience

Editor,

Once upon a time, the Defence land within the vicinity of Shillong town was held as a blessing in disguise. But it has now become a curse. The curse is getting more ominous when Shillongites have become richer and consequently rushing to buy more vehicles. Yes, nothing has stopped them from feeling the illusion of comfort in the stifling jammed roads of Shillong! Thanks to the move taken by a number of MPs, including our state's MP - Vincent Pala to find other ways to ease the traffic congestion. So, they all recently met with the Defence Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman and informed her the public hardship due to the ever increasing traffic congestion vis-à-vis the round-the-clock closure of roads in the Cantonment areas located in the heart of the towns in the country. It's remarkable that the sympathetic Defence Minister intuitively agreed to open all those roads for public convenience.

What is unfortunate now is that the understanding and kindness of the Defence Minister has not gone down well with some of the high ranking military honchos. They are still blocking the road for public use. I feel the State Government should take the matter very seriously by holding the officers concerned to account. I, too feel this pinch when I am not allowed the shortcut route to Madhav Kola from Rilbong. Students and teachers of the schools in 3rd-mile areas, and also visitors of Shiva Temple, are worst sufferers. In the past couple of years many parents have stopped sending their children to the schools in 3rd mile areas.

Hence in view of the increasing public hardship, I think we all have to shout out loud to make our appeal audible in Delhi. It's only a Defence Minister like Nirmala Sitharaman who is open to hearing the public plea and acting on it. She needs to discipline those intransigent officers who believe they own all civilian spaces and enjoy blocking off the public and causing them maximum harassment.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong-2

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

Indira's emergency and Modi's phoney one

# Missing midnight knock separates the two

***By Sushil Kutty***

The problem is June 25 happens every year. There is no avoiding the date. And nobody wants a repeat of June 25, 1975. It rhymes, rolls off the tongue like ball-bearings released from their slot. The Congress wants to forget but the BJP keeps reminding the Congress of Indira Gandhi's 'Emergency' like a broken record.

If yesterday it was Arun Jaitley - who Congress spokesperson Sanjay Jha calls the 'minister of blogs' - on Tuesday, June 26, 2018 - it was the turn of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who in an unsparing way equated Emergency with 'The Parivaar'.

Modi said the current Congress's move to impeach the Chief Justice of India and its railings against the Election Commission were proof that the 'emergency tendency' in the Congress was intact. Beware!

Between Jaitley and Modi, Vice President Venkaiah Naidu, Minority Affairs Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and HRD Minister Prakash Javadekar chipped in with an emergency not shown when the cow vigilante go on a killing rampage. VeePee and HRD want a chapter on Indira's 'Emergency' added to school textbooks to scare the jeepers out of young ones on the make!

Why? Shouldn't people be allowed to forget the chapter than revisit it? Ha! You see, 'Indira's Emergency' is not a cash cow but, it's a vote-cow the BJP can milk year on year, not mother's milk but milk that feeds generations of BJP recruits to grow up into sworn Congress-haters.

Oops! That's feeble. BWTH (but what the hell), it is a vocabulary emergency. The kind that struck 'minister of blog' Arun Jaitley! Stuck for the right word, he settled for 'phoney' to define Indira's 'Emergency' along with the okay 'constitutional dictatorship'.

Jaitley compared Indira Gandhi to Adolf Hitler. He attributed 'dynastic democracy' to her. Congress spokesperson Sanjay Jha and Swaraj politician Yogendra Yadav, both mild lookalikes, warned that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "undeclared emergency" was what should worry India.

The two were participating in a TV debate on the 'Emergency'. Yadav, in his sarcastic best, thanked Jaitley profusely for placing in perspective, "so beautifully", the dangers of 'Emergency', to the kind of atmosphere that pervades the India of today. "We should be warned," he cautioned from his drawing room.

Sanjay Jha, on the contrary, was a cornered Jerry (Tom & Jerry), with the 'Emergency' albatross weighing him down. He deflected, and deflected. Asked repeatedly to condemn Sanjay Gandhi he refused to say a word on his namesake! Sanjay on Sanjay was not an emergency!!

Janata Dal (United)'s KC Tyagi, who was jailed during Emergency, dismissed Yadav's sarcasm and satire with "hard facts" of 'Indira's Emergency', stating that those who did not experience the horrors first hand had no business talking about Emergency. Jha and Yadav (both born 1963) were schoolboys in 1975, not grownups for admission to Sanjay Gandhi's nasbandi camps.

Jaitley, on the other hand, was 22. A student of Delhi University and active in student politics, he proudly claimed to be the "first satyagrahi" of Emergency. That he was not sterilized is proof that Sanjay Gandhi wanted to keep nasbandi camps clean! And Jaitley's choice of 'phoney' to brand 'Emergency' maybe refers to that, though facts rubbish the claim - thousands and thousands were made unfit to procreate.

The Emergency was clampdown for the Press. It was in the tube (vas deferens) for those sterilized. It was in jail for politicians who refused to cow down. It was debris under the heels for those living at Turkman Gate. It was walking on eggshell not only for the henpecked but also ruffians and wife-beaters.

Emergency brought with it excesses but also discipline! And discipline is what sets developing China apart from chaotic India. That said, but for Sanjay Gandhi and her total recapitulation to his crazy whims and fancies, Indira Gandhi would have achieved what she, some say, set out to achieve - pull India out of abject poverty. Sanjay Gandhi's nasbandi - which targeted only the poor - cooked her goose.

**The Emergency was clampdown for the Press. It was in the tube (vas deferens) for those sterilized. It was in jail for politicians who refused to cow down. It was debris under the heels for those living at Turkman Gate.**

But she was back in 1980 with a bang! Go figure.

So, are we in a state of "undeclared emergency" these days? The opposition insists we are. Sections of the media rub it in. Yogendra Yadav and Sanjay Jha agree: There was 'Indira is India' then, there is 'Modi is Bharat' now; there was an 'insecure leader' then, there's an 'insecure leader' now. There was a clampdown on the Press then, there is a 'media curbed' now. There was nasbandi then, there's cow vigilante now.

But some 140,000 people are not in jail overnight. The Constitution still holds. Courts are going the way they want to. Spokespersons of opposition parties are calling Modi despicable names and branding him Hitler, casting him out among killers and murderers and still not getting arrested. TV anchors are throwing BJP spokespersons out of primetime shows with a 'shut up or quit' ultimatum and still carrying on with the show. Social media trolls are having an easy stroll on the internet.

Of course, Barkha Dutt has a grouse that "Modi-bhakt" Arnab Goswami got his TV channel while she's denied the honour. But Barkha could put that on twitter and get half the country behind her. Life is on a roll. Actors, politicians and sportspersons are allowed to have their say. If this is 'undeclared emergency', then boy, it's fun!

Just to put to test the Modi regime, let this column declare, without proof or reason, that Prime Minister Modi is a neech man, a cunning dictator, unfit to rule; and that he should be booted out ASAP. Let's see if the midnight knock comes. (IPA Service)

*" There's nothing more satisfying than seeing a happy and smiling child. I always help in any way I can, even if it's just by signing an autograph. A child's smile is worth more than all the money in the world. "*

**--- Lionel Messi**

**The Shillong Times**

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## Kashmir sequel

THE collapse of the government in Jammu & Kashmir naturally led to a trading of allegations between the PDP and the BJP. BJP President Amit Shah accused the Mehbooba Mufti Govt of discriminating against Jammu and Ladakh. The Mufti and the Omar Abdullah families were accused of amassing wealth at the cost of the people. Congress leaders Ghulam Nabi Azad and Saifuddin Soz were accused of being sympathetic to the LeT. It was alleged that pressure groups did not allow the Govt to function. P M Narendra Modi's largesse to J & K was not properly utilised. Mehbooba hit back saying that the BJP has disowned its own initiative. The PDP was wrongly blamed for being soft on the deteriorating situation in the valley which had been in turmoil for a long time. The floods of 2014 were a setback. But development was not stymied in other parts of the state. The BJP, she said, should review the performance of its own ministers who largely represented Jammu. None among them voiced concerns about discrimination against Jammu.

The PDP was not responsible for the shooting of journalist Shujaat Bukhari Shah who represented the power of the pen. Indeed the killers of Bukhari at still at large and so too the many others responsible for the elimination of journalists elsewhere. Some BJP leaders played a nefarious role in the Kathua rape case. BJP played hardball in the valley where protest against it was mounting. That the BJP sought to push all these inflammatory events under the carpet and now lay the blame for the rapid failure of governance on its PDP partner only shows how tenuous the partnership was in the first place. Now that President's Rule is imposed in J&K the BJP is talking of a muscular policy which will translate to more violence in the valley.

Why don't political parties learn that only a conciliatory approach can bring peace to Kashmir Valley. Prolonged Governor's rule caused alienation in the past and it is uncertain what the consequences will be this time around.

**LOOKING BACK**

**May 25, 1989**

## Indo- Bangla drug trafficking

The recent Indo-Bangladesh parleys held Dhaka took up one of the major problems of today the narcotics smuggling across international borders. Talking on the subject earlier this week in Calcutta Mr. H.P Bhatnagar, Director General of the Border Security Force won led the Indian delegation said that drug smuggling across the Indo-Bangladesh border has recently gone up substantially because of a change in the pattern of drug trafficking. This has been caused by the fact that while trafficking along the country's western border.

# Under the rule of duplicate traditions

***By Fabian Lyngdoh***

Most of the problems and social conflicts experienced by the Khasi society today are due to misinterpretation of traditions and acceptance of colonial innovations as sacred and God-given traditions that existed since time immemorial. Let us discuss on one of these colonial innovations which remains in force today through modern legal instruments, but stands in perpetual conflict with the deep-seated cultural sentiments of the people. Khasi elders of old said that the Syiem was appointed in a Raid or Hima because the Bakhraw, as leaders of the founding clans refused to take over the properties of extinct clans, to inflict punishments on criminals, thieves and murderers. The Bakhraw also thought that it was dishonourable for them to live by begging for free gifts, donations, or to fill one's coffer by fees, fines and taxes levied on the products of others in the markets. Hence, all these reprehensible functions and unholy sources of income were handed over to the Syiem.

The confederation of several Raids to form a Hima was only for judicial administration for inter-Raids conflicts and for defence purposes, but there was no unification of lands because the individual territories of the Raids remained intact and autonomous even after the confederation. Therefore, the Syiem and the Dorbar of the Hima had no territorial authority over the lands in the confederating Raids. Lands in the territory of the Raids were fundamentally in the nature Ri-Raid (commune land). The concept of the Ri-raid did not exist in the context of the Shnong (village) and in the context of the Hima (state), but it existed only in the context of the Raid. That is why the concept is called 'Ri-Raid. Hence, there was no such thing as the 'Ri-Raid Shnong' or 'Ri-Raid Hima' as suggested in the Report of the Land Reforms Commission for Khasi Hills, 1974. There may be some plots of land called 'Ri-Syiem' which are gifted by the Bakhraw of the Raids to the Syiem family for its maintenance, as in Hima Mylliem, or lands privately purchased by the Jait Syiem as in Hima Khyrim.

The Khasi Syiems were never owners of the territory within their jurisdiction. In 1935, an agreement was signed between the Myntris and Syiem Sati Raja, the successor of Kmuin Manik, incorporating a clause wherein the Syiem confirmed that he had no right over private or commune lands in the Raids of Hima Mylliem. In a letter from the clan Dorbar of the Jait Syiem of Hima Mylliem to the Chief Executive Member, Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, Shillong dated 20th August, 1976, in paragraph 2, it was written: "The Syiem lands are as follows:-

1. The Ri-Syiem, Syiem house ground which was gifted by the Bakhraw of Hima Mylliem, that is, by ka Mihsngi Kurkalang and ka Khyllun Nongkhlaw, and they apportioned to us the Jait Syiem with the generosity of these Bakhraw, the Kurkalang and Nongkhlaw. This plot of land called, 'Madan Iing-syiem is their generous gift to us the Jait Syiem.

2. The Ri-Syiem land at Ïewduh (Bara Bazar) gifted to us by the Bakhraw of Raid Mylliem to the Syiem mothers and the Syiem from the time past.

3. There are also some Ri-bam-Syiem (lands to support the Syiem clan) handed over to us by the Bakhraws of Mylliem and the Hima which is called, 'ka Umroi Ri-bam-Syiem."

The establishment of the Jait Syiem of Mylliem is in Raid Mylliem which is under the control of the Bakhraw of the Raid. The lands were gifted to the Jait Syiem of Mylliem by the Bakhraw not to the Syiem in office alone, but to his clan especially the female members who hold 'ka sad - ka sunon.' As such, the above letter says that the lands thus received from the Bakhraw belong to the Dorbar Kur (clan council) of the Jait Syiem as a whole, and not under the individual control of the Syiem in office alone.

This letter confirms the fact that the Syiem is only a state functionary, and the Syiem clan has no Raid of origin, and therefore the Syiem has no authority at all over the lands of the Raids except those which he bought and those that were gifted to him. Therefore, when Keith Cantlie said that a Syiem has the authority to hand over mines and minerals to the British on behalf of the people as a whole, amounts to what LG Shullai says, an attempt to jeopardize and tarnish the Khasi political system with foreign ideological parasites.

It has been lamented by various scholars and public leaders that through the forward policy, the British had robed the power of the Syiem and made them mere figureheads. But the reality is that, the British had diluted the position, power and authority of ki Bakhraw and handed over all authority to the Syiem alone to rule the Hima, not behalf of the indigenous people, but on behalf of the British Crown. LG Shullai had opined that the British had purposely mobilized and motivated the conversion of the concept of 'Bakhraw' to that of 'Myntri' until officially in State transactions, as well as in the people's minds, the Bakhraw came to be known only as Myntri whose function is only to elect and assist the Syiem. Study of the British documents reveals this gradual transformation of the Khasi political institutions away from actual traditions.

The Ri-Syiem land at Ïewduh (Bara Bazar) was gifted by the Bakhraw of Raid Mylliem to the Jait Syiem as a private economic resource to support the establishment of Syiemship in the Hima. According to tradition, the Syiem and the Syiem clan Dorbar shall appoint officers and employees to run the market, and to collect gifts, donations fees, fines and taxes on the sales and purchases of products in the market and other sources of revenue. But, having been converted into 'Myntris', the Bakhraw today had forgotten that it was dishonourable for them to live by begging for free gifts, donations, or to fill their coffers by fees, fines and taxes levied on the products of others in the markets. So, the Myntris today are more interested to be the tax collectors of the Syiem than to be the Bakhraw. If the Syiem of Mylliem had given away lands to the Panjabi community or to other private parties right there in the market place, he had given away the economic resource of 'ka Sad ka Sunon' of his own clan, and the Myntris would, according to tradition have nothing to say. But, the reality is that the Myntris were also involved in the corrupt affairs because they are no longer the Bakhraw.

According to Khasi tradition, it was the responsibility of the Bakhraw to provide economic support to the Syiem and the Jait Syiem because the Syiem was appointed only for the interests of the Bakhraw and their respective Raids. And, it was the duty of the Syiem to treat the Bakhraw honourably, and to provide for their various requirements whenever they assembled for a Dorbar. The Bakhraw were the honourable leaders of their own Raids and they had their own sources of income and finance from the resources of their own Raids. But today, on the basis of British innovations, the Bakhraw no longer have independent control on the resources in their own Raid. Indeed, the statutory existence of the Raids has totally disappeared, and what we have today is the Hima with the Syiem and Myntris. In this circumstance, to maintain such a duplicate tradition, it became the responsibility of the Syiem to pay salaries or to provide means of sustenance to the Myntris. In Hima Mylliem, where the tradition of ka Sad ka Sunon had been destroyed by the British, and election of the Syiem depends on the votes of the Mantris and politics of the District Council, the Ri-Syiem in Ïewduh becomes the gambling arena. The would be Syiem is ready to gamble away his clan land, gifted by the generosity of the Kurkalang and Nongkhlaw clans, who in good conscience of supporting ka Sad ka Sunon of the Jait Syiem parted away with their clan lands.

In Hima Khyrim where the tradition of ka Sad ka Sunon still stands, honourable relationship between the Syiem and the Bakhraw still exists. But with respect to Hima Mylliem, whether the fault lies with the Syiem or with the Myntris, or whether it lies with evolution of Shillong into a cosmopolitan centre, is something I will leave to the public to debate, but I believe that the parallel 'tradition' inherited from the British is certainly at fault. Is the mandate of the District Council to maintain and protect this colonial legacy as an unchangeable sacred tradition, or to assist socio-cultural change in a healthy manner?

# Making or Breaking News

*By Ananya S Guha*

It is fake news which is the talk nowadays. What is fake news? Ostensibly it is that kind of news doing the rounds, 'going viral' to use a contemporary classic phrase to pan emotions and to goad people into a willing suspension of belief or into believing something, or some news which is not true. That, is to put it mildly, dangerous and can impact society in the most deleterious ways. But, let us look at news. There is the sender and the receiver. While the sender has a responsibility towards the news sent o0t forwarded so has the one who receives the news/ information. And, if the latter without critical thinking or a pause at its implications sends the news to someone else, then he/ she is lending it a tangible credibility? Or is it? The person may be forwarding the news to await a response, perforce with a riposte: is it correct? And wait for a mandate. However, the general feeling is that forwarding something comes with the expectation that it will be fast forwarded with an end to bring in the nuisance value.

Similarly there is misrepresentation of facts, to create a fabulous world, such as astrologers' predictions, enormity of scientific discovery and inroads into personal lives of celebrities.

What then is news? Is it akin only to information, just as history is only parallel to facts? Because of information inundation, news is being hurled to everyone every second. How do we then distinguish the bad news from the good one, without a stain of prejudice or incitement?

That is not to say that without the internet there cannot be fake news. Fake news or rumours are as old as humankind with its innate urgency to tell stories. These stories can become lies, when they cease to edify or highlight a moral or ethical issue. That is the non creative aspect. The creative one is myth making, telling rather than merely stating and drawing parallels with cosmic significance. Unfortunately and, tragically we obfuscate news with the sensational and not through which human sustenance in terms of singular lessons of compassion are drawn.

Thus the word ' fake ' has gained a titillating currency and scourge in the world of news. But again, which news is important? A python consuming a woman in a South Asian country and its bizarre picture of the woman lying in it's belly is news to critically discuss, or is it simply to cause a perverse excitement? The animal man world is an enigma and there is discontinuity between the two. Can this be a debate- the mysteries of the animal world, their ' thinking ' of the human, their rationality, their desires or fears. Yet this will be a news item for visual circulation. This is not fake news, this is raking news or to some ' breaking ' news.

This constant breaking has to be braked. It is not only the users of social media sites that are culpable of ' breaking ' news. Often it is articulated by educated people and the media to create doubts and as a result protests. News should be presented in a manner, which should lend credibility to interrogate. Interrogative news is absent, what is present are raucous political debates on news channels.

*" We are slowly signing the death warrant of even dissent. Even dissent is not possible. What is required is ' being with us ' or ' being with them'. It is amazing to see the ingenuity of minds perpetrating falsity and falsification. Speaking out of context, messaging spurious and morphed photos are the signs of the times. Similarly the reinventing of history is another fad today, which is not less than fake news or rumour mongering of the highest order to rework passions and spout the culture of hate. "*

That then is a death warrant to dispassion and objective, sensible thinking. Taking a strict monosided view is a water tight compartment bursting at its seams. Then there is acrimony, hatred, vicious attacks. Dissent is hardly the word here. One can dissent without acrimony or without being acerbic.

We are slowly signing the death warrant of even dissent. Even dissent is not possible. What is required is ' being with us ' or ' being with them'. It is amazing to see the ingenuity of minds perpetrating falsity and falsification. Speaking out of context, messaging spurious and morphed photos are the signs of the times. Similarly the reinventing of history is another fad today, which is not less than fake news or rumour mongering of the highest order to rework passions and spout the culture of hate. Need I say more in the context of India at least?

News and facts; facts and information; mythical facts and misinformation; where are the dichotomies? Where are the multi layered possibilities to convert information, or for that matter facts into a high ordered reality of valuable, creative and original news? Fact is that originality has taken undercover and backseat to favour the scintillating and the rapacious. Analytical articles are not read, but television channels propagating discord are met with approbation and gleefully viewed. Poets and writers evoking responses to society are tripe. What kind of news do we want, in the pursuance of excitement, which in turn is divisive, what must we write or show to spell accord, rather than the stench and miasma of discord?

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Why is Garo Hills silent/ silenced?

Editor,

I am an ardent follower of your newspaper but I am appalled to note that there are almost no letters to the editor from the Garo Hills. It would appear that all is hunky dory in that region of Meghalaya. Yet the Garo Hill is still largely neglected. There are constant power failures and people suffer from travelling on bad roads. What's with the people of Garo Hills? They are educated, articulate and I see them very active on social media but when it comes to placing their demands in the mainstream media we see a complete silencing of the region. Does it take some earth-shaking event for the people of Garo Hills to begin to speak up? Prior to the elections I saw a few letters relating to politics but after that there was silence all over again. I am not a reader of Salantini Janera the sister edition of your newspaper in Garo hence would be able to comment if readers communicate their woes to it. While the name of your newspaper is The Shillong Times it does not necessarily carry news only from Shillong but from the entire state and also the region and the nation. Hence it is quite comprehensive in its coverage of news for a local newspaper.

I look forward to reading letters from the Garo Hills for I had worked there for several years and have now left to settle elsewhere.

Yours etc.,
A Deb,
Via email

## Demonetisation: Success or failure?

Editor

Leave aside politicians, but it is becoming a mystery for even economists to evaluate the impact of demonetization of high denomination of 500 & 1000 rupee currency by Prime Minister, Narendra Modi on Nov 8, 2016. The ruling NDA initially named it a historic and bold decision to curb illegal and black money, fight against terror funding and predicted the move to be a game changer. On the contrary, opposition parties raised the problems faced by the common man from the long queues in front of cash less banks and ATMs, frequently changed guidelines by RBI and closure of many medium, small and micro enterprises (MSMEs). This has affected millions of workers/daily wage earners with no signs of recovery even after a considerable period with lowered GDP growth rates. This compelled the renowned economist and former Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh to call it a monumental blunder. By and large, the 125 crore populace of this great democracy have shown great restraint despite hardships unlike in other countries like Venezuela, and this is totally attributed to the clean image of Modi and the people's immense faith in him.

Even before the restoration of normalcy from the tumultuous demonetization, the Modi Government rolled out the GST without the systemic preparedness. Traders complained about the tedious reports/returns to be submitted along with complicated and multiple GST slab rates, which had the danger of dampening of businesses. The Government came out with damage control exercise in relaxation/simplification of GST regulations and claimed it a success due to windfall generation of revenues in its coffers. But the benefits of lowered prices to customers post the GST as promised by Government still remains a distant dream. The glaring absurdity of keeping petroleum products away from the purview of GST questions the intentions of both Central and State Governments in passing the benefits to the end users, mostly from the middle class.

Nearly 18 months have passed since the implementation of demonetization, complaints of insufficient currency in circulation with 'No Cash' boards at ATMs in many states. Leaders like Nitish Kumar, Chief Minister of Bihar who had initially supported demonetization are coming out in the open that the stated objectives and benefits have not reached the citizens. He further blamed the banking system for its failure and it is no exaggeration that people have lost faith in the banks burdened with huge NPAs and incidents of defaulters like Nirav Modi and Vijay Mallya fleeing the country with mammoth debts on their heads. On the contrary, Government is claiming increase in tax revenues with the addition of tax payers after demonetization. Interestingly, Government's initial claims of 3 to 4 lakh crore rupees likely not reaching the banks for fear of being investigated for unaccounted money and in that event, the same being available to Government as bonus from RBI for spending on developmental purposes was totally ruled out with the deposition of more than 99.5 % of the currency back in the banks. As a result, the Government has become defensive on the issue of demonetization instead of marketing it as their achievement.

Now the Aam Aadmi is in a quandary over the much debated Demonetization. Is it successful or a disaster? How will we know?

Yours etc.,
Amulya Gupta
Makam,
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.***

*"Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself"*
**--- George Bernard Shaw**

**The Shillong Times**
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## Fighting Poverty

UNTIL recently, India presented a dismal picture of having the largest number of people living in extreme poverty. Recent research goes against it. It shows that the number of Indians living below $1.90 per day is falling rapidly. It is encouraging that the living standards of a large number of Indians is improving. Policy makers in Delhi should learn from domestic and global experiences. Poverty has been plummeting since 1991. Urban growth has been responsible to an extent in bringing down rural poverty. Economic growth has of course been the prime factor behind this development. It curtails poverty in two ways. Growth increases the purchasing power of a large number of people in India. Besides, the Indian government garners additional revenue coming from growth enabling it to make strategic interventions. That also expands the extent of India's social safety nets.

Add to this the benefit of globalisation, which has diminished economic inequality among different countries particularly in the last decade. Fall in poverty levels in China and India has contributed to that. It helps India create the best living standards for its people as possible in the circumstances. However, economic growth is the prime mover. Globalisation has been under attack from time to time. The emphasis in India has to be on economic growth at home. Take the cattle trade which needs a boost. Laws restricting cattle trade and slaughter hinder business prospects. China has achieved great success in this manner. Forty years ago China was very poor but now it has made great strides tapping every available opportunity. Finally, India's education policy and the need for key reforms in this area is the engine for economic growth in India. Education Policy needs a complete overhaul.

India has produced several generations of engineers, business managers, economists et al who have left the country to add value to western universities and financial markets. There has to be a policy of pay-back by such people who have received quality education subsidized by the state and the tax payer's money. However, it is time that this country too create the space for research and academic excellence where the best brains can flourish.

**LOOKING BACK**

**May 25, 1989**

## Noise pollution is legal offence now

India is getting noisier and noisier, but now at last one can seek court intervention for the protection of his quiet. A recent change in the control of pollution act now empowers authorities to ask people or industries causing noise pollution to take control measures or face pollution prosecution. The court moved in only after the decibel matter recording at some of the busies traffic intersections in Delhi, done at the behest of Air Pollution Control Board, started beeping cacophony upward of 90 decibels at peak hours.

The figure is almost twice the permissible level of 45 decibels at night and 55 during the day recommended by the World Health Organisation. Decibel level recorded in studies in other metropolitan centres and industrial towns of Kanpur and Nagpur. High blood pressure loss of hearing, acuity, constant headache, irritation, cardio-vascular diseases, blurred vision, hypertension, violent behavior, mental illness, lack of concentration and nervous disorder are some of the health hazards of noise pollution.

An industrial survey conducted in Madras shows that the agitating workers were mostly those belonging to the "noisy section" of their respective industries in more than half of the units covered. The findings of a committee appointed by the Bombay High Court are starting the level averaged between 57 and 105 decibels in this city. A survey conducted by the Society for Clean Environment indicates that 36 per cent of the population in Bombay constantly encounters noise pollution. Of them 76 per cent feel that they lack concentration due to noise, 69 percent complain of disturbed sleep and 65 per cent feel restlessness.

" Sixty per cent students in noise polluted areas fail to concentrate in the class, 40 percent suffer from hearing problem and a significant number of them complain of headache and irritation" says Dr Surya Kant Mishra who conducted a study in schools located on noise streets and railway colonies in Kanpur.

According to a study submitted to the Nagpur University, noise level is 60 to 80 decibels at noisy places in Nagpur. While school-children suffer from hearing problems, teachers show signs of high blood pressure, ulcer, mental stress, irritability and high degree of anxiety. They also suffer from symptoms of migraine.

# High time to upgrade Sohra Civil Sub-division

***By Aristotle Lyngdoh***

With the increasing demand from various quarters for creation of new civil administrative units, the constitutional validity of such action should be reexamined. In Part IV of the Constitution, the state is obliged to bring governance closer to every citizen in order to secure justice for everyone. Even though the actions of the government in this regard are not enforceable by any Court, but the state through its government shall strive toward betterment of governance and justice within its jurisdiction. To achieve the much touted aim of good governance and social justice there should be no hurdles for the state in reorganizing its administrative divisional units.

The criteria for creation of civil administrative units are primarily to ensure administrative convenience, strategic urbanization and to lessen the distance between remote villages and the Administrative Headquarter. Other factors include population density and whether the habitation is large enough to warrant separate administrative units. The benefit of creating new administrative units is to also make judicial services affordable and closer to the people thereby making the disposal of pending cases easier and faster. This is one way of securing justice for affected citizens. Further, such administrative units should also be reviewed from time to time to assess if there is a need to upgrade to higher levels. In this manner the state can ensure that the spirit of democratic and inclusive governance is being practiced in letter and spirit.

As far as Sohra is concerned, it is one of the oldest towns in the country. Pronounced 'Churra' by the British initially, the word 'Cherrapunji' was later derived and remained in currency for a long time. Being the primary British capital for Assam Province (1832-1866), it is additionally a cradle of Khasi literature and education. A large portion of the prominent educationists and pioneers of education and literary works in the state come from this area. Historically and topographically the area has also contributed towards the welfare and development of the state. The famous orange or Khasi mandarin, bay leaf (tezpatta), pure honey and others are major items produced from the region, apart from coal and limestone. It was also once upon a time a self-reliant and self-sustained region where the inhabitants did not need to migrate elsewhere for livelihoods. But since the creation of Meghalaya State, Sohra Civil Sub-Division has remained a backyard left out of the prospects of urbanization. The region should have progressed in every aspect had there been serious efforts from the government to further elevate and empower its administrative mechanism.

Coming to the economic and livelihood aspects, the traditional and age-old livelihoods from major crops and forest goods have decreased considerably during these years. Even though a few privileged families are benefitting from tourism yet the predominant population of the region is excluded from this business. Had there been unfettered production of indigenous crops and food items, I am sure that cultivators of the region will richly benefit from the increasing tourists inflow to the area. But, as it appears, this concept of ecological-economical balance is not in the minds of our development planners. Another drawback is perhaps that the jurisdiction of the current District Administrative unit (East Khasi Hills District) is too large and cannot meet the needs of the region substantially. There is an urgent need to revive and rejuvenate the production of these essential crops in the region to sustain the livelihoods of many and to further improve the economy of the state.

Unfortunately, the creation of new districts or civil sub-divisions in the state has been done with an eye on political mileage. It is imperative that such matters are not treated as political largesse or favours. The need to upgrade Sohra into a Civil Sub-Division should be solely because of the express need for better and improved administration. This is also necessitated by the fact that Sohra and the entire Southern part of Meghalaya is attracting more attention from people across the globe and has become an important tourist destination in the country and hence it would need better and more sustainable infrastructure. From this particular aspect, the region ought to have access to basic urban amenities equivalent to any city in the country. Hence, from national and international perspectives, it is important to bring administrative governance closer to the people to fast track responses to any issue. This will help converge tourism opportunities with an organized world class industry. Simply investing on tourism infrastructure and other allied business will only dilute actual development efforts for as long as there is a subordinate administration in the area.

All in all, delimitation of state and region improves the situation but is mostly done at the discretion of the party in power even though that decision may come at great cost to the state and country. The objective behind such actions by the party in power is purely to fortify and expand its area of influence and presence. Those at the helm of affairs are not bothered for as long their immediate objective is achieved. This has been the practice in our state and country when the leader of the party decides on certain issues. In reality, the government should demonstrate to the people by its actions how it holds fast to the principles of popular democracy and is committed to providing equal opportunity for growth and development.

The Southern part of East Khasi Hills District is gifted with abundant resources which can substantially accrue to the revenue of the district. Besides, the picturesque landscape, the conventional and ordinary eccentricity of the locale has also enhanced the prospects for world class tourism. Therefore, an initiative to upgrade the region to a full-fledged district will definitely rejuvenate the condition of age-old economic and livelihood practices in the area. Despite being a noticeable place in the globe, the development index of the entire southern region is not at par with other prominent towns in the state. And this is simply because governments and public representatives elected from the region have not understood and comprehended the advantages and benefits of preserving the state's asset such as Sohra. Further, the oldest heritage site 'Rangjyrteh' with valuable legacy for the state and community is also located here. It is therefore the duty and responsibility of the state to protect places and monuments of historical importance as per Article 49 of the Constitution. Yet nothing meaningful has been done in this regard so far.

Presently, as it appears, there is a rise in tourism business and opportunities for livelihoods in the region. Alongside such demand there is a need to engage and empower local citizens and the administrative machinery substantially with robust infrastructure to ensure sustainability. Hence it is important that decision-making, maintenance of law, health, disaster and rescue operations ought to be within the jurisdiction of the region itself rather than having to rush to the state capital of Shillong with its overcrowded roads. This can happen if the administrative set-up has more discretionary powers to deal with any challenge. It is ironic that the state administration has never contemplated such action.

Article 40 of the Constitution directs the state to make efforts in organizing village panchayats and endowing them with powers to function as units of self-government. But in our state since such a system is absent, the only option for citizens to participate in governance is through creation of administrative units and elevation of those with sizable jurisdiction such as Sohra Civil-Subdivision where not less than fifty thousand people will be covered.

**TO THE EDITOR**

## Human rights versus health

Editor,

The Sweeper Lane is not conducive for human habitation. That is a fact and no amount of argument on grounds of human rights can cut any ice. Human rights should include the right to live with dignity and that also means having enough space and proper sanitation. In this the state government should exercise its mandate to settle residents of slums to such spaces in the city or beyond it which are suited for residential quarters. To continue to rehabilitate the residents of this colony in the present location which is clogged with traffic and does not have the basic amenities that citizens of a 21st century country should have is to yield to populism. Governments are not elected to cater to a constituency but to look at the larger public good. There will be greater violation of human rights of the children growing up in that area than if the families are relocated to a more spacious locale. Hope this government will have the vision to do what is right for the residents of this colony instead of yielding to pressure from the different organisations from outside the state speaking on their behalf.

Yours etc.,
D Suting,
Via email

## Standing up for victims of torture

Editor,

The United Nations' International Day in Support of Victims of Torture is annually observed on June 26 to remind people all over the world that human torture is not only unacceptable - it is also a crime. Farooq Ahmed Dar reportedly came to cast his vote in the Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency braving the boycott call by separatist organisations. Investigation found that after voting, when he was on his way, to his sister's place for a condolence visit, the army picked him up and tied him to a jeep and paraded him through nearly 28 villages in Budgam district apparently to escape stone pelters.

The army and some of us had supported this action. Perhaps, it is another matter that Major Leetul Gogoi who was at the centre of human - shield controversy, is in the news again for some wrong reasons. Nevertheless, it is time to scrutinize if a human being can be treated in such a brutal way even for arguably a noble cause. Do we have to accept that the end justifies the means?

Now, we must examine the very area where workers have been facing torture in the name of occupational hazard. It is horrifying to see many construction workers engage in doing life-threatening jobs without having minimum safety protection. Shop assistants in some malls are made to work for more than eight hours a day.

They have been forced to hand over their mobile phones during working hours. Being totally disconnected, they cannot provide help to their families in crisis situations. Sometimes, they are not allowed even to go to the toilet! We need to create such an environment where they will be able to enjoy their "Fundamental Right against Exploitation" as enshrined in the Article 23 of the Constitution of India.

At the same time, we must try to attract every child to a school and to effectively end child labour and child abuse. Schools need to provide the students with a safe shelter, nutritious midday meal, drinking water and toilets where students can get quality education without facing any kind of torture be it corporal punishment or ragging or hunger or thirst or insecurity.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

## GST reforms

Editor,

The outgoing Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian suggested removal of 28-percent slab and a common cess of 40-percent on goods requiring tax-rate more than highest GST slab-rate. But these suggestions are not practical and incomplete. Many items like liquor presently attract much higher taxes which if allowed maximum 40-percent cess will become very cheap and cause appreciable loss to the public-exchequer. Likewise removal of just one 28-percent slab is nowhere near to ideal single-rate GST structure. Even 18-percent GST slab on service-sector is very high and needs to be reduced to 12-percent GST-slab with abolition of Input-Tax-Credit (ITC) provision at least from service sector to compensate loss by bringing it in 12-percent GST-slab.

Ideally the country should have one single 12-percent GST-slab abolishing all other slabs of 0.25, 3, 5, 18 and 28-percent. Rather exemption from GST should be altogether abolished. Such a provision will give much higher revenue than in the present system, apart from making the system simpler. People will be ultimately benefitted by abolition of 18 and 28 percent slabs even if they lose exemption on some commodities and abolition of five-percent GST-slab. Cess may be replaced by GST in multiples of 60 to be equivalent to pre-GST tax-structure on costly items to bring uniformity in tax-structure. This should be applicable even on costly items presently attracting cess.

Yours etc.,
Madhu Agrawal,
Via email

Mexico poised for a regime change on July 1

# Anti-Trump obrador is way ahead in Presidential Poll

***By Mark Gruenberg***

In news U.S. workers won't like to hear, particularly those in Midwestern industrial states that saw their jobs and plants decamp south of the border, some two-thirds of Mexicans support a new North American Free Trade Agreement. Some of that support seems to be coming from people in that country who are so angry at President Trump that they are inclined to back whatever it is that he opposes. Also in support of a new NAFTA is Mexico's leading presidential contender, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, known by his initials, AMLO.

Mexican hatred of Trump spans the political spectrum there, ever since he started his U.S. presidential bid in 2015 by fanning the flames of hatred of immigrants from that country. Trump denounced Mexican migrants to the U.S. as rapists and murderers and promised to build "a big beautiful wall" at the U.S.-Mexico border - and get Mexico to pay for it. Mexican politicians of all stripes resolutely refused and denounced him. AMLO is no fan of Trump's wall, either. Nor are organized labor or U.S. congressional Democrats.

Mexican opinion polls give the progressive Lopez Obrador, the candidate of his self-founded Morena Party, a 20-percentage point lead over each of the next two contenders, from two traditional parties, the conservative National Action Party (PAN) and the currently ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). AMLO currently gets 47 percent of those polled.

And political coattails still matter more in Mexico. The analysts at the discussion, sponsored by the Wilson Center in D.C., agreed AMLO could sweep Morena majorities into office with him in both houses of Mexico's Congress and in governorships of its most-populous states.

The current PRI government of Enrique Pena Nieto is renegotiating NAFTA, facing off against the Trump administration and the Canadian government of Liberal Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Trump repeatedly threatens to pull out of the talks and dump NAFTA, unless the two other countries agree to his demands.

The labor movement in the U.S. wants to see changes in NAFTA but focuses on the push for higher wages for Mexican workers. Better conditions for Mexico's workers would reduce the incentive U.S. industries now have to pick up and move to Mexico where they exploit much cheaper labor. Pena Nieto has resisted demands for higher wages and increased labor rights in Mexico.

Canada's Prime Minister Trudeau initially supported requiring stronger U.S. labor laws, including repeal of all so-called right-to-work laws, but has since soft-pedaled that stand. Trudeau also wants to keep the business-slanted secret trade court, the Investor State Dispute System, in NAFTA. Organized labor in both the U.S. and Canada has opposed the secret trade court.

The U.S. labor movement, in a long analysis of what the U.S. should seek in the "new NAFTA" talks, says Trump's trade negotiator, Robert Lighthizer, should push for higher wages in Mexico, and a lot more.

U.S. unions also urge Lighthizer to stand strongly for - among other goals - enforceable worker rights and independent trade unions in Mexico and curbs on how far unsafe Mexican trucks, driven by tired truckers, can roam over U.S. roads. The current NAFTA now lets them roll everywhere in the U.S., after a long, and sometimes-successful campaign by the Teamsters to limit the trucks to within 20 miles north of the border.

The Economic Policy Institute calculated that since it took effect a quarter of a century ago, NAFTA cost the U.S. between 770,000 and 1 million industrial jobs as corporations ranging from GM to Mondelez - Oreo cookies - headed south of the border to pay lower wages, escape unions and avoid environmental rules. The Communications Workers add NAFTA also prompted U.S. firms to shift call-center jobs away from union workers in the U.S., exporting them to Mexico, the Philippines and India.

And independent analysts point out NAFTA is responsible for a share of the undocumented people crossing the U.S. border since it passed. That's because NAFTA opened the Mexican market to cheap mass-produced U.S. farm goods, principally corn, decimating the Mexican agricultural economy.

Despite all that, especially the loss of farm jobs, many Mexicans view NAFTA as good for them because they have switched views over the last quarter of a century from being producers to being consumers.

Poor and working people in Mexico, like their counterparts in the U.S., have small incomes with which to meet a large number of needs. The lower prices available in outlets like Walmart, regardless of the role they play in the world economy, are something people need.

Younger and more educated people, including those who are a bit better off economically, are also shifting to Lopez Obrador, the panel said. And, unlike in past years, when AMLO ran from the left, even the upper, educated classes don't see him as a threat. One point which changed their views, according to panelists: Lopez Obrador's successful pragmatic mayoralty of Mexico City.

During his time in the mayor's chair, AMLO continued his nationwide reputation for grassroots organizing while using the slogan "For the good of all, the poor first" to promote old-age pensions, financial support for single mothers and the jobless, investments in urban redevelopment, infrastructure and education.

Mexican voters of all classes are more fed up with the performance - or lack of it - in this century. They fault Pena Nieto and PRI the last six years in combating crime, corruption and rampant drug trafficking, and prior failures in those fields by PAN's two presidents in the 12 years before that. Left unsaid: Until 2000, PRI ruled Mexico, for decades as a virtual one-party state, since the end of the second Mexican Revolution in 1929.

AMLO is an outsider" compared to his PRI and PAN presidential foes "and Morena is a new party. They (Mexicans) like that.

*"Rape is one of the most terrible crimes on earth and it happens every few minutes. The problem with groups who deal with rape is that they try to educate women about how to defend themselves. What really needs to be done is teaching men not to rape. Go to the source and start there."*

**-- Kurt Cobain**

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## Rape cases on a crazy spiral

THE Thompson Reuters report names India as the most unsafe country for women. This cannot be easily contested considering the growing number of rapes ad atrocities against women. Notably, the survey held periodically had ranked India at seventh slot in 2011, a year before the Delhi gang-rape of a paramedic that led to strengthening of related laws across the country. The scenario admittedly has not changed for the better. Rather, it's worsening by the day.

Clearly, here is proof that laws alone will not suffice to effect a turn-around in the situation. Sex is a primordial instinct that drives human life. At the same time, India is a nation with a strict moral code, adhered to largely in public life. Safety valves like organised prostitution centres do not mark out the life here, unlike in the West, or even in some Asian countries. In a society that's increasingly coming under the influence of the Internet, the interest in sexual matters is naturally on the ascendant.

Yet, the Indian establishment's approach to this serious issue leaves much to be desired. The way it deals with this steadily worsening situation is both old-fashioned and ham-handed. There is no real seriousness about going into the root of the problem and ensuring the safety of women both in public life and at their homes. A Union Minister is among those advocating castration of those indulging in rape. An issue in which human passions are involved cannot be handled in this manner, unless India wants to emerge as a nation on the lines of countries like, Saudi Arabia. Creating conditions for women safety is one thing, and increasing the level of punishment for such acts is quite another.

Today in state after state, the day starts with reports of cases of rape being filed. One of the main jobs at police stations today is filing of FIRs on rape cases and cases of sex-related crimes or atrocities on women, mostly girls in the public sphere. Teenage girls sadly form the bulk of the victims. Cases of tribal girls or those from rural areas being raped and murdered are cropping up with increased frenzy also because new laws have teeth and spread of awareness has helped in the matter of booking the guilty. But, notably, the number of such incidents are steadily on the rise. Herein lies a serious contradiction.

Migration & citizenship

# Assam, a critical case

***By Dr S Saraswathi***

The deadline for the final draft of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) for Assam set as 30 June 2018 is nearing and once again several issues surrounding migration and citizenship have burst out.

A few days back, students of Dibrugarh University declared they would prevent Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal from entering the alma mater until the Union Government scrapped the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 now under consideration. It is also reported in some sections of the media that he would willingly step down if he could not protect the interests of the people of Assam.

An executive order of the Home Ministry issued in 2015 relaxed the provisions for persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan from entering and staying in India without proper documents. There are about 400 Pakistani Hindu refugee settlements.

For about 28 per cent of Assam's population who are Bengali-speaking, the proposed Amendment of the Citizenship Act is crucial. They do not figure in the first updated NRC published in December 2017 implying thereby that they would lose their citizenship by end of June. They will have to prove their Indian citizenship to get enrolled in the Register. The omission includes 15 of 126 MLAs of Assam.

The Assam Government introduced a new rule making siblings of those marked foreigners ineligible for inclusion in updated NRC. It has also been sustained by the Guwahati High Court. Bengali Hindus are, therefore, worried about their future in Assam. The rule cannot be deemed as harsh as the attempt to separate children from migrant parents that was blocked in the US or the forceful advise of the US President that "people must simply be stopped at the border and told they cannot come into the US illegally". But still, it betrays departure from traditional generosity of Indians in dealing with migrants. There are bound to be differences among the people of Assam over adopting a strong stand on the migrant problem.

The Amendment Bill proposes that six "persecuted minorities" – Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians, and Buddhists – from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, who came to India before 31st March 2014, may not be treated as illegal migrants and seeks to grant them citizenship. It will mean that non-Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh will get citizenship of India which is contrary to the Assam Accord of 1985 that ended the long anti-foreigner agitation in Assam. It has raised protests from large sections of indigenous people on the ground that the move would make them a minority in their own State.

The Assam Accord has put the cut-off date as 24th March 1971 for citizenship. Those who entered after this date had to be tracked down and deported. It also provided for sealing of India-Bangladesh border. The extension of the cut-off date by over 40 years proposed in 2016 Amendment Bill would benefit several thousand migrants. Assamese are once again concerned about employment prospects – a worry that is bigger than their worry about the plight of their kith and kin abroad.

*"A few days back, students of Dibrugarh University declared they would prevent Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal from entering the alma mater until the Union Government scrapped the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 now under consideration. It is also reported in some sections of the media that he would willingly step down if he could not protect the interests of the people of Assam."*

It is a complex issue involving people's livelihood, human rights, nationhood and citizenship rights, and also relations with neighbouring countries. It is an issue in which citizenship and politico-legal interests are not in harmony with subjective factors like common religion, language, race, etc.

*An executive order of the Home Ministry issued in 2015 relaxed the provisions for persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan from entering and staying in India without proper documents. There are about 400 Pakistani Hindu refugee settlements.*

Any proposal coming from outsiders (including the Union Government) is not likely to please all the interested parties concerned in Assam. We have to find the most acceptable and least offensive formula. At the same time, the broader issues of nationhood and citizenship have to be kept in mind. The NRC, intended to cover the entire nation, is being prepared mainly for Assam under the amended sub-rules of Citizenship.

In the North-East Region, there are both migrants and refugees. Migrants do not enjoy protection and/or privileges under international law while refugees do. They move from place to place within a country or between countries by choice in response to pull and push factors and not under direct pressure of any persecution in their place like refugees. The receiving countries are free to legislate on migration and deal with migrants according to their own law. Refugees, on the contrary, have no choice in most cases, as they literally flee from their place to escape from some unlivable conditions.

Confusion over migrant and refugee status is a historic factor intensified in the influx of continuous stream of people from West Asia and Africa into Europe in recent years. Similar confusion in lesser degree exists in migrants in India also ever since the days of Partition.

Unfortunately, the plight of migrants and refugees is something to be experienced to be understood. So also, the problems of host States and communities who have to accommodate the uninvited guests are not fully comprehended by people living far away. In tackling such a problem, a heavy responsibility rests on concerned governments to approach the problem without violating the Constitution and laws and without affecting national interests or human rights and relationships.

In fact, identification of illegal migrants had always been difficult. The Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act 1983 had to be annulled in 2005. The All Assam Students Union and 27 other organisations of indigenous communities are said to be opposed to the Amendment of the Citizenship Act. Political consequence on the alliance in power in Assam is also a factor that will play a role.

There is no provision for citizenship on religious basis in India. The Constituent Assembly rejected such an idea. The Asom Gana Parishad does not agree to grant citizenship based on religion as proposed in the Amendment. But, under prevailing conditions, India cannot open its land to any community suffering persecution in their land.

Entitlements deriving from citizenship are given to individuals irrespective of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. But these are in reality diminished by undue pressure of various authorities and the bondage of individuals to birth-based attachments like clan and community. Some thinkers distinguish between substantive citizenship and formal citizenship. Citizenship is not just political; it is a social and moral function. It is a serious issue in areas near international borders involving the security of a nation.

India is home for thousands of migrants and refugees from neighbouring countries arriving mostly in search of decent livelihood and peaceful life. They are unlike Indian migrants going abroad for employment who comprise from unskilled plantation labourers to highly qualified technical personnel.

The North-East has always been facing the problem of "outsiders". Every State in the region is following its own way of dealing with migrant workers. Even a suggestion to grant State citizenship apart from national was mooted in Assam several years ago. In Manipur, for instance, the Meitis who are the most powerful group are demanding Inner Line Permits to regulate influx of migrants from other States.

The Assam problem cannot be solved by organising bandhs. National security has to be our primary concern while humanitarian considerations cannot be ignored. India has to maintain its moral stature and safeguard its material interests.---INFA

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

Disillusions of worshipping false gods

# Fallen off pedastal, shourie tries street fighter

*Sushil Kutty*

"What the hell's going on?" Resentment and bitterness have taken hold of the once redoubtable Arun Shourie. He says "we are so callous. We're demoralizing the army. They're endangering the lives of soldiers this way." Retired army generals do not think the 'leak' endangers soldiers. The decision to release video-proof must have been taken with the army's permission. Shourie cannot be such a babe in the woods to assume otherwise.

Shourie is behaving like he's on two stools – one is soiled, the other smells. Shourie ridiculed the surgical strikes as farcical, a hoax, 'furgical' to be exact. Did that not "demoralize" soldiers? At Saifuddin Soz's book release, he said the Modi Government is a "one-trick horse with no policy on Kashmir."

But, if he says the government is "endangering the lives of soldiers this way", that too is policy even if the policy leaks like a sieve. His flip-flops on the surgical strikes disappoint. Stick to one line, Man! For those of us, who were mentored by Arun Shourie in the late 1980s and in the early 1990s, who admired him for calling a spade a spade, this sort of double-speak "demoralizes".

For a long time Arun Shourie commanded respect from journalists. When "sacked" from the Indian Express with a one-line ticker-message, for the young journalists of that newspaper those days, the villain was Ramnath Goenka, not Arun Shourie! It was that kind of adulation that surrounded him.

And, now, to hear upstarts like Arnab Goswami roast him live on television! How the mighty have fallen!! Goswami says only Shourie's 'forewords' to his books 'make sense'. That shows how down in the depths Goswami is, weighed down by the stuff in his backpocket. But it also angers to see Shourie give upstarts, at-best deba(i)ters, openings to attack him.

Republic TV got to telecast #SurgicalStrikesProof earlier than other news channels only because the rival channels had established programmes for each 'hour', unlike the 'one-man show' for all hours on Republic. It used to be journalist-folklore that there was "undeclared emergency" in Times Now for as long as Arnab Goswami "addressed the nation" from there. Journalists are on record that the options were two: Get sterilized (silenced) or get the hell out!

Arun Shourie in his journalistic heydays was not like Arnab Goswami. He recognized talent in young journalists and went out of his way to give them a chance. Today, if this column can stand on its two feet, it's only because long ago Arun Shourie gave a chance. And that he did by just listening and getting acquainted to the voice of a sub-editor on the phone!

Those were the 'Mandal and Mandir' days and everybody knew where Shourie stood on those two issues. He wrote investigative pieces and the sub-editor who got the "honour" to take a "last and final look" at the already edited article, was like a 'made-guy'. And, by luck or chance, the writer of this column got to become a 'made-guy' under Shourie's watch.

Those were exhilarating days, till the mosque fell. Looking back, the verbal anger/violence displayed in newspapers like the Indian Express also contributed to the downfall of the decrepit Babri Mosque. Snakes and other creepy-crawlies that infested the ruins felt the loss but not Shourie or this writer whose epitaph to Babri was 'Babar should have behaved!'

So, what's the conclusion? Reports were that Arun Shourie was never a Modi-fan. After Godhra and Gujarat 2002, the newly-minted BJP leader was given the task by Advani and Atal to inform "Chief Minister Modi" to quit and go into hiding. But those two BJP heavyweights developed cold-feet.

*"Ambition unrequited is not different from love unrequited. Time had taken a toll on Arun Shourie. He must have had ambitions to add a chapter to India's growth story. But no! Whether Ramnath Goenka or Narendra Modi, Shourie's brilliance never could cut ice with street-fighters, not for long. Now, in his "autumn years", Arun Shourie has become a street-fighter and the transformation does not sit well on him."*

Then, when Modi was campaigning from end-2012 to 2014, Modi and Shourie met at the latter's Lavasa bungalow – friendly setting, hunky-dory meeting. Maybe, Modi held out a ministerial dangle at that powwow. But when time came to deliver, Modi reneged and Shourie found he was the turkey at the turkey-shoot – no ministerial berth, forget preferred berth.

Ambition unrequited is not different from love unrequited. Time had taken a toll on Arun Shourie. He must have had ambitions to add a chapter to India's growth story. But no! Whether Ramnath Goenka or Narendra Modi, Shourie's brilliance never could cut ice with street-fighters, not for long.

Now, in his "autumn years", Arun Shourie has become a street-fighter and the transformation does not sit well on him. Celeb TV anchors like Rajdeep Sardesai egg him on by celebrating his one-liners such as labelling Modi with "Look at me, Me Tarzan!" and Modi's policy of "the entire jaw for a tooth". It's confounding that somebody as discerning as Shourie cannot see through their games.

For Arun Shourie to get back his lost credibility, it requires more than video-proof. Reading 'Worshipping False Gods' by Arun Shourie might give some clues to his transformation. But it's the yet-to-be-written 'epilogue' that should make Shourie sit up, not the 'foreword' Goswami could not make sense of.

Is/was Arun Shourie a false god? ***(IPA Service)***

TO THE EDITOR

## In the name of Jaidbynriew

Editor,

I have been following the news about the Sweeper Line imbroglio since it started on May 31. What is puzzling is the stance of the Syiem of Hima Mylliem. How on earth is it possible to sell away tribal land to a non-tribal entity/person? How does the Meghalaya Land Transfer Act work here? If the land was gifted on humanitarian grounds then that should be registered as a Gift Deed. How did the Syiem of Mylliem give a Patta or several Pattas to the Punjabi Community residing in Sweeper Line? A Patta is usually given when there is outright sale of land. A lease deed is not the same as a sale deed. Was that land given in exchange for money? And what is the role of the Khasi Hills District Council here? Is the Council not supposed to protect the rights of indigenous people over their lands, rivers and forests? Is the District Council aware of the land transaction between the Syiem of Hima Mylliem and the Punjabi Community? If not how could the transaction have taken place? Which other land has the Mylliem Syiemship parcelled off without the knowledge of the KHADC?

As tribals I feel we have been duped by all these institutions that claim to be the flag bearers of tradition and the protectors of the jaidbynriew. In fact the jaidbynriew is the single biggest scapegoat that is repeatedly used by everyone with political ambitions. But we continue to fall for this bait because we are all the time looking for someone to protect us. It is time now to protect ourselves and arm ourselves with knowledge of the law or to use legal mechanisms to unearth all the murky goings-on in the Mylliem Syiemship and also in the KHADC. It is very disappointing to note that the Syiem Of Mylliem has legitimised something that is in the realm of if illegitimacy because the residents of Sweeper Line have added more structures to the residential quarters which include commercial complexes. Who granted permission for this? Who gave the trading licenses to run these shops? Fabian Lyngdoh has correctly observed that we are a confused people living within two sets of divergent laws. It's time to streamline things and bring the institution of Syiemship into account. So too the KHADC! On my part I feel that the District Councils are completely redundant. These institutions are mere fig leaves of an exploitative tradition.

Yours etc.,
AS Kharkongor,
Via email

## Consuming poison in the garb of fish

Editor,

There have been reports from many states that the dead fish being sold in the market contain chemicals like formalin and ammonia which are being used as preservatives especially the fish imported from Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and W.Bengal. Chemical experts have stated that both these chemicals have carcinogenic properties i,e. they can cause cancer on prolonged use. It will be therefore, mandatory on the part of the Government to instruct the drug/food inspection authorities to do random checking of the fish markets here in Shillong so as to ensure that the fish sold here are free from contamination of such chemicals

Yours etc,
Dr M M Sam,
Via email

## India still the most tolerant nation

Editor,

Apropos the letter, "Minority communalism" by Samares Bandyopadhyay (ST, June 23, 2018), I must congratulate him for his bold and straightforward writing as my views vis-a-vis the present sorry state of affairs in our country are strikingly similar to his. This is India and fortunately or unfortunately every citizen has the right to freedom expression but unscrupulous people take advantage of that right and even go scot-free. This amply proves that India, unlike most of our neighbouring countries, is still very tolerant and lenient to the core. Can one imagine the consequence of such an irresponsible and religiously insulting comments targeting certain community in countries like Pakistan or Bangladesh? And about the pseudo-secular writers, the less said the better. Actually, in my opinion, the Government should vigorously scrutinize the sources of income of such people and the size of the assets they individually possess, both immovable as well as movable, in and outside the country, as this would reveal whether their cry for 'secularism' is genuine or driven by external forces.

Partha Sarathi Gupta,
Via email

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