

“States get to improve transportation infrastructure; that creates economic development, puts people back to work and, most important, enhances safety and improves local communities.”

--- Corrine Brown

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.111 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2018

Row over GDP

A row is on over the downgrading of the GDP figures of the UPA periods by an entity of the Modi government. The Congress that led the previous government sees a "malicious and fraudulent jugglery of figures" by the present government to reduce the shine of economic growth claimed by its predecessor. Admittedly, it is generally surmised that every claim about GDP growth by every government is part fact and part fiction.

The row relates to a report released by the Central Statistics Office this week, saying the maximum economic growth rate during the UPA periods was recorded in the 2010-11 fiscal, at 8.5 per cent. This trashed the UPA claim of a 10.3 per cent growth during the Manmohan Singh government. The re-assessment has been made in a particular context. In 2015, the Modi government shifted to a new base year for GDP calculations -- to 2011-12 from the previously held 2004-05. A review and release of the figures for the years before the new base year started. Notably, the revised growth figures for the last two years of the UPA were higher than the originally released estimates, and the Congress too was happy. This time, the figures between 2005-06 and 2011-12 were released, which drew down the previously projected growth figures.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the total value of goods and services produced in a country in a year. GDP is cited as the "best aggregate measure of economic activity," a nation has. An argument against it is that it does not gauge individual economic welfare. If total output of a nation rises in conformity with a matching increase in population, it would not mean an improvement in individual welfare or comfort. GDP does not account for differences in income of various demographic groups. In India, this is of special note because we have here a curious scenario of 10 per cent of its people owning 80 per cent of wealth. GDP also does not look at black market economy which is strong in India, or might even outwit the real market economy. An argument against the feel-good-factor vis-à-vis growth in GDP is that it does not take into account or gauge aspects relating to critical indicators like poverty, joblessness, health graph and environmental protection. GDP's stress is exclusively on quantity, with no regard to quality.

All things considered, let the past be past and let's look forward to the future with more confidence. Fact remains that the UPA period under Manmohan Singh fared better for the national economy.

TO THE EDITOR

Khasi Hill areas in Garoland

Editor,

Apropos the news item "KHADC objects to inclusion of Khasi Hills areas in Garoland" (ST Nov 30, 2018), it is my considered opinion that the Executive Member, Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council in-charge Land, Latiplang Kharkongor, has raised a very important but sensitive issue about parts of Khasi Hills areas being included in Garoland. According to the map submitted by the ANVC to the Union Government before the ceasefire and laying down of arms by the outfit, many Khasi areas were included in the Map of Greater Garoland drawn by them.

Even the GNLA has re-emphasized the need for carving out the areas for greater Garoland in which many Khasi areas have been subsumed under it. If indeed the Centre accedes to the demand for creation of Garoland state it is feared that many areas of Khasi land will fall under the proposed greater Garoland state. This is not acceptable to the Khasis and they are sure to offer stiff resistance. How can vast areas of the Khasis be ceded to the Garos? The villages may be Garo Villages but the geographical areas fall well within the jurisdiction of Khasi Hills. The land is also under the ownership of the Khasis or belong to the Elakas under the Nongstoin Syiemship, Langrin Syiemship, Maharam Syiemship, N o p b o s o h p h o h Syiemship, Malai Sohmat

Fight for safe global climate is now crucial

Massive public transport system needed to curb pollution

By Ella Gilbert

You could be forgiven for thinking that Brexit is the only thing going on right now, but the political climate is not the only climate in turmoil. Behind the media headlines, the global climate system is changing and, for each year that this continues unabated, the odds for humanity stack up further.

Globally, surface temperatures have risen by around a degree Celsius since we started burning fossil fuels in earnest in the 1800s. But this figure masks huge spatial variation - some places have warmed much more than others. In the Arctic and parts of the West Antarctic, the figure is close to 3°C in some seasons - enough to change when and where polar ice is found, with dramatic consequences for more temperate regions. At the rate we're currently at, we're set to hit 1.5°C somewhere between 2030 and 2050.

This 1.5°C limit is increasingly being seen as the upper bound of "safe" climate change. A recently released report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), outlines the importance of staying within 1.5°C, a target also enshrined in the 2016 Paris Agreement, which commits 184 nations to stringent emissions reductions to curb warming. The consequences of overshooting this target even by half a degree are significant.

With higher average global temperatures, we can expect to see a more chaotic and less stable climate system, which will lead to more extreme weather events like drought, flooding and storms, loss of animal and plant species, thawing and melting of ice and permafrost in the polar regions and rising sea levels that could threaten homes and livelihoods worldwide.

If we continue to emit greenhouse gases at present rates, we're on target to warm global temperatures by 3-4°C by 2100. This, the most extreme scenario considered by scientists, would carry significant risks. Remember the summer of 2003?

The heat wave of July and August is thought to have caused 70,000 deaths across Europe. This is the kind of event that we can expect to see more of, with knock-on effects on crop harvests and water resources. Patterns of rainfall are likely to change, leading to extreme flooding in some places, while causing drought in others. In short, things are going to get more extreme.

Rising temperatures and melting ice sheets may lead to global sea level rise of

over a metre under this scenario. This puts low-lying and densely populated cities like Dhaka, Shanghai, Miami, Lagos and London at severe risk. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, many cities on the US East coast and Gulf of Mexico are likely to experience fortnightly "disruptive flooding" severe enough to force people to relocate within the next two or three decades. In the UK, projected sea level rise will hit hardest in areas at risk of erosion like South Wales and East Anglia. Londoners should be worried too, since 1-2 metres of sea level rise will probably cause enough flooding to overtop the Thames Barrier once a decade by 2100.

The most sensitive systems will be affected most rapidly and dramatically. On the course we're currently on, we may see the first Arctic summer with no sea ice by mid-century - great news for speedy shipping and oil extraction, but bad news for the climate. With 2°C of warming, summers without sea ice might occur once a decade, but, if we limit change to 1.5°C, it's estimated to be more like once a century. The majority (70-90 per cent) of coral reefs currently around today will probably be lost with 1.5°C of warming, because the species live in a very narrow temperature range. However, if warming reaches 2°C, virtually all (>99 per cent) will disappear.

Already, as the WWF reports, humanity has wiped out 60 per cent of mammals, fish, birds and reptiles and climate change is likely to add to this devastation. Changing ecosystems will jeopardise our ability to grow crops and find new medicines, increase the risk of vector-borne diseases such as malaria and limit the livelihoods that can be derived from natural resources, which will disproportionately affect the poorest farmers, fishers and foragers.

The risks don't just come from environmental change either. Increased environmental pressures force people to leave their homes, generating a refugee crisis elsewhere.

People are already fleeing their homes on Pacific Islands as a result of rising seas, while increased food insecurity in drought-stricken parts of Africa, Central America and the Middle East is causing a new surge of migration from these areas. Climate pressures have also been linked to conflict, with some suggesting that

environmental factors fuelled the fire of existing political and socio-economic tensions that led to the Syrian war. Increased pressure on resources will lead to further migration, which could lead to an increasingly hostile and turbulent political situation and, as has been demonstrated by the Middle Eastern refugee crisis in Europe, this is likely to benefit the far right.

If emissions ceased today, warming would probably halt below 1.5°C, leaving us with a world largely identical to the one we currently live in. Of course, we cannot simply "switch off," but sustained, aggressive emissions reduction could stave off the kind of nightmare scenarios that are painted above. The IPCC is clear about the practicalities. To have a "likely" chance of limiting warming to 1.5°C, we must reduce emissions to net zero by 2050, and achieve a 45 per cent reduction by 2030 compared to 2010 levels.

The longer these reductions are delayed, the more aggressive the cuts to emissions will have to be and the larger the requirement for future negative emissions technologies, like carbon capture and storage, which are not yet ready for deployment at scale. The longer we wait, the more pressure we are putting on the future use of as yet immature technologies.

Practically though, how do we achieve the kind of wholesale change required to transform society within 12 years?

Traditional measures rely on government action. Market-based solutions like carbon pricing could be effective, but the carbon price must reflect the true cost of its emission. The cost has never been high enough in emissions trading schemes like the EU ETS because of the power that industry and corporations have in determining government policy.

This same power of capital means that governments subsidise fossil fuel companies to the tune of \$548 billion worldwide, while slashing comparable support for renewable technologies like wind and solar, biasing the market in favour of unsustainable energy sources. In the UK, support for an industry as ludicrous as fracking is evidence of the influence of capital. The promise of profit for a few already wealthy individuals is enough to convince politicians of the need to extract marginal fossil fuel reserves against

the will of people locally and nationally and at great financial and environmental cost, rather than investing in mature, zero carbon technologies.

What is needed are nationwide schemes to generate renewable heat and electricity at the point of use, which would produce a huge number of green jobs, incentivise the use of electric vehicles and provide the infrastructure to support this and investment in a nationwide, nationalised public transport system that works for people, rather than profit.

The power of fossil fuels is built on the continued support of industries and individuals that profit from them. In the face of this almighty structural inequity it can be easy to feel overwhelmed. Never has working class solidarity and community organisation been more important. Of course we can, and must, all eat less meat and dairy, fly less and walk or cycle more, but we can achieve more than our individual actions by engaging with each other, rather than becoming the atomised, disengaged herd that capital would like us to be.

We must organise. In the streets, in our workplaces, in the pubs. But social and political change is not achieved by any one tactic. Only a diversity of approaches will force a far-reaching systemic shift. Grassroots organisation is complemented by aggressive direct action - strikes, demonstrations, blockades, the full suite of techniques - all targeted optimally to maximise the consequences for capital, to hit them in the pocket. There is no binary choice: petitions, community activism, direct action, writing to MPs, demonstrations, strikes - all have a part to play in shaping change. What is most needed though, is militancy.

The left has a responsibility to act. This is the fight of our lives. To do nothing is to condemn ourselves to a very near future of war, isolation and poverty. To act is to create something better, something stronger, something more beautiful than capitalism - hope. (IPA Service)

The writer is a leading Britain based environmental activist

My experience as a 1st time voter

By Jennifer V Pachuau

The date is November 28, 2018 and this is the first time I voted in my Home State (Mizoram) Assembly Election. Ever since the insurgent movement ended and we became a state on February 20, 1987 unlike most of our neighbouring North-Eastern States we are an Island of Peace. The chief insurgent group known as the Mizoram National Front (abbreviated as MNF) legitimately entered mainstream politics and we experienced peaceful elections ever since. However, the success of our peaceful democratic elections can be attributed not just to our political groups but the active labouring of our civil society groups. Particularly worth mentioning here are our Churches, our largest

helped prevent unfair practices such as impersonation by voters, repeated casting of votes and booth capturing. This system prevented miscreants from hampering a smooth polling process.

This year Mizoram elections faced a major challenge and at the heart of the controversy is a vote-bank that consisted of the Reang tribes. As reports mentioned, the Chief Electoral Officer(CEO) was accused of not heeding to the demand of the NGO forum that BRU refugees staying in Tripura shall cast their votes in the 2018 election as per commitment given by the Election Commission of India in 2014. Second, the CEO requested for deployment of more central forces without

“What was observed as a reaction to this was the convergence of the entire community irrespective of party allegiance. Our Mizo identity was all that was needed to bring the people together. Through appeals made by the organisers that consisted of YMA, Elders' Association (MUP), Women's Association (MHIP) and others using electronic and print media it became a mass movement.”

NGO 'Young Mizo Association (YMA)' and our civil society group specially created for elections known as the Mizoram Peoples' Forum (MPF).

To elaborate on the important role played by our tailor-made election watchdog MPF, let me begin by mentioning that aside from the Model Code of Conduct released by the Election Commission of India (ECI), MPF prepared its own set of ethical guidelines and obtained the consent of all political parties. This special code of conduct created by consent of all parties included a set of Do's and Don'ts for political parties and their candidates. MPF provides a common platform where all political parties can explain their election manifestoes with time for interaction with audience including a question and answer session modelled along the US Presidential elections. In addition, the MPF organised common platforms for candidates in different constituencies after getting the consent of the candidates and their convenience. The political party or their candidates contributed towards meeting the expenditure for Common Platforms. Invariably such programmes are covered live in the local channels in addition to our local papers for maximum public information. To prevent candidates from giving bribes to voters, volunteers from MPF accompany each candidate for door-to-door campaigns. MPF also strictly prohibited organisation of feasts which can sway voters. The same is also counted as source of corruption after election. Voters are also repeatedly requested to vote based on their ethical conscience rather than on blind loyalty to a particular party.

On Election Day, the MPF did not allow the political parties to set up office near the polling booths. Instead, The MPF set up an office to assist the voters by giving them chits to guide voters into their polling booths. Due to this reason, the entire polling booth area and election was not only peaceful but also

consulting the Security Committee that included the DGP, Chief Secretary and Home Secretary without considering financial implications and assessment of requirement of force made by the Police/Home Department. What was observed as a reaction to this was the convergence of the entire community irrespective of party allegiance. Our Mizo identity was all that was needed to bring the people together. Through appeals made by the organisers that consisted of YMA, Elders' Association (MUP), Women's Association (MHIP) and others using electronic and print media it became a mass movement. Without a single rupee spent all the Mizo people living within and outside Mizoram, including those in different parts of India, Europe and America, rich and poor, irrespective of party affiliation- supported the cause of the NGO and stood up against the injustice meted out to the people by presenting a United Front.

The escalation of violence was, thus averted through a Gandhian coup led by our major NGO's as it led to the ouster of the CEO who was seen as a thorn that pricked our identity. Subsequently, the polling stations of the Reang tribes were shifted from the Tripura Relief camps to Kanhmun.

As a voter it was quite an experience to just sit back, share a cup of tea with other voters that included both the candidates themselves and those that had come to cast their vote. Till late afternoon we could hear the local councils (in Aizawl) and village councils in other places, requesting every voter to cast their vote. The voters shared a hearty laughter as we enjoyed a hearty snack, shook hands with both strangers and friends and headed home. No election process can vouch to be 100% perfect or ideal. But my experience as a voter in terms of satisfaction was a close 100 %. And I would proudly proclaim that the Mizoram election can serve as a role model for a peaceful and corruption free electoral process in India.

himself in a soup for getting himself photographed with some journalists and holding up a placard that read, "Smash Brahminical Patriarchy," during his recent visit to India. Soon after the photo-shoot, which instantly went viral, many other important people expressed their anger against him. Why did it not occur to him that he is a public figure and the head of an epic social-media portal - Twitter? Yes, any great media tycoon should stay away from the influence of forces with ulterior motives. Who knows, such controversial steps by Jack Dorsey might stand as a stumbling block for him to dream big in the future.

It is ironic how Jack Dorsey suddenly developed a concern for patriarchy in India How many placards has he held

up so far that condemn the racist policies of President Trump or against the growing "white supremacy" in the USA. Has he ever pointed out the faults of the major communities with whom he has lived all this life and with whom he has day-to-day encounters? In spite of being the most advanced country in the world, male chauvinism is still the hallmark of the world's oldest democracy.

The world is practically shaken by the pervasive patriarchy of some of the communities that constitute the major portion of USA. Has Jack Dorsey ever spoken against these assertions of masculinity and the impacts they have on society? And how many Brahmins has he met in his life that he is prompted to use them as a metaphor for patriarchy and therefore paint them as perpetrators

of gender injustice in India? I guess, he should be informed that there are many negative patriarchal mores in European countries that should be "smashed" systematically first. Let him start his social work from his place of birth. Let him voice the concerns of the "depraved" without a specific agenda against any group or person in any corner of the world. Right intention is at the core of service to society. Twitter might go out of business if the Twitter CEO starts to send out the wrong notes. Discretion is always the better part of valour.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
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.

Syiemship, Mawsynram Syiemship, Shella W a h a d a d a r s h i p, Riangsih Sirdarship, Jyrngam Sirdarship, Raid Mynsaw Sirdarship, Rambrai Syiemship and so on. By no means can the Khasi areas fall under the proposed greater Garoland or Garoland state. The Khasis have no issues if the Garos are granted a separate state of Garoland but not at the cost of the Khasis and their valuable land.

Yours etc.....
Philip Marweñi,
Via-Email.

Twitter CEO in a soup

Editor,
Big people should learn to keep their distance even from minor controversies. Jack Dorsey, the CEO of Twitter, has just landed

A case for individuality

Winter fashion is evolving & personal twists rule over blind copying, reports Ritusmita Biswas

As winter approaches, glamour and the gorgeous get top priority in apparels, especially as the wedding season also comes up. Fashionistas keep an eye on major events like the much talked-about Deepveer wedding, not to forget PC’s upcoming wedding reportedly in a desert-setting, when the latest trends seem to be on display.

This trend is applicable not only to women but to their male counterparts as well concerned as they are about looking equally good. “Today, the Indian urban male is well travelled, aware of global standards and fashion trends and knows exactly what he wants. He also looks at adapting styles that suit his personality,” says designer Surbhi Pansari. ‘The Leaf Splendour’ collection from the designer is all about rich tones, comfortable fabrics, eye-catching textures which are tailored to perfection.

Celebrate yourself

In many ways, the current season seems to emphasise the person who wears it rather than a blind following of the rich and famous. Swati Bajoria from Mada Sasa fashion line agrees as she sums up, “Today, women love the fact that the clothes they wear are practical and comfortable. The concept of fusion came into vogue as more women expressed their desire to be themselves; the attires should complement them and not otherwise.” So though they drool over Deepika’s gorgeous wedding attire, while selecting their own wardrobe, they choose the ones which are not star-dictated but celebrate their attitude.

Agrees Stuti Modi of Afamado, one of the biggest names in the plus size fashion. “Fashion should not be limiting or restricting in any way.” Her brand has eliminated one of the biggest myths in the fashion world that high fashion is not meant for curvy women. According to her “Fashion is all about being true to one’s self and women, whether curvy or not, are beautiful and confident. We are consciously dispelling the idea that fashion has boundaries.” To prove her point, Afamado has incorporated a number of short dresses with assertive shoulders as part of Afamado’s winter collection which is an ode to 80s fashion that is making a major comeback to the fashion circuit this year.

The colour palette

The colour palette of winter fashion is undergoing a major transformation with the neons making their presence felt in the winter wears. Reflecting on this trend, Anupriya Agarwal of Azariya feels that the use of shades like lime green or darker hues like midnight blue are embraced by women who love to experiment with their style. “The millennial generation is extremely particular about what they wear, and they do not want to be part



of the run-of-the-mill fashion. For them, style is personal and they are not scared to experiment with unusual colours”.

Lately, designers have been experimenting with their cuts which borders on the eclectic, keeping the traditional emotions intact, but with silhouettes that are contemporary. The hues are bold but nontraditional. Designer Masaba Gupta who showcased her first ever bridal collection at Shaadi By Marriott event recently in Kolkata used bright shades of green, pink, blue and yellow in contemporary cuts which has a tinge of traditional but celebrates the modern woman.

Focus on specifics

Of course, with the change in the colour palette, the winter fashion trends have also displayed another as-

pect - concentration on specifics. Be it men’s or women’s fashion, detailing is the thing. Says menswear designer Poonam Kasera, “Pin tucks will be big this year. Fashion should not be overwhelming. Concentrating on one single element in the entire ensemble creates a huge difference to the way you look.” She also swears by the mix n match trend which she feels is going to be big this winter. “If you want, you can pick Jaipur prints, patan patola prints, classic tussar or a quilted bundi (waistcoat) in a bold palette and pair it up with rich textile kurta such as moonga silk.” At the end of the day, fashion should be the way you want it to be and how you want it to be.

Bajoria points out that specifics always make a designer’s product stand apart. “It is heartening that fashion-conscious people are acknowledging the importance of detailing,” she says.



Experimentation is a must

Mayank Agarwal of Simaaya, Sasya, Siyaa, observes, “It is great to see that Indian fashion is evolving because both men and woman are making informed choices about the attires they want to wear.”

He points out one of the most significant changes that in recent years is the wedding arena. Of course, everyone loves a touch of tradition in their ensemble, but the turbans have been gracefully replaced by safas and a blush pink Bandhgala has comfortably made its space beside the white sherwani in a man’s wardrobe. These changes are not sudden; they are a result of careful experimentation and a search for unique styles.” Contemporary winter fashion thus embraces both the traditional and the experimentation with equal elan. (TWF)



(Clockwise from top left) Creations by Azariya and Siyaa; a creation by Poonam Kasera; designer Swati Bajoria

ART OF THE MATTER

Peh Khaw: Canvas for creative experiment

Can Meghalaya inspire Slovakia? Can the lush green hills, the rolling meadows and the misty landscape be etched on the hearts and minds of artists from a faraway land with different culture, tradition and people?

“The hills here remind me of my country,” Ivan Lancaric, the ambassador of Slovakia Republic to India, summarised the emotions of seven visiting artists from the eastern European nation and five other countries, all of whom were part of an art residency programme held recently in South West Khasi Hills.

Aptly named *Peh Khaw*, which in English translates to ‘separating the grain from the chaff’, the art exhibition was a reflection of the artists’ innate curiosity about the newness around them that they commingled with unique creativity. Works of artists Bianca Tschakner from Austria, Barбора Kachlikova from Czech Republic, Jana Bednarova and Kristina Kandrikova from Slovakia, Kaoru Shibuta from Japan, Katya Buchatska from Ukraine and Lasse Mouritzen from Denmark were displayed at the exhibition at Windermere Resorts in the city on December 1.

A glance at some of the works, especially of Shibuta, gave an impression of an inchoate idea but a closer look with a mind as curious as the artist may reveal the assimilation of the young artist’s impressions of nature. The visual artist from Japan also painted impromptu at the venue as singer Alakesh Dutta strummed a Slovakian song followed by an Assamese one.

One does not have to be an aficionado to instantly feel the creative vibes and energy effused by Shibuta that is complemented by his co-performer’s



calm countenance.

The visual artists’ experiment with forms, colours and subtlety was impressive. Katya’s ‘view from inside a car’ was real.

The art exhibition was a culmination of the residency programme, Artists’ Point 2018, which is aimed at creating a dialogue between diverse art forms of different cultures, promoting and creating interest in art education and social awareness through art and providing a platform

for creative skill development of for the youths of Meghalaya.

The artists reached Jakrem in the first week of November. They had their art residency programme with a workshop for schoolchildren in Mawkyrwat, including children with special needs, differently abled and youths from an orphanage. Over two hundred school students were involved in a three-day workshop to harness and showcase their creative skills. Besides, school teachers were

also trained in skills to impart creative learning among students by using art as a medium. During their stay in Mawkyrwat, the resource art professionals introduced various creative techniques for innovative thinking and creative expression. The importance of natural resources and preservation of the environment have been holistically taught through creative exercises like creating windmills and learning about the ability to harness wind energy to generate pollution-

free power.

Saturday’s exhibition also displayed paintings by children from South West Khasi Hills. Local talent Damanbha Hynniewta was felicitated by the Slovak ambassador. “It was a wonderful experience in Mawkyrwat. The landscape was similar to our country. Interacting with children was an interesting part,” said Katya after the inauguration. She informed that in the last one month, she could pick up one local word, “Khublei”.

This year was the third edition of the art residency in Meghalaya. Last year, a similar programme was organised by Picasso Pupils An Art society in Sohra.

The exhibition was hosted by Shillong Public school and supported by State Education Mission Authority of Meghalaya, (SEMAM – SSA) in collaboration with Meghalaya Tourism Department and the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in New Delhi.

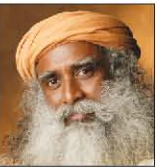


(Left) Katya’s creation at the exhibition and the artists with South West Khasi Hills DC Isawanda Laloo (centre, sitting) and other dignitaries during the workshop

Chasing time

‘Reading classics helps to improve global views’

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



Many people are asking the question, ‘Where is the time for yoga in our hectic lives?’ You get up at six o’clock, go to the office, work, come back home, take care of the kids, eat and till whatever time you go to bed, you have a busy day. Where is the time for yoga? You have time to eat, to gossip, to work, you have the time to take care of everything but you have no time to take care of yourself?

This attitude comes about because you try to act like a martyr all the time. I have no time for myself. I am giving myself totally to everybody. What is it that you are giving? Your agitations, irritations, anxieties are being passed on to children. If you are truly concerned about your children, creating a joyful and loving atmosphere for their growth on a daily basis, moment to moment, is more important.

So what is your focus about life? If you are able to manage your work, your children and everything else, do it. If you are unable to, do what you can do. Everybody can only do that much. Each individual has to decide how much they can do. Somebody may be able to get up at six o’clock and do all these things joyfully; somebody else may not be able to. Accordingly they have to adjust their life.

The whole problem is people are trying to be like somebody else. You want to have what other people have. You do not know whether you really need it or not. With all this work, what you have earned, your children, your husband, your wife, or whatever, you are no longer enjoying it. Then why do you need all this?

You have created all these things because you thought this is the source of your joy. But right now, that has become the source of your anxiety and misery. Then shouldn’t you look at the fundamentals of your life once again? You got educated, you found a job, you married, you had children; you did all this, why? Because you thought this is going to be the source of your happiness and wellbe-

ing, isn’t it? But now, that is taking your life. If it is so, you must look at it. One thing is, if you are incapable of handling it, maybe you have to scale it down or if you are capable of enhancing your capabilities, you must do that.

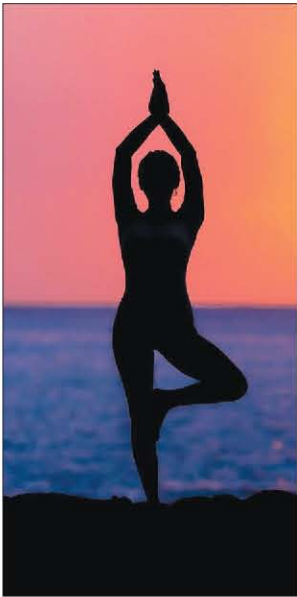
If you invest, let us say, even 30 minutes a day into yoga, you will enhance your capabilities and you will gain immensely, even in terms of time. The first thing that will happen is your sleep quota will come down. Right now if you are sleeping eight hours a day, that means you are just sleeping off one third of your life. If your body and your mind are more energised and active, your sleep quota will naturally come down. So if you gain three, four hours a day, just in terms of wakefulness, that is a huge benefit.

Apart from that, with a simple process of yoga, your body and mind get more organised. You would see that your level of performance becomes such that whatever you are doing in eight hours, you will very easily be able to do it in three to four hours. This is simply because, if you observe yourself through the day, suppose we take a video of your whole day without you being aware of it, you will notice how much unnecessary movement and unnecessary words and unnecessary activities are happening in your life.

If your mind becomes more organised, these unnecessary words and movements will disappear. Once they go away, you feel more energetic and will also have a lot of time. You have 24 hours to live. You don’t have to make this into 26 hours; 24 hours are enough. We can do a lot in 24 hours. If we are organised and focused human beings, we can do plenty in 24 hours’ time. If you are disorganised and unfocused, you think there is no time. Most people are not busy, they are just preoccupied. It is just too much preoccupation in the mind.

So if one makes time and brings yoga into their lives, suddenly the quality of their life will be very different.

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



Henry Eliot, author and Creative Editor of Penguin Classics, was recently in Kolkata for Penguin Random House India ‘The Great Classics Festival’ organised in association with Starmark. In conversation with IBNS correspondent Meghna Dunbar, Henry shared his views on various issues ranging from survival of ‘classics’ to the divide between printed books and e-books.

It is the first time a month-long ‘The Great Classics Festival’ is being held in India. Does this festival aim to invoke an interest of ‘classics’ among young readers?

The primary reason of introducing this festival here is to show people the huge world of ‘classics’ that’s out there. The second reason is that the bookshops get an opportunity to stock the huge list of ‘classics’ giving people access to all of it.

‘Classics’ have been there since ages. What do you think has made them survive till today?

A ‘Classic’ is like a time capsule which makes people view the world from the author’s perspective. They have survived till now because they have a spark inside them and they instantly connect with the readers. Our experience of the world becomes better after reading ‘classics’.

The ‘classics’ which were written aeons ago are recognised as timeless classics now. So, which of the books written today are likely to become ‘classics’ in the future, according to you?

We have a Modern Classics list at Penguin which contains our best batch of books that we think will become ‘classics’. However, only time will tell whether or not those books stand the test of time.

With the advent of e-books and e-readers such as Kindle, do you think the print publishing business is facing any challenges?

After the introduction of e-books, publishers were worried that no one would be interested in purchasing printed books. But luckily there has been a steady growth in the sale of printed books. This is because publishers had to increase the quality of the print books to stay in competition with e-books. I am not against e-books since it seems convenient to have a lot of books in a slim device but nothing can compare to the physical element of touching and smelling a new book, which I enjoy.

Is this your first visit to India? How do you find our country?

I have been in India before and I absolutely love this country. I love the food and I’m quite impressed by the warmth of the people here. Everyone here is so welcoming in contrast to London where people seem to be very systematic at all times.



‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, DECEMBER 2, 2018

Venus is forming an angle of 80 degrees with Pluto on your solar return chart indicates a mixed year. This can be a time for returning to previous studies or update your skills. Partnerships require more thought or strategy. While you're taking matters to heart, you are less inclined to take action and more inclined to reflect on matters related to relationships, your educational path, a long-term project, and opinions or beliefs. Decision-making may be particularly challenging but simply requires more time. Your mind may be looping back to the same old problems.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Your efforts, confidence and courage bring success in monetary gains and your energy increases for work projects. Your job environment is lively. This is a very self-expressive time when you have lots of energy, but not necessarily self-discipline to match. You express yourself creatively, through activities with children, romantic hobbies, or sports when learning, short trips, and other forms of communication and making connections, appeal strongly. It is easier than usual to be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

This period brings love, harmony and entertainment in professional and personal relations. A romantic short trip may be undertaken. People look upon you with more respect, tolerance, and acceptance. You don't feel the need to prove yourself, and that feels good. You have the chance to shine. You are especially appealing and charming in personal and family relations. Opportunities both personal and professional are likely to present themselves as a result. You may enjoy the challenge of tackling a variety of subjects. You might spend time in traveling and visiting friends and relatives. There will be a fluctuation in energy levels before a balance is achieved. Health will take a turn for the better.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

This period brings success in professional and personal relations. You take more pride than usual in your creations, your love affair, your children, and your hobbies. After a period of self-protectiveness, you are now more spontaneous and more willing to take risks. You are inspired creatively and emotionally. Pleasure and amusement play an important role in your search for freedom of self-expression now. You want others to take notice, and you are more sensitive to whether people appreciate you. You may have a desire to re-decorate your home. Some form of pleasant result in your professional life brings rewards and recognition. Personal projects are on an upswing. You will be considerably more productive, healthy, and focused.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

This is favorable time for hobbies, sports and competitive exams. You display great skills in sports or physical activity that wins you appreciation and opportunity to travel. Beware of a covetous and suspicious person around you who could cause misunderstanding in your personal relationships. You would be able to maintain peace and harmony at home. You try to be just and fair when making decisions, as you do your best to see both sides of an issue. A strong desire for companionship and sociability dominates during this period. Health and energy need to be conserved through a busy time at work.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

The planetary configuration increases confidence, courage and efforts at the work place. It's a great time to do something entirely new and pioneering. Discussions and ideas about finances and material security figure strongly. You may spend extra money on things that will make your life more comfortable and pleasant. Work that needs to be done in and around the home becomes a priority. Although you like the good things of life and may spend quite a bit on clothes, furniture, and entertainment, your innate sense of security will not permit you to go overboard to the point of extravagance. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for this placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

An excellent phase is in store especially for money, career, and romance. Friends and loved ones take priority at this time. People at work might be surprised by your ability to assert yourself and your needs. You don't find yourself lacking in opportunities to socialize. You are more peace-loving than usual and slightly detached on a personal level and feeling towards religion is enhanced. This is a good time for research and meditation; but do avoid being dragged down by issues that have outgrown their worth and purpose. Examining the past in order to improve the

future is certainly worthwhile, as long as you don't waste your energy.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

There is success, responsibility and maturity at the work place. You have much energy for new money-making projects, or for stepping up existing ones. Matters of the heart touch you deeply. You may willingly play a supportive role in the family and offer compassion and selfless love. This is a rather happy, goal-oriented time on the professional front. Relationships take on a fun outlook and activities with children increase. You are more stimulated by all that is unconventional and your ideas are original and progressive. This is a time to follow your dreams and ideals, and to plant a seed in the form of a wish for the future.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

This week is good for money, family, status and happiness. Money matters come into focus for you. You would adopt a serious approach to business because you are in the spotlight. Career and vocational issues may benefit from the increased clarity you possess. Much of your energy will be applied to vocational achievement, professional success, and leadership. Your love and affection life is more attractive and charming. Public relations work, promotion, and other such endeavors are favored now. You give attention to fitness and health related programs.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

Public relations work, promotion and other such endeavors come to the fore. Diplomacy, correctness in manner, finesse, and charm will be a big plus in aiding financial gains, especially in areas requiring public contact. You feel attracted to people with whom you can communicate well and exchange ideas. You know how to relate to others and you do it in a natural and warm manner. Your vision is practical right now, and you want to see tangible results for your efforts. More contact with authority figures is likely. Recognition is likely to come your way whether you ask for it or not, and the responsibility that comes right along with it. Do what you feel is right, keeping in mind that you are at your most visible in this phase. You might also enjoy analyzing different health or nutrition programs. It's a great time to make improvements to your regular routines.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

This is an excellent time to create a budget or financial plan, or to rid yourself of old habits that undermine your sense of personal power and self-mastery. A love affair may become a little more serious now. Spending time with someone special is a focus. You are looking to expand your activities, and you may find that you have a lot of energy for higher studies, travel, or brand new subjects. Something out of your close personal relationships is what makes you happy at this time. If single, you are more willing than normal to enter into a committed relationship. You pour more energy into self-promotion or business activities. It's a good time to work out money problems or other issues of sharing with a partner. You tend to be expansive and generous when it comes to love. Dealing with one situation at a time releases some tension and anxiety.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

All the matters hidden and personal come into focus now. Conflicts with a partner over values or personal possessions are likely to occur. Circumstances are such that your diplomacy skills are required. This is the time when you are most desirous of change on a deeper level. You are more willing than usual to explore life's secrets. On a more practical level, you may be dealing with joint finances and shared resources now more than usual. Social life takes priority in your life. You have recently become very serious about your long-term goals and motivated to put your plans and dreams into action. Social interactions of a personal one-on-one kind are emphasized. A health routine started now is likely to be successful.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

It's a generous, pleasantly emotional and creative time. Striking a balance between your attention to your career and to your family life is necessary. Taking steps to improve your family and home life as well as your career and public life will be in order. You will also thoroughly enjoy artistic, musical, or cultural events and activities, especially in the company of a loved one. You have good team spirit right now, and you are more tactful and obliging with your co-workers. You need the energies, companionship, and support of other people, and they may also seek out your support and companionship. It's important to include others rather than to go solo for the time being. You take more pride in the work you do and in your health routines than any other time. This is a good time to build your skills, get organized, and attend your health and well being.

NE offers opportunities

By Ranjan K Baruah

We are aware that a number of ecological disasters escalating every year which brings opportunities for ecologists. Ecologists can work as researcher/ecology scientist, natural resources manager, wildlife manager, environmental consultant, restoration ecologist etc. They may get job in government sector as well in private sectors and more importantly in various nongovernmental organisations.

One needs to have personnel qualities to be successful as ecologists. They must have lot of skill to be successful and some of the skills include observational skills, adaptability to a range of different working conditions, creativity and problem solving skill, expert in data collection; proper analysis, writing and speaking skills; expert in digital devices and knowledge of computers and internet.

Some of the terms associated with ecology/ecologists:

Urban Ecology/Ecologist: Urban ecology is the scientific study of the relation of living organisms with each other and their surroundings in the context of an urban environment. The urban environment refers to environments dominated by high-density residential and commercial buildings, paved surfaces and other urban-related factors that create a unique landscape dissimilar to most previously studied environments in the field of ecology.

Urban ecology is a recent field of study compared to ecology as a whole. The methods and studies of urban ecology are similar to and comprise a subset of ecology. The study of urban ecology carries increasing importance because more than 50 per cent of the world's population today is living in urban areas. There would be more demand for urban ecologists as the world is talking about sustainable development goals and how to achieve them. Urban ecologist would have more opportunities and responsibilities for planning and giving ideas for conservation.

Forest Ecology/ Ecologist: Forest ecology is the scientific study of the interrelated patterns, processes, flora, fauna and ecosystems in forests. A forest ecosystem is a natural woodland



ecologists work as researchers, environmental consultants and resource conservation managers.

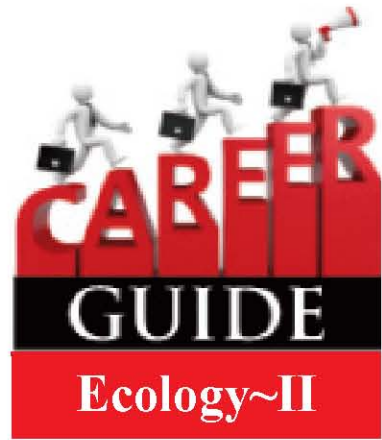
Restoration Ecologist: It emerged as a separate field in ecology in the 1980s. It is the scientific study supporting the practice of ecological restoration, which is the practice of renewing and restoring degraded, damaged, or destroyed ecosystems and habitats in the environment by active human intervention and action. The term “restoration ecology” is therefore commonly used for the academic study of the process, whereas the term “ecological restoration” is commonly used for the actual project or process by restoration practitioners.

All those who wanted to be ecologists must be from the science background and may take up subjects like botany, zoology, environmental sciences, etc. There are specific courses like eco restoration and similar in some of the institute. There is no doubt that this discipline has tremendous opportunity in Meghalaya and other north eastern region.

The northeastern region being one of the biodiversity hot spots brings more opportunities for ecologists from different perspectives.

Opportunities are there from research to restoration and conservation as there has been ecological degradation in the recent years.

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



unit consisting of all plants, animals and micro-organisms (Biotic components) in that area functioning together with all of the non-living physical (abiotic) factors of the environment. The forest ecosystem is very important and people who are engaged with it are called forest ecologists.

Marine Ecologist: Marine Ecology is the scientific study of marine-life habitat, populations, and interactions among organisms and the surrounding environment including their abiotic (non-living physical and chemical factors that affect the ability of organisms to survive and reproduce) and biotic factors (living things or the materials that directly or indirectly affect an organism in its environment). A marine ecologist performs research on aquatic systems, focusing on how water organisms interact with their environment. They can work in laboratories or out in the field, gathering data and experimenting. One main goal is to preserve life in water bodies. Marine

“Dreaming permits each and every one of us to be quietly and safely insane every night of our lives.”

--- William Dement

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.113 SHILLONG, MONDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2018

Exit Bush Senior

GEORGE HW Bush, who passed away at 94, served only one term as US President and yet left a lasting impression. What won him a special standing was the successful US war in Kuwait that was preceded by an invasion of Panama. What worked to his disadvantage while seeking a second and final term was his failure on the economic front. Yet, his term saw the Americans establishing a firm foothold in the Gulf region, and this meant both military success and a diplomatic push as well as opening of a new line for the US to fill its coffers by taking a cut from the wealth of ‘shaky’ oil kingdoms. When it comes to experience, he was second to none in claiming the top job. He started in the US Congress, functioned as vice president for two terms to Republican head of state Ronald Reagan, and in between also made his marks as US ambassador to China, CIA director, UN ambassador and Republican Party chairman. He had a world view and a clear vision about how to position the US in the new global power-play. It was Bush Senior’s turn to handle global diplomacy after the fall of the USSR and he ably tied up with Mikhail Gorbachev to shape up world diplomacy in the post-Cold War era. Bush Senior had his humanitarian side too, pushing the causes for a drug-free world, and laying great emphasis on education for all American children.

The Bush family also gave a dynastic twist to American politics. Senior Bush left White House in 1993, and eight years later his son George W Bush -- then governor of Texas-- entered it as President in 2001, the second such instance in US history. The previous one of Quail Adams had happened 24 years after his father John Adams quit office in 1801. The Bush example also inspired the Hillary Clinton push for power after the Bill Clinton presidency; she taking over as secretary of state under President Obama, but stopped short of a presidency. Donald Trump came from behind to occupy the exalted post. While senior Bush endeared the Gulf world with a timely military intervention to keep Iraq’s Saddam Hussein under control, his son made a mess of Iraq later, sending wrong signals to the Gulf and the wider Muslim/Arab world. Another Bush family legacy is Bush junior’s attempt to spread democracy in the Middle East, which is part success and part failure.

TO THE EDITOR

On feeding hungry mouths

Editor,

Charity begins at home. But when that charity steps out of the threshold of a home, it brings comfort to the deprived. Then true love for humanity begins to take root. Only then does compassion and love find expression. One starts to feel a better “human” whispering from within. Inner satisfaction out of an act of charity also overwhelms us with happiness. This is how one can cleanse oneself of the worldly toxicity that has gripped humankind. No amount of money held with a tight-fist has ever helped anyone gain virtue. Virtue is earned only by being generous and kind.

We should be grateful to the Ardhendu Charity Trust that has taken to practicing what it preaches. The TRUST initiated by former Minister Manas Chaudhari, is now feeding a minimum 200 hungry mouths at Jhalupara on a daily basis. People bestow their blessings on the TRUST which goes beyond materialistic calculation. Also what is very clear is that many people have learned from the TRUST how to make their lives more meaningful. It has awakened the spirit of benevolence in many which otherwise has been lying dormant. This adds to the positive vibes in society. Many individuals have come forward to pitch in for the service of feeding hungry mouths.

The enlightened sages

assert that amassing fortune has no value if the major part of it is not used for the betterment of the society and environment. In a practical sense, we are heavily indebted to Mother Nature. Only by generously giving away a part of our wealth towards righteous causes do we become free from that “debt.” Just imagine what would have happened if we had to buy “air” from the laboratory. Would each individual be able to buy air, without which we can’t survive even for a few minutes? We get it all for free. Similarly, we get water and all food products grown from this amazing earth. What would we do if from tomorrow all such nourishing plants, grains, and cereals stop growing! We will die of starvation. We can’t eat mud and stones for a living. So, we can imagine how we “owe our survival” to every part of Mother Earth; the entire NATURE. Hence by exercising charity we clear our “debts” and also clear out the accumulated dirt from our mindsets.

However, there is a bottom-line and a complete no-no in charity. Here is where many fail and become small. We should not expect any returns out of a charitable act. ‘Philanthropy with eyes set on favours from beneficiaries is like a trade’, says Vivekananda in his speeches. It will not reap spiritual benefits at all. Rather it stifles the soul. So let our souls breathe easy now and hereafter. No dead body has carried his/her accumulated wealth to the graveyard.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong-2

Put an end to slavery

Editor,

The International Day for the Abolition of Slavery is celebrated every year on December 2. The abolition of slavery is indeed a must for the survival of democracy. On being asked about the definition of democracy, Abraham Lincoln said, "As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy." This is the best explanation of why democracy can survive only after the abolition of slavery.

Though the practice of engaging bonded labour has been criminalised in India, it has not been totally wiped out. According to the 2018 Global Slavery report as many as 351 out of 743 spinning mills in Tamil Nadu engage bonded labourers. The movements of those labourers have been restricted. Their mobile phones have been taken away. They do not get wages and payments. What they get is just an assurance of a lump –sum amount at the end of a three year contract.

In Rajasthan many workers have reportedly been trapped in life-long debt bondage for loans ranging with interest rates of as high as 24 to 36 per cent. They have to work as bonded labourers for little or no pay at all. There are instances of inter-generational transfer of debts as it is a common

practice for immediate kin to replace an old and ailing worker. Debt bondage has also reportedly been used for sexual torture. The bridge between advance payment and slavery also exists in brick kilns in Odisha and Punjab. Poor people are forced to use their kidneys as collateral for money lenders in some parts of our country. In a landmark judgement, the Supreme Court of India termed the denial of the principle of equal pay for equal work as "exploitative enslavement". It is horrifying to see construction workers doing life-threatening jobs without having minimum safety protection and insurance coverage.

Shop assistants in some malls are made to work more than eight hours a day. They are being forced to hand over their mobile phones during working hours. Being totally disconnected, they cannot be with their families in a sudden difficult situation. Sometimes, they are not even allowed to visit the toilet. On other hand, the NGO Safai Karmachari Andolan has estimated that one sanitation worker dies every third day in our country. The transition from the formal employment system to the contractual system has enhanced the scope of exploitation like withholding of wages, debt bondage, holiday hijacking and even physical and sexual torture. Informal workers are highly vulnerable to exploitative practices as

records of their contracts are not maintained, thereby giving ample opportunity to the employers to adopt use (and abuse the workers) and throw (the ailing ones) methodology. Moreover, two layered discriminations namely social stigmatization and economic marginalization are still prevalent in our country.

When will all of us be allowed to enjoy the 'Fundamental Right against Exploitation' as enshrined in Article 23 of the Constitution of India? Unfortunately, there are some amongst us that give tacit support to slavery and child labour. They should remember what Lincoln had once said, "Whenever I hear any one arguing for slavery I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally."

Our Government needs to conduct monthly labour inspections and medical check-up of workers and upload the data of the contracts and the medical reports of the workers especially in high - risk industries like brick kilns, textiles and granite/ stone/ mineral industries. But we must also play a decisive role to wipe out the menace of slavery. We should all take the pledge of not visiting those houses and shops where the working class is getting inhuman and degrading treatment or a child labourer is employed. We need to upload such incidents on social media and help the administration take immediate action.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Via email

In Gratitude

Editor,

On the occasion of International Day for Persons with Disabilities, I wish to pay tribute and acknowledge the contribution of the late Mr. Sajjid Ali of Dwar Jingkyrmen, Shillong and convey the sympathies of the people of Meghalaya and especially persons with disabilities and their families. We feel a great sense of loss on the passing away of the pioneer who, together with his family and the Dwar Jingkyrmen community promoted the rights and entitlements of youth and children with disability. The services and training facilities of the institution have quality and have inspired so many of us who came into the sector later. Mr. Ali was a brother, friend to me and always supported, no matter what the cost, any cause that promoted the dignity of persons with disability. On this day, I once again bow my head in tribute and thank the Almighty for giving so many an opportunity to meet such a wonderful human being, who knew no compromise and spoke without fear. We miss you, we pray for your family and the institution you built and may your wonderful soul Rest In Peace. May your memory continue to inspire us all.

Yours etc.,
Carmo Noronha,
Bethany Society,
Shillong

Farmers destitution

March for salvation

By Shivaji Sarkar

Elections and competitive promises for loan waivers for farmers are inseparable. Despite this, the farm distress doesn’t end. Even if not on warpath, the farmers are marching to Delhi and Mumbai in lakhs for some succour. Loan waivers were given in Punjab, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Andhra, Telangana and Puducherry during over last three years. Now more promises are being made by almost all political parties, including Congress and BJP. New waiver promises have led the farmers to stop repayments in Madhya Pradesh and many go for more borrowings.

This April, the Government told Parliament that between April 2014 and December 2017, public sector banks (PSB) wrote off Rs 2,72,558 crore worth of loans. They recovered Rs 29,343 crores-- a mere 10.7 per cent -- of the loans that had been written off. This is also over 10 per cent of the Central budget.

This then should put the farmers in a comfortable situation. So why are they marching to Delhi demanding a special Parliament session to press for discussion on the agrarian crisis? It also includes enacting laws, some of which were presented in Parliament as Private Members Bills. The two proposed legislations are: Farmers’ Freedom and Indebtedness Bill 2018 and the Farmers’ Right to Guaranteed Remunerative Minimum Support Prices for Agricultural Commodities Bill 2018. Twenty-one political parties had extended support.

In the backdrop of agitation, remember, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley announced to implement MSP at 1.5 times the cost as per MS Swaminathan committee report. However, it is different that the basic Swaminathan premise was tweaked to keep the MSP lower than the actual expenses made. What relief have the farmers got?

The Akhil Bharatiya Kisan Sangharsh Samiti, the banner that is leading the farmers and farm workers, encompassing 207 organizations, to the Ramlila Maidan has ostensible support of the leftist Kisan Sabha. Recall, the Bharatiya Kisan Union had also recently organized a similar march from Haridwar on September 23 to culminate in Delhi border on October 2. But the Delhi police fired shots, charged water cannons and restrained them from entering Delhi.

The issues were identical. The Government and some ministers tried to describe this as an Opposition show. But let us not forget that last year too, the nation was surprised to see the farmers marching in perfect order to the heart of Mumbai without disturbing the Mumbaikars, termed as Kisan Long March and got support from ordinary citizens. Evidently, suicides by farmers have not abated. According to the National Crime Reports Bureau, 296,438 farmers have committed suicide between 1995 and 2014. About 4,000 farmers took their lives in Maharashtra between 2004 and 2013.

Worse, the distress is growing in rural areas as share of agriculture in GDP has come down drastically to about 14 per cent from over 50 per cent. Though a section of economists welcome the trend as it suggests that industry and services are growing and contributing in a major way to “improve” the national economy. Looking back, the economic changes in the country have led to increasing disparity. The 1991 “liberalization” led to more government controls. A US think tank, Heritage Institute annual index of Economic Freedom ranked India at 130 of 180 countries. It has categorized India as “mostly

unfree” in five categories. India apparently, is nowhere near the Western norms, often mocked at by many conservative experts.

The political system of the supposedly “despised” Congress continues, including the failed ‘Manmohanomics’, often referred to as 1991 New Delhi consensus. Socialism had at least ushered in a green revolution and helped the farmers to an extent. But industrialist-centric liberalism has robbed the farmers of their land for roads, airports, industry, real estate and a chaotic situation. The farmers and rural destitution has been growing. The urban and non-farm sector has not only seen a corresponding expansion, but has also been growing at a much faster pace than the agrarian economy. Nothing wrong. But it is at the cost of the rural and farm economy.

There was a period when Socialist or Gandhian economy was agro-based and the agriculture sustained the other aspects of the economy, including the industry. The 1991 consensus crushed the farm economy, exploited it, impoverished it and the corrections are still missing. This has spread the bribes to unknown areas, including bank officers and then there was demonetization, which gave unfettered powers to the tax officials. Many farmers and rural entrepreneurs were forced to pay to save their skin.

The indebtedness among farmers is high, said to be around 86 per cent. Almost half the farm creditors were harassed to repay. It led to assets’ sale and a fall in economic position. This is a vortex and leads to more debt burden.

The Supreme Court order for return of acquired land in West Bengal’s Singur to farmers exposed that Punjab had also acquired huge tracts of land in Barnala and even after 10 years these are unused. The land for roads may be giving one-time bounty, but it is displacing farmers and the mesh of roads is causing desertification in fertile areas. Tolls on roads are making the farmers alien in their own villages.

The State has turned into virtual venture capitalists. The big industrialists are making forays into the farmland further impoverishing the farmer. All of this is what the farmer is protesting today. It is a battle for his survival. There is consensus on this among both the leftist Kisan Sabha and rightists Bharatiya Kisan Sangh as also Swadeshi Jagaran Manch. The character of the State, irrespective of political parties, has not changed.

The cities would not be able to sustain for long if the villages continue to collapse economically. It may severely affect urban India. The government servants who feel secure with a pay packet may soon feel the pinch. Urban India may fall under a new pressure, sooner than later, which could lead to severe governance issues, if not chaos. Innovative and equitable governance calls for a churning in political thinking. The apathy is palpable howsoever political parties couch it in jargons. If socialism had kept industrialists in shackles of licences, the new “economy” puts many more controls. But liberal FDI has its complexities too. Repatriation of profits is high and farm land is nothing but an investment in real estate.

India has to chalk out its own way. A national policy on land acquisition is a must along with a deep thought on ending rural indebtedness and multiplying farm incomes. Else today’s Gandhian agitation can turn into violent Maoist movements. Political parties need to rethink for their own survival. ---INFA

“If your dream is a big dream, and if you want your life to work on the high level that you say you do, there's no way around doing the work it takes to get you there.”
--- Joyce Chapman

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.114 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2018

Dreaming big

THERE, in fact, is no limit to dreaming big. Problem is, Indians seem hardly ever doing this - and more so at levels where one's supposed to do it with great frenzy. This is a pity as, after all, dreaming is an inexpensive indulgence. Note, for instance, a proposal that has come up from the UAE, that has a population of less than half a crore including the large throngs of Indians and other nationalities. Its offer is to launch a UAE-Mumbai undersea, hi-tech rail service using magnetic pull to ferry passengers as well as move freight.

The UAE is by now known for its futuristic pursuits in myriad fields. The proposal made by a UAE start-up platform of considerable reputation is also to help ferry oil from the Gulf region to India, and in return take excess water from the Narmada to the desert-turned urban sprawls in the UAE and beyond. This could be done by laying of pipes alongside the proposed underwater rail line. Ultra-speed floating train is a concept that has already been implemented successfully in Japan, South Korea, Canada etc, and China is currently at it as well. Styled as Maglev trains, it works on the magnetic propulsion and repulsion system. The rail network will be less than 2000km long, and there's no hassle about land acquirement as is the case with other Indian projects.

Curiously, with a one billion plus population who have all the time on them to dream big, it is worth checking whether any such big, inspiring idea ever springs up from India in its avatar as the world's largest democracy. Even the bullet train project, started many decades ago by Russia followed by Japan and China, is making baby steps to its future launch here.

India's credits, rather, are what happened here in the distant past, centuries ago - to which some saffron saints now and then take real and imaginary journeys to boost their nationalistic spirit or Hindutva pride. Question is, where have India's scientists and technocrats got stuck? Other than in IT or to an extent in Space science, the Indian mind fails to work, and hardly ever springs surprises. Indian universities that should form the bedrock of scientific investigations are themselves ailing and not in proper form.

The blame must be fixed on those who lead this nation from the front - the leaders of various political hues and the bureaucrats who push growth backward with their whimsical actions, red tape and single-minded interest in making money for themselves.

TO THE EDITOR

Discrimination over power supply!

Editor,
Welcome December and hello my long lost friend-load shedding! Well, we all were, once upon a time used to this phenomenon and I remember a few years ago how we initially grumbled and fussed and then we just accepted it as way of life. No-one was spared, of course I mean the COMMON MAN. We all faced the trauma of hours of cut outs. Yet I did not complain because as far as I remember, we had power cuts during the wee hours of the night-from about 00:30 hours to around 05:00 hours. I definitely was not affected and I believe so was everyone else. I hail from Laitkor and I speak my personal experience as a resident of Laitkor Rngi. I must admit, I did see a WhatsApp forward titled "Load shedding notice" sometime around last week across several groups. Nobody really bothered to comment and even I did

not go through it, being assured that the concerned departments know their jobs and the same will be executed in public interest like it did in the past years. I woke up on the first day of December and realised there was no electricity, and as always, I called up the helpline number available for Area VI and was informed that we have been scheduled under a THREE HOURS load shedding routine w.e.f. December 1, 2018. I could not believe my ears initially and eventually I checked the WhatsApp forward and I was amazed at how conveniently my area has been listed under the 08:00-11:00 hours load shedding schedule. Now, I feel I need clarifications. Firstly, how does the MePDCL justify a shut down during the morning rush hours? Secondly, what do you suggest we do and how do we cope with the many more days of load shedding in terms of morning chores and activities and most importantly-getting to work? Lastly, I want to know how many people involved in the preparation of the load shedding

schedule, themselves experience THREE hours of power cut during the morning rush. I am compelled to put forward these questions because it is totally insane to consider residents of any area for a THREE HOURS power cut in the name of load shedding while being completely biased to other areas with better time slots of the day and for just ONE HOUR. What are the criteria and what are the statistics that you have collected that gives you the ultimate power to decide this blunder? Is it because we are placed under the rural bucket and that gives you the authority and excuse to heartlessly suppress the rural population? I really want to understand. We all know that majority of our rural population thrive on electricity for day to day activities. How can the department be so irrational and pretend like the schedule prepared has no flaws whatsoever? The matter will be pursued and open discrimination needs to be condemned. I can feel the pain of the residents of

these villages and it does not allow me to keep quiet. I wonder how such discrimination went unnoticed by the respective elected representatives in power. I urge upon the local MLA, who is also designated as the Chairman of the State Planning Board to kindly take note of the matter and make necessary adjustments to ensure that the residents of all the villages included in the THREE HOUR power cut are not ruthlessly discriminated. I believe that we need to stress on the "equality" factor that is repeated time and again and also practice what is preached in regards to equality towards all. People from the rural areas also have basic rights that and discrimination in this manner will not be taken lightly. This is a humble request to the concerned authorities to reschedule the power cut timings, if you have to, so that equality prevails in the true sense.

Rupert Lyngdoh,
A deeply concerned resident
Laitkor Rngi

On HIV testing

Editor
The global sensitivity regarding AIDS and HIV infection is shrouded in misinformation and lack of proper medical education and awareness. However, compared to developed Western nations, HIV testing is a taboo in most developing and under-developed nations in both northern and southern hemispheres. The root cause of such social mistrust, prejudices and injustice related to HIV testing and/or screening lies deep inside the highly conservative, primitive, authoritarian and male chauvinistic attitude of our Third World attitudes. If caste, creed, ethnicity, religion and language divisions in our societies are so deep, no wonder taboos associated with HIV testing will make any individual uncomfortable

or insecure towards any public demonstration or acceptance of the fact that he or she is going for an HIV screening and/or testing for purely protective purposes. It is this unacceptable societal shame and discrimination that has been pushing people to hide their HIV status and standing in the way of them going for HIV screening. Unless our level of education and awareness truly increases ad makes us more accommodating and empathetic towards HIV positive individuals, open or non-secretive HIV screening or testing is a distant dream in developing and under developed nations. Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Lethbridge AB Canada

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.

Governor centre’s stooge

Cat out of the bag!

By Poonam I Kaushish

United Front, Janata Party, Third Front have used, abused and debased this high office by making a Governor a trumpet and even a "chaprasi" of the Centre to topple uncomfortable or Opposition-ruled State Governments to further their political agendas. No wonder, Article 356 has been imposed more than 120 times in various States, at the whims and fancies of the Centre. But when they get hit all cry foul. A classic case of the pot calling the kettle black!

or Et tu NDA Modi's NDA's is no different from National Front VP Singh's 1989, Vajpayee's 1999 nor UPA's 2004 who got Governors appointed by their predecessors to resign. Since 2014 nine Governors have resigned, Kerala's Sheila Dikshit, M a h a r a s h t r a ' s Sankarnarayana, W Bengal's Narayanan, UP's Joshi, Pudicherry's Kataria, Goa's Wanchoo, Nagaland's Ashwani Kumar, Chhattisgarh's Shekhar Dutt and Mizoram's P u r u s h o t h a m a n .

“Governance, after all is one big nautanki which has rewritten the basic time-honoured rules of authority and turned democracy on its head. Bend them, break them, who cares! Call it déjà vu or Et tu NDA Modi's NDA's is no different from National Front VP Singh's 1989, Vajpayee's 1999 nor UPA's 2004 who got Governors appointed by their predecessors to resign.”

This subversive role of governors is something the Constitutional framers had neither envisaged nor imagined. Today, the essential criteria for the selection of a Governor is no longer whether he is a man of stature known for his integrity and objectivity but whether he is a 'yes' man, a chamcha who will scratch your back and you his. This has brought things to such a pass that over 60 per cent of the present lot of Governors are active politicians and the rest 'pliable' bureaucrats, police officers and Army Generals. Moreover, it has become the perfect lollypop for political castaways, parting gifts for subservient intelligentsia and convenient posts for inconvenient rivals. Underscoring, the Governor has become a convenient tool of the Centre, especially in Opposition-ruled States. Governance, after all is one big nautanki which has rewritten the basic time-honoured rules of authority and turned democracy on its head. Bend them, break them, who cares! Call it déjà vu

Notwithstanding, a 2010 Supreme Court ruling which laid down that a change of Government at the Centre was not a ground to remove Governors, even if they were out of sync with the policies and political ideologies of the Party in power. He runs the administration by proxy. By playing the I-spy game --- petty politicking, gross interference, open partisanship ---at the Centre's behest and sending for files, summoning Ministers and bureaucrats. Governors are there to hear, entice, provoke and register the voice of dissent against the State Government to his political patrons in Delhi. Bluntly, it is to make life hell for the Chief Minister at every step and use it as a springboard to return to active politics. To curtail the Governor from playing politics in the Chief Ministerial stakes, the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution headed by Justice Venkatachaliah, advocated significant changes. It wanted the Chief Minister to be directly elected by the Assembly to obviate the need to test

Madhya Pradesh politicians spend sleepless nights Sabotage from within, EVM security major concern

By L.S. Herdenia

Even after the hectic electioneering there is no respite for politicians of both BJP and Congress. While the BJP's worries are being caused by the flood of complaints about sabotage by rival party men, Congress is spending sleepless nights over the possibility of electronic voting machines (EVMs) being tampered with. Besides sabotage, a very serious complaint has been made by sitting BJP legislator Usha Thakur against party president Amit Shah and general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya.

The sitting MLA from Indore-3 Assembly constituency, who was fielded by BJP from Mhow, can be seen sharing her pain with party volunteers in a video, which went viral on social media recently. She has been anguished for being fielded from Mhow rather than from Indore-3 constituency. She can be seen saying in the video that national general secretary of BJP (Kailash Vijayvargiya) managed the national president (Amit Shah) to push her away from her seat. She also said that like Congress, dynasty politics has become dominant in BJP too. BJP fielded Kailash Vijayvargiya's son Akash from Indore-3, while Thakur was pushed to contest from Mhow.

Speaking to some senior party volunteers in Mhow, she says, "I want to tell you that I am M.Phil and M.Ed and teach children. I have around 450 children in my Ashram, which manages the expenditure on their education on its own. 17 of my students have become doctors and 13 of them have become engineers. My students are those who work on tea stalls and in brick kilns. I also run an orphanage and educating them is my work. I want to emphasise that politics is my mission. I am not here because of my networking. All of you are like my family members and hence I am sharing with you that I am a victim of political injustice. You are finding it difficult to accept me, which is natural as anyone might think that a new face has been planted and may question what will she do or not do and how will she work? But, do understand that I was simply asked to go...The dynasty politics, which had eclipsed Congress, has now plagued BJP. Our general secretary managed our national president and pushed me here".

When asked about the video, Thakur clarified that she said what the situation demanded. Party volunteers were unhappy as an outsider was thrust upon them. "I had told them to wait till the polling date after which we can together discuss the matter with the national president," she added. She emphasised that she simply abided by the orders given to her by the party and thus she contested from Mhow. Besides Usha Thakur, the BJP and RSS leaders have received several complaints by party candidates of sabotage by party rivals. Sources claim there are around 50 seats across MP where chances of BJP candidates were sabotaged. As a result the role of two main leaders in the state along with 6 MPs has come under scanner. A woman minister in the state government has made a complaint against an MP to RSS leaders. The MP is said to have worked against the woman minister. A complaint against an MP of Bundelkhand has been made to CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan and the party organisation at the national level. These MPs worked against the MLAs, who were not in good terms with them. Besides MPs, the ticket aspirants too worked

for the defeat of the BJP candidates. There are similar complaints against leaders in Gwalior and Chambal. There is not a single place in the state where the leaders did not work against the party candidates. There are allegations against an MP of Vindhya region for openly working against the party candidates. Ministers Narottam Mishra, Vijay Shan, Gaurishankar Bisen, Rampal Singh, Antar Singh Arya, Assembly speaker Sitasharan Sharma and MLA Shailendra Jain met the CM on Saturday and gave their feedback about the condition of the party in their constituencies and district to Chouhan. The main reason behind the sabotage is said to be weak party organisation. State president Rakesh Singh and organisational general secretary Suhas Bhagat failed to check leaders working against the party candidates. Despite the party candidates making complaints, nothing was done by the party organsiation against the saboteurs. Sabotage did occur in Congress also, but it was less than in BJP. Former CM Digvijaya Singh across the state ensured that no leader worked against party candidates. His Smaanvaya Yatra proved helpful in checking sabotage against the Congress candidates. Singh also got leaders to resolve their differences through compromises and made sure that they do not work against each other. Congress became suspicious about the safety of the EVMs after reports of delayed arrival of EVMs became public. In one case an EVM took 48 hours to cover a distance of 25 Kilometers. In Bhopal reports were received about the failure of CCTV cameras at the old jail premises where EVMs of Bhopal district were kept. The issue of EVM safety took such a serious turn that the party decided to bring the issue to the attention of the Election Commission. A delegation of Congress leaders on Saturday met the Election Commission with the party's concern over security and handling of EVMs in MP and Chhatisgarh. The Congress delegation also suggested measures relating to the process of counting of votes, which will be taken up on December 11. Congress also alleged that postal ballots were lying undelivered in various post offices. In a separate letter to the EC Congress leader Ahmed Patel said representatives of all political parties should be allowed on board when EVMs were transported to counting centers from strong rooms. Close on the heels of a controversy over reserved EVMs reaching Sagar headquarters 48 hours after the polling, CCTV cameras went off for more than two hours in a strong room of Sagar on Saturday, leading to Congress and other parties manning the strong room to cause an uproar. A naib tehsildar was suspended on recommendation of the district electoral officer (DEC). The action comes for alleged delay of 48 hours in handing over reserved EVMs. Congress workers staged a protest at Khargone district headquarters on Friday night alleging that malfunctioning EVMs were being mixed with normal ones in strong rooms. After the EVM row, CEO VL Kantha Rao assured the political parties by tweeting that the EVMs are tamper proof. (IPA Service)

“What if nothing exists and we're all in somebody's dream? Or what's worse, what if only that fat guy in the third row exists?”

--- Woody Allen

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi is on a mission to win friends all round. Indian diplomacy has taken a leap forward. Modi parleyed with leaders of the US and Japan on the margins of the G-20 summit in Buenos Aires and following that with China and Russia. It seems his costly never ending global Odyssey may be bearing fruit. From bilateralism, Indian foreign policy has sprung to tri-lateralism. Tri-lateralism between India, Japan and the US has reached a new high. He met President XI Jinping and President Vladimir Putin. Whether such a summit is an extension of the policy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam remains to be seen. However, the talks mark a departure from India’s past paranoiac attitude about the US and Japan. In the 21st century New Delhi has moved in the direction of cozying up with these countries. Australia has also come into the loop. India had been committed to non-alignment since the days of Jawaharlal Nehru which graduated to Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai and Hindi-Russi Bhai Bhai. The switch to quadrilateral diplomacy started under Manmohan Singh but it has become a roller coaster ride.

Even in the 21st century India had wavered in extending friendship to the West. Critics have attacked a long face-off with China and being over friendly with the US. Modi has however been trying to have faith in dynamic neutrality and disregard antipathies between the powers he treats as allies. The thorn in the flesh seems to be Pakistan. Pakistan’s friend appears to be India’s enemy. Prime Minister Imran Khan’s seemingly friendly overtures are treated with suspicion. India boycotting SAARC in Islamabad is not consistent with its policy with other countries. Perhaps what India has to do better in is in improving ties with its immediate neighbours. Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, The Maldives et al continue to see India as the overbearing Big Brother. Nepal is turning to China for assistance. Sri Lanka appears to be doing pretty much the same. India of course refused to interfere in Sri Lanka’s internal political shenanigans which are understandable. Bangladesh is our immediate neighbour and a strategic trading partner and an outlet for the North Eastern states through Chittagong port. It is important for India to pursue this friendship in the interest of operationalising the Act East Policy. India’s policy towards Myanmar too needs to be further crystallized to enable not just political and commercial but socio-cultural exchanges as well.

TO THE EDITOR

Appeal to Transport Dept

Editor

After the grand celebration of World Disability Day 2018 with the theme “Empowering Persons with Disability and ensuring Inclusiveness and equality, we would like to share the incident of the day after the observance with the public transport. On December 4, 2018 a person with locomotor disability (Wheelchair User) waited for a taxi from Laitumkhrah Beat House for 30 minutes. Since she could not get a taxi, she boarded the JNURM Bus No. ML-01 7649. On entering the bus with great difficulty, she found all the front seats filled up and a few seats empty at the back. As she was aware that two front seats were reserved for persons with disability and the aged category, she asked the conductor about the reserved seat. He replied, “I don’t know”. She explained to him regarding the seat reserved for persons with disability but he did not take any action and the young lady in the reserved seat too was not bothered to help or

to exchange her seat. Some passengers behind were kind and they called the disabled young lady to sit behind. She told them the back seats are high and she won’t manage to climb. So from Laitumkhrah she reached Motphran sitting on the floor of the bus holding to the rods for support.

On behalf of All Meghalaya Association of Persons with Disability (AMAPD) we strongly request the Transport Department to ensure that all drivers and conductors of public buses are made aware of the seat reservation for disabled persons and the law must be implemented both in letter and spirit. We appeal to the general public too to be sensitive even when we don’t know the law but helping and exchanging seats will not cause any loss to anyone. It must be mentioned that the conductor did not take the bus fare when she offered it, (As per the law, Persons with disability get half rate concession). We want to be contributing members, more than sympathy; we want your understanding and cooperation like (helping catch a cab, crossing the road, giving a little push in the steep road for

The recent re-estimation of GDP using 2011-12 as the base year has created a controversy and not without reason as this lowers India’s growth during the UPA regime. In August, an expert panel set up by National Statistical Commission and headed by economist Sudipto Mondle found that 10 years of UPA, propelled India’s growth by an average 8 per cent per annum, but the new CSO estimation reduced it to 6.7 per cent in nine years against the 7.3 per cent in the four years of NDA regime.

Whatever may be the implications of the debate amongst the BJP and the Congress about the legitimacy of the data, it is a fact that investment has been around 26 per cent of total income now compared to 36 per cent during 2007. Moreover, States such as Punjab, Maharashtra and Gujarat, once among the wealthiest are in turmoil. Distress signals are evident in every corner of the economy, specially the farm sector, where recently the farmers staged a demonstration just the other day in Delhi, demanding a nationwide loan waiver and a few months back launching a similar protest in Mumbai.

An economist friend of mine regretted the fact that politicians talk about growth and try to mislead the people by showing that growth is an indicator of development. It is a fact that growth and development are not synonymous and the state of grass-root development that benefits the people at the base level has been rather poor in the country over the years. It is indeed surprising that even educated people tend to believe that a high GDP growth finds reflection in development matters.

As is well known, the structure of our planning process is top down, i.e. centralisation is very much manifest. The planners and politicians are all urban centric and have little time to think of the villages in remote and backward districts of the country. Moreover, it is an accepted fact that the problems that exist in these areas are

Wheelchair users etc). Your little support means a lot for our daily challenges and finally coming to the theme ‘we want inclusiveness and equality.

Yours etc.,
Elkin Rynnaiw
President (AMAPD)
Shillong

When education becomes a nightmare!

Editor,

A school is supposed to be a place where toddlers learn, have fun and they are nurtured to be become good human beings. But when education becomes a nightmare, then children lose interest and start to hate school. Education is the most the important thing that parents can give to their children. We want good education therefore we send them to good schools. We follow the rules of the school. But instead of nurturing the kids to learn, to love school, reading and instill in them the importance of education, they are stressed and put under

indeed immense and huge resources would be required to uplift their conditions.

Political parties are aware of these aspects but have little resources to revive these. Building giant size statues, starting bullet trains, increasing defence expenditure though not improving the conditions of soldiers, who are guarding our borders, spending huge sums for building bridges, setting up toilets with or without water and the like are gimmicks that go down well with the rich and the middle class. Moreover, these expenditures ensure a cut in the money spent (commission) for the party in power as interests of business groups are involved.

The highlight of all talk relating to gearing up the economy lies in predicting a higher GDP for the current year and also possibly the next. But over the years, there has been very little development in the backward and tribal regions of the State if one core areas such as considers health and nutrition, education, sanitary conditions, shelter, child labour etc. Moreover, hunger still exists and there is widespread malnutrition as even government surveys have indicated.

Moreover, high GDP growth has unfortunately been accompanied by a slowing job growth, according to a recent report titled The State of Working India 2018 of Azim Premji University. Though much euphoria has been generated by India jumping 23 places, Chairperson of the Centre for Informal Sector & Labour Studies of Jawaharlal Nehru University and one of the authors of the report, Prof. Santosh Mehrotra, observed that ease of doing business or high GDP growth has hardly any correlation with job creation. One may mention here that in early 80s a sum of Rs 1 crore of

pressure. We do not want our children to turn out into ‘robots’. Children these days are under tremendous pressure due to the challenging work load they are burdened with early in life.

We want our wards to be successful persons after they complete their education. However, with the present education system, I fear that many will only aim for ‘pass marks’ or drop out of school due to stress. We as parents want ‘quality’ education and not ‘quantity’ for our children. But sadly ‘quantity’ is exactly what many schools are pushing children below the age of 10. How much can the little ones absorb and how much can they retain in their brain? A Class I student of St Mary’s Montessori School has to study around six chapters for one subject. The number of questions and answers a six-year-old has to memorise is beyond expectation. The question paper for a Class I looks like that of a Class X student. I wonder if the little child can even read and understand the marks that each question carries.

New GDP Data

Jugglery of growth figures

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

real fixed capital (at 2015 prices) supported around 90 jobs in the organised manufacturing sector, while in 2010 this had fallen to just 10 jobs. The most pertinent problem of unemployment cannot be solved by high growth but only through grass-root development.

It is not known why Prime Minister Modi has been giving so much importance to the ‘ease of doing business’ that helped to push the country to 77 in the World Bank ranking for 2019 that was published this year from 142 for 2015 and 100 in 2018. There is no harm in necessary reforms in this regard and making procedures easier to attract foreign companies to operate in the country but it should be ensured that they adhere to the rules of the land and help the development process. Just increasing the size of the economy to \$5 trillion without any resultant effects may not help the masses.

Possibly the only positive decision has been the Prime Minister unveiling a 12-point action plan recently for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), including subsidised loans, higher procurement and easier labour along with green rules to revitalise this sector which has been ailing for quite some time. In the plan, there is a provision for a two per cent interest subsidy for new or incremental loans of up to Rs 1 crore taken by MSME units through a new portal that promises to approve loans in 59 minutes is seen to be the most significant. In a situation of a credit crunch, sluggish manufacturing activity and increased competition from imports, specially from China, this could help revival of micro and small units and generating jobs.

Along with this, incentives should be specially geared for micro units in rural and semi-urban areas so that young entrepreneurs could not only make a living but also create a few jobs. The

Why can’t they write down the answer on the question paper sheet, which can be easier for a child? Why can’t the question papers be more children –friendly instead of that typical scary ‘question paper look’? They have around 9 subjects including computer (theory and practical). In computer, they are given questions like – Write down the steps to open window paint? What is dragging? What is single and double clicking?

And many more, these are a few examples of what a six-year-old has to memorise in St Mary’s Montessori School. There are equally tough questions in other subjects too which the little ones have to struggle with. Is the school going to hold back a class I student if she cannot attain pass marks in each subject even if she had performed well in the half yearly examination? If yes, as a parent I protest.

Dear school, I am not in a hurry to make my daughter a computer engineer, appear in competitive exams or do a PhD immediately after Class I. I would like the little one to grow and learn

spiralling effect would help improve the economic environment which is what is absolutely necessary at this juncture.

Surprisingly, the neglect of the rural sector – obviously to run after growth and big industry – has been flawed idea of development. Nobody had the vision to point out that with computerisation, heavy and even medium industry has the potential to create increasing number of jobs to keep pace with demand.

In such a scenario, it is quite obvious that the disparities in income between the urban and rural sectors are widening as opportunities are more in cities and there is all-round poverty and squalor in the villages. Even if one considers the much-talked of city, Ayodhya (renamed from the earlier Faizabad), and compares it with that of Nagpur or Bhopal, the wide per capita income will be manifest. And Modi talks of setting up an airport without bothering to examine the condition of health facilities existing there.

What needs to be pointed out here is that some young politicians lately, including the Congress President Rahul Gandhi, have been focussing the disparity that exists in the country. It is now time not to harp on growth but to focus on inclusive development and follow our late President Abdul Kalam, who voiced the need for PURA (providing urban facilities in rural areas). How quickly this will become a reality remains to be seen so that livelihood conditions improve through enhanced earnings of the rural populace.

The focus thus cannot and should not be on growth per se but on real development that takes place at grass-root levels. The jugglery with growth figures does not impress the aam janata who are only interested to see the actual results and the course of real development taking place in the country, not just relating to the economically weaker sections but also the lower income groups.---INFA

gradually and eventually. I request the school to look into the matter and not to stress kids at the elementary level beyond their capacity.

Recently, the HRD ministry, government of India has even issued a directive to all schools across the country that, “no homework should be given to students of classes I and II and also to limit the weight of school bags to lighten the burden of school children”.

Parents have also urged the school to change the board, to which the school nodded. Hope that this happens soon. Parents have often said during meetings with teachers in the school that they want ‘quality’ and not ‘quantity’ (marks) education.

I request the Education Department to look into the matter seriously and make necessary efforts to bring about changes in the education system.

Yours etc.,
A concerned parent
Name withheld on request

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.

Modi regime’s telecom policies cripple BSNL

Officers and Employees plan indefinite strike in protest

By P Abhimanyu

The entire officers and workers of BSNL are going on an indefinite strike from December 10, 2018. The All Unions and Associations of BSNL (AUAB), the umbrella organisation of all the associations of the officers and unions of workers, is spearheading the strike.

Demands of the strike include the immediate allotment of 4G spectrum to BSNL for rolling out its 4G service, implementation of the government rule in respect of payment of pension contribution by BSNL, wage revision of the employees and pension revision of the retirees, from January 1, 2017.

As of now, the whole telecom industry is gripped in a crisis. Big private companies like Airtel, Vodafone and Idea are running in huge losses. These companies are also laden with massive debts. The total debt of these telecom companies is in the range of Rs 8 lakh crores. As a result of this crisis, Vodafone has already got merged with Idea. Smaller private telecom companies like Aircel, Tata Teleservices, Anil Ambani owned Reliance Infocomm, Telenor, etc., have got closed down.

All these have happened due to the predatory pricings of the Mukesh Ambani owned Reliance Jio, which started its services in September, 2016. With its huge financial muscle, Reliance Jio is offering services at “below-cost” rates. The whole game plan of Reliance Jio is to wipe out its competitors, which includes the State owned BSNL. Once this target is achieved, Reliance Jio will show its real face. It will loot the people by steeply raising the call and data charges. It is a matter of deep concern that Reliance Jio is being openly patronised by the Narendra Modi government.

On September 6, 2016, when Reliance Jio started its services, Prime Minister Naredra Modi appeared with folded hands in the front page advertisements in all the leading national dailies, appealing to the citizens of the country to avail the services of Reliance Jio. These advertisements were a clear message to the entire nation that, Reliance Jio is very close to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and that, no one should come in the way of Reliance Jio in achieving its goals.

The one man who had dared to come in the way of Reliance Jio, had to pay the price. He was JS Deepak, a senior IAS officer, who was the then secretary of the department of telecommunications. He dared to point out how the predatory pricings of Reliance Jio were eating into the revenue of the government, consequent to the drastic fall in the revenue collections of all the telecom companies. (Telecom companies pay license fee and spectrum charges to the government based on their revenue collection.) JS Deepak wrote to the TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India), demanding action on Reliance Jio for adopting predatory pricings. As a result, JS Deepak was instantaneously shunted out of the DoT, and was dumped in the department of commerce. This was a clear signal given by the Narendra Modi government, as to what would happen to anyone who dares to speak against Reliance Jio.

To enable Reliance Jio to achieve its goal of wiping out all other telecom service providers, the government is engaged in the nefarious game of clipping the wings of BSNL. BSNL is a 100 per cent government company.

It is already four years since 4G service are rolled out by the private telecom companies. However, BSNL has not started the 4G service, since it is not allotted the 4G spectrum by the government. The AUAB is organising struggles for the past one year, demanding allotment of 4G spectrum to BSNL. But, the government has turned a deaf ear to this demand, with the ulterior motive of preventing the public sector company from putting up an effective competition to Reliance Jio.

It is very pertinent to mention here that, the employees have played a significant role in strengthening BSNL. They have launched various movements, to motivate the employees to improve the quality of BSNL’s services, and also to massively involve them in the company’s marketing activities. The “Customer Delight Year”, “Service with a Smile”, “BSNL at Your Door Steps” are the movements launched by the unions and associations of BSNL in the recent years. As a result of these efforts, noteworthy improvement has come in BSNL’s quality of services, which is reflected in its increased revenue and customer base.

BSNL was in a loss of more than Rs 8,800 crores in 2011-12. However, due to the combined efforts taken by the employees and the management, it started making operating profit (EBIDTA) in 2014-15. The company made an operating profit of Rs 672.57 crores in 2014-15. This increased to Rs 3,854.48 crores in 2015-16. Even after the entry of Reliance Jio in September 2016, BSNL earned an operating profit of Rs1,684.00 crores in 2016-17.

BSNL’s improved performance is reflected in the expansion of its customer base also. For example, the company’s mobile customers increased by 11.5 per cent in 2017. During the same year, Airtel’s customers increased by only 9.13 per cent, while Vodafone’s customers increased by 3.83 per cent and Idea’s customers increased by 3.14 per cent. It must be remembered that all these achievements are made by the BSNL without the 4G technology and with only 2G and 3G technologies, while all the private companies are armed with 4G technology.

Apart from the allotment of 4G spectrum, the AUAB is also demanding the implementation of the government’s rule in the matter of BSNL’s payment of pension contribution. It is atrocious that, the Narendra Modi government is violating its own rule, and is fleecing a huge amount from BSNL every year, in the name of pension contribution. This is seriously affecting the financial health of the company.

The AUAB is also demanding wage revision for the employees and pension revision to the retirees, from January 1, 2017. The unions and associations went on strike twice in 2017, apart from organising various other struggles. As a result, the minister of state for communications had invited the AUAB leaders for talks on February 24, 2018 and gave assurances to settle all the demands. However, after sitting on the assurances for eight long months, the department of telecommunications has sent a letter to the BSNL management November 6, 2018, rejecting the important demands of the AUAB. This has made the indefinite strike by the BSNL employees from December 10 inevitable. (IPA Service)

“Extremism can flourish only in an environment where basic governmental social responsibility for the welfare of the people is neglected. Political dictatorship and social hopelessness create the desperation that fuels religious extremism. ”

--- Benazir Bhutto

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.117 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2018

UP sinks into lawlessness

THIS time it was in Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh. Mob violence was triggered allegedly because several carcasses of cows were found in a nearby forest. Station House Officer, Inspector Subodh Kumar Singh, was first attacked with stones and later shot at. A bystander was also killed. Of course, anti-social elements were at work. Singh was no doubt doing his duty. It was an attack on the authority of the state. Singh was the first investigating officer of the 2015 lynching of Mohammad Akhlaq in Dadri village. He had collected evidence in the case and arrested several people suspected to be behind Akhlaq’s murder. The outrage had caused protests all over the country. The accused are on bail. Singh has now been killed over the same issue of cow slaughter. The victim was not a citizen but a police officer. So it was an attack on the state. Singh was accompanied by his force and his murder was not an isolated case. The crowd thought it could act in such a heinous manner as the Hindutva-led government would look the other way. The UP government is sold on cow protection. It also supports encounter killing. Vigilantism has a free hand.

This attack on the authority of the state signals a new low in the politics of the country today where the normal course for the police would then be to file cases against unknown persons for how can anyone identify a mob? The enormity of this crimes in UP is equivalent to the violence unleashed by Maoists in central India. The outrage has to be dealt with by the highest authority with due regard to the rule of law. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has thundered against such vigilantism. The Supreme Court has ruled against it. Exemplary punishment is called for. Yet all this is easier said than done.

A deeper conspiracy to kill Subodh Kumar Singh cannot be ruled out as he was a cop who was not co-opted by the state to carry out its diktat. Interestingly, UP Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath has asked the police to arrest cow slaughterers but he was silent on what action would follow on those who killed the police officer. Clearly, in Adityanath’s UP the cow is more revered than human beings. And even police officials who carry out their constitutional duties are dispensable. He wants to co-opt everyone, including government officials on to the Hindutva bandwagon.

LOOKING BACK

May 25, 1989

Panel to explore Sikkim - Centre tax wrangle

A committee consisting of three representative seach of the Centre and the Sikkim Government is being set up to go into the issue of extension of direct central tax laws to the Himalayan state. Chief Minister Mr N B Bhandari in a statement said today that the committee would go into the issue in order to evolve an amicable solution acceptable to both the centre and the state. He said that in view of the Prime Minister’s assurance, the Sikkim Sangram Parishad, the ruling party in the state, had decided to call off the proposed dharna at the Boat Club here tomorrow. Mr Bhandari said the suggestion to set up a committee was made by him during his meeting with the Prime Minister this morning.

New taxation measures

Food and drinks served in hotel and restaurants, cosmetics and shaving sets, bone china crockery and ladies hand bags, ready-made garments and alcoholic drinks are to cost more in Meghalaya. In his budget proposals for 89-90 Chief Minister Mr Purno Sagma has proposed higher sales tax, and availability fee. At the same time, sales tax on school uniforms is being

withdrawn, and tiffin boxes and school bags are also to be exempted. Butter not sold in sealed containers will also be exempt from tax. Biscuits are to cost less as the rate of tax is being reduced from 7 to 5 percent. The availability fees of whisky, brandy, gin and rum have been increased from Rs 5 to Rs. 10, while the fee beer, cider, are have been hiked from Rs 3 to Rs. 6. The concessional rate of exciseduty for canteens has also been raised from Rs 9 to Rs.12 per LPL. The licence fees for different categories of outlets for these drinks will also be revised.

Bandaranaike escapes attempt on life

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 at the inaugural parliamentary election campaign.

In search of an Epitaph for the Yogi

Land where cows vote their government

By Aditya Aamir

How about this gentleman returning to tending cows and offering prayers and platitudes to his followers in Gorakhpur Mutt? Clothed in saffron does not make a good administrator. And doesn't it strike everyone that it's not a political outfit ruling Uttar Pradesh but a religious order shaming and shamming under the cover of the Constitution? Wherever we look in Uttar Pradesh there's the colour of religion. Even when a police officer gets a bullet in his head, the blood is tainted saffron.

There is not much left to comment after that, is there? But there is. There is this question: When will UP be rid of a saffron head with hardly a hair to show? The answer to that is: Not unless the current dispensation ruling the Centre is booted out. Even, then, this cow will continue to head Uttar Pradesh. But he will be warned that one more cow-related antic and the new order in New Delhi would have all the reason to dismiss him. Will that happen? Only the EVM can tell!

That said, the Hindus have to contemplate, even if with empty heads, which most of them are. The glorification of the Hindu is so out of place when a picture of the Hindus painted by the likes of Yogi Adityanath looks so idiotic it makes idiots shake their heads in wonder! It can't be anything else other than mass-idiotcy which made people vote the BJP to power in Uttar Pradesh. There is no other explanation for the stupidity.

It shows that electoral democracy is not all that is made of it. People should have been warned the minute he set his khaki-clad Romeo Squads on necking heads in public parks and periodic ruins. That was a cheap shot. All the more because the only necking the Yogi has done is with cows! What does this chap know about love and how it takes hold of people of certain age? The backlash dispatched the Romeo squads underground but the bad taste remains.

Then, it came to notice that Chief Minister Yogi

Adityanath doesn't believe in the prison system and the notion that prisons are to reform-and-release, not bail-and-kill. His reign of police encounters of those with criminal records was utterly brutal, extra-judicial. Even perverse, because this is the man who once whispered in Parliament that the UP Police was out to eliminate him in a fake encounter. Cowardice has a name and it starts

in Sugarcane' doesn't make an epitaph! But it makes sense that death has a bald head - the skull-and-crosses danger symbol. The Uttar Pradesh Assembly must have it etched on its front wall with warning 'You could go down

There is not much left to comment after that, is there? But there is. There is this question: When will UP be rid of a saffron head with hardly a hair to show? The answer to that is: Not unless the current dispensation ruling the Centre is booted out. Even, then, this cow will continue to head Uttar Pradesh.

cial. Even perverse, because this is the man who once whispered in Parliament that the UP Police was out to eliminate him in a fake encounter. Cowardice has a name and it starts

in a hail of bullets in a sugarcane field! If this is the Gujarat Model, it isn't sweet to behold and definitely ain't worth emulating. It seems the Yogi thought it was a

Somewhere along the incline, the extra-judicial killings stopped and there are now under-trials in UP jails who believe that they can secure bail and stay alive on the outside; so many of them had refused to get out even after getting bail till as long as encounters were the order of the day.

with 'Y'. Somewhere along the incline, the extra-judicial killings stopped and there are now under-trials in UP jails who believe that they can secure bail and stay alive on the outside; so many of them had refused to get out even after getting bail till as long as encounters were the order of the day. It begs the question 'Why?' Someday, hopefully, there will be a judicial inquiry to lay to rest that 'Y'. There are folks in UP missing their sons, however miserable those sons were. 'Gunned Down

legacy worth carrying forward with its weight in blood. Also, in Yogi-raj, cows have it so much better than human beings, including having a dedicated ambulance service. Now, whatever happened to that? And the cows, they play such a big role in the Yogi's head. Pictures of him fondling cows made headlines in so many UP dailies that one wondered if cows were the ones which got his government voted to power. At least, one thing was confirmed, a cow rules UP with a pair of bloody horns.

TO THE EDITOR

Its beyond PHE to provide clean water

Editor, Apropos the news item "Pressure on PHE to provide clean water" (ST Dec.3, 2018) my take is that PHE will never be able to provide safe and clean drinking water to Shillong city as long as the PHE lake at Umiam (Mawphlang) is highly turbid and also is polluted by the upstream inflow all the year round. How much can the Treatment Plant at Mawphlang make the water clear, safe and clean? Even the highly turbid water at the Treatment Plant is made clearer and somewhat clean by adding Alum which makes the water oily and somewhat sticky. The treatment Plant at Mawphlang cannot remove all the turbidity, the germs, bacteria and whatever pollutants present in water. Water made available by PHE at the homes can only be boiled by most people before drinking. But boiling cannot remove all bacteria and pollutant compounds present in that water. It will be of great help if the catchment areas of Umiam river on which the PHE Mawphlang Dam is constructed is properly conserved, preserved and proper afforestation is done. Again building of check dams in the upper courses of the river will help

check heavy siltation. Some things require immediate attention. Sand mining, stone quarrying, washing of clothes, washing of cars and other forms of polluting activities in the up-stream of the river have to be stopped and this requires stringent action against polluters. This, in the long run, will help ensure clear, clean and safe PHE drinking water for Shillong city. Otherwise, we are asking for the impossible. Treatment of water at the Treatment Plant is of little help. If the public and the Government join hands to ensure that the above measures are put in place they can contain much of the pollution, but who will bell the cat? Yours etc., Philip Marwein, Viaemail

Bags of burden

Editor, Apropos the news item "Delhi fixes weight of school bags for students" (ST Dec 3, 2018), it is high time that our state government also takes similar initiatives in the interest of the students, since heavy school bags significantly affect a child's overall health. Many a times, we see young school children carrying their school bags which are quite heavy when compared to their

age. In Tura, most of the school kids go to school on their own; they even cross the streets themselves despite the heavy traffic of Tura. What's more dangerous is that children have to navigate the busy streets and walk alongside the moving vehicles. And it also happens that pedestrians have to signal the incoming cars in order to cross the street. Many associations and organisations claiming to work for the welfare of the student community are there, but most of them forget about the interest of school-going kids. And what about the school education officers? Aren't they supposed to be looking after the needs and to address the hardships of these children? I just hope that the school children in Meghalaya too are spared from carrying their heavy bags. Yours etc., Chanangbil Marak, Viaemail

Children need their space

Editor It is important for parents to realize that as their kids grow up they need to treat them as equal friends and not as commanding parents. In our culture, parents often consider their children as their extended ego or mirror shadow and dump all their personal aspirations, frustra-

Now, who was it said the devil has a pair of horns? Forget live mooing cows, even cow carcasses can unleash cow vigilantism in Yogi-land. The other day Bulandshahr, that fountain-head of goondaism in western Uttar Pradesh saw dead cows run amok and an inspector who investigated the "fridge" got a brickbat and a bullet in his head. All because cow carcasses were found at the outskirts of a village. The slain cop's sister spoke later: "All this man can think of is 'Cow. Cow. Cow'". Yep, that's right. All that Yogi can think is 'cow, cow and cow'. The day Hindus lose their cow-fixation there will be many an Indian citizen who will die in bed of old age. Iqbal and Pehlu Khan and that young boy on the train, Junaid. They didn't. Lives lynched because the world eats the cow and there are folks in Hindustan who worship cows let loose in the streets. Pictures of cows holding up traffic in Delhi and Mumbai don't surprise the global citizen anymore.

And when the inspector got cow-killed where was the Yogi? He was in Hyderabad promising to change its name to 'Bhagyanagar' if the BJP is voted to power in Telangana. Of all the arrogance, and the impudence! Of all the names - Bhagyanagar! Lucky will be the day if Hyderabad escapes this epithet! And reports are that Yogi Adityanath returned to UP from a bout of rallying-the-Hindu in Rajasthan to watch a sound-&-light show in Gorakhpur.

What to say, except that the day the people of Uttar Pradesh see the light of day, there will be no light in their lives. To reiterate, anyone clothed in saffron doesn't make a good administrator; especially, one who shaves his head, speaks intemperate language, not that of someone who holds a high constitutional office, and holds the lives of cows in higher relief than that of a fellow human being. 'Gone Without a Trace' will make a great epitaph. (IPA Service)

known to have been affected by it. At a global summit in Nairobi, the head of the United Nations Environment Programme spoke of an "ocean Armageddon." And yet there's a key difference: plastic is not as complicated as climate change.

After Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 disappeared from radar screens in March 2014 while on its way from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, the search for it extended from Indonesia to the southern Indian Ocean. It captivated a global audience for weeks. No sign of the wreckage appeared. On several occasions, when satellite images revealed collections of objects floating on the sea surface, hopes soared that they would turn out to be aircraft parts. They weren't. It was all trash-pieces of broken shipping containers, abandoned fishing gear, and plastic shopping bags.

Since the invention of plastic, the global economy has sky-rocketed. Production is on full scale and markets flourished- from polythene bags, plastic chairs. Now a portion of everything has plastic. UN estimates, every year the world uses 500 billion plastic bags. Half of the total plastic used is single-use or disposable items such as grocery bags, cutlery and straws. In India, 70 percent of total plastic consumption is discarded as waste. Around 5.6 million tonnes per annum of plastic waste is generated in our country, which is about 15,342 tonnes per day. So what happens to the discarded plastic? With only 30 percent of our plastics recyclable the rest 70 percent is sent to land-fills and in places where proper disposal of waste is not feasible. The waste is just dismissed off to rivers and streams whereas in coastal

Plastic or earth?

By Dameshwa M. Warjri

If plastic had been invented during the time of our forefathers - long before Tirot Sing, Kiang Nongbah or Pa-Togan Nengminza Sangma were even born, their 'Kwai' (betel nut)& 'duma'(tobacco) wrappers would likely still be around, hundreds of years later. If it were so and if our forefathers had been like many people today and simply tossed their empty bottles and wrappers over the side, our rivers and hills would be gift wrapped with plastic trash.

Plastic was not invented until the late 19th century, and production really only took off around 1950 and we have a mere 9.2 billion tons of the stuff to deal with! Of that, more than 6.9 billion tonnes have become waste. And of that waste, a staggering 6.3 billion tons never made it to a recycling bin-a figure that stunned the scientists who crunched the figures in 2017.

We are not aware of what mess we have created with plastic. No one knows how much non-recycled plastic waste ends up in the ocean, the earth's last sink or dumpster. Ocean plastic is estimated to kill millions of marine animals every year. Nearly 700 species, including endangered ones, are

areas, they are dumped into the sea.

If we look at this issue in our very own state, we will find that plastic has become a nuisance. The quantum of plastic waste generated daily is on the rise but there are no proper facilities to dispose of discarded plastic products and its waste. We have grown up in a decade where plastic bags are provided at every place we shop and we even expect them to provide it, but this small act of asking and using a plastic bag contributes to the promotion of plastic production. Another form of plastic that is of one-time use is packaged drinking water bottles; once used, it is disposed off. With lack of civic sense and proper disposal, where do they end up? A high percentage reaches the rivers, streams, forests and landfills. Let's not be blind to the fact that our rivers and streams in the city are turning into sewers. We may say that landfills are our answer but merely covering plastic waste with a layer of dirt does not resolve the issue. It just creates another problem- soil degradation. With plastic taking over 450 years to decompose, our great, great grandchildren will still be able to see the mess we have created

“Not all hope is lost to reverse the plague caused by plastic. Many ongoing researches point to biodegradable plastic. Another breakthrough is spurred by the discovery of plastic-eating bugs at a Japanese dump. Scientists have created a mutant enzyme that breaks down plastic drinks bottles - by accident. The new research of the first bacterium that had naturally evolved to eat plastic is produced by a bug. With ongoing research and study, it will take another decade or so to see visible results.”

known to have been affected by it. At a global summit in Nairobi, the head of the United Nations Environment Programme spoke of an "ocean Armageddon." And yet there's a key difference: plastic is not as complicated as climate change.

After Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 disappeared from radar screens in March 2014 while on its way from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, the search for it extended from Indonesia to the southern Indian Ocean. It captivated a global audience for weeks. No sign of the wreckage appeared. On several occasions, when satellite images revealed collections of objects floating on the sea surface, hopes soared that they would turn out to be aircraft parts. They weren't. It was all trash-pieces of broken shipping containers, abandoned fishing gear, and plastic shopping bags.

Since the invention of plastic, the global economy has sky-rocketed. Production is on full scale and markets flourished- from polythene bags, plastic chairs. Now a portion of everything has plastic. UN estimates, every year the world uses 500 billion plastic bags. Half of the total plastic used is single-use or disposable items such as grocery bags, cutlery and straws. In India, 70 percent of total plastic consumption is discarded as waste. Around 5.6 million tonnes per annum of plastic waste is generated in our country, which is about 15,342 tonnes per day. So what happens to the discarded plastic? With only 30 percent of our plastics recyclable the rest 70 percent is sent to land-fills and in places where proper disposal of waste is not feasible. The waste is just dismissed off to rivers and streams whereas in coastal

now.

Plastic is a revolutionary invention, it has made life much easier and because of plastic, we are able to have proper and safe package of everyday goods like medicine, food and other day-to-day products. Until scientific advancement in this field has found a better substitute for plastic, we cannot stop using it. The only thing we can do is to restrict its use only for packaging indispensable commodities like medicine and other goods.

Not all hope is lost to reverse the plague caused by plastic. Many ongoing researches point to biodegradable plastic. Another breakthrough is spurred by the discovery of plastic-eating bugs at a Japanese dump. Scientists have created a mutant enzyme that breaks down plastic drinks bottles - by accident. The new research of the first bacterium that had naturally evolved to eat plastic is produced by a bug. With ongoing research and study, it will take another decade or so to see visible results.

We have the power to decide what will happen to this planet, and we are to be blamed for what will happen to it as well. It is either our planet or plastic. We cannot depend only on scientists and the government to change the world. We can play a small part in shaping a better tomorrow. Carrying a water bottle instead of buying packaged water, using a bag or even a 'munadong' instead of accepting polythene bags while shopping. These small things done by one person will not make any difference but when integrated with the efforts of many, will create a new freedom movement, a movement for a plastic free environment.

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

“The determined scholar and the man of virtue will not seek to live at the expense of injuring their virtue. They will even sacrifice their lives to preserve their virtue complete.”

--- Confucius

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.117 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2018

Cautious optimism

TWO developments, one coming close on the heels of the other, sound curious. Christian Michel of the Agusta Westland VVIP helicopter scam dating back to years 2010-11 has been extradited to India from the UAE. Another high-flying 'wanted' businessman-turned fugitive Vijay Mallya swiftly changes his evasive tunes and extends an offer by tweet from the UK that he is willing to return to India and pay back every penny he owed banks - which is no small sum. The case against Michel was filed by the CBI in September last year, and the plea for extradition dragged due partly to the procedures involved. Luckily, India has an extradition treaty with the UAE signed shortly after the Modi government took charge in Delhi. But, whether the extradition would mean much by way of taking the VVIP copter scam forward to its logical conclusion is as yet an open question. Arguments could be, this is a drama being staged by the central government in its last leg of governance before the approaching Lok Sabha polls, to fool the people. Yet, it is worth watching how this case now progresses.

This should be small comfort for Prime Minister Narendra Modi who had in the last L S poll campaign in 2014 promised the people he would get back the black money taken away from India to safe havens abroad and redistribute it to the bank accounts of the poor. No major headway was made during the nearly five-year rule of the NDA government at the Centre in this respect. This is also evident in other old and new cases of bank frauds and scams, and the funnelling of such money to tax havens outside the country by several Indian businessmen. It would however appear curious that fugitive businessman Vijay Mallya, apparently taking a cue from the extradition of Michel, now promises to return the full dues to Indian banks amounting to nearly Rs 9,000 crore. Mallya had scooted from the scene in March, 2016 and this followed a plea to the UK by the Indian government in February last year. Mallya thought it fit to buy time and fight his cases through courts in the UK, stalling every move against him with considerable ease. Notably, a verdict on the plea for his extradition is expected from a UK court in a week's time. The proof of the pudding is in its eating. One has to wait and see how positive are the present turns vis a vis bringing the guilty to book.

Miscarriage of Justice

By Patricia Mukhim

As the editor of a newspaper it pains me to have to publish news regarding the former chief secretary of Meghalaya, Mr KS Kropha being pronounced guilty in the much hyped Coalgate scam - which concerns the allocation of coal deposits to the public sector and private companies. As a columnist, however, I am what Ezra Pound would call, 'The Village Explainer.' Hence this article! Now while the newspaper has to carry the news, the columnist-editor is entitled to her independent views and those views merit expression if only to show solidarity with an honest officer.

Mr KS Kropha, a 1982 batch IAS officer of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre, has held many posts in the state and is remembered fondly by all who have had occasion to interact with him. A man of few words, Mr Kropha perhaps believes that actions speak louder than words. Rather shy and reticent he hardly spoke to the media but if asked any questions he took pains to explain his brief. As far as corruption is concerned, there are many in the elite service, that have abused their positions but Kropha was not one of them. He rose above the venality of these troubled times.

One surmises that Kropha is a victim of perceived corruption as constructed by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), while he served as Joint Secretary with the Ministry for Coal, Govt of India. In 2014 the CAG stated that the Government is authorised to allocate coal blocks by a process of competitive bidding, but chose not to. As a result, both public sector enterprises (PSEs) and private firms paid less than they might have otherwise. In its draft report in March 2012, the CAG estimated that the "windfall gain" to the allottees was Rs 10,673 billion (US\$150 billion). When the final report of the CAG was tabled in Parliament it put the figure at Rs 1856 billion (US\$26 billion). In August 2012, the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had rebutted the CAG's report both in its reading of the law and the alleged cost of the government's policies.

However, while the initial CAG report suggested that coal blocks could have been allocated more efficiently thereby generating more revenue for the government, it never suggested that there was corruption in the allocation of coal. It's a different matter that in this country politics quickly

takes over the discourse. The BJP then wanting to come to power was quick to cash in on every alleged scam. And as is the norm today the media then takes over as the judge, jury and executioner even before the court has given its verdict.

It is educative that the equally hyped spectrum allocation scam during Pramod Mahajan's tenure as Telecom Minister in 2002 found the then Telecom Secretary Shyamal Ghosh, a 1965 batch IAS officer guilty of allotting airwaves in 2002 which led to the loss of Rs 508 crore to the exchequer. There were raids in offices of telecom majors, Airtel and Vodafone, which were alleged beneficiaries of NDA's telecom policies. Both companies had denied taking undue favour from the then government. Having known Mr Ghosh personally as a colleague on the Governing Board of an NGO - the Indo-German Social Service Society, I saw the pain and shock with which this allegation was received by Mr Ghosh, an officer whose credentials were impeccable. Yet, nine years after his retirement, Ghosh had to bear the cost of running to the law courts and spend money on engaging a lawyer to clear his name. In a conversation, Mr Ghosh once said that at the time, spectrum was a new thing and no one in the Government actually understood that air waves could be commodified and a cost fixed to them.

After a long trial, Mr Ghosh was acquitted in October 2015 and so too the three firms accused in the scam. The 235 page order of the Special Court came down heavily on the CBI and said that the charge-sheet was based on "deliberately redacted and garbled facts" and it was drafted in a manner to create an impression that a grave crime was committed, whereas there was none and there was "no incriminating material on record," against the accused. Special CBI Judge O P Saini also noted that the charge-sheet was filed for "extraneous reasons" and directed the CBI director to conduct an inquiry against the erring officials and take action against them as per law. The court said the CBI had "deliberately" not produced many relevant documents before it to indicate that demand for

additional spectrum started only after late Pramod Mahajan had joined as the telecom minister in 2001.Mr Ghosh evidently was a scapegoat in India's new saga of telecom scams and h i g h - v o l t a g e investigations.

In the light of what happened in the spectrum case we would be wrong to assume that every court verdict is based on the principles of justice because it takes a lot to establish what is absolutely just and what evidence the prosecution can put together against an accused person and how the defence counsels refute those allegations. The USLegal.com defines miscarriage of justice as a legal act or verdict that is clearly mistaken, unfair, or improper. Primarily, a miscarriage of justice is the conviction and punishment of a person for a crime they did not commit.

Most of us don't spend time to read CAG reports. Mediapersons have even lesser time to read the CAG narratives. We only go through the highlights. Hence in the case of Mr Kropha too, many have not cared to read the 69 page CAG report. The much hyped Report has itself stated that if the recommendations of the IAS officers in the Ministry of Coal (MOC) had been adopted then the notional loss of 1.86 lac crores to the national exchequer could have been avoided. When the officers in the Coal Ministry failed to get the auction method introduced due to stiff resistance from various stakeholders, they tried the next best thing. They introduced new measures to strengthen the then existing method of allocation. For the first time since 1993, they published advertisements and allocation guidelines for the public at large, making the entire process transparent and giving a level playing field for all participants. These officers also ensured that all applications and documents were examined by concerned State Governments and Administrative Ministries. They also introduced measures to ensure that public interest was taken care of in case of failure of the company to implement the project.

Meanwhile the officers persisted in getting the auction method introduced in place of the Screening Committee method until in 2012 their efforts fructified. The foundations of the current auction method

currently used was laid by these very IAS officers of the then Ministry of Coal.

It is ironic that today these very same officers are being crucified for putting in place a system that would indeed yield more revenue for the government and is also transparent and measurable. The IAS fraternity stands with the two convicted officers because they know that this is a test case and the crucible upon which their decisions today may be re-interpreted in the future. This over-hyped CoalGate scam will impact on India's governance system even as officers become wary about appending their signature on anything - even something they know to be in the larger public interest because they are unsure how future governments will construct their decision making wisdom at a particular juncture in history.

The IAS fraternity especially the serving officers know the credentials of their senior officers better than most. They know the two officers - HC Gupta the then Coal Secretary, KS Kropha the then Joint Secretary Coal and KC Samria, then Director in the Ministry of Coal have received no pecuniary or other benefits.

This case is destined to go down the way of Mr Shymal Ghosh's one because no one including the courts has suggested that these officers have received any benefits in the allocation process. The Enforcement Directorate and CBI have been investigating them for the last six years and have found no disproportionate assets.

A word to be said about the habit of the CAG to leak audit reports to the media and for the media to term such leaks as scams. Once the media labels something as a scam and names some individuals, a public perception is created that those names are guilty even before the due process of law takes its course. Who will ever forget Vinod Rai and his construct of the Rs 1.76 lakh crore "notional" loss to the Telecom sector. Come to think of it, the NDA rode to victory on the 2G scam.

In the same manner, today the Rafale aircraft deal is being touted as a 'scam' even before the CAG has placed its report in Parliament and this time the Congress wants to ride the waves of the 2019 parliamentary elections on the Rafale..Politics certainly is an outragoes game. Alas! Often it also claims innocent victims.

religion is being glorified and even normalized.

Also, there are discussions about whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi indeed has a 56 inch chest as is being claimed by him. Again, this has no bearing on political leadership. Mahatma Gandhi had a skinny body but no one complained about it because the father of the nation was a political leader and not a competitor for the title of Mr. Universe!

Instead of engaging ourselves in such frivolous diatribes we need to judge our political leaders by the yardstick of whether they have a clear vision to generate employment, develop human resources and overhaul the agrarian sector. It is a waste of time to indulge in non-issues that seek to divert our attention from inclusive growth which is the crying need at the moment for our hungry, malnourished children, unemployed youths and poor farmers.

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.

Modi, Mallya, Michel and Malayali on a mission
Hot Balloon to soar with Rafale

By Aditya Aamir

Should a man be punished for insisting that he wants to return money he owes to banks? Vijay Mallya says he's got the dough to pay for overdrafts; that he wants to clear the narrative that he "stole money" and the Modi government says nothing doing! And why link him to the extradition of Christian Michel, adds the fugitive and the Modi government weighs the perception. If the UK magistrate's court says "extradite Mallya" on December 10, it will be victory No.2 for a Prime Minister desperate to win the perception battle.

Rafale and 'Chowkidar Chor Hai' are building up to a crescendo - a la 'Ab Ki Baar...' in 2014 - and it's not music for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ears. Michel was extradited Tuesday night and, by Wednesday noon, Modi

What are the chances that the Modi government has not networked a deal to bring in Mehul Choksi from the West Indies? And what about Nirav Modi; is there a deal there too? Prime Minister Narendra Modi has to win 2019 come what may or the ceiling will dump on him. The Congress has promised to take him to the cleaners with Rafale and demonetization if it wins and it's not a light threat. Modi made it his business to 'Congress-mukt Bharat' and normal human behaviour dictates revenge. By any reckoning, the gloves are off.

Also, quite frankly, Modi will not want to walk into the sunset. Not just yet. There is so much of the world left to wow! Modi loves his sojourns overseas, the jhappi-pappi and the G-20. The question is does Rahul Gandhi have the killer instinct? All is fair in love

Michel needs counsel and he has to defend not just himself but also the Congress! The man needs all the help possible. The best Congress counsels should be ordered to defend Michel, all the way. To paraphrase the song, 'Dubai Se Aaya Mera Dost, Dost Ko Salaam Karo'. And if you ask 'Why the sacked Youth Congress legal head?' the answer is because he's a Malayali - Aljo K. Joseph! Don't forget Dubai is choc-a-bloc with Malayalis, that's why? History is proof that Malayalis have always stood by the Nehru-Gandhi family. Ask Tom Vadakan. AK Antony.

was telling poll-ready Rajasthan that "secrets will be out" and the "Signora" will be up to her neck in corruption trouble. Michel, for the BJP, is Modi's ticket to a second term. And Amit Shah knows how killing 'thadipar' can be.

Michel, they say, is in a tough spot. He has to expand the initials 'AP' and the half-eaten word 'Fam'. But the "middleman" has steadfastly refused to take ownership of the handwritten note containing 'AP' and 'Fam'. That is in the hand of some guy called Guido Haschke and he's beyond extradition. Also, handwritten notes don't stand up in court. There's a Birla-Sahara precedent. So, what does Modi and his government hope to gain from Michel's extradition? The answer to that is 'perception'; what voters think of politicians and political parties.

The timing of Michel's extradition is the biggest giveaway. That and the heavy-reason belief that the extradition is part of a deal involving the "runaway daughter" of a top UAE sheikh. A quid pro quo. The idea it seems is to drag the Agusta and Mallya cases along till general elections 2019 and hope that Rafale meantime doesn't explode midair! All the while also hope and pray that the Supreme Court doesn't edge in sideways with a ruling on Rafale, CBI and Ram Mandir to spoil the party.

and war and there's no love lost between the Congress and the BJP, Rahul and Modi. It's war with a capital 'W'. So, what is this business of not letting a Congress lawyer defend Michel in court?

Michel needs counsel and he has to defend not just himself but also the Congress! The man needs all the help possible. The best Congress counsels should be ordered to defend Michel, all the way. To paraphrase the song, 'Dubai Se Aaya Mera Dost, Dost Ko Salaam Karo'. And if you ask 'Why the sacked Youth Congress legal head?' the answer is because he's a Malayali - Aljo K. Joseph! Don't forget Dubai is choc-a-bloc with Malayalis, that's why? History is proof that Malayalis have always stood by the Nehru-Gandhi family. Ask Tom Vadakan. AK Antony.

Besides, the world knows the UPA government was the one which ordered the CBI to probe Agusta. It also got back the initial tranche of money paid and, for good measure, confiscated three of the 'birds'. Now, if Michel is back in familiar territory, it could be a 'sign' - a good sign! The mission to bring in Michel was named 'Mission Unicorn' and every Joker in town knows the unicorn is a mythical animal, alien to Hindustan. The cowlcks in Bharat probably never thought of it, used as they are so much to the holy cow! (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Glimmer of hope for farmers

Editor,
The Meghalaya Department of Agriculture hosted an ambitious two day Meghalaya Farmers Parliament, the first of its kind in the state on December 4-5, 2018. I was intrigued and so gate-crashed into the event by shamelessly inviting myself to the concluding two sessions on the last day of the meet. Participation was mainly from farmers of Khasi and Jaintia Hills and I was informed that a similar exercise is also earmarked for Garo Hills. The Convention hall was packed with over 400 delegates and participation was so passionate and enthusiastic that it even overflowed into the adjoining meeting halls of the Convention Centre. I came away with four strong impressions.

The meet was carried out in the local Khasi language and because of this, active participation by delegates, both literate and illiterate, was easy and effortless. Unlike usual boring English oriented Govt functions there were less lectures from VIPs to the audience and for a change the officers and experts on the dais listened

patiently to views, opinions, suggestions, grievances, proposals and ideas from the ground, and these flowed enthusiastically. That it was a bottom up and participatory approach was obvious but what made it more exciting was the eager involvement of the audience in the entire proceedings.

The second impression that came through the discussions was the felt need of the agriculturalists for a voice in the formulation of plans and projects that directly impacted on their livelihoods; the farm production on which they depended on and the incidental relevance Govt formulated schemes had on them individually and as a farming community. One got the impression that our farmers wanted more direct involvement in the formulation of plans that had a direct relevance with their livelihood activities. It sounded like a clear demand for a more and better bottom-up approach in agricultural development be it in Agriculture itself or in its allied activities such as Horticulture, Animal Husbandry or Fisheries. One came away with the direct impression that it was time for the Govt and its developmental departments to think of ways and means to empower and capacitate

our farmers towards a more participatory paradigm in Agricultural Planning.

The third impression one got was the verification of a long held suspicion - our agriculturalists from all walks of life were genuinely and basically unhappy with the marketing of their products. They grieved over the hold the middleman or the dalal had over them. They were angry over the short change they received from those who purchased their wares. They resented the absence of alternate markets where they could sell their products, other than lewduh. They lamented the lack of cold storage facilities that could prolong the shelf life of their produce. There was a universal demand for a MSP (Minimum Support Price) for agricultural goods together with the installation of an Agricultural insurance scheme as a safety net for crop failure of all kind. Agricultural marketing emerged as the weakest link in the chain of activities towards providing a viable and meaningful livelihood from Agriculture.

The last impression that one came away with was that the Govt had opened up a long suppressed need of the agricultural community - the need for a platform from where their concerns can be voiced. In the two days of

the parliament, farmers big and small, rich and poor, got a chance to voice, in their own language their concerns, fears and hopes for the livelihood options they had chosen for themselves. One was glad to see some obviously educated youngsters, Co-operative milk society members, pig farmers and fishery enthusiasts among the crowd. Their demands were not unjust but closely linked with what they believed to be crucial for the welfare of their trade. One welcomed the voices raised for the need for more beef cattle farms; more food processing and value adding technologies and last but not least for more and better coordination with the Govt extension services in providing improved methods and technology to our farmers. The Chief Guest of the day, Mr Prestone Tynsong, Dy CM promised that such sessions for farmers would be held every year and that the Govt will take the recommendations of the gathering seriously. A lot of hope has been generated in the rural community. I beg the Govt and the Department not to let it become a false hope!

Yours etc.,
Tokl Blah,
Viaemail

Enough of political trivia

Editor,
The discourse on some TV channels on the gotra and the size of chest of our political leaders makes me wonder whether these are issues for the voters before an election or for the negotiating families before a marriage! It has come to such a pass that some television channels even start focusing on whether Rahul Gandhi is a janeudhari (sacred thread wearing) Brahmin or not. This reminds me of what a friend said before his marriage. Whenever he was asked about his priority in marriage, he said, "pehle darshandhari piche gun bichari" (Beauty first; after that comes quality). Obviously he had less concern about whether his would-be wife was going to be a good human being or not. His top priority was the external beauty of his life partner.

Unfortunately, our political discourse is now relegated to the level of ~ "pehle janeudhari piche gun bichari" (Sacred thread first, after that comes quality). It is unfortunate that a symbol like a sacred thread that creates division within a

“*Fine words and an insinuating appearance are seldom associated with true virtue.*”

--- Confucius

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.118 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2018

The Climate Agenda

THE 24th Conference of Parties (CoP-24) is taking place in Katowice, Poland. It is intended to act as a guide to operationalise the Paris Climate Pact. Union Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan said India was expected to surpass commitments made in Paris in 2015. That means India will lower its emission intensity of GDP by 33-35% from 2005 levels by 2030. At the same time, it will raise the share of renewable sources in energy generation. But the Indian scene is bleak. India is the third highest contributor to global carbon emissions. Global carbon emissions are likely to reach their highest levels this year. Scientific cassandras warn that global temperatures may be spiked by around 3-5 degree Celsius by the end of the century. Science fiction may turn into scientific fact. The developing world will be the worst affected. But the developed nations will also be devastated. Donald Trump may not be aware of the impending calamity.

The irony about India is that it is not in a position to control the extraction of fossil fuels like coal in the different states because that activity is being touted as a 'livelihood.' This extraction of coal through unscientific mining methods has all but destroyed our rivers and farmlands. Sir David Attenborough told the UN climate change conference in Poland, "The collapse of our civilisations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon." Attenborough is correct and the sad fact is that nations know this and have worked out with scrupulous care, what needs to be done to avoid this catastrophe and to mitigate the effects of climate change but nothing is being done. Figures released by the University of East Anglia for the conference in Katowice show that global carbon emissions will rise by nearly 3% in 2018 - the highest ever. This is both astonishing and terrifying especially when the need to diminish the emissions is urgent. The main driver of this growth has been the increased use of coal, which is rapidly approaching its previous peak level, from 2013. It is time that all nations - developed, developing and under developed joined hands to face the crisis. But the world is yet unwilling to share its resources. Climate financing clouds discussions at successive global climate meets. Richer nations create most hassles. Unless the discord over fund sharing is resolved India can do little at the international level. It can at best set aside a larger share of its GDP to combat the climate threat.

TO THE EDITOR

Why a CBI enquiry is important

Editor,

The CBI is an independent investigation agency or that is what it is supposed to be. Hence the two RTI activists, Agnes Kharshiing and Amita Sangma who almost lost their lives in an attack by a mob owing allegiance to the coal lobby in East Jaintia Hills, have a legitimate claim to demand for a CBI enquiry. Both the activists know far too much about the politics of collusion in this whole episode and do not have faith in the State Police or in the present government, especially since the main accused is a member of the NPP which is ruling the state today. When the NPP supremo, WR Kharlukhi was asked what action is contemplated against Nidamon Chulet the NPP leader from East Jaintia Hills, he ducked responsibility saying that only Home Minister, James Sangma could answer the question. The NPP has not left any doubts about wanting the coal ban to be lifted. This was the plank on which the Party won its seats in Jaintia

The biggest take-away for India from the 13th G-20 Summit in Buenos Aires was what happened in a fringe meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, US President Donald Trump, and the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. In fact, this was the first trilateral meeting between the three leaders who are bringing their countries as close as never before as strategic allies. They are three members of the 'Quad' that includes Australia too. All the three leaders sang the same tune on the future of this significant alliance mainly for Indo-Pacific region where China has aggressive military designs.

Prime Minister Modi, known for coining new names and slogans acronymed the triumvirate as JAI, comprising the first alphabet of their names - Japan, Australia and India - which in Hindi means victory. He affirmed that the alliance would be victorious in contributing to 'world peace, stability and prosperity'. President Trump declared the US relations with India and Japan have never been closer before than they are now. He predicted lots of trade and military ties of US with India and Japan. Abe, the Japanese Prime Minister underlined the fundamental values and strategic interests shared between the three countries. All the three leaders reaffirmed the importance of a free and open Indo-Pacific region and pledged to deepen the trilateral cooperation in maintaining a free Indo-Pacific region.

The second gain for India was to be able to insert a nine-point active programme on fugitive economic offenders; to devise a mechanism that denies entry and safe haven to all economic offenders. This was a successive diplomatic achievement for India after it managed, against stiff opposition from some countries to introduce an 11-point agenda on terrorism as a part of Hamburg Declaration, in the previous G-20 Summit last year. This had activated the UN counter-terrorism network, Financial Action Task Force (FATF) that disallows countries charged with supporting cross-border terrorism from accessing international finances. Following this

Hills. It is therefore committed to deliver on its promise. But since the coal ban is not yet lifted the NPP would not like to disturb the illegal mining and transportation of coal and would even facilitate this process. If there is a CBI enquiry into the Agnes Kharshiing assault case, it is anybody's guess who all will be caught in the web. Hence the antipathy towards the CBI.

The Deputy CM, Prestone Tynsong's statement is even more bizarre. He repeatedly points to the previous Mukul Sangma government for allowing illegal coal mining and transportation of coal to carry on despite the ban. This of course is true. All governments are beholden to the coal lobby and the former chief minister, Mukul Sangma's wife owned coal mines. But the reason that people dumped the Congress Government and voted the NPP was because they wanted change. Mr Tynsong seems to imply that if the previous government indulged in wrongdoing, then the present government too can repeat those wrongs. Then what is the difference between the Congress and the NPP? And why is Nidamon Chulet still absconding? Why can't a red corner notice be put up

Yours etc.,
Ashton Nongkhlaw,
Via email

Demand for Garoland state

Editor,

Apropos the news item "Garoland group demand statehood panel from centre" (ST Dec.6, 2018) it appears that the Garoland State Movement Committee (GSMC) under the Chairmanship of Nikman Ch. Marak seems to be quite serious and committed in its

Jai Ho India!!

By Dr. D. K. Giri

Declaration, Pakistan was brought back to the grey-list of FATF, for financing global terror.

In the Summit, India sought to activate the UN regulatory bodies on economic offenders, like the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) and UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC) 2000. India stressed on the process of identification, extradition, and judicial proceedings against fugitive economic offenders.

Interestingly, as I write

Prime Minister Modi, known for coining new names and slogans acronymed the triumvirate as JAI, comprising the first alphabet of their names - Japan, Australia and India - which in Hindi means victory. He affirmed that the alliance would be victorious in contributing to 'world peace, stability and prosperity'. President Trump declared the US relations with India and Japan have never been closer before than they are now. He predicted lots of trade and military ties of US with India and Japan.

this column a few hours ago Christian Michel, a fugitive offender accused of receiving and disbursing kickbacks in the Augusta Westland Helicopter deal has been extradited to New Delhi from United Arab Emirates. This is a shot in India's diplomatic arm although New Delhi is accused of being selective and partisan in pursuing the economic offenders who have fled the country. This is of course tough for internal party political debate, but the success in bringing back the accused to the country cannot be undermined.

The third achievement is that of India securing the consent of the Italians to host the G-20 Summit in 2022, the year coinciding with 75th anniversary of India's independence. Italy agreed to swap it for 2021 when it will hold the Summit followed by the 14th in

Japan in 2019 and 15th in Saudi Arabia in 2020. NaMo has invited the world leaders to India to experience its growth and immense diversities which signify the intrinsic pluralism in Indian life and culture.

The G-20 group, created in 1999, is by far, the most powerful economic block accounting for 85 per cent of the world GDP, 2/3 rd of world population and about ½ of the area. It started in 1970s as G-7 comprising Canada, France, West Germany, Italy, Japan, UK, and USA. It became G-8

when Russia joined in 1996. In the late 1990s, when the financial crises affected a number of growing economies in Latin America and Asia and threatened to spill over to G-8 countries, it was decided to include other emerging economies. Now, it consists of 19 countries plus the European Union, which is represented by the President of the Council. Spain is a permanent invitee.

The tasks of G-20 include managing global trade, the trade tensions, imbalances and disputes plus any other emerging issue that can upset global peace and prosperity. In this Summit too, global trade tensions, the labour market, the oil price stability and the reforms of WTO constituted the agenda. The latter was dealt with carefully without touching on the WTO 'taboos' such as protectionism, IPR, taxation,

Wanted positive news

Editor

The quantity and quality of news generated by most government, private as well as independent media sources across the globe are nowadays loaded with information related to futile negative local and international politics; sex, violence, abuses, discrimination, accidents, riots, wars, terror attacks, mob violence, police inaction, corruption, nepotism, fraud, murder, failing economy to name only a handful. It is important to accommodate some different aspects of life with news too for building the newer generation and to provide a relief from the challenges of our present difficult life and challenges of our global existence. Life has more to offer than just struggle and it is important to motivate people towards the positive aspects of our socio-economic as well as socio-political life. International media houses that frame and help in developing global opinion should also look at accommodating some

etc.

However, the Summit was overshadowed by the ongoing trade war between US and China. It is no secret that Beijing is being criticised by the US, Europe and Japan for dumping, industrial subsidies, abuse of IPR, technology transfers etc. Donald Trump has been accusing China of stealing US technology worth billions and taking away jobs from America etc. China has been wary of US tariffs on its exports. In a one-on-one meeting with Xi Jinping around the Summit, Trump agreed not to impose higher tariffs from first of January 2019, as apparently, the \$250 billion tariff has hit China already.

Understandably, Donald Trump's supporters at home and Allies abroad would be glad to see him standing up to China and seeking to stop the expansionist approach of the latter. But his critics in his country accuse him of lack of leadership and displaying exceptionalism. They would like Trump to lead the 'pack' not withdraw and stand away from it. They consider the temporary truce in trade war with China a pyrrhic victory, not a long term viable strategy.

Undoubtedly, any political or diplomatic action is subject to interpretation and criticism. Donald Trump, Shinzo Abe and NaMo, all are under scrutiny of the people as the three of them represent open societies and political democracies. Nonetheless, it is fair to contend that India's diplomacy in the last two G-20 Summits came out in flying colours but the steps to watch are - NaMo had the second trilateral meeting with Putin and Xi Jinping.

Is New Delhi back to its old approach of balancing both the blocks? One just wished that it does not have the worst of both the worlds in its penchant for a balancing act, which was euphemistically called non-alignment. It was nebulous and non-workable. One has friends and enemies in international politics though axiomatically not permanent. To be sure none could be non-aligned. One again hopes our diplomats do not have a blast from the past in our foreign economic policy.---INFA

(The writers is Prof. International Politics, Jamia Milia Islamia)

positive news that could provide direction to our younger generations and help them to be futuristic but also better and responsible citizens.

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Leithbridge, Canada

Bring the perpetrators to book

Editor,

With the Uttar Pradesh police chief stating that there was a conspiracy behind the violence in Bulandshar, the cops of that state should unearth the truth behind the murder of a police official at the earliest. The issue has taken a political colour in that state with elections to the Lok Sabha just a few months away. The authorities should bring the conspirators to justice soon and ensure that such incidents do not recur.

Yours etc.,
M T Khan,
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.

Democrat-run U.S. House to initiate "real change"

Higher minimum wages, restricting big money donations, on anvil

By Mark Gruenberg

The Democratic-run U.S. House hasn't even gotten underway yet, but lobbies for progressive causes - from saving the environment to restoring the teeth in the Voting Rights Act - are already seeking spots on the incoming lawmakers' opening agenda.

What the Dems do when they take over is important to workers and their allies, even though very little - if anything - of what they're contemplating will become law in the next two years. That's because of a bigger GOP majority in the U.S. Senate, plus lockstep control of it by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kent., plus right-wing anti-worker GOP President Donald Trump in the Oval Office. All that means most of what the Dems do, unless they can insert their ideas in must-pass money bills to keep the government going, will be dead on arrival on the other side of Capitol Hill.

Instead, the measures will be planks in the House Democrats' erection of a party platform to present to all in 2020. Workers and their allies haven't openly presented their plans, yet. But Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., incoming chair of the House Education and Labor Committee will offer an increase in the minimum

That idea comes from Sen. Bernie Sanders; He calls it the "Stop Walmart Act," which refers to the extremely low pay from the retail monster - which then forces its workers to depend on public programs. Another, from Rep. Jerrold Nadler who will head the House Judiciary Committee next year, is to stop letting firms forcing workers into mandatory arbitration, even on labour law violations. The GOP Supreme Court majority legalized that, too.

But all of these ideas will take a back seat to one from Pelosi herself. In a Washington Post op-ed, co-written with Rep. John Sarbanes, D-Md., the two outlined "real change to restore democracy." Their measure, with the symbolic bill number HR1, would restore enforcement provisions of the Voting Rights Act, again targeting them to states and local governments with histories of racial discrimination at the polls.

Given the proliferation of so-called "Voter ID" and other voter repression mechanisms, Republican-run governments have imposed since their 2010 sweep, that cause alone will give the Dems a lot to counteract. HR1 will also attempt to counteract the

That's in line with the aims of the new and younger Democrats elected on November 6. Representatives-elect, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, the Democratic Socialist who is their unofficial leader, signalled they are interested in changing policies, not party leaders.

wage to \$15 an hour, says Rep. Donald Norcross, D-N.J., a panel member and former president of the South Jersey Building and Construction Trades Council.

And Scott himself is the lead sponsor of the Wage Act, the latest labor-backed rewrite of the nation's basic labour laws. It would legalize voluntary recognition ("card check") of unions at work sites when an independently certified majority of workers sign union election authorization cards. The Wage Act would also remove many business- and court-erected hurdles to organizing workers and negotiating first contracts. And the measure would increase fines for company labour law-breaking.

That's in line with the

aims of the new and younger Democrats elected on November 6. Representatives-elect, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, the Democratic Socialist who is their unofficial leader, signalled they are interested in changing policies, not party leaders. That became abundantly clear when the 29-year-old lawmaker-to-be, a Pelosi supporter, nevertheless joined a sit-in at Pelosi's congressional office to agitate for congressional action to combat climate change.

There's no shortage of suggestions, many of them important to workers. They include rebuilding U.S. infrastructure (North America's Building Trades Unions), ordering OSHA to write a standard to cut violence against health care and social service workers (National Nurses United and Connecticut Rep. Joe Courtney), and ending federal subsidies of corporate employers which let the firms underpay their workers.

GOP Supreme Court majority's 2010 Citizens United ruling, which threw open the U.S. campaign finance system to a tsunami of special interest, right wing and capitalist class corporate cash - overwhelming the rest of us.

The Dems' measure "would require all political organizations to disclose their donors and shut down the shell game of big money donations to super PACs" - campaign finance committees - Pelosi and Sarbanes wrote. That corporate and ruling class campaign cash, they declared, has stopped congressional action on workers' causes, ranging from improving the Affordable Care Act to enacting workers' rights to raising the minimum wage.

And HR1 would expand conflict-of-interest laws to "end the revolving door" between business and government, Pelosi and Sarbanes said. "On Day 1, Democrats will deliver something real for all Americans - the most ambitious set of democracy reforms in a generation. These bold and positive reforms will return us to government of, by and #ForThePeople," Sarbanes tweeted. "Our communities sent me and my fellow Members-elect to Washington with a call to action - get dark money out of politics, clean up corruption, and make sure every vote and every voice is heard. Let's make good on that promise," tweeted Rep.-elect Katie Hill, D-Calif.

Once HR1 gets put on the table, the other ideas will come up. That includes raising the federal minimum wage, now \$7.25 hourly, for the first time in a decade. That hike will be "a priority within our first 100 hours" Pelosi told union members. (IPA Service)

“If a man takes no thought about what is distant, he will find sorrow near at hand.”

--- Confucius

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.120 SHILLONG, MONDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2018

‘Yes’ from Imran

FOR the first time, Pakistan has admitted that the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks were planned and directed from its soil by Lashkar-e-Taiba. Recently installed Prime Minister Imran Khan deserves qualified praise for stating as much – something his predecessors and principally Nawaz Sharif failed to admit either by way of a pregnant silence or by feigning ignorance. But, to see this as a step forward on the part of Khan in facilitating a resumption of the stalled India-Pakistan dialogue is to ignore the ground realities there. Fact of the matter is that the Pakistani establishment, somewhat openly controlled by the Army brass with able support from military intelligence the ISI, has been playing hide and seek vis-à-vis the numerous wounds that the terrorist and other outfits there kept inflicting on India. Such heinous acts had reached highly provocative levels in recent years. After 26/11 came the “terrorist” attacks on Pathankot and Uri military establishments, in which personnel of the Pakistani army or those trained by the military were involved. These had the proportions of a mini war, but India bore the brunt with considerable patience and avoided effective retaliation. Rightly or wrongly, neither the Manmohan Singh government nor the Modi dispensation took matters to extremes.

The Manmohan Singh government was obviously weak-kneed. The maximum that the Modi government did was a set of surgical strikes on the night of September 2016 – nearly two years after the NDA government took power. This was no great shakes. Just a handful of casualties were inflicted, very little harm was caused to enemy infrastructure and no noticeable benefits came of it. A top soldier involved in the offensive has now disapproved of the political hype that followed. The Opposition had been rubbishing the government claims for long. Imran Khan saying -- in his first interview to a foreign (American) journal -- that he has asked his government to “find out the status of the case” and that “resolving this case is in Pakistan’s interest”, means little. Fact is, even if the PM wants to fix the perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks – which would essentially mean handing them over to India – this could be nothing more than wishful thinking. The role of courts there apart, the military is bound to block such efforts; and the military has a vested interest in keeping the Kashmir fire alive, for the reason that it’s the Kashmir card that gives the soldiers the legitimacy to keep the political establishment there under their control.

TO THE EDITOR

State of health sector in Meghalaya

Editor,

It is unfortunate to read the news reports regarding the deplorable state of the health sector in our state with many essential, life-support machines not functioning at various institutes and the lack of infrastructure and transportations as well. The institutions are facing shortage of doctors, nurses and with no governmental state of the art diagnostic center, the poor people are ultimately the sufferers as they have to shell out hefty amounts in private hospitals.

It is also being observed that the new state government with the BJP as its allies is no better. The rampant issue of corruption whether it be of sensitive departments like Health or Power carries on even while Government is turning a blind eye to it. Even worse is the life threatening assault on activist Agnes Kharshiing when she tried to bring to light the issue of illegal coal mining. The

growing strength of the KSU, FKJGP etc and the issue of Harijan colony and the riots that followed are not good indicators. The question that arises in my mind is whether Modi is really a watchman of the country or is he turning a blind eye to the states? The recent news about the faulty tendering process in the Health Department which bypassed the basic e-tendering mode, I wonder what the intention of this Government is. No actions is being taken against the errant officers involved. I am in serious doubt about the false promises of the BJP and their Hindutva agenda which has put secularism under a cloud. In fact I am starting to believe that the previous government was much better since we never heard of lynching or police officials being killed in the UPA regime.

Yours etc.,
Jonathan Lyngdoh
Via email

At last some improvement!

Editor,
The National Highway 40

Of Farmers’ Parliament and the Land they Till

By HH Mohrmen

The last one week the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) has done a commendable job and the government deserves a pat on the back on three counts. The first achievement of the government is the organising of the Farmers’ Parliament. The MDA also needs to be congratulated for the inauguration of the Orchidarium and orchid production unit by Institute of Bio-resource and Sustainable Development (IBSD). This Orchid based bio-entrepreneurship will go a long way in conservation of orchids endemic to the state as well as create commercial opportunities from it. Then there is of course the celebration of the World Soil Day.

Incidentally all the three occasions which happened last week have to do with the farming community which also gives us the impression that the Government is taking care of the farming community. The three events must therefore give the farmers in particular and the public in general some reason to cheer and hope for of the better days to come. As always, the week also has some share of good news and some bad news as it was reported that around 2.24 Mha of land is affected by soil acidity in Meghalaya. The acidity of soil coupled with increasing infertility of soil due to the overuse of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, is another cause of concern for the farmers in the state.

Although I was not privy to the proceedings of the Farmers’ Parliament, yet from the report in the press one can get some idea of at least the speeches made by the ministers and the bureaucrats at the inaugural function. Of the many speeches including the inaugural speech of the Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma, it was Mr KN Kumar’s speech that gave us some idea on the different categories of farmers that we have in the state. Kumar in his speech categorised the farmers in the state into three sections - small, marginal, semi medium depending on the approximate size of cultivatable land that they have in their procession.

Kumar further stated that the 3 lakh farmers we have in the state depend on 15 percent of land only. The marginal farmers own less than 1 hectare of land while small farmers of land and semi medium farmers own

less than 4 hectares of land. What Kumar did not say is that none of the farmers own more than 4 hectares of land. This of course is true in many cases but it can vary from one region of the state to the other depending on the kind of land holding system prevailing in the area.

Land holding system in Meghalaya varies from place to place or from one community to another. It is therefore wrong to assume that there is one universal land holding pattern for the entire state. Land ownership in the state cannot be painted with one brush and the ownership pattern is different and complex particularly in the two districts of Jaiñtia hills. In the two districts, it can

be broadly said that major part of the land in the area is either owned by the community or the clan depending on the region.

In the War Jaiñtia area or the large part of the Amlarem sub division, land is owned by the different clans and again in the different villages, different clans own major parts of land in the respective villages. In fact the distribution of land in the area is based on the time that the clan arrived in the region. For example, the first settlers or rather clan or clans which came to settle in the area first distributed among themselves what was seemingly the best portion of land in the area and left the lower grade or un-cultivable land for the migrants who come to settle in the village later. Clans who came to settle later were given non-arable lands and those who came after all the land was distributed, had to depend on the earlier settlers who in turn lease them land for their agricultural use.

In the War Jaiñtia area, to this day, the clans which owned large tracts of land

are still called Jamindar and they lease out land they cannot use, to farmers in their respective villages. So farmers who have no land have to take on lease land from the clan for use in farming or other purposes. The farmers then have to pay a yearly compensation to the land owner for the land they have taken on lease from them. This is the practice that is still prevalent in the War Jaiñtia area of the Amlarem Sub division. Now the question is whether the farmer owns the land in this case? Most of the farmers in this region are landless because the land that they use is taken on lease from the clan and this was apparent especially when farmers want to avail credit from the banks and they cannot mortgage the

land because the ownership is still with the clan.

Of course the good thing about this tradition is that the clan which owns the land cannot just take it back at their whims and fancy, but the ownership of the land is with the clan. The ownership of land in the southern slope of the district is different from those in the highlands. In areas like those in eleka Jowai, Nartiang, Shangpung and etc, the major part of the land is owned by the communities but even where the land belongs to the communities the farmers’ right to the land is only as long as they use it. But even in the area where the community is holding a major portion of the land, some Kurt or clan in the community still own large tracts of land. Now to the question whether Khasi Pnar is an egalitarian society? The answer is that by tradition, gender inequality in the community is already apparent and some clans are bestowed with the right to own more land than the other.

The threat is the fact that as time passes community land is distributed for settlement and agricultural

use and gradually public land is shrinking. Now many villages do not have common land anymore. Whatever land they have it would only be to provide plots for construction of houses for new families only. There is no more land to allot to farmers for farming purposes. The constraint on land is not only from the increase of population but the health of the soil is also having its toll on the farmers and their activities. Apart from the fact that around 2.24 M ha of land in Meghalaya is affected by soil acidity, it is also true that mining also had a drastic impact on the arable land in the mining areas and this is an open secret.

It should therefore be a matter of priority for the Agriculture Department of the state to take the health of soil and sustainable management of soil resources seriously. Because the pressure on land is from all direction, this is a critical issue and it should be a matter of grave concern for the government and the farmers of the state as such. Our efforts to promote agriculture will therefore be futile if these factors are neglected or not taken into consideration.

Farmers’ plight is more acute because of the issue of land but the fact that they have to depend on multiple livelihood activities to sustain their lives is another grave issue. In addition to the pressure on land which is already a scarce resource, farmers have to engage in multiple livelihood activities because of the unpredictability of the activity that they hold. Because the farmer cannot depend on one livelihood activity only, hence, their demand for land is twice or thrice as much. The reason is that apart from engaging in cultivation of various crops where the farmers totally depends on the vagaries of nature they also have to keep different livestock to ensure that they have a secure income.

The government therefore needs to do more to help the farming community in the state, but the acute shortage of land for cultivation and the health of the soil which has deteriorated day by day due to mining and other anthropogenic activities is something that needs immediate and serious attention.

to create trouble."

On being asked what message he would like to convey to the Chief Minister on Hindu - Muslim politics, the teen said, "Not just the Chief Minister, I would appeal to the entire country, please stop Hindu - Muslim violence. People get violent at the slightest provocation. People should understand and think, that they are bound by the law."

About his father, he said, "My father always used to say whatever else you become, you need to be a good citizen first. This country is yours. You people are not comprehending, I request you to understand - this mob culture will give us nothing."

The words of Abhishek convey a hint of a better tomorrow. There is every reason to be optimistic.

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*

Cow, Profitable Business Reaping political benefits?

By Poonam I Kaushish

The drumbeaters are busy serenading the victorious in the keenly fought five States polls, the losers sulk behind closed doors. Amidst all this “Gau mata” is once again back in the forefront for our Hindutva brigade. A convenient political tool to milk, rediscovering the holy cow’s brand equity as a profitable political business!

Think. While patronage and ideological indoctrination is one reason for the spiral of vicious violence, the vigilantes get away with murder as leaders look the other way and justify any action taken to protect the cow, even if it means taking the law into their hands resulting in the Government reaping political capital by inciting communal passions. A win-win situation for both!

It was no different last week when cow carcasses were found in UP’s Bulandshahr and all hell broke loose when rogue cow vigilantes patronised by the Bajrang Dal and the VHP went on a rampage alleging illegal cow slaughter resulting in the death of two including a police inspector. It is another matter that the inspector was the investigating officer in the Akhlaq lynching case of 2015 in UP’s Dadri wherein his family was accused of eating and storing beef in their refrigerator. Pertinently, all the 17 suspects he had booked are out on bail.

It is plausible that the criminals were spurred to action after a brief lull because their brand of poison seemed to have lost its potency in recent times, more so after the VHP’s Dharm Sabha in Ayodhya failed to generate a groundswell for a temple which worried the Sangh Parivar. Consequently, the focus on Gau Mata presently is not so much about the fate of the holy cow as it is about cynical competitive politics. Besides, with the general elections a few months away trust our saffron-robed Ministers, netas, swamis to make “Gau mata” the cause célèbre for milking in the race for power at the Centre and recklessly play the communal card. Politicising Hinduism to tailor to their ambitious needs and electoral gains where one man’s opium is another man’s poison is debasing the country.

The BJP played its Hindutva card wrapped in development that brought it power at the Centre and in several States in recent electioneering and continues to do so while the Congress is now trying to reposition itself to match the BJP’s Hindu plank for future electoral battles. Of course, no neta wants to get his hands dirty in the slugfest but it doesn’t stop them talking a lot of bull and relishing naked cow-trading.

In the just concluded polls in five States it was amusing to see both the BJP and Congress leaders outbid each other offering the moon and stars including gau rakshak. While the BJP promised a ministry dedicated to cow protection in Madhya Pradesh, the Congress guaranteed to set up a gaushala in every panchayat. In Rajasthan, the Hindutva Brigade vowed to set up a cow sanctuary and imposed a 20% cow cess on liquor while its arch rival distanced itself from meo muslims lest it be accused of pandering to minorities.

Undeniably, cow care and its protection have often dominated politics owing to patronage from the BJP, which relies on Hindu votes. Thus, over the years, it has pushed cow protection as an integral part of its political agenda by including it in their manifesto to appease the majority community.

Disconcertingly, the gau rakshaks have taken the cue from their political mai-baap BJP which is the driving force behind the spread and

hardening of cow rights legislation across the country. Whereby, the cow lovers coo that the ban to protect the cow is justified and should be seen as a legal offense and not religious. Adding, it would be nice if the minorities respect the sentiments of the majority of Hindus who consider cow slaughter as a sin.

Clearly, no lessons had been learned in the last three years since cow vigilantism reared its ugly head or remedial measures put in place post the public flogging of four Dalit men in Gujarat’s Una town for allegedly killing the cow they were skinning and forced them to eat cow dung in 2016 and lynching of a Rajasthan dairy farmer and the lynching of young Junaid accused of carrying beef on a train in Ballabhgarh last year.

Thus, we have a wacky hodgepodge of cattle laws according to leaders’ political appetite. While some States have banned cow slaughter, others allow killing of old or sick cattle, several kill, ban or no ban and not a few require a “fit for slaughter” certificate.

Notably, cow protection has been a live political issue over the years. It was hotly debated by our founding fathers in the Constituent Assembly leading to cow protection being included as a Directive Principle of State policy. While Article 48 reads: “The State shall endeavour to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall, in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds and prohibiting the slaughter of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle”. However, the Directive Principle does not provide for a total nationwide legislative ban on cow slaughter, which the Hindu fundamentalists have been demanding for long. Several agitations have taken place since 1966 when Parliament was sought to be gheraoed, resulting in police firing and deaths. As many as ten Private Member’s Bills have been tabled in the Lok Sabha between 1985 and 2006. In 1979 the Janata Dal Government tabled an official Bill and Indira Gandhi wrote to States to enforce a ban. Two National Commissions studied the issue. But there is no Central Act.

True, the cow is sacred to Hindus and is revered as Matrika. Every bit of the cow is useful. Even its urine has miraculous medicinal value. Therefore, it has a central place in religious rituals as well as free rein to roam in streets. Over the years, a majority of States have passed controversial slaughter laws which make killing local cows illegal. Certainly, as blinkered, dogma-ridden debates rage on about holy cows it marks a dangerous political trend of intolerance towards minorities and mob violence. If this trend goes unchecked society will get dangerously fragmented. With politics and polls only on their agenda, the polity must desist from playing with fire and instigate their vote bank. Alongside, both communities have to learn to cohabit together and the BJP must rein in its ‘fringe’ elements who feel emboldened with a majority Government at the Centre.

In sum our leaders must learn to tolerate differences and not beat everything in to a pulp with a meaty bone. In our political quicksand the gau rashaks vs the cow slayers underscore once again there is no sacred cow when it comes to garnering votes and settling political scores. Whereby, the revered bovine suddenly transformers into a political Kamdhenu. Let us not reduce the cow to a religious plank, political ping-pong or poll gimmick and profitable business! ---- INFA

“No one should have to choose between medicine and other necessities. No one should have to use the emergency room every time a child gets sick. And no one should have to live in constant fear that a medical problem will become a financial crisis. ”

--- Brad Henry

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.121 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2018

Country’s financial edifice shaken

THE resignation of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor, Urijit Patel, has come as a shock. Patel was in a running battle with the Government for some time now and he was expected to leave sooner but everyone thought he had been placated. Now Patel has finally left. And yet another institution has hit rock bottom under the watch of the Modi Government. Attempts to tinker with the operational autonomy of the Bank, is, what has brought it to this pass. Patel – a man of few words did not say much in his resignation letter to the Government except that it was for personal reasons but former RBI Governor, Raghuram Rajan speaking to the media here has cautioned that this could lead to a crisis which the country might not able to handle and that all Indians should be concerned about the growth and equity in the economy. Tremors began to be felt when the RBI Board started to over step its advisory role and intrude into matters that should have been left to professionals. Rajan also said that Patel’s exit is a protest that should not be taken lightly by the Government and it must have happened because he was faced with circumstances he could he could not deal with or pressures he could not succumb to. Indeed, there is a need to question Urijit Patel’s resignation and what has prompted this action, considering that the RBI Governor is not given to acting lightly.

The RBI Board comprises politicians and hand-picked party loyalists. This has happened with almost all institutions today including universities. The CBI, which anyway never enjoyed autonomy the way it is meant to be, reached a crisis point when its top brass got into a full scale war, necessitating the transfer of both. One was obviously a handpicked Modi man; the other was not. The credibility of the CBI has taken a beating. Now it is the RBI which is in dire straits. Directives to the RBI Governor from the Government, from time to time takes away the functional autonomy of the Bank. Perhaps the demonetisation move itself was the trigger point although Patel defended it to the hilt then. But Raghuram Rajan who left the Bank in September 2016 felt that is was a hasty move. Patel’s support of the demonetisation move earned him the sobriquet of a Modi stooge. Now that’s now in the past. The Government should get its act together and restore the operational autonomy of the Bank to prevent any further loss of public trust.

TO THE EDITOR

Public facilities in Govt institutions

Editor,

Most of the Government offices are such that there is regular interaction with the general public, and hence most of them receive a steady flow of visitors. Now, one notices that all available parking space is already blocked by the vehicles of the office staff, beginning with the peons to the directors. All of them seem to own vehicles and they need to flaunt them. One wonders why they all need to bring their vehicles and park them in the office premises and thereby clog up all the available space. Where will the public that come to these offices for a

short visit, park? Parking in offices should be meant for the public and not for the staff. Period.

Another important aspect in almost all government offices is the toilet facility. Toilets in most of these offices are kept locked, for use of ONLY the staff and officers. That is downright wrong and discriminatory. The toilets should be available for use of the visiting public, without any fuss. What if the poor visitor has an urge to use the toilet and it is not available? Is he supposed to go and relieve himself in the bushes or by the road-side outside the office? If cleanliness is an issue, then what are the sweepers etc employed in these offices doing? They should be taken to task, and proper maintenance of the toilets

ensured.

Yours etc.,
Lambok Dkhar,
Via email

Well played Indian team

Editor,

I would like to extend my heartiest gratitude to the best Indian wicket-keeper Rishabh Pant who finished with 11 catches, and equalled the record for most dismissals in a Test by a wicketkeeper, sharing it with England’s Jack Russell and South Africa’s AB de Villier in the opening clash against Australia in Adelaide Oval. He could have had 12 dismissals but unfortunately he dropped Lyon in the 105th over off Bumrah. Before Pant, Wriddhiman

Who Rules Meghalaya ?

By Toki Blah

Panchayati Raj regime. Our durbars were left intact as they were considered superior to the panchayats; immune from political influence and manipulations and expected to deliver towards the objective of empowering our communities. In Meghalaya the onus of developing and empowering village administration was thus entrusted, to the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs). Sadly this proved to be a horrible, horrible mistake. It was akin to expecting support from a rotting log of wood. For sixty long years ADCs have intentionally ignored and neglected this constitutional trust and responsibility. Not a single step was ever initiated to empower

“ The Top Down approach was expected to give way to a more pro people Bottom Up paradigm. The modern need is to do away with centralised governance and to encourage decentralised administration.”

and capacitate our Dorbars. Instead the strategy was to continue with suppression and maintain ADC control over them.

In more enlightened environments the strategy has been the very opposite. Development sustainability has been identified as the ability of the Government to do away with ‘target driven’ policies and to usher in ‘demand driven’ policies, the demand being the demand from the ground; from and by the communities themselves. The Top Down approach was expected to give way to a more pro people Bottom Up paradigm. The modern need is to do away with centralised governance and to encourage decentralised administration. In Meghalaya, especially in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, we have to accept that there is a reluctance and an inability to differentiate between governance (ka synshar ka khadar) and tradition (ka riti ka dustur). Many believe they are one and the same. In fact they are poles apart and to club them as one is the actual cause for all the confusion prevailing. Parochial politics and narrow minded politicians are mainly to blame. Within the context of this writeup, governance (ka shynshar ka khadar) needs to keep up with the times so as to bring in equitable development for our people.

We need to bring in a development paradigm where the people themselves take charge of their own wellbeing. This can only happen if our dorbar system is properly empowered to facilitate people, ie the electorate, to start think-

ing and planning for itself. Its what politicians fear the most as it is a direct threat to the politics of patronage where money plays such a pivotal role for being reelected. Not surprising to note the rising hysteria and clamour of desperation from decrepit selfcentered politicians whenever they hear talk of participative governance. They will oppose it tooth and nail because it empowers the electorate. It’s the death knell of worthless politicians!

In an attempt to empower our villages and bring in a demand driven development paradigm, the Central Govt has launched the “My Village, My Development Plan” (MVMDP)scheme. It’s a

scheme where in Meghalaya’s case, the Govt is expected to facilitate the empowerment of the village durbars so that the people themselves can come up with a ‘Bottoms Up’ development plan of their own. One is therefore shocked to read that the CEM of the KHADC has shown ‘ALARM’ over this central scheme to empower and allow ordinary village people to plan for their own development. He claims that his objection is based on his understanding that it is a surreptitious and devilish plan of the Central Govt to turn our Dorbars into Panchayats. Attempts to find out if this was true and whether the exemptions to the 73rd Amendment had been done away with by the NDA Govt proved futile. The search revealed that it was a false ‘ALARM’ and that, in reality, the status quo remains. No Panchayati Raj for Meghalaya! So where’s the panic? In fact in a Batesi News channel report the CEM even made the claim that the popular MGNREGA scheme meant for uplifting rural livelihoods and incomes was also another sneaky attempt of the Central Govt to introduce Panchayati Raj into our state. One can understand Panchayati phobia but there’s a limit to scaring people, especially gullible innocent people.

To simply block overall development for the self interest of the KHADC is something that the people of this state have to challenge and challenge very strongly. The usual stupid tactic of equating governance with tradition has to

be challenged. We can ill afford to keep on projecting Tradition and Culture as something sacred and inviolable; something rigid and inflexible; something that should never be improved upon. This excuse forestalled any action at Traditional Institution empowerment and durbars were for 60 long years left to their own devices. They were simply left to rot as history found them! Lots of people might not like this statement but sadly it happens to be the miserable bitter truth! The sad truth is that it is happening again under this present ‘One Idea a Week’ Executive Council of the KHADC.

In conclusion one can now safely predict that the VAB is unlikely to see the light of day in any foreseeable near future. With it the grandiose plans of the KHADC to control, use and to route direct funding to the Dorbars has now gone for a six. (One has a vivid and scary memory of the recent disappearance of the 131 crores development fund allocated to the KHADC by the Centre. It just disappeared into a bottomless pit and one dreads to think of the thousands of crores that can similarly disappear if Direct Funding to the Dorbars is controlled by our ADCs)) The only way left is to oppose the MVMDP scheme, frighten the people with evil Central designs over their tradition and scare the State Govt witless with the possibility of a mass movement if the KHADC is not given control over the MVMDP. If the My Village My Plan is implemented by the State Govt then the KHADC is the only party that stands to lose control over these funds. Who cares for the wellbeing and welfare of the general public?

The time has come I firmly believe for the State Government to take a firm stand vis a vis the challenge daily posed to it by the KHADC. Let’s once and for all decide who rules Meghalaya. If the Constitution of India is subservient to the 6th Schedule then let’s dissolve the State of Meghalaya and go back as Autonomous District Councils under Assam. All the present confusion of jurisdiction will disappear and we all can then get on with our daily lives. If however the 22nd Amendment of the Constitution of India and the creation of the State of Meghalaya is to stand then the Government of Meghalaya will have to take a call and assert its power and authority. Governance and the general welfare of the people cannot be sacrificed at the altar of uncertainty. It doesn’t work that way whatever might be the political calculations of desperate petty ego centric politicians.

(The author is President of ICARE)

Making india a cashless society may lead to chaos

Even rich countries going slow on cashless movement

By Nantoo Banerjee

If the world’s top ranking economies by per capita GDP and expenditure, education level, financial inclusion and digital penetration are not keen to go cashless in the face of resistance from their citizens, India’s bid to build a cashless society may be described as highly impractical or even a wishful thought with potential to lead to a nation-wide economic chaos. It is true that the latest data on payment behaviour from China has been an eye-opener even for many highly advanced countries. However, India is not China. The two countries don’t share the same political and economic systems. Even then, going by the available data, China still made payments for 37 per cent of all its purchases in cash in 2016 while 43 per cent of spending was via money card or credit card. Mobile payments made up 20 per cent of all transactions. This is despite the fact that China is the world’s largest producer-user of mobile phones. India’s current digital movement banks heavily on mobile phones, imported mostly from China, Korea and Taiwan.

The movement for cashless society is being resisted even in highly advanced democratic countries by per capita GDP such as Switzerland, Germany, France, Sweden and the USA. Interestingly, in Switzerland, the world’s second richest economy by per capita GDP and a global financial capital, the Swiss are less progressive when it comes to their payment behaviour. According to official estimates, around three quarters of payments were made in cash in 2016. Only 0.2 per cent of all transactions in 2016 were executed via smart-phone. Cash remains the most popular payment method in Switzerland and it’s not going to change anytime too soon. It is true that the backdrop in China and Switzerland is very different. For instance, in China the majority of the population do not have access to banking services.

The common man is concerned as cashless economy is more prone to fraud. Unauthorised electronic payments involving prepaid payment instruments (PPIs) are rising in India. Customers, who carry out transactions on mobile wallets such as Paytm, PhonePe, MobiKwik, among others, may lose their money in case of a cyber attack or negligence of the platform on which the transaction is taking place. To many, cash in hand for transaction is more likeable than mobile phones or credit or debit cards in hand. Consumers tend to spend more in invisible transactions. Cash transaction is simple. Cash is visible and easily divisible, offering a stable and reliable purchasing power. Cash payments are normally without a transaction cost. They are also geographically restricted to a currency zone. The relevance of cash as a store of value remains high and will increase further in times of negative interest rates, corrupt and authoritarian governments, ailing banks and financial systems, as well as criminal machinations.

Most economists across the world feel that a cashless society even in a small

country such as Switzerland, having a population of only 84.2 lakhs and boasting a per capita GDP of USD 80,189, remains some distance away. Despite the fact that 99 per cent of Swiss adults are literate, the country loves to deal in cash. Similarly, the people in Sweden, easily the world’s best governed country with strong societal values, having a per capita GDP of US\$57,000 and adult literacy rate of 99 per cent, are generally happy to deal in cash. The citizens go for digital transaction at their own will and convenience and not because it is thrust upon them by the Swedish government.

Considering the global backdrop, it is difficult to appreciate and justify the urgent need for a country like India, having a population of over 1.3 billion and per capita GDP of only USD 1,939.61 in 2017, to go cashless. The drive for digital transaction towards a cashless society in India does not even take into consideration that nearly 26 per cent of its adult population or over 150 million people are simply illiterate. The ongoing BharatNet project intended to offer internet connection to some 2.5 lakh village Panchayats may be a good idea on paper, but it does not guarantee that the wi-fi system will dependably operate in the absence of a reliable infrastructure, including power supply. The champions of Digital India may not be aware that even in the last five years, Indian Railways, boasting the world’s largest rail network, failed to ensure a reliable wi-fi system for passengers in its most prestigious Rajdhani Express trains.

In the absence of appreciation for societal values in India, including standards of education, guaranteed employment and income, quality of life, the rush for cashless society would appear to be unwarranted and uncalled for. The success of cashless society depends on the level of individual savings in savings or current bank accounts and mobile wallets and on the efficient function of digital infrastructure. In a country where over 70 per cent of the working people are low-income, part-time employees and daily wage earners, cash remains as the most desirable and easy route for money transactions.

Ideally, a society should decide the forms of financial transactions on the basis of their utility and convenience and not by a government diktat. A cashless society is subject to extreme legal restrictions on general cash acceptance. For a government, cashless society means a huge saving on cash production and better tax management, containing unaccounted income and black money circulation. However, under any democratic system, the choice for modes of financial transactions should be better left with individuals. A government would do well by indirectly moulding the individual choice by meeting its social obligations such as imparting education to its citizens, creating job opportunities and steady income and improving living standards. India needs a strong government intervention to improve the quality of life of its people, first. A less-cash society will automatically follow. (IPA Service)

portant to develop a comprehensive dictionary for such acronyms to be broken down into and listed alphabetically. Perhaps in the not so distant future such lexicographic initiative will be adorning our book shelves and work desks at both home and offices as a ready reckoner to help us understand random acronyms used in technical and non-technical communication and literature.

Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Lethbridge AB Canada

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.

Saha held the record for most catches in a Test match by an Indian wicket-keeper. I am really proud of him because he has made the country proud. I hope that he will play such a brilliant role again and again for the Indian team.

Yours etc.,
M T Khan
Via email

Mind-boggling acronyms

Editor,

Modern scientific literatures, newspapers, magazines as well as media in both electronic and hard copy versions are using too many acronyms for an ordinary individual to understand and grab the context. It is being increasingly noticed in all forms of educa-

tion and research including Sciences, Social Sciences as well as Humanities. Often only experts from the field could understand the complete meaning and the significance of such acronyms being randomly used in all forms of communications both technical and non-technical. Furthermore, the exact same acronym often carries a completely different meaning and context, thus adding to this grand confusion. In this modern era of social media use such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp as well as smart phone based texting, messaging and imaging, many common words are getting formatted into convenient abbreviations that often makes no sense to people who do not use them frequently. It is therefore im-

“*Recompense injury with justice, and recompense kindness with kindness*”
--- Confucius

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.122 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2018

Congress in the reckoning

WHAT was touted as the semi-finals before the 2019 Lok Sabha polls has turned out to be a bitter experience for the BJP. It virtually lost power in three states and is faced with a rejuvenated Congress party at the national level. Both Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh failed to give the BJP the easy passage to power this time, and Chhattisgarh famously dumped the saffron party. The BJP gained little from the polls in Mizoram and Telangana, with negligible seats in its kitty. Overall, the anti-incumbency factor was at work in the three states the BJP ruled, as also in Mizoram. Nothing encouraged the voters to wholeheartedly give the BJP a fresh chance in power; not even the spirited last-round campaigns by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The writing was on the wall. Rajasthan's Vasundhara Raje Scindia was predictably unpopular, and the state has a record of voting out the ruling party. This time, a new pro-Jat party further dented the BJP's prospects. BJP ran government for 15 years, or three terms, in Chhattisgarh and the people were obviously tired of chief minister Raman Singh even in the form of a Chawalwale Baba. So too with Shivraj Singh Chouhan in Madhya Pradesh, who ruled the state non-stop for 13 years. Democracy is about change. It was time to vote for change in these two states.

Yet, the contrast is noticeable in Telangana, where chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao rode his TRS to a spectacular second-time win with increased margins, seats and vote share. Chandrababu Naidu who came scouting back to Hyderabad to join hands with the Congress to prove a point and take on his old rival, learned a bitter lesson with outright rejection by the nativist electorate. Change was the 'mantra' in Mizoram too, where long-standing leader and chief minister for many terms Lalthanhawla was humiliated out of office this time with a biting defeat from both constituencies he contested. The spectacular come-back of the Congress, the vote shares it retains in the Hindi belt despite years of odds, the new legitimacy that Rahul Gandhi as Congress leader managed to acquire from this hard-earned success is something the BJP cannot easily dismiss. The Gujarat assembly polls as also the ouster from power in Punjab were wake-up calls for the BJP that was drunk with power. Karnataka sent a new warning to the saffron party. Here now is proof it has to fight every inch to make a mark in the 2019 polls.

LOOKING BACK

June 9, 1989

Hectic Politicking in Assam for Rajya Sabha Election

With only a day left for Tuesday's election to the two Rajya Sabha seats from Assam, brisk activities are witnessed involving the ruling Asom Gana Parishad Congress(I) and the Congress(S). Union Minister of State for Home Mr Santosh Mohan Dev and AICC(I) general secretary Mr A R Mallu have already arrived here as party observers during the election. Though almost all the parties have decided to support their own candidates, the Congress(S) are still trying to get the support of other members. The ruling AGP which is contesting only one seat, is sure of getting its candidate Mr David Ledger elected. The AGP has a strength of 72 in a house of 126 members. Two seats are vacant. The AGP has also extended its support to Congress(I) candidate Mr Amritlal Basumatary, a

sitting MLA, as the consensus non Congress(I) candidates for the second seat. The Congress(S) has only four members in the house, but apart from the AGP, the two-member CPI(M) group, led by Mr Golam Osmani, have also extended their support to the Congress(S) candidates. The Congress(I) which has a strength of 23 members fielded former Chief Minister Mr Hiteswar Saikia as its candidate. The 11 member (Dasgupta Group) United Minorities Front (UMF) has also extended its support to Mr Saikia. However, the three-member PTCA group in the house has not yet extended its support to anyone. There are three more members in the house while one belongs to UTNLF, two other are independents. Meanwhile, Janata Dal campaign committee chairman Mr Gorge Fernandes has alleged that the Congress(I) was trying to “buy the AGP members.”

MBOSE Textbooks: Need For Drastic Revision

I recently had the opportunity to review the Social Sciences textbooks prescribed by the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) at the secondary level in a workshop conducted by North East Regional Institute of Education (NERIE, NCERT). I would like to share my observations with the public and especially with the concerned authorities with regard to what we teach our children. I will give examples from the Economics section although general observations are common for all sections of social sciences, that is, History, Civics and Geography as well. In Meghalaya the textbooks are written by textbook writers employed by private publishers and the textbooks are prescribed by MBOSE for use in the schools affiliated to it. It appears that there is no mechanism in place to review the textbooks before they are prescribed. Or if there is such a mechanism, the process is not carried out with due diligence.

Social Sciences and particularly Economics is a daunting subject for many students not because it is difficult but because of the way it is presented in textbooks which shape the way it is taught. A textbook should empower the students to learn by themselves. Why Economics is difficult is because economic terms are introduced thoughtlessly in the textbook. When the Class IX students read, suddenly they come across terms like gross national product, economic growth, legal tender, black money, human development index, etc. They do not understand these terms and the subject becomes difficult. The concepts should be introduced clearly and gradually. The content should be written in such a manner that only those terms that are already explained earlier will appear. If any technical word or economic term is introduced for the first time, a box or a footnote should be there in the same page where the meaning is given. There should be a flow of ideas and concepts. Useless

By Dr. Veronica Pala

duplication should be avoided. Currently, in the first chapter for Class IX, the first topic is on economic and non-economic activity. Then in chapter 2 which deals with 'People as a Resource', there is a section on economic activities and their classification into primary, secondary and tertiary sectors. In class X again the students study the same classification. In my opinion, case studies should be reserved for later chapters when the students are familiar with more concepts. A case study can be properly analysed when the students already have the concepts and tools for analysis. Currently, in the first chapter of Economics of Class IX (the very beginning for the beginners) there is a case study. Further, the textbook should address the needs of diverse students. For this purpose, examples should be given from different settings and contexts. In the examples for economic activity, the activities that are given are, "when a person goes to office or a factory or to a shop to earn money." A large number of students in rural Meghalaya who come from farming households will not be able to relate to these examples. This brings me to the issue of contextualisation. What I observe is that currently there is forced contextualisation making it a farce. For instance, in the Class IX textbook there is the story of Banjop, a cobbler in a small village near Varanasi in UP (Class IX textbook, p.352). This is ridiculous; it puts the student off learning and kills the interest in the subject. Contextualisation has to be done through various examples in different settings and scenarios, particularly local ones. Changing the name in an example does not make it local. Most of the examples in the Economics portion in the current Social Sciences textbooks relate to Uttar Pradesh. There is a need to get the local

writers involved in developing textbooks to make them relevant so that students can relate to the examples, thereby making learning effective. The next issue is language. Language is the medium through which the concepts and knowledge is conveyed. Therefore, language experts should be involved in the process through a systematic mechanism. A manuscript should be reviewed by a language expert, otherwise, the students get confused and they dislike the subject as soon as they are introduced to it. Sample these extracts: "Male Khasi works parallel with female" (ibid, p.327); "The Khasis and the Pnars are very good in carving. They have their own style of making gold, silver, necklaces, gold chains, from the tree, earrings and so on" (ibid, p. 329). Utmost care should be taken so that the textbook is free from factual errors. Conclusions which are not factual but rather personal opinions of the authors should not be allowed. We are talking about Class IX and X students who have just been introduced to the subject. An example: "Most of the Indians are religious in nature. Religion makes them fatalist. The very spirit of hard work is lacking in Indians". Further, when figures or tables are given, the analysis in the text should correspond to those in the given table. For example, in the table, the poverty ratios are given up to 2011-12 which is the latest as of now, but the explanation in the text pertains to data for 1999-00 (Class X textbook, pp. 350-351). Such utter carelessness should be avoided because silly and careless mistakes confuse the young readers. Another example, in the Class IX textbook in the beginning of the chapter on Banks and Loans, the note which says "Why chocolate is very costly? My notebook's price has gone up. Why?" belongs in the next chapter on Inflation. There are a large number of such examples of careless and

thoughtless mistakes. The textbook should be subjected to thorough proof reading before final printing. There should not be duplication of themes or topics in the same subject. For example, currently in Class X there is 'financial education' in Civics and 'financial education' in Economics. The Civics portion covers commodity futures market, economic depression, investing in shares and initial public offering. The Economics portion covers benefits of insurance, learning to trade (in the stock market), stock exchange and economy. These are fairly advanced Commerce topics and a Civics teacher who has not studied Commerce or Economics will find it very difficult to handle these topics. Further, the relative importance of the topic 'commodity futures market' is little in the sense that a very small number of people trade in this speculative market. The number of those who trade in the stock exchange is far larger, although it is still a very small proportion of the population. In my opinion, teaching Class X students how to trade in the stock market is not appropriate for their age. On the other hand, nowhere in the class IX or class X textbooks are the basic concepts of demand and supply mentioned. Therefore, in developing a textbook utmost care should be given that the concepts are clear and introduced gradually. The needs of diverse students are addressed through proper contextualisation. Subject and language experts should be involved in reviewing the manuscripts. The textbook should be free from personal opinions, sweeping conclusions, factual errors and needless to say grammatical mistakes. Before a textbook is prescribed it should be thoroughly reviewed by a panel of subject and language experts. It should be made mandatory by the concerned authorities that such a panel is appointed and involved in a systematic mechanism. (The author is with the Dept. of Economics, NEHU, Shillong)

TO THE EDITOR

Wanted clarity in the Lineage Bill

Editor, With reference to the recently introduced amended Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Khasi Social Custom of Lineage) (First Amendment), Bill, 2018, I am to state as follows: 1. The KHADC recently introduced the amended Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Khasi Social Custom of Lineage) (FirstAmendment), Bill, 2018, with a special case of patriliney. In the amended bill, the customary practice of Ring Bia' or 'Shaw Bhoi' are defined as customary practices prevailing among some native indigenous Khasi clans in Ri Bhoi. Duh ling' is defined in the Bill as a family having no biological female offspring. In this case, a Khasi male member of such family may marry a non-Khasi and his offspring take his clan or title and they may be deemed to be Khasi if they fulfill the conditions of being a Khasi as laid down in Section 3 of the Act. The custom of 'Duh ling' recently added in the Bill is for a family having no biological female offspring and a Khasi male member of such family may marry a non-Khasi and his offspring take his clan or title and they

may be deemed to be Khasi. However, the custom of 'Duh ling' is not applicable for a family having no biological female offspring and who desires to marry a Khasi woman. In this scenario, any Khasi who takes the clan title of his father for himself or his children shall no longer be a Khasi and he and/or his children shall be disqualified from all privileges, status and benefits as a Khasi. So, if a family with no biological female offspring and already married with Khasi women wants to carry forward their clan they will have to leave their Khasi wives and re-marry a non-Khasi to enable the offspring to take their clan or title and that they may be deemed to be Khasi. Earlier, if a person from a family with no biological female offspring were to marry a non-Khasi, he would have to follow a custom of 'Tang Jait' where a new clan or title will be created out of that family. Hence, earlier any family having no biological female offspring had no scope of carrying forward their clan and they were left with no choice whether they marry a Khasi or a non-Khasi. Now, with the above 'Duh ling' clause such families will be tempted to leave their wives with

clause, I am already thinking of whether to choose to carry forward my clan by leaving my Khasi wife and search for a non-Khasi woman. Considering the above, I have the following issues: A. For a Khasi family having no biological female offspring but who are already married to Khasi women but also want to carry forward their clan title, a freedom of choice may be given to them to take the title of the father so that these families will also have a chance to carry forward their clan and there should be no disqualification for these family as being Khasi. B. For those Khasi families having no biological female offspring and who want to marry Khasi women in future because they don't want a non-Khasi wife but at the same time wish to carry forward their clan, a freedom of choice may be given to them to take the title of the father so that such families will also have a chance to carry forward their clan and there should be no disqualification for these family as Khasi. ' Yours etc., A. Wahlang Shillong- 8

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

Election Results: A bitter pill for BJP

By Prem Chandran

Regional satraps, pretenders to the Delhi throne, can stand aside and sulk for now. The Congress under the leadership of Rahul Gandhi has staged a spectacular come-back, grabbing three geographically contiguous states in the central Hindi belt and putting Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ruling BJP on notice. This is in part an anti-incumbency vote and in part a vote against the complacency of the BJP as a political establishment. Here's guarantee that an ideal system of two prominent national parties calling the major shots in Delhi will continue, leaving less room for regional entities to try and indulge in power games at the apex of power. Coming to the crux, sense the paradox. What the BJP aimed at somewhat arrogantly when Modi came to power in 2014 was a Congress-mukht Bharat. The results of the assembly polls in five states trashed this proposition as nothing more than wishful thinking. The Congress can now turn back and raise the banner of a BJP-mukht Bharat. In several of the recent polls, it is outwitting the saffron party. Even in the two states where the regional parties are set to take power now, the Congress emerged as the principal Opposition. However, the BJP can take some comfort in the fact that it was not a total washout for the party in the three states it ruled. Rajasthan has a record of changing parties in government every time an assembly poll takes place. It repeated the trend this time too. In Madhya Pradesh, the BJP under Shivraj Singh Chouhan ruled the state for thirteen long years while it remained firmly entrenched in power in Chhattisgarh ever since its formation 15 years ago, under chief minister Raman Singh. This time, it is a total washout for the BJP in Chhattisgarh, with the Congress registering a two-thirds majority in the assembly and making major forays into the previous Congress bastions in urban areas. The unmistakable message from this round of elections is that the upcoming Lok Sabha polls will be an uphill task for the prime minister and his party. Strong chances are that the Congress will muster enough support to fight the PM and the BJP to the finish. Cobbling such an alliance will now be easier. Importantly, it will now be Rahul Gandhi who will be in the forefront of this push. He has by now adequately and impressively proven to be a leader who means business; one with drive to first to take the party out of the woods and then to install governments in three major states alongside Punjab as well. The party shares power in Karnataka, thanks to Rahul's deft handling of a critical situation post poll there, and the party runs the government in Puducherry as well. Notably, the shadow of his mother Sonia Gandhi still looms over his leadership as also the Congress establishment. Most of Sonia Gandhi's advisers are around Rahul too, while the new leader has drafted a set of young Turks too to take his ideas forward. Together, they made a success out of the new party chief. Overnight, the likes of Mamata Banerjee of West Bengal who considered Rahul Gandhi as her "junior" in politics might see a shrinkage of their stature. Banerjee has just one state

with her against Rahul Gandhi's six. So too for Chandrababu Naidu, whose aim in Telangana this time was to put his Telugu Desam into power alongside the Congress, so that he could claim the status of a leader with not one, but two states in his kitty. Naidu was shown his place by the voters in Telangana, giving him no more than a handful of seats. His party's vote share in Telangana this time shrunk to just over three per cent from the 15 per cent it claimed in the 2014 polls. His survival in native Andhra Pradesh is also in serious doubt. Another crafty politician Jaganmohan Reddy is waiting in the wings to grab his chair. This, at a time when the public mood is turning against the CM. With what face can Naidu rush to Delhi the next time - which he keeps doing every week as the self-appointed architect of the grand alliance against Modi and the BJP? It's a moot point whether Rahul Gandhi would now give Naidu the same patronage he did in the recent weeks by allowing him to be in the forefront of the push! The Congress has, however been edged out the North-East as a whole, with long-time chief minister Lal Thanhawla bowing of office in Mizoram. This makes this sensitive and largely spread landmass out of bounds for the Congress at least in the immediate term. Yet, the Congress is there in power in the north, the south and the west, not to mention the central region which it has reclaimed. Clearly, its claim to being the Grand Old Party (GOP) with a nationwide organisational network and people's support stands reinforced and reasserted. It's here to stay, season after season, perched in the apex or spread over the plateau. It goes to show regional parties have less of space at the Centre. Chances of a coalition government after the 2019 polls still remain high. Yet, the comfort is that it would either be the Congress or the BJP that would lead it from the front; not the scheming regional satraps. All these go to show that the fight for the next Lok Sabha hustings would principally be a fight between Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi. This is a matter of some relief. A projected possibility till the other day was something different; to decide on the leader of the grand alliance after the polls, giving room for others to step in as well. What would one make of a nation led by a disruptor like Banerjee, a pretender like Naidu or a footloose Mayawati? By contrast, see the grace with which a Naveen Patnaik minds his business despite his long innings in power in Odisha and having a rightful claim of being among the senior politicians with considerable administrative acumen? So, what after the semi-finals? Will Narendra Modi keep the reins to himself? While Modi has quietly done a job, his flaws are there for all to see. As he approaches the next polls, a question is, what gives the voter the urge to put him back in saddle? He treaded a careful course, in keeping with the discipline that he imbibed from his RSS pracharak days. It helped; and avoided serious problems in governance. Yet, it might be stressed that India requires a leader who would confront situations with a stronger sense of grit, determination and speed. This is not to argue that Rahul Gandhi, the new knight in shining armour, could be a better choice.

“In a world of complex threats, our security and leadership depends on all elements of our power - including strong and principled diplomacy.”
--- Barack Obama

The Shillong Times

Vol No: L.XI No.123 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2018

Congress loses grip of North East

THE Congress is trounced in the Mizoram Assembly polls. The Mizo National Front (MNF) romped in after ten years. Seventy four year old MNF Chief Zoramthanga is slated to be Chief Minister. The state has a Christian majority and the House has 40 members. The Congress has surprisingly trailed behind in the third position securing only three seats. The MNF captured as many as 26 seats. The Zoram People's Movement - an alliance of non-Congress-non-MNF parties and was formed last year, won eight seats, coming in second. The BJP could grab only one seat in the Chakma Autonomous District. In 2013, the Congress won 24 seats and the MNF 5. This time Chief Minister Lal Thanhawla lost from both Champhai and Serchip.

The MNF won an absolute majority riding a strong anti-incumbency wave. It promised total prohibition and pledged to implement its socio-economic development agenda especially the land policy. Lal Thanhawla attributed his party's defeat to the people's desire for change. The Congress had underestimated the Zoram People's Front. The Church had played a significant role in the elections especially by backing total prohibition. What brought about the rout of the Congress was neglect of infrastructure and cronyism. The main feature of the elections was that the BJP which had been digging in for a number of years could win only one seat which goes along with its decline in some other states.

However, this election in Mizoram was less about political parties but more about an enlightened citizenry voting out a Government that has been involved in corruption and had become complacent about its commitment to deliver governance. Anti-incumbency happens because governments take voters for granted and the elected believe they are invincible. Political parties are inherently self-seeking and will do anything to remain in power. In that common quest, all of them are the same. There are very few distinguishing features. BJP's repeated claim about a Congress mukht North East is as hollow as it can get. The Congress will bounce back and will continue to be evaluated by its delivery than by its so called secular credentials. The Congress has been in power in the past and is therefore tried and tested and often found wanting. Now it remains to be seen how the Congress rules Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh and if the farmers will get their dues as promised. The farmers' distress is a constant thing in India. Hence political parties need to sit together to thrash out these issues of perennial concern.

Bringing back Christian Michel and securing the extradition of Vijay Mallya are being exhibited by the ruling BJP as a big victory for Indian diplomacy. Christian Michel is the main accused in receiving and distributing the kickbacks from Augusta Westland Chopper deal, and Vijay Mallya has charged with embezzling Rupees 9000 cr from Indian banks, and divesting a number of his employees of their salaries. There are others on the run, hiding in safer havens of foreign countries - Lalit Modi, Mehul Choksi, Nirav Modi. They have to be brought back too. One is not sure when. But the Government is claiming that a beginning has been made, the heads have begun to roll, and it is only the question of time, other fugitives are dragged back to the country to be tried for financial frauds.

Arguably, the Government machinery and the enforcement agencies have achieved tangible success in extradition of Michel and Mallya. The claim is that the agencies' efforts have come to fruition with support of its Foreign Ministry, and its diplomats at work. One need not grudge that credit to our diplomats as they have helped deliver Christian Michel and Vijay Mallya, although the latter may exercise the appeal-options in British courts. It is question of a few more months. But, anyone having knowledge of operation of British system would understand that winning appeals with higher authorities is not easy in British system. Unlike India, Britain follows 'the rule of law', and the senior officers and senior judges go by the letter of law, not discretion. So Mallya's extradition to India is a foregone issue, he should rather begin packing his bags.

It is in order that, in the light of the unprecedented success by our diplomats, we assess the intent and initiatives of our diplomats in finding the fugitives and chasing them back to our country, and putting them on trial for their lawless activities.

Obviously, the intent exists as may be seen from the latest move in the G-20 meeting earlier this month. The Indian Prime Minister managed to insert a nine-point action-plan to deal with fugitive financial offenders. This was done by invoking the UN provisions on economic offenders, like the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), and UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC).

Financial fugitives
Diplomacy at work
By Dr D.K. Giri

Indeed, the nine-point programme needs elaboration as it aims at an international understanding, essential to nab the economic offenders, and obtain their extradition which is a complex international legal process. The nine points are: (1) Strong and active cooperation across G-20 countries to deal comprehensively and efficiently with the menace of fugitive economic offenders. This means co-operation in legal processes, aligning them, effectively implementing them, and actively helping the country that seeks extradition.

ority and focus to establishing international cooperation that leads to timely and comprehensive exchange between the competent authorities and FIUs - Financial Intelligence Unit. A signing priority by FATF is the priority suggested by India. Interestingly, New Delhi has set up a FATF cell in the Ministry of Revenue.

(6) FATF should be tasked to formulate a standard definition of fugitive economic offenders. This is important as there would be no agreement on legal co-operation without a common understanding of a fu-

“ Arguably, the Government machinery and the enforcement agencies have achieved tangible success in extradition of Michel and Mallya. The claim is that the agencies' efforts have come to fruition with support of its Foreign Ministry, and its diplomats at work. ”

(2) Cooperation in the legal process such as effective freezing of the proceeds of crime, early return of the offenders and efficient repatriation of the proceeds of crime should be enhanced and streamlined. This stresses on the repatriation of the proceeds of the crime in addition to the extradition of the criminal. Many offenders deposit the loot abroad. It is no secret that tons of money is stashed away in Swiss banks by Indians.

(3) Joint effort by G-20 countries to form a mechanism that denies entry and safe havens to fugitive economic offenders. Without joint efforts, fugitives will roam around the world by exploiting legal loopholes in the host countries.

(4) Principles of UNCAC, UNOTC, especially related to the international cooperation should be fully and effectively implemented. There are many UN provisions that are observed more in non-compliance or slackness, than implementation. Hence, there is a need for effective implementation. India underlined this need.

(5) FATF (Financial Action Task Force) should be called upon to assign pri-

gitive offender.

(7) FATF should also develop a set of commonly agreed and standardised procedures related to identification, extradition and judicial proceedings for dealing with fugitive economic offenders to provide guidance and assistance to G-20 countries, subject to their domestic law. FATF must make the process uniform for others to follow and share.

(8) Common platform should be set up for sharing experience and best practices including successful cases of extradition, gaps in existing systems of extradition and legal assistance etc. A common platform is necessary for information and experience sharing which will help the process to be universal and transparent.

(9) G-20 Forum should consider initiating work on locating properties of economic offenders who have a tax debt in the country of their residence for its recovery. Unless a beginning is made in locating the properties and proceeds related to the crime, justice for the affected country will be delayed.

The above agenda was prompted by the heightened efforts by Indian diplomats

to go after the economic offenders like Vijay Mal(Prof. International Politics, JMI)lya, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi and Lalit Modi etc. This agenda if agreed upon will help nail the fugitive like the diamantaire Mehul Choksi hiding in Antigua who is exploiting the gaps in Antigua and Barbuda Government's extraditions laws. Mehul Choksi of Gitanjali Gems, in connivance with his nephew Nirav Modi, is accused of defrauding the Indian banks of 14000 crore.

India, and the Government of Antigua and Barbuda have no bilateral extradition treaty, but both New Delhi and St. John's (the capital city of Antigua) are of the view that since, both India, and Antigua and Barbuda are members of Commonwealth of Nations, the sections 3(2) and 7(2) of Antigua and Barbuda's Extradition Act 1913 do provide a scope for extradition. Article 3(2) says, "a person in Antigua and Barbuda who is accused of an extradition crime in a designated commonwealth country or who is alleged to be unlawfully at large may be arrested or returned to that country"; and Article 7(2) says "...following the purpose of section 3(2).... this Act shall have effect in relation to the return of persons to any designated commonwealth country".

In view of these provisions, Indian diplomacy may have to go over-drive in getting Mehul Choksi back to the country. So should be Nirav Modi and Lalit Modi, or any other economic offender who has fled the country.

Undoubtedly, getting the extradition of the economic fugitives will be a huge act of recovering staggering amounts of money, and checking corruption that is eating into the vitals of our economic development. Corruption has been the biggest obstacle to development and justice delivery in developing countries including India. This lethal virus needs to be completely neutralised in the body-politics and economy of any country. The disease is of corruption - kick-backs, money laundering, bank-defrauding is demoralising and debilitating for a country, its mood and machinery. With international support, deliberate or circumstantial, prosecuting the offenders is becoming a harder. Therefore, the diplomacy has to be at its best and always at work.---INFA

(The writers is Prof. International Politics, JMI)

Nobody owes modi a second term
PM-Shah election machine is wrecked

By Sushil Kutty

From now to Lok Sabha elections 2019, the BJP will be on the wrong foot. The party has nothing to show for the 5-state elections. At the fag-end of 2018, the party cadre stand demoralised and the Modi-Shah election-machine is wrecked, beyond repair. What can the duo spring in the short time left to GE 2019? And what can BJP offer to the distressed farmer - the tribal, the Dalit; urban voter - besides Jan Dhan and Ujjwala; the plunging rupee and rising petrol/diesel prices? The bad Press demonetization and GST got refuses to go away.

It doesn't matter if the Congress just managed to scrape through in Rajasthan or couldn't even do that in Madhya Pradesh. Chhattisgarh spoke volumes. The bottom-line is the BJP's election winning days are over. The momentum is with Rahul Gandhi and the Congress. The saying 'Winner takes all' will apply from now on. The message has percolated down to everybody, including Mayawati. Another meeting of opposition parties called will see better attendance. The "disagreements" Mayawati speaks about look like they disappeared.

The results in the 5-state elections leaves the BJP hobbled with no issue to bank on, or cling to. It stands defeated on the 'Vikas-plank'. The corruption issue doesn't hold much water because of the Rafale albatross around Modi's neck. Michel isn't "cooperating" to nail "AP" and "fam" for Modi. And Vijay Mallya is not leaving his London home anytime soon. There is no runaway royal daughter to trade-off with Buckingham Palace and Prime Minister Theresa May "may or may not" listen to Modi; he isn't damsel in distress.

So, what next for Modi and Shah - the Ram temple? 'Hard Hindutva' was already in play against 'Soft Hindutva' in Hindi-heartland Madhya Pradesh. And by now everybody knows which of the two hindutva brands won! Shiv-bhakt Rahul Gandhi revealed his gotra and covered every temple worth its deity in MP, including Mahakaleswar in Ujjain subdivision. Word is out that if anybody can get the Ram Mandir built in Ayodhya, then it's the Congress, the Congress alone, not the BJP which uses it only to win elections.

This time, in the 5-state elections, BJP couldn't even

do that despite help from Shiv Sena and VHP to drum up frenzy with rally and ultimatum, talk of ordinance and bill. On voting day, distressed farmers, troubled Dalit, fatigued tribal and cow-lynched Muslim cared two-hoots about Mandir or Masjid; whether a Ram Mandir is built or not; the wounds left by demonetization and GST, the cow-vigilante, were still raw in the mind. And, contrary to all breaking news, the Election Commission is autonomous - the EVM cannot be breached.

So it is with the Supreme Court. The top court will not be ruling on the Ram Mandir issue in a hurry, but it will deliver judgments on 'CBI' and 'Rafale' shortly and if the rulings go against the Modi government that shouldn't surprise anybody. Prime Minister Narendra Modi got his chance. The 60 months he asked for against the 60 years the Congress ruled, but Modi got his priorities wrong, forgetting that the 60 months were to set things right for the majority of Indians, not for the minority of the uber-rich - the Ambanis and the Adanis.

The ultra-rich never vote. They don't stand in queue. Considering that these were the lot who held most of the demonetized high-value currency notes, how many of them did the Aam Aadmi see lined up outside SBI and other bank branches? Not one, not a single Tata, Birla, Ambani or Adani. Yet, they went from uber-rich to stinking uber-rich in the two years since demonetization. For, if anybody Modi is 'mitron' to, it is with these floating rich.

So, let nobody mourn the BJP's defeats. Take it as what was coming to Modi and Shah, a fait accompli after all that they did and did not do. Who knows Rahul Gandhi must be the saviour Indians have been waiting for? The 'family Gandhi' owes a debt to India; maybe paid in part. It is time they paid back in full. Sure, it's a tall order but then what's the alternative - Modi & Shah? Forfeit 60 months out of every Indian's life and that will be 60 multiplied by 1.35 billion! Don't even start to count. The calculator will go bust in protest. Nobody owes Modi a second term, least of all aam aadmi. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Misleading article

Editor,

I was glad to see the article on 'cervical cancer: A preventable tragedy that requires attention', in the ST, Dec 11,2018 and I'm glad that the writer is raising awareness on the second most common cancer among Indian women. However, on going through the article, I was troubled to see that it has tried to twist the facts, making me wonder who the author would be. Cervical cancer is a disease which can be effectively controlled by using a strategy called 'screening', wherein the disease is detected before it manifests itself, thereby making the treatment easy. For several years the world was trying to screen cervical cancer using Pap smear, which, owing to the expertise involved, was impractical to be implemented in India.

In 2014, Indian researchers published their results of a study involving over 70000 Indian women, wherein the examination of the uterine cervix (VIA) by

a trained Healthcare worker was effective in reducing the death due to this cancer by 30%. Thanks to this study, the government of India has implemented this screening in 100 districts on a pilot basis.

Cervical cancer is caused by human papilloma virus(HPV) in majority of the cases and preventing the infection by better sexual hygiene is the most effective way of preventing this cancer. While a vaccine may prevent infection, whether that is the best strategy for the country as a whole is questionable. There have been several debates among academics on the role of vaccines in the prevention of cervical cancer. The following are the most important points against use of vaccines.

1. The incidence of cervical cancer is on the decline.

2. Use of vaccine does not obviate the need to continue screening for cervical cancer.

3. Vaccine can protect only against certain strains of virus, whereas many other strains can cause cancer.

4. Though costs can be reduced by bulk purchase, we need to first implement screening before we even talk about vaccination on a public scale.

It's unfortunate that this article deplores pelvic examination (screening with acetic acid-VIA) which is necessary even if the lady has been vaccinated. Besides, HPV DNA testing, which this article glorifies, also currently needs a pelvic examination for the specimen to be collected. While the author incorrectly says that trained clinicians are needed for the VIA screening, only a few weeks of training imparted to general health workers(matriculates) enabled them to perform this effectively in the study quoted earlier.

Screening for cervical cancer is recommended for all women over 30 years of age. An ideal preventive strategy is to improve sexual hygiene, which involves, among others, reduction in the number of partners. While individuals may choose to vaccinate their children before the initiation of sexual activity, whether the government should spend on

vaccines for the entire population is for public health experts to decide.

I request Shillong Times to publish articles from credible sources only and mention the author and affiliations too.

Yours etc.,
Dr Caleb Harris,
Associate Professor,
Surgical Oncology,
NEIGRIHMS

Illegal Coal Mining in Jaintia Hills:

Editor,

Apropos to the letter to the editor by Manuel Carey Lymba (ST Nov 28, 2018) captioned, 'Ban Coal Mining Indefinitely,' I fully agree with the views expressed on this subject. This has become a hot topic in Meghalaya after the assault and the attempted murder of Agnes Kharshiing and her colleague A. Sangma at Sohshrieh village East Jaintia Hills District by the coal mafia. While agreeing with Manuel's views that the coal mafia comprises

politicians, bureaucrats, police and mine owners, I must add that some prominent NGOs are also involved in this illegal mining and transportation of coal to Silchar, Karimganj, Guwahati, Bangladesh (smuggling) and in supplying to cement factories situated in East Jaintia Hills. As a punishment for the illegal coal mining and the attack on Agnes Kharshiing and A Sangma, coal mining should be banned by the NGT for the next ten years or until a new mining policy is framed by the Government of Meghalaya.

It is surprising that some cabinet ministers are quick to certify that there is no illegal coal mining in Jaintia Hills District whereas the recent visit to those mining areas by Justice BP Kataki of the NGT Judicial Committee and his team proved otherwise as he found some fresh extracted coal on the road and fresh lubricants applied on the cranes to bring to the surface the extracted coal. Everyone knows that NGT is a toothless lion otherwise why could it not take the help of central forces like CRPF, CISF,

Rapid Action Force etc to enforce the ban. Coal trucks are not the size of ants which police cannot see with the naked eye. Anyone can make out while travelling on the GS Road or NH. 44 that the trucks plying with tarpaulin are carrying coal.

As per information collected by me and my colleagues not less than 500 trucks are carrying illegal coal (smuggling) to Bangladesh, Silchar, Karimganj, Guwahati and supplying to cement factories located at East Jaintia Hills. Each truck pays Rs 80,000 to the people concerned comprising ministers, politicians, mafia, NGO's, police, bureaucrats etc., and this money is shared among them, percentage wise. Government and District Councils don't earn a single paisa by way of tax, royalty, challan etc. The volume of trade and loss to the Government exchequer is to the tune of Rs 80,000 x 500 trucks or Rs 4 crore daily and Rs 120 crore a month. This has been continuing for the last two years or so. How come the State Government and all the authorities under it are sitting idle and

pretending not to know of this illegal mining?

I met some coal mafia involved in illegal coal transportation and they say they rake in more profit now than before as they don't need to buy coal challans or pay royalty to the District Council and State Government. Otherwise how can they justify buying costly new cars, houses etc. It is a known fact that the DC's and SP's of East and West Jaintia Hills and Ri Bhoi District are handpicked by politicians and cabinet ministers to facilitate easy transportation of coal. If the Chief Minister, Conrad K Sangma wants to maintain a clean image and gain the confidence of the people he should act responsibly by transferring all the DCs, bureaucrats, SPs of East and West Jaintia Hills and Ri Bhoi District including the OC's of various police stations situated on the National Highway right from East and West Jaintia Hills to Ri Bhoi District up to Khanapara P.S. as all are involved directly or indirectly in illegal transportation of coal and are the ministers' cohorts. If the Chief Minister does not

believe this he should ask for their posting reports and I am sure he will be astonished to know that most of them have been transferred just few months ago due to their proximity with the present ministers by replacing the officers who are not yet due for transfer.

Last but not the least the Government of Meghalaya should agree with the Opposition demand that CBI should probe this illegal coal mining and transportation. Only then will the skeletons come out of the cupboards. No probe less than the CBI should be done as the people know that almost all the bureaucrats, politicians, police and NGO's have their own trucks for transportation of coal mined illegally.

Yours etc.,
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

He with whom neither slander that gradually soaks into the mind, nor statements that startle like a wound in the flesh, are successful may be called intelligent indeed.

--- Confucius

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.124 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2018

Gadkari's take on Mallya

UNION Minister Nitin Gadkari has come to the defence of fugitive businessman Vijay Mallya. Considering the overall scenario, what Mallya has done is indefensible, but there is another side to every story, which is what the Union Minister has now unravelled. Speaking at a business conclave on Thursday, Gadkari said that Mallya cannot be termed a ‘fraud’ for defaulting on payments to the banks from where he took hefty loans. This was because of two reasons; one being that Mallya had regularly repaid his loans for the past 40 years though he failed to do so after he fell into an aviation mess. The reference is to the heavy losses he incurred in running the Kingfisher airlines at a time when the aviation sector in India itself faced serious odds.

Mallya is facing extradition from the UK, based on a request from the Indian government and an order of a magistrate’s court there a week ago. It would take time for his return to India, considering the formalities involved and the possibility of an appeal. Mallya on his part has promised recently that he was willing to pay pack every penny he took from banks even as his dues are of the order of Rs 9000 crore. This offer came after the extradition of Christian Michel in the Augusta Westland VVIP helicopter case from the UAE. Mallya might have sensed that a similar scenario awaited him sooner than later. Yet, if he’s willing to pay back, what he avoided so far, he needs a favourable hearing, also considering the long years he dutifully paid his dues to banks and taxes. It is common knowledge that things often go terribly wrong in business. As long as a businessman is willing to make amends for his wrong acts, he need not be treated as a fraud, given the circumstances under which Mallya finds himself in. This would give confidence to businesses to take risks in future. There is no business if there’s no risk. Gadkari thus has a point. What is not justifiable on Mallya’s is for him to have fled from India when faced with a serious debt crisis. He sent the wrong signals to the banks as also the government. This is a serious matter considering that he had been a Member of Parliament. Be that as it may, the past should be past. It is also important that the government ensures that he pays back his dues to the banks since he has the resources to do so.

Congress should adopt two- pronged strategy for Opposition unity

Focus to be on preventing division of Anti-BJP votes in 2019 Poll

The results of the assembly elections in the three states-Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh have underlined the need for total unity of the opposition parties including the Congress, BSP and the Samajwadi Party. The Congress has done exceedingly well in Chhattisgarh on its own but in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, the Party could have been in far more comfortable position if there had been a total alliance of the anti-BJP parties including the BSP and the SP. The Congress is finally forming the government in Madhya Pradesh with the support of two elected BSP members of the assembly . The solo member of Samajwadi Party as also four elected independents have extended support to the Congress to form the Government.

The Congress certainly have enough reasons for satisfaction at the poll results in the three major BJP ruled states but this should not lead to any complacency in the Congress leadership since the Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a seasoned politician and he knows how to convert the serious challenges into opportunities. Already the BJP high command is working on the immediate measures for dealing with the major issue - farmers' distress which led to the defeat of the BJP in the three BJP ruled states. Plans are afoot to announce a national loan waiver scheme for the farmers to take the sail out of the winds of the Congress. The new RBI Governor will be of help to the centre by giving substantial funds from its reserves.. The RBI funds of more than Rs. 3 lakh crore will be of big help to the Modi government in funding the national loan waiver programme which may vary between Rs. 3.5 lakh crore to Rs. 4 lakh crore. The people of the Hindi speaking states will also wait anxiously whether the new elected Congress governments take measures immediately to deal with the farmers discontent. Congress president Rahul Gandhi declared in the election campaign in MP that within ten days of

By Nitya Chakraborty

coming to power, the Congress government will waive farmers loans. Now, the new Congress government has to implement that and if it does not do it, it will have adverse effect on the framing community and naturally, the BJP will take advantage of that. Only four months are left for the Lok Sabha elections, so every single step of the new Congress governments will be watched by the people and its impact will be felt in the Lok Sabha elections.

That way, the Congress's task is very tough on the eve of the Lok Sabha elections. The Congress is doing well against the BJP against which there is mass anger now, but the Party is not expected to do well against the regional parties where the BJP is not the front runner. There are state politics compulsion and even with the best intentions, it is not politically feasible to put one opposition candidate against the BJP at a national level. So the opposition parties have to work on a pragmatic policy of ensuring maximum pre poll collaboration to prevent division of votes, but in states, where the contests, even in a limited manner, become inevitable, the understanding should be a post poll alliance of these parties against the BJP and its allies.

In MP and Rajasthan, the BJP would have lost many more seats if the Congress had aligned with the BSP in the state assembly elections. Now with the BSP and SP giving full support to the Congress Ministry formation in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the stage is set for total alliance of these three parties in the three states as also in Uttar Pradesh which is electorally most crucial for the BJP in the coming Lok Sabha poll. The ambience of cooperation has been created and the Congress leadership has to ensure that the BSP and SP are kept solidly in the anti-BJP platform. This will be of

immense value to the combined opposition in reducing the number of the BJP seats in the Hindi speaking states. The BJP's total seats have to be kept under 180 if the opposition alliance including the Congress want to have a smooth ride after the Lok Sabha poll. If the BJP on its own crosses 200, it will be very tough for the Congress and its allies to stop Modi from his second term because flush with huge funds, the BJP has batter capability of post election bargaining with the vacillating allies and the parties like TRS.

Former BJP leader and central minister Arun Shourie said some months ago that the opposition parties must pledge to ensure they put up one common candidate against the BJP in every constituency. This is desirable but may not be objectively possible for political logistics in different states. Rather the formula mentioned by the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is far more practical. Congress will be the leader in the states where it is fighting the BJP as the major party. It will be having adjustments with the smaller parties but finally the responsibility will be with the Congress as the leader. But in the states, where the regional parties are the rulers like West Bengal, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, the regional parties naturally will not leave space to the Congress in the name of anti-BJP alliance and there the fights between the regional ruling party and the Congress can take place in Lok Sabha poll, but the understanding will be to be a part of anti-BJP alliance in post poll situation.

Even under this two track approach, there is a possibility of a common opposition candidate in about 400 plus seats leaving about 143 seats out of the total of 543 seats. If a total unity of the opposition parties is made possible against the BJP in 400 seats, there is every reason to believe that the opposition should be able to gain more than 272 seats from this 400

figure and the seats from the other 140 seats where triangular fights might take place, will be additional. The opposition need to remember that 31 per cent was the vote share Modi polled at the height of his popularity in 2014 and he is today much less popular and the opposition's starting percentage is 69 per cent if they have one common candidate against the BJP.As the 2014 Lok Sabha figures show that Modi became PM after 2014 poll because the BJP won 90 per cent of the seats in the states that contributes 60 per cent of the Lok Sabha strength. If the opposition combines in three states, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra apart from Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, that will be the end of BJP rule.

All depends on how the saffron leadership can meet the challenge of the united opposition in the Hindi speaking states. In southern states, apart from Karnataka, the BJP has not much strength in other states. In Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the total number of Lok Sabha seats are 102. In 2014 poll, the BJP won four seats out of which in two seats, it had an alliance with Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh. Now, it might lose those two seats without its alliance with TDP. The BJP will try to get one or two seats in TN but that is not certain yet as the DMK led by Stalin is on upsurge and the AIADMK is so faction ridden that the BJP might not get any electoral advantage even if it aligns with the ruling AIADMK.

For the Lok Sabha elections, the opposition, especially the Congress has to do two things - first the Party's election manifesto must reflect the aspirations of the masses, especially the young, unemployed and the farmers and it should form the core of the common minimum programme of the anti-BJP front, and second, the Congress must learn to act as first among the equals among the opposition parties and treat the smaller parties with compassion and dignity so that the anti-BJP front can be sustained on a long term basis. (IPA Service)

Poll Take Away

Achhe din backfires

By Shivaji Sarkar

The party with a difference, that LK Advani and Atal Behari Vajpayee built, has just become a different party under Narendra Modi and Amit Shah, quips a RSS leader. Even in the defeat in 2004, people felt something wrong or sinister had been done to Vajpayee. In 2018's near wash out in five States, the party cadre and the RSS in particular appear jubilant.

They are jubilant because arrogant party bosses and ministers have distanced themselves not only from the aam aadmi but also their own close cadre and workers, who toiled for decades to take the party to be "a formidable party and a national alternative". It is a different issue that till date it has not been able to spread its wings in southern India, eastern India and many pockets of the North-East. That was the strength of the Congress, in its heydays. It had its supporters in every nook and corner. The BJP still hasn't been able to do so.

Remember, Vajpayee could give a different human and pro-people touch to the administration. He was always keen on getting a feedback from his own people, journalists and friends. On the other hand, Modi and his ministers, except a few, who have been more than ignored, created such a distance that their workers and supporters feel insulted. Some say even they are not allowed to the portals of their receptions at the residences of their very own leaders. They are shooved away by the security men, albeit politely, and told to seek an appointment on phone. The poor man, who travels from thousands of kilometers away, ends up only cursing himself.

And then there are those, who are neutral but also curse themselves as the BJP has brought in an inflationary regime, something which the UPA had ushered in. They are not allowed to withdraw their own money. The accounts that have got dormant are difficult to be made operable. The bank fees and charges are going through the roof. Sinking interest rates have made the lives of senior citizens and women difficult. The fear of bank collapse have made all insecure.

Further, digital banking has seen swindling of amounts from their accounts. Inflation has made life difficult but shockingly the indices don't show it. It was the opposite with the Vajpayee regime. Prices of real estate had even come down without demonetisation. Worse, the GST is clearly a tax on tax!

Why should there be GST on house tax and not on petrol, is a big question? The loud bad-mouthed dirty attacks on the Opposition apparently made the people diffident. They wonder if the nation's first Prime Minister Pandit Nehru was the real reason for the failure of all programmes, which others had ushered in.

Ujjwala, the much-touted so-called free gas connection scheme, say the poor say has fooled them totally. They don't get the subsidy and Modi's government has made the cooking gas doubly expensive. Think, can someone having an income of Rs 1500 to 3000 a month afford a cylinder at Rs 1000 plus? The world over, petrol prices were lowered in sync with falling crude prices. However, India is the only country where it became a

profit earner for the companies and taxes for a "pro-people government". People now say, since the States' poll campaigns started, every day a ten-paise cut was affected. The Modi government must realise that voters are not fools. And certainly not in this digital age!

The State governments too faltered in many ways. In Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh the "bhavantar" - difference between food grain minimum support price (MSP) and market prices - did not reach the farmers. Rajasthan particularly failed on many fronts. Number of other schemes remained merely on paper. Adding insult to injury, the States could not create the jobs that were promised.

Then there is the connectivity story. They built sub-standard roads, so did the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI). But the toll charged is high on these. Both the Centre and States are at fault, despite the tall claims being made.

And why should there be persecution of the upper castes and protection of the Scheduled Castes? If people could vote against BSP's Mayawati, then they have voted against the BJP too in the States.

The BJP has specialised in fleeing every one. The middle class is pauperised. They chastised people, such as through the National Green Tribunal (NGT), reportedly at the behest of the big automobile companies. The people are being harassed and their cars impounded for having crossed a ten-year limit. The whole world does not mind driving 40-year-old cars but in the BJP government one has had to junk his/her fine operational vehicle!

The exit of RBI Governor Urjit Patel, Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian and Niti Ayog Vice Chairman Arvind Panagariya are not less shocking. In fact, it is a sad reflection on the system being run and perhaps they couldn't stomach it any more.

Importantly, Hindutva is no more a preserve of the Sangh parivar. It has become the common political plank. So Hindus no more vote for Hindutva. Worse, the Parivar has lost its credibility as its leaders identified themselves with the failed BJP leaders.

Is this the end of BJP? Is it the beginning of the Congress surge? The answer to both is a big no. The BJP has been Congressised and the Congress has BJPised itself. Take the case of Kashmir-BJP's failure there is because it followed the Congress policy. Insofar as the Congress is concerned, it could not create waves in either KCR's Telangana or its own ruled Mizoram, because it is conceived as the "B" party of the BJP.

Undeniably, Indian politics is in a confused state. Nobody thinks or cares for the people. The growing perception is both the BJP and the Congress are developing themselves as 'touts' of the corporates. People unmistakably are distrusting both. They are now looking for an alternative party for the people. Alas, presently it is nowhere to be seen. Definitely, the BJP has to do more introspection for losing the trust that people had on it in 2014. It looks like "Achhe Din" (good days) have back fired.--- INFNA

TO THE EDITOR

Don't divide the Khasi tribe

Editor,
As a member of the Khasi Tribe, I would like to comment on the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage, First Amendment Bill 2018 recently passed by the KHADC.

Firstly, the word 'Tang Jait' used in the Bill is a religious term of one religion; when applied here, it gives shape to communalism which is unpleasant to many other members of the Tribe. This may be deleted and replaced by the word 'Aijait thymmai.' But instead of Tang Jait", we may adopt the custom of Ringbia or Shaw Bhoi for all non Khasi women married to Khasi men. This will help reduce the number of new Khasi clans which come up every time Khasi men marry non-Khasi women. The same practice can be allowed for all men of the Khasi Tribe who marry non Khasi women for the sake of uniformity.

Referring to Sl. 4 of the bill, why is the whole section 3 of the Act deleted completely? This present bill is silent on the status of the children of a Khasi mother born from non-Khasi father. Does this mean that they are not recognised any more as Khasis? This is pure discrimination and such Act will not stand before the court of justice when the Tribe is still practising matrilineal system of lineage. In fact, the KHADC

and the State Government cannot stop love marriages between Khasi women and non-Khasi men; not even the parents. In course of time the population of children born from non Khasi fathers will increase and ultimately create a division among the Khasis. Therefore we can visualize the confusion and the sorry state of affairs which will prevail at that time within the society and in the state. Non-issue of Scheduled Tribe certificates to children born from non-Khasi fathers will create more problems and people will go to courts to seek justice and the court may ask for DNA tests to decide the cases. Who will be blamed when these things happen?

Also as per S1.7 of the bill, Amendment of section 6 of the Principal Act, especially deletion of the sub section 6(b), not allowing Khasi mothers to register and apply for ST certificates for their children born from non-Khasi fathers clearly confirms what is mentioned at S1.2 above.

As per S1.6 of the Bill, Amendment of Section 5 of the Act, it is not clearly specified as to which authority - the District Council or the State Government will issue ST certificates. This require clarity once and for all. But it is commonsense that the state government should retain that power. Also, a Khasi Tribe certificate is not necessary to be issued by the District Council when the ST certificate is issued by the State Government.

As per section 7 of the

Principal Act, the second part of sub section (3) says, 'within three years from the date of birth after the commencement of this Act', seems to contradict the Amendments of Sections 3 & 6 of the Principal Act which may be checked and corrected or sent back to KHADC for review.

Section 10 (c) of the Principal Act deprives Khasi status to persons who do not follow the matrilineal system of lineage. This Act is flawed because it is against the science of genetics. The criteria to be Khasi is not from the matrilineal or patrilineal system but on the basis of backwardness. Moreover, many Khasis have been practising the patrilineal system of lineage for over a hundred years since we received such wisdom through civilization. At present their numbers may be between fifty thousand to one lakh with many more moral supporters. Therefore, any attempt to divide and segregate the Khasis from Khasis by the KHADC is nothing but taking away the personal rights of the people and this will give rise to problems stated at SL2 above.

But I hope and pray that God will give divine wisdom to our leaders and to the Government on how to deal with these sensitive issues in order to prevent further division of our Khasi Tribe. Instead, the KHADC can make the Bills in such a way to accommodate the customs of War people also as they did in the case of

Shaw Bhoi. To speak the truth, the Khasi politicians are to learn many things from their Garo counterparts.

Yours etc.,
B.L. Lyngdoh
Shillong-3

Corrupt & tainted politicians

Editor,
The newly elected assembly of Mizoram does not have a single woman MLA. After the election results were announced on December 11, 2018, a study report by Associations of Democratic Reforms (ADR) revealed that as many as 36 out of 40 newly-elected MLAs in Mizoram are crorepatris. The outgoing assembly had 30 crorepati legislators. The average assets per MLA in the Mizoram 2018 assembly elections is Rs 4.84 crore. In 2013, the average assets per MLA was Rs 3.10 crore. Also the average assets of the 26 MLAs from the MNF is Rs 4.97 crore; the highest being Rs 5.13 crore for each of the five winning candidates from the Congress party. The average assets for the eight independent MLAs is Rs 4.39 crores, while the lone BJP MLA has declared assets worth Rs 3.31 crores. Growth of average assets per MLA works out to 56% approximately.

Regarding criminal records, the ADR said only

two MLAs (both from the MNF) have declared cases against them, as against none in the outgoing assembly. Kudos to the ADR for this report! By a similar study ADR may also bring out the statistics of the other four states viz Telengana, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Rajasthan, the results of which were declared on the same day and put that in the public domain. The electorate has a right to know how the assets of MLAs have grown exponentially. Are the MLAs spending MLA-LADS for development activities in their constituencies or pocketing the amount for growth of their personal and familial prosperity? At the same time the voters of the state have a right to know why majority of MLAs have not declared if there are any criminal records against them-which is mandatory and a violation of the Representation of the Peoples' Act, 1951 and therefore unconstitutional. That no woman has been elected in the newly elected assembly of the state of Mizoram underscores the fact that the state is indifferent to the cause of women and does not believe in women's empowerment.

Once the status of above parameters of the newly elected assembly legislators of the four other states are exposed by the ADR the voters will come to know about the qualitative change they have been able

to bring about in their last assembly election by unseating one group of individuals from the helm of power and replacing another set of individuals from different political parties. This will enable the electorate to choose the candidates they feel are honest and capable of providing selfless services to the people. It would also be clear as to which of the states are seriously concerned about the cause of women; the elimination of their woes, protection and empowerment.

In a large country like India, where majority of population cannot afford to have two square meals-a-day, if corrupt politicians with disproportionate and exponential growth of personal assets and criminal antecedents are elected, democracy cannot survive. It is high time for the Apex Court and the Election Commission of India to step in and take control of the traumatic situation for remedial strictures and directives to the Executives, to cleanse the administration and make the country free from corrupt & criminally tainted politicians by debarring them to contest elections for life.

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata High Court

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

Good leopards of urban forest

Citizens, researchers & forest department join hands to collect data on wildlife, particularly leopards, in a Mumbai colony.
Aditi Tandon & Kartik Chandramouli report

The Waghoba temple in Mumbai’s Aarey Milk Colony houses an idol of a big cat. Resembling a tiger, the idol is worshipped by tribal communities living in the area. A few metres away, a new statue is set to be inaugurated in Aarey — that of a leopard — in reverence of the feline residents that the locals share their space with, in the 13 square km Aarey Milk Colony.

The leopard population in Aarey Milk Colony (AMC) is small and often studied together with the leopards in the bordering Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) which has one of the highest density of leopards in the world. But with Aarey now a proposed site for a metro project, the wildlife of AMC specifically, is in focus.

The green patch in the midst of urban Mumbai’s western suburbs is identified for a metro car shed for the Mumbai Metro Rail Corridor line from Colaba to SEEPZ (Special Electronics Export Processing Zone) in the Andheri East area, which runs between south and north Mumbai. The Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) report2012 for the proposed metro project in Aarey stated “no wildlife has been observed at project site”.

But camera traps show otherwise. A group of researchers and wildlife enthusiasts, in collaboration with the forest department, has diligently been recording data of wildlife, including the elusive predators that have made Aarey their home.

In Aarey, at any given time there are about four to five adult leopards, including a transient population that moves between Aarey and SGNP. Four adult females, Adarsh Nagar, Bindu, Chandani and Luna have been regularly showing up in data recorded over various periods since this specific monitoring activity began in Aarey in 2015.

The initiative is led by a mixed group consisting of wildlife biologist Nikit Surve, honorary wildlife warden Mayur Kamath, journalist Ranjeet Jadhav, researcher Rajesh Sanap and team members Imran Udat, Kaushal Dubey, Prabhu Swami, Hitendra Pachkale, Sudam Nawale, Kunal Chaudhary, Satish Lot and Shahid.

Some of the members were familiar with awareness programmes through their former work with “Mumbaikars for SGNP”, a forest department and citizen initiative to deal with human and leopard interaction in the neighbouring national park.

“We work in collaboration with the citizens and researchers for monitoring the leopards in Aarey,” said Jitendra

Ramgaonkar, Deputy Conservator of Forests, Thane, highlighting the success of the model where citizens and the government have been working together for conservation.

“We provide equipment, some labour and our staff is already stationed in the area. The ultimate goal of this partnership is to create a peaceful coexistence of leopards and humans and change the perception towards the often misunderstood predators.”

The Indian leopard (*Panthera pardus fusca*), is listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, providing it the highest level of legal protection. Leopard falls under the near threatened category of IUCN (IUCN 2014) and remains in the Appendix 1 of CITES.

“Leopards are among the most adaptable species of cats and are found everywhere. They are comfortable in close proximity with humans,” said Dr Vidya Athreya, scientist at Wildlife Conservation Society India and expert in human-leopard interaction, emphasising that leopards living in close quarters with humans is a common occurrence.

Adarsh Nagar, the leopard who ‘doesn’t give a damn’

Adarsh Nagar, named after a locality in Mumbai which she frequented, was observed in Aarey for close to four months between 2012 and 2013.

While leopards usually prefer to stay hidden, Adarsh Nagar was “quite a bold” leopard, according to Rajesh Sanap, a researcher with the team. “There was a time when a team from BBC was visiting Aarey to get some footage for a documentary on leopards. Adarsh Nagar walked on the road for hours while the crew followed her, filming her,” he said.

Most leopards are okay with the presence of humans, as long as they have spaces to go into hiding, said Sanap. This is significant in the wake of upcoming infrastructure projects in the area. Leopards are likely to be comfortable coexisting with people that the projects bring in. But the absence of natural cover is what could drive leopards into human-occupied spaces and create chances of conflict.

Sanap narrated an instance of an abandoned industrial plot in Marol, a busy part of north Mumbai, where a leopard lived for an entire week. “The leopard had no problem being near humans, as long as it had its own space,” he said. “Leopards are active animals, they can live anywhere. The problem

will come once the green spaces begin to disappear and there is no space to hide.”

“There are tribal communities, new housing societies and Film City in and around Aarey. And there are leopards. We can’t remove any of them from the area. Our efforts are to work towards coexistence,” added Ramgaonkar.

The Thane Forest Department has control over forest related issues and wildlife cases in the area, but Aarey specifically is not a notified forest and is under the administrative jurisdiction of the dairy department. Aarey however, comes within an ecologically sensitive zone around SGNP, identified by the government in 2016.

Bindu, the leopard who feels at home among humans

Bindu was first spotted by the team in Aarey in 2011 when she was a cub. Even then, she was a curious creature, closely following the team members after they spotted her. Bindu was shy but always had an affinity for human-dominated landscapes.

From a five-star hotel to housing societies and even a film set, Bindu was often spotted roaming the concrete jungle that came up in and around Aarey. There were multiple attempts to relocate Bindu to the core SGNP area but she made her way back to Aarey, establishing it as her home, alongside her human neighbours.

Monitoring Bindu was an interesting study in leopard behaviour for the team, given that Bindu had such a unique personality.

But are leopards usually so comfortable around humans?

“The area where the Royal Palms housing society, where Bindu has been spotted, is located right between the Aarey Milk Colony and Sanjay Gandhi National Park. It is likely that this site was a corridor for leopards moving between Aarey and the national park,” said Sanap.

Leopards do not imagine boundaries the way humans do. For Bindu, the housing society location was still part of the territory she regularly traversed.

Leopards can share spaces with humans as long as prey population (both domestic and wild) remain sufficient and their habitat is protected.

In Aarey currently, the Warlis, an indigenous tribe inhabiting the area appear to accept the presence of leopards as a normal occurrence. They also appear to know about the behaviour of the animal.

The knowledge and information of

how to avoid conflict with leopards and peacefully live with them is being passed onto them over generations, according to a 2018 report on leopards in Sanjay Gandhi National Park and its surrounding areas, by wildlife biologist Nikit Surve in collaboration with the director of SGNP, Anwar Ahmed.

“The tribal communities have a deeper understanding of their wild neighbours which automatically creates deeper empathy and enables them to share the space and coexist peacefully,” said Athreya about the established tribal communities living in Aarey for decades.

For the newer population that has moved into and around Aarey, the data collected by the team is key in building awareness. “We have camera traps that show humans and leopards in the same location at the same time,” said Surve, who is conducting this research as part of his post doctoral studies. “The people may not even be aware that was a leopard in that location.” Such data helps the team provide proof of human and leopard coexistence in their awareness programmes.

Chandani, the three-legged leopard

Three-legged Chandani was a veteran of Aarey, observed by the team over five years. In 2016, the traps laid out for catching wild boars was where Chandani met her end.

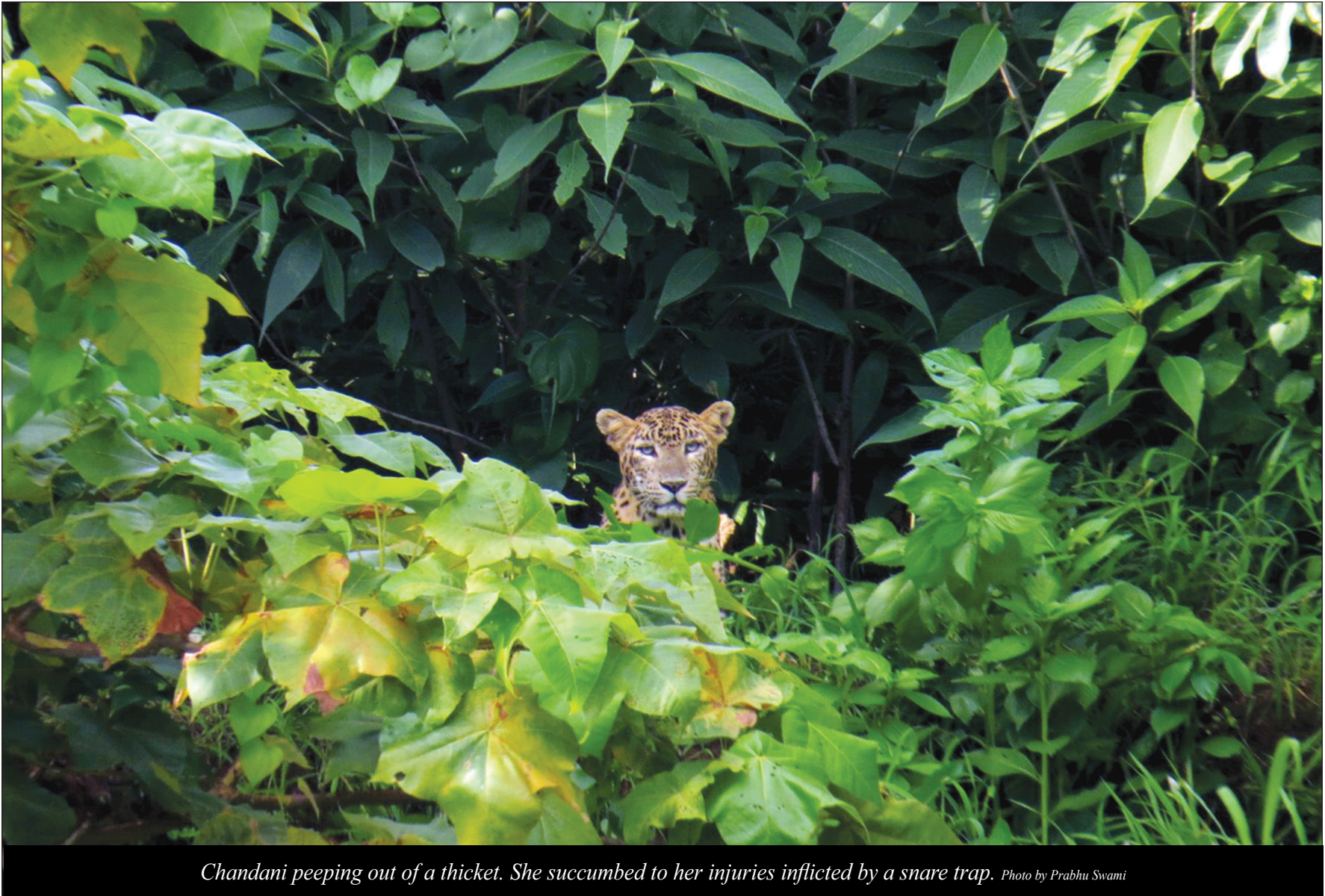
“Chandani had one paw missing when we discovered her. There is a common misconception that injured animals attack human children. But Chandani was never known for attacking humans,” said Sanap. In fact Chandani had her own little cub, an unlikely occurrence for an injured female leopard.

While humans feared that one day she would attack their children, the fear should have been Chandani’s. Her child too succumbed to a trap laid out by humans.

“She was our star. A fighter,” said Sanap. “She successfully coexisted in Aarey despite missing a paw. Had no conflict.”

Luna, the mother leopard rearing the next generation

Holding the fort for leopard population in Aarey, is the female leopard Luna. First spotted in 2015, Luna is the most documented leopard of the area. She has raised two litters in Aarey and has a third litter under her watch at present.



Chandani peeping out of a thicket. She succumbed to her injuries inflicted by a snare trap. Photo by Prabhu Swami



Bindu sitting on the wall of Royal Palms housing society that lies between Aarey Milk Colony and SGNP.

Photo by Palash Kashyap

Continued monitoring of Luna could give more insight into the leopards of Aarey, their behaviour and their adaptation to the landscape as humans take over.

“Mumbai is now so populous and overcrowded that it is no more a congenial home for wild animals,” says the EIA report which gives environmental clearance for the upcoming metro project in Aarey.

“Greater Mumbai at present comprises mainly of residential and industrial areas. At present there is no forest in the true sense except the national park at Borivali, extending over an area of about 19.18 sq km. Hence, wildlife as such is almost extinct from Mumbai.”

Dismissal of wildlife as “almost extinct” by such reports only highlights the importance of work that the team is doing in camera trapping and documenting visibly existing wildlife in Aarey.

“With camera traps, we can identify the leopards — something that we can’t do manually,” said Surve, adding that conservation takes time and continuous monitoring with tools like camera traps over a long term will help understand leopard population better.

“Through the data collection work, we get an idea of the movement of leopards. When there is a human-leopard conflict, the forest department is called in. Data helps us pinpoint which is the individual leopard involved in the conflict,” said Ramgaonkar.

“We get good support from citizens. We share information about sightings. Through collaboration with people doing scientific study, we can help citizens understand leopards and not panic.”

The team of researchers and volun-

teers has put together their findings in Aarey in a report to the forest department.

Mumbai, a role model for human-leopard coexistence?

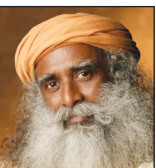
Athreya feels that Mumbai can be a model for collaborative efforts by citizens, NGOs and government to deal with leopards sensitively. Given that leopards are found in urban areas all over the country — Gurugram, Bengaluru, Guwahati, Shimla and more cities — Mumbai’s success story could be adapted to other places.

Surve too believes that Mumbai has pretty much an ideal situation in the understanding of leopards in urban spaces and handling human-leopard interactions. “Citizens are aware and often provide us information when they encounter a leopard,” he said. The media in Mumbai is also sensitised on the issue of human and leopard interactions and reporting has become more accurate, added Athreya.

Leopards who have been coexisting alongside humans for a while in Mumbai, understand the habits and schedules of the residents and plan their activities to avoid interactions, explains Surve. “Removal of leopards from an area is not a solution because another leopard will always take over the space. You rather have a leopard that has been living there for a while because it has adapted to the residents,” adding that leopards have proven that they can coexist peacefully with humans, it’s the humans that need to reciprocate.

(Mongabay India/IBNS)

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



The first and most fundamental responsibility for every person is to become a joyous human being. Because no matter what you are pursuing in life, whether business, money, family or spirituality, it is just an attempt to be happy. You have always understood that to be happy means you must be able to do what you want to do, what you want to achieve in the outside world. Being happy and peaceful is considered the ultimate aspect of a successful life, but it is really the most fundamental aspect of life. Being well means to be peaceful and happy. The level of happiness and peace may vary from person to person but what all people are aiming for is to feel happy. Some are conscious about it, some are not, but the fundamental goal of every single action a person performs is to be well, to be happy in his life.

Your fundamental responsibility

In many ways people’s happiness is dependent on the external situation. When you are dependent on external situations, you will never know true joy in your life, because you will never have absolute control over the outside. When you seek happiness through your action, you are always enslaved to the external. When you are enslaved, you will always be in some level of suffering. It does not matter what a person has, he will still long to have something else all the time. Until a man finds the inner basis of happiness, he will always live as a beggar. Whatever you understand or experience as happiness, or love, or peace in your life has a certain inner basis. Today if you lose your mental peace your doctor will give you a pill. These chemicals enter your system and

make you peaceful, maybe for just a little while. Or in other words, what you call as peace is a certain kind of chemistry within you. Similarly what you call as joy, as love, as suffering or fear, every human experience has a chemical basis within you. The spiritual process is just to create the right kind of chemistry where you are naturally peaceful, naturally joyous. When you are joyous by your own nature, then the very dimension of your life, the very way you perceive and express yourself in the world will change. The very way you experience your life will change naturally. Please see, your life will not attain fulfillment by some action. In every state of life you thought, ‘If this happens, my life will be complete.’ You got that and three days later

threw it into the dustbin. Life did not attain fulfillment. Fulfillment will not come because of some event or some action. Only if your inner nature is complete, you will attain fulfillment. The whole process of yoga is to make your interiority absolutely in your control. It is a possibility to move from a state of external enslavement to inner completeness, which is the state of unboundedness. If your inner nature is unbounded, your life is also unbounded. You can either sit with your eyes closed or you can perform different action - both ways your life can be complete. When a man has reached this state within himself, where his actions are only to the extent required for outer life situations, then he is a complete person. If within you, your inner nature has attained fulfillment regardless of

the external situation, we can say that you have become unbounded. This is a state of true happiness. First we need to know that the basis of our misery is that we have established ourselves in untruth. We are deeply identified with that which we are not. Somewhere along the way we have gotten identified with things around us. We have got identified with our body and mind. That is the source of suffering. Spirituality is simply the process of disidentifying with what we are not, to shed the layers of conditioning so that we know what we are NOT. When that is completed, we arrive at something that cannot be discounted. This discovery will be the recognition of divinity, and we will see that there is no reason for misery in the world. (Sadhguru is a yogi, mystic, visionary and bestselling author. He was conferred the Padma Vibhushan in 2017 for exceptional and distinguished service)

‘Women need to be empowered’

Filmmaker **Vivek Agnihotri**, who in recent times courted controversy over his urban naxal remarks and faced allegations of misbehaviour on the sets of his 2005 film *Chocolate* by actress *Tanushree Dutta*, was recently in Kolkata to attend the *Arth festival*. In an exclusive chat with *IBNS-TWF* correspondent **Souvik Ghosh**, the maker of *Buddha* in a Traffic Jam opens up about *#MeToo* campaign and also other societal issues.

Several activists were detained in the Koregaon Bhima case with alleged Maoist links. They were also called urban naxals. You made remarks on them, asked people to prepare their list and engaged in a Twitter war. Do you think it is a rising problem? Do you not consider them as social activists?

Of course they are activists, so was Osama (Osama bin Laden, founder of the pan-Islamic militant organisation al-Qaeda). People working against the state cannot be called social activists. They are traitors or terrorists. These people are traitors because they are working with the objective of breaking the Indian state with an armed revolution. They have only one place and that is behind the bars.

Do you think they are politically funded?

Of course. Even if one organises a birthday party or goes out with friends for a drink, he needs funding. How is it possible to organise so many protests and running a revolution (without funding)? But they are funded from international terror organisations and also they do lot of extortion of poor people.

What do you think about the problems in West Bengal where you come often?

I think West Bengal is very conflicted right now. There is a conflict between rich and poor, educated and uneducated, Hindus and Muslims, Indians and Bangladeshis. There is too much of conflict because in the rest of the places (country), there are generally two kinds of political structures- nationalist BJP type parties and Congress and others. Here on one hand, the state has old Communists, there

are Maoists and Marxists who Communists don't want very close ties up with, then BJP is making inroads here, there is a dying Congress and Mamata Banerjee with her unique Poriborton (change) politics. I haven't seen any poriborton in West Bengal at all. The kind of violence taking place in the state is very upsetting, so I am very disappointed with the politics of the city. I am coming here for so many years but I haven't seen anything changing in the city. It is a very depressing thing.



Recently a *#MeToo* campaign started in Bollywood where several actors shared their experiences on social media. But also question arises whether it is the right way to fight a serious problem or if internet justice solves a problem without approaching the judicial system. What's your thought on the entire matter?

See, no movement can be successful by writing on social media. The only way one movement can be successful is by changing lives. Unless someone's life is changed or improved, movements are not successful. If a woman gets empowered, then only I will call the movement successful, otherwise it makes no sense to me.

Do you feel *#MeToo* movement is gender neutral or only about women who were harassed?

I think more men are harassed than

anything. Everybody is harassed. The problem is anybody who is more powerful harasses the subordinates. So it is the fight between the powerful and deprived people. So anybody who is in a situation of less power is going to be harassed and exploited. Nobody should be exploited.

The campaign started with **Tanushree Dutta's allegations against Nana Patekar of sexually harassing her on the sets of film Horn Ok Pleassss. Later she accused you of asking to strip and dance to give cue to an actor on the sets of film Chocolate. How do you respond to that?**

She never said that. No. Did she say 'strip'? No. She said she was wearing a bathrobe and was asked to take it off. Of course one has to be in the costume. But I have filed a criminal case against her. Let the proceedings take place.

(However in an interview with *DNA*, Tanushree had said: "...This guy wanted me to give cues to an actor. It was an actor's closeup. It was not even my shot. I was not even in the shot. It was the actor's closeup and he had to look at something and give expressions. The director told me *jao ja ke kapde utaar ke nacho* (go, strip and dance)")

So you have taken a legal step. In a democracy what do you do? I am not somebody who writes on Facebook and Twitter only. I used to take the constitutional route.

Coming back to films, recently **Aamir Khan's big budget film Thugs of Hindostan didn't earn much at the box office. On the contrary, Ayushmann Khurrana's low budget films — Andhadhun and Badhaai Ho — did well. Do you think audience's taste is changing?**

No, it doesn't work like that. A good product is a good product whether made with 100 rupees or one crore rupees. On the other hand, a bad product is a bad product. *Thugs of Hindostan* was a bad film so it didn't work. *Badhaai Ho* was a good film so it worked. Simple.

(Image by Avishek Mitra/IBNS)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, DECEMBER 16, 2018

Moon trine Mercury on your solar return chart denotes a good year. Ego and self-respect would be high as the year begins. You would think a lot about yourself and your reputation. You want to feel respected and important. Good fortune is likely to begin favoring you from now. Good news from foreign sources is on the horizon. You might also travel. Your attention seems to be driven towards family, finance, tax, government etc. you may experience some mental distress and you may observe delay and losses in business matters. The last part of the year would be rewarding in terms of finance.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

This phase brings joy, understanding and harmony in personal and professional relations. You gain money and influence through business ventures and partnerships. You dominate the professional scene as you bring together divergent forces. You would express yourself with charm and grace in professional life. Quality time is spent at home bringing balance and perspective into your life. You have more energy for work and your daily routines tend to speed up now. Perhaps you have a larger workload than usual. You feel full of energy and indulge in sports, physical activities and a structured exercise routine.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

You are patient, laborious and clever with material aspects and manage finances and business ventures with ingenuity. This phase heralds cordial relations with extended family and friends. Cooperation and focus on harmony and understanding benefit you professionally and enhance your reputation in public relations. You need to curb comparisons and rivalry as it adds to stress. Personal relationships cannot be resolved through discussion and analysis but through love, acceptance and freedom. Changes in personal relationships and attitudes happen by themselves, with natural ease, rather than by your pursuing. You would regroup your energy and thoughts and focus on the basics, which brings achievement.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

This is a phase when you are more responsible, hard working, dutiful, and serious. This enhances the ability to achieve desired goals. You would take up tasks that involve cooperation and team harmony. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation and teamwork. You would have positive feels towards religion and related aspects. You are socially active, although you display a seriousness and self-discipline. You extend hospitality to family and friends as you entertain and organize meetings and get -togethers.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

This is an excellent period under which you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships with loved ones as suffering and negativity will be eliminated once you make a significant change in a personal relationship. You would expand your social circle and make more contact with groups and friends. It is advisable to be prudent in professional and work related matters. Avoid hasty and rash decisions when it comes to change. Give the matter due thought and consider the entire matter with care. There will be a fluctuation in energy levels before a balance is achieved. Health will take a turn for the betterment.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

This phase brings confidence, pleasure and involvement in personal and professional relations. There are deadlines to be met and presentations to be made. Your confidence and eloquence stand you in good stead as you take centre stage. Networking could help to boost your career. The support you receive from colleagues will help you gather and process more information. You enjoy doing jobs and tasks with your partner; however mundane they may be. You turn your attention on fitness and balanced diet programs, as these efforts would bring positive results.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

You are more focused and hard working which reflects in the results that you achieve. On the financial front, progress would be steady. This enhances self-confidence and enables you to take well thought out risks. You are likely to get business and work opportunities from hitherto unknown sources. The ability to ex-

press and communicate your ideas is extremely important to you. For you home is where the heart is as you do the extra bit and our close ones see you in a most positive way. You may be tempted to spend extra money on things that will make your life more comfortable and pleasant and represent a sense of security.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

Activities related to communication such as journalism, literature and fine arts are prominent. An arduous yet stimulating project should be taken as a challenge which would further promote business prospects. Physical energy and good health enable you handle a busy schedule and complete work commitments. Responsibilities and commitments may take up more time than usual, so set some time aside. Also, arrange your schedule so that you don't take on too much and you don't end up handling more errands and odd jobs than you can effectively manage.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You would take a more practical and disciplined approach towards work and on the domestic front. You assume a leadership role and take control of matters both at work and home. Those in the field of art or using their creative prowess would give a fresh dynamism to their work. You are drawn to intellectual pursuits. You take pride in your work and the thinking process helps you come up with ideas to infuse energy in the work at hand. This is an excellent week under which you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships with loved ones.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You use wisdom to overcome any misgivings in your professional field. Inner focus helps you feel enlightened as your thoughts undergo a transformation and become stronger and more positive. Strong existing relationships are likely to grow and transform. Your finances could also improve as long as you deploy well tried out strategies. There are also some unexpected expenses on family front. In love and romance your personal relationship takes on a special quality as you communicate and express your views beautifully. Physical energy and good health enable you to keep up with a busy schedule and work commitments.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

It is time to heal old friendships with tender, love, care and move into new relationships with love and sensitivity. There is strength in your feelings of love and the power of attraction, which may open the door to new romantic relationships. New ideas and concepts floated by you at your work place will be appreciated. At work, you may take up new assignments and project that would bring creativity and new ideas. You understand that nothing can replace diligence. There may be gains from property, shares and assets in hand. You are likely to get back to fitness routines and diet programs to enhance health and energy.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You would work in association with the young and this brings confidence and you use your best talents and inspired by the youthful energy you coordinate all activities with a joie de vivre. You express inner feelings, ideas and future plans without being afraid of results and consequences. You will be creative, adventurous and unconventional at work and this brings appreciation from senior colleagues. Changes in your lifestyle can now be incorporated with long term benefits. Any unresolved argument may create a rift in your relationships; take a softer approach in your interactions with people at work and home.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

This period brings more efficiency and creativity in your work in an unconventional way. There are chances of new associations and beginnings as new opportunities and changes may come. Your family would be more supportive and you will feel more comfortable. You exhibit individualism in handling business ventures and collaborations. You may take up assignments and projects and this would end on a winning note for you during the week. Your efforts to reach out to new people will be accepted and welcomed as you get success in matters connected to foreign lands too. You give attention to fitness and health related programs.

When Manipur became casteist

By Madhu Chandra

Shantidas Gosai, the Hindu missionary, who came to Manipur in the early 18th century, burnt the Puya, the sacred scripture of Meiteis, after converting them to Hinduism. The burning of Meitei Puyas had assaulted the culture, language, religion and social harmony among the society of Manipur. Pure and impure among the sections of the society after the coming of Hinduism in Manipur had affected the lives of people.

The concept of untouchable or the word used in Manipuri is a confusing terminology. People denied the existence of caste within the Meitei society. It is denied because people of Manipur do not like themselves to be labelled with the untouchable people of India.

The word for casteism and untouchability in Manipuri is Amang-Asheng. The literal meaning of Amang-Asheng is pure and impure. The concept of pure and impure blood is rather closer to the description of casteism in Vedic scripture.

After the attempt to insert the Hindutva machinery in Manipur University by the central government and ignorantly accepted by the state government, the talk about the practices of pure and impure has become a talk of the day on social media. It was fuelled by the unconfirmed rumour about construction of Rash Lila Mandop within the sacred place of Kangla.

Did the Amang-Asheng exist before the coming of the Hinduism in Manipur or is it the same connotation of casteism or untouchability?

For the last 20 years, I have been addressing the casteism and its impact on the life of people in Manipur. Every time I identify caste, I am accused of bringing casteism in Manipur. The attempt I did was to help our people understand the practices of caste among the section of societies in Manipur.

Brahmins not eating food cooked by other communities, no intermarriage between Brahmins and Meiteis and other communities, restriction on non-Brahmins to enter temples are the real life in Manipur, yet they are not seen as caste. If these are not caste, then what are they?

Meiteis as well as other communities in Manipur before the coming of Hinduism had the concept of sacred places, sacred days and sacred events. The sacredness or sanctity of the belief system of Meiteis is different from the untouchability or caste system. However, it becomes mixed with the practice of casteism or untouchability after the Meitei adopted Hinduism.

Talk about casteism becoming vibrant after attempt to expand Hindutva in the NE state



Amang-Asheng (pure and impure) is rather an appropriate word for a confused and mixed concept of casteism and untouchability.

Intermarriage between the people of the valley with those of the hills had been practised in Manipur. The kings of both valley and hill had wives from both places. There was no concept of untouchables. After the coming of Hinduism, untouchable became a part of life in Manipur.

A Meitei marrying a tribal woman had to go through the purification ceremony either of two forms.

One used to be the old practice of purification by giving the tribal woman to drink cow dung mixed with water or cow urine; another practice by asking the tribal woman to drink holy water collected from the washing of the feet of the Brahmins, which is known as pavitra choran, the holy

feet of Brahmins.

Till the purification ceremony took place, the Meitei man and the tribal woman were considered unclean. Until then the parents of the man would not allow the tribal woman to enter inside the kitchen. If the parents of the man died, both the man and the tribal woman would not be allowed to perform the ritual for the parents.

These social taboos never existed among the societies of Manipur before the coming of Hinduism. The untouchability extended between the royal families and general Meiteis. It extended further to the general Meiteis and scheduled caste communities and the hill people.

(The author is National Secretary of All India Confederation of SC/ST Organisations based at Hyderabad) Image by author

Managing bar counter

By Ranjan K Baruah

New restaurants and bars are being opened in different parts of Meghalaya and other parts of the North East. There are several bars and pubs too. With this, job opportunities have also opened up. Bartending is a lucrative career option in today's world.

One of the most eccentric and interesting careers in the hospitality industry is 'bartending'. It is a part of the food and beverage department of the hospitality industry. A bartender (also known as a barkeep, barman, barmaid, bar chef, tapster, mixologist, alcohol server, flairman or an alcohol chef) is a person who formulates and serves alcoholic or soft drink beverages behind the bar, usually in a licensed establishment. Bartenders also usually maintain the supplies and inventory for the bar.

Bartenders are usually responsible for confirming that customers meet the legal drinking age requirements before serving them alcoholic beverages.

In certain countries, such as Canada, the UK and Sweden, bartenders are legally required to refuse more alcohol to drunken customers. Historically, bartending was a profession with a low reputation. It was perceived through the lens of ethical issues and various legal constraints related to the serving of alcohol.

The pioneers of bartending as a serious profession appeared in the 19th century. 'Professor' Jerry Thomas established the image of the bartender as a creative professional. Harry Johnson wrote a bartending manual and established the first bar management consulting agency. At the turn of the 20th century, slightly less than half the bartenders in London were women, such as Ada Coleman. 'Barmaids', as they were called, were usually the daughters of tradesmen or mechanics or, occasionally, young women from the 'better-born' classes who had been 'thrown upon their own resources' and needed an income.

The bartending profession was generally a second occupation, used as transitional work for students to gain customer experience or to save money for university fees in few countries. The reason for this is because bartenders in tipping countries such as Canada and the United States can make significant money from their tips. This view of bartending as a career is changing around the world, however, and bartending has become



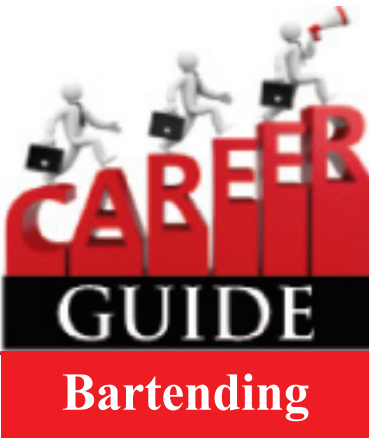
a profession by choice rather than necessity. We shall publish more in our next edition.

Updates:

Volvo Group Scholarship Program for Master's Students in Business and Economics in Sweden: The University of Gothenburg is offering a scholarship to the students to pursue a postgraduate degree program. The scholarship programme covers 100 % of the tuition fee for

a two-year Master's programme for one student. The purpose of this scholarship is to attract top quality international postgraduate students to the university and to support Sweden's research effort. The University of Gothenburg consists of future entrepreneurs, financial analysts, climate experts, top musicians, designers and many more. Application deadline is February 1, 2019.

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



“I heard a bird sing in the dark of December. A magical thing. And sweet to remember. We are nearer to Spring than we were in September. I heard a bird sing in the dark of December.”
--- Oliver Herford

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.129 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2018

The Brexit problem
Last week British Prime Minister Theresa May postponed a parliament vote on the Brexit deal; survived a no-confidence motion brought by conservative party members and then faced a stumbling block as EU leaders refused to renegotiate a deal. In a referendum in 2016, the British public voted by a narrow margin for leaving the EU. The exit is due to take place on March 19, 2019. A withdrawal agreement was struck in November 2018 about the modalities of the exit. The UK and EU were to make a trade deal and give businesses the time to adjust. Amid much concern Prime Minister, May anticipated that the Bill on the withdrawal agreement would not pass parliament and decided to postpone its passage. Criticism mounted. Continuance as Prime Minister was threatened. May went to Brussels to ask the EU for changes in the agreement before bringing the deal back to parliament. The move backfired.

The UK appears to be stuck with the deal which has been renegotiated already. If the Bill fails to pass parliament, which has to be done in three weeks, uncertainty will prevail in the UK. There are a number of possible scenarios. The UK may leave the EU without a deal. There may be another referendum which will require new legislation and majority support in parliament. A fresh election cannot be ruled out. Ministers have been quoted as saying that the government was not prepared for a second referendum and is sticking to the deal hoping that the bill will pass in parliament with just a few changes. Many senior 'leave' supporters believe the deal will be acceptable if preparations are made. Critics disagree. They argue that a deal would have disastrous consequences. Businesses will be adversely affected. There will be chaos at the border. Food prices will shoot up. A shortage of essential goods will occur.

Another hurdle is Northern Ireland which is part of the UK. Under the present EU arrangements it is easy for people to cross the border between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland. But if tensions prevail, barriers between the north and the south would revive. The conflict ended in 1998. The 'Backs Top' plan to ensure a smooth border is now in a state of uncertainty. While Theresa May has impressed many observers through her personal resilience, the Tories are bitterly divided over Europe and, with Labour pledging to oppose her forthcoming Westminster motion, the firm indications are that it is heading for defeat. In that eventuality, May would have no option but to resign.

LOOKING BACK
June 9, 1989

PM announces launching of Jawahar Rozgar Yojana

Prime Minister Mr Rajiv Gandhi today announced in the Lok Sabha the launching of the massive rural employment programme, "Jawahar Rozgar Yojana," in every panchayat. Mr Gandhi said in a statement under the scheme for which Rs. 2100 crores of central assistance would be provided in the current year, thirty per cent of the employment generated would be for women. The Prime Minister said all existing rural wage employment programmes would stand merged into the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana. The scheme would reach out all over the country to 44 million families in rural India living below poverty line. "We expect to be able to provide employment to atleast one member of each poor rural family for fifty to a hundred days of a year at a workplace near his residence", Mr Gandhi said. The Prime Minister was repeatedly cheered as he made the statement. Mr Gandhi said it was a programme aimed at placing in

the hands of the village panchayats around the country adequate funds to run their own rural employment schemes in the interest of the vast masses of the rural poor, constituting the bulk of rural India.
Opposition ruled states not cooperating with centre
Prime Minister Mr. Rajiv Gandhi today accused opposition ruled states in the south for assuming a "non-cooperative" posture towards measures initiated by the centre to develop powers to the people. Addressing the valedictory function of the two day panchyat raj sammelan for southern states at Vidyannagar, near here, he said the centre had embarked on conferences to discuss how the panchayatraj institutions could be made much strongly. He want a revolution that gives maximum democracy (to these institution) a revolution that gives more evolution that could fulfill the dreams of Gandhiji. "For this reason, we hold sammelans.

Little to celebrate global 'anti-corruption day' in India
Govt, CBI, ED are all under graft scanner

Few in the government or public life in India took note of the International Anti-Corruption Day, which quietly came and went on December 9, almost unknown, unrecognised. Rarely, a global UN event gets such a silent reception in India. There was probably no reason to celebrate the event at a time when the government and its top anti-corruption agency, CBI, are struggling to protect themselves against a host of hi-profile corruption charges. In fact, the country is continuously in the news for corruption at its highest echelons. The government itself is facing massive corruption charges, from the opposition Congress party, in the Euro 7.8-billion (worth over Rs.60,000 crore) Rafale deal with France's Dassault Aviation for the purchase of 36 multirole fighter aircraft. Though the Supreme Court has given a clean chit to the government, Rafale's choice of severely cash-strapped Gujarati businessman Anil Ambani as private Indian offset partner still remains a mystery.

On the other hand, two top executives of India's most powerful Central Bureau of Investigation are accusing each other of massive corruption. Such a situation is unthinkable in any government. CBI is practically lying topless. The stop-gap arrangement is without any fresh decision making power. Congress is now accusing the government's Enforcement Directorate, another hi-profile - though limited purpose - anti-corruption agency, to fix Mrs. Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law Robert Vadra on questionable business deals and money laundering charges. The charges against Vadra are nothing new. However, their sudden hype ahead of the coming Lok Sabha election, along with the trial of Christian Michel, alleged middleman in AugustaWestland VVIP chopper purchase deal during the Congress-led UPA regime, is being interpreted more as a desperate political attempt to fight the falling public rating of the main ruling party than their real worth.

Hi-profile bribery and corruption cases in India, involving top politicians and their business underlings, rarely end in conclusive conviction. In most occasions, they are used as political tools by both the ruling party and its opposition ahead of national election. However, never before had the government itself faced such a situation

By Nantoo Banerjee

In his 'International Anti-Corruption Day' message, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said corruption which is present in all countries - Rich and Poor, North and South - "is an

“ Hi-profile bribery and corruption cases in India, involving top politicians and their business underlings, rarely end in conclusive conviction. In most occasions, they are used as political tools by both the ruling party and its opposition ahead of national election. ”

where its No.1 sleuth in CBI lodged an F.I.R against the No.2 seeking the latter's arrest and prosecution in a graft case. CBI named its second-in-command Rakesh Asthana as an accused in a bribery case along with another agency official and two private persons. The accused named

assault on the values of the United Nations." The World Economic Forum estimates that the cost of corruption is at least \$2.6 trillion - or 5 per cent of global GDP. The World Bank estimates that businesses and individuals pay more than \$1 trillion in bribes each year. Corruption begets more corruption, and

“More than Rs.30 million in bribes were allegedly paid to get relief in a case against meat exporter Moin Qureshi and others, CBI said. In turn, CBI special director Asthana has accused the organisation's director, Alok Verma, of impropriety in more than a dozen cases. The faultliness have only become deeper.”

in the FIR (13A/2018) include CBI Deputy Police Superintendent Devender Kumar, Dubai-based investment banker Manoj Prasad and his brother Somesh Prasad. More than Rs.30 million in bribes were allegedly paid to get relief in a case against meat exporter Moin Qureshi and others, CBI said. In turn, CBI special director Asthana has accused the organisation's director, Alok Verma, of impropriety in more than a dozen cases. The faultliness have only become deeper. The CBI has hit a new low, even by its none-too-glorious standards. And, so is the government's image.

fosters a corrosive culture of impunity. Although millions of people in the democratic world go to ballots often with governmental corruption as a key campaign focus, nothing seems to really change after election. New government quickly compromises with old corruption practices. Incidentally, political corruption takes precedence over all other types of corruption. Bribery, cronyism, nepotism, kleptocracy, speed money, stash funds, legal plunder and electoral fraud generally manifest political corruption which is at the root of all other forms of corruption. According to the Transparency Interna-

tional, "in some countries across the Asia Pacific region, journalists, activists, opposition leaders and even staff of law enforcement or watchdog agencies are threatened, and in the worst cases, even murdered". India shares space with the Philippines and the Maldives among the worst regional offenders in this respect. The largest contributors to corruption are entitlement programs and social spending schemes of the Indian government, including the national rural employment guarantee scheme and national rural health mission. Among the other routinely big corruptions of permanent nature is India's goods truck operating industry which is forced to pay billions of rupees in bribes annually to numerous regulatory agencies and police stops on interstate highways.

Elections change administrations in the panchayats, district councils, states and the centre. But, the corruption trend seems to continue with vigour, expanding its scope covering newer areas, with every new election and new government. Laws and regulations to control corruption appear to open new avenues of corruption. For instance, laws such as FERA and FEMA did not prevent rising illegal Indian foreign deposits in tax havens. The privatisation laws offer new opportunities for corruption and public exploitation. Recently, a seemingly simple takeover of Anil Ambani's power supply business in parts of Mumbai by Gautam Adani's firm immediately led to massive expansion of electricity bills of consumers, generating protests across the city. The state is governed by BJP. Ambani and Adani, both Gujaratis, are known to be close to the power that be. India's effort to improve 'the ease of doing business' came at a high cost to the common man. The all-too-deep and all pervasive corruption is adversely affecting the country's economy. It is a pity that corruption is holding the economy back from reaching new heights. Instead, rampant corruption is stunting the country's development. In the end, it has made the government's fight against bribery and corruption almost a joke. (IPA Service)

Thirteen years later, it is clear that Sonia Gandhi's son and heir does not share the sense of shame and contrition of that hideous pogrom and his party's role in it. If he did, he would not have chosen Kamal Nath to represent the Congress's political revival. Rahul Gandhi was fourteen years old when his grandmother was assassinated and thousands of Sikhs were killed in retaliation with the complicity of the ruling party, the Congress. He might have been too young to take in the enormity of that massacre. That does not absolve him now as the President of the Congress when a person or a party fudges the starkness of its evil. What does Manmohan Singh, whom Congress had used as shield to cover-up deftly the heinous and most cruel massacre ever executed in the history of independent India, think of Kamal Nath's coronation?

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata High Court

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

Loan-waivers no solution
Delete it, toll, bank charges
By Shivaji Sarkar

India's economy is in a cyclical phase of loan waivers as the Congress comes back to power in three large States.

Banks with people's deposits, not Governments', seem to be an easy prey. Nobody is addressing the distress of the farmers. Four years back, in 2014 there were loan-waivers and now again it is happening.

There is a problem of perception too. The new RBI Governor Shaktikant Das says that the Government is not just a stakeholder, it runs the economy and manages financial institutions.

Das is correct to the extent that it manages the institutions. That is the task the Government has been given by the people. It has to be as per people's wishes and not as anyone in Government decides. Alas! People are rarely even consulted.

The economy is run and managed by the people --- entrepreneurs and financial institutions. The Government is an institution that was formed by the people to take of care of issues of daily management as a custodian and not owner. The Governments' that adhere to it, as possibly the Atal Behari Vajpayee did and to some extent the United Front functioned, made the people happy.

So the Governments' of any colour have to adhere to the basics and should not have euphoria of numbers. People want that as custodians of people's money and the manager of institutions, the Governments' protect their wealth and help increase it.

Since 2014 seven States have unveiled loan waivers totaling nearly Rs 182,802 crore. Agriculture economist Ashok Gulati reckons that the total farm loan-waiver may touch Rs 4 lakh crores in the run-up to the general elections in 2019 as other States join the fray.

Let the nation not feel that sudden changes in the RBI have made the stock market buoyant. In March, 1992, also this had happened. It later opened up a can of worms --- the Harshad Mehta stock scam. The present one may be a real boost but the stock market is not an indicator of the economy. Presently, it is definitely not. The reasons for its boost often are behind the scenes operation.

The situation is difficult. The rupee, despite occasional gains, remains volatile, economy unstable, job markets uncertain, investors wary, thus unreal stock movement needs to be seen with a pinch of salt.

For much of this year, the Urjit Patel-led RBI was seen resisting pressure as well as entreaties from the Government, industry and financial firms to ease lending and capital norms for stressed PSBs, particularly those under the prompt corrective action (PCA) framework, open a special liquidity window for non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) with a precarious asset-liability position and push the flow of credit to small enterprises.

Das has not dwelt on any of these specific issues that caused the strain in the relationship between the Government and the RBI. The political Parties manifestos of the five States were also silent on these issues. Of course, voters do not understand intricate issues. So populism marked it. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley is right in saying that populism does not help in the long run.

Parties practise it to get numbers to form the Government. Ignoring the numbers of finances however causes problem. The industry, the biggest de-

faultier in loan repayment, is also known to have withdrawn the largest cash along with many other players before the elections. Why? Everyone knows.

So except for cosmetic treatment not much could still be realized and the public sector banks (PSB) having capital of people's deposits today are in a severe crisis called the NPAs. It is true this Government did not proffer the bounties. Their predecessor did.

But now once again people have the problem of a cyclical nature of politics. So if this Government is finding it difficult would the next Government do it? Or would they again play with people's money to which no Government has the right to lay their hands on.

The suffering of the people, forget about mitigating, is increasing. The RBI is supposed to increase the rates to help poor depositors, senior citizens, women and the deprived Jandhan account holders, who put their earnings in the coffers of the banks.

The rate rise is required not just to help the depositors but to protect the nation's wealth. People's money is not for the large or largest corporate. The farmer and MSMEs - small entrepreneurs - also have a claim to it.

But loan-waiver creates an unwanted culture. As the elections to the States started, those farmers who could repay also are known to have stopped the repayments. The industry is willfully not doing it. The Government is recapitalizing banks with taxpayers' money. It is a vortex.

These issues have to be addressed. Farmers' income through their product sales have to be increased. The farmers are known to lose but the insurance companies are known to earn high profits. This is not welfare. A proper farm policy is a must.

The Parties if they want good governance have to do away with income tax. Citizens are not supposed to pay unnecessary taxes that deprive them of over four months of their earnings. Bank charges have to be lowered.

A relook before 2019 polls is a must. It is not populism but a national necessity.

The Government and Opposition also have to answer why people should pay high road tolls, when they are paying Rs 8 per litre as road building and maintenance cess. Toll is loot by organized mafia. It delays highway traffic, causes harassment and large pilferage. The NHAI is on record of not getting paid the toll and IL&FS would not have collapsed with Rs 90,000 crore losses had there been honesty in toll collection.

Even GST needs a relook. It is tax on tax in many cases.

Inflation as per RBI's latest monetary policy assessment is bound to jump because industrial products have become expensive. Food prices cannot remain low for long. Rate rise is logical.

The nation's economy is in crisis. People need succor and protection. 2019 will belong to those who can ensure the relief and safety of banks. Yes, the Government has been given the task to direct the economy, not run it, and it has to do that without hurting the people, their deposits or threatening to play with their wealth in banks or RBI. India needs pro-people, pro-farmer approach for livelihood creation. ---- INFA

“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”
--- William Shakespeare

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.129SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2018

Is the MDA Govt losing the plot?

THERE’S something to be said about governance. It requires experience and maturity and has to be on top of things. In this aspect the NPP-led led MDA Government’s flip-flop stance on illegal mining of coal is reminiscent of Hamlet’s soliloquy, “To be or not to be.” Is there or is there not illegal coal mining in Meghalaya? Who is allowing it to happen? Did the Government know or not know about this? If it did know, then what were the actions taken to prevent this illegality and trampling of the rule of law? A Government led by a young chief minister raised many hopes and aspirations that governance would take a new shape and that the venality and impunity that existed in the previous dispensations would give way to transparency and accountability. But this is not to be. The main accused in the Agnes-Amita assault case is still absconding. And now as if to nail the lie on the openly conducted illegal mining of coal, over 13 (some claim there were as many as 17) miners have been trapped inside a flooded mine since Thursday last and all attempts to rescue them have failed so far. The State Disaster Relief Force (SDRF) is at its wits end. Now the Chief Minister is seeking the assistance of the National Disaster Relief Force (NDRF). The narrative of a miner who just managed to escape the calamitous incident through the skin of his teeth shows the desperation of those who choose this risk-laden occupation.

The question now is who will be held accountable for this major catastrophe which should have attracted national and international attention and should have made the State and National Human Rights Commissions take suo-moto action. Someone has got to pay for this abominable crime fuelled by greed and which uses bonded labourers held captive by stark poverty, and, who are no better than modern day slaves. The standard argument peddled by the mine owners that this is a livelihood for many is despicable. No livelihood can be promoted at the cost of the environment and by flouting all laws and ignoring the human rights of labourers. The claim that relies on rat hole mining as the only option because it was a traditional practice has no legal basis. If we go by that logic then mine owners should not be using modern gadgets at home and should also not be living in plush modern buildings. When will the Government of Meghalaya come up with a robust mining policy which will see the end of all this illegality?

LOOKING BACK

June 9, 1989

Manipur's troubles

The Manipur Chief Minister's recent statement that there would soon be a minor reshuffle in his Ministry naturally makes one suspect that everything may not be too well in the State's ministerial front. It will be rather too naïve on his part to expect that people will swallow his facile statement that the reshuffle is meant only to tone up the administration. With the support of 49 members in his ruling party in a house of 60, Mr Jai Chandra Singh should not have bothered about a reshuffle, even a minor one, if he had been assured of unstinted loyalty of a majority of members in the State's Congress(I) legislature party. Mr Rishang Keishing's unceremonial ouster from Chief Ministership must be too fresh yet to be obliterated from his mind during the 14 months his successor has been in this office. The former CM would only expectedly be biding his time to be back in the reckoning with the State's Assembly election drawing near, probably synchronizing with the Lok Sabha election.

An Odyssey: From the Great Savanna to the Abode of Clouds

By Raka Matchisal A. Sangma

What is the first thing that comes to mind when we hear the word “COAL” or “KOYALA?” Does the word give a positive vibe or a negative one? The connotation varies, of course, with your stand on the popular debate, on whether coal is good or bad. I shall leave that for your free will to ponder upon and decide.

India is a resource hungry developing nation and any sudden jolt to its supply of resources can severely harm its developmental goals. The nation recently breathed a sigh of relief when the US gave it a temporary waiver of six months from CAATSA, as sanctions on Tehran takes effect.

Now the question is, (with all the hullabaloo about illegal mining in Meghalaya going viral) do the coal capitalists minting money from the Abode of Clouds deserve a waiver, or a slap on their businesses with sanctions apart from the NGT ban? Although the matter is already knee-deep in controversies, with the opposition taking swings at the incumbent at every chance it gets, for this particular discussion let us stay aloof from political interpretations and look at it from a layman's point of view. Let us try to demystify the ‘whataboutaries’ of this hydrocarbon which rendered SRK speech impaired in Bollywood’s Koyla movie.

Did someone say Coal Mafias? I beg to differ.

So are you telling me that they conduct their shady business with ‘The Godfather’ soundtrack playing in the background? It sounds rather preposterous! Do you require high-tech devices or a mastermind detective to smoke them out of their holes? Of course not! Coal is not being transported virtually, or by air, or ferried via water, or by any phantom medium. Here’s a revelation. The black gold is being transported by road and even school children can point them out. There is no need for Sherlock Holmes, Hercules Poirot, or Nancy Drew to solve the coal mess in the state. It’s safe to assume that the state

police are caught up in a Scooby Doo mystery case. You all know how every mystery unveils in that cartoon. Unmask the monsters, and you’ll find ordinary people.

How about we call them “Disasters” instead? (Sarcasm intended)

Since the medical expenses for Agnes Kharshiing and her associate Amita Sangma who were attacked by the supposed mafias were covered by the Disaster Management Corpus Fund, we might as well brand the perpetrators as a “Disaster.” Let us add more substance to it.

The Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT), which is an International Disasters Database by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), has laid down certain criteria, of which at least one needs to be fulfilled, for an event to be entered as a disaster in the database:

a) Ten (10) or more people reported killed

b) Hundred (100) or more people reported affected

c) Declaration of a state of emergency

d) Call for international assistance

Do the activities of the supposed mafias meet any or at least one of the above criteria? If so, then the “Coal Mafias” need to be rechristened as a “Disaster,” and for them and for their activities, the state needs to come up with a comprehensive Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategy. To mitigate, to be prepared for, to respond and to recover from the impacts.

The Savanna Principle

“The Savanna Principle is a term in Psychology, coined by Satoshi Kanazawa for the principle that human behaviour remaining to some extent adapted to the ancestral environment of early Homo in the savanna may lead to problems in a modern (Industrial or post-Industrial) environment.” Now the entire reluctance

TO THE EDITOR

Cult of silence everywhere

Editor,

The labourers trapped in the coal mines are not from the local Khasi or Jaintia community hence there is a studied silence on the issue. Most of the so-called NGOs remain silent when it comes to illegal coal mining. Have we heard them condemning the assault on Messrs Agnes and Amita? Why this silence? Is it not because the coal money funds most NGOs? Then why do there same NGOs pretend to take up some issues and to ignore others and why do the people have so much faith on them? Their dictum of these so-called NGOs is – if the trade is carried out by locals there can be nothing illegal about it. In short, in their books a local can break all the rules and even make their own rules.

And what about the Government of the day? What is their stand? Do they support coal mining even if it is carried out vide the rat hole method so long as some amount accrues to their party kitty. Obviously all political parties will need money for the district council elections in 2019. And what is the source but coal or forced donation from the business lobby! And since business too is not doing too well there will not be enough money to throw around for votes. We really have to watch how the

forthcoming elections will pan out. And don’t forget there is also the Lok Sabha elections next year. Although the Lok Sabha elections are not as expensive as the Assembly elections money is still the legal tender. The Congress candidate Vincent Pala from Shillong Parliamentary Constituency has his own resources but what about the NPP candidate from Tura? Coal money is perhaps the only source of funding that election. Also what about the BJP and the UDP candidate from Shillong? It will be a fight worth watching what with very little money infused into the electoral system..

And as far as our humanitarian values go, forget it..We maybe be Christians but out we still judge people in tragedies by their communities and religions. What a hue and cry would have been raised if those trapped in the mines were from the “Jaidbryniew.” Mea culpa..

Yours etc.,
RKharmalki,
Via email

Why the Congress returned

Editor,

This refers to the article, "Achhe din backfires" by Shivaji Sarkar (ST, December 14, 2018). In the recent assembly elections,

of certain individuals or groups to abandon traditional rat-hole mining and shift to a more scientific, sustainable and safe mining practices can be observed under this principle. The NGT’s “interim ban” should be acknowledged as temporary until a new mining policy materialises. Also, let us not be biased. The same principle applies to both the polar opposites. The ones who are against the ban and the ones who are blindly supporting it.

The Great Odyssey

Notwithstanding all the bad press, scandals and controversies surrounding coal, the promises of this hydrocarbon and its potential to take the state’s developmental agenda forward cannot be pigeon-holed. Meghalaya cannot make colossal investments to bring futuristic clean technology in its current state, but a transparent, more efficient and sustainable use of coal and all its other blessed resources can give it the leverage it needs to be a self sustaining state. Also the shift from the Congress’s Look East Policy to the BJP’s Act East Policy, should inspire Meghalaya not only to look beyond its periphery, but take advantage of its strategic location and start initiating its very own Act South Policy. Let this be the Great Odyssey of our state and make a paradigm shift from the savanna, to not just have a smart capital city, but a smart state as a whole.

Moving Forward: Coal Divestment

The contents of this article may seem to be soft or diplomatic, but it is done so as to bridge the gap in the society, that has been so polarised by the debate on coal. One cannot deny that the fossil fuel resources have helped achieve wonders, but at the same time, a transition from fossil fuels to renewable sources of energy needs to be prioritised. In the words of Durwood Zaelke, the president of the Institute for Governance and

Sustainable Development, “In the climate emergency we’re now in, SLOW SUCCESS IS NO SUCCESS.” This demands for a move towards a low carbon economy. This calls for a steady coal divestment.

The climate of suspicion, seeded by the coal wave needs to be addressed by the people of conscience. A surgical strike on the “coal mafias” or “Disaster Lobbyists” or whatever you want to call these plunderers needs to be carried out. If the atrocities committed by the resource looters, the global climate emergency, the humanitarian crisis of the “rat-hole minors,” seem too complicated to comprehend, we need not look forward, but to history. Lest we forget, let us be reminded that Meghalaya is located in Seismic Zone-V, which covers the areas with the highest risks. There is a lot to learn from the tragedy of the devastating 1897 Shillong earthquake. The major earthquake had a magnitude of 8.7 on the Richter Scale. It is said that the tremors were 50 times powerful than the ones that hit San Francisco on the 17th of October, 1989. The violent earthquake happened on the 12th of June at around 5:11pm and lasted for around 3 minutes. Meghalaya was still a part of Assam and the final death toll was estimated around 1,542 people, including those 600 people who lost their lives due to a landslide in Cherrapunjee. Now imagine an earthquake of similar magnitude, keeping in mind the population and infrastructure that has beefed up since 1897, as well as the mining activities that have further weakened the geography of the state. The consequences will be unfathomable. For it is not a question of “if” (the earthquake hits), but “when.”

(The writer is Alumnus of Jamsetji Tata School of Disaster Studies, TISS, Mumbai and an environmental conservation enthusiast who is deeply worried over the present reality of socio-environmental mess in which Meghalaya is in.)

in the 2014 Parliamentary election with the help of secular and inclusive slogans like toilet over temple and sabka sath, sabka vikas. But the people of our country got disillusioned by watching the mindless game of name changing, cow prioritising and spending a bomb for statue building while ignoring its election pledge of solving unemployment, agrarian and corruption issues.

On corruption, people cannot like the bottom - tight - top - loose kind of approach. While policies like demonetisation took the water away for small fries, big crocodiles happily survived on the land without water with the help of plastic money. On the other hand, soft dealing with macro bank loan defaulters and the hard approach on farm loans does not go down well with the farmers. Finally, Congress President Rahul Gandhi’s constant questioning of why the ruling party has been fighting shy of setting up of a Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Rafael deal seems to have given him an electoral dividend.

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

Loan waivers can’t increase farm income Well-directed policies required to improve plight of farmers

By Nilanjan Banik

In recent past, a lot has been written about farm loan waivers. Studies have pointed out loan waiver programmes do not make much economic sense (N. Banik (2018) Are Loan Waivers a Panacea for Rural Distress? Economic and Political Weekly). However, if current political discourse is any indication then loan waiver is the flavour of the month.

If not the farm loan waivers, what else to do to increase farm incomes? During the year following loan waivers, small farmers lose out on three counts: lower access to formal loan, falling agricultural revenue because of higher informal loan cost, and falling agricultural productivity. This has wider implication on income distribution. As many as 83 per cent of the farmers in India are marginal and small-type, with less than 2 hectares of landholding. Although these groups qualify for loan waivers, however, they don’t get the benefit as they do not access formal (read bank) loans.

The median annual income of these farmers is around \$290, which is barely two months’ minimum wage in Mumbai, the commercial capital of India. What interventions, then, could be more helpful in increasing farm income in India? After all, the current government wants to double farm income by 2022-2023 over the base year of 2015-2016.

During 2015–2016, per-capita farm income was \$1,693 per annum (in current price). To double farm income by 2022–2023 it will require agriculture output to grow at 10.4 per cent annually. However, at present, the agriculture output is growing at around 3 per cent annually. At this pace, it will take 25 years to double farmers’ income. To boost an increase in farmers’ income, there could be several other interventions.

Building cold storage and warehouses: India is one of the largest producers of agricultural perishables and yet nearly 20 per cent of India’s fresh produce is wasted because of lack of adequate cold storage facilities. Reducing waste of perishable fruits,

vegetables, and milk that command higher market prices than staple crops will augment farm income. Most small farmers do not risk growing perishable crops. Because of the lack of storage facilities, small and marginal farmers seldom venture to grow high-value crops. Only 22.2 per cent of marginal farmers (with less than one hectare of landholding size) and 23.6 per cent of small farmers (between one and two hectares of landholding size) grow high-value crops. Small and marginal farmers are likely to gain from shifting to high-value crops, after which the likelihood of a farmer being poor will be 3-7 per cent lower.

Linking domestic market with international market: The present government has increased budgetary allocation for agriculture sector, up from \$17.04 billion (between 2009 and 2014) to \$ 30 billion (between 2014 and 2019). This has led to an increase in food and livestock production. For instance, pulse production has increased on average by 10.5 per cent annually. Production of fish, milk, and egg has increased by 26 per cent, 24 per cent, and 25 per cent respectively. Although India allowed exports of livestock, the typical farm sector outputs such as rice, wheat, and other dietary items are only restrictively allowed. India also has higher import duties in comparison to the ASEAN level when it comes to agricultural products. In

short, trade in agriculture items is restricted to tame domestic price, enable food security, and ensure the livelihood of Indian farmers. However, a restricted agriculture market and lack of adequate storage facilities often lead to crop output getting wasted. Food grain production in India touched an all-time high of 280 million tonnes during 2017-2018, and there is need to follow a liberal trade policy and put in place necessary infrastructures to facilitate exports. For instance, a necessary condition for exports is to have testing facilities that provide sanitary and phytosanitary certification. Unfortunately, the number of such testing facilities is limited. Likewise, agriculture tariffs should be brought down to allow imports at the time of shortage.

S u p p l y - s i d e interventions: Building rural infrastructures such as village electrification and canals will help. The fact that irrigation coverage on small landholding size is less than 40 per cent means crop failures in bad rainfall years. Likewise, a reform in the APMC Act is required. In a supply chain examination study involving trade in potatoes, it was found that middlemen can charge a commission of up to a staggering 70 per cent. For example, during June 2017 in the Azadpur and Ghazipur markets of Delhi, the middlemen were selling a common variety of potatoes at 7-9 cents per kilogram. If these rates were being offered to the farmers they should have realized between \$3.5 and \$5 for a 50- kilogram sack. However, in reality, the maximum price the farmers were offered was \$1.4 for a 50-kilogram sack. Hence, most often farmers do not know the actual market prices of the commodities and it is the middlemen who siphon off most of the profits. The lack of reforms in the APMC Act prevents small farmers to sell directly to supermarkets, exporters, and agro-processors (thereby, enhancing their income).

Financial literacy: Lack of financial awareness has affected the growth and deepening of agriculture finance markets. The National Centre for Financial Education (NCFE) conducted India’s first-ever national benchmark survey of Financial Literacy and Financial Inclusion in 2015, which captured a broad array of information from 76,762 respondents. The survey highlighted that the farmers are not aware of basic financial products. For example, less than 1.67 per cent of the farmers are aware of crop insurance products. The corresponding numbers for cattle/livestock insurance and agricultural futures are 0.66 per cent and 0.38 per cent respectively.

Even introduction of e-mandis — an online market where farmers can bypass the middlemen and sell directly to the retailers — are helping them a little. Evidence from Rajasthan suggests that because of the introduction of an e-market, farmers witnessed a price premium of 13 per cent. However, at present, e-mandis are catering to only 7 per cent of all Indian farmers and handles only around 2 per cent of the total value of the country’s agricultural output. In conclusion, waivers of farm loans may help political parties win an election once. For them to win an election twice, however, it is important to undertake these aforementioned policies measures that will make a real difference to the life of poor farmers. (IPA Service)

(The writer is Professor, Bennett University, Greater Noida.)

“ A Supreme Court justice needs to understand that he is not a politician. He needs to understand that the judiciary is a passive branch of government. His decisions should not proactively seek to set policy. ”

--- Thomas Rex Lee

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.130SHILLONG, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2018

The Bulandshahr conundrum

TWO weeks after Inspector Subodh Kumar was killed in a mob violence on December 3rd over alleged cow slaughter in Uttar Pradesh's Bulandshahr, five more people have been arrested of which three were named for cow slaughter. The other two were arrested for their involvement in the mob violence that same day. Ironically the main accused in the killing of the police officer is still at large. The impunity is such that this accused is posting videos from his hide-out. Subodh Kumar's widow who has been inconsolable since her husband died questioned if what her husband had done in investigating the Akhlaq murder case was really worth it when she is now waiting for justice in vain. She and her two sons have accused the Adityanath Government of protecting the killers. The Yogi has meanwhile given a completely new twist to this episode. After three people, Nadeem, Raees and Kala accused of being part of a cow hunting gang were arrested, Adityanath said the mob violence was a political conspiracy against his government which is now 'exposed.'

Such a shallow analysis of the events of December 3, expose the shabby attempt to politicize the entire episode instead of going after those involved in the murder. This is unbecoming of a Chief Minister whose brief is to enforce the rule of law and not to give a political twist to a murder most foul. Adityanath now wants people to thank his government for having found and arrested the cow hunting gang even as the main accused in the gunning down of Inspector Subodh Kumar is still missing. Adityanath has made things worse by calling the murder an "accident" (durghatna)

Yogi Adityanath had been roundly criticised for showing more concern for cows than for human lives when he ordered senior police officials to arrest the cow slaughterers, after the police inspector's murder. The Yogi said that it was the cow carcasses which had provoked the mob violence. Clearly under the BJP regime Uttar Pradesh has returned to lawlessness which was what the Akhilesh Yadav government was accused of earlier on. Restoring the rule of law demands that the government remain non-partisan especially when dealing with law breakers. This is not happening in Uttar Pradesh where cow protectors are more equal than the rest.

LOOKING BACK

June 9, 1989

Bodo extremists kill 2 civilian

Bodo extremists shot dead a woman home guard, near Kokrajhar police station in Assam this morning, an official report said. The victim Rani Basumatary was killed while she was coming to join duty at the Kokrajhar police station. High civil and police officials rushed to the spot and started an investigation. No person has so far been arrested, the report said. Meanwhile, police arrested 17 Bodo extremists from Afagaon under Kokrajhar police station yesterday and recovere done pipe gun and fivecartridges from them. On Sunday the extremists set on fire a high school also in Kokrajhar district, but police with the help of local people extinguished the flames before any damage could done to the school building, the report added.

Inconsequential resignation

We confess we were a little hasty in concluding that the controversy over the location of a Central University in Assam has

afterall ended. The Union State Minister of Education's statement in the Rajya Sabha that it has been allotted to Barak Valley has since met with a prompt Cabinet decision at Dispur disapproving of New Delhi's decision and reiterating the claim for the other valley. There is no evidence either of any further initiative on the part of the Centre to counter this suggestion from the state government, nor any move to introduce a Bill in the Parliament as a follow-up measure flowing from Mr Sahi's announcement. The long and busy monsoon sessions of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha are getting to a close but the failure to introduce the expected University Billmay not be for the only reason that the Parliament has since been too much pre-occupied with too many of the more urgent national affairs. In the Barak valley, the Vice-chairman of the nominated Silchar Municipal Board has resigned in protest against, among others, this dilly-dallying on the part of New Delhi.

Who Will Judge the Judges

(In view of the growing discord between the media and the judiciary we reproduce below the article by Fali Nariman renowned jurist and President of the Bar Association of India, for greater clarity on our respective roles. This article was first published in the India Today, Nov 30, 1999 and updated on May 13, 2013).

The profession of law (that includes lawyers and judges) is one in which there is still very little transparency. When enacted laws are abstruse and unclear, we lawyers do little or nothing to educate the public about them. Our clients are, quite deliberately, left ignorant of the 'mumbojumbo' that we utter in courts; the vast majority of people can neither understand the purpose or tenor of prolix legal proceedings nor can they comprehend the drift of judgments (often, of enormous length) handed down from the bench. Under our Constitution, the higher judiciary enjoys pride of place-well-deserved no doubt-but its inevitable consequence is to put justices of the high courts and of the Supreme Court on the highest pedestal: on cloud nine.

How are judges appointed? How are they selected and recommended? What are their shortcomings and how are they remedied within the judicial fraternity? And why are judgments sometimes not delivered at all or (more often) interminably delayed? Before the advent of the RTI (and even thereafter), such impertinent queries were met with responses such as: 'It is none of your business to ask us questions' and 'we (the judges) know what is best for the system'. Similar attitudes have been exhibited by the higher judiciary in other parts of the world.

Strange are the ways of providence; sometimes, stranger are the ways of courts! There are no rules and no precise circumstances as to when it can be said that the administration of justice is brought into 'contempt'. Judgments of courts are strewn with pious platitudes that give little guidance to newsmen (and newswomen), editors or commentators. This part of the law of contempt-although necessary in extreme cases-constitutes a standing threat to a cherished Fundamental Right: the freedom of expression. It leaves too much to the predilections of the individual judge (or judges). Even the decisions rendered in contempt cases sometimes give the uncanny feeling that the status of the person who 'scandalizes' the court may well have influenced the ultimate result. In P. N. Duda vs P. Shiv

Shankar (AIR 1988, SC 1208 at 1213), a cabinet minister of the Government of India was exonerated though he had compared the judges of the Supreme Court to 'anti-social elements, foreign exchange violators, bride burners and a whole horde of reactionaries who have found their haven in the Supreme Court'. The court said that the speech of the minister had to be read 'in its proper perspective' and, when so read, it did not bring the administration of justice into disrepute!! But in a later case (also reported)- Mohd. Zahir Khan vs Vijai Singh and Others (AIR 1992, SC 642)-an impetuous (but insignificant) litigant, merely said in a loud voice in court: 'Either I am anti-national or the judges are anti-national.' He was immediately cited for contempt, pronounced guilty and sentenced to undergo simple imprisonment for one month!

In India the higher judiciary has inherent (and almost unbridled) powers of contempt-even beyond laws enacted by Parliament. And for that reason, the media and the whole lot of information-seeking agencies- not sure of how the contempt law will be interpreted- are tight-lipped. No one dares come out with what they believe to be the FACTS (in any matter pertaining to judges or the administration of justice) even though the law (amending the Contempt of Courts Act 1971) now permits 'justification by truth' as a valid defence. But let a complaint be made even by a responsible individual against a reputedly corrupt judge in the higher judiciary, and no newspaper will publish it! Give the newspaper as much proof or evidence as you will- it will still not publish anything!

Regrettably-with a few notable exceptions-the fraternity of justices in the higher judiciary in India tend to stick together when anyone speaks of any wrongdoing about one of them-alas, even when some of its members themselves entertain a shrewd suspicion of some wrongdoing! There pervades, in the higher echelons of the judiciary, what I would characterize as a spirit of trade unionism. Trade unionism amongst lawyers is different. It is also a closed shop but there are many leaks! One instance of wrongdoing about a colleague at the Bar and a dozen other 'lawyer-friends' will spread the word about more such wrongdoings! No, the trade unionism of lawyers is just no match to the trade unionism of judges. The latter close their ranks when one of their own is

By Fali S Nariman

involved.

In 2003, there were unsubstantiated reports about three sitting judges in one of the high courts in South India being found in some shady joint outside Bangalore city. Their reported shenanigans (or 'secret activities') were publicized, but met with instant denials. An independent inquiry into the alleged incident was not immediately ordered by the then chief

cited (by the High Court of Karnataka) in proceedings for contempt of court, they approached the Supreme Court of India for ultimate redress. I was appointed amicus by the court (to assist it to arrive at a decision), and a wise chief justice of India (V. N. Khare)- wise beyond his years-after hearing what I had to say passed an order staying all contempt proceedings initiated by the High Court of Karnataka.

“ The profession of law (that includes lawyers and judges) is one in which there is still very little transparency. When enacted laws are abstruse and unclear, we lawyers do little or nothing to educate the public about them. ”

justice of Karnataka. Instead, contempt proceedings were promptly initiated by the high court against the concerned newspapers that had reported the alleged incident. It was only later-much later-that the chief justice of India set up a high-powered committee consisting of the chief justices of three high courts in the country (Bombay, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala) to look into the incident and report back to him. When this In-

They remain stayed till this day! Meanwhile, the Inquiry Committee of Chief Justices proceeded with a very detailed investigation and its findings were reported to the chief justice of India. Unfortunately, these findings have never been published or publicized. In my view, this was a mistake, because if the finding of the committee was that there was no basis for any of the allegations initially made, the person/persons found

“In 2003, there were unsubstantiated reports about three sitting judges in one of the high courts in South India being found in some shady joint outside Bangalore city. Their reported shenanigans (or 'secret activities') were publicized, but met with instant denials.”

quiry Committee of Chief Justices took up its task, contempt notices had been already issued by the Karnataka High Court to representatives of the media (editors, printers and publishers), so that the latter were not quite sure whether, if they revealed to the committee, what they knew, or what they had heard, it may not be also used as evidence against them as contemptors.

By that time the so-called 'scandal' had been blown out of all proportion-not by fact, but almost entirely by rumour. Everyone-almost everyone- seemed to know (or suspect) what had happened, but no one would tell! The leading national newspapers having been

responsible for making them should have been dealt with severely; this was the only way to clear the fair name of the higher judiciary in Karnataka. 'Sunlight is the best disinfectant', as a former chief justice of India, Justice M.N. Venkatachaliah, always liked to say! But in the absence of a full public disclosure of the report, busybodies assumed the worse, on the facile (and often erroneous) assumption that 'there can be no smoke without fire!' It was definitely in the larger interests of propriety and justice that the report of the committee should have been promptly made public.

The role of the media in India in highlighting judicial corruption in the higher ju-

diciary (or some other wrongdoing of one of its members) has drawn a blank. We have to try different measures to root out 'judicial corruption' (or rather, root out manifest perceptions of it); first of all we must try to shame the (few) wrongdoers.

How do we do this? It is the lawyers who have to do it, not with a view to exposing 'skeletons in the cupboard', but for the good of the institution (the judiciary) and for the cleansing effect that transparency always has. But then, this is, at least for now, foreclosed, because we have to live with that (regrettable) decision of our own apex court in C. Ravichandran Iyer vs A. M. Bhattacharjee (1995), popularly known as Bhattacharjee's case. A. M. Bhattacharjee was chief justice of the Bombay High Court (from April 1994 to April 1995), and allegations about his 'wrongdoings' (along with those of one other high court judge in Bombay at the time) became (as the expression goes) 'the talk of the town'. The Bombay Bar Association (under its then president, senior advocate I. M. Chagla) took up the matter, and a resolution was passed by the association requesting Chief Justice Bhattacharjee to demit his office as a judge in the interest of the institution. Bhattacharjee resisted. In court proceedings initiated thereafter, a bench of two judges of the Supreme Court (Justices K. Ramaswamy and B. L. Hansaria) said (in Bhattacharjee's case) that even associations of lawyers could not on their own take up matters and pass such resolutions with regard to allegations of corruption against sitting judges. The bench also said that the associations must first take up the matter with the chief justice of the high court and, if there is no redress, then with the chief justice of India and await a response for a 'reasonable period'. But what constitutes a 'reasonable period'? And what if the chief justice of India failed to respond? The bench of two judges gave no answer. In my view, the judgment in Bhattacharjee is a dampener to transparency in cases of 'perceived judicial corruption' but it remains declared law and operates-with 'chilling effect' (as the popular American expression goes).

In Bhattacharjee's case, the judgment of the Supreme Court noted (with approval) the opinion of Harry T. Edwards, chief judge of the US Court of Appeals of the District of Columbia. He was at one time chairman of what is known as the Judicial Council in the United States, a statutory body set up by the US Congress for disciplining federal judges (who are appointed for life). Many years ago, when a team of Indian judges and lawyers (under the aegis of the Indo-US Legal Forum) had been invited to Washington D.C., I had visited Harry Edwards in his court. It was he who told me how the Judicial Council in the USA (of which he was one of the twelve members) dealt with all manner of charges against all manner of judges (including his own colleagues, i.e., federal judges). When litigants or lawyers there made complaints against sitting judges, the complaints were investigated and the result of the investigation was pronounced upon in open court. He handed me a judgment of his own with respect to a colleague (whom I later saw sitting on the bench with him) where a litigant had made certain allegations against that judge about his conduct in a case that had been previously heard. The allegations were investigated and dealt with by a speaking order in a judgment that was printed and widely circulated. There were no hard feelings amongst the judges. The in-house procedure in the United States is both open and transparent.

It was in Bhattacharjee's case that the bench of two judges quoted from an article written by Chief Judge Harry T. Edwards: Ideal of judicial independence is not compromised when judges are monitored and regulated by their own peers. This limited system of judicial self-regulation presents no constitutional dilemma as long as the removal power remains with Congress. I argue that the judiciary alone should monitor this bad behaviour through a system of self-regulation [emphasis added]. True. But we in India have so far lacked a system of transparent 'judicial self-regulation'. The concluding paragraph in the judgment in Bhattacharjee's case has told us why:

It would thus be seen that [the] yawning gap between proved misbehaviour and bad conduct inconsistent with the high office on the part of a non-cooperating Judge/Chief Justice of a High Court could be disciplined by self-regulation through in-house procedure. This in-house procedure would fill in the constitutional gap and would yield salutary effect. Unfortunately, recourse to this procedure was not taken in the case at hand, may be, because of absence of legal sanction to such a procedure [emphasis added].

(By arrangement with India Today)

then. The wires snap even with light winds, during rains and in almost all types of weather causing casualties and even threat to public life. Only God knows about the quality of the said wires. I have to suggest here on behalf of all the consumers that if this Power Company is unable to provide the basic amenities to its consumers then why not hand over the running of this Company to a private party? MeDCL is not doing charity. In fact they are collecting higher amounts from the consumers by installing the new metres that give higher readings compared to the earlier ones. Finally, water, electricity and telephone are the basic necessities of life and the consumers do not any compromise on these.

Yours etc,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Dr B Dhar
Shillong -3

Loan waiver needed

Editor,

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

“Fine words and an insinuating appearance are seldom associated with true virtue.”
--- Confucius

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.131SHILLONG, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2018

Back to Farmers

IT would seem, for a change, that farmers are back in the reckoning. The newly installed Congress government in Madhya Pradesh quickly announced a loan waiver to farmers for up to two lakh rupees, after the present round of assembly polls has brought rural distress to centre-stage. A change in perception was quickly reinforced by Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, who said the new governments in both Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh would follow suit. Gandhi’s offer is also that this would be the pitch on which the Congress would approach the Lok Sabha polls. Farmers across the country might or might not be enthused. For, many such promises in the past had not materialised. Notably, there has been more of crocodile tears for farmers than real help coming their way. A question might be raised as to why farmers and the entire rural economy are in such a pitiable state even after the same Congress party wielded power for six decades. The NDA led by the BJP too held power for repeated terms. All these did not lead to a noticeable strengthening of the rural economy. Farmer suicides are one too many, though not all of these might be due to crop loss or loan distress. As per estimates, 45 farmers commit suicide every day, or 12,000 farmers a year. At least, most of these could be avoided if there are effective mechanisms to help farmers with crop loss due to natural or other calamities, or if banks help them more liberally with loans and repayment provisions.

A crop loss is no small matter. Fact is, there is not even a proper pricing mechanism or distribution system at work to help small farmers who form the bulk of our population. Big talks by the Modi government too did not translate themselves into action. Since the 1990s, or since the age of liberalization, banks are reticent about extending loans to small and medium farmers. Chief minister Kamal Nath has a point when he asked why farm loans could not be written off when big loans by big businesses were written off. The Niti Ayog’s contention in this matter is worth noting. Its take is that only 10 to 15 per cent of the farmers in backward states could benefit out of loan waivers, termed a “palliative” for temporary relief rather than a long-term solution or redressal mechanism. Going round and round, and reaching nowhere, will not help. Meaningful help should be at hand to farmers which will translate itself into strengthening the rural sector as a whole.

The Judiciary, the Citizen, the Journalist and the Law

“Patience and gravity of hearing is an essential part of justice; and an over-speaking judge is no well-tuned cymbal. It is no grace to a judge first to find that which he might have heard in due time from the bar; or to show quickness of conceit in cutting off evidence or counsel too short, or to prevent information by questions, though pertinent.” - Francis Bacon, Essays on Counsels Civil or Moral; Of Judicature.

AG Noorani in his article, ‘Media and the Judiciary’ (Frontline, April 28, 2018) while commenting on the defamation case filed by Jay Shah against the web news portal “The Wire,” and the gratuitous comments passed by Chief Justice Dipak Mishra on the news portal said, “The judge’s seat is not a bully pulpit for a judge to embark on such an exercise at a critical stage of the proceedings while admitting its irrelevance to the case in hand. Is there any precedent in any apex court the world over for such a tirade by a judge and one admittedly unrelated to the case before him? Some have a wrong notion of the press; the failing affects judges, ministers and politicians. It is not a poor country cousin to be scolded at whim. It is the Fourth Estate, equal to the other three— executive, legislature and the judiciary. The judiciary lays down the law; the executive enforces it; the legislature makes laws. The press has a right and a duty to keep a vigil on all three.”

The media is not infallible in the same manner that judges and the judiciary too are prone to error. Judicial orders by lower courts are overturned by higher courts after all the facts have been placed in their correct perspective and after applying a higher degree of scrutiny. As part of media practice, if a person or institution is aggrieved by a particular news report (which is not prejudiced and based on facts as we are able to collate at the moment), the norm is for the person or institution to counter the report with a rejoinder. Only if the media fails to publish the rejoinder do people move court. One wonders then why the judiciary is so touchy about any criticism of its orders. If the Executive, the Legislature and the Press are critiqued relentlessly and also censured by the Judiciary, then why should their lordships be beyond criticism?

There are many who find the media offensive, intrusive and even impudent. Fortunately

By Patricia Mukhim

those are few compared to the large majority that need information to understand how institutions of democracy are functioning. Only those with vested interests and people who wield power don’t wish to be held accountable and resent media intrusion. But as someone rightly said, the media are the ‘ants in the pants’ of all those in the three other pillars that make the Indian democracy. So excuse us if we sometimes sting in the wrong places. But we are here to stay and so it’s best to accept the fact that we cannot be shouted at; not in an open court.

To help understand the role of media, one must read Edmund Burke the Irish statesman and political theorist who famously said, “There are Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters’ Gallery yonder, there sits a Fourth Estate, more important by far than they all.” Also let me add Thomas Babington Macaulay, the British historian who wrote: “The gallery in which the reporters sit has become a fourth estate of the realm.” And then there’s Lord Denning who says, “In every court in England you will, I believe, find a newspaper reporter ... He notes all that goes on and makes a fair and accurate report of it ... He is, I verily believe, the watchdog of justice... He [the judge] will be more anxious to give a correct decision if he knows that his reasons must justify themselves at the bar of public opinion.... If there is any misconduct on [his] part, any bias or prejudice, there is a reporter to keep an eye on him.”

Shimon Shetreat author of ‘Judges on Trial’ (1977) says, “The importance of the press in checking judicial conduct cannot be exaggerated. It is to be noted that only the press constantly and publicly criticises judicial conduct.”

While in India only jurists like Soli Sorajbee, Fali Nariman and AG Noorani who have transcended all judicial censure are able to write freely about the conduct of judges and to openly critique the Indian Judicial system; in other democracies the judiciary is regularly questioned. For instance, the Scottish jurist, James Dalrymple collected about nine cases of trial judges who made

silly or offensive remarks and wrote of them in *The Sunday Times* with scathing remarks. He says, “The theory is that beneath the ludicrous half-a-pound of permed horsehair there should lie a mind free of prejudice and capable of cool judgment. At best there should be old-fashioned common sense. Yet, again and again, we see glaring examples that this is not the case with some of the judges who control our courts. A few are guilty of jarring errors of judgment. Others, through comments of appalling crassness, seem to affront human reason. From the heights of buffoonery to the dark depths of gross prejudice, they blur out their inanities. ... Corruption is almost unknown in the brotherhood of judges, but stupidity, crassness and blatant prejudice—especially against women—are not.”

The judiciary must inspire public confidence. If people present in a courtroom feel intimidated because of the conduct of a judge then the judiciary would have failed to serve its purpose. Noorani says it is not an offence in law for the Bar or the press or any person or organisation to ask a judge to retire. The crucial test is public confidence. Shetreat also maintains that if a judge behaved in a way which seriously impaired public confidence in him, he would no longer be able to administer justice and therefore should leave the bench.” But Lord Denning’s pithy observations are intuitive. He says, “A judge whose conduct invited people to ask ‘who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?’ should “not be tolerated on the bench.”

In his book Dilemma of Democracy: Diagnosis and Prescription, British barrister and Conservative politician, Lord Hailsham, gave this advice to the justices: ‘So long as you do not find your private home invaded or your personal privacy intruded upon do not treat the press as your enemy. What goes on in court is public property and it is not merely their right but their duty to report and it is their right and very often their duty to comment. Private justice is almost always a denial of justice.”

It is a pity indeed that while India adopted the British judicial system and parliamentary system, lock stock and barrel and the country has clung on to the

vestiges of power that are ill-suited to a democracy when the Brits have given up many of the superfluous trappings of power because they are under constant scrutiny by the citizenry. Our courtrooms are designed in a manner that intimidates. The judge sits on a pedestal while those who appear before him/her have to be seated much below. So too the legal counsels. Isn’t everyone an equal citizen inside the courtroom with the judge being the first among equals? But Indians who are elected to rule this country have never ever wanted to let go off the trappings of power and the creature comforts that come with such power.

In conclusion, one must admit that the most important work of the judiciary is building trust in the justice system. It is in the judiciary that citizens expect to be treated equal irrespective of their stature in society. Hence along with super- intelligence to interpret the Constitution of this country the justices are also expected to carry themselves with dignity and to maintain the decorum of the courts. People come to the court to seek justice but if they are bullied and hauled over the coals even before any guilt against them is established then perhaps expecting justice from such a court would be a far cry. Some judges are in the habit of turning a hearing into a personal attack on the dignity and self esteem of those that appear before them. Why would a judge ask for the qualification of any person in order to establish the facts of the case before him? Does qualification or the lack of it render a person guilty or not guilty of what he/she is accused of? And as for journalism, the only qualification needed is (a) the passion to get a story out which is in the larger public interest (b) a deep sense of curiosity and therefore the attitude of questioning until one arrives at the best version of the truth (c) the ability to write well and to listen with empathy especially while doing stories with human interest stories (d) to give voice to the voiceless. And a degree in journalism may not necessarily equip a person with the above qualities.

The preamble of the Press Council of India says, “The fundamental objective of journalism is to serve the people with news, views, comments and information on matters of public interest in a fair, accurate, unbiased, sober and decent manner.” Period.

Leadership crisis in the Khasi-Pnar Society

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

The greater challenge for a country, state or a community is when there is a state of lawlessness and lack of good leadership at the top levels of governance. And this is exactly the situation that we are facing today in our Khasi-Pnar society. And who could possibly feel the direct threat and impact of this situation are the innocent citizens who are not politically or materialistically ambitious in life. From various incidences that have happened in the state recently and during the past few years, we see the breakdown of the rule of law and flouting of the law despite many prohibitions that are in place which I need not elaborate. Even though we always stake claims on customary laws that govern our society, they are mostly in oral form lacking the appropriate authority and power of modern jurisprudence. And the fact that the Khasis never had their own scripts is just another analogy to indicate the nature of hesitation of the people to come under any contract law or agreement but to rely solely on the conscience and conduct of the person, which is not suitable for the administration of justice in a modern state.

On the issue of leadership crisis, this is not a new development but is as old as the community itself. The primary reasons are perhaps that the Khasis have migrated to these hills not as a whole bunch of community or tribe but as individual clans in different times and seasons. And if this is the case then obviously there were frequent conflicts and misunderstandings on governance, land for settlement, etc. Hence, in some instances, these problems have percolated to every subsequent generation and its nature is also being inherited by many individuals and groups till date. But the prominent among these was on who should be the in leading roles because all clans are equal in status. Therefore, the most ideal situation is to have a third person to preside over them such as the ‘Chieftain’ or the ‘Syiem’. Thus in most cases the Syiem is always from outside their circle or an outsider.

As a community we have not been able to raise good leaders for the society because we are so divided politically and culturally into various groups of different thoughts and ideologies which is a result of that crisis. And the reason why I am saying this is because I do not see any capable Chief Minister from among the Khasi-Pnar community as of now and in the near future. The root of the problem lies in the fact that people at large have never understood the basic principles and values of leadership. And those who think and see themselves as leaders are relying exclusively on external factors such as finance, qualification and strategies which can be easily acquired but yet are not intrinsic human characters that will define true leadership. Self-styled leaders may be plenty but genuine and systematic leadership comes from the system within. We have therefore failed as a community and the state as a whole in this aspect.

Apart from this traditional nature, another major modern factor that has contributed immensely to this ongoing leadership crisis is the exemption of this topic from the entire educational curriculum. Right from the very inception of our educational system, this issue was perceived as academically irrelevant and unnecessary. The reason I am saying this is because nowhere in the past, during our school and college days have we ever come across the term leadership. And the primary goal of education was and is to get a government job at any cost in any capacity be it technical, clerical, secretarial and teaching as a security for life. Leadership is such a term which is strange and unfamiliar to the learning community during the past generations and in the present as well. Therefore, there is a lack of leadership skills in every department and sector of governance to ignite the mechanism of growth and development. Leadership et al is only learned in other courses of higher studies and prominently in the Management Institutes. Thank God for such institutions that are now available in our state but how many students from the native state are getting the privilege to enroll in these institutions. The CBSE on the other hand has gone much ahead by introducing leadership right from the primary level. This is outstanding because the opportunity to experience and taste the idea, concepts and challenges of leadership should begin from a very early age. Here again we can question the wisdom of our education policy and the competency therein in the mission and vision to shape the lives of our children and the future generation.

Look at the political parties that are functioning in our state and their leaders. Do we have any hope on any of them? They are there only for the sake of power and position during elections and when they lose the elections they just vanish into thin air. I just happened to watch a programme in a local TV channel attended by our Deputy Chief Minister as Chief Guest on the anniversary celebration of one local church where he unfortunately said, ‘Katba nang bun ki balang, katta nang bun ki jingsniew’ (the more churches, the more the crimes). What a silly statement from the Deputy CM! Does he mean to say that churches are propagating crimes? As a responsible person he should have put things the other way round. Just because he is in a position of power he has no authority to define things lavishly. It is here that leadership is also like an image that reflects the entire quality of an individual because a simple statement may ruin and damage the whole community thereby hurting the sentiments of many sincere adherents.

We always blame lack of unity for the sorry state of affairs, but in fact unity is the synchronization of each and every effort where we are all components of that effort. The concept of leadership as perceived by many especially the rural population is the strength of financial muscles. What a pathetic situation when money decides who gets elected and who forms the government. So what can we expect from people who pay money for votes? Nothing much, except that they will do all they can to recover their investment in the next five year. Therefore, there is an immediate need to inculcate the values and qualities of leadership right from the primary level of schooling in order to build the state and community for the future.

TO THE EDITOR

Judge, Judge Yourself!

Editor,
The reprinted editorial “Who Will Judge the Judges” (ST, Dec 19, 2019), is a timely reminder to the government, citizenry and the judiciary itself. It is written by none other than Fali Nariman, the Harvard-educated lawyer, who at the time of authorship was a practicing lawyer in the Supreme Court. Since then he has been appointed to the bench of the apex court, one of the very few Supreme Court judges who has been elevated directly from the Bar. Having been both lawyer and judge, he has a privileged and authoritative position.
From this article it is eminently clear that there are no effective procedures to evaluate the performance or probity of judges. The policy of self-regulation has been shown time and again to be a dead horse. So journalists or the ordinary citizen has no recourse, when a judge does wrong. The accusation of ‘contempt of court’ is repeatedly misused and redress or remedy is well-nigh impossible. Even the

most prestigious media houses usually give wrongdoing by judges a wide berth, knowing that charges of contempt are impossible to counter argue.
Journalists are soft targets. We expect them not only to report the facts, but also provide us with analysis and commentary. Politicians love to hobnob with prominent journalists but are quick to vilify the media. Trump’s meme of ‘fake news’ is a convenient slogan. The White House recently revoked the press pass of a CNN correspondent because he asked uncomfortable questions. Worse still, a journalist in Manipur has been imprisoned for a year for year for criticizing the state government. Even if he used offensive language, that is not cause for jail time. Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel, according to Samuel Johnson, and some politicians fit the bill by accusing critics of sedition.
But we expect the judiciary to generally uphold the profession of journalism, as the fourth estate provides balance to the functioning of democracy. But thin-skinned judges sometimes dispense with propriety when their selfish and self-centered impulses are exposed.

Journalists are hauled before the court, only to be berated and humiliated. The substance of the accusation is given a peremptory go-bye. Judges seem to be above the law.
Some are not averse to political ambitions. With the recent conviction of Sajjan Kumar, the role of Justice Ranganath Mishra is once again exposed. He presided over an inquiry commission that whitewashed the perpetrators of the pogrom that murdered 2700 Sikhs. After retirement he joined the Congress Party and was rewarded with a Rajya Sabha seat. Need anymore be said.
This oft-quoted aphorism by George Bernard Shaw comes to mind: “Every profession is a conspiracy against the laity”. Even the medical profession is called to account, “Physician, heal thyself”. It’s time we came up with something similar for judges.
Yours etc.,
Glenn C. Kharkongor,
Via email

Wanted Freedom of the Press
Editor,
Apropos the show-cause

notice by the High Court to the Shillong Times editor and publisher for an informative news report based on Justice SR Sen’s Court Order on providing various perks and facilities to retired judges and their family members went viral as the latest news. This Order issued by a single-bench presided by Justice Sen reads that the Court will be compelled to take suo moto contempt against the officers if not complied within a week. Justice Sen is to retire in March 2019.
After going through the Second National Judicial Pay Commission July 2018 and the 7th Central Pay Commission report, it is obvious that there is a conflict of interest and Justice Sen would profit directly from his decision.
The question here is, why Justice Sen did not recuse himself but instead issued a Show Cause Notice to the journalists who discovered this misconduct? I have often heard that Justices here in Shillong compare themselves to God and Kings and tried living like one. “The King can do no wrong” they think without realizing that it is the British

Constitutional Principle and is not applicable in a democratic republic.
In everyone’s opinion, the news report of The Shillong Times is not derogatory, baseless or an attempt to malign the Court. It is very much within the Fundamental Right of Free Speech and Expression. Anyone can get a copy of the Order and read it for themselves.
In recent times there has been a significant increase of cases where journalists have been threatened, intimidated and even killed. The rule of law can be provided only by a strong, dedicated judiciary but when we hear that on December 13, Ms Mukhim who was asked to appear in person before Justice Sen was asked about her educational qualifications and on being told that she is BA (Hons), B.Ed, the Judge in the open Court said “you are not fit to be a journalist, not qualified.” She was also asked who appointed her. On being told that the newspaper management did, the Judge retorted, “The management should also be put in.” In a democratic country of written Constitution where

Judges ought to be careful in authoring words and expression, the tyrannical behavior of the Judge makes one feel like we are living in Uganda – the land of Idi Amin where till today Human Rights Watch still reports about such behaviors of the political rulers of that country who control all media by simply asking the educational qualification of the journalists who run the media.

Freedom of speech and expression is a fundamental right under article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India which includes freedom of the press and circulation.
Justice Sen has passed some landmark judgments that this Court has ever seen but what a shame that his last days will vitiate all of that only to walk out vanquished and sink into oblivion.

Yours etc.,
Febrienna Syiemlieh,
Via email

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

“ *The judges, who breach, violate and break the concept of the constitution and law; they are not fair, to society, even to themselves. They just put the mask on their faces as the judge. However, the history is their judge that does not ignore the reality.* ”

--- Ehsan Sehgal

The Shillong Times

Vol No: L.XI No.132SHILLONG, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2018

Telangana Prospects

IN the Telangana assembly elections held this month, the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) swept the polls. It has now brought forward the idea of a non - BJP, non - Congress front ahead of the parliamentary elections in 2019. The proposed group has been called a neutral front. TRS Lok Sabha MP Kalva Kuntia Kavitha said the BJP- led NDA had failed miserably to keep its promises. At the same time she ruled out an alliance with the Congress- led UPA. The TRS is working for a coalition that will be free of both big parties. It does not want to be team B of a big alliance. It wishes to be team B of the Indian people. It is looking forward to the formation of a third force. One wonders if she has MNF in Mizoram and possibly the Trinamool Congress in mind. Kavitha has pitched for regional parties to come together. She hopes that regional parties will pay a bigger role in national politics in the coming months. Led by her father Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao of the TRS, her party, she hoped, would forge an alliance with parties which are not comfortable with either the BJP or the Congress. The TRS does not warm up to the idea of Rahul Gandhi as the Congress Prime Ministerial Candidate. His father, Rajiv Gandhi opposed the creation of Telangana when he was Prime Minister. Two other strong regional parties the Trinamool Congress and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) also objected to Rahul Gandhi's projection as the future Prime Minister.

The revival of talks for a third group by the TRS points to the developments. First it indicates K Chandrasekhar Rao's intention of having a hand in national politics much the same way as Mamata Banerjee. He proposes to leave the state to Rama Rao; his son. Dynastic succession seems endemic in Indian politics. There is a Congress revival on with victory in three states - Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Karnataka and Punjab are under Congress rule. Kerala is ruled by the CPI (M) in alliance with the Congress. It appears that a pro - Congress wave is sweeping over a large part of the country. A third group however favours the BJP as it will split anti- BJP votes. Does someone like Mamata Banerjee want BJP back at the centre?

In any case the quest for a unified political group with a common prime ministerial candidate appears like a futile search at the moment.

TO THE EDITOR

Whither press freedom

Editor,

Apropos "Wanted Freedom of the Press" (Letter to the Editor ST. December 21, 2018) I wish to say that Freedom of the Press comes from Article 19 (1) (a) of the Indian Constitution which guarantees freedom of speech and expression and which also includes Freedom of the press and circulation. I was shocked, amazed and concerned when the Honourable Meghalaya High Court under Justice SR Sen issued a show cause notice to the editor and publisher of The Shillong Times for the news item "When Judges judge for themselves," published by the esteemed daily. I have read the news item and found that it contained no bias, no derogatory remarks or defamation or contempt of court or any of that sort which can be taken exception to or which could constitute defamation or contempt of court . Then why did the judge issue show cause notice to the editor and publisher and as stated by the writer of the letter, the judge had even reprimanded them in his

Court. We fail to understand this development. The news item was based on facts and if there was anything that could be called a comment as such, it was only a fair comment and has no iota of malign or showing contempt of court. We do not see any reason as to why the judge should drag the editor and publisher to the High Court. I appeal to the Honourable Judge to leave the editor and the publisher aside and instead protect and uphold the Freedom of the Press to discharge its democratic duty as the fourth pillar of democracy which is expected of the third pillar of democracy.

Yours etc.
Philip Marwein,
Via email

Judiciary not immune from criticism

Editor,

Criticism and dissent are the nerve centres of democracy. That was why when our Constitution was being written there were several arguments, some very strong, in order to lay

the foundation for free speech and expression. Our founding fathers built the Constitution on the basis of dissent and that is why we dissented against illegal laws and policies of the British and it also why we still value dissent for stalling any legislation if it goes against the welfare of the society and people at large. Criticism of the judiciary is nothing new. It has happened over and over again when judges sought certain mileage for themselves. The beauty of our democracy is that we are able to allow dissent and also to critique the weaknesses in our political, judicial and legislative procedures. Hence there is no contempt when judgments come under media and public scrutiny.

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

REJOINDER

Editor,

I would like to make the following clarification apropos the letter to the editor which appeared on the December 20, 2018 under the heading 'Why this Injustice' written by one B. Mawlong.

1. The Construction

of the New College Building commenced after Building Permission was obtained from MUDA. The Approval is for a G+3 Building.

2. The College did not issue a rejoinder to the earlier letter to the editor as the construction work was according to the Building Plan duly approved by MUDA.

3. The College would never violate any rule or deviate from the Building Plan approved by MUDA.

4. The Building under Construction is on a steep slope. Half of the Building on the rear side is G+3 and the other half of the Building on the front side is G+3. When one views the buildings from the road adjacent to Governor's House they appear to be higher than G+3. In this case, perception is not reality. The conclusion that B. Mawlong came to is not true.

5. We concur with B. Mawlong that a Letter to Editor appeared in The Shillong Times on October 27, October 2017 under the heading MUDA back to its old truth! written by one BK Singh. Now B. Mawlong asserts that a letter was written by him a year ago. I would just like to get some clarification whether he is

the same person or not.

6. Officials of MUDA came for inspection after the letter appeared on October 27, 2017 and found that everything was as per the Building Plan. Again Officials of MUDA came for Inspection on the December 20, 2018 and did not find any deviation from the Original Building Plan approved by MUDA.

7. The College would be willing and happy to meet both BK Singh and B Mawlong if they are two different people to explain and address their genuine concern.

Yours etc.
J.B. Massar
Principal
Shillong Commerce College
Shillong.

Traffic solutions

Editor,

Again, there was another discussion held regarding traffic congestion in Shillong, (ST December 20, 2018). There have been many such discussions in the past and, over the past year or so, there have been numerous suggestions to solve the problem, - from

adoption of caterpillar trains to congestion pricing. There also seems to be a proposal of employing a Japanese Consulting Firm to study the traffic problem. It is learnt that a lot of proposals are in the pipeline, but we are in the dark as to the progress of those proposals. But there seems to be no more time left for any more discussions. Will the infrastructure be ready for the National Games in 2022? And what about proposals for a Smart City? I am sure if proposals for solving the traffic congestion are made public, cooperation from all quarters will be received, including matters relating to requirement of land, because everyone has a stake in this. Speedy action is the call of the hour.

I would like to point out that flyovers are a must for solving the problem of traffic congestion and also the construction of flyovers in Shillong is achievable. If a flyover can be made in the middle of Chowringhee Road, Kolkata, it should be possible in any difficult situation. The use of Prefabricated Steel Sections is the answer to speedy construction as in Kolkata. But, for the flyovers to be successful, "origin-destination"

studies are necessary and the flyovers must be provided accordingly. Unless "origin-destination" surveys are made at crucial traffic junctions, and flyovers are properly designed, we are likely to end up with traffic situation similar to that in Guwahati now,---with the traffic below the flyover always choc-a-bloc, while that on the flyover itself, is devoid of traffic. And it must be understood that it is not essential that a flyover has to be constructed only to cater to the traffic on the National Highway or the State Highway, and also it is not necessary that the flyover has to be double-lane. Even a single lane flyover may prove to be sufficient in certain circumstances.

In addition to flyovers, tunnelling may have to be resorted to if the situation demands. And it must also be understood that widening of roads may not be the solution to ease the traffic in all cases. It has been found that narrowing down sections of a road to provide just sufficient space for the number of traffic lanes, leads to traffic calming. Extra space encourages overtaking and unnecessary parking of vehicles. Instead, I

feel that the footpaths should be widened to cater to the pedestrian traffic.

The existing road to the Satellite Shillong Township has been improved but is still not adequate. It must be upgraded to a multi-lane highway to efficiently support mass transport at high speed. Again, elevated roadway, through cuts, diversions, may have to be adopted so that we may reach the satellite township in about ten minutes, what with such prestigious institutions like the Legislative Assembly coming up there, and the Games Village also being proposed there.

The long term solution to the traffic congestion is development of more such satellite townships around Shillong, adopting the hub and spokes model. But let's get cracking at the short term measures. What are the plans?

Yours, etc,
S. Ahmed,
Shillong-1

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

Rahul Gandhi can undertake a Padayatra in Bastar region

Time for Baghel Govt to start real dialogue with Naxalites

By Nitya Chakraborty

Now that the Congress has won convincingly in the state assembly elections in Chhattisgarh and formed the Government after fifteen years of rule by the BJP headed by Dr Raman Singh, the time has come for the Congress leadership at both state and central level to take up real dialogue with the Naxalites and make sincere efforts to go into the root of the problem of violence in the affected districts.

The course is not easy and it needs patience and earnestness to deal wit this delicate issue which has been bleeding the state since its formation. Rahul Gandhi has got an opportunity to project himself as a real defender of the rights of the poor and the tribals if he focuses on this issue at his party level and instructs the new Congress government to take initial steps to create a congenial environment for dialogue. The process should start right now and already there is the example of West Bengal where the Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee successfully neutralized the naxalite movement in Jangalmahal area consisting of five naxal affected districts by intelligently isolating the extremist leaders from the general supporting masses by introducing various schemes for bringing the youth and women to mainstream.

For the time being, in Chhattisgarh, like Bengal it can be the dual responsibility of both the centre looking after the security aspects in the sensitive districts and of equally of the new Congress government which will start the process of negotiations at the peoples level and also make efforts to contact the leadership of the naxalites. Some of the extremist leaders may not respond, but if the supporting base of the naxalites feels tat the new Congress government is following pro people policies and has delinked itself from the earlier programmes of the BJP led government favouring the contractors and the salwa judum, there may be rethinking. Once the new schemes for the tribals of these areas start getting implemented to their real benefit, the results will start coming. It may take time but

“ *Once the new schemes for the tribals of these areas start getting implemented to their real benefit, the results will start coming. It may take time but the process of alienation of the common supporting naxalites from their extremist leaders who are not for dialogue, will intensify.* ”

tions in Chhattisgarh is that the naxalites supporters looked with some hope at the Congress manifesto this time. The Congress has won 11 out of 12 seats in Bastar region and it was evident that the Congress workers got more advan-

“ *The Congress has won 11 out of 12 seats in Bastar region and it was evident that the Congress workers got more advantage in their campaign in this area from the local tribals as against the BJP candidates.* ”

tage in their campaign in this area from the local tribals as against the BJP candidates. There were definite signs that the tribals were looking to Rahul Gandhi with some expectations. The tribals in this region have been cheated many times by the political masters, nobody kept promises, but still hopes do not die and they are hoping again that something good might emerge.

Congress President Rahul Gandhi has to ensure that his state govern-

ment does not once again dash the hopes of the Bastar people who voted in large numbers the Congress candidates to defeat the BJP. The Congress manifesto mentions of initiating dialogue with the Maoists. The dialogue should be earnest for achieving results and

have to be ensured for bringing the tribals to the mainstream.

The Congress government has to withdraw immediately the pending cases in the courts against the human rights, activists, lawyers and trade unionists who were implicated by the erstwhile BJP government on different charges for defending the interests of the poor tribals. Rahul Gandhi has to ensure that his government gives a fresh signal that the Congress government will allow the NGOs and the human rights oranisations to work among the tribals without fear contrary to the situation in the last fifteen years.

In its manifesto, the Congress has promised to hike the prices of forest produce, to implement the Forest Rights Act, 2006 and Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation Act (LARR) 2013. These are sure to bring benefits to the tribals in the Bastar region and it should have a positive impact in dealing with the Naxalite activities. These should be taken up immediately and the impact must be visible before the Lok Sabha elections. The Congress has to show a new face of its leaders in the Bastar region. The Party must sideline the leaders who have connections with the contractors and Salwa Judum. The tribals and the present naxalites must have the feeling that the party of Rahul Gandhi is not a party of contractors and forest mafia, this is a party looking after the interests of the poor. If they get this feeling, the extremists among the Maoists who do not favour dialogue, will be isolated. And that should be the ideal strategy for the success of the programme on mainstreamisation of the naxalites.

The Congress President should take up this challenge. He can even think of a two week padayatra in Bastar region along with the Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Bhagel. The Congress can reinvent itself not only in Chhattisgarh but in the entire country if the Party leadership succeeds in starting the process of reconciliation with the naxalites in the Bastar region. (IPA Service)

Big brother is bothered his days are numbered

Vulgar attack on privacy to fortify rulers

By Aditya Aamir

So, if it was not a fake encounter, then it was a genuine encounter. Or, maybe, Sohrabuddin, Tulsi Prajapati and Kausar Bi just upped and set up an encounter with the police and were shot to ribbons. The CBI court, hearing the case, acquitted the last remaining 22 accused and washed its hands off the mess created by investigating agencies involved. But that is not what the CBI Court judge should be worried about. The Modi government most probably knew of the exact wordings of the verdict to come considering that his computer most probably was being snooped upon!

This nondescript PC on which this report is being written, the words popping up crab-like this very minute (1 pm sharp, December 21, 2018), is being monitored, intercepted and decrypted by the CBI, IB, Narcotics Control, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Commissioner of Delhi Police, Enforcement Directorate and other government agencies. While it gives a certain pomp to know that 'Boy! Am I not somebody VIP to be spied upon?' it also gives the creeps that somebody is reading what has just been written. Every citizen's computer is under surveillance. Courtesy an executive order of the home ministry. Phone tapping powers were already with the investigating agencies. With this executive order the rule of law has the power to invade, breach and appropriate "data" that is yours alone stored in your computer and if it is construed as remotely anti-national, then Man, you're dead meat, liable to be put out to dry in a dungeon dug deep enough to bury you for good with not even recourse to a personal computer to watch porn!

The cliché 'Orwellian' is out along with George Orwell, who is dead and gone, but before he left Orwell gave us the ominous warning 'Watch it, Big Brother is Watching' in his book 1984. And four to five months short of general elections 2019, it is truly become 'Ghar-Ghar Modi', classic Orwellian! The order of the Ministry of Home's cyber and information security wing is signed by the Home Secretary authorizes the 10

agencies to invade any and every computer. Computer sales will take a hit! Should Google, Facebook and Twitter bother? Should the courts be concerned? Surely, CJI Ranjan Gogoi and fellow justices must have personal 'personal computers' as well as computers in office and those should also be in the ambit of the MHA's executive order. And it was the Supreme Court which had earlier this year asserted that "privacy" was a fundamental right, repeat fundamental right, of every citizen in the realm and nobody, repeat nobody, will be allowed to play with it. So, what is the Centre playing at, why is it bent upon knowing the bent of mind of the electorate?

Most likely it has to do with GE 2019. That is the verdict on everybody's lips and you don't need 92 hostile witnesses to quash the thought. The executive order is not a fake encounter, it is genuine even if patently illegal. The 'we the people, for the people, by the people' government cannot snoop on 'we the people' to win another election by spying on people's bent of mind. This is Cambridge Analytica copied in a ham-handed manner. Poor sods playing pure gods and coming cropper at that in less than 24 hours!

Mark Zuckerberg should be laughing except that he himself is in deep trouble, being hauled over the coals once again with further revelations on Cambridge Analytica hitting the fan overnight. Remember the time Modi hugged Mark? Those were early days for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and now he faces another seminal elections, momentous, creeping upon him inexorably, unstoppable, a moment of reckoning - will or will he not get a second term? If the writing is on the wall, it should reflect on the PC monitor! Seems like the results of the 5-state elections were more than warning of things to come. It is not just Naseeruddin Shah who is in panic mode, worried where to hang his underwear; the Modi government and the BJP are also in panic and there is no panic room to duck into except to climb on to bridge and jump off the top deck before Titanic hits the iceberg. (IPA Service)

Bolly’18: Wedding bells ring

From wedding bells to #MeToo scandals, it has been a rollercoaster year for Bollywood & its stars. *Supriyo Hazra* moves through different corners of the year to check out performances of tinsel town players



Aamir Khan: It is a rare event when you have seen superstar Aamir Khan is apologizing to his fans for the debacle of his movie. Yes, this happened in 2018 when Aamir’s much-awaited Diwali release Thugs of Hindostan bombed at the Box Office and left millions of his fans disheartened. Aamir, who is known for making hit movies like Dhoom3, Dangaal, PK, had to apologise for the movie’s poor show and hopefully we will not see another such disaster from his bag in future.

Akshay Kumar: Akshay Kumar started off with Padman where he was seen enacting the role of Lakshmikanth Chauhan. The movie is based on the short story named "The Sanitary Man of Sacred Land" from Twinkle’s book "The Legend of Lakshmi Prasad". In fact, it is the life of Tamil Nadu-based Arunachalam Muruganantham, who created affordable sanitary napkins for the women of his village, who has been the main driving force behind the tale. Akshay portrayed the central character beautifully. The movie released in January and entered the Rs. 100 crore club easily, based on its strong content and storyline. With the film Gold, Akshay once again turned his patriotic button on when he played the character Tapan Das, who brought the Indian team together to win the first Olympic gold as an independent nation. In 2019, he will be seen in movies like Kesari and Mission Mangal.

Ayushmann Khurrana: Ayushmann had a perfect 2018 with all his movies-Andhadhun and Badhaai Ho- rocking at the Box Office. While, Andhadhun gave Ayushmann a chance to move out from his boy-next-door characters to play the perfect protagonist in the thriller, he was once again back in his usual cute avatar with Badhaai Ho. The Dussheera release was loved by people across India and the movie emerged as one of the biggest hits of the year. Ayushmann will soon be seen in Dream Girl. The announcement about the movie was made recently via an interesting video which the makers created specially by keeping in mind the impact Ayushmann is making in recent times.

Aishwarya Rai Bachchan: Ash, the Bachchan bahu, was back on the silver screen this year with Fanny Khan. After a long time, she was seen pairing with her old onscreen partner Anil Kapoor. The movie, however, failed to impress fans much and did average business at Box Office.

Anushka Sharma: 2017 was a major year in her life as Anushka, the poster girl of Bollywood, tied knots with Indian cricket team captain Virat Kohli. This year, Anushka came roaring on the big screen with a horror movie named Pari. The posters of the film, which was released in 2017, had created much thrill among fans. Pari finally released during Holi and Anushka surely impressed people with her experiment of playing a scary-yet-lovable *Pari*. She then arrived as the autobiographer in the biopic based on actor Sanjay Dutt’s Life-Sanju. Anushka was praised for her small yet significant role in the movie. Anushka will end the year with the release of her much-awaited movie *Zero* where she will once again pair with Shah Rukh Khan and Katrina Kaif, her co-stars in 2012 movie Jab Hai Jaan. The Anand L Rai movie has already created lots of anticipations among fans who are expecting to see a firecracker at the Box Office at the end of the year. Mrs. Kohli also paired with Varun Dhawan for the first time in her career to deliver another hit of her mov-

ie life- *Sui Dhaaga*- in 2018.

Alia Bhatt: Apart from her love affair with Ranbir Kapoor making the headlines in the year, actress Alia Bhatt impressed her fans with perhaps one of her best performances in *Raazi*. The Meghna Gulzar directorial Indian spy movie provided Alia the perfect platform to perform strongly the character of Sehmat Khan. The movie was appreciated both by fans and critics and surely provided the much needed momentum to Alia Bhatt’s glowing career. Away from *Raazi*, she was engaged in shooting for her upcoming movies which include *Gully Boy*, *Brahmastra* and *Kalank*. The announcement was also made about *Sadak 2*, in which filmmaker father Mahesh Bhatt will direct his daughter Alia for the first time.

Ajay Devgn: Ajay Devgn’s major activity in 2018 was his appearance in the movie Raid. Directed by Raj Kumar Gupta, the film is inspired by the real life income-tax raid conducted by the officers of the Income Tax Department under the leadership of a courageous and upright Indian Revenue Service officer in the 1980s. The movie earned positive reviews from critics and fans.

Deepika Padukone: The Bollywood beauty finally said ‘Yes! I do’. The dimple-cheeked B-town queen, perhaps one of the most successful actors of this generation, tied the knot with another tinsel town heart-throb Ranveer Singh. In a wedding that could even give a tough challenge to the beautifully scripted marriages of Bollywood, Deepika and Ranveer skipped media attentions to land in Italy to be the perfect man and woman forever. ‘DeepVeer’ perhaps became the new word that emerged in the world of social media following the marriage. Images of the wedding went viral on the internet as the entire nation rejoiced and wished the couple a very best of luck for their new innings in life.

On the working front as well, Deepika and Ranveer paired together for *Padmaavat*. Amid controversies and opposition by some Hindu activists, the movie was released amid positive reviews across the country.

Hrithik Roshan: Hrithik Roshan did not appear on the silverscreen for a single time this year but anticipations over his 2019 release *Super 30* is already quite high. The Indian actor will be seen playing the character of a teacher. Away from his glamorous roles in movies like *Dhoom 2*, Hrithik has been portraying a simple look with a beard in the movie.

Irrfan Khan: Karwaan and Blackmail were perhaps two movies in which Irrfan appeared this year but it was the news of his cancer detection which left fans shocked across the globe. A Twitter post earlier in 2018 by Irrfan Khan had left his well wishers silent as the actor said that he was suffering from neuroendocrine tumour. Irrfan has been receiving medications for the disease in the UK and has been away from India for a long time now.

Jacqueline Fernandez: Bollywood’s Sri Lankan diva Jacqueline returned onscreen with his Kick co-star Salman Khan in *Race 3*. The Eid release made reasonably good business at the Box Office. The actress also tasted some social media trolls and criticisms over her move of experimenting to recreate Madhuri Dixit’s iconic *Ek Do Teen* song in her own way. The attempt left most of her fans disappointed. Comparison with Madhuri Dixit and the original number from 1988 movie *Tezaab* even

made situations tough for the Sri Lankan actress. The *Baaghi 2* song remained one forgettable moment of the year.

John Abraham: Bollywood’s hunk returned onscreen in his kickass avatar with two movies- *Satyameva Jayate* and *Parmanu: The Story Of Pokhran*. Both the movies performed reasonably well at the Box Office and John made his presence strongly felt in the Bollywood arena with his power packed performance. *Satyameva Jayate* will be specially remembered for the item number Dilbar. The recreation of the iconic Bollywood number of the 90s earned appreciation from moviegoers.

Kareena Kapoor Khan: Kareena was back in action with *Veere Di Wedding* this year. The poster of the movie had earned attention of fans in 2017 and this time the movie also grossed well though it was disliked by critics. Kareena shared screen space with other ladies in the film like Sonam Kapoor, Swara Bhaskar and Shikha Talsania.

Katrina Kaif: The Barbie Doll of Bollywood made a poor start to the Box Office this year with her highly anticipated Diwali release *Thugs of Hindostan* doing poorly. While the movie boasts of a cast like Aamir Khan and Amitabh Bachchan it failed miserably at the Box Office, disappointing fans and critics alike. Katrina will end the year with another probable major movie of her career- *Zero*. The film will see her unite with her old Jab Hai Jaan co-stars Shah Rukh Khan and Anushka Sharma. Katrina’s sizzling avatar in *Hush* Parcham song from *Zero* wowed her fans as they are going gaga on social media. In 2019, Katrina will be back with Salman Khan once again with their Eid release *Bharat*.

Priyanka Chopra: India’s international star had the most memorable 2018 as she tied the knots with US singer Nick Jonas in Jodhpur. Nick and Priyanka married just days after Ranveer and Deepika wedding, giving Indians a chance to celebrate two major Bollywood marriages back-to-back in one year. Priyanka appeared for one last time in the third season of her international TV series *Quantico*. She also worked in international movies like *A Kid Like Jake* and *Isn't It Romantic?*



Movie lovers are eagerly waiting for their release. However, despite opting out from *Bharat*, Priyanka is currently busy with her much-awaited Bollywood return- *The Sky Is Pink*.

Ranbir Kapoor: After a poor show in 2017, Ranbir returned with a bang this year as ‘Sanju’. The biopic on actor Sanjay Dutt helped Ranbir shine at the Box Office. His transformation from Ranbir to Sanjay Dutt had become the talk of the town this year and Sanju remained one memorable film in his career. Fans will be looking forward to see Ranbir Kapoor once again when he will unite with his real life love Alia Bhatt for *Brahmastra*. The fantasy film will also feature Amitabh Bachchan.

Ranveer Singh: Officially scheduled for release on Dec 1, 2017, controversy surrounding his *Padmaavat* movie had forced makers to delay its release till 2018. The movie finally released this year amid protests, violence and even ban on release in several states. However, *Padmaavat* and *Ranveer* as *Alauddin Khilji* shined on the big screen. The movie became a smash hit and *Ranveer* earned appreciation from both fans and critics for his strong performance onscreen. He will once again be back on the silverscreen as the tough cop in *Simmba*. *Ranveer* pairs up with young Sara Ali Khan for the Rohit Shetty directorial film that will try to compete with Shah Rukh Khan’s *Zero* at the end of the year.

Saif Ali Khan: Saif Ali Khan is a happy father in 2018 as his daughter Sara made her Bollywood debut with *Kedarnath*. Sara will also feature in *Simmba*, opposite *Ranveer Singh*. On the work front, Saif’s two movies *Kaalakaandi* and *Baazaar* released this year. The movies performed moderately at the Box Office. But the biggest takeaway for Saif this year is probably Netflix’s web series *Sacred Games*.

Salman Khan: The blackbuck poaching case came haunting Salman Khan in 2018. After spending two nights in jail, the Bollywood superstar, who is convicted in the 20-year old Blackbuck poaching case, was granted bail by a Rajasthan court in April this year. The actors were accused of poaching a blackbuck, an endangered species pro-

tected under the Indian Wildlife Act, in Kankani village of Jodhpur during the shooting of film *Hum Saath Saath Hain* in September, 1998. Khan was convicted under Section 51 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972. In his career, Salman featured for the first time in *Race* movie series with *Race 3* and the Eid release once again did not fail to entertain fans. Salman once again made a special appearance in 2018 movie *Zero* for a special song *Isaaqbaazi*. Salman and Shah Rukh Khan could be seen entertaining their fans with their signature dance steps in the special Christmas gift for their fans. Salman will be seen back with his Eid release *Bharat* next year. He is pairing up with his old colleague Katrina Kaif for the movie. Salman also hosted popular TV shows *10 Ka Dum* and *Bigg Boss* this year.

Sushant Singh Rajput: Onscreen MS Dhoni was back with one special year end release *Kedarnath* where he was seen romancing Saif Ali Khan’s daughter Sara Ali Khan. It is time to see how he delivers at the Box Office after a dry 2017 where his only release *Raabta* failed miserably.

Shah Rukh Khan: He started 2018 with a teaser and now he is ending the year with the whole movie-*Zero*. So far, the teasers, trailer and even the songs of the movie, where SRK is playing the character of a vertically-challenged person, has left his fans quite impressed. Khan has paired up with director Anand L Rai and actors Anushka Sharma and Katrina Kaif with the promise of delivering one major hit at the end of the year. In 2019, SRK’s *Kolkata Knight Riders* will be back once again on the field with the aim of winning the title for the third time.

Sunny Leone: Sunny Leone remained absent from the Bollywood screen for the entire year. She was last seen in 2017 released movie *Tera Intezaar* which had failed miserably at the Box Office. However, it was her biopic that made headlines in 2018. Titled "*Karenjit Kaur – The Untold Story of Sunny Leone*", it was an original web-series by ZEE5. The series narrates her journey from a middle-class girl in Canada to becoming India’s most googled celebrity. Sunny and her husband Daniel announced the birth of their twin boys, born through surrogacy. They named the boys Asher Singh Weber and Noah Singh Weber.

Varun Dhawan: After completing a successful 2018, Varun Dhawan appeared in two movies this year-October and *Sui Dhaaga*. While October passed away silently, it was the other movie, which also featured Anushka Sharma, that made some bang at the Box Office. Both critics and fans loved the simple story of hopes and aspiration that made *Sui Dhaaga* one big hit of the year.

Special mentions

Neha Dhupia: Away from Deepika and Priyanka, bold and beautiful actress of Bollywood-Neha Dhupia- also tied the nuptial knot with actor Anag Bedi in 2018 and the couple was blessed with a baby girl Mehr Dhupia Bedi in November. Neha appeared in two important releases this year- web series *Lust Stories* and Kajol’s comeback movie *Helicopter Eela*.

Bhumi Pednekar: Another unconventional Bollywood actress, who had made her debut with *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* in 2015, returned with the bold step of performing in a web series-*Lust Stories*. Bhumi and her bold perfor-

mance in the storyline proved strong enough to attract netizens to watch it online. Her fans will surely look forward to her releases in 2019.

Shraddha Kapoor: *Stree* and its success as a horror movie would not have been possible without *Shraddha*. The movie emerged as one surprise hit of the year and *Shraddha* competed hard to match with the skills of *Rajkumar Rao* in this movie. Her mysterious character and that too without a name left viewers spellbound. She was also seen in other major release of the year *Batti Gul Meter Chalu*, opposite *Shahid Kapoor*, but it remained mostly unnoticed.

Radhika Apte: You cannot ignore *Radhika* when it comes to content driven movies and her eye catching performance in making the characters go alive onscreen. From *Akshay Kumar’s Padman* to *Ayushmann Khuranna’s Andhadhun*, *Radhika* left her presence strongly felt in all of them. She was also seen in *Saif Ali Khan’s Bazaar*. With three big releases and her notable appearance in web series *Lust Stories*, *Radhika* dominated the world of Bollywood in her own ways in 2018. Not to forget Netflix web series *Sacred Games*, in which *Radhika* made her mark.

Sonam Kapoor: Sonam Kapoor finally said Yes when she tied the knots with Anand Ahuja in May this year. The first fat Bollywood wedding of 2018 was followed by two more as *Deepika-Ranveer* and *Priyanka* and *Nick* also tied the knots in the flag end of the year. In the working front, Sonam worked in three popular movies-*Padman*, *Sanju* and *Veere Di Wedding*.

Mr Consistent of the Year

Rajkumar Rao: There was a strong competition this year between *Bareilly Ki Barfi* co-stars *Ayushmann* and *Rajkumar Rao* when it was time to find the consistent performer of the year. But it was probably *Rajkumar Rao* who once again who stole the show with the variety of characters he played all through the year. From a serious role in *Omerta* to the ghost hunting village simpleton in *Stree*, *Rajkumar* did it all to entertain his fans. He also appeared in two other major movies this year- *Love Sonia* and *Fanny Khan*.

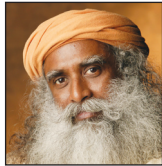
#MeToo

Following Hollywood, #MeToo movement had also created ripples in Bollywood this year. The campaign began with actress *Tanushree Dutta*’s allegations of sexual misconduct against *Horn Ok Pleassss* co-star *Nana Patekar*. Following *Tanushree*’s claim, several actresses belonging to different generations came out in public to share their experiences of sexual harassments and assaults. One of the allegations, which raised storm, was brought by writer-director-producer *Vinta Nanda* against onscreen ‘*Sanskari*’ actor *Alok Nath*. *Nanda* alleged that *Nath* had sexually violated her years ago.

RIP Sridevi: The Bollywood screen goddess, who ruled the hearts of her fans for decades, passed away in Dubai. When the news of her death broke, generations of Indians were too shocked to digest it. *Sridevi*, who died due to ‘accidental drowning’, was just 54. *Sridevi*, who left a strong impression in the minds of Indian cinegoers with her films like *Mr India*, *Sadma*, *Chandni*, *English Vinglish* and *Mom*, had gone to Dubai to attend a wedding ceremony. (*IBNS-TWF*)

Who needs luck

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



For those who depend on luck, they are always looking for places, things, stones and beads – lucky shoes, lucky soaps, lucky numbers – all kinds of things. In this process of looking for luck and waiting for things to happen, things that they could have easily created for themselves are completely lost.

With every aspect of life, it is you who has to make it happen. Your peace and your turmoil is your business. Your sanity and insanity is your business. Your joy and misery is your business. The devil and the god within you is your business.

We don't know whether you can become the richest man on the planet or not, but if you wish, you can become blissful and joyful. All of us have this capability – we don't need any luck. It is not even a question of capability. It is just a question of being willing and sensible and every one of us have that much sense, if we are willing. We may not have the intelligence to build a nuclear reactor, but all of us have enough sense to live joyfully within ourselves. And, whatever our capabilities we have in terms of external action can also find full expression only if you are peaceful and joyful. Otherwise, even your most fundamental capabilities will not find expression in the world outside.

Instead of allowing your energies to express themselves to their fullest capability, instead of creating the necessary inner and external atmosphere around us where the right kind of situation can happen, we are always looking for something else which could make that happen for us. Today, from morning to evening, how it happened for you within, is definitely yours. Today, how much friction you had with people around you simply depends on how insensible you have been in understanding the situations and the people around you – their limitations and possibilities within themselves. It is definitely not decided by where the planets are standing on this day or what lucky charms you may be wearing. It simply depends on how sensibly, intelligently, and with how much awareness you walk and look

Today, how much friction you had with people around you depends on how insensible you have been in understanding the situations and the people around you

at life around you.

One day, two men met in the airport. One man was looking truly dejected. So the other man asked, “Why are you like this? What happened to you?” The first man said, “What should I tell you? My first wife died of cancer. My second wife eloped with my neighbour. My son is in prison because he attempted to murder me. My fourteen-year-old daughter is pregnant. Lightning struck my house. All my shares went bust in the share market today, and my medical report says I have AIDS.” The other man said, “Oh, that’s a list of bad things and bad luck for you. Anyway, what do you do? What’s your profession?” The man said, “I sell lucky charms.”

On the Shaiva path, people invite bad luck. They do not ask for good luck. Shiva bhaktas never asked for good luck.

They have always said, “Let the worst things happen to me and let me have the strength to go through all this undisturbed.” They never ask for luck because people are living in that level of strength and solidity within themselves that they know whatever happens around them, it is not going to matter within themselves.

The very fundamentals of a spiritual process is to integrate our energies in such a way that things, people and situations don't guide our lives anymore. Our destinies are not created outside of us. Our destinies are created within us – to become in such a way that the very process of life, death, and beyond becomes a conscious process, it is no more subject to other forces in the existence. You become the very source of who you are. You become the very basis of everything that happens to you and become independent of external influences.

When I say external, I am not just talking about the world or people outside, even your body and mind are external to you. When even your body and mind does not influence you anymore, then there is no power on Earth or beyond which can pull you this way or that way. Whichever way you wish, whichever way your being longs, that is the way everything happens.

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

When winter comes, can nolen gur be far behind?

By Uttara Gangopadhyay

Remember the 1973 Bollywood film Saudagar set in a Bengal village starring Amitabh Bachchan and Nutan? An adaption of Bengali writer Narendranath Mitra's short story 'Raas', the film depicted a pre-stardom Big B (in a skull cap and lungi) wooing Nutan (a widow adept in preparing jaggery) just to take forward his trade of gur (palm jaggery) sale so that he could save and marry another woman finally.

The storyline of the film — a scheming Bachchan with an ulterior motive behind his wooing of Nutan — apart, Saudagar also depicts in great detail how the famous Bengal jaggery is prepared with Nutan playing the woman with wonder skills that go into stirring that treacly concoction called 'nolen gur'.

Even a few years ago, 'nolen gur' was a winter-special delicacy used at homes and traditional sweetmeat shops of Bengal. But as chefs and food experts discovered this natural flavourful sweetener and began to experiment with it, the humble fresh 'jaggery' processed from date palm sap turned into a gastronomic phenomenon.

While the use of jaggery for preparing delicacies or cooking is known across India, nolen gur is unique to Bengal. The collection of the liquid sap is a specialised job and undertaken by a group of people known as 'siuli', who are expert tree climbers. They also know which trees to tap and when. All calculations are based on knowledge handed down for generations and personal experience.

A 'siuli' climbs the tree, makes slits in the stem just where the leaves branch out, and attach narrow pipes to them; a small clay pot is tied beneath the free end of the pipes. Night long, the sap drips into the pots. The pots are brought down at dawn. The sap is poured into a metallic pan and stirred over a wood-fired oven. The colour of the sap changes from light to dark brown and has a relatively thicker consistency. The pan is removed from fire, the liquid poured in clay pots and taken to the market for sale.

Even though the demand for their white rasogolla never recedes, in winter there is a heavy demand for their nolen gur flavoured rasogolla, said Dhiman Das, a scion of the famous KC Das family. It is his ancestor Nabin Das who is acknowledged as the inventor of the now GI-tagged 'Banglar Rasogolla'. Other traditional sweetmeat manufacturers also agreed that demand for sandesh and other sweets flavoured with nolen gur or 'notun gur' (new jaggery) go up in winter.

One of the popular sweetmeats that have been consumed at Bengali homes for ages in winter are 'joynogorer moa'. Joynagar is a suburban town to the south of Kolkata where 'moa' or roundels made from 'khoi' (popped rice) and nolen gur are very famous. The gur is also



used liberally during the making of various kinds of 'pithe' or 'pitha', traditional pancakes with sweet fillings, again a winter delicacy.

With the spread of molecular gastronomy, food experts are also finding innovative ways to use its flavouring properties.

"Earlier, in winter, clients used to ask us to provide notun gur rasogolla as part of the marriage feasts," said Khokon Das, who runs a catering business. "But now people have started asking for nolen gur ice creams." Several Kolkata res-

New-age chefs are nudging nolen gur out of its complacent place among the sweets of Bengal and making recipes like Prawn and Crabmeat Dumplings stewed in spicy nolen gur reduction

taurants even serve nolen gur cheesecake.

Chefs such as Joymalya Banerjee have nudged nolen gur out of its complacent place among the sweets of Bengal. Some diners still recall the Prawn and Crabmeat Dumplings stewed in spicy nolen gur reduction available at his restaurant Bohemian.

However, lurking within the heartening news over the use of nolen gur is some bitter truth. Usually, it is the first two to three weeks' supply of sap that is considered valuable for the

making nolen gur, according to experts. To produce enough gur for the ever expanding market means a you need many hundreds of date palm trees. But cultivable lands are vanishing under demographic pressure. Even though there is no concrete data available but the scarcity of good quality nolen gur is evident in the market.

Weather also plays a crucial role — the colder the winter, the better the sap. Apparently, the best nolen gur is obtained when the temperature dips to 15 degree Celsius or so. So if the winter is late or it is not cold enough, it is not possible to get nolen gur of the highest standards.

"We are very particular about the nolen gur we source from the market," said Dhiman Das. "Earlier, we used to conveniently source from the local market. But now we have to source it from a trusted agent in Nadia district."

Besides, according to many gur sellers, the number of expert siuli is also dwindling. Remember, it is not easy to climb up and down a date palm tree. Even the hours of work are far from comfortable. It is a low-paying job and young people are not interested in pursuing it.

But what is even scarier is the fact that with rise in demand for nolen gur, not only in winter but round the year, there are reports of use of synthetic flavours and colours.

According to media reports, certain well-known institutions have said they preserve the nolen gur through various means for year-round use. But even they agreed that the taste and flavour varies. Biswa Bangla, an enterprise under the Department of MSME of West Bengal, has introduced packaged liquid nolen gur (in 100 ml tubes) with a shelf life of three months for those who want to enjoy the ambrosia (yes, it has some curative properties too).

So if you are a connoisseur, enjoy Bengal's nolen gur in its many avatars while winter lasts. (TWF)

Manipur entrepreneur makes a mark at city expo

In the recently held Himalayan Expo in the city, one shop from Manipur stood out for its unique products – knitted shoes.

MoirangthemMuktamani Devi, blushed with a humble smile when she was told about the hand-made shoes. Hailing from Manipur's KakchingMoirangthemLeikai, Muktamani Devi is the proud owner of Mukta Shoes that she started in 1990-91.

Muktamani was always interested in knitting and would make sweaters and other woollens for her children. But becoming an entrepreneur was never in her scheme of things until she realised that her talent would not only give her economic independence but also help in maintaining the family budget at ease.

"The first shoe that I knitted was for my daughter in 1989. We could not afford to buy a new pair for her school so I knitted one on the old sole of her torn shoe," said Muktamani, who has trained over 2,000 women so far.

The shoes were greatly appreciated by her teacher who also wanted a similar pair for her daughter. It was the beginning of a journey for Muktamani whose shoe business gradually flourished.

Investment, however, was and is still a hurdle. But Muktamani has not given up. She sells her products in her hometown Kakching and other places. Her products are also available on giskaa.com. The unique knitted shoes have travelled across the country in fairs and are supplied to countries like Canada and Australia.

Muktamani — who she is a National awardee on Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise and state awardee on handicrafts — said de-



spite all the hardships, her husband Kshetrimayum Naran Singh and children were always supportive.

When asked whether she wants to expand her business to other parts of the northeastern region, the entrepreneur answered in affirmative

but flagged the issue of finance and manpower. "I would love to train more women and take the product to all states but that needs financial assistance," she said.

~ By Our Reporter

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, DECEMBER 23, 2018

You would make some positive decisions during this year as Moon opposite Saturn on your solar return chart. Long cherished dreams are likely to be fulfilled. Efforts for a job change or switchover can be stepped up. Family life will be fantastic you can look forward to a lot happening at home. You enjoy the changes made in your lifestyle. If involved in social work or political activities then you take centre stage. Good academic progress would be made. Love and affection is reciprocated in no small measure which puts you on cloud nine. Contacts need to be cherished and revitalized.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

This is a mixed period for you. You are compassionate and generous with family, friends and relatives. You would be more accommodating in relationships and not take things personally. Work wise there will be some obstacles that you would face. It is best to accept challenges that life offers you and keep going through ups and downs realizing that this too shall pass. It is time to express your feelings and ideas and share what you have learned through a variety of experience in this life. There could be an interaction, which on the face of it looks difficult to resolve but you reach out and get to the root of the problem.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

There is a deeper understanding in professional associations and personal relationships. Your associates and co-workers prove to be loyal and disciplined. You are patient, laborious and clever with material aspects and manage finances and business ventures with ingenuity. You are likely to meet well known people in authority and share ideas and spend a fair bit of time in their association. A stimulating project should be taken as a challenge that would further and promote your business prospects. You are in touch with innocence that comes from life lived fully, which also has a quality of wisdom and the acceptance of the ever-changing wonders of life. Health will take a turn for the better.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You would be able to integrate forces, resources and professional aspects to achieve success in important ventures. You are individualistic in professional aspects. You boldly express your views and comments without being afraid. It would be good to say what you feel that you would be appreciated for being honest. There could be alteration in ideas or plans, increase and decrease in finances and fluctuation in business. On the personal front you go all out to make the special people in your life feel wanted and special. This is a time for you to renew your energy.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

This is altogether a happy and relaxed time for you. There is perfection and beauty in emotional relationships as you come from a deep and spiritual space within to relate in a new way with your loved ones. Communications and business associates from overseas bear good news and offer lucrative opportunities. Marriage, business partnership and collaboration would be strengthened through understanding and commitment. You may handle more than one project at the same time with expertise and success. End of this period brings fresh energy, love and romance in important relationships.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

This phase brings pleasant results in your professional life with rewards and recognition. You would also work hard and would get ready to express yourself and take charge and responsibilities. Personal projects are on an upswing. Income from foreign sources could also figure during this time. You would be able to complete work assignments and personal business with good energy and support. Emotional attachments and relationships are rewarded with reciproca-

tion. Some interesting people are drawn to you and invite you to work with them. Health problems are resolved and your energy is restored.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

There could be an exciting job offer, reward, recognition, or promotion. An opportunity to expand on a global level arrives now. You would have more energy for work and your daily work tends to speed up now. Perhaps you have a larger workload than usual. This is a very significant period of the

year, when you are inspired creatively and emotionally. You can draw correct conclusions from prior knowledge of people you meet. A new cycle begins with the old order finishing as inner and outer changes are on the cards. You feel on top of things as you are blessed with good health and energy.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This period is marked with fun, entertaining and happiness. Your hobbies, leisure time, moments spent with family and children, are highlighted. There is youthful energy and verve in your life. You are generous, kind and preserving in family and personal relationships. You are diligent and pedantic at work as you exhibit your knowledge in your field of activity. You can well utilize the energies to attend to your health and well-being. Though you are assiduous and hard-working you do not relish being tied down to your laptop or cell phone and would like to spend quality time on the personal front.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

There is good-luck in love and romance and personal relationships. You are on the threshold of a creative and inventive assignment that brings you name, and exposure, as your desire for some form of recognition will be fulfilled. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering as you have to positively use your talents and efficiency. Good health and energy enables you to participate in sports related pastimes. A pleasant surprise awaits you. Yoga and meditation put you in touch with inner bliss.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You would handle your profession sincerely and creatively and devote your time to children and family members. A personal involvement has the qualities of love, balance and freedom that you desire. On the other hand you are frank, outspoken and can be outrageous or undiplomatic on occasions. Learning important lessons from life could be the beginning of spiritual growth and understanding. Spiritual pursuits and meditation can be rewarding. You grow and transform as you pass through a touching emotional experience. Health needs to be maintained with a planned diet and fitness schedules.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

As you improve personal and professional relations with patience, love and care you avoid long drawn discussions, criticism and arguments. You are blessed with divine wisdom and inspired to take up a professional challenge. You are original and ambitious instilling a personal style in whatever you do. You give and receive affection and love from friends and relatives. You connect with old friends and business associates. Being open and receptive, you attract prestigious opportunities and interesting people. You are happy as there is balance and harmony at home and synergy in the work area. Don't allow personal feelings to influence professional decisions.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Pay close attention to performance and continuity and your efforts would be visible to senior colleagues and people in authority. You resolve an important issue that has been the cause of anxious moments for some time as you start a new business project while adding zest to an old one. Express your views and conditions clearly when it comes to business and financial dealings. Sharing your philosophical interests with a romantic partner may be especially appealing to you. A new person or influence leads to renewed interest in creative fields. Fresh attitudes and a new perspective are needed.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You would effectively handle difficult projects at work. Your idealistic nature is stimulated, and you are likely to yearn for a connection to more spiritual or idealistic pursuits. A sense of belonging through connection to something larger than yourself is something that is entering your life now. You look to community service and lend a helping hand as you want to make a difference. Be ready to make quick decisions at work and act spontaneously in personal situations. You would achieve success at work and complete projects through interplay of ideas and correlation of subjects since communication is your forte. You could be restless and pay impromptu visits to friends and relatives.

“*Fine words and an insinuating appearance are seldom associated with true virtue.*”
--- Confucius

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.134SHILLONG, MONDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2018

Scare over snooping
SNOOPING of any kind is not a welcome step. More so, when such actions are initiated by government agencies. However, to say that such a situation is arising in India for the first time after the central government issued an order earlier this month is to ignore the existing realities. The order granted power to 10 investigation agencies to closely monitor citizens’ internet-computer activities if and when a need arose. Every new age shady activity happens via the internet. Fact is governmental agencies world-wide engage in snooping, though there could be certain limits to what they could do, depending on the freedom that each nation guarantees its citizens. China and Russia, as also the Islamic nations, could be in the forefront of snooping while the land of freedom –the United States – is not immune from the scourge. Admittedly, governments cannot do without this. Every society has its troublesome elements lurking in the shadows. Identifying them and keeping a close watch on them is a matter of priority to any law-enforcing agency worth its salt. To what extent they can go is still a debatable point. For instance, if such agencies get the legal right to put a snooping device inside an individual’s home, this is prima facie provocative and unacceptable.

At the same time, not to be ignored is that, whatever passes through internet is bereft of its privacy. There is someone, somewhere who, without our knowledge, has access to it. It could be internet service providers, it could be someone else. We are into the worldwide web. Secretly, governments are already keeping a watch on internet communication, which is how several terror-related cases are cracked. Terrorist networks are led to believe certain modes of transmissions cannot be tracked. Fact is, there is no such safe system. It is now on record that the UPA government too had indulged in snooping. As per an RTI reply, the UPA II period saw tapping of 9000 phones and 500 email systems/addresses a month. This goes on. What the government now did was to ensure legal sanction for such ongoing acts. It might be of interest to know that the present advocate of snooping, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had, while as Opposition leader in Rajya Sabha during the UPA period, vehemently opposed similar provisions in the IT Intermediary Guide Licence Rule. Snooping cannot be wished away. It’s there to stay. What’s advisable is to try and limit its scope. And citizens’ ought to question this for democracy is all about citizens’ rights.

TO THE EDITOR

Don’t Infringe into my ‘Private Space’

Editor,
On the morning of the December 21, 2018, the people of India woke up to the startling news that the Central Govt on the midnight of December 20, 2018 had issued an order giving 10 central intelligence agencies sweeping powers to intercept, monitor and decrypt any message transmitted, received, stored or generated from any computer or mobile phone of any of the 1.35 billion Indians living in India today! In effect the Fundamental Right to Privacy of the Indian citizen as guaranteed by the Constitution and as ordained by the Apex Court of the country has once again been violated. This draconian order ostensibly had been triggered in the name of National Interest and National Security. Within the context under discussion one has to accept that National Security and National

Interest are not one and the same because National Interest can easily be twisted to merge or be the same as the interest of the Govt in power. As such the fig leaf oversights provision of this order, that approval of the Home Secretary is required for any of the above 10 spy agencies to act, does not hold water as the officer himself is part and parcel of the Govt, which is the principal party and originator of the order itself. The absence of a third party oversights agency such as the Judiciary or the Courts to oversee and regulate the implementation of the order is therefore a scary and frightening omission that threatens my right as a citizen of this country. The whole order smacks of a state of Emergency where a grave threat to the nation from internal and external sources or because of a grave financial crisis exists. One looks around and no such threat or crisis is in evidence. So why this undeclared Emergency and what are the reasons behind it? If not the Nation then who has a crisis? One looks around and the only apparent threat visible is to the NDA Govt at the

Centre. They have just lost three important mainland Hindi belt states to the rival Congress party. The opposition is smelling blood and the 2019 MP hustings may not be as rosy for the BJP as they might want it to be. Most probably there already exist massive online communications and internet and social media chit chats between parties, groups and individuals hostile to the BJP. The Government seems to believe that Govt agencies under its control need to gain access to such private conversations. There needs to come in some sort of check, a snooping or a monitoring mechanism before simmering dissent could turn into an avalanche already termed as the Mahagadbandan. The writing is on the wall and the BJP needs no Daniel to interpret what that means for 2019.

No spy agency is required to decipher the panic that must be building up within the ruling BJP. What puzzles is the need and necessity to drag in the interests and rights of the common Indian into this dirty no holds barred

political battle between the ruling dispensation and its political opponents. Well if you want to listen to what your opponents are saying about you, please go ahead and do so to your heart’s content with all my blessings. You can’t however breach, infringe or violate my privacy and my private space to do your dirty political eves-dropping. Kindly back off and you don’t have to murder democracy to do it. Don’t deny me my democratic rights and the appeal to all the freedom loving citizens of this country is to rise up, raise your voice; protest; write; use social media and resist this violation of your Rights until it is rescinded. Survival of our Democracy depends on it.

Yours etc.,
TokI Blah,
Via email

True meaning of peace

Editor,
Christmas tells us to replace confusion by peace ~ as Jesus said, ‘For God is not a God of confusion,

but of peace.’ (1 Corinthians 14:33 KJV). Indeed, we find peace in love and harmony. We get strength in peace. William Shakespeare had once said, ‘Our peace shall stand us firm as rocky mountains.’ In peace, we feel the magic of egalitarian divine love that rains cutting across social divisions. The problem arises when we equate laziness with peace and thus give peace a bad name. But static inertia must not be passed for peace. Sri Aurobindo said, ‘In a certain sense this inertia and peace are the bright and dark counterparts of each other, tamas (darkness) and sama (equality) - the higher nature finding repose in peace, the lower seeking it in a relaxation of energy and a return towards the subconscious, tamas.’

There is indeed a conflict within us. The psychic energy in us wants peace not for lying on the bed but for moving forward physically, mentally and spiritually. On the other hand, the matter in our body seeks peace to enjoy material comfort and rest. But the latter takes us to the deceptive quicksand of the

status quo. It discourages us to work for inner peace. When we feel thirsty, we fetch a glass of water and drink it. The activity of taking a glass out and drinking water, gives us satisfaction without which we cannot attain peace. My mother used to say ~ ‘sukher cheye shanti bhalo.’ It is a Bengali saying which means peace is better than material comfort. As a matter of fact, the unending desire for more material comfort cannot give us peace. Rather it makes us unsatisfied and robs us of our poise which is an essential condition for acquiring inner peace. And inner peace is a must for our health and happiness. ‘Peace,’ said Sri Aurobindo, ‘is a calm deepened into something that is very positive amounting almost to a tranquil waveless Ananda.’

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*

A Christmas that all can celebrate

By H H Mohrmen

Jews and the Romans did not consider Jesus to be a significant part of history, but he is important enough to find mention in the annals of the history of both the Jews and the Romans recorded by the duo.

It is also a fact which cannot be denied that the roots of Christmas celebration are found in the early Christian period and the first Christmas was celebrated more than three hundred years after Jesus died, but it is also equally true that this Christian celebration has pagan roots. Throughout history Christmas has evolved with time and accommodated not only Christian and Pagan elements but it has also

the celebration of the birth of a religious leader of seminal important. His teachings using parables have influenced the thinking and lives of many. Some of his parables like the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son are common even among people who have not heard about Jesus. One would find them refer to the parables even if they are not Christians themselves.

His message of Love and Forgiveness and to love God and love fellow human beings have a universal appeal, but personally the Sermon on the Mount is the epitome of his teachings. The sermon which is a foundation of Christian ethics is a call to his followers to aspire and thirst for righteousness, to

important than any of these concerns. It matter not if it has an extraordinary and virgin birth or he was born as any other human, or how he may have been conceived and born. All these in no way diminish the importance of his life and teachings. On the contrary, if he was born in the usual manner and from a poor humble family, that gives us more reason to celebrate the greatness of a life which has a modest beginning. It tells us of a story of a man born of an ordinary birth and from a humble beginning who has been able to achieve so much in his life.

The greatness of Jesus is that he has influenced even people who do not call themselves Christians. I remember reading a piece which mentioned of an incident in Mahatma Gandhi’s life when a pastor who accompanied him, and also realised that Gandhi was reading the Bible and was well verse with the Gospels in particular, asked him what prevented him converting to Christianity? To which Gandhi replied, ‘if by being Christian means following the teaching of Jesus, I am already a Christian.’

Jesus has non-Christian followers too so he is one religious teacher who has influence beyond Christianity or even on people outside his religion. Although these people do not worship him as their saviour or the Son of God, but they see him as a Rabbi, a prophet of love and a messenger of peace whose message is universal and everlasting.

Although many Christians wish that the day is celebrated only as the day Jesus their saviour was born and nothing less and nothing more, but Jesus’ influence is not restricted to Christians alone. He has influenced the lives of many great people and Tolstoy and Gandhi are few of them. Christmas also reminds us that Jesus many people worship him in secret and that there are also those who adore his life and teachings and deep inside their hearts wish to follow in his footsteps.

Whoever we are, however we may like to call ourselves, may the reason to celebrate Christmas be in finding at its heart the message of divine love for a world that is greatly in need of love and compassion.

Attack on privacy: Back to square one
Snooping order neutralises Aadhaar verdict gains

By K. Raveendran

Authoritarian regimes tend to think they are for ever. And they create draconian rules to drive their agendas, but without realising that they could some day be at the receiving end of their own evil when they change places, which is unavoidable in any democratic set-up.

The Modi government’s laest snooping order, which has caused a nation-wide alarm, precisely falls into this category. It would go down in history as the saffron party’s most brazen attack on individual freedom and liberty, introduced through the backdoor, after several attempts through other means failed to bring success. It draws strength from the thought that it will help the saffron party trample down on dissent, enabling it to manipulate things to ensure its continued rule or that it will be around for beyond its current tenure naturally to reap the benefits. Either way, it seems to be a pipe dream

for data interception and decryption, the sweep of which is much wider and the worst part is that it is not subject to judicial review. By implication, a computer or device owner will lose the right to even delete data. This is a serious threat to privacy concerns and negates all that the citizens achieved by way of the Supreme Court striking down Aadhaar’s encroachment into the privacy of individual citizens.

The courts have ruled that a reasonable expectation of privacy requires that data collection does not violate the autonomy of an individual. The judgments noted the centrality of consent in a data protection regime, declaring that consent, transparency and control over information are crucial to informational privacy.

The judgment in the all-important Puttaswamy case had recognized the right to privacy as a constitutional guarantee protected as

The government has sought to justify the all-pervading surveillance in the interest of national security, the interpretation of which has seen much abuse under the Modi dispensation, which equates patriotism with love for the ruling party and the prime minister. It is as dangerous as the ‘India is Indira and Indira is India’ slogan coined by the then Congress president Dev Kant Barooah, which Indira Gandhi started believing herself, emboldening her to embark on her dark Emergency designs, bringing discredit to Congress, a stigma that will remain with the party as long as it is in existence.

that has little likelihood of coming true. People have fought a number of similar sinister designs and this one will also pass.

The government has sought to justify the all-pervading surveillance in the interest of national security, the interpretation of which has seen much abuse under the Modi dispensation, which equates patriotism with love for the ruling party and the prime minister. It is as dangerous as the ‘India is Indira and Indira is India’ slogan coined by the then Congress president Dev Kant Barooah, which Indira Gandhi started believing herself, emboldening her to embark on her dark Emergency designs, bringing discredit to Congress, a stigma that will remain with the party as long as it is in existence.

Law and IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad has justified the new order on the ground that it is based on an order issued by the UPA government in 2008. While it is true that the origin is the the old order, the sweep of the new order is much wider and is open to more abuse as the 10 authorised agencies include the Delhi Police, which makes the citizen much more vulnerable. The tone and tenor of the minister’s assertion is enough to send a chill down the spine of any potential victim. Some countries following new governance standards have instituted the ministry of happiness; likewise, if ever a ministry of arrogance is instituted, Ravi Shankar Prasad would be the ideal man to head it.

Compared to the old order, the new one provides

intrinsic to the freedoms guaranteed by Part III of the Constitution. “Privacy is integral to the realization of human dignity and liberty. A society which protects privacy, values the worth of individual self-realization. For it is in the abyss of solitude that the innermost recesses of the mind find solace to explore within and beyond,” the judgment said.

The new order is certain to be challenged in the courts again as it involves fundamental issues of personal liberty. As Justice Chandrachud in his dissenting note in the Aadhaar verdict observed, “Constitutional guarantees cannot be compromised by vicissitudes of technology.” With the new snooping order, the fears of India becoming a surveillance state have been rekindled. The nation had heaved a sigh of relief when an outcry against monitoring of social media forced the government to drop the move after the Supreme Court questioned the government’s plan, saying that this would pose a danger in a country where privacy was a fundamental right. It was alleged that the proposed social media communication hub, for which the government had even floated tenders, sought to create a technology architecture that merged mass surveillance with a capacity for disinformation. By way of the new order and its extended provisions, the Modi government seems to have achieved exactly the same kind of objectives, necessitating a new struggle against the autocratic tendencies of the government. (IPA Service)

“ The spirit of Christmas is the spirit of love and of generosity and of goodness. It illuminates the picture window of the soul, and we look out upon the world's busy life and become more interested in people than in things. ”

--- Thomas S. Monson

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.135 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2018

Khan May Show The Way

WHEN intention is good, it’s important for one and all to take a comment in the right spirit. So too with the promise from Pakistan President and former cricketer Imran Khan, the other day. His statement was that Pakistan would show India –and PM Modi- how to treat its minorities. Implicit in this statement is a resolve to try and improve the kind of treatment his nation meted out to religious minorities – mainly Hindus and Christians. The sentiment behind this statement is thus appreciable.

However, underlying this statement is also his view that India does not treat its minorities well. Minorities everywhere feel they’re not getting their due. In India, Muslims feel more neglected than other minorities – say, Christians, Parsis, Jews, etc who by virtue of their financial clout managed to get better education and enter the job market with greater confidence. The demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 was a turning point in India’s history and the general sense of comfort among the minorities took a nosedive. The ham-handed manner in which it was done left a bitter taste among peace-loving and secular Indians. The aggressive stands taken now and then by the Sangh Parivar added to the minorities’ sense of alienation. The Modi era in the past five years saw communal riots in Uttar Pradesh and some other places, but the scenario was generally under control, other than for the attacks on Muslims in the name of cow protection.

Progress of the nation is possible only if all its components act in unison for a common purpose. It is for the majority community to provide that sense of comfort and confidence to the minorities. Acts of terrorism and the growth of the aggressive Wahabist cult etc among Muslims also added to the worsening of the communal scenario and growing trust-deficit in social life here.

Pakistan and other Islamic nations have a record of ill-treatment of their religious minorities. Both Hindus and Christians are often at the receiving end in Pakistan. In the Gulf region, the past domination by the Europeans helped in Christianity having strong bases there. But, even in the UAE, a lone Hindu temple had to function in a “hidden” mode. In Pakistan, there is scope for much improvement in extending protection to the minorities, as attacks on churches are often reported. The Hindus there are scared and adopt a low profile. Good lessons are always welcome, appreciable and adaptable for India, as also for others. Khan can lead the way and make good that promise.

TO THE EDITOR

Pensioners deprived of Winter Allowance

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily I wish to draw the kind attention of the Government of Meghalaya on the subject mentioned above. State government employees who have served the State during their entire service careers and enjoyed the benefits of winter allowance, for the months from November to March, are deprived of that benefit after retirement, when they need it the most. Winters in Shillong are severe especially for senior citizens who need extra expenses for heating arrangements, warm clothing etc to save themselves from the bitter cold. Unfortunately, the government is indifferent towards this genuine need. May I draw the kind attention of the present Government of Meghalaya

to consider the matter sympathetically and introduce winter allowance for the pensioners of Shillong, with immediate effect so as to provide them relief during the bitterly cold winter months?

Yours etc.,
Uma Purkayastha
Retd. Principal, Govt Girls H/S School
Shillong - 1

Where are the taxis of Shillong?

Editor,

Everyday, scores of people are seen standing and waiting outside Centre Point, Police Bazaar, shivering and trembling in the chilly weather, battling to find a taxi to take them back home. In a world where Ola and Uber cabs are the most common means of transportation, people of Shillong daily struggle to find a shared cab with five people and sometimes, more stuffed inside a single cab. The area around Centre Point is now famous for battle between passengers and cab drivers who tell passengers to book the entire cab or will drive away carrying absolutely no passengers. Out of all the places in Shillong, the toughest areas to find a cab for are Jhalupara, Bishnupur and Laban. There is rarely a cab that agrees to go to these areas, even while passengers fight over four seats. The ones who find themselves a seat are considered lucky and the ones left behind obviously have to wait for at least 20 minutes or more for another cab. Life is a harrowing experience for daily commuters.

Last week when the entire city was enveloped in a blanket of fog, my mother and I had gone to Police Bazaar and it was already 5.15 p.m. by the time we were done with our work. We knew that getting a cab to Jhalupara would be a gruelling task but we decided to try anyway. We

waited for exactly 30 minutes, found no cab to Jhalupara; the ones asking us to book the entire cab demanded Rs 150 and more. After another 15 minutes, mother and I decided to walk to Jhalupara. It took us over half an hour to reach home. By then my mother had developed a bad headache, and I got a terrible cold. It took us two days to regain our health. But this is not just about us; it is also about all the people who have to stand there, waiting for a cab and struggle to get inside one. Many are forced to book an entire cab or walk back home in this chilly weather at great cost to their health especially for the elderly. It’s also about all the people of Shillong who stand at Centre Point for hours but neither gets a cab nor the attention of the Traffic Policemen or the "Shillong Taxi Association," who would definitely be aware of the unfortunate situation taking place daily at Police Bazaar but would never make an effort to

ease the situation.

It is my earnest request to the Taxi Association and the Government to study this matter and take immediate action to remedy the situation. Remember there are more people using public transport than there are people with vehicles of their own. The Government's basic responsibility is to ensure ease of public transport and stop allowing the cabs to dictate terms to passengers.

Yours etc.,
Avantika Sharma
Via email

Imran Khan’s impertinence

Editor,

After the partition from India the population of total minority community in Pakistan was about 12-13%. During last seven decades after a planned and systematic decimation of the major minority community in the province of

Sindh and other places the percentage of total minority community (Hindu, Sikh, Christians and Buddhists) in Pakistan today is about 5%. Propped up by the army and ISI combine Imran Khan has been seated as Prime Minister to steer a country with a nose-dived economy. The episode of Asia-Bibi, should teach Imran the first lesson of establishing “zero-intolerance” in Pakistan and to free the country of “made-in” Pakistan religious-fanatics and terrorists.

India has had two occasions when its Presidents were from the minority community. Supreme Court Chief Justice of India was also chosen from the minority community leaving aside high ranking army officers aplenty. Many members of the minority community are holding important ministerial portfolios in India. In sports too minority communities are patronized for participation and performance without any discrimination. In Pa-

kistan occupied Kashmir “Vox populi” is gagged and the human rights of citizens are completely denied and the atrocious Pakistan army force innocent people to join terrorist camps for training to become religious fanatics and jihadi terrorists to infiltrate into India and prepare for proxy-war.

Article 19 of the Constitution of India provides protection of certain rights vis-à-vis freedom of speech, etc.’ But that does not mean one has unlimited rights to harass army personnel, hurl filthy abuses at the Air Chief of Staff and pelt stones at army jawans on duty and killing them. It is expected that advocates of tolerance would agree that too much of everything is bad. Although the Constitution has provided enough freedom of speech it does not permit excessive freedom or misuse of the provision.

Imran Khan needs to show by example, first by establishing a total tolerant environment for the

minority community, ensure safety and security of their life and property, restore human rights of the people of PoK and Pakistan and free them of religious-fanatics and terroristic nurseries. He must fully realize that “charity begins at home” and example is better than unsolicited advice. Only when he has done the above can he advice Prime Minister Modi how to deal with minority communities in India.

Captaining a cricket team and functioning as a head of state are very difficult sides of a coin.

Yours etc.,
Samares
Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata
High Court

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

The Cross at Christmas

By B J Syiemlieh

birth, what is unique in this story is the possibility of identifying them as Persians or non-Jews. In fact, they are specifically identified in the story as coming from the “East,” a term which can refer to anyone from Turkey to India. In most situations where the pride emanating from eth-

“In the Christmas story narratives in the gospel of Matthew (Matthew 2:1-23), the story begins with an episode narrating about the visit of wise men from the East to pay homage to the infant Jesus. This episode is followed by a narration about their encounter with king Herod, who on knowing about the birth of the new king of the Jews, conceived an evil design to kill Jesus.”

nocentrism is the norm, the point to be noted in this identification of the wise men is that non-Jews were part of the reception of Jesus at his birth or that the community welcoming the

“Without delving into all the details, the first point that a reader familiar with the story would take note is the identity of these wise men. In the context of ancient West Asia, the Greek word “magoi,” which is translated as wise men, refers to persons of the Persian priestly caste in Zoroastrianism.”

birth of Jesus is inclusive leaving no room for ethnocentricity. In other words, pride is replaced by humility which is one of the attributes of the cross in the process of forming an inclusive community.

Another point that most readers would note this story is the reaction of Herod when he heard about the birth of Jesus from the wise men. Being a puppet king of the Romans, there is no doubt that he would feel insecure about losing

reaction of Herod functions as a critique about the abuse and misuse of power through violence.

Alongside the critique of abuse and misuse of power, the narration also lays emphasis on the suffering of the righteous which is a dominant theme in the Bible. This aspect is evident in the massacre of the innocent children the pain it inflicted on the grieving parents. The point to note here is what when power is abuse and misuse, it is bound to victimize and make the innocents suffer. In other words, this narration portrays the looming shadow of the cross which is perfected in the life, ministry and death of Jesus on the cross who himself was innocent and righteous but yet suffered a painful and shameful death.

Finally, the story also narrates that divine providence helped Jesus escape the evil design of Herod by fleeing to Egypt. Here, it may be noted that Egypt is best remembered by the Jews as the land where they experienced oppression and slavery at the hands of the Pharaohs though there are instances where Egypt served also as a place of refuge for the Jews in times of calamities like famine. In the birth of Jesus, the often forgotten role of Egypt resonates again when it gave refuge to Jesus when he was persecuted in his own land and by his own people. Here also, the point to be noted is that in the new dispensation marked by Jesus’ birth, social and ethnic boundaries are crossed and enemy lines become obsolete and irrelevant. Again, it may be reminded that crossing boundaries or treating an enemy as a guest is never an easy task as it demands a radical form of humility as symbolized by the shame in the cross. Therefore, at the birth of Jesus, a new and inclusive community is formed with the cross as the central point.

Christmas is a time of joy, fun and celebration. But the point to ponder and remember is that joy can be more joyful when voluntarily and selflessly giving even to the extent of losing something dear and precious, becomes the hallmark of the celebration. This story about Jesus’ birth shows that there is no Christmas without the cross. A meaningful celebration of Christmas is when the shadow of the cross looms large over humankind to create a new and inclusive community.

40 to do an alamo on Sabarimala Chennai women’s group to try busting male bastion

By Sushil Kutty

Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, the Mexican General who led the siege of the Alamo in the 1830s, got hit by a cannon shell on his ankle, leading to the amputation of a leg, which he ordered buried with full military honours. He seems to be the inspiration of child-bearing women wanting to breach the male bastion of Sabarimala! The Alamo finally fell, but Texas remained with the Americans. There ought to be lessons in that for the barred women but they don’t seem to lack in determined guts a la Santa Anna!

Sunday, some 40 women of a Chennai-based rights group will try to reach Sabarimala in an attempt to break the gender-barrier, their spirits bolstered or wounded by the fact that four transgenders could make it but not women despite Supreme Court go-ahead. Women of child-bearing age – 10-50 years – were being stopped from entering the shrine and that was what a five-judge bench of the apex court overturned on September 28, 2018 by a 4-1 vote, the lone dissenter judge favouring Swami Ayyappa’s vow.

News is that the 40 have Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan’s backing and they have been in email-contact with him, resulting in the state government giving them an assurance that they will be given full police security to go ahead and try taking a hit for the sake of gender-equality. This, when a modicum of sanity has come to prevail in Sabarimala following at times violent protests and even the great Trupti Desai was not allowed to step out of the Kochi Airport.

The women from the rights group ‘Manithi’ will reach Kottayam Sunday and from there travel to Sabarimala. The Pinarayi government has guaranteed them security but it has to be seen how much of a promise that will be. Recent history shows the Kerala Police has been more interested in seeing that women don’t undertake the last leg of the journey, sitting them down for what looked like counselling sessions of the family court-kind between estranged wives and cheating husbands! Only the most obdurate of women refuse to listen; that has been the experience so far.

The Ayyappa devotees thronging the shrine in the

thousands are themselves the biggest barrier to child-bearing age women and security for the celibate Ayyappa. The four transgender who went to the shrine a week ago on the “invitation” of the Chief Tantri faced tense minutes when they were mistaken for women by the male Ayyappa devotees, clad as they were in sari. So much so, police in riot-gear had to give them cover. And because the police were in boots, the Chief Tantri later led a cleansing operation of the shrine.

So, for all the bravado and guaranteed police security, the 40 are most likely to return with vow unfulfilled because the final word has to come from the Chief Tantri who has vowed that one whiff of ‘woman of child-bearing age’ and he will lock the shrine and walk off with the key, to the palace of ex-royalty, which still holds sway in the lost kingdom of Pandalam, of which Sabarimala is part. Pinarayi Vijayan is chief minister of Kerala but his writ doesn’t run in Sabarimala, where a 3-member committee of two High Court judges and a top cop has sole jurisdiction. And the top cop is no friend of Pinarayi!

Pinarayi may play along with such requests from determined barred women but they should know his hands are tied to the extent that he is politician first and gender-equality warrior second. And he has his own agenda, the larger goal of bringing wholesale Navaothanna to Kerala, of which bringing Sabarimala to its knees is a major part but not the sole part. He has more important things to do, one of which is to put up the Vanitha Mathil or the Great Wall of Women extending from Kasargode to Thiruvananthapuram on January 1, New Year 2019.

Pinarayi has staked his all, including his tough-man reputation, on building the Vanitha Mathil and he wouldn’t let 40 Tamil women on a wild goose chase to spoil his New Year! In that he will have Tamil MP Pon Radhakrishnan on his side. The Union minister is pissed off that he was halted and harangued by a special cop on his way to Sabarimala. So much so, miffed Pon has slapped a privilege motion against the cop in the Lok Sabha and the cop happens to be a Pinarayi-favourite.

“ *The purpose of human life is to serve, and to show compassion and the will to help others.* ”
--- Albert Schweitzer

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.136 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2018

No value for human life in Meghalaya

IN Meghalaya not everyone enjoys human rights. The poor and voiceless certainly have no rights. The miners trapped in the mines at Ksan in the Lumthari area of East Jaintia Hills District on December 13 last when the mine suddenly flooded, are virtually left to their fates. There is no public outcry against this inhuman treatment of over 15 lives left to die in agony for want of rapid assistance. This issue raises many questions. Firstly, what is the readiness of the State Administration to tackle mining disasters? How quickly did the East Jaintia Hills (EJH) Administration respond or was it busy trying to cover up its tracks about illegal mining happening under its nose? What communication went out from the District Administration, EJH to the State Government about the imperatives to rescue the trapped miners? Were the Defence Forces contacted for assistance? Is the State Disaster Relief Force (SDRF) trained to tackle accidents in rat-hole mines? Do they know the standard operating procedures? Why is it taking so long for the 100 HP Pumps for suctioning out the water from the mine to arrive? This mining disaster actually questions the capability and competence of the State Disaster Management Force (SDMF) to tackle any accident. In a state where large scale mining operations are going on and rat hole mining has been permitted to carry on up until 2014, the SDMF should have been trained to tackle mining disasters. But that evidently is not the brief of this Force since mines privately owned and miners are treated as commodities.

The common perception is that miners are either interlopers from Bangladesh who are desperate for work or they are from Nepal where they enter India on the basis of the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty. But in this case there were three local miners too who are from the District and seven others who are from West Garo Hills while four are from Kokrajhar district, Assam. To add insult to injury none of the ministers from the ruling Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) have visited the site of the mining disaster. Even the Minister in Charge of Disaster Management, Kyrmen Shylla who had earlier stated upfront that there is no illegal mining in his constituency in East Jaintia Hills did not feel the need to get a first-hand account of the incident by visiting the site. But neither have any MLAs from the Opposition visited site at the time of writing this edit. Only the MLA of Rajabala constituency, Azad Aman, went there because the seven miners belonged to his constituency.

That Government of Meghalaya gives no priority to disaster management is evident from the fact that the Departments of Relief and Rehabilitation and Disaster Management were merged with the Revenue Department in March 2006. Vide Notification No. RDG4/2003/55 dated 02.03.2006. How and why the Revenue Department which looks after the administration of land and land records in the state should also be looking after disaster management is the question that begs for an answer. And Government should answer this question!

TO THE EDITOR

Where is our humanity?

Editor,
A video showing people of Jowai dancing on the streets on Christmas eve has gone viral. When not far away from Jowai, there is death and destruction of over 15 human lives who are trapped inside a flooded mine, how can people be so insensitive as to shut their conscience just because the tragedy has not visited their own families? According to reports there are three young boys from the Catholic Church who went inside the mines because they needed money to take part in a Youth Convention at a nearby church. It pains me that young people have to go through so much hard-

ship just so they can take part in a religious convention. But it also speaks of their commitment to their faith.
In a completely different situation, in the midnight Mass in the Catholic Cathedral of Shillong, Archbishop Dominic Jala reportedly reminded the congregation to pray for the miners trapped inside the mines irrespective of their faiths and circumstances. This is how religious heads are supposed to respond to a humanitarian crisis. But perhaps in many of us, the need for noisy celebrations has superseded the call of conscience to empathise with fellow humans. We have entered a materialistic age when individualism has become the norm. Otherwise, the Christmas celebration in Meghalaya

should have been more sombre and reflective and should have been spent on prayer for redemption of the souls of those who rule our state but have no compassion for people dying inside those inhuman mines even though they have used coal money for winning elections. This is the tragedy of the coal mining business in Meghalaya. While it is the miners who enrich the mine owners by risking their own lives, no one cares about their safety. The entire politics of Meghalaya as we all know runs on coal money but now no one wants to go near the mines. What a sad thing it is for the State which is now in the news for the wrong reasons.
So who will be held accountable for the deaths of the miners trapped inside the rat holes? The mine

owner/s? The State Government for allowing this dangerous mining practice to continue? The Central Government for not responding adequately with the required equipments? Or the District Administration which has not followed standard operating procedures even when such mine accidents have happened in Garo Hills in 2012? We can go on and on trying to find out who to pin the blame on and this engagement is important because we do not know when the next disaster will strike. And if it does strike will we see the same state of unpreparedness?
Christmas surely cannot be a ‘Happy’ one with so many deaths hovering over us. And I am using the word deaths because no one can survive in a flooded mine for two weeks without water or

oxygen. It frightens me to even think about those poor souls.
Yours etc.,
Kynsai R Nonglait,
Via email
Message for humanity
Editor,
The Ramkrishna Misson Institute of Culture, Golpark, Kolkata is my Alma Mater. So, I was delighted when its secretary, Swami Suparnananda had invited Thomas D’Souza, the Archbishop of Kolkata to address a Christmas Eve gathering at the institute to "establish trust and friendship among the people" as he said, "We need to understand other religions more than ever." The invitation

was accepted by the Church. A Church official observed that though it was uncommon for the Archbishop to accept invitations from outside, but it was done as he said, "We are going through a phase when we need to create a spirit of mutual respect and propagate the message of love and peace."
On Christmas Eve, my Alma Mater got the message across. The first one was delivered when Archbishop Thomas D’Souza said to the packed audience, "Swami Vivekananda in his famous Chicago address had called all those who were present his sisters and brothers. It was a beautiful expression but a very strong message. On Christmas Eve, let us bring this message. If we are all sisters and brothers, how can we hate one another;

how can we kill one another? We cannot do that. If we have the same humanity, have the same feelings as human beings, how can we not accept others? If it happens, it saddens us. We can't hate or kill others unless there is loss of humanity, compassion, sensitivity and concern for others."
Then Swami Suparnananda recalled the message of Swami Vivekananda ~ "A good Hindu is a good Christian, a good Christian is a good Hindu, a good Musliman is a good Christian and a good follower of any religion will protect every other religion and the followers of each and every religion. This is the message of Jesus Christ. The same is the message of Buddha, Krishna, Chaitanya, Sri Ramkrishna and Mohammed."

In another Christmas Eve gathering at Ramkrishna Misson Ashram, Narendrapur, Father Rodney Borneo said, "When we don't see human beings as human beings but call them Hindu; when we don't see human beings as human beings but call them Muslim; when we don't see human beings as human beings but call them white or black; or say he is shikkhita (educated) or ashikkhita (uneducated); and when we bring these differences in our love.... we break our relationship with God."
Amidst intolerance all around, we need to hear such messages again and again.
Yours etc.,
Sujit De,
Kolkata

Farm loan waiver : Replace with policy mix

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

digitising and identifying plots.
Followed by Dr Rajan’s warning, the Niti Aayog has come up with a slew of measures for the farm sector because as now the policies help only a fraction

A certain section of economists feel, and quite rightly, that these measures are too theoretical and do not have much relevance to the real issues at grass-root levels. Most farmers do not get the MSP due to rampant

“ *The statement comes at a time when seven States announced farm loan waivers of Rs 1.8 lakh crore with the newly-elected government in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh expected to join the ranks of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Telengana and Andhra Pradesh.* ”

of farmers and is no solution to agrarian distress. According to its paper it suggested the scope of contract farming, scrapping the Essential Commodities Act and replacing the minimum support price (MSP) with a minimum reserve price (MRP) for auction of grain at the mandis (local markets). The think tank has emphasised the partici-

corruption and are cheated by government agencies. It is also difficult for them to shift to value-added crops due to lack of finances. Moreover, at times of high yield, they are forced to sell vegetables below costs of farming as has happened this year in case of onions. Meanwhile, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, after the new

“ *In particular, a key source of agrarian distress in recent years has been that the terms of trade confronting farmers have turned progressively more adverse, partly as a result policies to combat food inflation”, the economists stated in a 14 page note released to the media.* ”

pation of the private sector in agricultural development, promote agri entrepreneurs and create a policy environment that enables income security for farmers.
Though the suggestions may merit attention, it would have been better if the paper would have gone into the details of the proposals and what immediate measures the government intends to take. The need for more private participation in the farm sector has been a long standing demand but unfortunately this has not materialised as the returns are not attractive enough. Moreover, the scrapping of the Agricultural Costs and Prices Commission and replacing it with a tribunal, which would determine the minimum reserve price has not been well explained.

government took over, announced loan waivers, as promised before the elections. In Rajasthan, Chief Minister Gehlot announced waivers of farm loans up to Rs 2 lakhs till November, costing the exchequer Rs 18,000 crore. Earlier in MP, Kamal Nath cleared a proposal for waiving farm loans up to Rs 2 lakhs, which is expected to benefit 34 lakh farmers, whose size was pegged around Rs 35, 000 crore. However, such waivers may not be useful in the long-term because in MP, a study was undertaken which pointed out that farm related non-performing assets doubled in a little over three years between 2014-15 and June 2018.
It is indeed distressing to note that the share of the farm sector in GDP declined from 29 per cent in 1990 to about 17 per cent in 2016 but

it remains a major source of employment. According to OECD data, 85 per cent of operational land holdings are less than 2 hectares and account for 45 per cent of the total cropped area. Only 5 per cent of farmers work on land holding larger than 4 hectares, as per the Agricultural Census 2016.

Productivity lags other Asian economies such as China, Vietnam and Thailand and average yields are low compared to other global producers. Wheat and rice yields are nearly 3 times lower than world yields while those for mango, banana, onion or potato are between 2 and 7 times lower than the highest yields achieved globally, says OECD.

In such a situation, the obvious answer is cooperative farming of say three to five small farms and trying to raise productivity. Added to this, diversification from staple crops to value added crops and certain vegetables and fruits would help to boost farmers’ income. It would be ideal if some areas go for contract farming and entrepreneurs come with capital and technology to reverse the trend of declining productivity and falling prices. There is need for political parties through the involvement of panchayats to ensure that either cooperative farming or contract farming becomes a reality and aids small and marginal farmers.

Another significant point missing in the Niti Aayog paper is the emphasis on R&D. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) should reach out to farmers at the sub-divisional levels through panchayats and, in cooperation with the IITs, help farmers with innovative and low-cost farming technologies. Strategies should have evolved for creating infrastructure for watershed development and integrating rainwater harvesting with irrigation, creation of markets and storage facilities. Moreover, there should be some stress on organic farming, not just for those who are interested in exports but also to get higher prices in the domestic market.

Thus, loan waivers may not be the right panacea for revival or rejuvenation of the farm sector. The way farm distress is headed may have a disastrous effect in the near future and thus the question of agricultural rejuvenation must remain a priority. The adoption of the right strategy, whether by the BJP or the Congress, is imperative as it would have a great bearing on their performance in the 2019 elections. An action plan with specific targets has to be brought out as early as possible. --- INFSA

‘Fighting situation’ to unseat Modi Much depends on shape of alliance in UP

By Aditya Aamir

A C-Voter-Republic TV ‘National Survey’, released a couple of days ago, gives the Mahagathbandhan 50 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh, if ‘elections are held today.’ There is a caveat: There should be a MGB. Well, MGB did not come gift-wrapped this Xmas, and is not likely to arrive as a New Year package, primarily because of characters like MK Stalin, who proclaimed Congress president Rahul Gandhi ‘PM face’ of the Opposition, aborting any chance Santa had of gift-wrapping MGB for GE 2019.

BSP commander-in-chief Mayawati, who like many of history’s greats goes by a single name, is extremely sensitive to such authoritarian declarations. But then, what more can be expected from a person named Stalin? Perchance, if big brother Alagiri was DMK chief, he would have announced himself PM-2019! Jokes apart, the C-Voter-RTV national survey predicts BJP+ will be ahead of opposition numbers if there is no Mahagathbandhan, i.e., if ‘Bua’ Mayawati and ‘Bhatija’ Akhilesh Yadav do not make an Aligarh-strong combination lock, in which case opposition parties will get only 38 “if elections are held today.”

Then, there is Mamata Didi. The CV-RTV survey says the BJP will get ‘9 seats’ in West Bengal. ‘Bollocks!’ erupted the Trinamool guy on the RTV panel. He should have sought to know the difference between national survey and opinion poll? ‘National’ cannot be ‘opinion’ in any dictionary – Oxford, Cambridge, Webster or Collins. Why, even Dictionary.com will balk at drawing false equivalence. Words, they have sanctity and cannot be gift-wrapped for TRP-hunters.

Mainstream news television channels are all con-claves (and a summit) after the 5-state election results. But people have got wise to such glitzy gatherings in 5-star settings. It is all part of setting the ‘perception’. The visual media is mostly about fables told with a ‘?’ The ‘?’ put there purposely because even falsehoods have conscience! Opinion polls have sample-sizes. National surveys skim the top. At least that is the feeling. Mainstream television media is about fleeting pictures. The ‘experts’ appearing on them every weekday evening with party and personal agenda. RTV is about which expert shouts the loudest. The same expert is soft-spoken gentleman on other screens, the transformation jarring to eyes and ears. Down south, in Kerala, RTV goes by the nickname ‘Sanghi Channel’. There are also ‘Congi’ and ‘Commie’ TV channels in ‘God’s Own Country’ and together they

make the perception battleground. Among the English language visual media, the ‘Sanghi Channel’ BARCs the most. Tamil Nadu has Sun TV and Jaya TV with Kalaiginar TV thrown in for good measure. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have a slew of Telugu news channels. Both states share a lingo and that is advantage television channels. Chandrababu Naidu and Chandrashekhhar Rao may hate each other’s guts but they are in the same channel! The CV-RTV national survey says TRS will sweep Telangana but TDP will get ‘zero’ in Andhra Pradesh, where Jagan Reddy will top and Rahul’s Congress will be ‘second’. The BJP will cipher!

So, where all will BJP+ do well ‘if elections are held today’? Gujarat, Karnataka, the northeast, Bihar (Jharkhand, the Congress tips the scale), Madhya Pradesh, UP (if there is no MGB), Odisha and to an extent Maharashtra. Also in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, where it could be uphill! But the thrust of the CTV-RTV national survey is that the NDA will fall short of ‘272’. After every set of state-wise numbers displayed, the acclaimed/declaimed RTV anchor extracted a promise from each party with pre-poll alliance that it would not ditch post-poll. If that is not ‘agenda’, then the bob-cut MGB lady is bobcat PM!

Yes, GE 2019 will be fought on the plank of who will be Prime Minister 2019? There are four candidates. Narendra Modi is obvious contender and cannot be displaced though an online effort to pitch the minister for roads and highways against him went off the bend. MK Stalin wants Rahul Gandhi to be PM. Mayawati wants ‘Mayawati.’ Mamata Banerjee wants ‘Mamata Banerjee’. If Nitish Kumar “dreams to be PM”, the “mousahar Maanji” is not his ‘sarathi.” And stomach-crunching Yoga-guru Baba Ramdev says he ‘cannot tell who the next Prime Minister will be.’ Speaking in English, Ramdev said he’s not ‘supporting anybody for Prime Minister’, stating that it is a ‘fighting situation’. To add to his ambiguity, BJP ally in Uttar Pradesh Apna Dal cautioned the BJP to ‘respect allies’, especially after its ‘recent losses’. Apna Dal wants more ‘Lok Sabha seats’. Uddhav Thackeray says Modi is sleepyhead Kumbhakaran and Chandrababu Naidu said at a TV conclave ‘Modi is a negative character who ruined the economy’. Ramdev is right. There is a ‘fighting situation’ to unseat Narendra Modi from the prime minister’s chair and replacements gift-wrapped. (IPA Service)

“I have not seen a person who loved virtue, or one who hated what was not virtuous. He who loved virtue would esteem nothing above it.”
--- Confucius

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.137 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2018

After defeat the blame game

THE BJP house is not on fire; not yet. But, the smell of smoke is around, two weeks after the party’s loss of power in three Hindi-belt states at one go. Clearly, when defeat came calling out of the blue, there were no takers. Success, it is said, has many fathers while failure is an orphan. So with the predicament of the BJP which is well-explained by former party chief and present highways minister Nitin Gadkari. More of such catcalls could be in the offing, and the RSS is waiting in the wings too. Gadkari’s target appears to be Amit Shah, if not PM Modi himself. Shah was made party chief by Modi after the 2014 verdict though the RSS wasn’t in full agreement. Notably, every election the party won thereafter was credited to the magic of Modi and organisational skills and strategies devised by Shah. Now, it was not just silence on the part of Shah and the PM, but also indirect hints that the wayward chief ministers in three states brought shame upon themselves and the party by their ego-runs, as also omissions and commissions. The CMs who lost their chairs are silent like a tomb-stone. This, thus, looks like the silence of a graveyard.

Likely, after a pause, the BJP would gain its steam again or end up the loser. It depends on the craftiness of Congress president Rahul Gandhi, who’s now tasting success after the Congress party remained in oblivion for years. The Gujarat and Goa assembly polls last year were a wake-up call to the BJP. It learned no lesson. Then came Karnataka, and the Congress snatched victory from the jaws of defeat there by crafting a post-poll alliance with the JDS. The BJP again failed to see the writing on the wall. With just four months left for the next Lok Sabha polls, the Naidus and KCRs are scouting around to strengthen themselves and strengthen the Opposition unity, and the Shiv Sena is roaring against its ally in power. Questions are increasingly raised against the eluding Achhe Din. Yet, the elections in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, despite the anti-incumbency factor, prove that all hope is not lost for the BJP. The vote shares are almost equal for the BJP and the Congress in these two states. This means the Congress, as also the rest of the Opposition, needs to put their act together sooner than later.

TO THE EDITOR

Meghalaya's tragedy is India's tragedy

Editor,
Even after two weeks, the fate of 15 people trapped in an illegal mine in Meghalaya is unknown. The rescue efforts by different agencies of the government are also found hugely inadequate. Some time back in Thailand, members of a football team were rescued with international joint efforts, and the Indian Company, namely, M/S Kirloskar Brothers, its pumps and equipments along with some engineers had a big hand in the entire operation.
Alas, the same cannot be said of the rescue operations in the mine in Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. Each human life is precious, and the machinery of Meghalaya Government was unable to mobilize the resources and to make a valiant attempt for rescue operations. There was a lot of noise with one arm of the government blaming the other for the mishap. It's a lesson on how we value human lives.
In the case of Thailand, the whole world was praying for

the safety of the trapped people, but in the case of Meghalaya miners, even the media, national or otherwise, put the case in the back pages.
It's a tragedy in Meghalaya, but is a very big tragedy for India.
Yours etc.,
A Bhuyan
Nagaon , Assam

Does competence depend on academic qualification?

Editor,
Apropos the article “The Judiciary, the citizen, the media and the law,” by Patricia Mukhim (ST, Dec 21, 2018), it’s complete stupidity to want to measure the competence or intelligence of someone only with the yardstick of “academic” qualification which itself is imperfect. Education as it exists today has considerable scope for improvement. I don’t think Homer and Dante had ever acquired high degrees before authoring their masterpieces -- Odyssey and Divine Comedy. William

MDA loses the battle of perception

“Truth is a battle of perceptions. People only see what they're prepared to confront. It's not what you look at that matters, but what you see. And when then different perceptions battle against one another, the truth has a way of getting lost. And the monsters find a way of getting out.” Emily Thorne

Perception comes from the word perceive which means to sense or feel something; some emotion and to form one’s opinions based on those sensory experiences. The mining tragedy in the Ksan mine, Jaintia Hills has given a very negative perception of the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) Government. It is seen as being uncaring and indifferent about the loss of human lives. Home Minister, James Sangma seemed clueless about what’s happening on the ground at the mine disaster site. That’s because he has not visited the site yet. And neither has Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, if only to empathise with family members of those who lost their sons in the quest for a livelihood. Perhaps there is unease on the part of the Government since it has been denying that there is illegal mining happening in all the mines of Meghalaya be it Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills or West Khasi Hills. At no time has a lie been exposed by the gory facts of the mine disaster.
The District Administration of East Jaintia Hills too was on the back-foot. For every crisis in Meghalaya the standard operation procedures (SOPs) are given short shrift or they don’t exist. From the 31 May incident at Punjabi Lane to the Jaintia Hills mine disaster the public perception is that the authorities are groping in the dark. The public perception is that the MDA Government lacks the maturity to handle the cut and thrust of governance. Other than Messrs Prestone Tynsong and AL Hek and the Sangma brothers who held ministerial positions for a short while in 2008, all the other ministers are greenhorns and cannot be expected to contribute much to the tough call of governance. The ineptitude in handling matters small and big is unfolding before us.
The Jaintia Hills mine tragedy has called attention

By Patricia Mukhim

to Meghalaya and naturally those who head the state and the two power centres the CM and HM are both in the firing line – this time by the national media. Both have been found wanting in terms of how they grasped the situation on the ground and whether they have done enough for those miners trapped to their deaths in a watery grave. When even after thirteen days have passed not a single minister of the MDA Government, including the minister in charge of disaster management have visited the tragedy site the public perception is that this Government does not care about those miners because they and their families don’t have Voice and therefore No Agency. Hence they are dispensable. Imagine if some children or relatives of some politicians were to be similarly trapped! I am sure then that the relief equipments would have been air-lifted.
Only on the 14th day of the mine mishap did two ministers of the MDA Government – Education Minister, Lahkmen Rymbui and Disaster Management Minister, Kyrmen Shylla finally visit the site of the tragedy, perhaps because they too have been called out by the media. And it was saddening to hear that they were representing the Chief Minister who is currently in Delhi. Someone recently remarked that Chief Minister Conrad Sangma spends his weekends in Delhi. May we ask why? Is Delhi now the new headquarters of Meghalaya?
As far as the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) is concerned the perception is that they are ill equipped to handle mine accidents such as the present one. The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) arrived to assist but without the necessary equipments. Do they have the 100HP pumps to suction out water from the 70 ft long shaft? No they don’t, so they need to ask for those from the Kirloskar Brothers who had rendered assistance to the rescue mission in Thailand where 13 school children were trapped inside a cave. Obviously the requisition for the pumps has to go through a bureaucratic process which took its own

time. The public perception is that the District Administration lacked the sense of urgency. Now we are told that even NDRF personnel cannot dive below 30 feet. Mining expert Jaswant Singh Gill who had earlier helped to rescue 65 miners from the flooded Mahabir mines of Raniganj in West Bengal had volunteered to assist in the rescue mission. It was he who suggested that the at least 10 pumps with a horse power of 100 each was needed to suction out the water from the 70 feet mine.
The public perception is that Mr Prestone Tynsong is holding fort for the CM each time he travels which is very frequent. With so much of travel, including campaigning for his party wherever elections are held, Conrad Sangma is unsure if he is the NPP Chief or the Head of the State of Meghalaya. He reminds us of Mr Narendra Modi who has to campaign for every state election and leave governance to others which is perhaps why the NDA Government is today floundering on all fronts. Conrad Sangma has to decide if he is the NPP chief or the Chief Minister of Meghalaya and which of the two are his priorities. Else this ambivalence will cost Meghalaya dearly.
The next question to ask Conrad Sangma is whether he has figured out what exactly ails Meghalaya? After so many months of being in the driving seat has the CM waded through the mess and sorted out his priorities? What about his views on the whole mining business? Is his Government going to come up with a Mining Policy that will address environmental concerns and mine safety? Or will he dilly-dally like the previous government did and try to dig in his heels instead into the futile argument that Meghalaya is a Sixth Scheduled State and can therefore claim immunity from the national mining laws? Does he want to promote the climate of laissez faire in the coal mining business rather than usher in a progressive mining policy? Is he concerned about the need to reduce the extraction of fossil fuels because of the horrific impacts on the

environment which ultimately leads to climate change?
And now that another member of the Sangma family - Agatha Sangma - is heading the State Climate Change Panel with the perks of a minister, it is time to question her too on what she feels about the illegal coal mining business? Doesn’t rat hole mining hurt the environment and cause incalculable and irreversible harm to it apart from exposing miners to huge risks? Is Ms Sangma going to detoxify the rivers of Jaintia Hills? What is ironic is that illegal coal mining is continuing but the Panel is silent on this issue. Isn’t this then a conspiracy of silence? Was this Climate Change Panel meant to really work on a clearly stated mandate? The public perception is that this Panel was created only to accommodate the former MLA for vacating the seat for her brother to contest from Tura? The perception today is also that the Sangma family wants to concentrate all powers within the family. This is not very different from the Mukul Sangma regime with different members of the same family holding positions of power. That this concentration of power within single families is allowed to happen in a democracy only goes to show that the Meghalaya voter has not come of age. And that Rahul Gandhi the leader of the Congress dynasty has many admirers and followers here in Meghalaya.
In the battle of perception, the MDA Government has disappointed those who genuinely admired it and expected it to deliver. The less said about the regional parties supporting this Government the better! They don’t seem to have any say at all in how the Government is run and at the moment seem keen to launch into the district council elections than in thinking about governing the state of Meghalaya. The only action taken by this Government so far is to transfer officers and police officials in certain districts to facilitate illegal mining and transportation of coal. That too is a public perception. And the monster of bad governance is out there!
Yours etc.,
Saikat Kumar Basu
Lethbridge AB Canada

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

Capitalism has led to global ecological crisis
Marc Brodine outlines strategy for green socialism

By John Bachtell

The warning signs of a planetary emergency abound: Record heat, massive wildfires, extreme weather events, declining agricultural yields, sea level rise, spreading diseases, mass species extinction, and a climate refugee crisis. The latest report by the UN International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) ominously warns the Earth’s inhabitants have 12 years to avert the worst climate catastrophes and “must act on a scale that has no documented historical precedent.”
Two other scientific reports further illustrate our planet in peril, including the U.S. government 4th National Climate Assessment and the National Oceanic and A t m o s p h e r i c Administration on ice melt in the Arctic. And no matter what steps humanity takes, the effects of these crises will persist for decades. Life is in the balance and every day counts. Meanwhile, the Trump administration blithely ignores science and dismantles government agencies that regulate polluters when both are essential to combat the climate crisis.
On December 14, governments met in Poland to follow up the Paris Climate Accords. The Trump administration, which already announced the U.S. withdrawal from the pact, allied with Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait to block recognition of the dire warnings of the IPCC report. But there is hope! It lies in the action of tens of millions of people and growing eco-consciousness across the planet, and the response by civil society, elected officials, federal, state governments, and municipalities. One of the most exciting developments is the call for a Green New Deal, a mammoth national project (potentially without “historical precedent”) to transition the U.S. economy to sustainability by 2030, backed by a growing movement with support from elected officials.
This is why Green Strategy: Path to F u n d a m e n t a l Transformation, by American Marxist environmentalist Marc Brodine, is a timely contribution and essential reading. The vast majority of works on the climate crisis only venture a deeper understanding of how bad things are and its causes and issue a call for urgent action. But here we have a work that is also a manual for action which projects the movement needed to overcome the crisis and how to build it. Brodine brings insights from decades of experience in the environmental, labor, and mass democratic movements, including an understanding of Marxist strategy and tactics.
Brodine explains the Marxist methodology succinctly, how it can be employed to gain a deeper understanding of the ecological crisis and its roots in the capitalist mode of production. Marxism helps us understand the interconnectedness of all phenomena, ecological systems and processes, their interrelationship with human society, and how dialectical change happens, or what Steven Jay Gould described as “punctuated equilibrium.” Green Strategy, in clear and compelling words, offers a picture of the climate and multiple ecological crises and their interrelationship. While the accumulation of greenhouses gases is the most tangible and urgent crisis, it is related to other disasters created by capitalism. These include the warming, acidification, and changing currents of the oceans; melting of the polar ice cap and Arctic permafrost leading to the mass release of methane; choking toxins and plastics

in the water, land, and air; deforestation; depletion of soil from industrial agricultural practice; collapse of sea life, bird, and bee populations; looming exhaustion of vast aquifers; destruction of wetlands, etc.
Brodine explains how each system and process has its own tipping points, feedback loops with ominous implications, and interpenetration with other ecological processes and systems. All these crises must be addressed together.
When humans act on nature to produce the things needed for survival, we alter nature at the same time. That interaction is not abstract. It is governed by the dominant economic system, the capitalist mode of production in which distinct and irreconcilable classes relate to the production process. The capitalist class owns and controls the means of production and exploits the working class. Labour and nature are the sources of all new wealth created in this process. Brodine explains how capitalism’s insatiable drive for maximum profits and wealth accumulation places it in conflict with nature. The capitalist system can only exist through infinite expansion of production which inevitably collides with the Earth’s finite resources and capacity to absorb the waste generated by production and consumption. The ecological crisis is also a crisis of capitalism itself.
The sheer concentration of wealth and scale of the exploitation of nature’s resources by the capitalist mode of production make contemporary monopoly capitalism particularly destructive. One hundred corporations rooted in the energy sector are responsible for 71 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. And just 25 corporations are the source of over half of all emissions since 1988.
Green Strategy offers a broad understanding of the movement needed to defeat these corporate forces, the relationship between reforms and revolutionary transformation, and strategy which involves stages of the struggle, political objectives and alliances, and tactics that result in unity and victory.
Drawing on examples of the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam War movements, Brodine asserts that every arena of struggle (electoral, political, economic) and every method (voting, civil disobedience, boycott, etc.) must be utilized. All forms of struggle complement each other.
The government can play a dastardly role under the thumb of the energy corporations. But the government also has enormous leverage by mobilizing people and resources on a national basis, favoring sustainable strategies, the control of procurement, and funding scientific research and public health. Therefore, ousting the fossil fuel-backed GOP from the White House, Congress, state legislatures, and municipal government and electing pro-environment governing coalitions in alliance with the Democratic Party, is a strategic imperative.
The climate and ecological crises are common problems of humanity and “require the collective thinking and action of humanity.” The path to fundamental transformation, as Brodine sees it, is through a majority movement in the U.S. and globally that vanquishes the corporate interests blocking change and reorganizes society from top to bottom.
Calling for a Green New Deal and the creation of millions of new jobs building a green infrastructure and adapting the country to the ravages of climate change is a project that can unite environmentalists, organized labor and distressed working-class communities. (IPA Service)

"It is easier to fight for one's principles than to live up to them."
--- Alfred Adler

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.138 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2018

The Northeast Connect

ONE of the impediments to economic growth of the Northeast is lack of connectivity. The Northeast has been waiting for the obstacle to be removed for the last 16 years. Now Prime Minister Narendra Modi has dedicated Bogibeel Bridge in Assam, India's largest railroad and double-decker bridge to the nation. With this, travel between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh has been further eased. The 4.9 km long bridge cuts the five hour 212 km travel time from Dibrugarh to Itanagar by ferry to barely three hours on ground. The Prime Minister also flagged off the Tinsukia-Naharlagun train service via the new route on the Bogibeel bridge. It will cut train travel between Tinsukia and Naharlagun by over ten hours. The Bridge is also for the purpose of bolstering India's defence capability along the China border. People can now travel to Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Bengaluru direct from Northern Assam and Eastern Arunachal Pradesh without passing through Guwahati.

Almost two lakh people came to witness the inauguration of the bridge as Modi reiterated the NDA government's commitment to develop connectivity in the region. He claimed that in the last four and a half years the Centre has stressed connectivity in the North East along with completing pending projects speedily. Modi referred to the lackadaisical attitude of previous governments which thwarted development of the North Eastern region. He reiterated that on assuming power, his government completed more than half the projects in just four and a half years. He said that if his government had held office earlier, the Bridge could have been commissioned long ago. Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister said that now his state could move shoulder to shoulder with other states. Whatever may have been the pace of progress in the last decade, people of the North Eastern states can now look forward to expeditious development of the regional economy. Connectivity is not the only problem but it is a major problem. Movement of goods and food products which takes weeks to reach Arunachal Pradesh or Mizoram by road would now take lesser time by train. There is of course a clash of interests between the states vis-a-vis the contested boundaries between Assam and Meghalaya, Assam and Nagaland, Assam and Mizoram and Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. There is also militancy especially in Assam and Nagaland. That remains unsolved. Besides, there is a problem of citizenship in Assam. When will influx of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh be halted and how? This is the most tormenting question for the region.

TO THE EDITOR

Inundation of Rat-hole Mine in Meghalaya

Editor,
As per reports of the Shillong Times of December 14, the NPP led State Government's denial of illegal coal mining was blown to smithereens on Thursday (13 December 2018) as 13 miners were feared dead in a rat-hole mine at Ksan near the Lyteih river under Saipung police station in East Jaintia Hills. According to information received, 13 people were trapped inside the illegal coal mine at Ksan. The National Green Tribunal has banned unscientific and unsafe rat-hole coal mining in Meghalaya since April, 2014. According to the police sources, it appeared to be an old coal mine and the labourers were engaged in the rat-hole coal mining three days before the tragedy which happened to sudden flooding of the mine at 5.30 am on Thursday, December 13.

The NPP-led MDA government all this while has been denying any illegal coal mining taking place in the state. Coal Mining, or for that matter any underground mining is an extremely hazardous industrial operation and profession, entirely different from any other industry, where compliance with the Acts,

regulations and rules framed and imposed by the Director General of Mines Safety (DGMS) & other authorities are to be religiously adhered to and complied with for ensuring safety and security of men and machine engaged. Continued "rat-hole/ illegal mining of coal" in the name of "traditional mining" in the state of Meghalaya is just to delude the Regulatory & Statutory Government authorities. It is neither "Scientific Mining" nor a "Safe Mining" practice.

The problem with the state of Meghalaya is that "rat-hole mining" in the name of traditional mining is still rampant in the coal-bearing areas of the entire state despite the ban imposed by the NGT. This happens with direct/ indirect support/ of the administration, government officials and political leaders, irrespective of their political affiliations and all for vested interests.

Advocates of "traditional mining" in the state defy and deny statutory requirements of compliance with the Central Acts, Rules & Regulations framed by the Director General of Mines Safety on the basis of over 200 years' experience of coal and metal mining operations in the country. Major Coalfields of Meghalaya being in

It was a perfect electoral cake rolled out by the Congress to the strains of 'Vote For Me.' Iced with luscious lip-smacking loan waiver for the debt-ridden Kisan, wherein, sound economic sense was surrendered to political gamesmanship with reckless abundant as a populist sop yields better electoral rewards than reasoned issues and sustainable programmes. Who cares? After all in rajniti, public funds translate into netas spending our money!

Predictably, post victory in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh the Congress with a flourish waived of farmers loans of Rs 38,000 crores, Rs 18,000 crores and Rs 6,100 crores respectively. BJP-ruled Assam followed with Rs 600 crores and Jharkhand, as had Maharashtra earlier writing of Rs 34,500 crores.

Then the blame game started. While Prime Minister Modi blamed the Congress for the agrarian crisis in the country, Congress's Rahul asserted he will not let NaMo sleep until all farms loans have been waived. It is another matter the Niti Aayog went against the grain giving a thumbs down to the farm loan waivers as it aids just 10-15% of farmers and the rest don't have access to institutional loans. "It is a deadly poison, it's a wrong way of addressing the real issue," added a bank Chief

Raising a moot point: Where do they get monies to fund these doles? Obviously, by taxing us, the people. Should our hard-earned tax money be used to boost a Parties electoral votebanks? Shouldn't leaders or their Parties pay for it from their pockets or funds? Should loans be waived?

Notably, given the economic logic that there is no such thing as a free lunch, a populist scheme is invariably paid for either in the form of higher taxes or increasing inflation. Underscoring that what ails India and its burgeoning poor is not poverty, which can be corrected, but the ruthless heartlessness of our netagan who not only lack humility but also empathy for the garib. Worse, it exposes their sheer ennui and paucity of

proximity to and stretched along the international Indo-Bangladesh border crony politicians in nexus with a section of businessmen are earning astronomical sums of easy money in terms of dollars. Reportedly majority of politicians of the state are also owners of more than dozens of illegal coal mines.

The water inside the mine in all probability gushed in from the nearby Lyteih river. Search and rescue operations launched since the day of the accident on December 13 proved futile because of lack of experience of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) to deal with such emergencies. This coupled with poor planning and because of engagement of low discharge capacity pumps for de-watering over the past 13 days the water level in the mine at Ksan has not yet receded. It is most unfortunate that the district administration has also suspended the on-going rescue operations from Monday (24th December).

Associated with mining industry (coal & metal) for the last 55 years and having experience of Chasnala & Buradhemo inundation rescue & recovery operations as an active rescue worker it is suggested that the immediate requirement is to

By Poonam I Kaushish

ideas along-with accentuating their moral bankruptcy. And a perspective completely divorced from reality.

True, it can be argued netas are obliged to be seen as populist in the no-holds-barred free-for-all electoral race, as it would be stupid to wish away political lollipops to entice the electorate. But do our narcissist leaders need to act like modern-day feudal maharajas? Whereby, they expect the aam janata to prostrate before them and dole out money which doesn't belong to them.

Certainly it is nobody case that farmers or rural poverty should be ignored. However, the harsh truth is that political promises in the economic sphere should not cross the prudence limits, where it starts hurting the economy as a whole. Notwithstanding, assurances of loan waivers, or cheap rice, free electricity can be justified on the grounds of farmers suicide and acute poverty.

Plainly, we pay taxes for the growth and development of the country, for better educational institutions, health care, hospitals, infrastructure etc. The only long-term solution to the farming crisis lies in a good agriculture policy, boosting labour-intensive industrialisation to absorb excess farm labour and moving to schemes such as Telangana's Rythu Bandhu which provides investment support to farmers up front. Alongside state of art storage facilities to ensure farmers produce does not rot, cold chains and crop insurance.

Besides, there is always a question to what extent this relief measure helps bring farmers out of indebtedness and suffering. Since waivers are instant temporary relief from debt preventing suicides, it has largely failed to contribute to farmers' welfare in the long term, filled with lack of proper monitoring, transparency and accountability, reducing the effectiveness of loan waivers. Also, waivers are not a permanent solution for agriculture until fundamental problems are solved.

Given the level of

dishonesty, populism and irresponsibility which increasingly governs our politics, these waivers are an invitation to disaster. None sees the danger of economic derailment as the biggest loser are the farmers, poor, weak and under-privileged in whose name many freebies are justified.

By providing free candies to the voters the masses have become dependent on the politicians with the result that there is no true empowerment. This has resulted in the people not being able to critically evaluate their own leaders.

Sadly, there is no agency which can stop public funds from being wasted, despite views expressed by committees. Thus, given the level of dishonesty, populism and irresponsibility which increasingly governs our political system along-with a leech-infested environment of the undata takes it all, our carpetbaggers refuse to let up.

Making it imperative for us to have a code of governance and conduct of ethics to minimize our polity's violations of regulations including unjustified misuse of public funds. Time now, for our leaders to realize that populism will only provide immediate succour at the expense of the future. It is no remedy for neglect, faulty priorities in industrialization and under-investment in rural areas.

They need to concentrate on the big picture. Wherein, energies are channelized to address poverty through faster, broad-based growth, supported by well-functioning delivery mechanisms. The effort must be to reduce the number of people in need of handouts.

Pertinently, in the Subramaniam Balaji vs Tamil Nadu Government case in May 2013, the Supreme Court directed the Election Commission to frame guidelines to restrain Parties from promising freebies to voters, so as to maintain a level playing field during elections.

rescue and save human lives.

Yours etc.,
Samares Bandyopadhyay
Advocate, Kolkata
High Court & Former
Chief Mining Consultant

Humanity is dead

Editor,
Your editorial, "No value for human life in Meghalaya" (ST, December 27, 2018) is right in pointing out - "The miners trapped in the mines at Ksan in the Lumthari area of East Jaintia Hills District on December 13 last when the mine suddenly flooded, are virtually left to their fates. There is no public outcry against this inhuman treatment of over 15 lives left to die in agony for want of rapid assistance."

The horrifying fact of, "No public outcry" has also been highlighted in the letter, "Where is our humanity?" (ST, Dec 27), in which Kynsai R Nonglait said, "A video showing people of Jowai dancing on the streets on Christmas Eve has gone viral. When not far away from Jowai, there is death and destruction of over 15 human lives who are trapped inside a flooded mine, how can people be so insensitive as to shut their conscience just because the tragedy has not visited

"Distribution of freebies shakes the root of free and fair elections to a large degree," it underscored. Even as it observed nothing under Section 123 of The Representation of the People Act barred Parties from promising voters freebies in their manifestos.

With polls due next year, one way is to make it obligatory for Parties to inform the EC where the money will come from to implement the free giveaways and if they will raise taxes, reduce allocation for these programmes once in power.

Two, it would be more beneficial for Parties to offer people permanent solutions to their problem in their election manifestos instead of a slew of seemingly advantageous, but temporary stop-gap measures. Three, the EC needs to penalize Parties who use the quick exploitative mechanism to win people's votes.

Clearly, care should be taken to draw a distinction between welfarism and populism. Welfarism takes into account the needs of different sections of society as a part of a large development framework. Populism is purely guided by vote banks. Albeit, granting concessions which have no economic rationale and are not part of the larger economic planning, as enunciated by a Government.

Unfortunately, our policy-makers have been unable to perceive the reality of the situation. They have consistently failed to evolve a strategy of development which would take into account our pluralism and fluctuating economic disparities.

It is time now for the netas to realize that liberalization and populism do not go hand in hand. The aam aadmi is no fool. Each populist slogan only accentuates his growing awareness. Public accountability is indispensable in a democratic set-up. A Government cannot afford to throw away public money on private populist whims. The time to draw a 'lakshman rekha' on vote bank politics and junk farm loan waivers. What says you? ---INFA

their own families?"

No public outcry is also a phenomenon when a safai karmachari (scavenger) dies every third day in a gutter on an average in our country. Indeed, we seldom, if ever, talk about it. It is highly unfortunate that we do not value the lives of the common people. Our attitude had been as callous when more than one hundred people died at the altar of demonetisation in various places of our country or when nine children were crushed in front of their school by an SUV in Bihar or thirteen poor people had been devoured by a man-eater one after another in Maharashtra for two years. This showcases how we have been devaluing the lives of Indians. Ironically, the common people are like the Indian rupee that keeps getting cheaper by the day vis-a-vis the dollar. Some people believe that the rich have the merit in them to be treated differently. But there is no merit in inequality and inhumanity! And it does not depend on the merit of a person to be born with a silver spoon in her or his mouth.

Yours etc.,
Sujit De.
Viaemail

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

Nation Eye's 2019 Wish for politico-economic vision

By Shivaji Sarkar

The year 2019 comes with hopes but the path is murky. Economy needs a new path, resuscitation and people-oriented policies.

It's time to rethink. Manmohanomics has failed the governments and the people. The BJP, which followed in the same footsteps, is now wondering whether it has also lost the way. The Congress does not know what the economic outlook should be. No political party has been able to spell out a new vision. Neither has any got a plan yet for resuscitating the economy. The regional parties are fighting a battle of existence be it TMC, TDP, BSP, SP, or the Left. None apparently has an ideology.

Worse, nobody has a plan for the farmers, for the people, for boosting production, increasing purchasing capacity, strengthen the rupee and reducing petrol prices when international prices come down. People of India are in a quandary. They do not know who would have a plan for the farmers or how to reduce the influence of corporate that has ruined the banking system and caused rise in prices.

Education is becoming expensive every day. It is causing severe uncertainty and negativity among the youth. Jobs are eluding them. There is no plan to cleanse the education system. High tuition fee, high coaching costs and fleecing of students by private universities have become the norm. Some such universities or institutes levy indiscriminate financial penalties, which in many cases are at least half of the tuition they are supposed to pay.

The ensuing elections would bring a mere 'interim' Budget. People may know the figures but not its import. Indians are wondering whether economy is liberated or under control of the Government as the new RBI Governor Shaktikant Das says. They are failing to understand why the NDA Government needs to have slices of the RBI assets, over which no government has any claim.

The society is now discussing why banks should give any dividend to the Government, which is a mere custodian of people's deposits. As per good banking practices, earnings should be reinvested to incentivise the depositors and not be given to anyone. Additionally, taxes despite reduction in GST are at high levels. Tax on income is being paid by the lowest paid employees or other small businesses. High taxes and tax terror are stymieing economic activities.

It is also being asked how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) covers funding for sculptures. While on the one hand, the petrol prices are being increased and so are the taxes, profits of oil companies phenomenally rise, on the other how come they are funding activities that are neither related to business nor social good?

Overall quality of life is deteriorating. A Gallup survey in September, 2018, finds that Indians' ratings of their current lives nationwide are the worst in recent record, an average of 4.0 on a 0-to-10 scale in 2017 -- down from 4.4 back in 2014. The survey finds decline in the percentage of Indians who rate their lives positively enough to rate it as thriving. Only 3 per cent of Indians consider themselves thriving in 2017 compared to 14 per cent in 2014. The living family wage in India remains almost flat in the Rs 17300-17400 a month or years. Wages paid to low-skilled workers

decreased to Rs 10300 a month in 2018 from Rs 13300 in 2014.

Food has become expensive even in rural areas. "Beginning in 2015, rural Indians began reporting increased difficulty paying for food," says the Gallup report. Over 28 per cent rural Indians reported not having enough money to pay for food at some point that year. About 18 per cent urban people reported similar hardship. It has increased every year. About 41 per cent of rural people and 26 per cent in urban areas said they were not able to afford food in 2017.

The Gallup survey supports the rural dismay. Suicides by farmers continue. Debt level remains high despite loan waivers. No mechanism has evolved for paying remunerative prices to the farmers. Even the difference between MSP and the actual prices that they were getting called 'bhavantar' in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh did not mitigate their woes.

Post demonetisation cash crunch has caused severe distress. But officially there is growth. The IMF World Economic Outlook predicts Indian economy will grow at 7.3 per cent in 2018 and 7.4 per cent in 2019, up from 6.7 per cent in 2017. It is projected to be higher than China's economic growth at 6.6 per cent in 2018 and 6.2 per cent in 2019, down from 6.9 per cent in 2017. But the volume of Chinese economy is many times larger than India's.

The New Year does not seem to make much of a change whatever the poll outcome. The nation is looking for a solution. Would 2019, before or after the elections find out the cherished path? It is not easy. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan and Syria would pose new challenges.

The country needs a politico-economic vision and not rhetoric. The new generation politicians irrespective of their affiliations are clueless. The distrust in them is reflected in the high number of votes polled as NOTA in the recent State Assembly polls. Apparently, the voters don't want anyone or feel everyone is equally ineffective. It is a sad statement on the lack of vision across the political spectrum. If people are drifting away to the Opposition conglomeration, it indicates not a gain for any party but the lack of an alternative.

The visionary alternative which could be the people's choice is not there. That is the crucial issue. The election is still over two months away. Could there be a change? But if the manifestos of 2014 are any indicator, it seems manifestos are mere "jumlas" (rhetoric) and have lost most of their meanings. The promises are not delivered. The reforms are for the corporate and not the people.

More the reforms and more the slogan of 'Make in India', the country is being flooded with foreign produced goods, high profit repatriation, high trade deficit, job losses and a crisis of confidence despite higher government expenditure. The erstwhile Planning Commission was at least guiding us to a path. NITI Ayog seems to be still looking for one. Today, nobody knows what would be the path to revival of economy.

That is ironically the hope. Year 2019 may become a watershed in Indian politics and who knows a new leadership and vision may emerge out of a hopeless situation.---INFA

A great year for metal but rock is not dead

By Anand Venkitachalam

The year bore witness to a plethora of new material from various metal artistes. As they — old and new, the famous and the underground — decided on innovations and new ideas, it energised a whole genre.

At the same time, rock charts showed little or no creativity by most of the alternative and Indie bands that dominate, rehashing the sound of their past. That, however, does not mean that rock is dead. There were still bands putting out some really cool stuff.

Here's a look at top metal and rock offerings which made a difference during the year.

10. Metal: 'Pal' by Kalmah. The Finnish melodic death metal legends returned with yet another brilliant album after five years. While no means groundbreaking, 'Pal' features amazing arrangements, melodies and death metal aggression and technical dexterous precision.

Rock: 'Eat The Elephant' by A Perfect Circle. American rock band's fourth studio album was worth its 14-year wait. This record is more of an atmospheric art rock record and lacks the band's previous heavier alternative metal sound. But nonetheless, it's a great piece.

9. Metal: 'Cobra Speed Venom' by The Crown. The Swedish melodic death and thrash metallers have come back with added energy. There is a lot of violent fervour, growls, heavy thrashy riffs, melodic leads and powerful drumming. It is a combination of thrash or death metal LP.

Rock: 'Prequelle' by Ghost. While definitely not a straight-up pop rock album as it does contain plenty of heavy elements, this is far removed from metal, though it does have a lot going on: Hard rock, pop rock, some prog and for the first time arena rock. Most songs have the element of catchiness due to the openly pop influences here such as ABBA.

8. Metal:'The Wake' by Voivod. One of the most underrated and creative bands, the Canadian progressive thrash metal veterans have released one of the greatest albums of their career. 'The Wake' manages to rival their original classics like 'Killing Technology' and 'Dimension Hatross' while combining modern production.

Rock:'Stone Temple Pilots' by Stone Temple Pilots. The self-titled album of the San Diego legends brings their trademark sound of distortion-filled heavy hard rock riffs, marked by a psychedelic but also grooving melodic atmosphere. New lead singer Jeff Gutt does a splendid job.

7. Metal:'Electric Messiah' by High on Fire. You can always count of Matt Pike if you want something barbaric. This is definitely one of High On Fire's best. This album descends upon you with a plethora of monstrously heavy riffs and is just straightforward metal.

Rock: 'Still Cyco Punk After All These Years' by Suicidal Tendencies. While essentially a near complete re-recording of frontman Mike Muir's '96 solo album 'Lost My Brain', it is still fully energetic, raw, fast, hard and fun.

6. Metal:'Rainier Fog' by Alice in Chains. The band is renowned for their dark and heavy sound and bleak subject matter. 'Rainier' sounds a bit closer to their older stuff while nonetheless having the sensibili-



ties of their newer sound. Another truly brilliant record by AIC.

Rock: 'Living the Dream' by Slash Ft. Myles Kennedy and Conspirators. When making a rock'n roll record with heaviness and attitude one can never truly go wrong with the guitar legend Slash and vocalist Myles Kennedy. Bluesy hard rock riffs and passionate soaring vocals, grooving drums and strong bass make this record yet another strong hard rock piece.

5. Metal: 'Devouring Radiant Light' By Skeletonwitch. Rather underrated, Skel-etonwitch is an American band which plays blackened melodic thrash metal. In 'Devour-ing', there is a change in vocalists and the style is different. The black metal tendencies are less and the music packs progres-sive tendencies and a powerful atmospheric element.

Rock: 'Time and Space' by Turnstile. American punk band's second album is an instant classic for the hardcore scene. It has pretty much everything you want: raw, loud, aggressive, heavy, short and does not mess

around with any experimental tendencies.

4. Metal:'Automata Part I & II' by Between the Buried and Me. A double-part concept album, about a man whose dreams are broadcasted worldwide as a form of entertainment. While the second part of this record is superior, the first is no slouch either. The band beautifully balances their progressive elements with a refined melodic technical death metal sound.

Rock: 'Ember' by Breaking Benjamin. Rarely has a band sounded so consistent and yet not managed to grow dull. It has hard heavy metallic riffs, melodic choruses with clean singing and raw screams packed with a dark emotional atmosphere. Nothing different and yet everything sounds fresh and original.

3. Metal: 'Thunderbolt' by Saxon. One of the most legendary bands in heavy metal history, Saxon were part of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal. Anyone who thought that Saxon's quality may have dropped as a result of their age is in for a severe shock.

This album has everything. Just listen and be transported to Valhalla.

Rock: 'Book of Bad Decisions' by Clutch. Full of hard, raw gritty engaging songs, with southern rock and blues influences. And it packs a punch.

2. Metal:'Firepower' by Judas Priest. One of the first metal bands in history and instrumental 'Firepower' by Judas is just full-on energy packed, no messing around, straight-up melodic metal. Another masterpiece by 'The Metal God'.

Rock: 'Vaxis Act 1: The Unheavenly Creatures' by Coheed And Cambria. Having influences in hard rock, alternative rock, progressive rock, metal and punk, 'Vaxis' is a continuation of the concept based on frontman Claudio Sanchez's comic book series 'The Armory Wars'. Engaging to say the least.

1. Metal: 'Queen of Time' by Amorphis. It is one of the greatest Finnish metal bands. While their style has changed, Amorphis have come out as an evolved animal, their sound being a unique mix of melodic death metal, heavy metal, folk metal and progressive metal. Everything about it speaks perfection.

Rock: 'Lost on the Road to Eternity' by Magnum. What is astounding about the British progressive rock veterans is how inspired Bob Catlin and Tom Clarkin, the creative core of Magnum, manage to sound in their 70s. 'Lost' is all you can want -- melodic, catchy, progressive and full of pomp.

Honourable mentions: Metal:'Love In Shadow' by Sumac;'A New Kind Of Horror' by Anaal Nathrakh;'The Science' by Sleep;'Our Raw Heart' by YOB;'Diluvii' by Obscura; and'Sunshine Dust' by Skyharbor.

Rock:'Vicious' by Halestorm; 'Resistance Is Futile' by Manic Street Preachers and 'Joy As An Act Of Resistance' by Idles. (IANS)

(Anand Venkitachalam is a Delhi-based metal fan. He can be reached at jordanmetalhead@gmail.com)

Mixers in demand

By Ranjan K Baruah

A bartender is someone who serves beverages at a licensed bar to paying customers. A bartender mixes and serves drinks, mostly alcoholic.

In some establishments, the bartender might participate in flair bartending, which contributes to the entertainment in the bar. Bartenders are expected to be able to mix hundreds of types of drinks to please any paying customer in a quick and accurate way. Bartenders with professional experience and graduated from bartending schools get better employment opportunities due to their ability to handle customers and other required skills.

The best part is that there is no specific formal degree or qualification required for this career. However, some of them enter this career after completing a course in Hotel management or a certification course in Bartending. Now due to demand in this field those students in hotel management and hospitality field are taking short term courses in bartending as an add-on to their skill.

In India, job prospects for this career is more now than earlier with the mushrooming of hotels, resorts and night clubs. Bartending jobs are available both as part time and full time. In fact, bartending is one of the best part-time jobs available to college students. Strong competition is expected for bartending jobs at popular restaurants and fine-dining establishments.

Those who have graduated from bartending schools and those with previous work experience and excellent customer-service skills will have the best job prospects.

Students from hotel management have more scope to join this profession. Any one may try and become a successful bartender. Earnings vary greatly depending on the type of establishment. Further wages vary from country to country. However, in most cases bartender's tips are higher than wages. A good bartender with experience is always in demand. Bartending has always been a male-oriented business. This is a fact not only India but abroad as well, though the percentage of female bartenders definitely is much more in the west.

Some students might not like this as they might be against bars and pub culture but the fact is different and it brings opportunity for many young people.

With the 'pub culture' becoming widely popular across the country, bartending as a career is also gaining wide popularity in India.

There are courses like Mixology and Flair Bartending, Professional Bartending Course, Advance Bartending Course, Craftsmanship Course in Bartending, Certification Course in Wines and Spirits, Molecular Mixology Course, Basic Flair Bartending, Certification Course in Blair Flair, Exclusive Bartending Course, etc.

Most of the institutes offer direct admissions to the certificate and diploma courses in Bartending. The minimum eligibility criterion for Bartending certificate and diploma courses is 10+2 in any stream. Success depends on motivation, training and required skills. This is something new in the region but as the demand has increased so there would be more demand for individual who have experience in this area.

Updates:

NIFT Entrance: Interested students may apply for the entrance for admission to 4 years undergraduate and 2 years post graduate professional programs for the academic year 2019 at National Institute of Fashion Technology. NIFT has different campuses across India which offers different courses like B.Des in Fashion Design, Leather Design, Accessory Design, Textile Design, Knitwear Design, Fashion Communication, etc apart from Masters Programme. Last to date to apply for the entrance is December 28.

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



‘Indian cuisine most difficult to master’

Chef Ben Ungermann, the MasterChef Australia 2017 finalist, recently visited India for Johnie Walker Gourmet Experiences- Season 3. While speaking exclusively with IBNS correspondent **Souvik Ghosh** in Kolkata, Ben spoke about his life's journey, cuisines and future plans

Take us through your journey in MasterChef Australia 2017.

I would probably say that in terms of the competition, it is definitely 40 percent mental and 60 percent cooking ability. The amount of pressure they put no wonder is immense. I suppose if one wants to be at the grand final, one will have to sort of learn to study a nerve a bit. It's incredibly demanding but I don't want to make it sound as if the experience was negative but it was definitely the most stressful time in my entire life.

Do you think these competitions bring out the right talent?

There are two sides to this. One is that I have seen really great cooks leave the competition early because they aren't able to deal with the pressure. For the same token, being a chef is an incredibly stressful job. It is like a yes and no. Bit of both. Yeah.

Tell us about your association with Gourmet Experiences.

We are really excited to work with Johnnie Walker (Johnnie Walker Gourmet Experi-

ences curated a menu with Ben that will remain open for consumers for the entire December at Serafina, Quest Mall in Kolkata) purely because I do a lot of ice creams and things like that and the depth of flavours. Having said that, it's about teaching the greater population. Usually when one has a meal at dinner, it is paired with wine. It could very well be whiskey. That is what I am trying to show the population. I am really excited to be part of this. I do enjoy whiskey and I think it plays beautifully with every course.

I was reading an article which stated you will probably launch a store in India. Is it true and if yes, how the plannings are going?

To be honest, I can guarantee that I will be spending at least some permanent amount of time in India in 2019. I can't say exactly what is going to be but I will definitely be having something here very soon.

Which city you are targeting to open it? Is it Bengaluru?

I can't really tell you for sure. All I can tell that I am definitely in some serious talks at the moment.

Which part of the country you are looking for? Anything going in your mind?

To be honest I haven't decided on a particular city or the talks didn't happen yet to decide the location. But considering India as a massive country where the food is so diverse, I would actually have a hard time to pick a city.

How the Indian cuisines are doing internationally?

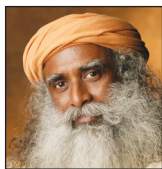
I would say right now the Indian cuisine is the hottest among all in the planet. The reason being I think the European cuisine is about the actual product or main ingredient. The Indian cuisine is completely different as it is about intense flavours, layers of spices. There is so much depth which goes into the Indian cuisine. In my opinion, the Indian cuisine is the most difficult cuisine to master and cook well.



Inspire the youth

Pet shops should sell local breed, rescued dogs

Sadhguru, Isha Foundation



Usually the older generation handles youth as some kind of disease that needs treatment. They do not need treatment. It is people who have gone away from life who need treatment. Those close to life just live. Actually, it would be wonderful if this world were to be guided by little children because they are closer to life than anybody else. If you look at your children and yourself, your children are definitely a lot happier than you are. And after all, everything you wish to do is for human wellbeing, and human wellbeing means human happiness. So this being the case, is it you or your children who should be consultants of life? You are carried away by your thoughts and emotions: they are much closer to life. If only the world learned from children rather than trying to teach children, the world would be a beautiful place.

So if something constructive has to happen in the world, it has to be by youth. If something destructive has to happen in the world, that too has to be by youth because youth are in a certain state of high energy and if there is no inspiration or proper guidance, that energy can very easily turns negative.

Today, our educative systems have become 100 percent informative; there is no inspiration. Without inspiration, no human being rises beyond the limitations in which he lives.

You can get information anywhere. You do not really have to listen to a teacher. A teacher is not the best means of transmission when it comes to pure information. A book is better, the internet is even better. Only if the teacher’s role is to create a thirst for knowledge and inspire people to learn, then a teacher’s role has something to give. Making the whole education system purely informational has caused enormous damage. The time of life when you are youthful, when you are capable of many things, unfortunately goes waste simply because the necessary inspiration is not there.

Generally most leaders in the world have always inspired people only by creating an external enemy. If you create

an external enemy, you can have everybody on the street. But the real enemy is within you – your limitations are your biggest enemies. Whatever limitations which one suffers from – your fear, your anxiety, your anger, your hatred – are the biggest enemy. When the enemy is within you, it needs much more commitment and dedication to inspire you. Unfortunately, dedication and commitment have become such scarce material on the planet. Everybody is thinking of doing one big mela one day and getting the youth inspired into wonderful states. Such things will not happen. It needs daily committed, dedicated work; it is a lifelong work.

It is like nurturing a plant. If you want it to bear fruit, you have to nurture it, water it and take care of it every day. If this dedication is shown by the adults, youth will do miraculous things. Only because such dedication is missing in the general population, youth seem to be disoriented. They do not know what to do and they are doing their own things. Because everybody is working on short-term goals, youth also work on short-term goals.

One big thing that needs to happen with the youth and with everybody is that their identification with humanity should not be limited to just themselves, it should include the larger society and a larger world around them.

Unfortunately, this is missing in education. Modern education is constantly training people to think only about themselves and nothing but themselves. The whole process of science is only about how to use everything for our comfort and wellbeing. Initially, we use the planet, then the trees and plants, then the animals, then of course the human beings also. We exploit everybody to our benefit and comfort. This attitude has been deeply set with the process of modern education.

As we are investing our time, resources and energies in transmitting informative knowledge, we have to invest a certain amount of time, energy and resources to inspire the youth. If this happens, then the world would become a truly beautiful place.

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

By Maneka Sanjay Gandhi



do something about the “dog menace” in order for them, their children, and their dogs, to move freely without encountering “junglees”, “strays”, “pi-dogs”.

While the government, and all the courts, have ordered sterilisation of all dogs by all municipalities and district administrations, in reality less than a tenth of the country is doing it. Lack of vets, lack of money and most importantly lack of vision.

The dog sterilisation programme is controlled by the Ministry of Environment, who put out less than 50 lakh a year for it, instead of the Ministry for Health which has been allocated more than Rs 300 crore. But the Ministry for Environment will not hand it over. And the Ministry for Health is not trying too hard because as their secretary said to me, “Our job is not to sterilise dogs.”

Since this would come under the heading of rabies control, I asked why they were killing mosquitoes since that was not their job. Because that was the only way to bring malaria under control. Exactly. Sterilising and vaccinating dogs would remove rabies within five years.

It is difficult to educate bureaucrats since the space where their brains should be is filled with ego and a limited logic that runs only on one narrow gauge track.

However, here is another way to deal with the dogs and cats on the road. Illegal breeders are breeding lakhs of pedigreed dogs who are unhealthy, inbred and found in every pet shop. It is now illegal for any pet shop to keep any animals without a registration, which is very strict, but our feet on the ground are so limited and so vulnerable to bribes that I am not sure how long it will take the authorities to apply the new laws.

So, here is what we can do:

America’s shelters have a kill policy. Abandoned animals in shelters are allowed to live 28 days and if they are not adopted, they are killed. Over the years a large number of no-kill shelters have come up. But the dogs live in cages for the rest of their lives, unless they are adopted.

In 2017, California passed a law A.B.485 that pet stores will only sell puppies, kittens and rab-

bits 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 illegal breeding.

Recently, we had to rescue 11 dogs in the backyard of a doctor in Thane. They were starved, on the verge of death, eating their own faeces, but each had given birth to any number of puppies who had been sold by the doctor with forged certificates as to their foreign pedigree.

The pet trade in America predictably protested

huge woolly Swiss ones which were originally smuggled into India. And, of course, lots of Vodafone pups.

We put the dogs into a special enclosure, in full view of the hundreds of visitors who come, so that they can adopt them. Some get homes. Others waste away with broken hearts, and the terror of being in an uncomfortable enclosure with 50 other dogs, till they die.

My sister takes the most damaged ones home, and she has 17 in her tiny house. I have 24. Once they recover and bounce back, we try and find



saying “it would jeopardise jobs”. (They were overruled). But in India the trade does not employ anyone. It is an illegal business which operates by taking a few dogs, tying them up, forcibly breeding them every six months and then putting them in illegal pet shops. It will put no one out of business.

Why not bring the same law into India? Almost every city now has an animal welfare group. Many of them have animal shelters. My shelter in Delhi, Sanjay Gandhi Animal Care Centre, gets a minimum of 10 throwaways a day. People who have bought pedigreed dogs, kept them badly, made them sick, tied them up the whole day and made them ferocious, and then they came to the hospital, pretend they have come for medicine / treatment and then, when they think no one is looking, they run off, leaving the dog behind in an alien, diseased, unfriendly surrounding.

We take Rs 15,000 for each abandoned animal but in order not to pay, these people – who have paid far more in buying the dogs, will tie them to the gate or even throw them over the wall.

Most of the abandoned dogs are Pomeranians and Spitzes. The others are Labradors, and the

homes for them.

So if we made it compulsory for pet shops to only sell dogs and cats from shelters, we would be able to achieve two things: the abandoned foreign animals would find homes and the shelters would make a little money. The dogs/cats could be sterilised, vaccinated and made healthy before selling — unlike the pedigreed dogs/cats that come from breeders. They are sold without vaccinations and most of them die as puppies of distemper and parvo.

The other thing it would achieve is that pet shops will start selling the cutest Indian puppies supplied to them from shelters. No shelter will breed foreign dogs, so in the absence of formal retail outlets, the breeding of foreign dogs will go down. People who want dogs will take Indian dogs. People who like buying dogs will buy them from shops. Please start campaigning in your states for this. We can make the world a much kinder place if we push for the right things.

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

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi **Sunday, DECEMBER 30, 2018**

Mars semi-sextile Uranus on your solar return chart will help you streamline aspects of your life. You would be both more forceful and resourceful as it is now time to go after what you know you're meant to do professionally. Your attention will also turn to domestic issues and plans for children will be made and home renovation projects will also be launched. You can effectively use your emotional balance to strike the right chord with people in high places. Financial judgments will be sound and you make good investments and create assets. Some lifestyle changes could enable you to improve your health.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)
Self-confidence and action are highlighted and you tend to instinctively know the right course of action to take in most situations. Good work opportunities crop up for those working with overseas connections. You probably should be prudent as there is a tendency to create financial stress due to extravagant spending habits. At times you feel fun loving, energetic, and willing to explore new ideas. At home, you would resolve your conflicts and move ahead in harmony. Stress may crop up at unexpected turns and this would require you to look at some lifestyle changes and even incorporate some techniques like exercise and meditation.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)
Economy in the home and management of manpower and finances at work keep you in control of situations. You further your business by expanding in related fields of activity with good chances of collaborations. You would have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort and status. You would have more opportunities to improve relations with relatives, friends and loved ones. You take on a dreamy and philosophical outlook. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with hitherto unapproachable people. Your hobbies, leisure time and time spent with children come into focus. Give yourself a fitness routine and healthy diet program.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)
This week brings harmonious relations with friends, colleagues, loved ones, family and children. You will be able to make best use of your talents, work experience and would insert your creativity into your work and projects in hand. You would be more determined and diligent. On the financial front, progress would be steady and solid. The need to express and communicate your ideas is extremely important to you during this period. Your domestic life takes on top priority. Making yourself feel comfortable and secure is paramount, and you have every chance to boost your feeling of stability and support of the family. You may be tempted to spend extra money on material goods.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)
Good financial returns are on the cards as your meticulous planning pays off. A promotion at work or gainful business opportunity starts. You win many a point with your dynamic energy and communication skills. Your personal charm and charisma take you through complicated situations. You would spend a lot of money on clothes, furniture, and entertainment. Domestic relationships and the home environment would be harmonious and peaceful. This is an excellent period in which you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships with loved ones.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)
Professional situations turn in your favor. You would be able to face truths, deal with emotional challenges and difficult situations. You would be able to integrate forces, resources and professional aspects to achieve. With mastery in your field you meet deadlines. Your actions and emotions are balanced as you bring more accuracy in your work area. It is best to accept challenges that life offers you and keep going through ups and downs realizing that this too shall pass. You would be compassionate and generous with family, friends and relatives and earn respect from them. There will be a fluctuation in moods before a balance is achieved.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)
Activities related to communication such as journalism, literature and fine arts are prominent. You would successfully use your charm and your sense of humor to make peace and harmony in personal and professional relations. Romance brings a sense of belonging and feeling of security. You exhibit an ability to adapt to most situations. You would be willing to adapt to new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. News and visitors from far off places are likely to arrive. You are nurturing and caring in

personal relationships. You are blessed with good mood and health for most of the week.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)
Excellent opportunities for people in show business, entertainment and related fields are in the offing. You would work more creatively and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. You have been more determined and hard working and this brings fulfillment of all desires particularly in your personal and domestic life. Your personal charm and attractiveness would have a positive effect on your relationships. People see you as a loving and lovable person, and as someone who is aware of their needs and feelings, which can benefit you at this time. Others are willing to help and cooperate with your goals and ambitions. It would be better to go for long-term investments and speculations for financial gains.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)
You would use your talent and knowledge together in personal and professional life. You would get familiar with new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. Strong existing relationships are likely to grow and transform. Your finances could also improve as long as you employ strategy and work in a disciplined manner. You encounter people who are very considerate and understanding. You would also form relationships with people based on a deep level of mutual appreciation and understanding for each other. This is a favorable period for people in fine arts, hospitality and other related fields. It's a great time to exert your personal influence, as you are coming across as especially cooperative and graceful.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)
It's a very favorable time for developing your relationships with parents and other relatives. Personal relations are precious and need to be treated with tender love and care. New ideas and concepts floated by you at your work place will be appreciated. You may take up new assignments and project that would bring creativity and invention of new ideas. Your inner hopes and desires come to the fore even as you tackle your job with a realistic and practical purpose of mind. There may be gains from shares and assets in hand. You impress people with your talent and charisma and invite fresh opportunities. This is a good time for teachers, salespersons and those in related fields of communication.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)
You would be able to maintain balance of the head and heart in professional and in personal relations. Family is supportive, children are loving and friends extend hospitality and love. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. You are more willing to adapt to new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. You are able to find creative solutions to problems now. You put in a lot of efforts and then find this has established a strong professional base with your hard work and this brings in desired and even unexpected gains. It is a good time to organize your workplace, tools and thoughts.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)
Your courage and confidence will keep your hopes alive. You can attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with seniors at work. Increased energy and a renewed feeling of confidence favor you. Take advantage of time and utilize your energy accordingly. Problems in your life may be overcome by bravery, self-assertion, and directness. There's nothing wrong with a bit of self-centeredness. You are highly motivated to make money which enhances your energy for new moneymaking projects. Romantic matters, as well as pleasure-seeking activities, come to the fore. You might spend a lot of time in making short frequent trips, visiting friends and relatives. Activities related to communications such as journalism, literature and fine arts are highlighted.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)
A wonderful professional opportunity takes you towards success. A personal meeting will lead to romance, love and a long lasting relationship. There are chances of new associations and beginnings as new opportunities and changes may come. Your family would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You exhibit brilliance in handling business ventures and collaborations. This helps you to build your self confidence and strengthen your financial position. You would take up assignments and projects which would end on a winning note for you. Your efforts to reach out to new people will be accepted and welcomed as you get success in foreign matters too. Physical energy and good health enable you to incorporate a busy schedule and work commitments.

By Annapoorna Ravichander

I was surprised and happy that I was invited to Beijing to present a paper at Tsinghua University. This was my first trip to China. I had several apprehensions — people had warned me that the English language could be a challenge and it might be difficult to find “pure vegetarian food”.

Of course the only solace is that I eat eggs but did not want to project this as a preference. I went through all the formalities in office and received all the required documents. While I was planning the professional aspects of the trip, I also started planning the personal itinerary.

I had decided to stay in Beijing for two days post the conference. So I started talking to friends who had visited Beijing earlier. I took a lot of tips from them and planned accordingly.

Then I conducted some research on the internet.

Before I embarked on this sightseeing trip, I had a fantastic time with a journalist friend Feng whom I had established contact with prior to my visit. She took me out to dinner to a vegetarian restaurant. The ambience was lovely, the menu card (I should rather say book) was even lovelier with graphics and a huge menu. With Feng’s help I believed I chose “pure vegetarian” dishes. However, I think I ate fish which was supposed to be rice crispies!

I then launched on to the solo touristic trip. With the help of one of the organisers of the conference, I booked myself on a coach to visit the Great Wall of China. This would be the second wonder of the world I would be visiting (the first being the Taj Mahal). I had to go to a point to meet Victor, the guide, who came to pick me up.

The journey was for about 1.5 hours. This is where I met some Indians, Pakistani and tourists from other countries. Victor explained the tour and set the expectations for the trip, for the next few hours. On our way, we stopped at a small village (Huai-

rou County) to pick up snacks, coffee etc. According to Victor, it was inexpensive to buy from the small shop than to buy at the Great Wall of China which would be far more expensive.

Then we passed a village Mu Tian Yu where the government has encouraged local artisans to set up their wares and artefacts for selling. It is said that it is mandatory that all tourists need to walk through the village street and pay a toll, which goes towards the upkeep of these artisans. We continued our journey to the Great Wall. Apparently the wall measures up to 629 km in Beijing alone and the official length is 21,196.18 km across the whole of China. History claims that small fortifications were built as



TRAVELLER’S DIARY

early as the 7th century. The wall also served as a defensive shield apart from being a corridor to transport goods for trading purposes. Cable car ticket cost us 100 yuan (to and fro).

Along the wall are several arch gates which are built of brick and stone. They are cemented by a mixture made from rice starch which holds it fast.

The wall has several watch towers which served in identifying enemies and also in protecting the city. The steps are narrow and steep in some places.

The walk on the wall is quite easy in

most places, but it is a very long walk. I could cover three towers and then returned to wait for Victor at the base.

All Chinese people have 2 names- Chinese and English counterparts. So Victor’s name in Chinese is actually Wu (meaning victory). We then had lunch at Mr Yang, a small restaurant. The vegetarian meal we got consisted of boiled cauliflower with red chillies, tomato with scrambled egg, lettuce salad, aubergine and fish and chicken (which is considered vegetarian and of course I did not eat it).

We returned to the city and I visited the Lama temple with some friends (from India and Pakistan) I had met on the tour. The temple was beautiful and the building and artwork were a combination of Han Chinese and Tibetan styles.

We then visited the Silk market where we shopped and went for dinner to Ganges (an Indian restaurant run by a Gujarati from Mumbai).

The next day I decided to take it a bit easy and visited the Tiananmen Square. It was initially built in 1417 during the Ming Dynasty (1368 AD-1644 AD). History claims that this was the front door of the Forbidden City. It was used for celebrating ceremonial events and was meant for only the royalty. It is a well-guarded place with several security men placed all over the square.

Unfortunately I could not enter the Forbidden City (also known as Palace Museum) since it is closed on Tuesdays. However, whatever exterior I saw, was lovely and huge. It is said that the palace was the home for over 24 Chinese emperors from 1420 to 1911. The palace is surrounded by a moat which is 3,800 metres long and 52 meters wide.

One of the unique things I discovered in Beijing was the number and different types of electric vehicles. The 2-wheelers would appear silently and if you are not careful bump into you and receive some swear words from the rider.

(The author is Editor at Large, South Asia @ On Think Tanks)

“*Fine words and an insinuating appearance are seldom associated with true virtue.*”

--- Confucius

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXI No.140

SHILLONG, MONDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2018

Bangla Poll

ADVOCATES of democracy in Bangladesh must have been in great mental confusion as the country had its poll on December 30. A third consecutive term to the secular Awami League is on the cards. On the other hand Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been authoritarian, cracking the whip to suppress individual freedom, jailed opponents and crushed dissent. The Opposition Jatiya Oikya Front, a motley group of parties is led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) which is right wing, Islamist and in cahoots with fundamentalists. It has fielded candidates from the banned, Jamat-i-Islami which had links with Pakistan against the liberation war in 1971. The Front is led by Kamal Hossain who was one of the authors of the new country's first Constitution with his Oxford legal background. He is not contesting in the elections. BNP leader Khaleda Zia was imprisoned on corruption charges. Her son was also convicted and exiled.

Hasina has been in the saddle since 2009. There have been upheavals in the country but she has remained firm. The war crime trials caused international controversy. Several Jammata leaders were convicted and hanged. The party was banned. The election in 2014 was boycotted by the BNP. Hasina came to power again but her liberalism retreated into a cloud. Hasina gave asylum to nearly a million Rohingyas fleeing from Myanmar and won global applause. But she did not spare her critics. The plus points of Hasina's regime are that the Bangladesh economy has grown at a healthy pace. Its human development indicators are the best in South Asia. Hasina is still, on the whole a popular leader. Prime Minister Hasina is by and large friendly with India. Her government has turned its heat on safe havens of terrorists operating in North East India. She has backed India against Pakistan in their disputes. She has built ties with China without antagonising India. China has helped Dhaka with dollops of financial assistance. Delhi has avoided getting involved in the internal and international problems of Bangladesh. Only the dispute over Test waters causes discord between the two countries as also the lack of security of the border. Meanwhile some issues between Bangladesh and India remained unresolved. The use of Chittagong port would have been a boon for land-locked North Eastern states such as Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura. This has not been vigorously pursued by the Indian Government for reasons best known to it. Even the border trade through Land Custom Stations (LCS) has not received much traction. This needs to be strengthened for mutual advantage.

TO THE EDITOR

Dangers along National Highway 40

Editor,
On December 27 evening I had occasion to travel from Gauhati to Shillong along the four lane National Highway 40. It was a pleasant drive along the expressway and we reached the Quinine – Umsning stretch by about 9 pm and it was here that we noticed a disturbing peculiarity. Each two lane part of the expressway was further divided by yellow markers into two parts. This was to facilitate the free and smooth passage of vehicles travelling at different speeds in the same direction. The edge of the road is marked with a white border. There is no provision for parking within the lanes and stationary vehicles were designated to park outside the white border, leaving both lanes of the Expressway free for moving vehicles. What was disturbing to note was that both 10 wheeled and 6 wheeled trucks were found parked well inside the outer lane of the Freeway. One lane of the two lane road thus became blocked forcing moving vehicles to move only within one lane. This is a gross violation of highway rules and the surprising thing was that there was literally no police to regulate the same. There was no Highway Patrol

in sight. The offending trucks were carelessly allowed to park and encroach in front of tea stalls. It was a clear traffic offence just waiting for an accident to happen. Clearly the Ri Bhoi Police will need to gird their loins if they mean business and wish to be seen as smart and effective upholders of the law.
Again for the past few days FB posts went viral with the news that along the same Expressway, somewhere beyond Umling after the toll gates, miscreants are in the habit of pouring mobile oil or diesel on the road surface to make speeding vehicles skid and crash. Thereafter a tow vehicle would miraculously appear out of nowhere and the “good Samaritan” tow truck would offer the traumatised crash victims a tow for their crashed vehicle. All for a hefty fee of course! Pictures of the damaged and crashed vehicles were also posted. Now if this is true then a serious crime with the intention towards extortion, grievous hurt and to kill has been committed. The affair needs immediate investigation and if true the culprits should be brought to book and harshly dealt with according to law. We can't afford such dangerous criminal activities along the

2018 : The Year that Was

By HH Mohrmen

Like every other years that has gone by and the years to come, this year too is no different. It has been both good and bad. And at the fag-end of the year and the threshold of the New Year, with the benefit of the hindsight we can only look back and reminiscence of the time gone by.
In the state of Meghalaya, 2018 started with fun and fervour because election to the state Assembly was round the corner. Then as expected after the February election, the outcome was a fractured mandate and the only option was a coalition government. The National Peoples' Party (NPP) under the leadership of its national president formed the government which is supported by the BJP and the three regional parties. Christened the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) the government started on a high note with people expecting the new government led by a young, suave and savvy leader would deliver. Unfortunately, now that the government has been in power for nearly nine months the public is yet to see the common minimum program that the coalition partners have promised.
The MDA government is therefore working without a roadmap as every minister is given a carte blanche by the Chief Minister. Of course the government can claim that within a few months of being in power, it was able to come out with a State Education Policy. But what use is the Policy if the teachers have to strike work every time because they are not paid regularly. And what change can a Policy bring if LP school buildings in the villages are in a dilapidated condition and basic infrastructure is lacking in the schools? Education policy without motivated teachers and basic school infrastructure is like a body with an unhealthy soul and a weak mind.
The 2018 election outcome is that there is a general consensus across party lines that money has played a major role in the election. Some even said that this has corroded the moral fabric of the society. Money has indeed had a big influence in the last election and this can be seen from the fact that candidates organised election rallies are estimated to cost a bomb.

The election also ushered in a new era in Meghalaya politics with the rise of several political dynasties in Meghalaya. The state not only witnessed the rise and rise of the two Sangma dynasties in the Garo hills region of Meghalaya, but there is also the Dhar family which have won three out of four seats they have contested. And of course another dynasty in the making is the father-son duo of Charles Pyngrope David Nongrum.
The next issue that had hit the headlines of newspapers in the state for quite some time was the Punjabi lane or Them Iewmawlong imbroglio. The skirmish between few people had unfortunately escalated and took a different turn, leading to a serious law and order situation in the state. This was then followed by the clash between the police and the mob which also brought a bad name to Shillong in particular and Meghalaya in general.
The issue compelled the Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh to send few Congress MLAs to meet Chief Minister Conrad Sangma. Manjit Singh Rai, member of the National Commission for Minorities also visited the state to assess the situation. Before that, Mohinderjit Singh member of the United Sikh Organisation led a five member delegation to meet the Home Minister, James Sangma to take stock of the situation.
The High Level Committee which was instituted after the conflict is yet come up with a proposal to solve this chronic problem, once and for all. Instead it was reported that the Punjab government has sanctioned rupees sixty lakhs as compensation to the victims affected by the conflict.
The other issue which has captured the eyeballs of the people in Meghalaya was the Bill introduced by the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council. The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (Khasi Social Custom of Lineage) (Second Amendment) Bills, 2018 which is an amendment of the Khasi Social Custom lineage Act passed by the KHADC denies a woman who marries a non Khasi-Pnar and her offspring the

right to be a Khasi.
The Bill which was hurriedly passed and sent to the governor for assent had to be recalled and passed again in the Council. But the pertinent question is its implementation because it is of course easy to make law,s but difficult to implement and this particular Bill will meet the same fate if at all it is enacted.
This year the State also witnessed interesting twist and turns in its politics. The much hyped story of a man whom the Congress had allegedly dumped into the gutter, was retrieved by the NPP. DD Lapang who had decided not to contest the last election, felt humiliated about the way the Congress treated him and joined the NPP irrespective of the fact that age is catching up with him. Lapang no doubt is a fighter difficult to beat, but the one thing that he will not be able to beat, is time. However he may wish to win over it, his spirit will very soon have to bow down to the dictates of time.
The most interesting of all the political developments in the state, is the story of P.N. Syiem. The Congress leader who earlier quit the party started his own party just before the election and contested the election on the new People's Democratic Front (PDF) ticket but lost his seat. But in politics nine months is a long time; a lot of things can happen within that short span of time. And before the party could even celebrate its first anniversary, the President and the founder of the party quit the party he founded. On a lighter note, some Facebooker suggested that if 'PDF' is not working with PN Syiem, then he should try the MPEG and JPEG format.
Then came the dastardly attack on the two women activists by a group of 30 to 40 people led by leaders of political parties became a cause for concern. The statement of the State NPP President that the Party would take action against the alleged culprit only if the absconding politician is found guilty, is nothing but patronising crime. WR Kharlukhi must have forgotten the saying in Khasi 'U nongtuh u phet

khlem don ba beh.' Last but not the least we unfortunately close this year on a sad note. The unfortunate incident at Ksan in the Lyteĩn area under Saipung Block of East Jaiĩtia hills District in which an unknown number of people were trapped inside the coal mine caused by the water from river Lyteĩn which flooded the mine, is a sad commentary on the dangers of rat hole mining. This is a major accident waiting to happen. God only knows how many incidents of mine collapse or death of miners due to falling from the more than 200 feet ladder or the case of a miner crushed to death because a steel cart use to lift coal from the depth of the pit to the ground fell on him. Many of these cases were not reported.
If readers of my column would recall, after the NGT ordered the ban on rat hole mining and transportation of coal from Meghalaya, the government came up with an argument that mining in Meghalaya is no longer done vide the rat hole system, which prompted me to counter it by writing an article on the following Monday with a title, 'A hole by any name still smells a rat.' The box cutting method is equally or even more dangerous than the rat hole mining and the incident only proves this point.
And like a bolt from the blue Shillong MP Vincent Pala instead of pleading in the August House for the early rescue of the trapped miners and their families, instead argued that the accident is the reason that the government should allow mining to continue without regulations. This is like suggesting that after a major road accident on the highway, the government should instead stop regulating traffic and allow the drivers to drive on their own freewill. Whereas any sane person would understand that we need to make rules and regulations to prevent such incidents from recurring.
It must therefore dawn on the Congress, the NPP and all the regional parties that the only way is to come up with a Mining Policy which will regulate all mining activities. The Government needs to come up with a mechanism which minimises damage to the environment and also ensures the safety of those who are engaged in the activity.

Meghalaya's mine disaster and the aftermath

By Thomas Arbenz

I followed the mine disaster in Litein valley from the day the news out in the media. The issue has been troubling me for various reasons and I have been looking at it from different angles, following different lines of thought. Drifting off and coming back to them kept me troubled and with more reports and more aspects hitting the front pages with more social media comments spreading fast, some kind of frustration kicked in – in the end I decided to write it down – possibly for my own peace of mind.
Why am I concerned? I have been on the Nongkhlieh Ridge and in Litein Valley many times over a period of seven years. I have explored its caves, walked and mapped the whole area, visited the villages, know people, have friends. And I saw how a lovely, peaceful valley was transformed into a dusty, scarred wasteland – saw how a clear stream full of life was turned into a deadly, acidic sewer.
The unquestionable facts are tied to the site of the coal mine and the rat-hole type of mining. These mines follow a very simple concept: You dig a vertical shaft down through the caprock until you reach the coal seam. The shaft is large enough to create sufficient operating and winching area at the bottom, but not larger than need be. The coal at the bottom of the pitch is extracted and then serious mining starts: Horizontal tunnels are hacked into the coal seam, which is between 2 and 4 feet thick – miners are working laying flat out, on their knees or stooping low using pick axes and shovels, and simple handcards. Only coal is extracted and the tunnels spread out like spokes from the central hub, then interconnecting galleries are dug sideways never getting higher than the thickness of the seam. The labyrinthic network of low passages spreads wider and wider.
Now an accident happened perhaps because the miners struck water. Perhaps they broke into an abandoned mine, flooded by the last monsoon rains; it may be that they struck an underground stream or the nearby Litein river or that they dug onto the water table. The effect was that the mine flooded, water rushing through the tunnels, reaching the main shaft, flowing into the other tunnels, filling them up and then backing up in the main shaft, rising to nearly valley floor level. Nobody present inside the mine stood a chance to survive.
13, 15 or 17 miners have been trapped inside – killed by the flood. The news spreads, people rush to the site, hoping for survivors. Information is passed to the local authorities then on to the district level. Officials in charge assess the situation thinking how to organize a rescue or rather a recovery of the bodies.
At some point the media get the information and the news hits the headlines. Facts are scarce but the potential for a story is huge: there is disaster and drama, blood, sweat and tears. Some reporters are dispatched to the site, others just write up bits and pieces at their desks. What is published in the following days is far from objective and balanced but a mixture of fragmented facts, picked-up gossip, wrong information and alleged expertise.
Nobody really knows how the accident has happened, how many people were inside the mine – the exact location remains unclear, the circumstances too, but the information is passed nevertheless; printed for the sake of the story. The accident happens in troubled times where activists and miners fight each other, set up by whoever has an interest in keeping the kettle boiling. It is hard evidence of illegal mining still going on despite the official ban,

clandestinely and well hidden from the public eye behind Nongkhlieh Ridge and in the hinterland south and east of Khliehriat. Officials, rulers, even governmental key persons are part of it and crores of money is involved. The first response from those people is to keep everything at low profile, to hush it up and put a lid on it. Then, confronted with public pressure, coal barons and politicians come forward with statements, attempting to profile themselves but in fact just underlining their helplessness and ignorance. Because the fact is that a large number of miners have died in an illegal mine before and nobody really knows how to deal with the problem in a decent way and with respect for the people who have perished and for their families.
Outrage spreads and suddenly a question is aimed at an international audience. Why was there such a huge response and international support with cave divers flown in to rescue those boys in Thailand trapped in a flooded cave, and now nobody cares about these miners trapped in a coal mine in Meghalaya? The answer is simple, and it hurts: the two situations are as different as they can be and not at all comparable. In Thailand there was a good chance to get some, if not all the boys out of the cave in time and alive. In Meghalaya there wasn't. Apart from the mine having been completely flooded in a very short time with no chance of survival, no diver in his right mind would dive further than the bottom of the main shaft. Getting into a flooded maze of low and narrow tunnels in black, coal slush saturated water with zero visibility would be suicidal.
What remains is pumping. Emptying the flooded mine and recovering the bodies. Pumping must have started right away; the miners have pumps and they are loyal to each other, so they help. But the pumps are small, designed to deal with seepage occurring in every mine. But the sheer amount of water is humungous. More powerful pumps are needed. So the NDRF is called in. The process is slow, bureaucracy comes in the way of speedy decisions. The situation has to be assessed; officers have to add their expertise without really knowing how to handle it - always with the pressure of the media and the “public opinion” hounding them. Most of them are out of their depth, still somehow trying to cope. Time is running out – but then time has actually never been an issue. The slow progress becomes understandable – but some questions need to be answered and mistakes made known, because there will be a next time: So, why have pumps to be transported from as far away as Pune and why does an Airforce Commander have to say “... personnel will be airlifted to Guwahati”? Why not to Shillong? And then why not straight on to Litein Valley? Why does a technical director think that “the first task is to try to get the map of the illegal coal mine”? But there never is a map if it comes to an illegal coal mine. In the meantime, the accident is exploited by politicians, NGOs, interest groups and individuals of every colour, left and right. To make a point, to raise a voice, to gain advantage to save face.
Now, as the beast becomes huge, self-centered, and uncontrollable, let's just hope that despite all this there are still some humans who will be there to hold the hands of the grieving families and help them along to live their lives without their fathers, brothers, and husbands.
And still I hope that I have been badly mistaken and the miracle happens.
(The writer is a speleologist and avid caver)