

"Great minds discuss ideas; average minds discuss events; small minds discuss people." —Eleanor Roosevelt

The Shillong Times

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Mann Ki baat hits century

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi must be lauded for his Mann Ki Baat programme that he skillfully employs to reach out to the masses for the past over eight years. Its 100th episode was an occasion for celebration and the UN broadcast it live at its headquarters in New York. Modi is first and foremost a performer on the political stage and yet he wisely kept politics out of this unique endeavour. His claim is that this is the Mann Ki Baat, as Modi remained "silent" on the pressing issues of the day. Truth obviously lies somewhere in between.

Mann Ki Baat has been motivational, inspirational and educative while its principal audience principally comprises ordinary folks, who have time at hand on a sweet Sunday. This is more so for the women across villages as All India Radio and Doordarshan are the sole mediums that provide a staple diet of information and entertainment to them by the hour. Modi has shrewdly caught onto these in the form of a direct interaction with the masses. The subjects he took up were appealing to their ordinary senses — like Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, the use of Khadi, the inspirational stories of ordinary men and women who charted out an exemplary course in various walks of life, the unknown heroes and heroines in the rural and urban landscapes. There have also been praises of the legendary figures of the past like Babasaheb Ambedkar, community leaders across states and regions; a clear attempt on the part of the PM to endear himself to such segments of the population.

Question is, do we require to learn history from a Prime Minister or whether showing platitudes on the dead would take the nation forward. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote Discovery of India from jail before he became PM. Modi hesitates to speak about serious matters concerning governance even as a PM leading the nation as its chief executive can, from a vantage point, enlighten the public on the course that his government and the nation are taking in multiple fields. The PM rather skirts such matters, a reason why the educated and enlightened upper segments of the society are disinclined to spare their time for this programme. It is clear from the PM's tone that he specifically targets the lower rungs of the society, or the children, the grandmas and such like. People are missing an opportunity to learn about the state of the nation or its governance today. What is worse is that the PM has remained silent on the ongoing protests by female wrestlers against sexual harassment by those running the federation. Why pick and choose only some topics? As PM, Modi must address all sections of the citizenry.

Letters to the Editor

Health Dept Response on Gramin Healthcare

This is in response to the Letter to the Editor written by Francis Khonglah, EX-IRS Officer, published in your newspaper on April 26, 2023. The concerned has expressed his disagreement on the engagement of a private primary healthcare provider, questioning the credibility of the private healthcare company, Gramin Healthcare, and the intention of the Government to bring in such an initiative into the State.

Across the country, private healthcare is available in big cities only. Due to lack of primary healthcare delivery in rural areas, the common people from rural villages are forced to travel to the cities where in need of health services, thus wasting their day's wages and bearing extra travel costs. Hence, the Government of Meghalaya is taking proactive steps for strengthening public health facilities by creating several new health facilities in remote areas across the State. In addition to these efforts, the Government also brought this last mile healthcare solution using innovative models through private primary healthcare providers to the rural and remote areas, where villagers can easily have access to a doctor, basic diagnostic services and a pharmacy, all in one place and at a reasonable cost. The idea is to provide

more options for rural communities with a mix of both public health centres and private clinics, with the intention of making healthcare accessible and affordable for all. However, this does not mean that it has stopped improving facilities at the public health centres. Currently there are 20 villages across the State where Gramin Healthcare Clinics are present and are providing the comfort of a consultation with a doctor and being checked by a nurse. Some time patients have their first eyesight at these clinics. Close to about 4000 patients from the clinic locations as well as surrounding villages have accessed standard health services from these clinics. The commitment and general appreciation of people with the services provided at these clinics is already testified in the article published.

It is also true that the nurses, pharmacists, centre managers from the State who provide services at these clinics. Close to 100 youths from the State have gained employment from Gramin Healthcare since the clinics were scaled up across the State in August 2022. The false narrative of bringing consultants, etc., is not just unnecessary but misleading and incorrect.

Enabled by the Government of Meghalaya's first pilot clinic at Sohrim in April 2020 after it showed interest in serving in the rural areas. All expenditures for the pilot were borne by the company itself. Good response from the community prompted the Government to

Seven Huts and One Tribe

By H H Mohrmen

The issue of reservation policy in the state and the outcome of the imbroglilo from the roster system have created bad feelings amongst the major tribes in the state. Pressure groups and even leaders of different organizations have put their weight behind their respective community's claims. The issue has started to even create a division amongst the people who live in the Khasi and Jaintia regions of the state. Some people take advantage of the reservation policy and the roster system to say that the Khasi and Jaintia Hills regions are not the same and hence should be considered as a separate category in the state reservation policy. This sentiment does not wish to say anything about the reservation policy issue, but instead about the tribe as such.

Our stories are our history

It is generally accepted that the Khyrim, Pnar, War, Bhoi, Lynggam, and Maram are all the same people, but the question is what is the basis of our claim. They all share the same genesis of how the tribe Hyntew Trep Hyntew Skum came to be called "Hyntew Trep Hyntew skum" or "ki ynhaw wasa, ki ynhaw wasung". The creation story that there were originally 16 huts, with 7 deciding to go down to earth and the 9 remaining in heaven is shared by all.

They speak the same language

Though there is a variation in their dialects, the Khyrim, Pnar, War, Jaintia, Bhoi, Lynggam, and Maram, speak the same language. The Pnar, War, the Maram, and the Lynggam may not be able to understand each other but from the linguistic point of view but the language they speak belongs to the same group known as the Austro-Asian Monkhmer group of languages or the Khasi-Kimic.

They share the same culture

The culture that is unique to this particular tribe is that the lineage is taken from the mother's clan line. In the matrilineal system followed by the tribe, the clan is the most important unit in the family, and the maternal uncle holds a special status in the system. That the people who live in the Khasi and Jaintia regions of the state are the same is also evident from the fact that there are also kur in Khasi hills that are related to kars in Jaintia

hills, such as ka Lamin and others in War. Jaintia area are related to Lalou, Pyboh, and others in Pnar and Diengboh, Mangar, Syngai, and Pariang in Khasi hills. All of these clans belong to the same descent from the same progenitor, 'ka lawchibidi.' Similarly, the Sutnga are related to the Syemchih, and so on. The Makhri related to the Chahlan in Jaintia hills, and there are Shylla, Saiting in Khasi hills as well in Jaintia hills. There are only a few examples of the connection based on clan. The list is however not exhaustive.

The people and their stories

The Khyrim, Pnar, War, Lynggam, Maram, and Bhoi also have a rich tradition of storytelling. They not only share the same creation story but stories of their ancestors, Kren lamit, ka lu kum lam, ka lwa i tymph, had ka dama ala are few stories that were

told and retold in all the communities. There are also parallel stories, the story of Umiam and Umieis is similar to the story of ka Lukha and ka Lumar that the two sisters were sisters and they on one market day decided to visit the market in the plains. The sisters decided to compete against each other and see who can reach the market in the plains first.

The monolith practice

The other customary practice that people have in common is the monolith or megalithic culture as the case amongst the Pnar and the War Jaintia. In some communities, the tradition is continued by people who still follow the traditional religions. The monolith culture is not as simple as one might think. The only variation is seen if one studies the tradition one would find the similarity in the stories that people tell about these stone monuments. The only variation would be the megalithic burial the sculptures, the carvings in the War Jaintia, and the stone

from the other tribes that are again shared by all the different sub-groups of the Hyntew Trep. People's traditional values include leading a more upright existence, being a loving, caring, and giving community, and having a close relationship with nature. This value system is closely woven into people's lives, embodying cardinal principles of 'ka tip biew tip blici, ka kamai ia ka kok, ka tip kur tip kha had ka tip tip kur tip so'. These are a few cornerstones on which the life of a member of the tribe stands.

The tribe's traditional value system

The Hyntew Trep has their unique way of life which differentiates them

from the other tribes that are again shared by all the different sub-groups of the Hyntew Trep. People's traditional values include leading a more upright existence, being a loving, caring, and giving community, and having a close relationship with nature. This value system is closely woven into people's lives, embodying cardinal principles of 'ka tip biew tip blici, ka kamai ia ka kok, ka tip kur tip kha had ka tip tip kur tip so'. These are a few cornerstones on which the life of a member of the tribe stands.

The Jaintia Story

The Jaintias have a history of flourishing kingdom from 1500 till the kingdom was annexed by the British in 1835. The kingdom's reign extends from Garba-Sonapur in the north and to the river Saraw in the south, the east by the river Kupli and to the west the Brahmaputra. It is also one of the few kingdoms in the region to mint its own coins. The hills people of the kingdom belong to the 'khan Hyntew Trep Hyntew skum' tribe. But in Jaintia Hills there are also tribes that do not speak the Monkhmer group of languages and do not follow a matrilineal system and they are the Bhatelites of Saipung, the Hinat of Khadum area, and the Hudem of Saisana.

In conclusion

It is clear that therefore, despite certain differences in the manner in which people speak (dialects), and other variations, the Khyrim, the Pnar, the War, the Bhoi, the Lynggam, and the Maram are the same people.

Is the interview for LDA in EJM Court a mere formality?

I don't know. Last time I flagged about the notorious LDA examination conducted by District Court Khehriat and as expected I received the written exam and was therefore called for the interview. But sadly, they gave us just about 8 days to prepare for the interview. I was sceptical and also pessimistic about appearing for the interview, given the situation that was created during the written exam. I always thought that at least, recruitments to courts would be fair and without bias unlike recruitments undertaken by the government. It is with this optimism and hope that I presented myself before the interview board for the LDA post. But to my surprise, the interview was a mere formality. I had prior working experience, to which I replied in the negative. Then another panel member commented, "We want people with prior experience." I recall that in the advertisement, nothing was about prior working experience being an criterion.

When I got out of the interview, I asked myself whether they would prefer the temporary staff (who are not qualified for the interview) for regular appointments instead of the rest of us. If

Provide Living Wages, Rights and Entitlements for Every Worker in The State

By Kyrsibor Pyrrah

The first day of May is the occasion for workers to come together to celebrate and remind everyone that they are indispensable, but yet the most oppressed sector. A worker's sweat is the lubricant which greases the wheels of the economy and furthers the growth of the State/Nation. A happy worker can always contribute immensely but unfortunately that is not the case in Meghalaya.

One should not misconstrue that the workers' movement is a Communist's affair. The socio-economic movement for living wages, free health care, education and housing is not the monopoly of Communist's groups. We do not have to be a Marxist to understand the pangs caused by the present socio-economic hardship in the State. In this neo-liberal era, exploitation against workers is intense and people are making their fortunes by breaking the backs of the workers. It becomes vital for the workers in the State to come together as a collective to fight against all forms of oppression and to push for pro workers policies and laws.

Genetic evidence

Although tracing the origin of humans using genetic science is still at a nascent state, even studies using DNA reveal the people who live in the Khasi, Jaintia are Ribbui areas as one tribe.

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any thing kiar thylleg rupa," which means keeping the honour of spoken word, are some of the qualities that people hold in high regards. The profound connection with Mother Nature The Hyntew Trep people also consider nature or the Earth to be their mother (mei ramaw/Bei ramaw), and it is also the dwelling place of the "ki ryngkaw ki bsa" or nature deities. They see rivers and mountains as gods and deities and hence have a close bond with nature. They weave stories about the rivers, mountains, hills, animals, and even natural phenomena and the most important aspect in this regard is the fact that they see animals and other creations as equal beings. In their understanding of nature, man is not the master to lord over the creations or nature; he is not even a steward but an equal being in nature.

In today's world, they call it natural resource management (NRM), but in all the subgroups they already have an ingrained in their indigenous traditional knowledge system (ITKS) that protects forests and even water bodies. They call it law kyrim, the law adeng or law shing, but it is people's way of managing their resources.

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The Government's despicable attitude and indifference to the plight of the poor and working class is evident. A year ago, the streets of Shillong were replete with agitated workers from the Association of SSA school teachers in domestic workers. The SSA School Teachers of Meghalaya, who have been clamouring for their basic right to living wages and various entitlements. The vehement agitation also reflects the deplorable condition of the education system in the State. Unlike other plump departments, "Education is neither a profitable portfolio nor can one make fast buck from it, so no one seems to take keen interest and thus it has been left to rot".

On several occasions in the past, the Meghalaya ASHA Workers Union had to cease work and come out into the streets to protest against the delay in payment of incentives, among other pressing issues. The ASHA are trained female health volunteers and on ground they are working full time from dawn to dusk to fulfil their duties in the health care system in the State. On the contrary, they are the most underpaid workers-volunteers and are being exploited to their benefit.

Notably in the State there is the emergence of gig workers who also play an important part in the growth of the economy in the State. At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that majority of workers in the State are working two jobs in order to feed their families. Life is less than a struggle, especially the un-organized workers in the State. Unfortunately, today we spend more time and energy quarrelling over the reservation policy in the health care sector which barely generates 12 to 15% of jobs in the job market and that too is catering to a handful of "privileged class" who have access to quality education and are well connected. While the real time issue of workers' rights, both in organized and un-organized sectors, remains unresolved.

The discrimination

The discrimination and the sin of unfair treatment towards the workers must end. Together the workers must raise a war cry for "Justice, Living Wages, Dignity" and proclaim their rights for living wages, free health care, education and decent housing. The workers of Meghalaya must reiterate their demands are rising and fairly treated in every aspect. Thus, the workers in the State demand (i) to immediately adopt a policy towards providing a living wage to all workers (ii) to immediately raise the salary of all the teachers in the State as per Law (iv) to constitute a Private School Regulatory body and protect the private school teachers against exploitations (v) to create better working conditions (vi) a Legislation for the protection of Domestic Workers (vii) to regulate and protect workers' rights and entitlements, which include, but are not limited, as per law (viii) to upgrade ASHA volunteers as regular health workers (ix) to immediately constitute the Meghalaya Domestic Workers Welfare Board, Meghalaya Gig Workers Welfare Board, Private Transport Workers Welfare Board, Private School Teachers Welfare Board, etc. and constitute the Meghalaya Affirmative Action Commission to look into the implementation of reservation policy in just and fair manner.

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

"All the art of living lies in a fine mingling of letting go and holding on."

— Havelock Ellis

The Shillong Times

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Meghalaya's Health Sector

MEETING the healthcare needs of rural Meghalaya has been a persistent challenge in Meghalaya. In the last five years however, there have been significant initiatives to ensure that health needs of the rural population are being met through targeted interventions. One reason for high maternal and infant deaths is the poor health and nutrition of the pregnant mother who then gives birth at home to an under-nourished child because institutional delivery was not accessible for pregnant women living in remote, unreachd hamlets where there are no roads. The MDA Government has made some noble interventions in the form of the CM-CARE's scheme (Comfort, Assist, Respect, Empowerment). Under this scheme every month a robust network of frontiers track the growth of about 5 lakh children in the age group of 0-5 years in the villages of Meghalaya. Children are being weighed in Anganwadi centres which are now functioning as mini health centres and those that are underweight are being prescribed proper diets and vitamin supplements. PM CAREs was launched in December last year and needs to be carefully monitored so that it delivers what is being envisaged.

Chief Minister Conrad Sangma had stated at the launch of the CM CARE scheme that Anganwadi centres would be transformed into Early Childhood Development Centres with better infrastructure and professionally trained Anganwadi workers. Parents would be made important stakeholders in this programme. Improving the overall human development goals is part of the UN initiated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Additionally, the MOTHER Programme - Meghalaya's Outcomes-oriented Transformation in Health, Nutrition, Education and Rural Development Programme will ensure that key data on health, nutrition, education and rural development are collected and collated and the same data will be viewed in the chief minister's dash board in real time. This micro data will be used to make policy interventions. The MOTHER App uses real time data on pregnant women to monitor their health status on a continuous basis. This should help reduce maternal and infant mortality the twin concerns in Meghalaya.

Now that 31 CHCs are being upgraded into first referral units to tackle emergency surgeries and other health concerns, access to healthcare would further improve and there would be less dependence on private healthcare providers. The Government would be doing great service if it is able to ensure that resident doctors are in place in each of these CHCs. For decades, doctors commute from Shillong to the CHCs and so do only on market days. Hopefully that era of non-resident doctors will now be over when the 30 doctors currently trained in Chennai to handle UltraSonography, life-saving skills, emergency obstetric care, Caesarean delivery (C-section) among others return to take on their responsibilities. The first referral units would ensure that pregnant mothers do not have to travel more than 45 minutes to 1 hour for delivery. This would democratise healthcare delivery, apart from making it affordable.

Letters to the Editor

Banteidior's 180 degree turn!

Editor, We are all nonplussed by the political turn of events. Just four months ago preceding the Meghalaya Assembly elections, Banteidior Lyngdoh, the then cabinet minister and PDI president had declared on December 21, 2022 in a public function at Mawkynrew, East Khasi Hills District that he was offered Rs 5 crore to join NPP, but he had outrightly rejected the mouth-watering offer as he yearned to pursue a clean image in his political career and is committed to serving the people and not to create for filthy lucre!

But to our dismay, now we hear that Banteidior Lyngdoh's party the Peoples' Democratic Front (PDF) would merge with the NPP, as confirmed by none other than the Deputy Chief Minister, Preston Tynsong himself. The NPP is a party which Banteidior had squarely accused of being unprincipled by way of targeting the then

NPP candidate D. Lamare of Nongkrem constituency and alleging, thus, "I have witnessed trucks carrying blankets in Nongkrem constituency for distribution among the people." And in this context, I heard several people saying that perhaps Banteidior has been offered double the amount that was proffered to him four months ago, or he might have been assured of a cabinet berth in the unforeseeable future.

All said and done, politicians, not statesmen, will invariably be politicians and in parallel with this contention, the time tested phrase, "Boys will be boys," still holds water. Yours etc., Jerome K Diengdoh Shillong-2

Time to cut debts and outdated institutions

Editor, Two news items, "CM Sacks Centre's support for

Matrilineal and its dynamics

By Dr. Rekha M Shangplang

Of late there have been wide speculations about the resilience and future of one of the oldest known kinship institutions in society: Matrilineal. It has made headlines in many local dailies and became a topic of discussion amongst academicians and scholars about the emerging issues and challenges to this age-old and much venerated social institution among the Khasi. This leads one to wonder whether the term 'Matrilineal puzzle' which was once coined by the British Anthropologist Audrey Richards way back in 1950 to understand and analyze matrilineal norms and principles has some truth behind it. If one goes by the various theories in Sociological and Anthropological literature such as the Descent, Functionalist, Evolutionary theory etc., these theories have tried to explain the origin and foundation of Matrilineal as one of the most unique kinship systems which is grounded on a common folk-culture and native ideology and hence that women give birth to children therefore the 'mother-right' principle was the first stage in the evolution of human society. In fact, as Johann Jacob Bachofen, the Swiss thinker and Professor of Roman Law at the University of Basel, Switzerland who in 1861 had proposed a stage called 'Das Mutterrecht' (Mother Right) as being the primary stage of all kinship systems at a time when religious and juridical character was accorded to women in the Ancient world. If matrilineal has had such strong foundational roots then it leads one to ponder upon the question as to why this age-old and venerable institution is facing the winds of change and transition as visible today? Does it see this as a gradual de-evolution of the universal assumption of pervasive male dominance or patriarchy? These and many other questions have probed the minds of social scientists to dig deeper in understanding the nature and status of social institutions such as the Family, Marriage and Kinship which are gradually weakening in many societies. It is because such institutions are not able to use their adaptive mechanisms to face the external forces such as borrowed world views, modernization, new legislations and intervention of new cultural forces and demands of a new patriarchal order? The question of when and why societies have transitioned from matrilineal towards other types of kinship systems has been a subject of much debate and more so this is a subject of much resistance on our own Khasi matrilineal society as we see the recent stand by an organization at the District

Council's decision to deny ST status to Khasis using their father's surname. This news item which made headlines in The Shillong Times on April 28, 2023 is an eye-opener to many of us who belong to this community as well as to the larger network of surviving matrilineal communities across the world. What impact would it have on the institution as a whole? Will the 'Clan' or 'Kur' which is the cradle of Khasi kinship system will lose its importance? What are the gender implications if this system is rooted out? Will such a change be effective in maintaining the balance in population due to its rigid structure? There have been mixed reactions from members of the community itself and the question stands - is surviving the crossroads? The current debate looks at a few surviving matrilineal societies of the world such as the Minangkabau of Indonesia, the Ashanti of Africa, the Mursi of Ethiopia, the Janulus of Zambia, the Malenians of the Gambia, Khasi and Jaintia of Meghalaya which these matrilineal societies have traditionally exhibited strong 'matrilineal' arrangements where inheritance, succession and descent follows through the female line and 'woman' is the propagator and bearer of lineage and descent. This enjoins on her the rights and responsibilities of the family at large. The woman nurtures the child in her womb and therefore reserves her right to her lineage. Among the Ashanti tribe, "the basic building block of structural continuity in the lineage is the sibling group born of one mother and not a 'line of descent' reckoned from the father, let alone the individual." This theme line followed through the common 'blood line' of the mother has been the guiding principle of many primitive societies like the Ashanti who designate women as 'mother' and men like 'mogya-kon' (mother's blood) as also the equivalent Khasi concept of 'ka iawbei tyam' (the root female ancestress) as the progenitor of the clan. It is also customary for the Khasi to speak of a family of brothers and sisters who are the great grandchildren of a great grandmother and identify themselves as members of 'shi khyi' which literally means 'one womb' and the belief that 'womb relationship' is stronger and more important than any other ties. Therefore the one binding factor that has helped to sustain many matrilineal societies today is the lineage traced through a woman. Khasi matrilineal is one of the oldest surviving kinship

For Mother Nature's Sake, Let's Meet, Talk then Walk The Talk

By Dr Larlin Kharpuri

Around the first week of August 2019, The Shillong Times (TST) celebrated its 75 years of works in progress and continuing life date. A unique project was initiated by TST as part of its platinum jubilee celebrations. Project Operation Clean-Up (OCU) was led by its Editor, Patricia Mukhim along with other like-minded people as members. The members met, discussed and debated the project's mission, and finally walked (and still walking) the talk. The Project primarily involved cleaning up the Umlakhar part of the Umlakhar river; it also includes other parts of Shillong like Gollimuk, Laban, Umlakhar river near Imphing village, Shillong peak and Imphing. With the exception of interruptions caused by the lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic the team of Project OCU met almost every 2nd or 3rd Saturdays of the month to clean the Umlakhar river. Today, in its fourth year of existence Project OCU has seen many members come and go, but some have stayed. Operation Clean up included individuals like Kadi Warji, Jivat Vasanti and his team Diva, Brian Wallang and students of K.C. Secondary School, members of Make Someone Smile, students of Marlin Luther Christian University (MLCU), Shubham and NGO, the Col Sishanul Home Guards and quite importantly the drivers of garbage trucks and earth moving machines and the cleaners from the Shillong Municipal Board. It has been the constant presence at the OCU activities.

On April 6, 2023, the Department of Meghalaya called a meeting to discuss the cleaning and rejuvenation of Umlakhar, Umshyri and Umshen rivers with various stakeholders like the KHAID, Darbar Shongos, Civil Society Organizations and concerned Government Departments on board. Although an informal group of concerned citizens from disparate fields, members of Project OCU like were the guests invited to share their experiences and provide valuable suggestions. Looking back over the years, the project has to give due credit to the exemplary leadership of the core members of Project OCU, for their tenacity, grit, and strength of character, in going on and on, over and again, without fail. The Government did the need of Project OCU activities! The article, "No more meetings on garbage, please," by Anvita (TST), dated April 28, 2023, made some interesting points on the total waste of time on TALK-ING. For cooperation and engagement rather than confrontational attitude, a consensus before any action is always necessary. Unless of course, humans are only driven by impulse and emotions and they take action without any thinking, deliberations or any regard for the consequences. "It is in the roots not the branches, that a tree's greatness lies" (Mahatma Dhillayaw). (The writer teaches in the Department of Sociology, NEHU, Shillong)

The Anglo-Khasi War (Khasi Resistance against the British Raj) of 1829-33 under the leadership of U Tirol Sing System was started only after due deliberations in the general Durbar of Himra Nangkhal. A few months before the War, a durbar was held for two days to deliberate the application for permission by the British to construct a road from Sylhet to the Brahmaputra Valley through areas under the independent Khasi and Jaintia States. This durbar, witnessed by British officials, invited admiration and respect from the white men with one even comparing it to the proceedings of the Westminster Parliament. Historically, as part of oral narratives, it has been recorded that such deliberations did take place before the British. The British and the indigenous tribes of Meghalaya are known to have a deliberative process of decision-making from the family, clan (kurand mahar) level to the village, Raji, Rai, Nohmah, Filaka and Himra level. The Preamble in our Constitution states that India is a

of the Government of India, keeping in mind the revenue of the State government which is just 20% of the funds made available by the Government of India in a federal structure. Meghalaya's contribution to the total tax revenue of the country is only 0.2% whereas the new states of India like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh contributed 2.3, 2.1 and 1.1 percent respectively to the national exchequer. According to the data of the Reserve Bank of India for the last ten years it is apparent that the Debt-to-GDP ratio of the State is manageable compared with other states in India and the country. While the Debt-to-GDP ratio is manageable, the State has to reduce its outstanding liabilities and internal debt. According to the RBI the outstanding liabilities during 2013-2017 grew at an annual average rate of 15.17% and in the last five years (2018-2022) it grew at 9.78% annually. In 2014 it grew at 25.3% and in 2017 at 22.94%. In 2018 it grew 9.87% and in 2022 at 7.82%. Similarly the Internal Debt

during 2013-2017 grew at an annual average rate of 14% and during 2018-2022 it grew at 16% up by two percentage points over the previous period. Internal Debt needs to be reduced and managed prudently with frugal measures in government expenditure. Investment demands borrowing if its resources are meagre but borrowing should be prudent and in consonance with a higher economic trajectory. Every government, at any time, that matter an individual borrows and invests but it has to be ensured that such borrowings are invested like a business entity to build upon the economy keeping in view the liabilities and internal debt. The resources so borrowed should be used frugally and ploughed back to hasten the process of economic development. It is now time to dismantle the State Planning Board as it has outlived its 'shelf life' just as the Government of India dismantled the Planning Commission and brought about the NITI Aayog by a Resolution of the Government of India

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

"The promise given was a necessity of the past; the word broken is a necessity of the present."

— Niccolò Machiavelli

The Shillong Times

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Politics, Pawar play

WHEN a banyan tree falls, the earth shakes. It is a debatable point whether the exit of veteran politician Sharad Pawar from the leadership of his own Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) has created any shock within the party or in Maharashtra. Pawar, through his seven decades of political activism survived odds, ditched the Congress, formed his own party, returned to the Congress, became Union minister, handled key departments and then formed another party by rubbishing Sonia Gandhi. He had also functioned as chief minister of Maharashtra. Even in recent years, he straddled the politics in his state with confidence and flaunted the 'national character' of his state-level party by questionable methods that also formed a model for Mamata Banerjee and others to emulate. What they all had was large stocks of money to splurge. Pawar is now crest-fallen. His nephew is reportedly in a mood to break the NCP and take away most of its legislators to bargain for the CM's post in a new political alliance. Considering Pawar's advancing age and ill health, most MLAs of the party would likely side with the nephew. That could leave Pawar's daughter Supriya Sule too in the lurch. She can neither disown her father nor afford to lose her political clout.

Notably, regional satraps like Sharad Pawar raised their heads only by taking advantage of the weakening of the Congress party at the national and state levels. Ideally, India should have two national parties with marching might so that the people will not be taken for granted. On the other hand, if a hotch-potch of regional parties join hands and form the government at the Centre, chances are that it would fall in a matter of months. Such parties are not guided by any ideology or a commitment to the nation. Many of these are family enterprises and their tendency is mainly to take a huge cut from every government deal and create individual empires of their own.

To cite one recent instance, Sharad Pawar who defended his romance Anil Deshmukh, as his home minister allegedly asked the Mumbai police to collect and give him Rs 100 crore as bribe from bars in Mumbai every month. Prime Minister Narendra Modi once publicly called NCP the Nationalist Corruption Party. Most regional parties are engaged in a political circus without a ring. Note how Telangana's chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao built the state secretariat in the format of a mosque and named it after Dr BR Ambedkar. The elections there are eight months away but he has shyly reserved the support of two principal communities there. This is the India of today

Letters to the Editor

After Adani episode what next for Opposition?

Editor, After the report of SEBI that wrong-doings related to Adani Group require more time and the Supreme Court has allowed six months extension to submit the report, now the question that arises is what is in-store for the Opposition for the coming Lok Sabha elections scheduled for April 2024. Here it is worth noting that two major parties — the NCF and TMC are already against JPC. It is agreed that state elections are fought on local issues. For example the Congress won the Himachal Pradesh Assembly elections on the issue of implementation of the Old Pension scheme. The same may happen now in Karnataka assembly elec-

tions as reports are pouring in that in the parliamentary elections voters give preference to national issues as we had seen in the last assembly elections of Rajasthan MP and Chhattisgarh where Congress won the assembly elections but in the parliamentary elections held just after a few months BJP won almost all the seats. This time neighbouring country Pakistan is speaking very highly of the Modi Government on issues of foreign policy as well as inflation and distribution of facilities which are meant for uplift of needy persons and moreover the Indian currency is very strong as compared to Pakistan's. Mr. Modi and Congress had to suffer for the same. The Congress should learn from the BJP how to change the election scenario in its favour and the example is of misapprehension of fund by Adani whereas Congress miser-

Inclusivity and diversity must be the core of new education policy Both centre and the states should build strong support system

By Dr Taniya Malik

The recent suicide of Darshan Solanki, an 18-year-old chemical engineering student at the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay, belonging to a Scheduled Caste (SC), has once again sparked a debate on caste-based discrimination in particular and inclusion in general at prestigious higher education institutions (HEIs) of the country.

Even the Chief Justice of India, Dr D.Y. Chandrachud, expressed concern last month at the pattern of students from Dalit, Adivasi and other marginalised backgrounds at top HEIs taking their lives. The rampant suicides prevailing amongst the marginalised communities at HEIs is a symptom of a larger problem, which concerns the often ignored but relevant issue of 'inclusion' in higher education in India.

Caste-based discrimination exists not only among students, but is also experienced by faculty members belonging to marginalised communities. In 2019, it was reported that when counted together, SCs, STs, and OBCs make up just 9 percent of the total faculty in India's higher education. Similarly, the representation of SCs, STs, and OBCs in Ph.D. programmes at HEIs and HEIs remains poor, well below the constitutionally mandated norms. Thus, inclusion and lack of diversity at HEIs in India are clearly pertinent issues that require the immediate attention of policymakers and academics.

Inclusion can mean many things to different people, for a layperson, inclusion could mean a state of being valued, respected, and supported. Its dictionary meaning is "the action, practice, or policy of including any person in an activity, system, organisation or process, irrespective of race, gender, religion, age, ability, etc." Particularly in the context of higher education, inclusion stands for continually transforming the process of acquiring education at institutions to fulfil the needs of everyone, especially those belonging to marginalised groups.

A number of individual and socio-economic factors can hamper a person's ability to access and engage in higher education. These factors might be based on gender, caste, socio-economic status, special needs and place of residence, among other things. Inclusion in higher education demands that these factors must not limit an individual's ability to access and pursue higher education.

Lack of access to higher education can have cascading effects, including reduced earning potential, disorientation with life, substance abuse, and a greater reliance on public assistance. Entry into quality HEIs can open up a number of suitable opportunities for individuals and push them with a decent standard of living. Thus, inclusion today is seen as a basic human need.

In the Indian context, the discourse of social inclusion in HEIs begins all the more relevant considering its diverse population comprising many different religious, caste, cultural and linguistic groups. Thus by virtue of its function as a public good, higher education must reflect the richness of this diversity by being socially and linguistically inclusive. While access to higher education has improved across all segments of the Indian population, a 2019 research paper titled 'Quality and Inclusion in Higher Education in India' from the Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education at the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) has comprehensively demonstrated that socially and economically disadvantaged groups continue to lag in their access to education at HEIs. These inequalities exist because of regional, socio-economic and gender-based considerations.

In India, a preference for urban areas for the location of HEIs has reinforced the divide of higher education, as physical distance is a barrier for many people, especially those from disadvantaged groups. This urban bias has resulted in rural-urban disparities in access to higher education. Expanding higher education in India has not eliminated social inequalities. Although social inequalities in access to higher education have not worsened, they remain significant in contrast to regional disparities. For example, the gross enrolment ratio (GER) of upper castes is nearly twice that of STs and 1.5 times that of SCs, as per the NIEPA research paper. The GER increases as one progresses up the caste hierarchy, demonstrating graded access to the resources required for enrolment in HEIs.

As per the NIEPA research paper, Consequently, the likelihood of enrolling in HEIs in India continues to be significantly influenced by one's socio-economic position. The gender divide in access to higher education is another instance of inequality. At the national level, access to higher education continues to be uneven (GER of 32.14 percent) over women (GER of 27.73 percent), notes the NIEPA research paper. In addition, women from castes experience more disadvantages than those from higher castes when it comes to access to higher education.

In addition to the previously mentioned inequities, it is also crucial to note that disadvantaged socio-economic groups experience unequal access to high-value disciplines of study like science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Additionally, students from privileged backgrounds — including men, those from higher castes and socio-economic classes, and those who live in urban areas, study STEM fields. In contrast, those from socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEBGs) and those who live in rural areas are more inclined to study social sciences and agriculture, indicates the NIEPA research paper.

The Constitution envisages the formation of an egalitarian Indian society. Particularly, Articles 14, 15 and 16 of it guarantee notions of equality and inclusion. Equality has many dimensions: social, political, gender-based and economic. The specific policy interventions are essential for marginalised groups to bridge the existing gap in access to HEIs. In order to achieve this, several measures recommended in the NEP 2020 can be helpful, such as increasing financial aid and scholarships for students from under-represented and disadvantaged students, making the curriculum more inclusive, creating bridge courses for students from under-represented backgrounds, strictly enforcing non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies in HEIs, and raising awareness of gender identity and diversity issues among faculty, guidance counsellors and students.

While the NEP has laid the broad schemes for promoting inclusion in HEIs, Union and state governments must focus on providing incentives and support systems to ensure the representation of SEBGs in higher education, and address the underlying issues of low public investment and the digital divide to promote inclusion in higher education in India. At the same time, in alignment with our constitutional mandate, HEIs must also reflect inclusion and diversity while recruiting faculty members and admitting Ph.D. scholars. (IPA Service)

Courtesy: The Leaflet

gamings should be put up before the public otherwise this may be the third consecutive terms when there will be no Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha.

Yash Pal Rathan, via email

Culture and children

Editor, It was an honour to see the letter entitled "Protect the Children" that appeared in the Shillong Times on Apr 29, 2023. The hasty judgement passed on the Dalai Lama by the writer, John Saikhub, is more belittling than the representation of a tantrikharal panchayat. He contradicts a friendly interaction between the Dalai Lama and a young boy as akin to an animal act of pedophilia. I am sure though the informed world has moved on from the incident.

Pondering over our Educational System

By Dr Barnes Mawrie

"Education is a social process; education is growth; education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself" (John Dewey).

The latest news on the suicide of ten students in Andhra Pradesh two days after the publication of the Intermediate results, is a matter of great national concern. A study done by NCRB in 2021 shows that 13,080 students died of suicide which is an increase from 12,526 in 2020. A large number of these suicides are due to failure in examinations. Whenever results of various school and college examinations or entrance tests etc. are declared, we hear of suicides by students who could not make the grade. This tragic phenomenon is afflicting our country more than elsewhere in the world. Unfortunately, in spite of the recurring mishaps the government does not seem perturbed. How long should we helplessly watch our youth being plagued by this fatal trend?

The root cause of this social problem that has taken thousands of young lives, is closely linked to the inability to cope with the reality of failure. It is a well known fact that our present academic evaluation system is examination based which remains a highly competitive system. Our students as well as their parents and teachers are worried about "how many marks the students score." Even within the classrooms students vie with each other for higher marks. The culture of "raton class" is growing by leaps and bounds all because parents want their children to score higher marks. It is pathetic to see that even primary school students or even tiny tots are deprived of their right to daily recreation because as after-school hours they are sent for tuition classes.

Prior to public examinations, students are tortured with extra classes in their respective schools and colleges. The competition mania is affecting individual students as well as the educational institutions themselves. Every school and college tries to outshine the other in their quest for prestige. The whole educational system is literally caught up in this rat race. In all of this, the students continue to be the helpless victims of stress and tensions. There are many ambitious parents who stretch the limits of their children's intellectual capacity, not realising that they are harming the mental health of these youth. They keep on indulging in "impossible dreams" for their children and in the process they build their own tension instead. With the introduction of more and more competitive examinations like the CUET, JEE, AILET, GRE and many others (probably it would take more than a page to list down the number of competitive exams in our country), the mental tension on our youth is growing

dangerously. The question we should ask is — should India keep on watching with indifference while young lives are being lost wastefully on a daily basis due to these mental tortures? It is high time that the educational department of our country finds a permanent solution to this problem. Having known that the common factor for this national tragedy is the competitive evaluation system, we need to think of an alternative system. Competition always leads to rivalry, individualism, selfishness and at times dishonesty and cheating. Apart from these, competition is the breeding ground for mental tension and anxiety. On all these counts, a competitive system appears to be more detrimental than to be more dovish and healthy system. The exam-oriented education is intended to foster values like altruism, solidarity, honesty, justice and peace, then competition is the worst punishment. There is urgency to do away with our present evaluation system and put in its place a more holistic and healthy system. The exam-oriented education should be replaced by a knowledge-oriented one. The present evaluation system which is based on scores alone is a holistic approach to education. A student's performance should not be based on marks alone but should include an overall evaluation of performance in all sectors, intellectual, psychological, social, cultural, moral and spiritual. I do not think that our education caters to these needs apart from intellectual formation.

When it comes to social and cultural education, I can boldly say from my experience that our system has failed in fostering virtues like civic sense, altruism, sensitivity, cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication. With regards to moral education it is a national disaster. Corruption, dishonesty, violence and crimes in order to connive us of the dismal performance of our educational institutions themselves. It is often the so called "well educated" persons who are at the helm of our state's affairs, who are perpetrators of such unethical behaviour. The attempt to suffocate education today, namely, to idolize Hindu culture and history, is going to harm education further. It is going to radicalize our young citizens along religious lines, a perfect cocktail for a national disaster. We should all remember that a classroom is a factory of citizens and that speaks volume about its importance. What sort of citizens does India want to have today and in the future? That would depend on the quality of our educational institutions. We must all meet the great philosopher Aristotle who had this to say about education, "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all."

Glenn C. Kharkongor, via email

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*"The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible."*

— Arthur C. Clarke

**The Shillong Times**

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**World Press Freedom Day, Uneventful**

MAY 3 is observed as World Press Freedom Day but as usual this day passes off uneventfully. World Press Freedom Day was set aside by the United Nations with a purpose and that purpose is to raise public awareness on the importance of a free and fair press which is integral to the functioning of democracy and in ensuring the human rights of citizens. This day is a reminder to citizens of democracies across the world that a free press is the sine qua non for ensuring transparency and accountability in governance. Indeed, the press exists to keep a constant vigil and a tight leash on how elected governments perform their constitutional duties and deliver public goods. However, this day is a caustic reminder to those in government and the practitioners of journalism that across South Asia today, particularly in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and even India, journalists are being murdered, jailed for pointing out the corruption of governments and also facing censorship of various shades. There is a climate of fear among journalists due to state intimidation. That journalists continue to work in such an atmosphere of oppression should be a matter of concern not only of the journalistic fraternity but of the citizenry as well. Journalists after all serve the cause of the citizens by bringing before them information on what governments do; their acts of omission and commission and their public spending. Writing truth to power is the credo of every self-respecting journalist and media house. For this they often have to pay a heavy price.

It would be fair to say that quite a good number of media houses and publications today are playing safe through self-censorship. It is also ironic that the press fraternity have to fight their own battles when it should be the citizens that should come to the defence of a free, fair and independent press. The importance of press freedom cannot be over-emphasized. It is only when citizens are informed about the functioning of a government that they can make informed decisions particularly during elections. Besides, it is not just the press that has to hold those in power accountable. This critical role is also that of citizens.

The theme for this year's World Press Freedom Day is "Shaping a future of rights: freedom of expression as the engine of other human rights." These words sound good on paper but trying to push this agenda cannot be the brief of journalists only. Unless the citizens rally round the practitioners of journalism and stand shoulder to shoulder with them when they face state reprisal for exposing corruption and human rights abuses, press freedom will remain only an ideal.

**Letters to the Editor**

**AAP's lust for luxury unacceptable**

Aam Aadmi Party was born with professed austerity. Fighting rampant corruption in Indian politics and governance was its prime motive. First initiated by Anna Hazare, the movement was fully supported by the general populace, which was later popularly capitalized by Arvind Kejriwal and his colleagues. Soon after the 2013 Delhi election victory, AAP Chief Arvind Kejriwal thundered that his party colleague would never take any government-provided pash bungalows. They would instead prefer smaller government flats. It earned the party more popularity by the day. People thought that something extraordinary would happen to the nation. In the initial days, without any false show and pomp, the Delhi CM and his MLAs were often seen even commencing by auto rickshaws and mixing with every poor person on the street. This further helped the party win the hearts of the underprivileged

**A Cry For Help!**

By Iaphinewkor Thangkiew

Location: IGP, Shillong, Meghalaya; Number of minutes I have been sitting idly in this cramped taxi: 40 minutes (\*noted as I was returning home from school one cold winter afternoon). Returning home without the unnecessary pamper of my parents to pick me up from school these past few months opened my eyes to the horror of traffic congestion in Shillong and how awfully every student, child, elder, worker, etc., suffers from it. Fortunately, after our last midterm exams in 2022, Class XI students were required to prepare a Project on Economics/Statistics. The horrendous flashbacks of being stuck in traffic during exhausted and early afternoons of the school, has led me to decide on the topic: Traffic congestion in Shillong City and Suggestive Measures.

I had handed out to 50 students within the age range of 13-18 years, 50 questionnaires comprising 13 questions, provided with multiple choices of answers for the comfort and flexibility in answering the given questions. Upon receiving all the successfully answered questionnaires, I was startled at the various responses of the students, and soon realized that the enemy was closer than I thought. The enemy is among us, the enemy is us and we decide the future of the Earth.

"Traffic congestion is transport that is characterized by slower speeds, longer trip times, and increased vehicular queuing," defined by Google's Wikipedia, leaves a calm factual idea in our minds of what traffic congestion is. However, if someone were to ask me what is traffic congestion, I would simply show them the narrow winding roads of Laitumkhrah, Police Hazar, Garikhana, Nongthlymyai, Dhakruti, Malki, Mawli, etc; on ordinary weekdays in January, February, March, and so my point is made. At present, Shillong is reeling under the pressure of daily traffic jams, to the point where the Meghalaya High Court has sought a response from the State government. The then Superintendent of Police (SF) Shillong-Dra Bamanaya in an interview had stated that roughly 50-100 vehicles are being added on to Shillong roads on a daily basis. He also said, "Due to manpower crisis, the Department is facing some challenges. We are trying to ease the traffic congestion but lack embark-

ment statistics obtained from 50 questionnaires distributed to 50 students. We now know that 22 commute by private cars, which is a huge problem since only 20% of the 50 students said they use public transport, creating a confusing imbalance. It is also seen that the car-pool method of commuting is rarely used by students. Car-pool reduces fuel costs as a much more environmentally friendly and sustainable way to commute as sharing journeys reduces air pollution, carbon emissions, traffic congestion on the road, and the need for parking spaces. This analysis clearly prove that students are one of the major reasons for traffic congestion during early mornings and late afternoons. An important question was also mentioned in the questionnaire - "Do you think traffic lights should be placed in Shillong?" The majority answered with a "Yes", however, the remaining answered "No" and were required to provide a reason for their choice. Their reasons stand strong against the majority as they stated that, firstly, damaged roads should be properly fixed, and secondly the common mass would hardly as-permeate with a non-living medium such as traffic lights. We can therefore conclude that, on a realty check, traffic congestion cannot be reduced by placing traffic lights in the streets of Shillong as it would take a few years for it to become a habit and the safety of the citizens too is at risk. Instead, we are hoping

for proper, more efficient traffic management system and strict traffic police who would guide the pedestrians and vehicles around the streets of Shillong. 46% of the respondents have agreed that a household should only own two vehicles at the most, while the remaining are against this recommended regulation. A majority also agreed that the loan facilities offered by various banks lead to an increase in the number of vehicles in Shillong. By the online statistics of an approved website, updated on 31st March 2023, there are 3,66,000 registered vehicles in the State of Meghalaya. Surely, loan facilities by banks are a major cause for increase in

vehicle population. The last question of the questionnaire was, "Are you aware of the scrapping policy?" The majority responded with "No," as expected since there have been no such awareness campaigns initiated, not to say such policies by the government. India's Vehicle Scrapping Policy took effect from April 2022 with the objective of phasing out old passenger and commercial vehicles in order to reduce the rising air pollution, and to increase passenger, pedestrian and road safety. With this new policy imposed, we hope that the masses use it to its full potential, to not only help in reducing the number of vehicles but also in reducing the air-polluting emissions of pollution all over the globe. Reducing traffic congestion should be the government's and the citizens' top-of-the-list priority at present, not only to avoid wastage of time and risks to human lives but also to reduce the impact to the planet's health.

Let us look into some suggestive measures that can reduce traffic congestion: (i) Walking: If an individual stays at a walking distance away from their school, college or workplace, we highly recommend them to commute by walking as it not only helps reduce traffic congestion, but also guarantees their good health. (ii) Car-pooling: Schools should encourage parents to send their children to school on car-pool. This method saves fuel costs and greatly reduces traffic congestion in the mornings and afternoons.

Let us join hands and sing a peace song as we create a world which is a safe haven for the future generations. Take this write-up not as a ranting of a 17 year old, but take it as a cry for help from the Earth and a cry for help from the future generations. (The writer is a student of Class XII Arts 'B' St Anthony's Higher Secondary School, Shillong)

**Bench 'hunting' continues to hound delivery of justice and fairness**

**Justice Joseph's lament must lead to serious judicial introspection**

By K Raveendran

Five years after the historical 'national duty' press conference by four judges alleging undesirable practices including 'bench hunting', the problem continues to be the bane of Indian judiciary. All the four judges have retired a long time ago but many of the problems they raised persist, undermining people's faith in the system.

Bench hunting works both ways, sometimes in looking for pliable benches and at other times in avoiding inconvenient benches whose perceived independence can be detrimental for the inter-



ests of those who want judgments to go a certain way. It was only the other day that Justice K M Joseph, hearing Gujarat riot rape victim Bilki Bano's petition challenging the remission of jail term of convicts by the state government, along with fellow judge B V Nagarathna, expressed anguish at the way the proceedings were sought to be thwarted on behalf of the convicts through what senior counsel Indira Jaising described as 'bambooing tactics'.

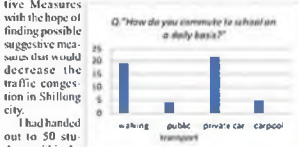
It is apparent that the counsel appearing for the convicts do not want this hearing to take place. Every time the name will be called up, one or the other

characterized by a focus on the larger picture, rather than on the individual facts of a case. This approach has enabled him to make decisions that are more consistent with the principles of justice and fairness. Justice Joseph's strong stance on habeas corpus, calling it a 'cancer' that must be eradicated from society, will be considered a landmark in judicial activism. In a recent ruling, Justice Joseph declared that hate speech is a serious threat to the social fabric of our nation and that it must be addressed with utmost urgency and that the government must take steps to ensure that hate speech is not tolerated in any form.

**"The bench of Justices Joseph and Nagarathna issued notice to the Union government and the state government, calling for all the relevant files, but both governments failed to do that, saying they were planning to move a petition for reviewing the decision."**

will come and say that he needs time to file a reply. It is more than obvious," Justice Joseph said. "It is somewhat clear what is being attempted here. It is obvious, rather more than obvious, that you all do not want the hearing to be conducted by this bench," the judge whose last working day is set for May 19 before the court closes for summer vacation, said in frustration. It was the bench headed by Justice Joseph that admitted Bilki Bano's petition, after the Supreme Court and Nagarathna issued notice to the Union government and the state government, calling for all the relevant files, but both governments failed to do that, saying they were planning to move a petition for reviewing the decision. But given that Justice Joseph is set to retire before the petition is taken to its logical conclusion, solicitor general Tushar Mehta informed the court that the records would be produced before the court.

Why the governments want to avoid Justice Joseph's bench is quite obvi-



brought all the way from Vietnam to up the house, costing Rs 30 crore. How could one reconcile the leader of frugality suddenly chooses a wardrobe of Rs 11 crore while having a taste for kitchen appliances that touched 1.1 crore? What is most unbecoming is that all these extravagant ideas occurred to the CM's mind when the capital city was "seriously plagued" by COVID-19. A senior government employee from Delhi remembers how some of our leaders shamelessly luxuriate on the tax-payers' hard-earned money and cheat the gullible public. This episode has hurt Anna Hazare and his followers more than any other. "One wonders why the party that promised to root out corruption and uplift the underprivileged so quickly deviated to embrace the life of luxury and opulence. Some of our leaders may fool people with their rhetoric and continue refurbishing their houses and what have they, but will they ever be able to "refurbish" their guilt-filled hearts? No, not at all. The laws of karma will cut them down to size at the end of the day. Moreover,

take the front seat in professional departments like police where accountability or ownership of work would create trust amongst the people whom they promise to serve. Michael Sheehan, author of Crush the Cell during his tenure as Deputy Commissioner for Counter-Terrorism at New York Police Department created a right unit - a massive video unit. Yours etc, Salil Gwalia, Shillong

**Trimming the bloated force**

Editor The news caption titled 'With VRS, Assam packs off 300 alcoholic cops' in a section of media comes with a breath of fresh air. It is common to notice that the Khaki force not only in Assam but across the states suffer the same syndrome. Take the case of Meghalaya where the law enforcer seem to be on auto-pilot during court auction, illegal transportation or election related duties. Will the Home Minister take a cue from Assam on this issue? The inn first approach by the Assam government can draw a pool of talented youngsters who are well versed with crypto-analyses, foreign language skills combined with strong cultural connections. Thoughtful leadership has to

**Bamboo mission**

Editor, In 2020 when scientists and experts on bamboo had visited the state and met officials related to the state bamboo mission, the overall summary that came out from the meeting was that the state would start to adopt new learnings and incorporate models on bamboo propagations through community management and innovations. My report when I was with Meghalaya Institute of Governance under the flagship of MBDA I

had suggested that the Pradhan Mantri Awasz Yojana-Gramin could be "modified" at the State level by making the maximum utilization of bamboo houses for the rural poor who had limited means of building a house of their own. This would require mapping of bamboo clusters for nurturing bamboo nurseries and supplying top bamboo wood quality under the scheme which would be economically viable, sustainable and affordable and also linked under the rural housing subsidy of 15 percent. Through affordable bamboo housing we can help in mitigating natural calamities, promote direct and indirect employment services, sustain the ecosystem and prevent wastage of bamboo outside the state. However, nothing much has been heard since my exit from the MGI but it is hoped that a second opinion and discussion could be initiated under a revised mission mode. Yours etc, Dominic Stadlin Wankhar Via email

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"Liberty may be endangered by the abuse of liberty, but also by the abuse of power."

— James Madison

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Sports and politics

NATIONAL life is increasingly being gripped by a sense of despondence and the society is surprisingly acting numb even in situations of grave provocations. The complaint and street protests in the national capital by seven ace wrestlers against "prolonged sexual harassment" by Wrestling Federation of India's president and BJP member of Parliament from Uttar Pradesh, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, might perhaps be the tip of the iceberg. The protests over the past 12 days came as a bombshell on the sports bodies as a whole and have exposed their underbelly. The Modi government is in the dock for its abject failure to comprehend the gravity of the situation. It has responded to the complaints in a routine manner by ordering an inquiry in January last and issuing an advisory to sports bodies to strictly adhere to the guidelines governing their functioning. It is refusing to arrest Brij Bhushan and take him to task. The Supreme Court is satisfied with the fact that an FIR has been lodged against the accused.

In between, the panel headed by Mary Kom did a job by squarely pointing out to the government that the internal complaints committee as mandated by the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act of 2013 is not functional in the wrestling body. This also led to a realization that such a mechanism is deficient in most such national-level entities. While rules are framed and laws enacted with commendable seriousness by governments and legislative bodies, the problem lies in the lack of seriousness in their implementation. As a result, the situations keep worsening, rather than improving.

Coming to the crux of the problem, the installation of wayward politicians at the head of every sports entity has been a practice for long. That they rubbish these entities is evident also from the way the most populated nation of 1.40 billion is putting up a pathetic show at every Olympics or even in the Asian Games and the CWG. And, the scam that the political bosses perpetrated in the Commonwealth Games in Delhi is fresh in everyone's mind. That the Congress governments started the practice of installing politicians at the head of such sports bodies should not have been an excuse for the NDA to carry such unacceptable systems forward. Instead, at the first opportunity, Amit Shah's son Jay Shah was brought into commanding positions in cricket bodies like BCCI and ACC. Such positions involve huge income and power equal to a minister. The misuse of such authority by a 'criminal' like Brij Bhushan has come to such a pass that the nation now hangs its head in shame.

Letters to the Editor

Protect children across cultures

I had written a letter to your esteemed daily titled 'Protect the Children' which was published on 29th April, 2023, wherein I had advocated that we must respect the personal spaces and physical boundaries of children, precisely because we do not know the heart and intent of a man. I had said that love and innocence cannot be a license to invade the space of another human being. I had written this in light of the recent controversy courted by the Dalai Lama in his interaction with a young boy. My contention is that even if the gesture was innocent and non-sexual, physical boundaries and spaces must be upheld because we do not know the heart of a man. I certainly do not hold the Dalai Lama as infallible, nor do I see the Pope of Christianity, nor any man. So, we should be on the safe side of the children first, rather than any man. This should be the precedent in human behaviour, especially in light of worldwide abuse of children, by family members, by religious leaders, by organised paedophile rings, by even local prostitution rings as we have witnessed in recent years.

However, Glenn C. Kharkongor, through his letter titled 'Culture and

children' (ST May 3, 2023), has stated that he was agitated by the precedent that I proposed through my letter. He quoted my views to a 'kangaroo court' of a patriarchal kham panchayat. This is not an argument but an ad hominem attack against this writer. Well, the behaviour of the Dalai Lama was condemned in the court of public opinion, on the basis of collective morality and decency. But of course, collective morality and decency is beneath the wisdom of "the informed world," to quote Kharkongor. And what is patriarchal about upholding the physical boundaries of children? The word 'patriarchy' is often used in public debates to refer to a structure that allows men to dominate women. Now, I would like to ask Kharkongor: what does the debate about Patriarchy have to do with my letter? He is simply taking the word 'patriarchy' and labelling it on to this writer, and applying all the modern negative connotations of the word on to this writer, which ends up being incoherent, if not dishonest. It is a logical fallacy. Protecting the personal space of children should be a universal principle of any healthy social structure, be it patriarchal or otherwise. Cut to the chase, I will only conclude that Kharkongor does not see his own inconsistencies. He is applying the word 'culture' and 'the informed world' which is an appeal to authority no doubt,

Substance abuse among youth: We can be part of the solution

By Marbabing Syiemlieh & Basaralyne Thabak Synthling

At dusk, as we were returning from work, a few youth were standing on the roadside and smoking weed (marijuana). We could sense that they were enjoying themselves. We only glanced at them and went along. However, this incident kept us thinking and raised a lot of questions: were they also doing other drugs? What are their life situations? Can we do something about it?

Drug abuse is becoming a major problem both in urban and rural Meghalaya. According to the National Survey on Extent and Pattern of Substance Use (2019), the number of people who inject drugs in Meghalaya are 11,420 with many unreported cases. The problem is intensified with drug use being linked to sex work and high risk activities such as injecting drug use and sharing of such equipment that can result in public health epidemics such as HIV, Hepatitis B and C, sexually transmitted diseases and other blood borne viruses (The Meghalaya Drug Abuse Prevention Policy, 2020). In a study conducted by NACO (2014-15), it was reported that the mean age of intravenous drug users (IVU) was 26 years of which a majority (59%) of them were in the age group of 25-34 years with a literacy rate of 97.7%. In terms of occupation, 20.6% are unemployed and 15% are students.

We have to recognize that adolescents and young adults are vulnerable to drug use. Meghalaya has drafted the Meghalaya Youth Policy 2021, a great milestone, as the growth and development of youth has often been sidelined. The rationale for having the Youth Policy is to recognize the potential and contribution of youth to the development of the state. Having said this, youth transit major changes as they grow from childhood to adulthood and to responsible adults. Many are at risk of ill-fated social issues of the society, one among these is their inability to illicit drug abuse.

We wanted to delve deeper into this reality of drug use and abuse. Hence, we were grateful to few organizations in Shillong working with drug users who helped arrange a few interactions with them and their peer educators. These interactions gave us broad insights into the lives of these young people who are drug-dependent. We found that initiation into drugs was as early as 12 or 13 years of age and the high-risk groups are around 14 to 16 years of age, disinterested in school (smoke and snorless) as nicotine was

not even considered as a drug by these children and youth who are into substance use. Why do these adolescents get into drugs? The contributing factors of substance use among adolescents and youth are firstly, a "broken family". The family as a basic unit is supposed to be a safe haven for children and youth. All these drug users who we interacted with reported that they come from broken families, where there is no close child to parent relationship since their parents are always preoccupied. Hence they never felt love, attachment and bonding even though they may be living under the same roof. Although their basic needs are met the youth said that motivation and attachment were absent and that pushes the youth to substitute that craving for love with substances instead. Many of these youth mentioned that their parents are also substance dependent and they regularly witness fights, arguments and violence between their parents. The perception of these youth is also distorted. Many times, they think that it is alright to try alcohol and drugs at an early age, as they see their role models at home abusing substances. As parents, we often forget that children model our behaviour. Secondly, the easy accessibility to substances is another contributing factor. The youth said there was no obstacle or hindrance in acquiring drugs whenever they needed them. Drugs are easily available in the city; drug peddlers are everywhere. While the general presumption is that substances are expensive, the fact is that these adolescents and youth despite their low socio-economic positions still manage to acquire them. Further, adolescents and youth who are substance dependent resort to anti-social activities such as stealing and shoplifting in order to finance their drug needs. Such delinquencies are not considered as wrong in their minds as long as they are able to obtain the substances.

This peer influence to casually try and initiate drug use is another factor contributing to the rise of substance use among adolescents and youth. The youth mentioned that they actually felt good if they could persuade another peer into substance initiation. It takes only two to three days for the body to start craving for the drug and within a week of daily use, one becomes dependent. Fourthly, the media has had negative effects on adolescents. Long hours of exposure to unhealthy content

leaving a passage. If this is the plight of normally-abled citizens, it gives us goosebumps to even imagine how differently-abled citizens like blind and lame people would struggle to negotiate this traumatic state of affairs every single day in Shillong. After all, just like the hawkers, they are not equally respectable citizens, and we must 'make room for everyone in the city,' as Mr Caldwell rightly asserted.

Regarding the criticism towards the Federation of Hotels, it is an open secret that Tourism is now the mainstay of our economy and also the biggest contributor to job creation in our state. There are numerous small hotels, guest houses, and homestays being run all around the state, which give about 200 jobs to more than 10,000 households all around the state. Meghalaya is blessed with phenomenal natural beauty, and we can be responsible for its to keep our streets, roads, rivers, etc., clean and decongested to avoid making it a deterrent for tourists to come to our state. And while the Federation openly accepted that there is a great need for hawkers in any manner, all they wanted was to appeal for a separate 'hawkers' zone to avoid making it a win-win situation for all and helps the heart of the city regain its lost glory even as it is gasping for breath at the moment.

Interestingly, while some

recreational activities so that youth can have some leisure after school or college hours rather than being held captive by their mobile phones and getting hooked to online games, which has already affected their physical and mental health.

Some initiatives that can be taken up as per recommendations provided by substance dependent individuals are to develop social competence and critical consciousness among youth through training programmes so as to prevent early initiation into drugs. Additionally, regular house visits by representatives in the community without being judgemental or biased and training for parents (training is a must to prevent drug abuse among children and youth).

For parents and elders that are using alcohol dependent, they suggested subsidised treatment rates for rehabilitation and detoxification and mental health services for those belonging to households living below poverty line. Besides, vocational training and employment agencies for recovered addicts, spiritual awareness, training for community members about the illness and related interventions, health vigilance by community groups through provision of help, instead of punishment, and more Drop-In Centres (DICs) in other districts, since most are concentrated in Shillong.

essential interventions to curb and support our youth. In the present scenario, we hope for government support to tackle this problem as Meghalaya has its own Drug Abuse Prevention Policy, 2020. Further, in January 2023, the Meghalaya Cabinet passed the Drug Reduction, Elimination & Action Mission (DREAM) with a mission to build a Drug Free Meghalaya by leveraging the culture and communities through a multi-faceted, coordinated strategy to eliminate the incidence of substance use in the state.

Let us unite with a common purpose and set in our own homes and communities. Let us start these conversations about how we can support families and youth. These are not far fetched. Discussions on this issue should be initiated by us and only if communities come together to intervene for the welfare of our youth. 'Motivation can heal the person. Love can heal the person. Unfortunately, these are absent in many of our contemporary families.' The crux of the matter truly is to provide a safe, loving and healthy family environment.

(The writers are faculty of the School of Social Work, Martin Luther Christian University.)

Sharad Pawar's planned resignation aimed at dissenters in NCP. The Maratha strongman has emerged stronger to keep MVA united

By Tirthankar Mitra

All his life, Sharad Gowindrao Pawar has been his own man. Be it walking out of Congress when defying Gandhi family was considered to be political suicide or coming out in support of top notch industrialist Gautam Adani recently thereby running the risk of fracturing anti-BJP alliance, the Maratha strongman has been known for his out of the box

supremo Bal Thackeray and Swati Gandhi too. Pawar has used it effectively to divert attention from NCP's intra-party squabbles. The resignation was aimed to scotch the rumour that NCP is heading for a split. Pawar has put in place his nephew Ajit Pawar who nurses the ambition of being the chief minister or at least the NCP

"His resignation has put the entire quantum of support and sympathy of NCP activists in Pawar's kitty. A dissident who defects from NCP now or tries to upstage Pawar will consign himself to political wilderness and get the party supporters' wrath as a bonus thanks to the emotional button the NCP chief has pressed. Pawar has thrown down the gauntlet to likely challengers."

decisions. The decision of stepping down as the chief of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) is in keeping with Pawar's past actions which for good or bad have kept him in the limelight. Amidst

chief. How was the junior Pawar to know that after having accepted his uncle's resignation, he (Ajit) would end up as just one of the 15 committee members tasked with finding out his uncle's successor?



walls of his party activists to reconsider his decision, the man from Barnauli has let it be known that his decision to step down as the head honcho of the outfit he founded is not yet final. This is what makes Pawar the shrewdest politician around. He has not closed the door on the possibility leading to the chair of the NCP chief and embarked onto a journey to political survival. The door has been kept ajar. Pawar can take the

entire quantum of support and sympathy of NCP activists in Pawar's kitty. A dissident who defects from NCP now or tries to upstage Pawar will consign himself to political wilderness and get the party supporters' wrath as a bonus thanks to the emotional button the NCP chief has pressed. Pawar has thrown down the gauntlet to likely challengers. But they are loath to pick it up.

"On the surface, Pawar awards himself with the status of NCP's chairman emeritus. Together with it, he remains a rare leader who does not care to cling to the leadership of a political outfit he has founded. Thereby, Pawar assigns more elbow room for himself."

seen in NCP that is rightly his at any moment. Now his decision keeps his allies and opponents guessing. It is worthwhile to look into the reason which prompted Pawar's decision sending NCP in a tizzy. A group of NCP leaders reportedly in touch with the BJP are targeted by Pawar's decision to resign. He seeks to single out those who would raise even the feeblest voices of protest to his resignation decision. After all, the last thing these persons will wish for is Pawar's continuance as the NCP supremo. Small wonder, they will not be among the lead singers in the chorus asking him to step back in his post.

Sharad Pawar's nephew, Ajit Pawar's name figures high in the list of those suspected to be in touch with the salffrom camp. There are other names too who have responded to chalking out the outlines of a bloodless coup following which would be Ajit Pawar who would be in NCP's driver's seat.

Resignation is a tried and tested instrument that politicians, especially veteran leaders use at the time of rebellion in the party ranks. One recalls similar efforts by Janata Dal leader and Karnataka chief minister Ramakrishna Hegde, Shiv Sena

retains for him the attribute which friend or foe will never deny wanting in him. He remains a game changer. On the surface, Pawar awards himself with the status of NCP's chairman emeritus. Together with it, he remains a rare leader who does not care to cling to the leadership of a political outfit he has founded.

Thereby, Pawar assigns more elbow room for himself. Moreover, he enlists himself in a halo which would give him greater gravitas in negotiating with non-BJP parties before next year's Lok Sabha polls. Pawar's resignation elevates him from the position and status of a one party supremo. He is placed in the unique position of a statesman. It remains to be seen whether Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), the Opposition alliance which Pawar has cobbled together can weather the churning within the NCP. His challenge now will be to convince his followers to stay the course.

The out of the blue announcement of Pawar's stepping down came at the release of his autobiography 'Lochak: Sangam (People are my friend)'. In sum, his decision has ensured that he remains a man of the people. (HSA Service)

Respect all sections of society

Editor, Apropos of the letter by Caldwell Manners, 'Dehumanising language targeting the hawkers' situation in Shillong' (ST April 28, 2023), I am appalled to see that the writer has given importance to the language and choice of words used by the unregulated capture of space by hawkers in the prime hubs of the city. The current state of affairs is abysmal that pedestrians are literally left with no footpaths or roads to walk on in the streets of Lumbini, Police Bazar, Moiphra, etc. In some areas of the street people cannot even cross the road as hawkers have completely overtaken the same without hav-

ing a passage. If this is the plight of normally-abled citizens, it gives us goosebumps to even imagine how differently-abled citizens like blind and lame people would struggle to negotiate this traumatic state of affairs every single day in Shillong. After all, just like the hawkers, they are not equally respectable citizens, and we must 'make room for everyone in the city,' as Mr Caldwell rightly asserted. Regarding the criticism towards the Federation of Hotels, it is an open secret that Tourism is now the mainstay of our economy and also the biggest contributor to job creation in our state. There are numerous small hotels, guest houses, and homestays being run all around the state, which give about 200 jobs to more than 10,000 households all around the state. Meghalaya is blessed with phenomenal natural beauty, and we can be responsible for its to keep our streets, roads, rivers, etc., clean and decongested to avoid making it a deterrent for tourists to come to our state. And while the Federation openly accepted that there is a great need for hawkers in any manner, all they wanted was to appeal for a separate 'hawkers' zone to avoid making it a win-win situation for all and helps the heart of the city regain its lost glory even as it is gasping for breath at the moment.

Interestingly, while some

Yours etc, Name withheld on request. Via email

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

"There's no present. There's only the immediate future and the recent past." —George Carlin

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Manipur in flames

IT takes only a small spark to create a bonfire in states where inter-tribal rivalries are embedded in their histories. What happened since May 3, last was impregnated for several months if not years. There are certain intrinsic geographical and historical anomalies that are seemingly too late to correct. The Imphal valley where 67% of the population resides, mainly the Meitei people who make up 53% of the population is an oval shaped valley measuring approximately 2238 sq km in a total land area of 22,347 sq km. This means that 67 percent of people live in 10% of the geographical area of Manipur whereas 90% is the hilly region where the tribals comprising Nagas, Kukis, Zomi people have lived for centuries. The Meiteis adopted the Vaishnavism form of Hinduism in the 18th century. It is for this reason that the Meiteis are not considered Scheduled Tribes despite being of Tibeto-Burman origin like the other tribes occupying Manipur.

In March this year the single bench of the Manipur High Court acting on a petition for including Meiteis in the list of Scheduled Tribes directed the State Government to begin the process and write to the relevant authorities so the matter can be taken up by the Union Government and passed by Parliament. This was what incensed the tribals whose grouse is that all development has happened in the Imphal valley, all institutions of higher learning including the Manipur University, the Regional Institute of Medical Science (RIMS) and the Central Agricultural University are in Imphal Valley thereby providing more access to higher education to the Meiteis.

Another trigger point is the attempt by the State Government to identify what it calls the illegal immigrants who are basically of Kuki-Chin origin and who have close ethnic ties with the Kukis residing in Churachandpur area. On May 2, Manipur Chief Minister Biren Singh also announced that the Inner Line Permits to Manipur would now include the face recognition system since the number of illegal immigrants has gone up and about 410 Myanmar nationals without valid documents were in jail. This did not go down well with the Kukis as their ethnic brethren were being considered refugees. What has irked the Kuki people however is that the Government has surveyed the forest areas which are inherently owned by the tribals, with the intent of converting them to reserved forests without any process of consultation. Also the Manipur Government intends to expand the area under marijuana cultivation as the Government is in the process of legalising it for use in medicinal and industrial purposes. Government is also aware that large hectares are under poppy cultivation, the raw material for opium and intends to put an end to this. Many drug lords would be affected if this happens so this is also at the root of the conflict. How the conflagration started is because of a solidarity march by tribal students' bodies in the hill districts. The violence started when some miscreants burnt a portion of the Anglo-Kuki War Memorial gate at Churachandpur. The tension persists with no sign of any peace committees coming forward to douse the fires of hatred.

Letters to the Editor

Call for peace

Editor, Every day since May 3, we have been reading the news of violence in Manipur but there are no peace committees that have come out to douse the fire and to have inter-community dialogues. This is indeed very unfortunate. There are many reasons for the violence in Manipur, not least of which is the dictatorial attitude of Chief Minister Biren Singh in trying to bring forests which have been under tribals and turning them to reserved forests without any consultation. The fact that the fifth Schedule of the Constitution is not operative in Manipur leaves the Autonomous District Councils with very little powers and an extension of the State Government. Also Biren Singh's propensity to term the Kuki-Zo people now sheltering in Churachandpur area as illegal immigrants is not acceptable as they have kinship ties with the Kukis in Manipur. The same refugees who have fled Myanmar after the junta took over are treated very humanely in Myanmar. Is it because those refugees are not Meiteis? The Meitei versus tribal conflicts are embedded in the policies of Manipur. Ironically the Meiteis are a majority in the Assembly and Government hence their

will runs while the tribals are alienated from the system. Now that even the Kuki underground groups have pulled out of the suspension of operations agreement with Government of India things don't look good for Manipur. Several hoses of tribals in the Imphal valley have gone up in flames and even being looted. Also what is shocking is how the mob were able to enter the police armoury and take away the INSAS rifles which they brandished and which were circulating on social media. All this shows that the Manipur Police had completely lost control of the situation. But for the central government to impose Section 355 is unprecedented although the Union Home Ministry has denied this. The Meiteis want Scheduled Tribe status because they are the Meitei way of life is all about tribal and if Hindus can claim tribal rights then what happens to tribals? They will be further marginalised. All these issues require sensitive handling else they can go out of control. Having lived in Imphal for several years I should know what I am talking about. Yours etc., N Songrum, Via email

What kind of leaders do District Councils need?

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

Election in the state is not over yet. With the completion of one, another is under process. Many are still under election hoop or especially those in rural areas. For them, election is a moment of joy and excitement and this is openly exposed by the people themselves during election-caring. On one hand, friends and close aides of the prospective candidates are working all out to ensure victory to their respective candidates so that they may also benefit from the winner.

But here again we encounter a crisis and lack of quality leaders and leadership. The cry for leadership is not only a global concern but a local concern as well. The need for responsible and moral

act local" has no meaning at all in this materialistic world. Everyone wants to be recognized as leaders because followers these days can easily be bought, but what is wrong to be a follower if one has the quality and traits of a great leader? The sad thing today is that we have too many self-proclaimed leaders whose mentality is that of a follower.

Very soon we will have the MDC, MP and bye-elections. Political aspirants too are gearing themselves up to find a place in the political arena by lobbying with key persons of every political party. VPP is now gearing to take control

with the democratic practice and which renders the wise judgement of the screening procedure meaningless. Such indecisiveness will eventually reflect and indicate the type of leadership and stewardship the party has.

With regards to the importance and speciality of identity as individuals and as a community, the existence of District Councils as a constitutional body has provided us the space and opportunity to feel proud and unique. And let me make it clear here that our identity as a community is not defined by blood because every person on earth shares the same variety of

blood groups. Therefore, our identity is defined by the uniqueness of our culture and tradition. For instance, the matrilineal system of lineage and the consanguinity of marriage that people have maintained and followed till these days. Besides, there are other customs and traditional practices associated with the community such as land, forest, inheritance etc., as specified under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution where proper codification or legislations are required in order to bring uniformity and equality.

Unfortunately such a thing has not happened so far due to differences of opinions politically between the AIC's and the state government. District Councils are supposed to be the guardian of these traditions and customs. Its mandates is to enact laws with regard to all the subjects listed in the Sixth Schedule relating to the customs and usages practiced by the community. Unfortunately this has not fully happened. Instead we have seen many a time that District Councils have been used as temporary asylums for the

anyone. This is the root cause that aggravates the contentious border issue. Therefore, as far as election of members to this statutory body is concerned, it is advisable for the electorates to consider all these essential obligations carefully and to set some basic qualifications or criteria for the candidates who wish to contest the MDC elections. And these qualifications should be on the basis of maturity of age; well informed about issues and persons with deep understanding about the foundations of custom and traditions. The reason why I say so is because most of the youngsters today do not understand or have any knowledge about their legacy. They are driven by emotions and lack of opportunities in other spheres. Hence acquiring and gaining political mileage is their prime objective. By setting down some criteria for giving tickets to candidates, it will curb the drainage of public wealth and assets. It will also help prevent this valuable institution from being politicized and misused by those with ulterior motives. Failing this our valuable legacy and tradition will be in jeopardy.



Leadership is indispensable today than ever before. To understand more about this topic let us look at some of the research work done specifically on this issue post pandemic.

American author, columnist and businessman Don Seidman says "The combination of the corona virus pandemic and the wave of global protests against systemic racism have illuminated the deep need for moral leadership in our world today." Based on the survey conducted, 86% of the respondents that included executives, managers and employees from various industries, cited moral leadership as an important business need. Seidman listed three essential characteristics of moral leadership: 1. Emotional Intelligence, 2. Integrity and 3. Drive by values. The same thing applies in our situation here in the country, the state and district level too. We cannot ignore the fact that we need to integrate and follow the pattern of the 21st century. But this too seems to be under constant challenge due to the conflict of interests and self-aggrandizement. The paradox "think global,

leadership is indispensable today than ever before. To understand more about this topic let us look at some of the research work done specifically on this issue post pandemic. American author, columnist and businessman Don Seidman says "The combination of the corona virus pandemic and the wave of global protests against systemic racism have illuminated the deep need for moral leadership in our world today." Based on the survey conducted, 86% of the respondents that included executives, managers and employees from various industries, cited moral leadership as an important business need. Seidman listed three essential characteristics of moral leadership: 1. Emotional Intelligence, 2. Integrity and 3. Drive by values. The same thing applies in our situation here in the country, the state and district level too. We cannot ignore the fact that we need to integrate and follow the pattern of the 21st century. But this too seems to be under constant challenge due to the conflict of interests and self-aggrandizement. The paradox "think global,

of the KHAAC. Considering the kind of wave that went in favour of VPP in the last MLC election these political aspirants will definitely approach and knock at VPP's door to seek their favour and blessing. Irrespective of whether they understand the party ideology or not. Some have even declared themselves or various social groups as MDC candidate from the party VPP, another once as MP candidate. Without the party's knowledge and consent how could they make such claims. This shows that right from the start of their journey in politics they seem to be cynical in nature. Suppose, the VPP did not face well in the last Assembly election, will anyone dare to make such declarations? This is the reason why I say they have no ideology or principles. On the contrary, the party leadership too has made it clear through social media that in case the number of applicants are more, the party will have no other alternative except by casting lots or a lucky draw for allotment of party tickets. This in fact is a strange approach that does not conform

Bob's Banter Learning English Through Books..!

By Robert Clements

"Sir," said the man to me over the phone, "I am not getting a good job, because I want to speak in English but am not able to, what should I do?" "Read!" I told him. "As many books as possible and those books will teach you how to express yourself, and talk better than any grammar and composition book can ever do for you!" "Is that how you learned English sir?" "Yes!" I said, "and what a beautiful journey it has been!"

All these adventures were mine, without spending a single pie, as I entered the cover of one book or another, that my mom or dad brought me from various libraries they became members of, and later which I also became a member of. Oh the world of books, that kept me propped up in some different corner of my

his next article or story or play or plot. But on those delightfully glorious occasions I find I have that odd hour or two, I pull out a huge volume of short stories by Roald Dahl, and lose myself in his world of fantasy, and unexpected story endings.

I was pleasantly surprised that Dahl is also a favourite author of British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak! What a special day it was for all of us here in India when a country that prided itself in being white outside and white inside too, decided to have a man of Indian origin as their Prime Minister. Something that would have made the likes of Winston Churchill and Queen Victoria turn in their respective graves. But as they voted him in, it was not the colour of his skin the Tories saw but his rhetoric, his skill in oratory and his brilliant language!

That skill can do the same for anyone of us! And to a very great extent the command of our language does not come from learning the dictionary by heart but comes from a passion for reading! The best textbooks on grammar are not the white and Martin we studied in school, but the billions of books written so painstakingly by authors over centuries. Read and learn! Many of us think that by learning a new world a day

here in India when a country that prided itself in being white outside and white inside too, decided to have a man of Indian origin as their Prime Minister. Something that would have made the likes of Winston Churchill and Queen Victoria turn in their respective graves. But as they voted him in, it was not the colour of his skin the Tories saw but his rhetoric, his skill in oratory and his brilliant language!

home or perched on a window sill, and without a word not disturb board around, me everyone kept away from me as I disappeared often from me real time to another into the imaginary fantasies of some wonderful author.

Never a dull moment for me, as holiday mornings saw innumerable authors calling out to me from within the confines of their very descriptive or picturesque covers, shouting, "Bob, you want to be kidnapped today? And I would grin at Robert Louis Stevenson as he took me into the realms of his book, "Kidnapped".

It was a happy world, and a joyous one, certainly not escapism! No, I was not running away, because when I returned to the world of flesh and blood I seemed the very ones who I'd spent some hours before were there spinning tops or flying kites or even playing cards with me, because good authors, make their characters so real, that later when you meet them in flesh and blood it's as if you've met them before in some tale in the hardbound covers of a book!

That for me was fiction! And those books helped, because as my classmates often struggled through grammar and adjectives and adverbs, I found the stories I'd read had automatically got me used to writing and speaking right and this was an additional bonus in my travels into a world, authors laid out and kept their doors open for me.

And then with all that reading, what better than to one day decide that I would continue my life's journey by becoming a writer. But that's another story, this is about reading, learning and yes, leading to... A writer rarely has free time, not because he's always writing, but that he's thinking

Modernity over-sexualised

I read with interest, the interchange between John Saikhuid and Glenn Kharkongor, on the recent "scandal" regarding the video of H.H. the Dalai Lama, asking a young boy to "suck his tongue". It seems to me that Mr. Saikhuid's arguments (while they may sound intellectual and sophisticated) are almost entirely tangential to the main points made by Mr. Kharkongor - that there was a huge cultural misunderstanding of the Tibetan phrase, "che le sa" (eat my tongue) and of the meaning of sucking one's tongue as a mark of respect in the Tibetan culture. An additional point (relevant to this issue) is the fact that His Holiness is single with the English Language. So he mistakenly used "suck" instead of "eat". This is not to say children should not be protected. However, children, more than anyone else, understand the difference between clean affectionate physical touches and those that are violent. The child in question has not complained. Nor has his mother.

Mr. Saikhuid is clear, he does not hold the Dalai Lama or the Pope as infallible. This attitude, it seems to me, denies the divine potential in human nature. It denies what

Consulation on Police Bazar required

I would like to appreciate the move of the Government of Meghalaya to decongest Police Bazar and relocate the street vendors. On behalf of the Police Bazar Welfare Society, I welcome the initiative taken by the Government. However, as far as making Police Bazar a pedestrian zone is concerned we would request the authorities to take into confidence the residents and commercial establishments of the area and listen to our grievances, and not to take any decision unilaterally so that we are not deprived of our civil rights.

Yours etc., S.I. Singhania, President, Police Bazar Welfare Society

Food adulteration a huge concern

The illegal practice of adulteration of food items is increasing at an alarming rate in our city. This adulteration of food items is affecting people's health. Despite being aware of the fact, the authorities concerned are allowing traders to sell such adulterated food items.

Yours etc., Deepu Majumdar, Via email

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# How British imperial history shaped Charles III's coronation ceremony



(Above) King George V and Queen Mary in India in 1911. (Left) The Koh-i-Noor diamond, seen here in the crown made for Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and sitting atop her coffin, did not appear in the coronation ceremony.

By Sean Lang

The coronation ceremony of Charles III reflects how monarchy has developed since Saxon times, but it still carries many vestiges of Britain's imperial past.

In the 18th century, the royal title changed from "King of England" to "King of the United Kingdom", as successive Acts of Union joined England, Scotland and Ireland into one political unit. However, the biggest change in the royal title came in 1876, when the Royal Titles Act made Queen Victoria Empress of India. This gave her authority even over those areas of India which were not formally subject to British rule.

To give this change of title a formal announcement in India, the British authorities staged what became the first of three durbars - ceremonial events held in the British Raj to formally proclaim the imperial title.

Queen Victoria's was held in 1877, the year following the act, but Edward VII's and George V's were held in conjunction with their coronations.

The viceroys of India in 1877, Lord Lytton, concocted the original durbar from a mixture of Persian, Mughal and English ceremonial traditions, as a formal proclamation of the queen's title.

When her son became Edward VII in 1901, a bigger durbar was organised to proclaim his imperial title - although, like his mother, Edward remained in London.

In 1911, George V and Queen Mary travelled to India for an elaborately staged coronation durbar, where they would take centre stage. This raised tricky questions of protocol.

George's coronation in Westminster Abbey invested him with all his imperial titles, so what

would be the impact of being "crowned" in India? Would it mean that his successors would not be emperors unless they held a durbar? And what did it mean for his predecessors who had not attended theirs? The crown of England was not allowed to leave the country, so a special crown was constructed for George V to wear in India, while Queen Mary wore her "best tiadem" - a heavily ornamented headband. They sat sweating under the Delhi sun in their heavy coronation robes, furs and all.

In the end, the Delhi durbar consisted of Indian princes paying homage to the king-emperor in a ceremony that owed as much to European feudalism as it did to Indian tradition. Plans for George VI to have an Indian durbar were postponed in the post-abdication sense of general exhaustion, and abandoned as war loomed.

## CORONATION AND THE COMMONWEALTH

The 1931 Statute of Westminster formalised the evolution of some former colonies into self-governing dominions within a British commonwealth. Both George VI and Elizabeth II were crowned as monarchs over the UK and of territories overseas.

The coronation oath, a legal requirement dating back to the Coronation Oath Act of 1688, has been amended on various occasions, taking account of former colonies which have become republics.

The oath Charles III will take has been amended slightly to cover his duties to his other kingdoms by agreement with their governments. Even so, for the king of Canada to be crowned in London is a reminder that the modern monarch's title still reflects the old empire.

## ELEMENTS OF EMPIRE

Even the medieval roots of the coronation have elements of empire built into them. The Stone of Scone, which will be placed beneath the coronation chair, was removed from Scotland by Edward I as a symbol of Scotland's subjugation to England. Scottish nationalists demanded the stone's return to Scotland for years.

When John Major acceded to their wishes in 1996, it was on condition that the stone would return to Westminster for future coronations - a gesture some see as an unwelcome remnant of England's imperial hold over Scotland, though others regard it as a symbol of unity.

In a nod to Welsh nationalist feeling, King Charles's coronation will also include the *kyrie* (*Lord Have Mercy*) performed in Welsh.

One item of the crown jewels is a stark reminder of empire - but it will notably be missing from the coronation ceremony. The Koh-i-Noor diamond was taken by the British after their wars with the Sikh kingdom of Punjab, and presented to Queen Victoria in 1849.

It was reshaped by Prince Albert and fitted into the crown jewels. Both Queen Alexandra and Queen Mary wore it at their coronations, though Queen Mary, tactfully, did not wear it for the 1911 coronation durbar.

Seeing the diamond as symbol of British imperial acquisitiveness, the Indian government has demanded its return, though, historically, both Pakistan and Iran could also lay claim to it. Camilla, the Queen Consort, has decided to be crowned in Queen Mary's crown, from which the famous diamond has been removed. The controversy about the Koh-i-Noor will doubtless continue, but won't intrude on this coronation ceremony.

## A NEW-LOOK GUEST LIST

The biggest move away from imperial tradition has been in the compilation of the guest list. In the past, the only rulers to receive an invite were those of British overseas territories, such as Queen Salote of Tonga, who delighted the crowds in 1953 by braving the rain in an open-top carriage and scoring an umbrella.

Charles III has departed from precedent by issuing invitations to monarchs from Europe and the Middle East, regardless of whether or not they had ties to the British empire. Some other heads of state are also attending, though the US will be represented by the first lady, Jill Biden, rather than the president.

At a time when polling suggests declining support for the monarchy, especially among the young, the coronation might seem an irrelevant, if colourful, distraction from more pressing concerns.

There has been similar indifference before other royal events. Elizabeth II's silver jubilee in 1977 was preceded by "stuff the jubilee" protests, but still proved a popular success. The unexpectedly warm public responses to her subsequent jubilees, and especially to her funeral, might suggest that many British are secretly more royalist than polling would suggest.

By inviting representatives of a wide range of ethnic groups and different faiths to participate in the ceremony, the king is turning his coronation into a reflection of his diverse and decidedly post-imperial kingdom.

The coronation is still not entirely free of echoes of empire, but it represents an important stage in the modern monarchy's move away from its shadow.

(The Conversation)

# Heatwaves a threat to India's fight against poverty, inequality

Record-breaking heatwaves in April 2022 put 90% of people in India at increased risk of going hungry, losing income or premature death, according to our new study.

After 2022 was designated the hottest in 122 years, extreme heat has appeared early again this year with over 60% of India recording above-normal maximum temperatures for April, according to the country's Meteorological Department. El Niño, a natural climate event that can increase global temperatures, is also expected to occur this year.

The increasing frequency of such deadly heatwaves could halt or even reverse India's progress in reducing poverty, food and income security and gender equality, harming the quality of life for over 1.4 billion Indians.

As a natural phenomenon, extreme heat is projected to occur every 30 years or so in the Indian subcontinent. This is no longer the case thanks to man-made climate change. India has suffered over 24,000 heatwave-related deaths since 1992 alone, with the May 1998 heatwave being one of the most devastating as it claimed over 3,058 lives.

During the May 2010 heatwaves, temperatures in the western city of Ahmedabad reached 47.8°C and raised heat-related hospital admissions of newborns by 43%, prompting the city to become one of the country's first to implement a heat action plan meant to guide prepara-

tions and emergency responses to heatwaves which has since saved thousands of lives. The 2015 heatwave killed over 2,330 people and prompted the government ministry for disaster

economy by 2030. A "real-feel" measure Heat action plans are only useful if they can represent the consequences of heatwaves



management to set guidelines for preventing deaths during heatwaves and push Indian states to develop their own plans.

Failure to implement these strategies may stymie India's economic progress. If proper heat action plans are not developed, excessive heat could cost India 2.8% and 8.7% of its GDP by 2050 and 2100, respectively. This is a worrying trend, especially given India's goal of becoming a 10-trillion-dollar

over the entire population. For Indian authorities to recognise when deadly heat is present (and emergency action is needed), the government has to know how conditions feel for the public.

We used an environmental health measure popular in the US called the heat index to determine how hot the human body is likely to feel in relation to air temperature and humidity levels. This helped us to map how sensitive people were to heatwaves across India and discover

that 90% of the country was in danger of severe repercussions during last year's heatwave.

It's important to accurately measure India's vulnerability to lethal temperatures. The metric

Underestimating the effects of extreme heat in India could reduce or even reverse its progress on a range of goals for sustainable development. These include those related to poverty, hunger, health and wellbeing, equality, economic growth and industry, innovation and biodiversity. This is especially concerning given that India's progress towards achieving these goals has slowed over the last 20 years while the number of extreme weather events has increased.

Extreme heat, for example, can exacerbate drought by drying up the soil and disrupting rainfall patterns, ultimately blighting crop production and food security, which endangers the health and wellbeing of a large portion of Indian society. Being a primarily agricultural economy, productivity losses in this sector threaten the jobs and health of millions of marginal and small landholding farmers, as well as their ability to adapt and take up new livelihoods. Another worrying tendency with heatwaves is increasing water-borne and insect-borne diseases, which could further strain India's already beleaguered public health system.

Every year, millions of people from rural areas migrate to India's cities in search of a

better quality of life. But heatwaves have a disastrous effect on the country's urban population too. Practically the entire city of Delhi and its 32 million inhabitants were threatened by the 2022 heatwaves. Most migrants are forced to settle in the city's poorest quarters, where the effects of heatwaves are particularly catastrophic. Sadly, these communities also lack the means to buy air conditioners that might ease their misery.

Present procedures for assessing the sensitivity of India to climate change will not help people resist the exceptional heat seen in recent years and must be upgraded immediately. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that heatwaves in South Asia will grow more powerful and frequent this century. Heat action plans will be crucial in speeding up efforts to mitigate and adapt to the effects, but they must represent the complexity of India's vulnerabilities to climate change. The emphasis on making Indian cities resilient to extreme heat is critical, since cities will see a population explosion in the next ten years, with 70% of Indian building stock yet to be created. There is a chance to incorporate methods for adapting to extreme heat by designing new homes that are easier to keep cool.

With many more people in India expected to be hit by even greater heat extremes in the future, finance, urban design and education are necessary to help people adapt.

(The Conversation)

Stop underestimating heatwaves





"If you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice." — Neil Peart

The Shillong Times

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Nepotism over Merit

NEPOTISM seeps through the government system of Meghalaya from job appointments to national and international jaunts. Nepotism is a blatant display of favouritism towards certain individuals for reasons ranging from exchange of money or favours, social ties, or family and kinship ties. It gives birth to cronyism that destroys institutions at their core. In Meghalaya a person only has to have the right connections to be able to climb the ladder of opportunity not through the front door. It has to be the backdoor, always. The infamous white ink scam in the Education Department over which the CBI is sitting on and the Courts have not given their final ruling yet is a case in point. In this case primary school teachers who did not qualify were appointed in place of those that earned their appointment through sheer hard work. But merit was given a go by, influence trumped merit and this is just one case that came to light because the teachers approached the courts. Not everyone, however, has the wherewithal to knock on the doors of the temples of justice because legal fees are prohibitive. So, people take it and lump it but also nurse deep grievances against the entire system.

Unfortunately due to want of public action these acts of nepotism are repeated ad nauseum and leave more scars. People feel helpless and it dawns on them that 'justice' at least in Meghalaya is a far cry. The recent call for nomination of two names of filmmakers by the Union Ministry of Information & Public Relations has turned into a needless controversy when the names of two deserving film makers from Meghalaya who have also earned a name for themselves nationally and internationally and whose names were recommended by the State I&PR Department were unceremoniously dropped. It would appear that certain forces are at work to derail the process of governance and departmental autonomy, for in this case, someone from the Tourism Department appears to have pulled the strings to ensure that their cronies are represented at Cannes.

This power play at the top levels of the bureaucracy has been evident for some years now in the Meghalaya Government and it does not augur well for the state. The State Chief Secretary who has the overall authority in ensuring the smooth functioning of the bureaucratic hierarchy has to step in and assert his authority to ensure that no bureaucratic oversteps his/her limits. Each time opportunities open up for deserving people to travel abroad to expand their horizons, it is found that their chances are scuttled by someone in the government. This cannot and should not be allowed to happen. Justice and fairness must prevail. The elected too must assert their authority in the right direction. Enough of nepotism and injustice! Let merit win the day!

Letters to the Editor

The Cannes controversy

The controversy surrounding the participation of representatives from Meghalaya to the Cannes Film Festival, arguably one of the most important events in the film festival calendar, has put the State in a bad light. It was a golden opportunity for Meghalaya to send two among its most creative representatives to a festival that boasts of a marriage between art and commerce. The matter was simple. A letter from Joint Secretary Films, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, had come to the nodal department to select and recommend representatives for an exposure visit to Cannes to allow them to bring back learning experiences to the State to be further shared with creative individuals. However, a simple exercise was turned into a needless exhibition of power equating with vested interests, reducing the State's image to dust in the eyes of the film fraternity, the Government of India, and the Embassy of France in India, while embarrassing the State Government and its functioning in the eyes of its own people. It is pathetic to see a budding filmmaker withdrawing his candidature from something which would have done his credit a world of good. It transpires that he was sold by vested interests, who had their own interests at stake. What is also surprising is the role of a department (read bureaucracy) which has

no locus standi to nominate the film makers. It has not only usurped the function of a legitimate department but also recommended a choice which has left a bad taste in the mouth. What the entire episode has done is to show a section of the media, which has no control over her own department, nor influence in the Cabinet. Her explanation that the media on the controversy betrayed a sense of helplessness knowing that the bureaucrat in question wields a lot of clout. It would be interesting to watch what action the Chief Minister as the final arbiter take in this case or if he will just look the other way. The I&PR Minister should have ensured that the individuals who got themselves nominated through deceit in the first place are withdrawn. If this is not done, her authority will be eroded for all times to come, with the same principles applying to other departments. The name of Commander Shangkhang, the president of the State Development Council, no consequence, and his proximity to the powers that be has also raised the hackles of top filmmakers in France in India, while embarrassing the State Government and its functioning in the eyes of its own people. It is pathetic to see a budding filmmaker withdrawing his candidature from something which would have done his credit a world of good. It transpires that he was sold by vested interests, who had their own interests at stake. What is also surprising is the role of a department (read bureaucracy) which has

In the last few weeks, there have been a lot of discussions on the issue of whether the matrilineal system of the Khasi/Jaintia has outlived its usefulness and a change to the patrilineal system is much more desirable. This is not a new issue; it has been raised in the past and most probably will be raised in the future as well. Surrounded by patrilineal societies, the pressure to conform to what is considered "mainstream" is very strong. Whenever the arguments made by those who are advocating for the change, behind all that is the desire to "fit in," which drives the upward march. The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council has opposed such a move and directed that the ST certificates should only be issued to those who use their mother's surname, as mandated by the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council Customary Social Lineage Act, 1997. The reason given for this strong move is the need to protect the age-old traditional customary practices. While I think the move is a bit strong, I do support the need to protect our matrilineal system. This is not only for maintaining the identity of the Khasi/Jaintia as a distinctive ethnic group, but as an indigenous group as well, which could have ramifications beyond just confusion in the kinship rules.

In India, the word indigenous is not considered synonymous with tribes, first peoples or nations, aboriginals, ethnic groups, Adivasi, or Janjati. The official position is that tribes survive but not as indigenous people. Instead, in India, the official term used to categorize such groups is 'Scheduled Tribes' (ST), based on Article 366 of the Indian Constitution, which gives power to the President of India to notify any group as Scheduled Tribes in relation to a particular state or union territory. The Scheduled Tribes in the Indian Constitution, Scheduled Tribes have been identified to have the following features: (i) indications of primitive traits; (ii) distinctive cultures; (iii) geographical isolation; (iv) shyness of contact with the community at large; and (v) backwardness. This is not far from how the erstwhile colonists view the indigenous communities in the Americas, Russia, the Arctic region and many parts of the Pacific. Discrimination and harassment subsequently follow. And it is here that the

to represent the State. This statement comes from the same Department which has allowed the Organization to be a section of the media. There are talks that the organization owes money to many vendors, and that accountability procedures have been bypassed by the same individual. The matter should not end merely with the cancellation of the nominations but the Aungan stables must be cleaned. As the head of the bureaucracy, it is also enjoined on the Chief Minister to take suo motu cognizance to probe the transgression of bureaucratic procedures and the authority-responsibility principal be laid down in no uncertain terms. It must be ensured that in future, the over-arching powers of a single individual do not derail opportunities that come to the fledgling art and culture industry in Meghalaya. The department deserves to be condemned in the strictest possible terms and lessons be drawn up to prevent a repeat of such incidents.

By the way, the very manner in which the recently concluded Meghalaya International Film Festival was conducted must come into public scrutiny because a lot is at stake for the Government and the State. There was no candle to light the inaugural film. Bonowad actor Adil Hussain saved the situation by fishing out a cigarette lighter from his pocket and doing the needful. Let us

Matrilineal to patrilineal: what is the cost?

By Bhogoram Mawroh

Intentional framework for indigenous peoples becomes very important. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 puts forward two criteria for identifying indigenous peoples: subjective and objective. The subjective criterion is descent from populations that inhabited the country or geographical region at the time of conquest, colonization or establishment of present state boundaries, and/or retention of some social, economic, cultural, and political institutions irrespective of their legal status. The subjective criterion is self-identification on the individual level and being accepted by the community as a member. Let's first look at the objective criteria to try and understand the antecedent of the Khasi/Jaintia in the history of the sub-continent. The 2013 paper 'Two thousand year of iron smelting in the Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, North East India' by Pawel Prokop and Ireneusz Suliga has revealed that iron smelting, an important industry for the Khasi during the pre-colonial period, has been practised in these hills for at least 2000 years. According to the authors, the manufacturing technology appears to be of indigenous origin, which means that it was developed by the Khasi/Jaintia on their own. This, of course, must have taken a lot of time, and therefore the date of arrival of the Khasi in the region is much earlier than 2000 years, maybe 3000-4000 years ago. In fact, the same paper also mentions that based on present studies, it is assumed that "the Khasi and Jaintia groups, belonging to the Austro-Asiatic language family, migrated from Southeast Asia and spread up the Brahmaputra/Ganges around 3000 BCE, or 5000 years ago. The date is confirmed by other studies as well. In 2015, Arun Kumar and his colleagues published their paper, 'A Late Neolithic expansion of a chromosomal haplogroup O2a1-M95 from east to west. It was from the origin and dispersal of Y-chromosomal haplogroup O2a1-M95, which distributed across the Austro-Asiatic speaking belt of East and South Asia, i.e., it is found among the Khasi/Jaintia. The study found that O2a1-M95

carrying people spread to the sub-continent from the East, most probably from Laos, arriving in the North East (i.e., most probably with the Khasi/Jaintia now mostly found in present day Meghalaya) in the late Neolithic period, i.e., around 4000 BCE, and 2000 BCE, or 6500 and 4000 years ago. The latter is a critical date since it was around 4000 years ago, that the Mundu and the Khasi/Jaintia shared a common ancestor. These dates are very important. It was around 2600 BCE (4600 years ago) that the Indus Valley Civilization was beginning to gain prominence. But by 3500 years ago, i.e., it had declined, and the birth of the modern state of India post-1947.

Through all these changes, the Khasi/Jaintia and their Austro-Asiatic cousin, the Mundu, endured. They held on to their own social, economic, cultural, and political institutions with some influences from the surrounding region, but not for the Khasi/Jaintia, the pressure to conform must have been more immense since they are matrilineal and distinct from other groups, whether indigenous or not. A very common experience of indigenous peoples all over the world is the discriminatory, patronising, and generally demeaning attitude of the dominant groups towards them because of their distinctive identity. But despite that, they have decided to maintain that identity, as have the Khasi/Jaintia. This is what is meant by the subjective criterion of self-identification, which, in simple words, means a group or an individual identifying themselves as being indigenous despite the negative

approach high court for bail. In the media it is reported that the same reporter had highlighted the Kejriwal offence from the wrong side and it is for this reason that she was harassed. Can we call ourselves a democracy, if we allow freedom of expression and pursuit of

Penyashaling Lyngdoh, Via email

Ranking of freedom of press further lowered

India's world ranking in press freedom is further lowered whereas the ranking of Pakistan and Afghanistan is better than that of India's. Why is it so? I quote here two instances which happened recently and which will explain why the ranking of this country via its press freedom has plummeted. Case 1: This case is related to CPM Rajya Sabha member and who is also a best parliamentarian. He has written an article in a newspaper entitled, 'Penis of propaganda.' But a BJP leader from Kerala made a complaint to Chairman, Rajya Sabha under Section 133A and accordingly the Chairman had a discussion with Rajya Sabha member Brittas. Now the question arises whether India allows free speech?

RWB, headquartered in Paris and which has a consultative status with the UN, is reporting that the objective of which is to compare and quantify the level of press freedom enjoyed

connotations associated with it in terms of political, social, and cultural aspects. And it is here that the danger lies in the demand for changing the lineage system from matrilineal to patrilineal, the loss of indigenous identity, and the memory of the ancestors who, despite all challenges, decided not to fit in with the mainstream. It is, however, not the case that Khasi/Jaintia were not aware of the patrilineal traditions. In fact, they did use them to enrich the system but not to break it, something that is being proposed by those who want to change the system from matrilineal to patrilineal. In the Bhoi region, there is a type of matrilineal alliance known as Shim-Dhe. Incases where a family has no male children, in order to keep the property within the same clan, brides are sought from the Karhi clans (who follow the patrilineal system) rather than the matrilineal Bhoi clans. The children get the father's surname, and if they in turn have female children of their own, the matrilineal system is adopted. So the patrilineal system is used, but in relation to a Khasi/Jaintia man marrying a non-Khasi/Jaintia woman, not for marriages between members of the same group. This innovation was to ensure that the resources of the community were not appropriated by other groups. Is there a similar threat that compels those members of the Khasi/Jaintia community who want to adopt a patrilineal system? That is something only they can answer. Even that were the case, I don't believe a system that has lasted around 6,000 years (in this region at least) is so fragile that it will change now because some people want to hold on to some more property. The matrilineal system is the bedrock of Khasi/Jaintia identity as indigenous people. It is also a homage to the ancestors who kept hold of their identity despite the many challenges they faced throughout many generations. And it is imperative that this tradition be kept alive, for without it, I am afraid we will be a people without identity and without history. That, I hope, is not the fate of our people. (The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organization or institution)

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Polls and the paradox in Karnataka

By Jagdish Rattanani

Without delving into what the Karnataka elections hold and which way the wind will blow, it can be safely said that this is an election that has significance well beyond the immediate. In fact, rarely has a State election been so important for the nation as the one in Karnataka now. For what we are seeing is not just one election battle but a fight for a larger message that this electoral outcome will send out to India and the world. Most observers (irrespective of political leanings) would agree that the results of this election will carry significant implications for Indian politics into 2024 and beyond. This is a place of privilege for the State and its electorate of over 52 million. It also places an enormous responsibility on the people of Karnataka, a State that has been a pioneer in science, technology and innovation. In its popular Indian imagination, the State continues to be at the top in building new and modern tech-based solutions. For example, it lends the nation its total installed power of grid-interactive renewable energy. It is fertile ground for a host of start-ups and the angels who give start-ups their fuel to play around and experiment. The State has 47 per cent of India's total of 95 unicorns. It has over 13,000 start-ups now.

More than 40 years ago in this State was elected the first woman to head the government. It was a woman who went on to showcase India as a global software services power house, kick-starting the IT revolution and a revolution that has over five million people in direct employment and many times that number indirectly. It was a woman who was founder N.R. Narayana Murthy polarised messages of integrity and how a straight path can help build a long-term business. These stories have been told again and again in educational and business institutions across India. They marked a modern story of growth with values.

A new high in this story of business for good, values in the lead and a spiritual outlook of giving away came again from Karnataka in the leadership of Arun Prernji and his giving pledge: "I strongly believe that those of us, who are privileged to have wealth, should contribute significantly to try and create a better world for the millions who are far less privileged. I will continue to act on this belief." Prernji, himself the creator of Infosys, a global IT giant, cut new ground and became India's tallest business leader when he pledged to raise his total lifetime giving to USD 1 billion in 2010. Every student in India knows these stories. They showcase Karnataka as a State that looks to the future and pushes ahead to meet the needs of a bold, modern, globalised India where Indians are not only the consumers but important suppliers of talent and ideas. In its phenomenal professional excellence, a spirit of service as well as resilience and humility. Yet, this is also the State that has hit the national headlines for other reasons, like the ugly controversy fire created by interested groups or whether girls wear the jibba in colleges — the so-called hijab row. The pictures and interviews that emerged at the height of the controversy in Feb. 2022 presented Karnataka as a State that was seen a recent increase in cases of communal violence since Jan. 2019 (Jan. 1, 2019 to Feb. 15, 2022), with no convictions as of

Feb. 2023. This translated to one communal disturbance every 18 days in a little over three years. The last days of a bitterly contested and important election are once again seeing the push towards a communal agenda with the BJP putting its energies in defence of the Hajarang Dal. The Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself led with "Bharang Bhai Ki Jai" and asked voters to chant the same as they cast their vote. It is clear that the voter, if any, is gone and the appeal on religious grounds is as direct as it gets. One reason could be the BJP's worry that it is losing ground. It thinks that a dose of religion will help it sail through in the face of challenges like internal local area scuffles within the BJP and the Congress hammering away on the monumental completion that has allegedly become the signature of the BJP rule in Karnataka. The BJP push back is on a point in the Congress manifesto that promises "Decisive action as per the law including suspensions for Indian politics into 2024 and beyond. This is a place of privilege for the State and its electorate of over 52 million. It also places an enormous responsibility on the people of Karnataka, a State that has been a pioneer in science, technology and innovation. In its popular Indian imagination, the State continues to be at the top in building new and modern tech-based solutions. For example, it lends the nation its total installed power of grid-interactive renewable energy. It is fertile ground for a host of start-ups and the angels who give start-ups their fuel to play around and experiment. The State has 47 per cent of India's total of 95 unicorns. It has over 13,000 start-ups now. More than 40 years ago in this State was elected the first woman to head the government. It was a woman who went on to showcase India as a global software services power house, kick-starting the IT revolution and a revolution that has over five million people in direct employment and many times that number indirectly. It was a woman who was founder N.R. Narayana Murthy polarised messages of integrity and how a straight path can help build a long-term business. These stories have been told again and again in educational and business institutions across India. They marked a modern story of growth with values. A new high in this story of business for good, values in the lead and a spiritual outlook of giving away came again from Karnataka in the leadership of Arun Prernji and his giving pledge: "I strongly believe that those of us, who are privileged to have wealth, should contribute significantly to try and create a better world for the millions who are far less privileged. I will continue to act on this belief." Prernji, himself the creator of Infosys, a global IT giant, cut new ground and became India's tallest business leader when he pledged to raise his total lifetime giving to USD 1 billion in 2010. Every student in India knows these stories. They showcase Karnataka as a State that looks to the future and pushes ahead to meet the needs of a bold, modern, globalised India where Indians are not only the consumers but important suppliers of talent and ideas. In its phenomenal professional excellence, a spirit of service as well as resilience and humility. Yet, this is also the State that has hit the national headlines for other reasons, like the ugly controversy fire created by interested groups or whether girls wear the jibba in colleges — the so-called hijab row. The pictures and interviews that emerged at the height of the controversy in Feb. 2022 presented Karnataka as a State that was seen a recent increase in cases of communal violence since Jan. 2019 (Jan. 1, 2019 to Feb. 15, 2022), with no convictions as of

The results will help navigate this complex territory. They will speak for now, doing so, they will cast their long shadow on the 2024 national elections as well. (The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SJIUVA. He is also a columnist (Syndicate, The Billon Press) e-mail: editor@thebillonpress.org)

"There's nothing like desperation to sharpen your sense of focus." — Thomas Newman

The Shillong Times

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Azad's own Kashmir

A sense of realism is integral to politics. Unfortunately, this is not the case with the parties of various hues here. The result is that even when a government is seen to be taking action in national interest, support for it comes only or mostly from the ruling party. An example is the abrogation of Article 370 thereby removing the special status of Jammu and Kashmir by the NDA government in 2019. Former Union minister Ghulam Nabi Azad, a seasoned Congress leader who quit the party and formed his own Progressive Azad Party some time ago, has admitted that the abrogation has helped "end the scourge of terrorism and stone-pelting" in the harried Valley. This is well-known but it is quite uncommon for an opposition political party leader to acknowledge such things, let alone support such actions. Azad means well for his own people in Kashmir and means well for the nation as well. This is the reason why he has qualified this statement with an observation that this administrative change brought about by the Centre is, however, not "good" for the people in the Valley.

Admittedly, the entire opposition did not stand against the abrogation in 2019. Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, for one, backed the historic government decision. To the common eye, this decision on the part of the Modi-led government was a master-stroke. The decision was taken shortly after it won the parliament polls for a second term in office and Amit Shah took charge as the new home minister. The Congress party, principally Rahul Gandhi, had opposed the move along with the rootless, visionless leadership of the Left. Most other opposition parties remained silent on this count. They chose to play safe. Admittedly, Kashmir is not still back to the level of a fabled 'paradise on earth'. Stray acts of terrorism are occurring, but the terror outfits have obviously lost steam. Stone-pelting by belligerent youths on the security forces is certainly an old story.

More importantly, the youths in Kashmir have begun minding their business of studies or finding jobs. Concurrently, the Pakistani establishment and its mischief-mongering military have begun lying low vis-a-vis their vicious engagements against India. Fact is, it is difficult to sustain terrorism for too long. The LTE ended up in a whimper after its assaults for a quarter of a century; so with Al Qaeda and the ISIS or the outfits in Europe like Sinn Fein; so with the militant outfits of the past in the North-East region, though Manipur has emerged as a new worry now. By their very nature, such outfits have an expiry date. State power cannot be neutralized with violence.

Manipur will never be the same again

By Albert Thyriang

The images and footages emanating from Manipur are shocking to say the least. The scenes of thousands of charred vehicles, the flames and smoke in the skies from homes set ablaze, the looting, the destroyed churches, the vandalised war memorials reveal the extent of the mayhem. The most appalling are the video clips of people being beaten mercilessly (even to death) by rioters. The sense of humanity vanished. The emotion for ethnicity took over. Even though those who escaped the violence, eyewitnesses recount their horrors, the quantum of violence may never be comprehended. The scale of destruction is immeasurable. That heinous acts should take place in the 21st century is unimaginable. The seriousness of the situation was so grave that the Centre had to commission the central forces under Article 355, one short of 356, namely President's Rule. The latest counts of deaths are more than 160 (may rise rapidly), thousands have turned refugees in their own state in expanded relief camps with minimum privacy and handouts are arranged in hospitals. An unprecedented human crisis!

While Manipur boiled and burned the Prime Minister was totally unresponsive. He was too obsessed with the elections in Karnataka to be concerned with the communal clashes that engulfed the state. He had indulged 'The Kerala Story', a mere movie that depicts terror conspiracies to accuse the Congress of playing vote bank politics. The 'Kerala Story' should also be made to set the record straight. The state silence is not hard to read. The BJP is ruling Manipur. To even say that any form of violence is unacceptable might be seen as a criticism of the state government. But the actual reason could be none other. It is far to say that the minority is more at the receiving end in the Manipur riots. The majority should not be offended so that the vote bank could be kept intact or even improved. The non-tribal community in that state constitutes 57.2% per cent of the population and command 40 seats in the state Assembly. It is feared the unrests are being used to strengthen the vote bank of a particular communal party.

One of the baffling scenes is the burning of churches in the Meitei dominated areas. The issue has nothing to do with religion, it is about the large scale vandalism of as many as 25 churches? In some videos we hear that the destruction of churches was not done by the Meiteis. Then who did it? The alleged conspiracy of the involvement

of Christians themselves to damage the reputation of the Meitei community is totally baseless. The damage to the churches and property has been done by Christians the most and has cast a shadow on the majority community in Manipur. Some BJP cohorts in 'mainland' India, have also made the wildest of allegations that the whole episode was a Christian conspiracy. BJP's tag of being anti-Christians is enhanced and paraded. Only the Metropolitan Archbishop of Bangalore, Peter Machado has condemned the targeting of churches and persecution of Christians in Manipur. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) expressed concern at the situation.

Though the Meiteis have largely abandoned their traditional religion, Sanamahism and converted to Hinduism is argued to be against their demand for tribal status it could be argued that tribals who have embraced Christianity still enjoy tribal status.

ation pointing to the counter mobilisation by some Meitei groups against the Kuki demonstration mentioning also the burning down of the Kuki war memorial. Some bishops in the North East have asked for prayers for peace in the troubled state. But none of the otherwise noisy Keralite bishops has uttered a word because they have been hobnobbing with the BJP, politically in recent times.

The why and wherefores of the chain of events including the horrifying violence has been elucidated in the print and electronic media. The breakdown on the genesis of the turmoil are easily available across platforms. What triggered the real events was the recommendation of the Manipur High Court directing the state government to consider granting ST status to the Meitei community within a time frame. There were a so other flash points like the evictions of tribals from forest lands, the crack-down on poppy cultivation of the tribes in the hills, the pulling down of 'illegally' constructed churches, the alleged racial profiling of tribals, among others. But the tipping point was the High Court's verdict.

The judgement is quite strange. Though the Meiteis have largely abandoned their traditional religion, Sanamahism and converted to Hinduism is argued to be against their demand for tribal status it could be argued that tribals who have embraced Christianity still enjoy tribal status. Yet,

the confusion is the following. Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) exist for the Meitei community. Before deciding on whether Meiteis are a tribe or not the SC and OBC conundrum should be cleared first. What will happen to the SC and OBC arrangements if the Meiteis fulfill the tribal criteria? Will the constitutional SC and OBC structure be done away with? There is also the long argument that since the Meiteis are already an advanced and progressive group, why are they still nurture this long pending demand for 'tribal' status?

The crux of the complex issue is land. The unstated reason for the ST demand is

the scarce commodity. Land is even scarcer for the Meiteis in Manipur. They occupy only 10% of the total land (mainly the Imphal valley or the plain areas of the state) though they make up nearly 60% of the population. They can't buy land in the 90% areas that are owned by the multiple tribes who together comprise 40% of the population. In addition to this, tribals can also purchase and own land in the 10% general area. The tribals have the geographical advantage. Land pressure on the Meiteis is seen as the motivating factor for the ST demand.

Tribal groups on the other hand, feel endangered. Their very existence is threatened if the Meiteis indeed wear the tribal card. They will be able to buy and inherit the lands, including the Kuki, out-Moveover job and business opportunities, reservations in educational institutions and many other privileges will be significantly reduced for the tribals in favour of the Meiteis who are already much more developed in every sphere of life besides enjoying the demographic advantage. However, the Meiteis themselves, reservations in educational institutions and many other privileges will be significantly reduced for the tribals in favour of the Meiteis who are already much more developed in every sphere of life besides enjoying the demographic advantage.

Another, but the tipping point was the High Court's verdict. The judgement is quite strange. Though the Meiteis have largely abandoned their traditional religion, Sanamahism and converted to Hinduism is argued to be against their demand for tribal status it could be argued that tribals who have embraced Christianity still enjoy tribal status. Yet,

Bob's Banter ChatGPT, Chanakya and Compassion..!

B Robert Clements

Last week I had to make different groups of people in a class I was teaching to enact small plays, and feeling lazy, I decided to use ChatGPT instead of writing them. Well they turned out to be exceptionally good skits, and like I said, all done using ChatGPT. As the performances began, I watched the actors working on their dialogues and noticed their lines were all geared towards solving addition problems. ChatGPT had done an excellent job of giving solutions through clever discourse and rational thought, but as I continued watching, I noticed one or two ingredients missing, and this made me literally scratch my head. I wondered what it was and slowly the realization came to my mind as to what the missing ingredient was. It was something ChatGPT or any other software would have found impossible to duplicate or replicate.

I'm sure you're all wondering what I'm speaking about, and the only way I can explain this is through an incident. Over two thousand years ago, while Jesus was in the middle of his ministry here on earth, he delayed a visit to a close friend who was dying. He knew that Lazarus was sick. He knew that Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus, expected him to rush to their house and save their brother, but he did not go. The sisters even sent word to Jesus that Lazarus, "he whom thou lovest," is ill. But Jesus told his followers: "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's son may be glorified through it."

It was done on purpose, which was to reach the residence of the sisters and work a great miracle, so that many would see the power of God. And that was exactly what he did. He waited, or as the old English word says, he tarried, and then made his way to the home of his friend, and I am sure in his mind, he knew already that his friend was dead. That still made his way there. When he reached Bethany where Lazarus lived, he knew from the sounds of mourning and maybe from the fact that there were even lesser sounds than when a man had just died, that Lazarus had passed on, and had passed away a few days before. As was expected the sisters ran up to him, to tell him their brother was dead. They cried in deep agony, saying "The Lord had come earlier, Lazarus could have been healed."

Jesus knew what was going to happen. He knew soon there would be laughter and rejoicing as the dead man walked out of his grave. Yet, on seeing the grief of those around, Jesus wept. In the Holy Scriptures, it is the shereva verse, but I think the most revealing and powerful! A powerful healer, though he would soon see a man resurrected, still allowed himself to become vulnerable to feel with his heart the emotions of sorrow around him. That heart of compassion,

faults actually revealed perfection. What we see in our country today is the use of Chanakya strategies by most everyone, especially in politics. We even have poll strategists who craft winning poll formulas. Think deeply dear reader, are we playing a game of chess using people as pawns? Remember that in the middle of one of Christ's greatest miracles he broke down, feeling the sorrow around, and in that breaking down, revealed the character of God: a God who could show compassion even before strategizing a miracle.

But here in our country, it's not late for change. There's a chance today for our own political leadership to throw out ChatGPT and Chanakya thinking. Yes, there is! Every day we've been seeing pictures of young girls like your daughter or mine, on the front pages of our papers or appearing right in our living rooms through our TV screens. Young girl wrestlers weeping over being molested and sexually assaulted by a powerful man. It's so sad that they are described all the time as 'wrestlers' that we forget they are the same young age, as the teenager next door, or maybe my daughter or yours. I hope they are on a man in Delhi, day and night asking the nation for justice!

Now, if our Prime Minister could one morning, without cameramen or journalists, just walk over and stretch out his arms to these poor girls, and assure them that his heart feels for them, what a glorious moment that would be for India!

It would speak louder than all the gold medals, the girls have won. It would be close to what that biblical verse says, in what a weeping Jesus did. Can he do it? Can he reach out to them? Because today, in our country needs huge doses of Compassion, not Chanakya strategies or ChatGPT formulas..! That heart of compassion,

that slipping from clever speech and Chanakya strategy, was not there in those scripts. ChatGPT noticed was clever, but could not move from perfection to humanness! Many years back my late dad and I went to a newly built theatre. My dad was an artist and interior designer. We reached the new theatre. They had called us, as they wanted us to do a small interior designing job for them, and entering the gates, I was awed by the decorative fittings of the theatre and other extravagan features that the owners had decorated the theatre with, including the magnificent marble. I turned to my dad and whispered, "Dad, look at the beautiful marble they've used!" My dad looked at me and smiled, "That's not real marble! That's imitation marble! Real marble has faults which run through it!" I nodded as I understood what he was trying to tell me; that those so-called

Letters to the Editor

Need for societal dialogues

Editor, The march to uncertain times will begin with scenes on May 12, 2023 when the VPP will in all probability throw life into yet another spin of uncertainty. It could end up with a law and order problem but let's hope not as life has been normal in spite of electricity and water problems pushing us to adapt to the lack of essentials in our day to day existence. As mentioned in the newspapers, the VPP says it will not be responsible for the presence of a large crowd. The question is, who will be responsible then should things veer out of control? I quote from a meeting with a learned man, "In the present situation if one decides attention and reaction from the Government all that is to be done is to create a law and order problem." We get back to the same nature of putting the entire wheels of the economy on a grinding halt. Everyone gets affected and children are among the

worst victims whose traumatic experience stays on for years while also losing out on their crucial formative and growth periods. Daily wage earners will yet again have to beg, borrow and steal to see through the day and the list can be endless. We should ask ourselves a question. Have we not gone through years and years of agritations by the same political leaders? Yet it is not surprising that we are at the bottom of the list in all achievement parameters? All these can be avoided if we can only sit down and discuss the contentious roster and quota issue instead of marching to the Secretdat of Ministry to submit a letter to the Government. This is too high a price to pay for the valuable years of our lives. Some evolved and mature thinking NGO's have publicly stated that the roster issue should be handled with kid gloves and this is much appreciated. Will a neutral, frank debate in a non-threatening space be tolerated if there is one? Can we step on this tent before we act on the 12th of May?

Yours etc., Pynkhabowr Chhyme, Via email

'The Kerala Story' - a wake-up call or propaganda?

Editor, What if your daughter is radicalized and wants to leave your home? What if your sisters are brainwashed to change their religion and marry the fighters of ISIS, one of the dreaded extremist groups? As loving parents, you will then certainly rant at those who all have tried to suppress the ugly realities, calling them mere propaganda. A noted writer and Archbishop of Kerala, Dr. Mar Joseph Pamplany, in his book 'The Kerala Story', has argued that 'love jihad' doesn't exist in Kerala or anywhere else. "Such people, be they politicians or those from social and cultural spaces or media, may have their own vested interests. But one thing is clear: we are losing our young women. It is not just about love marriages. It's a war strategy to destroy their lives." Should this lament by the concerned bishop be doubted? Is the anxiety

and anguish of countless parents whose daughters are in the clutches of the wrong hands less important than the hypothetical approval of a certain section of people who try to dismiss the incidents of increasing indoctrination by certain people employed by certain terror organizations? Even Prakash Karat, the general secretary of the CPM, had expressed similar apprehensions, particularly concerning HF activities in relation to the danger posed by some militant organizations since the former was actively supporting the extremist forces outside the country.

Against the backdrop of an impending dangerous situation for so many years, some bold people have come forward to raise their voices against the ordeal faced by gullible young girls. The Kerala Story is one of those efforts. In 2022, the United Nations also sounded the alarm by declaring that Kerala is fast becoming a hotbed of ISIS recruitments. The world's leading newspapers, such as The Guardian, Washington Post, New York Times, Herald Sun, and The Telegraph, regularly published heart-wrenching

accounts of women who experienced the brutality of certain extremist groups. There are many documented cases on this made by countless people. A popular scholar from Portsmouth, UK - Khalid Umar, writes - "Talk about terrorism, ISIS and forced conversions. Muslims dry up their throats ranting this is not true Islam." Make movies like THE KASHMIR FILES, THE KERALA STORY, the same Muslims cry hoarse. This is Islamophobia!! Do we hear it? They are confirming what is true. Find me another cult that tries so foolishly to confuse the kafirs. In the modern world, no other religion is so heavy on humanism, tolerance and respect for women. A concerned mother from Kochi says: "The Kerala Story has helped awaken the masses about the tragic reality of love jihad. How the unsuspecting girls are brainwashed by certain people and get married to terrorists as sex slaves. Please spare a thought for the victims."

In view of the impending danger, the CPM's top leader, also the former Chief Minister of Kerala - V. S. Achuthanandan, also said

long back in 2010 in an interview that some people with certain mindsets are luring their youngsters to marry Hindu or Christian girls to increase their population. This will pose a serious threat to the nation and its democratic setup.

Well, I am not here to give a 5-star rating to this film - The Kerala Story. But what I feel is that no people, no organizations, no religions should hold humanity for ransom. No one should encourage brutality and bloodshed in the name of religion. Also, do not trust those forces who try to brush aside the bloody acts of terror under the carpet. As responsible citizens, we should raise our voices for "humanity" but nothing like the Manipur Compassion, love for "all" and tolerance are the only pathways to divinity.

Yours etc., Satil Gwalior, International Human Rights Commission, Shillong

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"Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing so gentle as real strength." - Saint Francis de Sales

The Shillong Times

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Unplanned Smart City

SHILLONG is supposed to be a smart city but the smart infrastructure is woefully missing. One of the first things visible in a planned city are recreation spaces. In Shillong the only recreation space for children is Lady Hydari Park.

Lady Hydari Park and Wards Lake are both legacies of the British. We may disagree with the British on many counts but in terms of foresight and imagination they are a class apart.

Come to the New Shillong Township. That place too does not seem to have been planned to include a children's park. It is already being heavily constructed although there is still some space along the area where the Shillong International Centre for the Performing Arts and Culture (SICPAC) is located.

Letters to the Editor

Garos solidarity triumphs

It was good to see that Dominic Sangma's name has finally been included in the list of two filmmakers to be visiting Cannes shortly. The Government was bound to cave in to the demands from the Garo community which questioned why Dominic Sangma's name was not included in the recommendation.

This is an example of what group solidarity can do for a good cause. Unfortunately our Khasi brothers and sisters are too divided and obsessed with the Roster system to even stand up for

Public opinion in the Khasi Hills, or to be more precise in Shillong, seems to strictly forbid us from referring to the numerous hardships we are coping with. Instead, we take them in our stride, even though the hardships we face actually have simple solutions.

We all ought to have become aware of this of our own accord. Roads cannot take priority over water or forests just because we permit ourselves to be flattered by a nonsensical assurance that we have found a solution to the traffic jams.

with each other in offering solutions, where we can, so that our moral, cultural and historical responsibility is fulfilled. Yet even as we suggest solutions to the problems we face, we must confess and be humble enough to accept at all times, that our solution is not the only way out of the problem at hand because in doing so we might actually be bringing upon the people an even greater danger.

Indeed, everyone, especially the Shillong based writers and thinkers, who command and attract attention in the things they write and comment on and who

other issues

"STEMS" - A good initiative

Traffic jam has become one of the major problems in the city. Since most of the people have to deal with it on a daily basis it negatively affects work, education and the personal lives of people. During school hours, we experience a slow pace of traffic especially in and around Lalitankhrah - Dhanketti road, where students attending school or college get late.

Kudos to the Government of Meghalaya for incorporating STEMS (Sustainable Transport and Efficient Mobility System) programme to run 30 school mini buses in order to reduce the congestion in Shillong city. This will not only decongest the traffic but will also help in reducing various forms of pollution which would disturb the surroundings.

Roads Cannot Take Priority over Water

By Gregory F Shullai

In solution must not be something that will create a more serious problem in its aftermath. And this is what we have dismissed with a shrug of our shoulders anything that called for the destruction of forests, but of late we have seen the affections and the foibles which a drunken spirit may be responsible for, as in the case of the road along the stretch in Upper Shillong where the tree cover has been depleted.

"We all ought to have become aware of this of our own accord. Roads cannot take priority over water or forests just because we permit ourselves to be flattered by a nonsensical assurance that we have found a solution to the traffic jams."

to which we now ascribe the water source to lakhs of residents, but even our planners are so manifestly devoid of an understanding that they can suggest a solution with such a earnest vehemence of honesty without hesitating the least to do a problem this plan would bring, then we have no option but to oppose them.

When will we have uninterrupted power supply?

This load shedding has been going on in our state for quite a number of years now and we consumers are fed up of this disruption. This time the things for load shedding are so haphazard that we are not in a position to schedule our work hours. We would like to know from the Power Department the exact status of the MEPCL so that we can be prepared to cope with the power cuts which actually interfere with our well-being. Load shedding is not a recent phenomenon. We have been experiencing it for many years. But we are kept in the dark about the real reasons for the power cuts.

When will we have uninterrupted power supply? This load shedding has been going on in our state for quite a number of years now and we consumers are fed up of this disruption. This time the things for load

from the very start. That they are acting like modern day Philistines is surprising to one and all of the affected localities. The intention of Government to ease traffic congestion in Shillong town by destroying our forest cover and our water sources, must be prevented at all costs because if we don't all we would have succeeded bringing about the end of Shillong itself.

Are there any other consequences that come along with the development of the urban mind over the tribal one? Yes, there are and that was very clearly stated during the pre-election period when candidates were required to declare their assets and to which the Income Tax officials made a passing reference on the need to re-examine the exemption of wealthy tribals from Income Tax.

replace the completely impracticable ones from the moment the load shedding is lifted but whatever it is we want an assurance that come 2024 there will be no more load shedding.

Why the inconsistent load-shedding?

Earlier the load-shedding at night was scheduled from 12 AM to 5 AM. But now for the last few days we fail to understand as to why the MEPDCL has resorted to rescheduling the timing i.e. load shedding from 12 AM to 2 AM and 4 AM to 6 AM. Why is power restored from 2 AM to 4 AM. These are odd hours when people are not likely to be awake. I request the MEPDCL to stick to the old timing of load shedding from 12 AM to 5 AM. Restoring power between 2 AM and 4 AM is unnecessary.

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A case for no roster

By CF Lyngdoh

Fifty one years ago the leaders of the Hill State Movement, Captain William Sangma, Mr. B.B. Lyngdoh, Mr. Kistobin Rymbai, Mr. G.G. Swell, Mrs. Miriam D. Shira and a host of other leaders from Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills with an astute foresight for the two hill areas, finally heaved a sigh of relief when their dream for a separate Hill State finally saw the light of day when the Hill State was inaugurated on 21st January, 1972 with a poetic name 'Meghalaya' - 'the land of clouds' which it is actually so.

There are two main tribes - the Khasi Jaintia and the Garos who will work together and if they can cooperate in the interests of the well-being of the new state and their people. Thank God, things went smoothly and very well for the people of Meghalaya.

the government and in educational institutions so also the Garo Tribe is entitled to 40% reservation, in appointment to posts advertised by the State Government.

the other hand by observing the formula 40:40, the KJ tribe would get only 40% posts (against 47% actually) and the Garo group would get 40% posts (against 33% actually). By simply adhering to the Reservation Policy, the Garo Tribe gains an extra 7% posts advantage while the Khasi - Jaintia Tribe loses 7% posts for every 100 posts appointed by the government. With all this extra advantage enjoyed by the Garo Tribe to the disadvantage of the KJ Tribe, the latter has the loss ungrudgingly in the last 50 years. Is it not a fair or justifiable to make the Roster System an important issue to demand for restoration of vacancies which could not be filled up in the past for nobody's fault? It is hoped that good sense will prevail among the two tribes not to insist on roster system nor vice versa for the Restoration Policy envisaged by the founding fathers for the general state of Meghalaya and the wellbeing of

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Khasi - Jaintia Tribe (KJ, in short) works out to about 14,00,000 (14 lacs). This is based on the records of the KJ Presbyterian Synods, the Ri Bhoi Synod the All Saints Church the Catholic Church, the Church of God, the Niam Khasi, Niam Tre and the Unitarian Church without taking the record from the smaller Christian denominations. The population of the Garo Tribe can be reasonably put at 10,00,000 (10 lacs). The population of the non-tribals is estimated to be 363,347 in KJ Hills and 103,542 in Garo Hills, i.e. a total of 466,889 excluding the floating population. Overall, a rough estimation of the population structure is as follows:

Table with 2 columns: Number and Percentage (out of 2 decimal places). Rows include KJ Tribe (14,00,000, 47.19%), Garo Tribe (10,00,000, 33.70%), Non Tribal &amp; (5,66,889, 19.11%), and Total (29,66,889, 100.00%).

Rest of the population is 19.11% on percentage basis

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The population of the all the citizens of the State

"No design, no matter how common or seemingly insignificant, is without its adamant critics as well as its ardent admirers."

— Henry Petrosk

The Shillong Times

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Powers of states

A Supreme Court order delivered by a Constitution Bench vis-a-vis powers of the Centre and state governments on Thursday deserves special attention. The order comes after years of arguments followed by a judgment that got referred to a three-member Constitution Bench for the final order, in relation to powers of the Delhi Government. The bench has held that the National Capital Territory of Delhi or its government can exercise "legislative and executive powers" to administer the state in all matters excluding law and order (police) and land. In specific terms it made clear that the Lieutenant Governor shall be bound by the decisions of the Delhi government and the officers of the civil services have to be under the administrative control of the Delhi government. The bench rightly noted, "If the civil service officers feel they are insulated from the control of the (Delhi) government, it will dilute accountability and affect governance..."

It's common knowledge that the AAP government of Arvind Kejriwal has been an eyesore to the BJP-led central government. Several attempts by the central authority to disrupt the Delhi government have been thwarted by Kejriwal by sheer dint of his determination and the unity of the AAP top brass against many temptations. Scruples have often been thrown to the winds by those at the Centre to make the going tough for the AAP and its government in the national capital. One tactic employed by the Modi dispensation was to use the Lt Governor and the civil service officers to browbeat and derail governance by taking advantage of the special provisions relating to Delhi, a 'state' that has less powers compared to other states. The apex court corrected a previous observation by a judge that civil services were totally outside the purview of the Delhi government.

The federal system the nation has adopted for smooth running of governments accords due importance to both the Centre and the States. While it is natural that states keep seeking more freedom for governance, it is also important that the Centre remains strong. Without the Centre, there cannot be states; and vice-versa. Yet, perceptions are that the Modi government is stretching its limits and suffocating state governments in some respects. Such was the scene during the period of Indira Gandhi as well. There are parallels between the governance styles of Indira Gandhi and Narendra Modi. Both appeared to be authoritarian by their very nature. Yet, there can be no circus without a ring.

Letters to the Editor

Citizens must voice out their concerns

Editor, People have told me that it's pointless expressing one's response to The Shillong Times news and articles... 'Who hears your voice?' is the oft repeated refrain. Government is never moved by the plight of the people! Nevertheless, the article, Roads Cannot Take Priority over Water, by Gregory F Shullat, (ST May 11, 2023) has prompted me to respond! It is because he exercised his duty of care to highlight an issue of the water priority, I reciprocate my duty too through this letter.

It was compelling to see a photo of AL Hlick inaugurating the newly installed water taps contributed by the Rotary Club at Nong-mensong, on page 4 of the same day. And I chuckled at AL Hlick's frank address, 'Rotary Club is an organisation which reaches out where even the government fails to reach.' How very true!

Now, if we the people (including NGOs) don't raise our voices and voice with each other in offering solutions, the agonising suffering by the voiceless people in this crisis will persist. The crisis is acute and alarming in many localities, but because water tankers are readily available, our frustrations

is on these hills that the British came, conquered and settled in the early 1800s, to escape the heat and humidity of the plains. It had been the capital of the erstwhile Assam province till it was shifted to Shillong in 1861. It's the place where the first church and first Khasi was baptised by the Missionary from Wales, Rev. Thomas Jones, who is subsequently called "Father of the Khasi alphabet." Rev. Thomas Jones not only pioneered the change in education, religion but also the economic, social, political and modern outlook of the Khasis who until the advent of the missionaries were simple tribals, backward and almost primitive people with their animistic beliefs.

With the passage of time and the fall of the once mighty British empire in 1947, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills with their many local chiefs, had voted to merge with India and not with East Pakistan. When the partition of India and East Pakistan now called Bangladesh, trade that once flourished between the hills and plains stopped abruptly.

Sohra: Yesterday, today and tomorrow. Editor, "Cherrapunjee" is a name given by the British but "Sohra" in local dialect, is the place where the highest rainfall in the world is recorded, till its record is broken by nearby Mawsynram. It lies in the southern part of Meghalaya, where the plains of Bangladesh can be clearly seen from its rolling hills;

Conflict Management: An Important Soft Skill

By Patricia Mukhim

We live in a disparate region - a cauldron that tends to blow up on our faces every now and again. The reason is because we are different ethnicities that have failed to address the tribal divide to analyse and resolve the socio-economic challenges we face and to try and resolve these. On the contrary, the tendency is to paint the other tribe as the 'enemy' and lash out at their community. One can also understand that there are long-standing unresolved issues that have simmered and then come to the boil thereby causing a lot of pain, ill-will, loss of lives and property, such as happened in Manipur today.

There are inherent inequities in Manipur that continues to haunt. After this annexation by the British post the Anglo-Manipur war of 1891, Manipur became a part of British India. The British ruled Manipur through an administrative system called the "Native Rule" where puppet kings with limited powers were put on the throne and the administration was run indirectly by the British. Manipur is well known for uprisings against the British. The Kuki Rebellion of 1917-1919, the Zeliangrong Naga uprising 1930-32 and the anti-British women's movement the Nupulan (1930-40) were all uprisings against the British. In 1907 the British decided to hand over charge of the state to Raja Churaohing by constituting a Darbar headed by the Raja as President, called the Manipur State Darbar formed under the Rules for the General Administration of the State (RGAS).

The British knew for their chieftany separated the administration of the hills occupied by the Naga, Kuki and other tribes from the valley. The hills were under the charge of the Vice President of the Manipur State Darbar, a British officer with the scope for the Raja to interfere in the administration. The British argued that the hill tribes were very different from the valley based Meiteis and had very different customs, languages and ethnicities. It was this that sowed the seeds for the present division between the 'people of the hills and the valley' (Source: Understanding Conflict in Manipur, A Socio-Historical Perspective by Yvonna Khangchangi).

At the time of India's independence, there were 65 princely states in India of which Manipur was one. In September 1949 Maharaja Indrprabha Singh signed the Instrument of Accession to India. Manipur became a Union Territory in 1962

and a full-fledged state in 1972. However, the seeds of inherent distrust sowed by the British and the largely monogenic ethnicities - the Kuki-Zo-Pate, Naga, Meitei ensured that they could never learn to live together in harmony. The situation is made worse by the fact that about 67% of the population live in 10% of the geographical area of Manipur while with Burma and its neighbour which constitute 90% of the total land mass of Manipur.

The Nagas and Meiteis feel that the Kukis are not settlers from the Chin hills of Burma which is a fact that having lived in those hills for the early 18th century they can hardly be considered migrants and certainly not 'illegal migrants' as being made out to be. It is true that after Myanmar repressed into military rule a good number of Kuki-Chin people from Myanmar have taken up residence in the hill areas. What makes things convoluted here is that India has no national law on religion. The 1951 Refugee Convention. This leaves a staggering 250,000 recognized refugees in a legally grey area. India primarily needs a Refugee Policy.

While people of the same ethnic and kinship ties from Myanmar arrived in small numbers both in Manipur and Mizoram there is no definite plan about their return. Their absorption into the two states would pose a problem of resources which are already scarce. India's North Eastern states were not created on the basis of their economic viability. They were all created out of political exigencies. Hence unregulated population growth is problematic. However, there are ways of resolving these issues. Mizoram seems to be more transparent in handling the Myanmar refugees. Manipur does not seem to have a handle on this.

It is also problematic is the reluctance by the Manipur government to devolve power to the Hill Areas Councils (HAC) and give them full powers to govern their hill areas. There have been governance autonomy. From the very beginning the Government of Manipur has been playing fast and loose by not empowering the tribal councils and allowing them to plan out their development framework. Here the role of the Hill Areas Councils (HAC) was also questioned. For 21 years the hills had boycotted the elections to the governing bodies. This should have been a

critical election agenda but it did not become a point of convergence for the hill tribes. Is this because the Naga, Kuki and other tribal MLAs cannot sit together in the House and the largely monogenic ethnicities will challenge the Government in Imphal?

The recent intrusion of the Manipur Government into the forest lands of the Kuki tribes in a bid to turn them to reserved forests and wild life sanctuaries is also a sore point since the tribes believe they own the hills and forests. The Manipur Government also evicted the villagers of K Songuing village during the creation of newly created villages much after the Indian Forest Act, of 1927 and its subsequent amendments.

There are also allegations that Chief Minister N Biren Singh wants to expand the area under marijuana cultivation with the intention of legalising it for medicinal and industrial use and to reduce unemployment in the poppy cultivation. In fact, the area under poppy cultivation in the hills has come down from 6742 acres in 2021 to 1118 acres in 2022. That the drug lords of Manipur irrespective of ethnicities would be unhappy with this, goes without saying.

The hill tribes of Manipur have had an ongoing grudge against what they call the state under various guises. It invests the large part of its resources in the valley while the hills are left in the lurch with very little infrastructure and not even good roads. All major institutions of learning are based in Imphal. This governance deficit is sure to create animosity and a sense of deep frustration. Why do we wonder then when violence becomes the strategy of choice? Who do the tribals feel they are disaffected to? Who listens to them? Where are the conflict management platforms where they can at least voice their grievances and let out steam?

It is in this context that schools, colleges and universities need to train their young ones to channelise their anger and frustration in a manner that they are able to get their grievances addressed without bloodshed, violence, killing and arson. It's a high price to pay for the sole reason that the state has failed to create institutions of conflict management. Should we not work at this objective collectively instead of raising and sniping at each other? We are after all humans of the same origin; our allegiance to our ethnicities only serves our ego. Its time we learn to have cross-community conversations. It's the only way to a more livable future.

and also giving jobs to local communities. Sohra is a town in the hills, removed unique brand of cool weather, meandering rivers, green hills, cascading waterfalls, forest trails and the Great outdoors. The local people, etc offers both national and international tourists a place to enjoy and remember.

The Government had encouraged the local populace to invest in homestays, resorts, eateries to tap into the flow and the basic need of both national and international tourists. But the Government needs to do more by attracting private or public investment in the industry, and by additional push in basic infrastructure like roads, water, electricity, security etc, so that footfalls of both national, international and high end tourists is not hampered. The rise in footfalls will bring more crucial revenue for the local populace. Moreover, they provide permanent jobs to local people with safe, secure and stable earnings.

Agriculture, horticulture, food processing unit, health and wellness centre, centre of education etc, or other avenues that are relevant to the weather of Sohra and its location or are aligned to the sustainable development goals of the government or the local communities should be urgently pushed by the government to boost the

socio-economic upliftment and productivity of the local communities. The Government, NGO's, community leaders should urgently address the problem of unemployment, by pushing as had been done in the 60's, but now reversed, from non-sustainable development activity to more environment friendly and sustainable activity.

The local population has enough trained manpower, skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled workforce ready to be absorbed in any sustainable activities initiated by the above mentioned project. But the only crucial and critical point is to make sure these private, public entities coming to invest should not infringe and trample on the rights of all workforce, by exploiting or discriminating them on the basis of their race or otherwise, so that their safety, security and stabilised earning capacity is not compromised. This is how will ease the frustration of many jobless, unemployed youth making them positive contributors to the society, economy and the nation as a whole.

Yours etc., Pynkhem Lyngdoh Mawksiyim, Sohra

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

Pakistan's Story An analytical perspective

By Dr. D. K. Giri

The dramatic arrest of 70-year-old Imran Khan, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan has plunged the hapless country into a civil war. Imran Khan was by far the most popular cricketer and leader on many counts, his marriage to Jemima Khan, the daughter of media tycoon James Goldsmith, and his own aristocratic background. However, the arrest was on the cards as is typical of Pakistan politics of revenge. When the friends or allies fall out, like the English playwright William Congreve (1670-1729) put it, "Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, nor hell a fury like women scorned."

One is referring to love lost between Imran Khan and the Army which propelled him to the position of the Prime Minister in the first place. It has not been clearly revealed why they fell out. The jury is still out on it. May be, Imran Khan was overshadowing General Qamar Javed Bhutto in international fora, or the Americans found Khan too hot to handle, as Imran himself alluded. Be that as it may, for the first time in Pakistan politics, the civilians and the Army are at daggers drawn, civilians arming the military houses

more precise, the Army has remote controlled the civil administration. Since 1947, when Pakistan was created, the Army has directly taken over twice by staging coups. Worse than that, having taken over, it has physically eliminated the political rivals or made them flee the country. Army officials have minted money through foreign exchange mainly from the US promising support to fight the Mujahideens and then the Taliban. On the contrary, the Army has used that money to sponsor terrorism in India. It double crossed even USA by sheltering Osama Bin Laden in their army barracks. Thanks to American intelligence agency, it took them ages to find out Pakistan's duplicity. Only Donald Trump spoke candidly that Islamabad was bad housing for the US leadership.

The third pillar is Kashmir. Here again, Pakistan is caught in a perennial bind. All their national and international policies are driven by their obsession with Kashmir. The division of Kashmir is a historical fact which must be accepted. If it was not in Pakistan politics, by Parul Nohra, even the PoK should have been with India. Be that as it may for

"Imran Khan was charged with series of corruption, including laundering money... to Al Qaeda through his third wife. Arrest warrants were issued. Khan was evading. Finally he was picked up from the court premises in Islamabad. Along with him his key supporters have been picked up."

and establishment. One is absolutely unsure where will this lead to.

Before analysing the Pakistan politics, the structural anomalies, let us have a brief look at the run up to the arrest. Imran Khan was charged with series of corruption, including laundering money to Al Qaeda through his third wife. Arrest warrants were issued. Khan was evading. Finally he was picked up from the court premises in Islamabad. Along with him his key supporters have been picked up. The 3-member ruling coalition seems to be elated with the development as in the event of Imran Khan being disqualified for life, his prospect of coming back to power is nil, whereas they should support Khan in his battle against the all-powerful anti-democratic military, and thus bankrupts". The Government's policies which are derailing the country and have brought it to such an impasse.

Pakistan politics stands on three legs. It is why it remains ever unstable. These are Islam (religion), the Army, and Kashmir. These three determinants of both domestic and foreign policy have proved directly detrimental to Pakistan's economic growth and democratic development. Let us take the first pillar, religion. The basis of creation of Pakistan by separating from India was the religion. It was a wrong promise. It was and is a multicultural country with variations within each tribe language, religion, caste, ethnicity, and so on. What one means is, if Pakistan were an Islamic state, why did East Pakistan (Bangladesh) break away from it? It did because, although they were Muslims they were like Bengalis in their language, food and clothing, etc. Further, the cultural division between the various groups like Punjabis, Sindhis, Baluch, Pakhtoons are not yet resolved and are under constant threat of break up.

The second leg is the Army. Pakistan is called a hybrid democracy. That is power alters between the Army and the civilian administration. In fact, to be

now as no one can predict the future. But the most point is Pakistan continuing to claim Kashmir as it is a Muslim majority state is ludicrous. If that is the logic, why could they not hold on to East Pakistan (now called Muslim region)? The division of India in 1947 had certain protocols and formulae. Kashmir decided to accede to India, and that is it. Pakistan's Kashmir obsession is ruining its politics and economy. Islamabad was using the US support to engineer terrorist violence in India and now it has, through a satellite state of China. Many observers have pointed out that embracing China is like a bear hug. Countries tapping China's so called surplus money as once Nepalese Ambassador to India hinted "it inviting oneself into a debt trap and then bankrupts".

Finally, Pakistani democracy is flimsy. It has to be made mass based. Then all Pakistani stakeholders - political, business, civil society, professionals, should have a nation-wide debate including a referendum on their top political priorities, if necessary, with international supervision. New Delhi could give a hand in helping Pakistan stabilize, with only one precondition that Pakistani Army should stop terrorism in India. Dis-membrement of any country is in nobody's interest beside humanitarian risks. Pakistan should not reach the brink. The grin must be arrested.

The Indian tradition of good neighbourliness New Delhi should open a back-channel diplomatic intervention. Both countries should forget that anti-India or anti-Pakistan rhetoric gives them political dividends. That is political brinkmanship. What we require in current troubled times across the world is statesmanship...D.K.G. (The writer is Secretary General, Asa For Democratic Socialism)

"For success, attitude is equally as important as ability."

— Walter Scott

The Shillong Times

SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MAY 13, 2023

Power Cut Trauma

IT would be a travesty to lay the blame for the 10-12 hour power cuts that Meghalaya is going through and which is disrupting lives and livelihoods on the present government. But perhaps one reason why people voted for the NPP-led Government in 2018 was that it would bring a major overhaul in all sectors, especially one that was debilitated by gross mismanagement over many years. It is an open secret that the industrial sector in Meghalaya has been given too much indulgence and they have been drawing huge amounts of power but not paying their dues on time. The trouble is that neither governments past or present have ever been transparent. Each government has been trying to hide the cumulative losses of the MeECL and have tried and are still trying to bail it out with central funds and loans. There has been no trimming down of the loss-making verticals which is transmission and distribution.

All those companies that have bid for hydel power projects during the Congress-led MUA Government have come a cropper. Not one of them has ever started their projects except for the Ganol Project which, although inaugurated, has not produced a single watt of power till date. The public needs to know the status of the Ganol project and even the existing hydel projects. How much is Meghalaya currently generating and what is the quantum of power that the state is buying from the national grid and at what cost? How much of Meghalaya's own power generation capacity is being eroded due to depreciated machinery that can no longer be repaired? All these should be put up on the public domain since it is public money that is being consistently pumped into what is a losing concern. All other states of the North East have got out of the load shedding syndrome including Manipur which once was notorious for it. Meghalaya's power sector which was run very ably in the 1990's until the later period of that decade suddenly went downhill. The sheer scale of mismanagement is unprecedented and has brought the state to where it is today.

There have been suggestions from various quarters that Meghalaya should now think of investing in thermal power plants since it has captive coal mines which will last for several decades. When the whole world is thinking of going slow on the use of fossil fuels can Meghalaya do differently? What would be the investment for clean energy generation for thermal power? All these have to be kept in mind, apart from the environmental degradation that will follow the coal extraction and processing.

Letters to the Editor

Time to put a halt to hydel projects

Editor,

With reference to the news article "Optimisations in EPII for stage-1 of hydel project" (ST May 9, 2023), is another hydel project really feasible, in light of the worsening power crisis in the state, that is at the mercy of rainfall?

Perhaps it is time to put a halt to hydel projects in the state. What will be the climate condition in the years and decades to come? Will the money spent on hydel projects be worth it, if we have power shortages during the dry season, which may worsen in the years and decades to come?

The good news is that the Centre has given a nod to four miners, and scientific mining will begin soon in Meghalaya. It is high time we opt for Thermal Plants, which will generate power and revenue all year round. A Thermal Plant project will not be at the mercy of the climate conditions, and so power output and revenue projections will be more or less accurate, even for years or decades.

to fuel such a plan, if we can only get rid of the negative attitude towards fossil fuel plants.

Yours etc., Koidor J. Bhab, Shillong

Water versus Roads

Editor,

I wish to endorse Gregory F. Shilla's recent article "Roads Cannot Take Priority over Water" (ST May 11th 2023) wherein he had succinctly given a clear picture of the importance of providing clean water to the residents of Shillong. Yes, no doubt Shillong is now plagued with many a problem and one of them being the massive traffic jams on its roads. A solution to the traffic jams is definitely required but this cannot override the importance of providing water to the residents. In order to ease the traffic jams, we hear of plans to create roads through the forests lying on the northern slopes of Lam Shilling from where many springs supply clean water to many localities including some areas under the Shillong Municipal Board. Construction of these roads will definitely cause the destruction of a pristine forest and its springs which will then cause havoc in the above mentioned residential

areas when the water supply stops as it is bound to happen when massive road building is undertaken.

The 'Double Engine' Sarkar Under Scanner in Karnataka

By Rajdeep Sardesai

"Double engine sarkar" is a term that has steadily crept into the political discourse in the last eight years ever since Narendra Modi became prime minister. The 'double engine' rhetoric is part of the BJP's armoury in every state election, designed to convince the voter that only when the same party rules in the state and Centre will the benefits of development reach the people. It also mirrors the prime minister's larger than life persona where Mr Modi remains the BJP's poll trump card in every election from municipal to national. But here is the intriguing question being posed in the headbanging Karnataka: can the prime minister's undoubted popularity overcome the anti-incumbency being faced by a relatively weak BJP government in Bengaluru?

So far the 'double engine' concept has not met with mixed success. In Himachal Pradesh just six months ago, the BJP government was unable to win re-election despite the prime minister's appeal made with typical political bombast that a vote for the lotus 'will come directly to Mr Modi's account as a blessing'. By contrast, in Gujarat where elections were held at around the same time as Himachal, the 'double engine' strategy was a resounding success. The BJP's Gujarat chief minister, Bhupendra Patel is a relative non-entity, a first time MLA who was suddenly pitchedforked into the top job a year before the elections. Even in the BJP's publicity material, he was barely visible. And yet, the BJP scored an historic record-breaking win in Gujarat on the back of the Modi factor. Gujarat is, of course, sui generis: it is the prime minister's home state but also a BJP dominant party state where the party has been in power for more than 25 years.

Where does Karnataka then fit into this 'double engine' sarkar with a base of his own, especially amongst the influential Lingayat community. The attempt to push him into a semi-retirement 'margdarshak mandal' didn't quite work, and the party has been belatedly forced to accommodate him as a star campaigner. A tacit acceptance of his stature as the BJP's tallest Karnataka face by some distance.

Moreover, while the BJP grapples with a leadership deficit at the state level, the Congress in Karnataka is uniquely blessed with a plethora of well entrenched local leaders. The resourceful DK Shivashankar and the crowd pulled Siddaramiah may not see eye to eye but are paradoxically the Congress's Karnataka 'double engine', two leaders with the political nous and grassroots connect that the BJP can't quite match in Karnataka. Siddaramiah fits in particular enjoys

huge goodwill for his pro-poor welfare programmes as chief minister in interior villages, it isn't unusual to hear voters cutting across Karnataka's traditional caste fault-lines express a desire for Siddaramiah as chief minister and Modi as prime minister.

Which explains why the BJP has been forced to turn to Prime Minister Modi's now familiar campaign blitzkrieg as their last throw of the dice. BJP President, JP Nadha has even gone so far as to suggest that 'the people of Karnataka should vote for the BJP if they wish to continue to enjoy the blessings of Mr Modi'. The BJP President might have got carried away with the Modi 'bhakti' opponents see the remark as a threat of preferential treatment - but it reveals just why the 'double engine' concept is fraught with danger, politically and constitutionally, in a vast and diverse federal polity like India.

The constitution is designed to protect a federal compact by ensuring that the Centre responds to states in a non-discriminatory manner. In Indira Gandhi's era, that promise was betrayed by a dominating Centre that routinely misused Article 356 to dismiss opposition state governments. In the Modi era, 'co-operative federalism' is again in danger: several opposition ruled states fear that the Centre is partisan and vindictive in approach with the chief engine driver missing central agencies to settle scores or else deny funds to the states.

Politically, this is reviving regional sentiment in states with a history of cultural distinctiveness - we saw it in Bengal when the prime minister's 'Dido Didi' campaign jibe allowed Mamta Banerjee to successfully unveil a sense of wounded Bengali sub-nationalism. In Karnataka, the BJP's political managers beyond just this election, Karnataka, after all, was seen as the BJP's gateway to the south as part of the party's attempted geographical expansion. But if the perception grows that the 'double engine' model is actually a remote controlled Delhi-centric governance system, it is bound to erode the boldness of southern state governments and leaders to prey on regional anxieties. The Modi personality cult which is at the heart of the 'double engine' outreach is, in that sense, a double edged sword. While it gives the BJP a distinct edge in a presidential style 'election' election, it also exposes the limitations of a political model which is almost obses-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramiah and other leaders.

Round The States

By Insaf

Centre must change attitude

It's high time New Delhi sees the writing on the wall and mends its ways. The Supreme Court has in recent terms asked the Centre to learn a lesson or two in governance. Dealing with petitions on the constitutionality of decisions taken in Maharashtra and Delhi, the apex court has cautioned on the Governor and the Union Government's functioning respectively. In the national capital, the AAP had a major victory. A five member constitution bench in a unanimous verdict put the lid on an 8-year running battle. Chief Minister Kejriwal has had with Union Home Ministry and its appointed LGs, ruling the Delhi government has legislative and executive powers over services except for public order, police and land. The Ministry's notification asserting its control over services, was thus nullified, as the court noted the NCT administration is unlike other UTs and has been 'accorded a sui generis (unique) status by the Constitution; an elected government needs to have control over bureaucrats, failing which the principle of collective responsibility will be adversely affected'. Plus, it's in spirit of cooperative federalism that the Centre must exercise its powers within boundaries created and can't subsume NCTD in unit of the Union merely because it's not a 'State'.

An upset AAP reacted: 'Delhi wins' order is a 'high slap' on mission to topple State governments across the country and sends a stern message that Delhi government officers are meant to serve its people through elected government and not unelected usurpers parachuted by Centre to stall governance, namely LGs. 'Hopefully it shall no longer have to cry foul that IAS or Joint Cadre services, were not carrying out its orders. It can quote the court: 'civil servants are accountable to ministers and they, in turn, are accountable to Parliament or State legislatures'. Division of administrative powers between Union and Delhi government 'must be respectful'; LG is bound by aid and advice of Council of Ministers. 'The purpose of giving powers to a constitutionally recognised and democratically elected government would be diluted'.

Delhi ministers viz legislative matters of city government; administration with regard to LG powers can't be understood as 'entire administration of Delhi, otherwise, the purpose of giving powers to a constitutionally recognised and democratically elected government would be diluted'.

Delhi ministers viz legislative matters of city government; administration with regard to LG powers can't be understood as 'entire administration of Delhi, otherwise, the purpose of giving powers to a constitutionally recognised and democratically elected government would be diluted'. Having got a breather, AAP government has got cracking. Hours after the Thursday verdict, it removed Secretary, Services Dept. Res assured this is just the beginning.

Rap on Maha Governor. Likewise, dealing with a number of petitions viz Maharashtra's political crisis leading to fall of Thackeray-led NDA government, the Supreme Court noted 'Governor of a State is not empowered to enter the political arena and play a role in inter-party or intra-party disputes, or the director exercised by then Governor Keshari asking then Chief Minister Uddhav to face a floor test was 'not in accordance with law'. This, as the Governor had 'no objective material' on which he could doubt the incumbent's confidence. The Constitution empowers elected representatives to act on behalf of people and, consequently, the Governor, despite his constitutional status is unelected, is vested with 'limited discretionary powers'. While

Thackeray says it's a moral victory, his decision to resign without a floor test is bound to haunt him. For the court held Governor's decision inviting Eknath Shinde to form a new government 'was justified since Thackeray had resigned without a trial of strength'. At the same time, the court has asked the Speaker to deal with the disqualification of 16 MLAs issues within a 'reasonable period'. Hope for Thackeray?

Karnataka D-day. The dice has been cast in Karnataka. With record 73.19% voter turnout, the countdown begins today - will this southern State keep its 38-year-old tradition of voting out the incumbent party, the BJP and give a boost to a beleaguered Congress. So far, neither are heading for a majority (113 seats of the 224 Assembly) and the State may be having a hung Assembly, as predicted by 7 of 10 exit polls. Plus, BJP's could be 'kingmaker' against the Congress. Leader already needs a majority with a gap of at least 30 seats given that BJP will polluce on the smaller number of seats over the Congress in other States. Though all eyes will be on the losers and winners, Congress' complaint to ECJ needs attention. It has accused Prime Minister Modi and other BJP leaders of 'brazen, deliberate and calculated violation' of the MCC and provisions of RPA, 195. On 9 May, Modi addressed the public via a video message, wherein he appealed to the voters after the 'silence period' (all campaign activities cease) since 6 p.m. on 8 May;

10 hours of power cut - Darkest Age of Meghalaya!

Yours etc., Namrata Chetri, Shillong-1

India's population explosion

India has surpassed China recently in terms of holding the world's largest population tag. Although it's a great honour for a serious pain. In other words, it's a signal for disasters waiting for us in the history of Meghalaya when we are over stretching our resources, struggling for space to survive, unemployment is killing us due to lack of economic opportunities for our next generation to establish themselves. We are unable to provide service at every front for such a huge, staggering population. No government in this planet is efficient enough to get it to such an expanding population yet life ostriches we are hiding our heads in the sand and thinking that this will pass over and tomorrow will be a great day. All our social economic problems as well as issues related remain unresolved. And our

failures in every facet of life is related to this uncontrolled and unmonitored growth of population decades after decades. No political party wants to make this an important issue as this is going to impact their vote bank.

Anyone talking about population control will be politically victimized. But our progress and development as well as protection of the environment is related to that. We do blame all existing central and/or state governments for that. But this is not just the problem of the government. It is our socio-cultural and attitudinal problem. No particular government can fix this problem. Our politicians and parliament members come from the same society that we all belong to. Hence, they will have the same weaknesses as we have. If we are too sensitive to control the population, and blame others for our negligence, inappropriate attitude and failures; then we have to face the consequences. No one can help us. Only we can help ourselves to change our attitudes.

Yours etc., Sakai Kumar Basu, Via email

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

## Walking through fog with author Anuja Chauhan



By Sukant Debnak

A permanent gray envelops everything around. Clouds, an arm's length away are doing somersaults on the mountains wearing thick greens. The light is tricky for a photo shoot, but author Anuja Chauhan is game -- like her writing, she believes in chance.

After all, every time she writes, it is an exercise to look through the fog. "There may be silhouettes and mist around when you start, but then it slowly melts and you walk with the faith that there is something out there... Also, my process changes with different books. The 'reasons' for writing may be different too -- sometimes a compelling theme, other times, a conflict," Chauhan tells *IANS* during the Sikkim Art and Literature Festival organised by the state government in collaboration with Teamwork Arts.

Currently doing final edits on her upcoming book centring around a murderer that takes place on Karva Chauth, the author makes it clear, it is not exactly a sequel to *Club You to Death* as reported widely. The only common character is detective ACP Bhavani Singh. The book is set in Bangalore.

Some of Anuja Chauhan's previous bestselling novels include *Those Pricey Thakur Girls*, *Bauz*, *The Zoya Factor* and *Battle for Bitara*.

In fact, *Those Pricey Thakur Girls* is now a web series (*Dil Bekaraar*) being streamed on Hotstar, and *Bauz* has been taken by Yashraj and it could be a web series.

The author, who started her writing career with advertising and continues to write for different genres stresses the same keeps her sharp. "I write a column for major magazine as well because it's a different medium and I have to read the newspapers for that. And I write books as well of course. Advertising also shows up. It is like multi-training in the gym, doing new stuff to keep surprising the body for best results."

Someone who detests labels -- like being called a Chick Lit writer, Chauhan says it is sad that everything is being labelled. "There are labels on behavior too, the kinds that never existed before. Why dumb down things by labelling them? Yes, it may work for publishers, but it is not healthy," concludes the author who during her advertising days wrote lines like *Yeh Dil Munge More* (Pepsi), *Dar Ke Aage Jee Hai* (Mountain Dew) and *Teda Hai Par Mera Hai* (Kurkure). (*IANS*)

## Rare Assamese journals and books to be digitised



A community project, 'Digitizing Assam' has been launched aiming at the digitization of rare Assamese journals and books published between 1813 and 1970, for public use.

The launching ceremony was attended by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday evening.

An initiative of the Nanda Talukdar Foundation and supported by the Assam Jatiya Bidyalay Educational & Socio-Economic Trust, this project is going to digitize every possible rare Assamese language book and journal, regardless of their location, and making them available to the public for posterity through a dedicated website.

In the first phase of this ambitious project, journals published between the years 1840 and 1970 have been included encompassing 3071 editions of as many as 161 journals with a total of 2,45,680 pages. The second phase of the project, under process, shall cover books published between 1813 and 1962.

Sarma said that launch of this project would prove decisive in conferring the world of Assamese literature its rightful exalted status in days to come. Referring to the 19th century as the era that led to a new dawn for Assamese literature, he credited literary stalwarts such as Lakshminath Bezbarua, Chandra Kumar Agarwala and Hemchandra Goswami for its forward march.

"The 20th century brought with itself greater avenues for growth of Assamese literature," Sarma added.

Referring to the 21st century as the "digital era", he said digitizing rare Assamese literary works would go a long way in preserving such remarkable works for ages.

"The coming generations would be able to appreciate the works of literary gems in the Assamese language through such initiatives. I appeal to members of the general public in possession of such rare works to come forward so that all books can be digitized," he said. (*IANS*)

# COVID is officially no longer a global health emergency

World Health Organisation (WHO) experts have officially declared that COVID no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (Pheic). This coincides with the WHO's new strategy to transition from an emergency response to longer-term sustained COVID disease management.

This may not change too much practically. COVID will still have pandemic status, and countries will continue to have their own authority as to whether to treat COVID as an emergency within their territories (some countries, including the US, have already declared an end to the national emergency).

For the global public health community, however, this is an event of monumental importance, drawing to a close the emergency response period which commenced on January 30 2020.

At the same time for a large portion of the general public, it may well pass by relatively unnoticed. For many people, it's been a long time since they viewed COVID as an emergency. In the UK for example, COVID no longer features in the regular Office for National Statistics public opinion survey that asks people what they think the key issues facing the country are. Even a year ago, only two in five Britons were very or somewhat worried about COVID, according to the survey.

Along with other behavioural scientists, I have been following public experiences of the pandemic for the past three years. The results have yet to be peer reviewed but by summer 2022, many participants in our research described the pandemic as being like "a distant memory" or like it "never happened".

As we move into this next phase, it's time to consider what we've learned about human behaviour during the pandemic, and what happens next.

### Old habits die hard

In the early days of the pandemic, many behavioural scientists, myself included, wondered whether some of our pandemic habits were here to stay. Would face masks become a regular wardrobe staple? Would people stop "solidifying on" and going into work when unwell?

It turned out that for most



people, the pandemic hasn't permanently changed our behaviour and habits or created a "new normal". Looking again at the UK, face mask use has consistently declined, with figures from last month suggesting that fewer than one in six adults had worn a face mask recently. Regular use is likely much less common.

Social distancing has long since disappeared, except for a relatively small proportion of the public, in particular those most vulnerable to COVID.

The COVID pandemic has taught us how adaptive behaviour can be, in particular how much people were willing to change their behaviour to keep themselves and others safe. Most people followed the rules during the height of the pandemic, no matter how difficult. COVID has reminded us how resilient we humans can be.

These pandemic adaptations, and the fact that our pre-pandemic behaviour bounced back so quickly, shows how important social cues and social norms are to behaviour. Putting on a mask or keeping our distance from others were habits -- actions triggered automatically in response to contextual cues, such as seeing signs with pictures of people socially distancing.

Social norms -- what we think

others are doing -- were key to vaccine uptake and to our uptake of preventative measures in general. As these contextual cues disappeared and the social norms started to change, and as vaccine coverage increased and the risk to the majority decreased, our behaviour changed.

The pandemic has also demonstrated how important social connections and social, especially physical, contact can be. This is something we have already argued COVID couldn't keep at bay forever. According to social safety theory, which sees stress and wellbeing as a product of biological, psychological and social factors, COVID posed a threat to the "social fabric that makes humans resilient and keeps us alive and well".

It's unsurprising that life satisfaction and happiness were lowest during lockdowns, and recognised as people started to mix socially again.

### The emergency isn't over for everyone

As we mark the end of the emergency phase it's important to remember the nearly seven million lives lost due to COVID since 2020.

And of course, we must consider that for some, especially those who are clinically vulner-

able, the emergency is not yet over, and may never be.

Although it's no longer a Pheic, as the WHO reminds us, COVID is still responsible for millions of infections and thousands of deaths each week around the world. Also, thanks to long COVID, hundreds of millions of people are in need of longer-term care.

In the future, we need to move from relying on the resilience of individuals to building resilience in our institutions. We can all take measures to continue to protect ourselves and those around us from COVID and other viruses (such as hand washing and immunization). But responsibility for preventing public health emergencies shouldn't rest solely in the hands of the public. Actions that governments, employers and health authorities can take now could protect against future public health emergencies.

Systematically tackling misinformation, improving ventilation in schools, workplaces and other public indoor spaces, and making longer-term improvements to paid sick leave are all good ways to start building more resilient societies in preparation for the next pandemic. Hopefully this is something we will never see in our lifetimes. (*The Conversation*)

## Increase productivity, self-assurance, fulfilment & sleep through mindfulness



Idanim, a meditation and mental wellness app, just reached the milestone of 1,000 guided meditations over more than 40 categories, including meditations for sleep, antisocial, anxiety reduction, vipassana, etc. to support specific goals. In less than a year after its release, the app has received over 50,000 downloads, and more than 5,000 users meditate using it each month.

With a total experience of more than 200 years teaching meditation, the platform's team of world-famous teachers comes from a variety of countries, including the US, Canada, Australia, India, Singapore, and others.

Idanim users can receive guided meditations from these teachers. The app includes daily LIVE meditations with these masters in addition to guided meditations. These

sessions give Idanim users an opportunity to interact with these international mindfulness experts and obtain answers to their questions about meditation in addition to experiencing meditation in a studio-like setting with a LIVE teacher.

The app also has a feature called "Recommend Me" that allows users to get personalised experiences and find meditation materials quickly.

The app's user-friendly interface makes it suitable for both newcomers and seasoned practitioners. Users can select any meditation category and start practising right away.

Depending on one's interests, one can also put diverse techniques like Yoga Nidra, Buddhist and Zen meditations, and chakra meditations into practise.

Commenting on the same, Raman Mit-

ta, Co-founder, Idanim says: "Meditation is a practice of exploring within oneself and is not a fixed destination, where one should aspire to reach. Your head doesn't become vacuumed free of thoughts, utterly undistracted. It's a special place where you experience each and every moment in the now. When we meditate we venture into the workings of our minds, our sensations, our emotions, and our thoughts. We are delighted to introduce 1000 meditations across 40+ categories to create a mindful environment."

Idanim was created for working people and individuals to increase productivity, self-assurance, fulfilment, and sleep through mindfulness.

It was developed by TO THE NEW, a digital tech services firm and seven-time Great Place to Work winner. (*IANSLife*)



"If you're happy, if you're feeling good, then nothing else matters." —Rubin Wright

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Boost to Congress

THE verdict is clear – and a virtual slap on the face of the BJP for its omissions and commissions and its overdrive on the communal front in Karnataka. The Congress sweep in the assembly polls was more than expected though anti-incumbency sentiments were evident from the very start. For the Congress party, this morale boost came at the precise time when it was almost down and out at the national level and its spearhead, Rahul Gandhi, was targeted by the Modi government in questionable ways. The saffron party that went on a communal overdrive has been given such a drubbing that it would nurse this wound for a long time. It lost its only base in the South and brought shame to Prime Minister Narendra Modi too by making him run around the state with a begging bowl for votes. The huge dependence on Modi was a clear hint that the BJP's state leadership and chief minister Basavaraj Bommai lacked the strength to take on the opposition.

For the BJP, this is the second state to go this way – after the Congress captured Himachal Pradesh from it in the November 2022 assembly polls. The saffron party famously keeps demonstrating that it is yet to have an organizational heft. Its chief ministers are poor performers and faceless men. It lost Maharashtra and retained Haryana by allying with a regional party, in Karnataka, as many as 11 ministers lost the polls, signifying the poor image of the outgoing government. Most BJP governments are non-performing. In state after state, the party is basking in the glory of Modi. But, the 72-year-old Modi is just three years away from likely political sanyas.

The Congress party played its cards well this time. However, its win in Karnataka is no more than a temporary reprieve. Bigger battles lie ahead before the 2024 Parliament polls. Assembly polls in Rajasthan, MP, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and elsewhere are expected before the end of this year. All eyes would now be glued to those polls. The tricolour party has won the moral courage to take on the BJP in the coming polls by its decisive victory in Karnataka. Perhaps an understanding had been reached between the two party stalwarts – Siddaramaiah and DK Shivakumar – vis-a-vis the CM's post and government formation, or that a new formula could be contemplated. Notably, their communities – Dalits and Vokkaligas respectively – have energetically backed the Congress this time. Only Bengaluru and the coastal region sided with the BJP. As for the JD Secular, it reduced its assembly seats substantially as did the BJP. Its leader HD Kumaraswamy could neither be king nor king-maker as he had hoped to be. Voters ensured as much.

Letters to the Editor

Our the Boiling Frog Story

Editor, This is with reference to a letter to the editor under the caption "Citizens must voice out their concerns" (ST May 12, 2023) by Kevin Phillips. In this regard I would like to say that I've had similar experiences of having been told by several people including highly educated ones that it is pointless to express their dissent against any things not going right in our state because, "government is never moving by the plight of the people." I guess that this sense of general impotency and helplessness gradually crept in some years after our attainment of statehood and has become unmistakably visible in the last two decades. In short, most people have given up.

This attitude reminds me of the "Boiling Frog Syndrome." The Boiling Frog story is a moral fable describing a frog being slowly boiled in water. The premise is that a frog is put suddenly in boiling water, it will jump out, but if the frog is put in tepid water (that which is then brought to a boil slowly, it will not perceive the danger and will unthinkingly be

cooked to death. The story is often used as a metaphor for the inability or unwillingness of people to react or be aware of sinister threats that arise gradually rather than suddenly.

Here in our state, corruption has been creeping gradually and it has almost reached catastrophic proportions. Because the process is so gradual, it has also seeped into our psyche very imperceptibly to the point that it has somehow become normalized and we now have no compunctions to indulge in it and accept it. Hence, with increasing corruption in society our concern for the general good has correspondingly been severely eroded to the point that we now generally care for the well-being of our immediate families only, thinking that what evils exist outside our little worlds do not concern us, as if these evils will not in the long run come to bite our own children and grandchildren.

For me, the deafening silence of intellectuals is majorly responsible for the sinking of Meghalaya into the bottomless pit of corruption and the few voices of dissent that we hear are nothing less than mere cries in the wilderness. In concluding, this quote from Edmund Burke seems appropriate: "

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing."

Yours etc., Samuel Swift, Shillong-12.

Dorbar shnongs must function under a set of rules

Editor, As a regular reader of this column and above all other issues that are usually highlighted from time to time, I would also like to draw the attention of the authorities, the district administration and the KIIADC in particular. Can a dorbar shnong levy fees for sale and purchase of land? However, there are certain rangbah shnongs who charge exorbitantly in the name of village development fund while they charge separately for a residential or non-residential certificate. Since these institutions are in direct contact with the people at the grassroots, one has to succumb to what is demanded to get the paperwork done else it becomes an issue for any individual living in that system.

Even the staffs at the sub-registrars office will ask for a seal deed that has the headman's seal whenever

registration of land is sought for at the DC office. Till date it is not clear whether the headman's NOC for sale/purchase of land is mandatory. Therefore, it is for the government authorities to issue notification to the general public about the relevant procedures and also of the prescribed fees that dorbars can collect in such cases. As of today, the land documents obtained from KIIADC are still not accepted by the banks for loans but a no objection certificate from the District Council and the rangbah shnong is necessary for mortgaging the land to banks for availing loans. When will there be a system that will ease up land registrations in the state of Meghalaya?

A family member of mine was asked to pay 1% from sales proceeds as donation towards dorbar fund of a particular village for road construction. We found out that as per sales of the Shyam of Mylliem the rangbah shnong was only allowed to charge a nominal amount as witness to the sale which should not be paid at any cost; they reluctantly agreed to sign the papers after lengthy argument. The

question remains as whether dorbars fall under any ambit when it comes to collection of such fees? It is pertinent to ask when developmental funds in the state come through schemes, how can collection of fees by village dorbars be permitted openly in the name of development? If that be the case then where are all the public schemes of MLAs and MPs that are meant for the people?

There are dorbar shnongs that fall under municipal areas that also collect fees for cleaning and maintenance of the locality on a monthly basis when the same is charged by the Shillong Municipal Board. Many citizens are skeptical about paying such fees since it becomes a burden for families to pay to two different authorities but most are reluctant to raise their voices in the locality for fear of harassment by the headman. Now how can such double collections be allowed? It is for the District Administration to inter-ene to bring a stop to this illegality that is rampant under its nose.

No doubt dorbar shnongs provide yeoman service in times of tragedies and effectively assist the government in many different ways and their recent handling of the Covid pandemic is

commendable; however they should function within the mandate given to them under the Constitution so that people in general are not affected by their self-made diktat. For instance, the recent directive from the KIIADC barring rangbah shnongs from active participation in policies should adhere to while the State Government should also consider a remuneration for headmen as per provisions available because they cannot be expected to do their job pro-bono. In municipal areas of Shillong an urban local body should be constituted urgently to tackle the ever increasing civic issues.

Your's etc., Ibs S. Khamrai (Shillong-1)

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

Saving The Rivers of Meghalaya

By H H Mohrmen

It is for the first time in living memory that the monsoon is playing truant in Meghalaya and the north-eastern region. Ever though we have always crossed the half year mark for this year, the rain is still avoiding its landing on these rolling hills. If the dry season continues, then, like Umiam Lake, all the rivers in the state will become thin and muddy, and only the skeletal remains of their former image will remain. With temperatures continuing to rise, the water level will fall, leaving the rivers with very shallow waters. The rivers in the entire state are now showing this sign of stress, and if the rain god is not kind to the people, then the river beds of many rivers in the state will soon be visible to the naked eye. The question that arises is: what will happen to the aquatic life in these rivers? The most important question is: what will happen to our rivers, which are already under great stress?

The condition of our river The CEO of the Jowai Municipal Board and the Member Secretary of the Khasi Hills Building Structural Regulatory Authority, Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, Shillong, respectively, both issued public notices that shed light on the state of our rivers. These notices, which appeared in The Shillong Times, serve as a grim reminder that, in addition to the Wah Umkrab in Shillong, rivers in the state are also in danger. The two public notifications that were the result of the court or tribunal orders showed that the state's rivers are not in good shape, and the Meghalaya government and the autonomous district councils should collaborate to save the rivers before it is too late.

The fish-flowing river Myntdu A serious issue is raised by the notice issued by the Additional Deputy Commissioner of the West Jaintia Hills District and the Chief Executive Officer of the Jowai Municipal Board on May 3, ordering households in Jowai without proper septic tanks to stop flushing their toilets into drains and water bodies in their areas. The order states that, as per the report prepared by the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board, the National Green Tribunal has found that the health of the river Myntdu is seriously compromised due to its high acid content.

Human interference is causing the river to deteriorate, and excessive siltation is causing to reduce in size.

It was also said that people indulging in open defecation as a result of which the faecal coliform and total coliform counts are very high and the BOD level is beyond the normal limit. What is also not potable due to the disposal of untreated waste and sewage into the river. The term "BOD" refers to the amount of molecular oxygen needed for the biological oxidation of organic matter in water as well as the typical oxygen requirement for organic waste. It can be broken down aerobically. Therefore, in compliance with the Hottle NGT order, the Jowai Municipal Board has directed the households without a proper sanitary latrine under low town to stop the direct discharge of faulty septic tanks or latrine to drains and water bodies and to construct a proper septic tank or sanitary latrine within 90 days.

The people of Jowai are literally drinking their own waste The residents of the town are unaware of the fact that, despite the completion of the new water supply project, Jowai continues to rely on the Myntdu, which is unfit for human consumption, for its daily water needs. The grand old Myntdu water supply project, which is pumped from Myntdu, water supply town with 4.066MLD of water (RTI reply No. EE/PHE/1161/JW/14-15, 21/2022-23/1075 dated December 23, 2022). The much hyped and recently inaugurated Umngot water supply, on the other hand, supplies only 1.486 MLD of water to the town, which is less than the total amount of water supplied to the town (Ibid, RTI dated December 23, 2022).

The Myntdu water supply project continues to be the main source of water for the people of Jowai, as it supplies more than fifty percent of the town's water requirement. The question that the people of Jowai need to reflect upon is how they have treated the river Myntdu, the town's main source of water supply. Another query is whether the

PHE department is aware that as per MSNP report, the water provider in the municipality is unfit for human consumption? The important point is how the department continues to provide water to the community despite their knowledge that it is unfit for human consumption. The government has obviously failed the people of Jowai, and this matter should be taken seriously by the people consuming this water and by the government of the day.

The KIIADC Notice On the other hand, the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, in its notice dated May 10, 2023, cited and High Court of Meghalaya order in P.H. No 10 of 2019, which prohibited any

"The rivers in the entire state are now showing this sign of stress, and if the rain god is not kind to the people, then the river beds of many rivers in the state will soon be visible to the naked eye. The question that arises is: what will happen to the aquatic life in these rivers?"

The river affected by AMD

The rivers in the coal mine areas are highly polluted by acid mine drainage (AMD) that comes from the mines. In spite of the fact that no study has been done to determine the condition of the rivers in the coal mine areas post-NGT ban, the government has celebrated the issuing of mining leases to the coal miners in the state. It is indeed sad that while the government is crying foul over the pollution of the rivers in Shillong, it doesn't care a hoot about the rivers in the rest of the state. Whether the new so-called "scientific mining" would not have an adverse impact on the rivers in the state is another question. If the acid mine system is allowed to pollute the water bodies, then this government is closing the leakage of one hole and, in the process, opening a new hole.

Saving the rivers, saving water, and saving aquatic lives It is sad that, to date, the state has not been able to even complete the People's Aquatic Biodiversity Register of the aquatic animals that are found in the rivers in the state. Without a doubt, aquatic life in the rivers in the coal mines has been gone forever, but the administration is completely ignorant about the existence of aquatic life in the other rivers in the state. Despite the fact that in most of the rivers one can see the golden mahseer "kha-lad" (Tor putitora) and chocolate mahseer "kha-seet" (Neolissochilus hexagonolepis) swimming, not much is known about these fish species. Even though the IUCN has listed the golden mahseer (Tor putitora) as "endangered" and its population is declining at an alarming rate, the government has done nothing to protect these aquatic species. Chocolate mahseer (Neolissochilus hexagonolepis) is found only in the North Eastern Himalayan region, particularly in Meghalaya, and the fish is also considered a threatened species by the IUCN (2016).

Saving our rivers before it is too late It is now obvious that it is not only the Wah Umkrab that needs the government's attention; all the rivers in the state are under stress and need protection. The court and tribunal's intervention should be taken as an alarm bell by the government and the people of the state. The government, along with the Autonomous District Council, should wake up and take immediate action to protect and preserve our rivers before it is too late.

A centenary tribute to the FMA pioneers

By Barnes Mawrie

"If you think in terms of a year, plant a seed; if in terms of ten years, plant trees; if in terms of a hundred years, teach the people" (Confucius)

Way back on 8th December 1923, six sisters of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, popularly known as the FMA sisters, arrived in Northeast India, one year after the arrival of the Salesian missionaries. The six pioneering sisters were Sr Innocenza Vallino who was their leader, Sr Maria Bricearelli, Sr Giulia Berna, Sr Clotilde Appiano, Sr Cecilia Da Roit and Sr Antonietta Rosetti. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA) are a congregation co-founded by Don Bosco and St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello in Morcese (Italy) in the year 1872.

Their charism as spelled out by their founders, is to work for the material and spiritual well-being of poor girls especially through the ministry of education. The congregation

since their arrival here, the Salesian sisters have always catered to the socio-economic needs of the people. As we all know, the tribal communities of this region during those years were largely backward in every aspect of life. The sisters have dedicated themselves

"This year 2023, the congregation is celebrating the hundredth anniversary of their arrival to Northeast India in 1923. At this juncture it is relevant and significant to look back and see the tremendous contribution that this congregation has made to our region. First of all in the area of education, the sisters have rendered a yeoman service to society since their arrival. Today the congregation runs as many as 33 schools and 4 colleges of their own and 27 schools and 3 colleges in collaboration with others."

Today ranks as the biggest women congregation in the Church with over 13,653 members of which more than 1222 are in India alone. In the last one hundred years, the congregation has grown immensely in India with seven provinces spread all over the country. In Northeast India alone they have two provinces, namely, Shillong and Guwahati with over 600 sisters of whom 500 of them being local sisters.

This year 2023, the congregation is celebrating the hundredth anniversary of their arrival to Northeast India in 1923. At this juncture it is relevant and significant to look back and see the tremendous contribution that this congregation has made to our region. First of all in the area of education, the sisters have rendered a yeoman service to society since their arrival. Today the congregation runs as many as 33 schools and 4 colleges of their own and 27 schools and 3 colleges in collaboration with others. What is more admirable about them is that most of their educational institutions like schools and hostels are situated in rural areas, catering to the poor and marginalized people. Some of their prominent schools are St. Mary's Higher Secondary School in Guwahati (1922), St. Joseph's School in Tezpur (1936), Sacred Heart HS School in Shillong (1938), Auxilium HS School, Shillong, and Little Flower HS School in Imphal (1958), Little Flower HS School in Kohima (1964), St. Mary's HS School in Maligaon (1967), Auxilium HS School in Agartala and many others. These schools have churned out thousands of eminent leaders in the region and in the country as well. Many of their past pupils have played an important role in society at large. Through education, the sisters have been able to empower especially rural girls who otherwise would have been left at the periphery of

difficult tasks like running orphanages, doing social upliftment services, running non-formal and vocational training schools, organizing youth centres and empowering women in every way. In many rural areas, the sisters are instrumental in initiating Self Help Groups which have been responsible for the economic progress of rural communities. Today the sisters have a large network of SHGs in the region. Working side by side with the Salesians of Don Bosco in most of the parishes, the FMA sisters are playing a great role in the transformation of Northeast India. Definitely we cannot ignore the contribution of other women congregations like the Loreto Sisters (LVM) and the RNDM sisters who in their own rights have been giants especially in the field of education since the start of the 20th century. Today there is a plethora of other women congregations who work in this region two of whom, namely, the MSMMC and the VSDB sisters, are indistinguishably founded by late Mgr. Stephen Ferrando and late Mgr. Hubert D. Rosario respectively. The former congregation (MSMMC) was in fact groomed by the Salesian sisters in the initial years of their existence.

In conclusion, I would like to make a comment on the opening quote from Confucius. It is evident that the Salesian sisters who came to Northeast India in 1923 had a long-term plan and that is the reason why they have committed themselves totally to the task of "teaching" people – teaching them the basics of life, fostering knowledge in them, instructing them on bases of health care, teaching our youth an honest way to earn their living and above all inculcating in our youth fundamental moral, human and religious values which have gone a long way to make Northeast India what it is today.

"What a cage is to the wild beast, law is to the selfish man."

-- Herbert Spencer

The Shillong Times

Vol. 55, No. 272 SHILLONG, ASSAM, MAY 16, 2023

Roster system a tinder box

RESERVATION also known as affirmative action or positive discrimination is backed by the Indian Constitution. The Meghalaya State Reservation Policy was intelligently crafted by the founding fathers of this state essentially to address the need for affirmative action for the indigenous tribes of Meghalaya the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo. If all the three tribes are classed as one, Meghalaya would, as per the Constitution, only be able to have got 50% reservation since the Constitution does not allow anything more than that for any single ST category. By dividing the tribes into two major categories the first legislators of the new state of Meghalaya were able to get 80% reservation for the local tribes, 5% for the minor tribes who are of Meghalayan domicile while 15 % was for the open general category. Perhaps the only error was that the Government at the time did not anticipate that the matter would reach the portals of a court and be questioned. It was impov...

At the time the number of technically qualified people were relatively few in number and often the ST vacancies had to be filled by those from the unreserved category. The other alternative was to let the vacancies remain unfilled and have a governance problem at hand. The very fact that vacancies arise is because there is a need for critical manpower in those positions. But all these remain unrecorded for the past 50 years. Add to this the nepotism that crept in when the undeserved from amongst the reserved categories got in while the deserving were left in the lurch. Now 50 years down the line the Meghalaya High Court had to raise the Roster question because that is the only way to ensure equity and justice in appointment to entry level posts. It is unfortunate that this matter has taken on a dangerous political colour which threatens to break the long held solidarity between the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo tribes. Anything that takes on an ethnocentric colour is unhealthy in a state with mixed ethnicities.

The Voice of Peoples' Party (VPP) has given an ultimatum to the government to resume the job appointment process by following the Reservation Policy minus the Roster System. The matter is still in the Meghalaya High Court. The VPP comprises some of the best educated members and scholars. They are well aware that if they wish to challenge the Roster system the court is the proper forum. So why are they taking the political instead of the legal route? Not everything in the life of a state must be reduced to political brinkmanship.

Letters to the Editor

Of educational structure & learning quality

The SSLC examination and hence cannot choose that subject. The blame for this rests on the MOSE curriculum and its lack of approach and objectives which do not allow students to build their interests in certain disciplines from the early stages of the secondary level. They are only guided on how to pass the exams and this mindset carries on until the SSLC examinations. For instance, in the subject Social Science, Class X, there are four disciplines (History, Civics, Geography and Economics) with a total of about 39-40 chapters but only for a total marks of 80 (20 being internal marks). Now students have to prepare 40 chapters for only 80 marks and during exams there are chapters from which not a single question is set. Every year candidates complain that during the SSLC exam they can't perform well in Social Science. Last year it was all over the news and social media about the difficulties faced by students due to lack of preparation. The same can be said for Science, English or Mathematics. A student might show great interest in Geography but not in History; might perform better in Biology but not in Physics; might be very good in mathematics but not in Science. It's time to revisit the existing syllabus and make changes to the textbooks so that our students will well-equipped when faced with

national competitive exams in various fields including CUET to undergraduate programmes). Compared to central or other Boards, the curriculum is very rigid and mismanagement, paucity of funds, teachers' salaries and job security for teachers etc. no one talks about. One of the problems faced by our students. Nobody represents their plight; no one questions the availability of proper infrastructure and facilities for learning or whether there even exists a healthy learning environment (including academic guidance, even physical well-being). Finally it's time to question whether the structure of the MOSE curriculum is measurable and serves its purpose of benefiting the students.

Often, I would wonder at the role and functions of MOSE. Do they really have a curriculum framework in the first place? Is there a Committee to look specifically at this matter and to discuss and come up with solutions? Or is MOSE only responsible for registration of students, scheduling of examinations and conducting of results? The National Education Policy (2020) is in place and will be implemented before the timeline of 2030. However, it is clear that much progress we have made as a state, in terms of preparation to incorporate this great reformation in the Educational System. It is imperative that the State Board sits, rethink and reconstruct its curriculum. It's time to revisit the existing syllabus and make changes to the textbooks so that our students will well-equipped when faced with

Manipur Riot: The tragedy of ethnic -based evacuation of population

By Thanggoulen Kipgen

On May 3, 2023, the All Tribal Students Union Manipur (ATSUM) organised a "Tribal Solidarity March" in all the hill districts of Manipur against the demand for inclusion of the dominant Meitei community into the Scheduled Tribe list of the Constitution of India. The rally concluded peacefully in the hill districts, but on highways were blocked in a few places in the valley by some Meitei volunteers to express their displeasure at the peaceful rally. A group of unknown miscreants burned the Anglo-Kuki War Centenary Gate in Churachandpur district and then fled thereby infuriating the locals. The tribals and the Meiteis immediately engaged in a bloody battle in the Forbang and Kanyai areas of Churachandpur district. Many people died and hundreds of homes were destroyed on that tragic night. The violence spread to the Imphal valley as Kuki-Zo/dominant localities were attacked and their houses burned down, including churches. The Indian military has been ordered to "shoot at sight" as the violence has spiralled out of control. This conflict is the culmination of long-standing discomfitment among the tribals of Manipur including the recent infamous, "Three Bills" issue, in which eight tribals lost their lives in 2015; the forcible eviction and relocation of Kuki villages by declaring their habitations as Reserved Forest or Protected Forest; the passing of the Hill Area Committee (HAC) of the Manipur Legislative Assembly in matters pertaining to the tribals, among other grievances.

Since the outbreak of violence, targeted communities from both parties have sought refuge in army garrisons. An estimated 30,000 Kuki-Zo have sought refuge in Imphal Valley military cantonments and garrisons. Similarly, a few hundred Meitei also took refuge in army camps in Moreh and Imphal. In the aftermath that followed, the Imphal valley saw lynchings, arson, and looting. Except for state government employees in uniform and a handful who have chosen to die in their homes, no Kuki-Zo or Meiteis remain in the valley or the hills following the evacuation operation. Statement from the Global Naga Forum and Professor Kham Khan Sunu, writing in the Indian Express, have referred to this massive communal conflict as an "institutionalised riot system" (IRS) because of its planned and abrupt nature.

The challenges of competing and pursuing higher courses of studies. Personally, I feel that while all the issues on education in our state are about mismanagement, paucity of funds, teachers' salaries and job security for teachers etc., no one talks about. One of the problems faced by our students. Nobody represents their plight; no one questions the availability of proper infrastructure and facilities for learning or whether there even exists a healthy learning environment (including academic guidance, even physical well-being). Finally it's time to question whether the structure of the MOSE curriculum is measurable and serves its purpose of benefiting the students.

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more strenuous efforts to form ethnic enclaves and neighbourhoods where one group dominates, and others are not welcome. What does happen, it will disproportionately affect minority communities and could stoke further ethnic tensions. The administration has failed miserably to address the problem associated with evacuation and has no idea what to do about the massive strain on resources caused by the influx of evacuees in need of food, housing, and medical care. If the government is responsible for returning the victims to their homes, when will that happen? Is this evacuation meant to be a temporary measure until permanent physical security measures can be put in place? Does this mean that relocation is irreversible and that people need to start over with new social and physical structures? State governments and affected communities need to take these inquiries very seriously.

As fighting and violence persist, the Kuki-Zo people have blocked national highways to express their frustration with the government's policies. On the other side, in cities like Shillong and Delhi, conflicts between the two populations have also been reported, fueling further outrage and violence. Most obviously, the ethnic schism, resentment, and suspicion are intensifying in online communities like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. False information and counter-arguments have been flooding online communities. The situation, though claimed by the Chief Minister of Manipur, is not normal on various occasions, is not close to normal, with tensions still high on both sides.

Manipur is at a crucial stage in resolving the mounting ethnic tensions and communal violence. The community has suffered from a breakdown in their social networks. Third, relocating and segregating populations along ethnic and geographical lines should not be viewed as the ideal long-term solution. The root causes of the conflict and does not in any way promote reconciliation. Instead, efforts should be focused on addressing the underlying, sustainable solutions, fostering dialogue, and building trust that embraces diversity and resolve conflicts through

(The author is an Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at IIT Kanpur)

Value Education as propounded by Radhoo Sing Berry Kharwanlang

By Bijoya Sawian

As we commemorate the 120th Death Anniversary of Babu Lechon Roy on May 16 we remember with admiration and respect the contribution of Radhoo Sing Berry Kharwanlang towards value education. Radhoo Sing Berry Kharwanlang, Lechon Roy's friend and literary soul mate, compiled 'Ka Jingseng Tymmen' (The Teachings of Elders), the Khasi book of moral ethics and etiquette. It is a literary masterpiece, first published in the Khasi newspaper, U Khro Myma in February 1897. It comprises a hundred and twelve lines. In March 1902, he added another ninety-two lines. In December 1901, he published a book form by Lechon Roy in the Ri Khasi Press. The following year Part II was published. Book I has forty-one stanzas and Book II, sixty-eight stanzas. Radhoo Sing wrote it in exquisite Khasi but it is written in English and having it published some 120 years later in 1997. Here are a few stanzas that encapsulate the Khasi way of life and living.

"All you children, nieces and nephew, learn good behavior, the best possible. Your good reputation will always remain from season to season as you grow you will gain. Wherever you walk, wherever you go be modest, be humble, don't let arrogance show. In the house you are born there you must learn how to sit and how to stand. How to walk, how to eat, how to drink, how to talk, how to glance, how to move how to advance, how to work how to labour, how to cope with the work you shoulder. How to dress you to attire. How to be modest how to be careful, your father you will wear how to comb and make your hair, how to give how to accept, how you will give and how you will receive. Think and ponder be not vain be not proud be not abroad, in or out, take not these words lightly for they will be the seed for your own shame camouflaged. You may reach the top, sit on horse, elephant! If your reputation is sullied what use is it? Even if you worship with folded hands What use is it if you are dishonest and unkind? Even if you work hard and have money, if your goodness is not rooted deep, how long will you escape His wrath His judgement. Today, tomorrow you'll come to a sad end."

"In front of elders any time place speak with humility and grace. When they enter the room, when you're alone or with friends stand up give your seat, me'er feel shame or offence. In front of them in smoking don't indulge, be humble their position and dignity very much. You too will yourself stand up. When you are a hothead upstart who knows not his place. "When your kin and kin have trials and tribulations, never refuse help and cooperation. Whether they can repay your kindness or not, don't ever confront them, don't keep a grudge. If they have a fest and join joyously, if they don't invite you don't sulk needlessly. Around food and drink your life shouldn't revolve. Eat and drink only to be healthy and strong."

"Always with discretion talk and tell it's an investment that remains intact. Do not overspend and your earnings deplete. In drink and food, be discreet. An extravagant life leads to penury. Conscience on life that is good and true. Good fortune will always be well-served by the inquisitive and not by the meddling and by too interfering. Always keep your hearts pure as a pearl. All you budding youth, you boys and girls. "Alcohol you shouldn't touch, it has in it both fire and water. Smoking hashish too do not dare. Impoverished you will be, for my son, you won't care. As for opium and other stronger drugs, they will shorten your life if in them you indulge. From gambling you should stay far like a homeless pig it will you devour. Keep away from women of bad character. Or Khro Myma in February 1897. It comprises a hundred and twelve lines. In March 1902, he added another ninety-two lines. In December 1901, he published a book form by Lechon Roy in the Ri Khasi Press. The following year Part II was published. Book I has forty-one stanzas and Book II, sixty-eight stanzas. Radhoo Sing wrote it in exquisite Khasi but it is written in English and having it published some 120 years later in 1997. Here are a few stanzas that encapsulate the Khasi way of life and living.

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"Curiosity will conquer fear even more than bravery will."

— James Stephens

The Shillong Times

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Chastening of satraps

THE palpable sense of chastening on the part of West Bengal's chief minister Mamata Banerjee after the Congress swept the Karnataka polls is a pointer to the road ahead for the 2024 General Elections...

Many were in a mood to write off Rahul Gandhi after the establishment went into an overdrive and unseated him from Parliament in the follow-up to a controversial local court order against him in Surat...

Letters to the Editor

"Issue of Father's surnames" Does it require any debate?

Editor, In opening a serious discussion on this matter, I would like to point out first that westernization in any name should be forbidden...

It is evident that as per Sections 3 and 12 of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council by not debating on the Act which is yet to be given assent to by the Governor...

Custom of Lineage act, 1997 passed by the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council by not debating on the Act which is yet to be given assent to by the Governor...

Again, our great grand uncles, our great grandfathers have observed that at the time of birth of a baby, there is a novel which contains the new baby's with the mother which needs to be cut off after birth...

Thanking our concerned Authority in anticipation for an expected prompt reaction Yours etc. Louis Pyngrope Via email

Karnataka Verdict: Modi is not invincible

By H. Srikanth

Whatever be the projections of the pollsters, everyone closely watching the elections in Karnataka knew pretty well that BJP was going to be routed...

Earlier, Karnataka was viewed as a progressive state where the people believed in moderation. It was the state known for reformers and noted literary personalities like Basavanna, Koveppu, R.K. Narayan, U.R. Ananthmurthy, etc.

In the name of NEP 2020, the government removed the lessons on revolutionary and reforming leaders, and added lessons, romanticising Hinduist icons. Had the BJP government succeeded at the level of governance, it could have consolidated the gains of its Hinduist experiments to some extent...

In normal conditions, when it is confident about its victory, BJP talks of 'vikas', meaning development. But in Karnataka, BJP virtually had little to boast on the performance of its government. I could not talk against corruption, as its own leaders and the government faced corruption charges...

BJP leadership indulged in implementing the Hindutva agenda, rousing communal tensions through propaganda on issues over Tipu Sultan, hijab, halal, religious conversions, love jihad, etc. No efforts were made to trace and punish the criminals involved in the killing of progressive social activists...



The corporate national media projected Modi's orchestrated road shows as game changing. Taking advantage of the employment problem, Modi on Bajrang Dal, Modi invoked Lord Hanuman to woo the voters. National media gave such publicity to his Bajrang campaign as if it was going to till the election results in favor of the BJP...

Everyday problems like corruption, infrastructure bottlenecks in the cities, the increasing crisis of fertilizers, rising prices, growing unemployment problem, etc. mattered more to the people than issues like Tipu Sultan, Muslim reservations and Hajrang. Cases is no doubt a factor, but class issues also became equally important to the voters...

What one hardly thought of: The overconfident BJP led the present election in Karnataka. This was not surprising. The BJP had pleased some while offending many others during its term in office. Hope this victory of the Congress party brings about more positive changes in the country...

Despicable attitude of DG Assam Rifles

Editor, Areas around schools/colleges are often places of hustle and bustle especially during rush hour. Pedestrians as well as drivers require to be mindful and cautious. Vehicles need to slow down and in some cases, hit the brakes to allow pedestrians to move safely especially in areas where there are no footpaths...

Further, the height of the footpath along St. Anthony's College on the Gundwara is very high, thereby preventing pedestrians to use it. Besides, there's minimal space to walk on the footpath as the hawkers and their customers take up all the space. Since the government is currently repairing the footpaths around the city, I hope it would take up this issue to prevent any untoward incidents in the future.

Yours etc., D Lyngdoh Shillong-3

Congress' victory should ensure a better tomorrow

Editor, Life is never a bed of roses. Uncertainty brings forth

out to the people. While our leading national media remained biased towards BJP, social media channels helped the Congress party to reach out to the electorate. Different radical NGOs and civil society groups went to villages and slums to campaign against the BJP government...

The Karnataka verdict has shown that it is possible to defeat BJP politically and ideologically. Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra played a role in setting the background for the people of Karnataka to think beyond communal issues and focus on real issues of concern. Rahul (Gandhi) played a role in inspiring the state leaders to forget their differences and fight together in the elections...

The assembly elections in Karnataka show that it is not necessary for opposition parties to take to soft Hindutva to fight the BJP. It is possible to educate and organize people around real issues confronting the masses. If there is a definite and reliable alternative, it need not be only the Congress party voters don't hesitate in exercising the option...

Several decades, Pakistan has been supporting and instigating diabolical forces with arms to create instability and disturb communal harmony in the Indian territory. One conspicuous example is Kashmir. We must learn from the bitter experiences and "innumerable" bloodbaths the nation has previously endured. Of course, we can love our enemies and extend our hands for better relations...

It may be mentioned that during Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' several anti-national shouts were heard. I don't think such a serious instance should sink into oblivion. The easy-going and complacency could prove detrimental later. Moreover, Pakistan has never been India's well-wisher. With impunity for

Yours etc., Sajib Gwalji, Shillong

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Bob's Banter Handling Disagreement Skilfully..!

By Robert Clements

The incident I'm going to relate, actually happened, and left me a little concerned with those who wield authority and get furious with views that counter theirs. A teenage girl saw that her priest had done something to her father which bothered her. She was the niece of the priest, and her father was the priest, and her father was the priest...

She had been in America when the mother of both the priest and her father passed away, also in America. The priest, who was the younger son, rushed to America to conduct the funeral, whereas her father who was not in the best of circumstances financially couldn't go.

The priest, after the funeral, returned to India, but did not bother going across to see his elder brother to tell him about the funeral or in what circumstances their mother had passed away. He did not even try to spend time with his brother. His daughter, who knew her mother was alone and grieving, wrote to her uncle the priest and told him that she his favourite niece was hurt that he couldn't go across to his brother and spend time with him. My father, your brother, is alone and grieving!

There was an instant upheaval: The priest, instead of heading his niece's request, emailed her back, "How dare you write this to me!"

What he was trying to establish was that he was a priest, and she a mere girl, and that she did not have the right to express her views to him.

Hearing about this episode saddened me, because after that, the girl was not only disenchanting with her uncle, but also with the church, for having leaders with such small egos!

I've realized ever since that the greatest gift a leader can gift himself or herself, is to present oneself with a team who have the freedom to disagree with the leader.

"Sir, I don't agree with your views!" is a statement one should welcome in a meeting, whether it's government, corporate or religious. Because that disagreement is founded on a thought that has already been expressed by the leader, which means that the new thought or disagreement has started moving forward, and whatever comes out of that debate which follows, will be a deeper, wider and broader viewpoint, than originally expressed.

If there are ten people at the meeting, it is the collective intelligence of ten, instead of just one. History books will tell you without hesitation that such combined thinking has always worked the world forward.

Rulers of yore whose advisors were "yes men" soon found themselves on the streets or under a hangman's noose. At some stage the "yes men" realized that the only way to keep their heads from being dismembered was a cackle, "yes to everything the leader said."

A mistake we often make is to think a strong man is strong because he takes no advice but his own. On the contrary, that is a weak person. His insecurity makes him feel that any contradiction to his view is a personal affront.

"He is slighting me!" whimpers the so-called strong man to himself, most probably being reminded of incidents in his past, most probably childhood, when he or she was educated for something they expressed or did.

The day they come out of that insecure feeling, the day, he or she is willing to just listen and agree or disagree fairly, it is to use better of incidents in his past, most probably childhood, when he or she was educated for something they expressed or did.

A strong leader will allow people the freedom to disagree. He will try to understand what is being said, and if not agreeing patiently explain his own plan in plainer terms, or start agreeing to what has been agreed to.

A wise parent would have shown the child right there what the difference was in being like an obedient child who agreed to, "It's not that the teacher doesn't like you, but the teacher didn't think your answer was the correct one."

We need to learn to accept the views of others. To find out how the greatest nation in the world reached that high pinnacle, one has only to get to open one's books of history and see debates, and those between Douglas, and Lincoln that fashioned great thought.

To understand this even further, one has to accept that each of us is blessed by our creator with different gifts that mould our belief systems. An businessman who has come up by his bristles, may feel that hard work is the only way to succeed and looks down on handouts and freebies, whereas someone who was helped with a scholarship or financial grant, will most probably have a compassionate heart to help the less fortunate as he was helped.

These two minds will collectively shape an idea that can better society. And if it's ten minds, more ideas and a better design. All this comes through argument, debate and convincing. But when a company or country starts curbing the freedom to disagree, then comes a quick and steady decline of our nation forward.

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bobscant@gnail.com

"All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence, and then success is sure."

— Mark Twain

The Shillong Times

SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MAY 18, 2023

Meghalaya's grim power scenario NEWS that the Jiamia Lake has dipped to its lowest ever and with the rains playing truant, Meghalaya is heading towards a power crisis of unprecedented proportions. Only Ri Bhoi district seems to be favoured by very few hours or no power cuts at all because the steel and other factories are located at Bymnat and these draw the maximum power even while they also default on payment of power bills. But that aside there is today a dire need for the state to think of other power sources and not be too reliant on hydel power. Run of the river projects and dams are both dependent on the monsoons. This year April saw very little rains. Half of May has passed with the showers crossing over large tracts of Meghalaya and shedding their moisture elsewhere. In this situation it is not time for Meghalaya to think of alternative energy sources and look at examples within the region and outside?

As far back as 2016 the ONGC had set up a 726.3MW combined-cycle gas turbine power (CCGT) plant in the Palatana village of the Udairipi District in Tripura. The first 363.3MW unit of the CCGT plant was dedicated to the nation in June 2013 and the second unit was commissioned in November 2014. On May 1, this year the Tripura government announced that it would set up a 120 MW Combined Cycle Gas Turbine (CCGT) funded by the Asian Development Bank. The gas-based thermal power project in Rokha near Sepahjira district would be upgraded from 63MW to 120 MW under "Capacity Augmentation," system. The initial cost of the project was Rs 720 crore which has now increased to Rs 840 crore. The ADB would provide funding in an 80:20 ratio while the state and central government would also contribute to the project. This is called planning ahead.

It is time for Meghalaya to think along the same lines and to tap other energy sources including gas-based sources. Meghalaya has huge resources of coal which could also form the base for thermal power plants. In the 1980's the Nangalshiba project was supposed to be a thermal power plant but was abandoned due to faulty planning and poor connectivity. Now the Garo Hills are better connected and thermal power plants would help augment the power requirements of Meghalaya. Power fuels all industries big and small and the power disruption these past months has also caused undue losses to young and established entrepreneurs who have had to invest in diesel run generators and buy diesel on a daily basis. This is bound to impact negatively on their businesses. The Meghalaya Government can no longer rely on hydel projects. It has to invest in alternative power sources and what better than gas and thermal based power.

Letters to the Editor

Need to update our social norms

The article "Value Education as propagated by Radhoni Singh Berry Kharwanlang" by Bijoya Sawian that appeared in the Shillong Times on May 16, 2023 is a timely reminder of the values and etiquette that are cherished by the Khasi tribe. The article is about the book Ki Jingsong Tyamnam, which is written in poetic form. Much of this book, seemingly for children and youth, contains enduring wisdom and counsel.

But some of it is woefully out of date and cringing out of sync with social norms that are now universally accepted. Two examples of archaic mindsets that appear prominently in the book is the attitude to women and to persons with disability. Such prejudices militate against an equitable and inclusive society.

Listen to this verse that is harsh and cruel to persons with disabilities, "When you are pregnant, it is a law, not to look at the unborn child with love, or the unborn child will surely be affected. The personality of the person, will, on the baby, be affected" (Verse 31 Part II). According to the book, handicapped

persons must be excluded from religious rites and government.

Several passages are severely misogynistic. Verse 8 of Part II says, "Listen children, let me now relate, who to avoid, for one's welfare, one's advantage. A woman who does not have a feminine mind... Widows who no children have borne... Those unfortunate ones who are childless and barren, they're also unfiling 'em if they're virgins." This particular passage condemns certain women to discrimination and victimization. How is it their fault if they don't look womanly or cannot bear children? The closing lines of this passage states a further unjust punishment, that such women "must never be present in religious matters and administration".

Verse 42 says, "Don't give a woman too much freedom. Her womanly grace will degenerate. She won't realise what is wrong, what is right. Don't give her too much liberty, for she may lose her dignity." How come such admonitions are not applied to men. Such thoughts are unacceptable and must not be passed on to children. By the way, certain kinds of men are also condemned, including men without monogamy.

Such prohibitions are hard to accept, and are often passed on to the next generation. Surely, we must engage with and change some of the traditional mindsets for the good of our society. Yours etc., K.L. Lyngdoh, Via email

Salt of the Earth

Editor, Indian Railways are the "Life-line of the Nation." It is fair to say that River Uniam and its Dam are the "Life of Meghalaya." Dams play an extremely important role in flood control, power supply, dams generally were built to store and provide water for mechanical power generation (e.g., waterwheels, industrial cooling, hydroelectric power generation, irrigation, municipal water supplies and impoundment-based recreation like boating and fishing). However, they also pose significant threats to the downstream areas and damages include the replacement costs of residential, commercial, and industrial property as well as infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and utility lines. They also pose a huge threat to the economy. Despite the increasing safety of dams resulting from improved engineering knowledge and better construction quality, a full non-risk guarantee is

not possible, and accidents may occur owing to natural hazard or human actions. Even on younger or modern dams can lead to disaster. Recovery costs will be huge, considering the impact on housing, infrastructure, utilities, health, environment, and cultural heritage. Lessons should be learned from previous dam failures and their aftermath. Ageing dams have various structural and hydrological deficiencies; their strengths do not remain the same or strong enough, especially when an earthquake of high magnitude occurs. Loss of lives cannot be compensated. It is also not right to make a blanket statement saying all dams have outlived their purpose. Assessments should be made by reviewing dams that have reached 50-60 years of age. Therefore, the Dam Safety Act 2021 is a welcome step in this direction. It is also fair to say that "soil and water are the life of the earth," and we humans are, "the salt of the earth."

Yours etc., D Pakyotin, Shillong-4

Of prejudiced views

Editor, I have for long been a reader of The Shillong Times

A US\$ 10 billion economy gimmick

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

Meghalaya's US\$ 10 billion economy is capital. Where will the money come from? It is no surprise that CM Conrad Sangma has approached and is planning to further approach the centre for more centrally sponsored schemes. The gimmick is at the mercy of the central government. While capital investment is the key, other areas of natural resources, education and governance are equally important. Tourism (contributing around



7% to the GDP) is now seen as the driver of growth. As tourism in Meghalaya is nature-based, the manner in which the resources are destructed raises questions on how much and for how long it can continue to contribute towards growth. The natural resources are not being used effectively and sustainably. For example, the possible human resource which is empowered through proper health and education. The education is contemporary to the times and supported with an infrastructural ecosystem which nurtures growth. The development regulations are progressive on the back of a stable and visionary government. If the determinants are in place then growth would be automatic. Instead of focussing on the US\$ 10 billion it would be better to start by assessing the ground reality. Stop the vicious cycle of taking new loans to service the old ones. Invest the new loans on building infrastructure like roads and bridges, not on vanities such as festivals. For example, if a loan is used to build infrastructure then the benefits would be long-term, but, if it is used in festivals, etc. the results would be over-heating of the economy (hyper-inflation). The biggest limitation to

"As tourism in Meghalaya is nature-based, the manner in which the resources are destructed raises questions on how much and for how long it can continue to contribute towards growth. The natural resources are not being used effectively and sustainably."

The result is underutilization of potential with extensive destruction of environment. Education is critical for growth as once the people are educated the interface with the government improves. The people become more knowledgeable and aware of the policies and schemes. For example, it is found that the educated lot in the villages feel more empowered to visit the block offices for schemes. This is required to happen on a larger scale.

and my interest has been the letters published there because they reflect the diverse views of a cross section of the Shillong populace. One person who expresses his views regularly is Salil Grewal. For a while now I have noticed his righteous leanings but this came to the fore when he penned the letter praising the film The Kerala Story directed by Sudipto Sen and produced by Vipul Amrutlal Shah. He even warned people that they might get wooed by some Muslims in what is called the "Love Jihad." The bluff of the director and producer has been called out by people who asked them where they got the data from on the number of young girls lured into the love jihad trap. The director and producer gave usishy/washy answers. In the film they claim that over 3000 girls have fallen into the trap of Muslim men who forcibly marry them to populate the Hindu headline. Those who know say that there are just about three girls who might have been lured into the love jihad angle. The director and producer and now man and nature to answer queries. This film tries to mimic the Vivek Anshoori blockbuster "The Kashmir Files" but did not succeed because everyone has seen through the ruse.

On May 17, Grewal wrote another letter whose

is not pushed at all, whereas, coal mining which would benefit a few and at the cost of the environment and may be more lives is hurriedly pushed along to completion. It is apparent that MDA 2.0 is only interested in achieving US\$ 10 billion goal. How would it be achieved, would it be holistic, what would its impacts be, are not subject-matters of consideration.

There is inequality in Meghalaya which has stemmed from inequity. With 40% of the population being below the poverty line, a strategy is needed on how this doubling of GDP would carry all in its fold. As of today it can be argued that it would include and benefit only a few. With big business people and politicians owning and controlling majority of the capital resources, plus a government which is bent on benefiting only those who are in their good books, schemes only for those who voted for them, this US\$ 10 billion gimmick might turn out as a disaster for the majority.

The way forward is to conduct a proper base-line assessment to understand the demographics and socio-economic status of the people. This is to be tagged with goals of sustaining and reclaiming the environmental resources. Start from the bottom up. The top-down approach of policy making does not work. Make policies and schemes by interaction with all the grassroots stakeholders. They are the ones who can really give correct and tangible inputs on how a policy might be shaped. Then we may have a practical, workable and people friendly policy. Then only those who are equity whereby those who need more help will get more assistance and vice versa. Meghalaya development has to ensure equal distribution of benefits to equitable distribution. For example, schemes with subsidy may be designed in such a way that the really poor may be entitled to a greater share of subsidy. Have more of an affirmative action in the entire process.

In the end, the talk so far by the government is only on economic growth, but, growth is not development. Development is holistic encompassing social, cultural, empowerment, etc. aspects. MDA 2.0 is silent on this front.

(The writer teaches at NEHU; Email - benjamin@mlu.edu.in)

"Congress victory should ensure a better tomorrow." A first glance one thought that Grewal was actually lauding the Congress for their resounding victory in Karnataka. But that was not to be. I am not sure what sources Grewal used but he says that after the Congress won the elections there were shouts of Pakistan Zindabad. How does Grewal know that these shouts were not orchestrated by rivals of the Congress who found the bitter pill of losing the Karnataka polls too hard to swallow.

One does not expect such prejudiced views which are steeped in right wing ideology from someone who claims to be an intellectual and whose book is ostensibly prescribed in some foreign university and who also identifies himself as a member of an International Human Rights Organization. How does anyone who claims to be a human rights activist be so ideologically wedded to the BJP ideology? I needed to call out this hypocrisy hence this letter.

Yours etc., Eugenia Kharkongor, Via email

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

Karnataka: A thumping victory and some concerns

By Ajit Ranade

It is a record broken after thirty-four years. Both in terms of numbers of seats and vote share, the Congress Party's victory in the elections to the State Assembly of Karnataka is the highest it has been in the past thirty-four years. It is a decisive and sweeping mandate with a record voter turnout of 72 percent. There will be endless analyses of the factors and players who contributed to this thumping victory. Was it a severe case of anti-incumbency? Karnataka has never returned an incumbent back to power since 1985. Was it because of disgust against the corruption captured by the phrase, "40 percent commission"? Was it because of an excessive focus on issues touching religious fault lines? Was it your vitiger with hate speech? These are all negative motivator factors.

What about the positive motivators that led to this victory? Was it the five-guarantees that the Congress manifesto mentioned? These were about free power, guaranteed minimum income, free food and free bus passes, and unemployment insurance. Some of these promises sound like freebies and some-like social protection.

The latter is needed, and the former is troublesome. In the end, this debate about causative factors will never be conclusive. All factors surely mattered to some extent. And the voters as always are influenced more by emotive factors than rational, economic or objective factors. This is a feature of all political elections in India.

But there is one aspect of the outcome which should worry us all. It is about the rise of criminal elements. If anything, it calls for an urgent need for reforms which can cleanse the electoral process. The share of winning candidates who have pending criminal cases has jumped sharply from 35 percent in 2018 to 55 percent. The rising share cuts across political parties. Of these 55 percent newly elected legislators, even if one looks at those with only serious criminal cases, the trend is alarming. That share of winning candidates has gone up from 24 to 32 percent. The serious cases are those related to murder, assault, kidnap and rape or economic offences. These are non-bailable offences, which attract a maximum punishment of 5 years or more.

The law is clear about the definition of what constitutes a "crime." These are not merely the filing of a complaint, or a First Information Report (FIR) with the police. The criminal cases are the outcome of a competent magistrate applying his or her judicial mind, and then framing charges. Of course, a person is innocent until proven guilty. Only convicted persons are barred from contesting elections. And that too if the conviction is not under appeal in a higher court. Pending cases can go on for years and years in the appeal process.

Hence the electoral law as it stands has failed to keep criminal elements out of our State legislatures and parliament. Prime Minister Modi in his maiden speech in the Rajya Sabha in June 2014 had expressed great anguish about this issue. He had said that cleansing the polity of criminal elements would be a top priority and asked the courts to fast track these particular cases. But no law has been passed for disqualification. The issue of disqualifying candidates

with criminal backgrounds has been discussed for more than three decades. The 170th report of the fifteenth law commission under Justice Jeevan Reddy in 1999 had submitted reforms to disqualify candidates. The 244th report of the twentieth law commission under Justice A.P. Shah had very detailed proposals for disqualifying criminal candidates. This report was submitted in February 2014. Much earlier, a committee led by Home Secretary N.N. Vohra had submitted report on the criminalisation of politics in October 1993. It is thus clear that at least since the early 1990's the issue of a criminal taint to politics has been of great concern to everyone. And yet the share of those with criminal backgrounds keeps rising.

This is a phenomenon seen in Parliament as well as the State legislatures. There is no denying that the people keep electing those with criminal backgrounds, so what can we do. Last month a gangster turned politician and his brother were shot dead by vigilantes while in police custody, and before television cameras that recorded the killings. That was wrong. Extra-judicial killings and vigilantism need to be condemned. But it is also a matter of concern that the person was a member of parliament once and had been elected to the UP assembly a total of five times.

The problem of cleansing politics has a supply side and a demand side. The latter aspect means that voters need to choose clean candidates. Demand for tainted politicians should decrease. Voters should firmly reject anyone with a criminal background. However, there is also a supply problem. How can we have any "clean" choices on the ballot list. What if all the candidates contesting for a constituency are tainted? Here comes the supply side solution. We need to put a bar on criminal candidates from contesting elections. The right to contest is not a fundamental right as per the constitution. And if the concern is that the cases against them are false cases, then their names should be cleared by the courts. Politicians complain about the politics of vendetta, where ruling parties slap false cases against opposition members.

The Justice Shah committee has specified safeguards against such a possibility in their reform recommendations of 2014. It is time that voters must insist that the mere disclosure of criminal cases is not enough. We need to move from disclosure to disqualification. The disclosure (via self-sworn affidavits) law came in 2003. More than twenty years have passed but the share of criminal elements is rising relentlessly. It is time we passed a strict law, as per the recommendation of the Law Commission's report of 2014, to debar criminal candidates from contesting. There are other electoral reforms needed too, relating to transparency in political financing, in engineering inner party democracy and also subjecting political parties to the Right to Information Act. But surely the most urgent need is to bar, at least those with serious criminal cases against them, from getting a ticket. Surely a nation of 1.3 billion can find a few thousand clean and non-criminal legislators.

(Dr. Ajit Ranade is a noted economist) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

"Depression begins with disappointment. When disappointment festers in our soul, it leads to discouragement."

— Joyce Meyer

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Cornering of Imran

PAKISTAN appears to be at the edge of a precipice. The political and military brass are targeting former Prime Minister Imran Khan who has been out of office since April last year. He's fearing not just his arrest but also liquidation as had often happened to former rulers there at the hands of the military or other stakeholders. The police having surrounded his home in Lahore, Khan spoke of the emergence of a situation similar to the East Pakistan upheaval of the 1970s leading up to the division of Pakistan and creation of Bangladesh. Almost the entire leadership of his Tehreek-e-Insaf party has been put under arrest as also thousands of his activists after last week's protests followed by Khan's dramatic arrest in a corruption case - and his subsequent release by the Supreme Court. Khan fears his party itself might be banned on the grounds of violence against the army, at the precise time when his popularity graph is at a high. While the establishment's stated aim is to fix men who had attacked the army in street violence last week, it would appear that this is part of a larger conspiracy.

The street violence in Pakistan happened alongside the ongoing massive rebellions in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by separatist groups set against the Pakistani establishment. The Sindh and Punjab provinces, the base of Pakistan's traditional ruling/political class, is the only region where the situation had remained under control. Prime Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif and the Nawaz Sharif family are at the receiving end of the people's anger over the worsening economic situation and resultant woes in their lives. An IMF bailout is the only hope for the nation embedded in a deep economic crisis. Amid all these crises, Pakistani elections might not occur in the near future also as Khan's popularity was at 61 per cent against Nawaz Sharif's and foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Sardari's 36 per cent.

Corruption in the Pakistani army is legion over the past many years. It is no secret that the loot by the Pakistani generals as also top politicians are parked in tax havens abroad and in investment in the UAE. The Surgical Strike and the February 2019 Balakot bombing by the Indian military - in retaliation to the terror activities by Pakistani agents and the Pulwama attack on CRPF convoy in Kashmir - shamed the Pakistani Army's top brass. To rebuild their stature, the generals there are now playing the Islamic card and seeking to take on Imran Khan by stressing that any attack on the military is tantamount to an attack on the Islamic traditions of the country.

Letters in the Editor

MDA Govt, don't take the public for granted

The Cabinet has discussed the Roster System on the May 17 and will be discussing it again in the All-Party Meeting slated for the May 19, this is far from over. The movement against the retrospective implementation of the Roster System and for the review of the State Reservation Policy of 1972, led by VPP is gaining momentum. I do hope that the government will take timely and appropriate decision and not wait for the movement to take on epic proportions and blow into a full scale public anger, particularly in Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Ri-Bhoi areas as it is going to be detrimental to the peace and tranquility in the State. The Roster System is not rocket science and can be made comprehensible in tabular form. Starting from May 26, 2022, the day the Roster System was notified in the Gazette of Meghalaya, a brand new and fresh model roster of 100/200/500 etc. points (each point representing a post) showing the points to be reserved for different categories to be appointed by direct recruitment to posts and services in the State of Meghalaya is not rocket science and can be made comprehensible in tabular form. Starting from May 26, 2022, the day the Roster System was notified in the Gazette of Meghalaya, a brand new and fresh model roster of 100/200/500 etc. points (each point representing a post) showing the points to be reserved for different categories to be appointed by direct recruitment to posts and services in the State of Meghalaya is not rocket science and can be made comprehensible in tabular form. Starting from May 26, 2022, the day the Roster System was notified in the Gazette of Meghalaya, a brand new and fresh model roster of 100/200/500 etc. points (each point representing a post) showing the points to be reserved for different categories to be appointed by direct recruitment to posts and services in the State of Meghalaya is not rocket science and can be made comprehensible in tabular form. Starting from May 26, 2022, the day the Roster System was notified in the Gazette of Meghalaya, a brand new and fresh model roster of 100/200/500 etc. points (each point representing a post) showing the points to be reserved for different categories to be appointed by direct recruitment to posts and services in the State of Meghalaya is not rocket science and can be made comprehensible in tabular form.

Something dreadfully wrong with our lives

By Patricia Mukhim

There has to be something seriously wrong with our lives when students attending post graduate classes remain completely silent and ask not a single question to ask after a presentation and one that is provocative. This culture of silence however is part of the social norm of the Khasis. The reason? Right from the time when kids are growing up they are told never to ask too many questions, not to question elders and to take everything they say as nuggets of wisdom. Family conversations are stilted and rare. No wonder when we do question governments and institutions we do so as a crowd. Individual questioning is hardly ever seen because we are ever so afraid of making public our personal opinions.

It is my experience that if one makes a presentation anywhere else outside Meghalaya one would be bombarded with questions galore. Some students would even challenge the presenter but not here in our State. It makes one wonder whether it is even worth preparing for a presentation which students are obviously not interested in. Or does the problem lie somewhere else? On two occasions I have noticed students leaning on their friends and sleeping through the presentation right from the start. If the students were to drift off to sleep midway one could do a course correction and jerk them up with some dramatic in-classroom joke or a very provocative question but that's not the case. These students were already sleepy when the best they could have done is to leave the session and go home to sleep. Period.

But why are students listless and drowsy in the morning? Have teachers asked themselves this question? The reality is that we are at a very difficult juncture in our social history today. As tribes we wish to cling on to the past lest we lose our identity yet modernity draws us to its lap and cajoles us like a mother who does not want to be weaned by her child. We are wooed by gadgets and that single gadget that fits in our palm has become the be all and end all of our lives. There is no time for serious or even playful conversation at home. We are hooked to the smartphone that has reduced us to unsmart junks. Young people across ages and some adults prefer to spend time with their smartphones rather than engage with real humans, unless the return is a lover. The smartphone is perhaps a non-

threatening space where the youth prefer to hide behind. So friendly are they with the gadget that they cling on to it far into the night and are hooked to it even past midnight and into the wee hours. By the time they sleep it is well past the time when the body clock ticks to tell us we should sign off and shut our eyes and minds so that we recover our energies. But who listens?

Come morning, the youth either has to attend school, college or university. At 7 am they are just unable to drag themselves out of bed even while exasperated parents yell at them to get

ready and get out to their school/college/university on time. Those who are already working drag themselves out somehow only to reach their place of work after 10 am. But the mind is far from being able to absorb anything. It is yearning for sleep. All the teaching goes over their heads. Nothing registers. Marks drop; performance is mediocre and at the end of term they miss their goals by a huge gap. This is what life has become for many young people.

How do we deal with this crisis? Is there any institution that can detox the mind from the newest drug, the smartphone? Its pointlessness to expect parents to do it. Many families are disoriented because children are sulking at their parents for not letting them use the smartphone. With college and university students, it is very obvious that parents can do because the excuse is that there's a lot of referencing to be done from online sources. When parents do not let their children use the smartphone, they have little else to do but trust their children even when what's happening in the study room has nothing to do with education. This is a soft point that the youth consumes. Very soon it becomes an addiction.

No wonder teachers sense a complete lack of interest among students for any serious presentation on an issue, even one that directly affects their lives. Several studies have of course been conducted on the impact of smartphone addiction on young people. HMC Psychiatry, an open access peer review of journal which analysed 41 studies involving 4,200 young people in an investigation into "problematic smartphone usage," found that 23% had behaviour that was consistent with addiction. This included anxiety over not being able to use smartphones; not being able to moderate the time spent and using the mobile phone to the point when it had begun to negatively affect other activities. The mobile phone has brought about a planetary re-wiring of human interaction. In fact, smartphone use has transformed peer relationships, family relationships and the tone, tenor and texture of daily life for everyone including those that don't own a phone or have social media accounts. However, research will reveal that the number of people without smartphones is on the decline. Most people even in distant villages consume news on their smartphones and they did so even before the pandemic induced lockdown.

A rare student who still believes in chatting and laughing over jokes with friends says that it is now very hard to strike up a casual conversation in the cafeteria. The phone is what everyone is staring down at that has become harder to confide in friends and try to relate to. The smartphone with them because they are distracted by every ping, every vibration that alerts them to a notification on their phone. "Reclaiming Conversation," Sherry Turkle writes, "life with smartphones means 'we are forever elsewhere.' And we are never in the moment."

One of the most interesting aspects of this crisis is that it is not just a cultural phenomenon but a social one. A race is identified by the food habit, the attire, the language, the culture, the social system, the kinship and the geographical location etc. Devoid of these characteristics a person morally disqualifies himself/herself of his/her ethnicity. We must not deviate from our roots; as the famous saying goes "Think globally act locally".

Fortunately now we have an act of law that bans any action that overturns these traditions. Certain individuals in our jaijymbew behave as divine messengers and feebly justify such acts as though they were inspired by the divine and their ancestors may be kind and loving. It is doubtful if these individuals were permitted by the concerned Dorbar Kurto impose their clan's name on the North East etc., while the Patrilineal-Patriarchal system. When one steers away from the above it only signifies one's disrespect and disregard for his own clan and tradition. It further indicates the willful desire of such a person to jump out of the ambit of his/her lineage. It is doubtful if these individuals were permitted by the concerned Dorbar Kurto impose their clan's name on the North East etc., while the Patrilineal-Patriarchal system. When one steers away from the above it only signifies one's disrespect and disregard for his own clan and tradition. It further indicates the willful desire of such a person to jump out of the ambit of his/her lineage.

We must salute the champions of the lineage Act of 1997. Had they not been fought-off by now we would have

The deep connect and sense of community has dwindled in college and university campuses. A University teacher says that often when he would arrive a little early for a lecture, he would find students sitting in the classroom in complete silence, each absorbed in their smartphones. Such students apparently are afraid to speak and be heard by their peers. As a result, the students are further isolated and their self-identity and confidence suffers. Needless to say most young people and adults as well are glued to their social media accounts. And of all the social media platforms, Instagram is the most popular because the young show off their dresses, their figures, the places they visit; the celebrities they meet and the eating places they frequent.

Studies by social psychologists Jonathan Haidt have found that as Instagram grew in popularity over the decades, it had particularly strong effect on girls and young women, inviting them to "compare and despair" as they scrolled through posts from friends and strangers showing faces, bodies and lives that had been edited and re-edited until many were close to perfection than to reality. But as of now no one can wean the youth away from Instagram. It happens to be the most popular medium for those not interested in politics and political grandstanding. All of that is for the Twitterati crowd which is also a bit of a highbrow crowd more intellectually inclined. Very few if any college and university students have a Twitter account.

That smartphones impact mood disorders, emotional fluctuation, poor family relationships is a reality today. Most young people don't communicate with their families today. And yet there is no reason to be no cure to this addiction. What's dangerous is that this will affect the ability to think on one's feet; the quick thinking needed for problem solving because the brain has become lethargic. We need sharp, intelligent young people with the reasoning skills to unbundle problems but if they don't get enough sleep their brains refuse to perform to its optimum. What happens then? What sort of future are we looking at? It's imperative for educationists and health scientists to do a deep dive on this issue because we can only ignore it at our own peril.

been trampled upon by the empty vessels that make much noise. Later, we rarely hear of the religious practices of interring the bones of the deceased at designated "Mawshiyeng(s)" of the specific clans which is now followed only by a few from the indigenous faiths. Had these happened in the past the mortal remains (bones) of the ones who violate any of the above might even be denied a place at such Mawshiyeng(s).

I earnestly urge upon the "Kur(s) of the Briu Hymhew Trep not to condone such acts that will adulterate the entire ethos of our Matrilineal System. On the side lines, I further urge upon the Kur(s) to shelve upon themselves the responsibility to correct the wrongs done in the past with regards to the proper spelling of their Clan names and other similar things for such fancy endeavours might mislead the future generation.

Yours etc, D Pynqong, Shillong - 6

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Dejected, yet Northeast Bengalis confide in pluralism

By Sahyasachi Roy

Hope, vis-a-vis, fear of exclusion encompasses the life of the Bengalis of Northeast India, in the seemingly present predicament. A University teacher says that often when he would arrive a little early for a lecture, he would find students sitting in the classroom in complete silence, each absorbed in their smartphones. Such students apparently are afraid to speak and be heard by their peers. As a result, the students are further isolated and their self-identity and confidence suffers. Needless to say most young people and adults as well are glued to their social media accounts. And of all the social media platforms, Instagram is the most popular because the young show off their dresses, their figures, the places they visit; the celebrities they meet and the eating places they frequent.

Studies by social psychologists Jonathan Haidt have found that as Instagram grew in popularity over the decades, it had particularly strong effect on girls and young women, inviting them to "compare and despair" as they scrolled through posts from friends and strangers showing faces, bodies and lives that had been edited and re-edited until many were close to perfection than to reality. But as of now no one can wean the youth away from Instagram. It happens to be the most popular medium for those not interested in politics and political grandstanding. All of that is for the Twitterati crowd which is also a bit of a highbrow crowd more intellectually inclined. Very few if any college and university students have a Twitter account.

That smartphones impact mood disorders, emotional fluctuation, poor family relationships is a reality today. Most young people don't communicate with their families today. And yet there is no reason to be no cure to this addiction. What's dangerous is that this will affect the ability to think on one's feet; the quick thinking needed for problem solving because the brain has become lethargic. We need sharp, intelligent young people with the reasoning skills to unbundle problems but if they don't get enough sleep their brains refuse to perform to its optimum. What happens then? What sort of future are we looking at? It's imperative for educationists and health scientists to do a deep dive on this issue because we can only ignore it at our own peril.

been trampled upon by the empty vessels that make much noise. Later, we rarely hear of the religious practices of interring the bones of the deceased at designated "Mawshiyeng(s)" of the specific clans which is now followed only by a few from the indigenous faiths. Had these happened in the past the mortal remains (bones) of the ones who violate any of the above might even be denied a place at such Mawshiyeng(s).

of Sylhet with the newly formed Assam Province (1874) after being carved out of the Bengal Presidency, followed by Partition of Sylhet (1947), enactment of the State Official Language Act (1960), language movement and the demand for implementation of Article 6 of the Assam Accord (2020) - this multidimensional scenario has affected the deviation from the crux of stability of the Bengalis in Assam.

But it should not have been like that. Since independence Assam was considered as a multilingual state. The Bengalis, who had been the majority in the region, had been repeatedly scratched and inked over the course of time. It had been the Suma Valley Division during the British period, because Cachar district was separated from Sylhet. Later the region was divided into three districts and got its own identity as Barak Valley. It was to be believed that the land, which had been so seriously scarred in post, found in this manner a rather semblance of its former self. Unfortunately, the political history of the valley has failed to play a supportive role in making the natural or economic aspects subsequently. As a result, it has not been possible to take full advantage of the socio-cultural and linguistic tradition of the region.

When the Barak Valley, which is the heartland of Northeast Bengalis, is engulfed in such uncertainty, the situation prevailing in the region is not only bleak but also deplorable. Bengalis are a minority in the Northeast, except in Barak Valley, where they are the majority. The religious divide is prominently visible. This something is consequent upon the failure to establish a firm control on this linguistic minority of the region. So far, Bengalis have not been able to understand the reasons for what they did, they are unable to get out of it. Despite these multidimensional impulses emanating from the political arena, the Bengalis of Barak Valley are celebrating May 19, keeping faith on their motto to enter pluralism, not seeking hand with separatist forces. The Bengalis have created the glorious history on 21 February 1952, subsequently forming the independent Bangladesh in 1971. February 21 was a successful attempt to establish language as the basis of religious narrowness. As a result of this, the independent Bangladesh state was made a universal state using out of these is constantly slamming back at the Bengalis. One of the causes of this is that the Bengalis have not grasped it, or have neglected to grasp it and as such have pushed themselves into such a scathing situation.

This picture is common throughout the country, but is distinctly visible in Northeast India, which is the third home of the Bengalis. Although Bengalis are a minority in the rest of the Northeastern states except in Tripura, they are contributing immensely to the socio-economic development of these states. Unfortunately, in these states now their roots are being uprooted. They are tagged with pejorative like 'Foreigner', 'Chuspia' or even 'lemie'. Here they are marginalised and the main reason for this contracting social identity is, of course, their linguist identity. Excluding Tripura and Assam, the Bengali population in the remaining five states is less than 10 percent (65 percent in Tripura, 29 percent in Assam). And, in those states, there is little opportunity for cultivating Bengali language and culture. In Assam too, the socio-economic and political position of Bengalis is not very bright. Amalgima-

tion of Sylhet with the newly formed Assam Province (1874) after being carved out of the Bengal Presidency, followed by Partition of Sylhet (1947), enactment of the State Official Language Act (1960), language movement and the demand for implementation of Article 6 of the Assam Accord (2020) - this multidimensional scenario has affected the deviation from the crux of stability of the Bengalis in Assam. But it should not have been like that. Since independence Assam was considered as a multilingual state. The Bengalis, who had been the majority in the region, had been repeatedly scratched and inked over the course of time. It had been the Suma Valley Division during the British period, because Cachar district was separated from Sylhet. Later the region was divided into three districts and got its own identity as Barak Valley. It was to be believed that the land, which had been so seriously scarred in post, found in this manner a rather semblance of its former self. Unfortunately, the political history of the valley has failed to play a supportive role in making the natural or economic aspects subsequently. As a result, it has not been possible to take full advantage of the socio-cultural and linguistic tradition of the region. When the Barak Valley, which is the heartland of Northeast Bengalis, is engulfed in such uncertainty, the situation prevailing in the region is not only bleak but also deplorable. Bengalis are a minority in the Northeast, except in Barak Valley, where they are the majority. The religious divide is prominently visible. This something is consequent upon the failure to establish a firm control on this linguistic minority of the region. So far, Bengalis have not been able to understand the reasons for what they did, they are unable to get out of it. Despite these multidimensional impulses emanating from the political arena, the Bengalis of Barak Valley are celebrating May 19, keeping faith on their motto to enter pluralism, not seeking hand with separatist forces. The Bengalis have created the glorious history on 21 February 1952, subsequently forming the independent Bangladesh in 1971. February 21 was a successful attempt to establish language as the basis of religious narrowness. As a result of this, the independent Bangladesh state was made a universal state using out of these is constantly slamming back at the Bengalis. One of the causes of this is that the Bengalis have not grasped it, or have neglected to grasp it and as such have pushed themselves into such a scathing situation. This picture is common throughout the country, but is distinctly visible in Northeast India, which is the third home of the Bengalis. Although Bengalis are a minority in the rest of the Northeastern states except in Tripura, they are contributing immensely to the socio-economic development of these states. Unfortunately, in these states now their roots are being uprooted. They are tagged with pejorative like 'Foreigner', 'Chuspia' or even 'lemie'. Here they are marginalised and the main reason for this contracting social identity is, of course, their linguist identity. Excluding Tripura and Assam, the Bengali population in the remaining five states is less than 10 percent (65 percent in Tripura, 29 percent in Assam). And, in those states, there is little opportunity for cultivating Bengali language and culture. In Assam too, the socio-economic and political position of Bengalis is not very bright. Amalgima-

On using the clan name

Editor, (It is discourteous to be in

"Flatter: corrupts both the receiver and the giver."

— Edmund Burke

**The Shillong Times**

**Ultimatums not the option**

ON the Roster System the Voice of People's Party (VPP) is riding a tiger from which it would be difficult to dismount. A lot is at stake insofar as the Roster System for the State Reservation Policy implemented in Meghalaya is concerned. For political parties looking for an issue to curry favour with a section of constituents and with an eye on the 2024 District Council elections and perhaps even the Lok Sabha elections the Roster System first pointed out by the Meghalaya High Court comes as a god-send. But at this critical juncture statesmanship is called for rather than political brinkmanship. The propensity to make political capital out of an issue that threatens to divide the three tribes is uncalculated. But for a people governed largely by rhetoric and emotions any appeal to reason is futile.

Let's face it the Government of Meghalaya too was taken by surprise at the non-maintenance of a Roster System to keep a record of the seats availed by the tribes for which they were reserved and also whether the unreserved seats (15%) too were filled up. At the moment the focus seems to be on whether the seats reserved for the Khasi-Jaintia community would henceforth be availed of by those from the Garo community or the minor tribes, or the unreserved categories of people who could not avail of their share of reserved seats for reasons beyond their control. To do so with retrospective effect would be a no-brainer since there have been several notifications from time to time to maintain an equilibrium and fill in vacancies that require to be filled up for the purpose of smooth governance. These notifications have come not just within the state government but also from the Centre when seats for certain categories of backward tribes and castes were raised and in other cases subtracted, depending upon how many from that section of population have benefited from the reservation policy and which are the previously unreserved categories of backward tribes/castes that need reservation to be able to come up to fill up vacancies in the government sector.

Today there is a new reserved category of people who fall under the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) for whom 10% reservation is granted over and above the existing 50% reservation for SC/ST/OBC categories. This was contested by several groups in the Supreme Court but the matter was finally laid to rest in November 2022 when the apex court upheld that the 103rd constitutional amendment of the Constitution for providing legal sanction to carve out 10% reservation for the economically weaker sections from unreserved classes for admission in educational institutions and government jobs is just and equitable. The Supreme Court ruled that the 50% cap on quota is not violative and affirmative action on economic basis may go a long way in eradicating caste-based reservation. This constitutional amendment pushed the total reservation to 59.50% in central institutions. Reservations therefore are not meant to be static and not a right to be claimed to perpetuity.

**Letters to the Editor**

**Roster for reservation of vacancies/posts for SC & ST**

may be, had already lapsed and even records of unfilled and carried forward posts may not be available? Yours etc, A. Pyral, Shillong-14

**Passion with a Mission**

Editor, I was hoping, may rather expecting someone to respond to the letter captioned: 'Of educational structure & learning quality', (ST May 6, 2023) by a teacher who had no option but to request anonymity because the rules bound him/her to do so. Nevertheless, the writer must be commended for the observations expressed which are spot on and hard hitting. It exposes the underbelly of the failings and shortcomings of school education! Yet politicians blather about the changes and the plans of action they are going to initiate in addressing all educational matters. What vexes me is that politicians say the right things, especially to the public at school celebrations, conferences and meetings. Hopelines, excitement is high. But then they drag their feet when it comes to implementation of what is promised. No clarity and commitment is ever made in a time bound measure! This

**Khasi-Jaintia and Karbi: A shared bond**

By Bhogoram Mawroh

The recent conflict between the Khasi-Jaintia and the Karbi people is not the first to have occurred in recent times. Although I am forgetting the exact year, tensions between the two groups flared up when I was doing my PhD at NEHU as well. At the time I was staying in the hostel, and one evening all the residents were asked to come to the hostel parlour. A policeman asked if there were any Karbi students. They were concerned that, given the tensions between the two communities, there might be an attempt to target Karbi students on campus. To the relief of the police, there were no Karbi students in our hostel, and we were sent back to our rooms.

The conflict abated soon after, and I did meet some Karbi students later on. In fact, some were my juniors in the PhD programme, and there were some whom I taught during my stint as a guest lecturer in my department. One of the students whose Masters' thesis I was supervising happened to be a half-Karbi student from Ri Bhoi. The topic was how language change was taking place in a particular village in Ri Bhoi, which, though initially pointed by a Karbi man, had switched to speaking Bhoi (a dialect different from the more commonly used Sohra dialect) as the main language in the village. As a matter of fact, I met a Karbi lady who first identified herself as a Bhoi; when prodded further, she revealed that she was a Karbi who had been married to a Bhoi. In her sixties, she told me that "a Bhoi is someone who takes the mother's surname, while a Karbi is someone who takes the father's surname". This particular Karbi lady had married a Bhoi man, and her children now have a Khasi surname. Though she still has Karbi surnames, she hardly communicates in Karbi anymore. With the Karbi people from other villages also, she converses in Bhoi, and she was not the only one.

Then I came across the book 'People of the Margins' by Philippe Ramirez. In his book, there was an interesting phenomenon of equivalence of surnames, which was quite common in Bhoi. In other words, a surname among the Bhoi is found to have an equivalent among the Karbi as well. For example, Ingli, Ronghang, Hlanse, Be, Inglang, Timung, and Teron were Karbi surnames, that were considered to be the same as Bhoi surnames, Mukhtik, Markhap, Khyndin, Muker, and so on.

Lamare, Syngkli, Umbah, and Myrsong respectively. This meant that following the rules of endogamy, marriages cannot take place within the equivalent clan across the ethnic categories. Therefore, an Ingli cannot marry a Mukhtik, and vice versa, because they, by logic of the equivalence of surname, belong to the same clan. The same is true with the other mentioned surnames as well. Following from this, the other important function of this system is that new members of a group can only be admitted into clans that already have established inter-ethnic affiliations. Similarly, when a Karbi decides to become a Khasi or the other way around, they can only do so by joining the surname that belongs to the same clan.

"There will definitely be anger at what both communities perceive to be injustice done to them, especially when someone is hurt or someone is admitted to the hospital after being injured in the clash. It is difficult to reconcile, especially when there is much anger and frustration. That is completely understandable."

across the two ethnic groups. Therefore, if a Teron were to become a Bhoi, he or she could only join the Myrsong clan and not the other. This works the other way around as well, i.e., if an Urbah were to become a Karbi, they could only join the Timung clan and not the other. Essentially, this means that there are Karbi who are actually Khasi and there are Khasi who are actually Karbi.

This close connection between the Khasi-Jaintia and Karbi is again seen in many cultural aspects as well. Again, among the Bhoi, there is the tradition of the wretiger or the tiger-man. Desmond L. Khasmarablang, Professor of Cultural and Creative Studies at NEHU, has done excellent work on this topic. According to his paper, "In Search of Tiger-men: The Wre-Tiger Tradition of the Khasis," there are men and women who are known as Khasi Phul, or tigers transforming from human to wre-tiger. Sometimes these creatures were referred to as San Sarang, meaning five claws, "in difference to the tiger from the Ryngkew tigers, or the real tigers, which were known as San Sarang," or the four-clawed ones.

I myself met a Bhoi man who told me of a story where the Karbi had killed a tiger in the jungle with a bullet

penetrating one of the animal's ears. In another village, a Bhoi man dropped dead suddenly in his home. While inspecting the body, people found that the dead man had the exact same bullet wound on the same ear as that of the tiger, proving that the tiger killed was actually a wre-tiger, with the man who had died being the one who had transformed into the animal.

Similar stories are there in Jaintia Hills as well. The 2011 article 'The Legend of the Tiger-Man' by III Mohren tells about the folklore of the Pnar/Jaintia about men who change their names into tigers (Bibhu Kyllu Khybi). According to the article, the Karbi also has a legend of a man who can

transform himself into a tiger, and he is known as Killing Chongkret. In fact, in 2007, Dhaninim Tiso, a Karbi film maker, brought out the movie Kangkon Killing Chongkret, which translates to 'My Dear Tiger-Man'.

Similarities or shared cultural features between the Khasi-Jaintia and the Karbi are seen in the traditional dresses as well. When I was passing through Dokmoka, a Karbi town on the way to Nagaland, I saw many women walking on the streets wearing what looked like the jainkyrsah. It is a piece of clothing worn by Khasi-Jaintia women as a drage over their traditional saris or even a shirt and skirt. This is usually worn by women during household work or when they go to the market. If it weren't for the colour and the patterns (which are quite bold and vibrant in the Karbi version), I would have mistaken the dress worn by the Karbi women for the jainkyrsah. The similarity, however, does not end with the women's dress.

Under the section 'Dress' in PRT Gurdon's 1914 seminal work 'The Khasis', there is a sketch of a Synteng (another name for the Pnar/Jaintia) man whose dress reminded me so much of the Karbi dress I have seen on the internet. It was not the black waistcoat that we see

today worn by Jaintia men during the traditional events, but a striped waistcoat very similar to the one found among the Karbi even today. The only thing that could identify the man as being Jaintia was the cap, which is also depicted as being worn by Kiang Nongbah in the portraits made of him. Karbi men, on the other hand, have a piece of cloth wrapped around their heads as a headband.

There is no doubt that the Khasi-Jaintia and the Karbi are distinct communities. The Khasi-Jaintia are matrilineal and speak an Austro-Asiatic language. Karbi, on the other hand, follow patrilineal custom, and their language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family. However, as can be seen from the above discussion, both groups share many cultural features, which include extended kinship relations among the two communities and similar folklore and beliefs. There is, however, also a history of hostility between the two communities, which resurfaces from time to time. However, what will not change is the living history of the shared bond among the Khasi-Jaintia and the Karbi, not just culturally but geographically as well.

Both communities have lived side-by-side with each other for many generations, and they will continue to do so in the future as well. There will definitely be anger at what both communities perceive to be injustice done to them, especially when someone's hut is burned down or someone is admitted to the hospital after being injured in the clash. It is difficult to reconcile, especially when there is much anger and frustration. That is completely understandable. But violence is not the solution. I, therefore, request that both communities come together and find common ground. No doubt, the two communities are sensitive zones. But that must have been the case in the past as well. Despite that, history has shown that both communities, the Khasi-Jaintia and Karbi, have been able to build connections with each other and thrive while living among and close to each other. Shared cultural features are a testament to that. It is that shared bond that I hope will characterise the relationship between the Khasi-Jaintia and Karbi, not just in the future as well. That is my sincere hope and request.

(The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organization or institution)

**Clinical Trials: Mistrust to trust**

By Dr. Caleb Harris & Dr. Fine One Laloo

May 20 is observed as International Clinical Trials Day. Theyear was 1714, Dr. James Lind, a naval surgeon and physician onboard the British Navy ship, HMS Salisbury, carried out the first controlled clinical trial ever recorded in medical science by taking 12 sailors suffering from bleeding gums and skin ulcers, divided them into six pairs and treated them with six different remedies. Among the six remedies, the duo treated with a quart of cider a day was well enough to nurse the others after a week. His paper 'Treatise of the Scurvy' was published in 1753. To commemorate the day that this clinical trial was started, the European Clinical Research Infrastructure Network (ECRIN) launched International Clinical Trials Day in 2005.

Clinical trials fall under the broad umbrella of Clinical research. All clinical trials are clinical research whereas all clinical research are not clinical trials. Clinical research ranges from a simple collection of personal information related to a disease, to using a new drug or treatment technique. Participating in clinical research is an altruistic and noble gesture because sometimes the trials that they are involved in may or may not be beneficial to the participants; however it helps researchers and doctors to subsequently treat the disease better, based on the data collected from the trial.

The public perception

regarding Clinical Trials is at times negative. Probably because some have not been ethically. The Nazi Human Experiments during World War II, has had a long and lasting negative impact for generations. German doctors subjected prisoners in the concentration camps to several harmful and pain-

ful experiments in the effort to discover new medicines for diseases. Post World War-II, the Nuremberg code was put into force which at its very core stresses on the voluntary consent of participants in the trial. Subsequently, the World Medical Association, in 1964, developed the Declaration of Helsinki wherein the basic principles include respect for individuals, the right to make informed decisions, recognition of vulnerable groups and more.

The 21st century saw the unprecedented growth of clinical trials regulations, monitoring and participation. With the advent of precision medicine, clinical trials have become mandatory for introducing new drugs. On this note, there have been wide misconceptions among the masses regarding how clinical trials are conducted. Once a drug has been tested in laboratory animals and has been proven to be safe and effective, a clinical trial is usually initiated in a small group of human volunteers. If found to be safe, it is then tried out in a larger number of patients to see if it is effective. There are several stringent rules and regulations put up by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and other regulatory bodies to safeguard the participants and

their rights. One of the main protective mechanisms is the Informed Consent Document (ICD). This contains all the details pertaining to the clinical research in an easily understandable language, including the benefits and risks of participation. A participant who consents to participate in a clinical trial can withdraw at any particular time without citing any reasons whatsoever and there will not be any retaliation directed towards them for withdrawing. The second is the Institutional Ethics Committee (IEC) which has to be mandatorily set up at all institutions involved in clinical research. The IEC is an independent entity chaired by someone from outside the research institute and International Clinical Trials Network (ICTN) is a project of Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) which falls under the Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. CTN aims at making the collaborating centres ready for Clinical Trials of major diseases which plague the state and the nation as a whole. Clinical trials for cancer have

been carried out for some years now. NIGRHIMS is looking forward to conducting ethically. The Nazi Human Experiments during World War II, has had a long and lasting negative impact for generations. German doctors subjected prisoners in the concentration camps to several harmful and pain-

ful experiments in the effort to discover new medicines for diseases. Post World War-II, the Nuremberg code was put into force which at its very core stresses on the voluntary consent of participants in the trial. Subsequently, the World Medical Association, in 1964, developed the Declaration of Helsinki wherein the basic principles include respect for individuals, the right to make informed decisions, recognition of vulnerable groups and more.

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to treat our patients may not be the best interests of our patients.

Many patients and caregivers consider clinical trials as something which is of no direct benefit to them and fraught with risks, but this is far from the truth. A clinical trial is performed under a controlled environment and hence the safety of the participant is given a lot of importance. All the necessary interventions are performed (extra) carefully, thereby minimizing the errors. Besides, several new drugs (which have been proven in other trials) may who otherwise not have access to such treatment. Usually free of cost.

Clinical Trials have transformed the way we treat patients and unless the participants are aware of the misconceptions how clinical trials are conducted. Misconceptions need to be cleared in order to enable us to move forward, with the single goal being to provide the best possible care for the sick.

(Dr. Fine One Laloo, Pharm.D. is Clinical Trial Coordinator, Department of Surgical Oncology, NIGRHIMS, Shillong). (Dr. Caleb Harris is Associate Professor and Head, Department of Surgical Oncology, NIGRHIMS, Shillong).

**Resolution versus Policy**

Editor, A Resolution is a plan sent to a meeting for discussion. Debate, approval and adapting. If the motion is approved by the members present at a meeting, it is referred to as a resolution. There are three forms of resolutions, (ordinary) adopted by a simple majority, special (adopted by three-fourths majority) and unanimous (unanimous in total agreement). State Resolutions are generally adopted by State Legislatures in the Legislative Assembly.

A policy is a system of guidelines to achieve rational outcomes, and is implemented as a procedure or protocol. Policies are generally adopted by the Government. Under the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act, 1969 (Act No. 5 of 1969) (29th December, 1969) Meghalaya was born as an Autonomous State on 21 April 1970, consisting of 41 Members, 38 Members indirectly elected and 3 members nominated. Meghalaya became a full-fledged State on 21st January 1972 and comprised 60 elected members. But the Resolution on job quota issued vide No.PER.222/71/38 Dated Shillong, the 12th January,

1972 was issued without proper procedure and method of identifying, the weakest of the weak, wherever they may be found among the populace. Hurriedly, it was issued (in 10 days) before the State of Meghalaya was officially formed on the midnight of January 20-21, 1972 and less than 2 (two) months before the first election which was held on 9th March, 1972. Moreover, it was not discussed, debated, voted, passed by the Autonomous State Legislature as empowered under article 16 clause 4 of the Constitution of India (strictly for reservation of posts). It was simply issued as a decision without adequate representation of these communities in the services under the autonomous State (not full-fledged State) of Meghalaya in terms of their population that for maintenance of efficiency in the administration. The old Resolution needs revision. Khasi, Jaintia and Karbi, let us stand together for the betterment of the State.

Yours etc, D. Pakyintin, Shillong-14

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

Your etc, Kevin Phillips Shillong - 19

# The travel trails of English women in the 19th century



(Clockwise from top) An illustration by Anna Forbes; Mary Kingsley's "Making a charm in the Upper Ogové Region in West Africa" and Isabella Bird's "Fujisan, from a village on the Tokaido".

By Victoria Puchal Terol

In recent years, a series of publications, anthologies and documentaries have revived the figure of the 19th century English woman traveller. On screen we can also see their lives adapted to neo-Victorian fictional characters. Generally, these protagonists are described as "rebellious", "intrepid", "ambitious", "brave", "queens" or even "adventurous". Their lives serve as inspiration for today's screenwriters and artists who, for some reason, are eager to show us a different version of women's history. For many, their stories are inspiring; for others, almost implausible. Women's Victorian woman very represented?

In general, the writings of these travellers reflect the experiences of women writers from a variety of backgrounds and social classes, although they tend to depict the experiences of the wealthy. This is due to the availability of these texts and the imprint these women have left on historiographical archives and on ourselves.

It is important to remember that our interpretations of their travels and experiences can be influenced by cultural and social bias, so it is necessary to take some distance when reading travel accounts written by nineteenth-century women. When we read their works, we are looking into the experiences and inner world of "one" woman, undeniably conditioned by her environment, her culture and her own history.

## VICTORIAN TRAVEL WRITING

During the 19th century, England was part of the British Empire. Travel was not only for pleasure, but also for conquest or exploration. Colonial travel was reserved for men, who had a more active role in spreading the Empire — they had to fight or participate in diplomatic missions abroad.

However, we tend to forget that British women also played a decisive role in this desire for conquest. They often travelled with their husbands, fathers or brothers to try to replicate English society in the colonial settlements. There they would create these nuclear families, surrounded by their sons and daughters, their servants (in the case of the wealthy classes) and their social events.

Of course, many of them also felt the desire to recount their experiences in the first person. These writings aroused much interest and were often published in newspapers and magazines.

We usually distinguish between two types of texts when talking about travel writing in the

19th century: on the one hand, texts of scientific rigour, usually dealing with socio-political issues and with anthropological overtones. On the other hand, lighter and observational texts, perhaps of an anecdotal nature. They reflected an alternative experience and dealt with lifestyle, people and generally mundane subjects.

## THOSE WHO DISCOVER AND THOSE WHO OBSERVE

As we can imagine, it was common to classify the writings of women travellers under the latter heading. In *Celebrated Women Travellers of the Nineteenth Century* (1882), one of the leading anthologies on women travellers of the nineteenth century, the writer William H.D. Adams differentiates between two broad categories of travellers: discoverers and observers.

Discoverers, according to Adams, enter regions previously unknown to civilisation, adding new lands to the maps. Observers, on the other hand, simply follow in the footsteps of their daring predecessors, gathering more accurate information. For Adams, women travellers of the time belonged to the latter category and could not compare with such great names of exploration as David Livingstone, Heinrich Barth, John Franklin or Charles Sturt.

Adams's impression illustrates very well the tendency to dismiss the work of nineteenth-century women travel writers. The gender ideology of the 19th century placed women in the private sphere and made it difficult to see the relationship between women and scientific, political or economic matters. In this way, an infantilised or unserious image of everything produced by women was perpetuated.

Moreover, we must remember that for many women access to "elite culture" was quite limited. Not all of them could receive more than an elementary education, nor did they have the time and resources to develop their interest in science.

## "ONLY A WOMAN"

It is common to read in the introductions to women travellers' texts or in their private correspondence phrases expressing modesty or apology for their "daring" to meddle in male subjects. Many of them exaggerated their womanhood and took care to remind the reader that they were "only" women. Of course, this was merely a device to avoid the censure of their contemporaries.

A notable example is Mary Kingsley who, with a biting sense of humour, described herself in



one of her letters: "I am only one woman and we, although we are great in details and concrete conceptions, are never able to feel devotion for the things I know well enough to be great, namely abstract things".

Similarly, Anna Forbes hides behind her womanhood to avoid being criticised for devoting herself to writing. Forbes describes herself as "a small and very feminine woman" in her *Unbeaten Tracks in Islands of the Far East* (1887), reminding the reader of her status as a respectable person.

Some of the women writers who travelled earned, with great effort, the respect of their compatriots. One of the best known examples is Isabella Bird, the 19th-century female traveller par excellence.

She was the first woman to be accepted by the prestigious Royal Geographical Society of

London in 1891, after trying for many years. Her writing, honest and descriptive, raised suspicion among her readers for often being too explicit (particularly the number of sexual double entendres in her writing is often commented on).

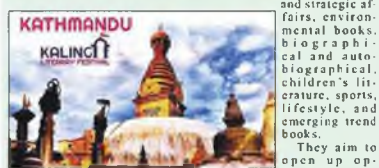
Bird travelled alone, but often had local guides, men who knew the terrain she was exploring. It is not hard to imagine why this might have been uncomfortable for more conservative audiences. In addition to writing, Isabella Bird took photographs of the people she encountered on her travels in Persia, Japan, Korea and Manchuria.

Bird, Forbes and Kingsley are just a few examples that show us that there is not just one "female travel writer": there are as many as we want (and are able) to rescue from oblivion. Hopefully, the adaptations and versions of them that we see in popular culture will help us to feel some curiosity about their lives, which are very real and therefore very possible. (*The Conversation*)

## Kalinga Literary Fest introduces Nepal Yashaswi Book Awards

The Kalinga Literary Festival (KLF) has introduced the 'Nepal Yashaswi Book Awards' for 15 writers in 15 categories from the year 2023 for Kathmandu KLF.

The awards will be given in various categories, including fiction and non-fiction, poetry, books in translation, business and strategic affairs, environmental books, biographical and autobiographical, children's literature, sports, lifestyle, and emerging trend books.



They aim to open up opportunities to identify, recognise, acknowledge, encourage, and honor the literary talents across genres, for both established and new writers.

The books were selected from those submitted and nominated by publishers, and writers across all categories. The winners will be felicitated and awarded during the annual Kathmandu - Kalinga Literary Festival. The award consists of a prize, a trophy, and a specially designed citation.

KLF will host the annual Kathmandu - Kalinga Literary Festival (Kathmandu - KLF) on September 1, 2, 3. The authors will be taking part in a host of conversations, workshops, debates, panel discussions, straight talks, and more. The festival will host more than 60 sessions. (IANS)

# Mood detector for your pizzas

Pizza Hut has installed a one-of-its-kind AI-powered mood detector device that studies facial cues and expressions of customers and gives them recommendations for pizzas that best match their moods with "Your Mood, Your Pizza" campaign.

The brand becomes the first-ever QSR brand to use the power of AI to understand the mood of its consumers to help them choose what they crave. This device is installed in select restaurants across Delhi, Lucknow, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai.

The mood detector uses innovative technology that offers a unique and personalised ordering experience. All you need to do is stand in front of the device, look into the screen, and leave it on the detector to calibrate your mood and flash its pizza recommendation before you.

The device uses a statistical model that detects facial expressions by analyzing landmarks on the face such as eye movements, smiles, frowns, etc. captured by the camera.

against a database of hundreds of thousands of publicly available images. Customers' privacy is protected because the AI only stores face patterns as numbers and does not save any images in any format.

Anandita Datta, Chief Marketing Officer, Pizza Hut India said, "At Pizza Hut, we believe that dining is more than just eating - it's about the entire experience. With our new AI-powered mood detector, we're taking that experience to the next level by offering personalised pizza recommendations based on our customers' moods. We're thrilled to bring this innovative technology to our customers and offer a new and exciting way for them to interact with our brand. This is just one of the many ways that we're striving to provide the best possible service to our customers and can't wait to see their reactions!"

The AI-enabled device gives pizza recommendations in both veg and non-veg variations from Pizza Hut's new range of 10 exciting and unique flavours like Mazedar Makhni Paneer, Dhabe Da Keema, Cheesy

Mushroom Magic, Mexican Fiesta, Awesome American Cheesy, and Nawabi Murg Makhni, among others.

The mood detector will be installed at the following Pizza Hut restaurants for a limited period, following the below listed schedule:

- Store Schedule**
- Delhi**  
Janpath, New Delhi, May 10 to May 17  
Saket, New Delhi, May 19 to May 26
- Bengaluru**  
Nexus Mall, Koramangala, Bengaluru, May 16 to May 17  
Mantri Mall, Bengaluru, May 19 to May 26
- Lucknow**  
West End Mall, Lucknow, May 29 to June 5  
Engineering Crossing, Lucknow, June 7 to June 14
- Chennai**  
Ashok Nagar Metro Station, Chennai, May 29 to June 5  
Phoenix Market City, June 7 to June 14
- Hyderabad**  
Sarath City Mall, Gachibowli, Hyderabad, June 17 to June 24  
GSM Mall, Miyapur Main Road, June 26 to July 3. (IANS)



# The Cosmos and the origins of time and life

By Thomas Hertog

The late physicist Stephen Hawking first asked me to work with him to develop a new quantum theory of the Big Bang in 1998. What started out as a doctoral project evolved over some 20 years into an intense collaboration that ended only with his passing on March 14 2018.

The enigma at the centre of our research throughout this period was how the Big Bang could have created conditions so perfectly hospitable to life. Our answer is being published in a new book, *On the Origin of Time: Stephen Hawking's Final Theory*.

Questions about the ultimate origin of the cosmos, or universe, take physics out of its comfort zone. Yet this was exactly where Hawking liked to venture. The prospect — or hope — to crack the riddle of cosmic design drove much of Hawking's research in cosmology. "To boldly go where Star Trek fears to tread" was his motto — and also his screen name.

Our shared scientific quest meant that we inevitably grew close. Being around him, one could not fail to be influenced by his determination and optimism that we could tackle mystifying questions.

He made me feel as if we were writing our own creation story, which, in a sense, we did.

In the old days, it was thought that the apparent design of the cosmos meant there had to be a designer — a God. Today, scientists instead point to the laws of physics. These laws have a number of striking life-engendering properties. Take the amount of matter and energy in the universe, the delicate ratios of the forces, or the number of spatial dimensions.

Physicists have discovered that if you tweak these properties ever so slightly, it renders the universe lifeless. It almost feels as if physics come in a fix — even a big one.

But where do the laws of physics come from? From Albert Einstein to Hawking in his earlier work, most 20th-century physicists regarded the mathematical relationships that underlie the physical laws as eternal truths.

In this view, the apparent design of the cosmos is a matter of mathematical necessity. The universe is the way it is because nature had no choice.

Around the turn of the 21st century, a different explanation emerged. Perhaps we live in a multiverse, an enormous space that spawns a patchwork of universes, each with its own kind of Big Bang and physics. It would make sense, statistically, for a few of these universes to be life-friendly.

However, soon such multiverse musings got caught in a spiral of paradoxes and no verifiable predictions.



## Turning cosmology inside out

Can we do better? Yes, Hawking and I found out, but only by relinquishing the idea, inherent in multiverse cosmology, that our physical theories can take a God's-eye view, as if standing outside the entire cosmos. It is an obvious and seemingly tautological point: cosmological theory must account for the fact that we exist within the universe. "We are not angels who view the universe from the outside," Hawking told me. "Our theories are never decoupled from us."

We set out to rethink cosmology from an observer's perspective. This required adopting the strange rules of quantum mechanics, which governs the microworld of particles and atoms.

According to quantum mechanics, particles can be in several possible locations at the same time — a property called superposition. It is only when a particle is observed that it (randomly) picks a definite position. Quantum mechanics also involves random jumps and fluctuations, such as particles popping out of empty space and disappearing again.

In a quantum universe, therefore, a tangible past and future emerge out of a haze of possibilities by means of a continual process of observing. Such quantum observations must not be carried out by humans. The environment or even a single particle can "observe".

Countless such quantum acts of observation constantly transform what might be into what does happen, thereby drawing the universe more firmly into existence. And once something has been observed, all other possibilities become irrelevant.

We discovered that when looking back at the earliest stages of the universe through a quantum lens, there's a deeper level of evolution in which even the laws of physics change and evolve, in sync with the universe that is taking shape. What's more, this meta-evolution has a Darwinian flavor.

Variation enters because random quantum jumps cause frequent excursions from what's most probable. Selection enters because some of these excursions can be amplified and frozen, thanks to quantum observation.

The interplay between these two competing forces — variation and selection — in the primeval universe produced a branching tree of physical laws.

The upshot is a profound revision of the fundamentals of cosmology. Cosmologists usually start by assuming laws and initial conditions that existed at the moment of the Big Bang, then consider how today's universe evolved from them. But we suggest that these laws are themselves the result of evolution.

Dimensions, forces, and particle species trans-

mute and diversify in the furnace of the hot Big Bang — somewhat analogous to how biological species emerge billions of years later — and acquire their effective form over time.

Moreover, the randomness involved means that the outcome of this evolution — the specific set of physical laws that makes our universe what it is — can only be understood in retrospect.

In some sense, the early universe was a superposition of an enormous number of possible worlds. But we are looking at the universe today at a time when humans, galaxies and planets exist. That means we see the history that led to our evolution.

We observe parameters with "lucky values". But we're wrong to assume they were somehow designed or always like that.

## The trouble with time

The crux of our hypothesis is that, reasoning backward in time, evolution towards more simplicity and less structure continues all the way. Ultimately, even time and, with it, the physical laws fade away.

This view is especially borne out of the holographic form of our theory. The "holographic principle" in physics predicts that just as a hologram appears to have three dimensions when it is in fact encoded in only two dimensions, the evolution of the entire universe is similarly encoded on an abstract, timeless surface.

Hawking and I view time and causality as "emergent qualities", having no prior existence but arising from the interactions between countless quantum particles. It's a bit like how temperature emerges from many atoms moving collectively, even though no single atom has temperature.

One ventures back in time by zooming out and taking a fuzzier look at the hologram. Eventually, however, one loses all information encoded in the hologram. This would be the origin of time — the Big Bang.

For almost a century, we have studied the origin of the universe against the stable background of immutable laws of nature. But our theory reads the universe's history from within and as one that includes, in its earliest stages, the genesis of the physical laws. It isn't the laws as such but their capacity to transmute that has the final word.

Future cosmological observations may find evidence of this. For instance, precision observations of gravitational waves — ripples in the fabric of spacetime — may reveal signatures of some of the early branches of the universe. If spotted, Hawking's cosmological finale may well prove to be his greatest scientific legacy.

*[The author is professor of theoretical physics at KU Leuven, Belgium.]*

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambani Sunday, MAY 21, 2023

**'Birthday Forecast'**  
Moon sign Aquarius has on your solar return chart and will give good results. There will be an increase in your domestic environment. You will get a lot of support from your relatives and well-wishers. You will find more energy and power in the affairs of people connected to you. You will get a job offer to be a manager. You will do much work with your family, hard work and a good job and will also get the desired results. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will also focus your attention on your health. There is a possibility of a change of business which you have in mind. There will be a good understanding between husband and wife. There will be profit in your business and your confidence will improve.

**'This week for you'**  
**Aries (March 21 - April 20)** It is going to be a fantastic week. You will be moving forward on your path of progress. New job offers will come to you. You will be working hard and will be successful in your job. Your business will also bring you a lot of profit. You will also do some work at your workplace. You will get a job offer to be a manager. You will do much work with your family, hard work and a good job and will also get the desired results. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will also focus your attention on your health. There is a possibility of a change of business which you have in mind. There will be a good understanding between husband and wife. There will be profit in your business and your confidence will improve.

**Taurus (April 21 - May 21)** This week will be a wonderful week. You will have a lot of success in your work. You will be working hard and will be successful in your job. Your business will also bring you a lot of profit. You will also do some work at your workplace. You will get a job offer to be a manager. You will do much work with your family, hard work and a good job and will also get the desired results. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will also focus your attention on your health. There is a possibility of a change of business which you have in mind. There will be a good understanding between husband and wife. There will be profit in your business and your confidence will improve.

**Gemini (May 22 - June 21)** This week will be a wonderful week. You will have a lot of success in your work. You will be working hard and will be successful in your job. Your business will also bring you a lot of profit. You will also do some work at your workplace. You will get a job offer to be a manager. You will do much work with your family, hard work and a good job and will also get the desired results. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will also focus your attention on your health. There is a possibility of a change of business which you have in mind. There will be a good understanding between husband and wife. There will be profit in your business and your confidence will improve.

**Cancer (June 22 - July 22)** It is going to be an auspicious week. You will be working hard and will be successful in your job. Your business will also bring you a lot of profit. You will also do some work at your workplace. You will get a job offer to be a manager. You will do much work with your family, hard work and a good job and will also get the desired results. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will also focus your attention on your health. There is a possibility of a change of business which you have in mind. There will be a good understanding between husband and wife. There will be profit in your business and your confidence will improve.

**Leo (July 23 - August 23)** This week will be a wonderful week. You will have a lot of success in your work. You will be working hard and will be successful in your job. Your business will also bring you a lot of profit. You will also do some work at your workplace. You will get a job offer to be a manager. You will do much work with your family, hard work and a good job and will also get the desired results. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will also focus your attention on your health. There is a possibility of a change of business which you have in mind. There will be a good understanding between husband and wife. There will be profit in your business and your confidence will improve.

**Virgo (August 24 - September 23)** It is going to be a wonderful week. You will have a lot of success in your work. You will be working hard and will be successful in your job. Your business will also bring you a lot of profit. You will also do some work at your workplace. You will get a job offer to be a manager. You will do much work with your family, hard work and a good job and will also get the desired results. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will also focus your attention on your health. There is a possibility of a change of business which you have in mind. There will be a good understanding between husband and wife. There will be profit in your business and your confidence will improve.

**Libra (September 24 - October 23)** This week you will get mixed results. You will have some success in your work but you will also face some difficulties. You will be working hard and will be successful in your job. Your business will also bring you a lot of profit. You will also do some work at your workplace. You will get a job offer to be a manager. You will do much work with your family, hard work and a good job and will also get the desired results. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will also focus your attention on your health. There is a possibility of a change of business which you have in mind. There will be a good understanding between husband and wife. There will be profit in your business and your confidence will improve.

**Scorpio (October 24 - November 23)** It is going to be a wonderful week. You will have a lot of success in your work. You will be working hard and will be successful in your job. Your business will also bring you a lot of profit. You will also do some work at your workplace. You will get a job offer to be a manager. You will do much work with your family, hard work and a good job and will also get the desired results. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will also focus your attention on your health. There is a possibility of a change of business which you have in mind. There will be a good understanding between husband and wife. There will be profit in your business and your confidence will improve.

**Sagittarius (November 24 - December 23)** This week you will be having good results in your work and business. You will be working hard and will be successful in your job. Your business will also bring you a lot of profit. You will also do some work at your workplace. You will get a job offer to be a manager. You will do much work with your family, hard work and a good job and will also get the desired results. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will also focus your attention on your health. There is a possibility of a change of business which you have in mind. There will be a good understanding between husband and wife. There will be profit in your business and your confidence will improve.

**Capricorn (December 24 - January 23)** This week you will be having good results in your work and business. You will be working hard and will be successful in your job. Your business will also bring you a lot of profit. You will also do some work at your workplace. You will get a job offer to be a manager. You will do much work with your family, hard work and a good job and will also get the desired results. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will also focus your attention on your health. There is a possibility of a change of business which you have in mind. There will be a good understanding between husband and wife. There will be profit in your business and your confidence will improve.

**Aquarius (January 24 - February 18)** This week you will be having good results in your work and business. You will be working hard and will be successful in your job. Your business will also bring you a lot of profit. You will also do some work at your workplace. You will get a job offer to be a manager. You will do much work with your family, hard work and a good job and will also get the desired results. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will also focus your attention on your health. There is a possibility of a change of business which you have in mind. There will be a good understanding between husband and wife. There will be profit in your business and your confidence will improve.

**Pisces (February 19 - March 20)** This week you will be having good results in your work and business. You will be working hard and will be successful in your job. Your business will also bring you a lot of profit. You will also do some work at your workplace. You will get a job offer to be a manager. You will do much work with your family, hard work and a good job and will also get the desired results. Your business will prosper and flourish. You will also focus your attention on your health. There is a possibility of a change of business which you have in mind. There will be a good understanding between husband and wife. There will be profit in your business and your confidence will improve.

# The eco-friendly appeal of dry flower jewellery

By N. Lathughen Humssee

"Dry flower jewellery also offers a unique and natural aesthetic that is increasingly popular in the fashion world. The delicate and intricate patterns of the flowers create a one-of-a-kind look that cannot be replicated by traditional jewellery materials. Each piece of dry flower jewellery is a work of art, reflecting the natural beauty of the world around us," said Milind Mathur, Director, Kohnor Jewellers Agra.

Moreover, the use of dry flowers in jewellery making can also promote sustainability in the flora industry. Flowers are often discarded after they have been used for bouquets or events, contributing to waste and environmental pollution. By repurposing these flowers for jewellery making, they are given a second life and their environmental impact can be minimised.

Furthermore, the use of dry flowers in jewellery making can also have a positive impact on mental health. Studies have shown that exposure to nature can have a calming effect on the mind and body, reducing stress and promoting relaxation.

By wearing jewellery made from natural and preserved flowers, individuals can bring a piece of nature with them wherever they go and experience these calming effects throughout the day.

The demand for sustainable fashion is only expected to grow in the coming years, and dry flower jewellery is poised to become a major player in the industry. Not only does it offer a sustainable alternative to traditional jewellery materials, but it also provides a unique and natural aesthetic that is increasingly sought after by consumers.

In conclusion, it offers a sustainable and beautiful alternative to traditional jewellery materials. It is versatile, biodegradable, and provides a unique and natural aesthetic that is increasingly popular in the fashion world.

By promoting sustainability and reducing environmental impact, dry flower jewellery is poised to become a major player in the industry and a favourite among eco-conscious consumers. (IANShijc)

"Peace is a journey of a thousand miles and it must be taken one step at a time." — Lyndon B. Johnson

The Shillong Times Vol No-LXXV No. 279 SHILLONG, MONDAY, MAY 22, 2023

Exit of big notes

BETTER late than never! The halt to circulation of Rs 2000 currency notes, announced by RBI this past week was in the pipeline. For a wrong decision taken under pressure in 2016 lived out its time before it was effectively rescinded in a quiet manner now. The very purpose of the note ban announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in November 2016 was majorly defeated by the flooding of these highest denomination notes in the market. If the principal aim of the high-value currency note ban of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes was to curb counterfeit and black money hoarding, the introduction of the Rs 2000 notes made those jobs easier for those who indulged in such notorious acts. The Pakistani angle was very pronounced too. For the government and RBI, the printing of Rs 2000 notes was a matter of urgency as banks and markets were starved of currency notes for circulation in the immediate aftermath of the notes ban. RBI says it had stopped the printing of the Rs 2000 notes by 2018-19 and that some 89 per cent of these notes had been released prior to March, 2017. This amounted to an admission that a wrong step had to be taken in the introduction of this high-value currency. Under these circumstances, the government and RBI would have been well-advised to take one more risk and withdraw this currency long ago in the long-term interests of the nation.

The nation needs to wait and see how the present scenario would pan out. Those ruling the black money market are big sharks and they are generally smarter than those who man the governments in a massively corrupt nation. In 2016, these sharks found several loopholes and exploited them to their advantage. Many of them in a jiffy converted their hoarded money into gold by hurried or even back-dated purchase of gold etc or by manipulations with banking managers, temple managements etc. With the steady rise in prices of gold, those who purchased gold then benefited hugely in the coming years. This time, a rule is that only 10 notes can be exchanged for other notes at a time in a bank; and rule's are also in place wherein larger transactions in any deal would require quoting of PAN number. Those who resort to alternative means to unload the hoarded money would eventually be made to explain the source from which they made the money and they will have to pay the taxes thereof. The government is also making efforts since 2016 to encourage digital payment vis-a-vis currency transactions. Impressively, this is happening now even in retail purchases. That is the ultimate way to check the menace of counterfeit currency and black money hoarding.

Government and the ADCs vis-a-vis the Constitution 125th Amendment Bill 2019

By H H Mohrman

For the majority of the country, the Constitution 125th Amendment Bill of 2019 which deals with re-organising and empowering the District Councils, ought to be a very crucial piece of legislation. The Bill was introduced to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the Republic of India. It is an issue bill states are managed in the future. While the Bill is a crucial one, neither the state government, nor the district councils, or the general public has debated over it. Unfortunately, neither universities nor colleges have held a debate on the subject even at the state's political parties, both national and regional, have not discussed the Bill or its possible effects on the area it becomes law.

Government passing the bill back to the District Councils

The Shillong Times issue dated April 25 reported that the government has asked the three autonomous district councils to suggest recommendations and changes to be incorporated in the draft amendment to the Sixth Schedule. Preston Tysing, the Deputy Chief Minister in charge of District Council Affairs, who was a professional debater during the election campaign, has no suggestion to incorporate into the Bill. One can also question if he (or any MP, MLA, or MLC, for that matter) ever had the time to read the prospective law. The Minister in charge of District Council Affairs does not realise that the government is equal stakeholder and has an important role to play in the process. The question is: why is the government unable to organise a meeting between the Chiefs of the District Councils and members of the public to debate at length on this very important issue? What is the Minister's Law Department or the State Law Commission doing? Why didn't the government eventually be made to explain the source from which they made the money and they will have to pay the taxes thereof. The government is also making efforts since 2016 to encourage digital payment vis-a-vis currency transactions. Impressively, this is happening now even in retail purchases. That is the ultimate way to check the menace of counterfeit currency and black money hoarding.

By H H Mohrman council, which they fear will dilute the powers and functions of the traditional village administrative system practiced in the state. Point taken, but isn't it ironical that the ADC's to raise objections to a section of the Bill without offering any suggestions on the issues raised? The state does have an existing Village Administrative System, but is it a perfect model of grass-roots administration? There is still scope for improvement of the institution of the Darbar Shmang, and people who work with these organisations know where the gaps are. Hence, the government and the district councils should take this as an opportunity to address these lacunae and present their case with the concerned ministry. The other issue that the District Councils in Meghalaya raised is that of the minor tribes in their respective areas, which also needs to be debated as the issue is not something that one can just sweep away.

The Bill and empowering the village administrative system

The statement of objects and reasons of the bill is clear which is that there is a need to relook at the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution, which deal with administration of the tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura through district councils and regional councils. Although the councils were vested with legislative powers, their own sources of taxation and ways provided to administer their justice and administrative systems, there is a need to re-examine the Schedule of the Constitution, especially in light of the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992, and the Constitution (Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act, 1992. It was observed that the two Acts, which are not applicable to the Sixth Schedule areas, have brought a considerable delegation of powers to local bodies in the other parts of the country in comparison with local bodies in the Sixth Schedule areas. The Darbar Shmang are less empowered than the Panchayat Raj Institutions which function in other parts of the country.

Administration of urban areas in the region

Another very important section of the Bill is with regards to the administration of urban areas. Administration of urban areas in Meghalaya is state subject. The Municipal is state subject. The Bill contains all doubts as it envisages keeping the administration of urban areas under the District Councils. It foresees that within a period of one year from the date of commencement of the Act, each district council shall establish village councils for a village or a group of villages in the rural areas and municipal councils for an urban area or an agglomeration of such urban areas in the district. As villages are growing and the borders of some villages overlap with one another, it is imperative that these villages be treated as one administrative unit. This particular section of the Bill addresses that issue. The case in point is Jowai, which is in reality a municipality in name only.

Direct funding to the District Councils

It was noted that there is currently no provision for the Finance Commission established pursuant to the Article 280 of the Constitution to provide separate funds for the autonomous District Councils in Sixth Schedule territories. The autonomous District Councils have poor socio-economic infrastructure. The Bill would provide for the Finance Commission to add provision for increasing a state's consolidated fund to complement the District Councils' resources, including village councils and municipal councils in the tribal regions within the states covered by the autonomous district councils.

Increasing the strength of the House

The Bill also sought to increase the strength of the Councils with the objective of improving female representation in these Councils; it also made provision for the appointment of nominated members to the House. The Bill also requires the introduction of a provision in the Constitution providing for the disqualification of elected members on the grounds of defection. The much-debated 'bam amshul' will come to an end as no more double membership will be allowed in the future. The Bill envisages that if an elected member of the Council is elected to the Lok Sabha or the State Legislature his

seat in the District Council shall become vacant after the expiration of a period of fourteen days from the date of publication of the declaration in the Gazette of India or in the Official Gazette of the State from where he has been elected. District Planning Committee The Bill also requires that each District Council establish a District Planning Committee which will comprise members from the District Council, Regional Council, village council as well as from the municipal council. The role of the DPC is to create a development plan for the district as a whole and also address other issues. It is also envisioned in the Bill that the Committee needs to be presented to the Governor for his assent before it starts functioning.

The role of the state

The state government cannot wash its hands of the activities of the District Council, as the Department of District Council Affairs under the state government. In fact, the Bill also envisages that the superintendent, direction, and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for aid the conduct of all elections to the District Council, Regional Council, Village Council, and Municipal Council is vested in a State Election Commission appointed by the Governor for that state.

The Bill needs extensive discussion

The Constitution of India Amendment (One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Amendment) Bill, 2019, will amend Article 280 of the Constitution to allow the Finance Commission to suggest actions to increase the Consolidated Fund of the States in order to supplement resources for the Sixth Schedule Autonomous Councils, Village Councils, and Municipal Councils. It also moves to change the names of the current autonomous district councils to territorial councils. Additionally, it aims to increase the number of District Council seats and reserve at least two of those seats for women. It also seeks to establish the Territorial Council in place of the Autonomous Council and to create the State Finance Commissions in the States having the Sixth Schedule.

Therefore, the public needs to be made aware of the importance of this Constitution after the Bill has been thoroughly discussed.

Yours etc, Svetlana Wankar

Via email

Meghalaya's Reservation Policy

Appropos of W R Khartab's question, "What is the Constitution does it say that population is the criterion for determining the reservation policy?" it may be reminded that the Government of India has been reserving posts in services for the SCs and STs based on the percentage of those communities separately to the total population of India as recorded in the decennial censuses. After the 1951 census, 15.05% of posts was reserved for SCs and 6.3% for STs. After the 1961 census, 15% of posts was reserved for SCs and 7% for STs. This continues till date, perhaps, as there has been no change in the population of those communities to the total population of India as recorded in the censuses. Had the Government of Meghalaya followed the Central Government method, they would not have had to handle the present situation, which, who knows, may turn into a law and order problem in the future.

Yours etc, A. Pymsh, Shillong-14

Brewing a 'Sha-saw' in Shillong

By Sujit Kumar Mohanty

As the gentle light of Sunday morning filters through our curtains, and we find solace in the comforting embrace of our beloved cup of tea, let us pause and immerse ourselves in the enchantment of International Tea Day observed on May 21 every year. According to ancient tales, the wise Chinese Emperor Shen Nung discovered tea some 5,000 years ago when during a serendipitous moment, a solitary leaf gracefully wafted into the emperor's sizzling cauldron of water. To his astonishment, he noticed that this seemingly ordinary leaf not only enhanced the flavour of the water but also bestowed upon him a revitalizing energy, as if awakening his senses. The rest was history.

The formal introduction of tea to the Indian subcontinent came with the British, who were resolute in their endeavour to challenge China's tea monopoly. Recognizing the favourable Indian soil and weather conditions for tea cultivation, they embarked on establishing tea gardens in the region. In 1776, English botanist, Sir Joseph Banks, advocated for tea cultivation in India. By 1780, Robert Kyd conducted experiments with tea cultivation, using indigenous tea seeds that purportedly arrived from China. A few decades later, an intriguing discovery unfolded as Mr. Robert Bruce stumbled upon wild tea plants flourishing in the scenic Upper Brahmaputra Valley. In a noteworthy moment, the first Indian tea from Assam was sent to England for public sale in the May, 1823. Although the year 1972 witnessed the separation of Meghalaya from its Assamese roots, the bond between these two states remains intricately woven into an inseparable unbroken cord.

Tea, emerging as the second most qualified elixir after water, holds a significant place in our lives, passes mere refreshment. The burgeoning tea culture that has taken roots in Shillong beckons a profound exploration into its intricate socio-cultural fabric. One of the 20th century's most important political phrases coined by John F. Kennedy was "if you want to win the quality of a food culture don't look at its finest restaurants and go to its lowest end. Look to its street carts."

The burgeoning cafes that sprout like mushrooms in the charming town of Shillong do not give a true insight into the tea culture that breathes life into this land. These modern-day replicas, reminiscent of the Bill, has been thoroughly discussed. Yours etc, Svetlana Wankar, Via email, Meghalaya's Reservation Policy, Appropos of W R Khartab's question, "What is the Constitution does it say that population is the criterion for determining the reservation policy?" it may be reminded that the Government of India has been reserving posts in services for the SCs and STs based on the percentage of those communities separately to the total population of India as recorded in the decennial censuses. After the 1951 census, 15.05% of posts was reserved for SCs and 6.3% for STs. After the 1961 census, 15% of posts was reserved for SCs and 7% for STs. This continues till date, perhaps, as there has been no change in the population of those communities to the total population of India as recorded in the censuses. Had the Government of Meghalaya followed the Central Government method, they would not have had to handle the present situation, which, who knows, may turn into a law and order problem in the future.

There also exists a nostalgic remembrance of the grace the quintessential sweets predominantly managed by the entrepreneurial non-natives holds a significant place in our lives, passes mere refreshment. The burgeoning tea culture that has taken roots in Shillong beckons a profound exploration into its intricate socio-cultural fabric. One of the 20th century's most important political phrases coined by John F. Kennedy was "if you want to win the quality of a food culture don't look at its finest restaurants and go to its lowest end. Look to its street carts."

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Yours etc, A. Pymsh, Shillong-14

Meghalaya's Reservation Policy

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Yours etc, A. Pymsh, Shillong-14

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Letters to the Editor

Compensatory Implementation of Roster System violates State Reservation Policy

for a minimum fraction of 0.4 of the number of posts. If that community is under the particular category, the number of posts advertised as carry over for any of the above protected categories, shall not exceed 90% of the total number of posts. Is this being followed in the midst of this compensatory implementation of the Reservation Policy? Or is it the case that in some recent recruitments, 100% of the vacancies were allotted to one particular community? Lastly, there is confusion prevailing over the provision of the Resolution that the backlog vacancies shall be carried over for no more than one year. Does that provision actually nullify any compensatory or retrospective implementation? If no, then what is the justification? What is that Resolution when it clearly stipulated in a case 2 that, "If sufficient number of suitable candidates for filling up the reserved vacancies are not available from respective classes in any particular year, then such vacancies will be available to others" (namely either qualified Garo or Khasi-Jaintia candidates). One also implies that if there are no suitable or qualified Garo candidates, then quota should be filled up by the Khasi-Jaintia who are suitable and qualified for such vacant posts and vice versa.

In the same clause it is stipulated that, "The deficiency in the ST and SC will be carried forward to next recruitment year but shall not be carried forward for more than a year and after this reservation i.e., shortage of either Garo or Khasi-Jaintia STs shall be treated as "Lapsed". These terms and conditions are simple to understand. Then why did the High Level incumbents who are members of the meet while discussing the Roster System, quickly moved these important clauses? What does "Lapse" mean in this clause? It means that the shortage of either Khasi-Jaintia or Garo among the vacancies shall be carried over and filled up the shortfall of ST Garo or Khasi-Jaintia become null and void or invalid. It also means that the vacancies are filled up solely by 40% Garo and 40% Khasi-Jaintia candidates. So by hypothesis and meaning of the terms of the Reservation Policy stipulated out above, all STs of Meghalaya are equally represented in the recruitment of any posts or vacancies and there is no backlog at all.

Moreover, the Resolution provides that in any particular year, the number of normal vacancies plus the backlog vacancies that are carried over for any of the above protected categories, shall not exceed 90% of the total number of posts. Is this being followed in the midst of this compensatory implementation of the Reservation Policy? Or is it the case that in some recent recruitments, 100% of the vacancies were allotted to one particular community? Lastly, there is confusion prevailing over the provision of the Resolution that the backlog vacancies shall be carried over for no more than one year. Does that provision actually nullify any compensatory or retrospective implementation? If no, then what is the justification? What is that Resolution when it clearly stipulated in a case 2 that, "If sufficient number of suitable candidates for filling up the reserved vacancies are not available from respective classes in any particular year, then such vacancies will be available to others" (namely either qualified Garo or Khasi-Jaintia candidates). One also implies that if there are no suitable or qualified Garo candidates, then quota should be filled up by the Khasi-Jaintia who are suitable and qualified for such vacant posts and vice versa.

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Yours etc, Kidor H Hlah, Shillong

Roster System Vrs Reservation Policy

On going through several news reports, articles and letters to editor of your esteemed daily, it is clear that there is a conflict between the Roster System and the clause 2 of the terms, rules and conditions of the first and original Reservation Policy notified vide No. P.E.R. 222/11/18 dated 12th January, 1972. How can there be a roster system, when the terms and conditions of the above reservation policy clearly stipulated in a case 2 that, "If sufficient number of suitable candidates for filling up the reserved vacancies are not available from respective classes in any particular year, then such vacancies will be available to others" (namely either qualified Garo or Khasi-Jaintia candidates). One also implies that if there are no suitable or qualified Garo candidates, then quota should be filled up by the Khasi-Jaintia who are suitable and qualified for such vacant posts and vice versa.

Understanding. Then why did the High Level incumbents who are members of the meet while discussing the Roster System, quickly moved these important clauses? What does "Lapse" mean in this clause? It means that the shortage of either Khasi-Jaintia or Garo among the vacancies shall be carried over and filled up the shortfall of ST Garo or Khasi-Jaintia become null and void or invalid. It also means that the vacancies are filled up solely by 40% Garo and 40% Khasi-Jaintia candidates. So by hypothesis and meaning of the terms of the Reservation Policy stipulated out above, all STs of Meghalaya are equally represented in the recruitment of any posts or vacancies and there is no backlog at all. According to my view the question is where there is any necessity of having a Roster System when we are equally represented amongst the Garo ST and Khasi-Jaintia ST candidates. It also implies that if there are no suitable or qualified Garo candidates, then quota should be filled up by the Khasi-Jaintia who are suitable and qualified for such vacant posts and vice versa.

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Yours etc, Kidor H Hlah, Shillong

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"He has a right to criticize, who has a heart to help."

— Abraham Lincoln

The Shillong Times

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Icon of democracy

THE inauguration of the new parliament building, a part of the ambitious Central Vista project, on May 28 was expected to be a solemn occasion to reinforce the pride of India as the world's largest democracy. But, the event is already drowned in the cacophony of protests from the Opposition parties; and their arguments have substance to them. The announcement that is Prime Minister, Narendra Modi would inaugurate it but the Congress party has demanded that this should be done at the instance of President Droupadi Murmu. Official sources say Murmu proposed the PM's name for this. The President is the head of the nation and 'head and shoulders' above other leaders in the conventional sense. The inauguration of the facility at her hands would have been appropriate. At the same time, at a practical level, the Prime Minister is the elected leader of the nation. In terms of esteem and respectability, both are on an equal footing.

The argument advanced from the government side that the President is not part of Parliament is absurd in the current context. As head of state, the President summons parliament sessions and no bill passed by the two houses becomes law until the President gives his/her assent. Without an address of the President, the Parliament does not start its major sessions. Another reason cited is that the day, May 28, falls on the birth anniversary of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the proponent of the Hindutva ideology and main inspiration to the RSS band. This, thus, cannot be a coincidence. The BJP-led central government is wedded to the RSS ideology, though in a more liberal format.

Appreciably, the successful completion of the new Parliament's building in a matter of two and a half years is proof of the importance that the Modi government accorded to this project. The rest of the Central Vista project that would involve residential houses for the Prime Minister and Vice President, all close to Rashtrapati Bhavan on one side and the old Parliament building on the other, would take time for completion. The new Parliament House has adequate space to accommodate two enlarged houses - with 888 seats for Lok Sabha and 300 for Rajya Sabha. The long-delayed constituency delimitation process is expected to start after 2026 when the number of MPs in Parliament could go up substantially in both houses. That this process was kept pending since the 1970s is another proof of the culture of "drag" that the governing systems here are infamous for. However, with the inauguration of the new Parliament House, a major hurdle to this could be removed.

Letters to the Editor

The Reservation Dilemma

Editor, The papers these days, both English and vernacular are all occupied with the Reservation Policy and the Roster system that comes with it. Let me from the beginning admit that I am quite vague about it all and quite surprised about the hue and cry that has emanated from the Court verdict on the matter. It's quite Meghalaya to react to an issue; panic over it and then when the dust finally settles down to discover that the whole thing was not worth the time and energy wasted on it. Again, true to form there is no broad based understanding and agreement over an issue which simply results in numerous leaders (saviors of the people) emerging, each one crying bawls from his own self made vilo with no one seeing eye to eye with anyone else yet everyone crying to the heavens for unity among the Jaintias/mis.

Typical Meghalaya scene is all about the ability of the reservation policy and its potential (if) for a war of a better

ward) to provide Govt jobs to individual members of our society. For 50 long years we all sat silently, apparently private, because of the rapid advance of Artificial Intelligence (AI), will undergo severe cuts in requirements for human work force. Only skills manpower will be in demand of which Meghalaya is in perpetual poverty. In view of the above why are we all so concerned and desperate for Govt jobs as they will progressively deteriorate and become meaningless. We will be doing our future generation the worst disservice if we spend time and energy providing opportunities which will be of no value to them. No point in wasting our time over Govt jobs. Instead less think on how should we prepare our children for job prospects for tomorrow. How about coming together to all political parties, NGOs, Dorbas, etc; forget about scoring political points against each other and instead together think about how do we improve the Economy of the state. Meghalaya's future will depend on how strong an economy we have. Not on how many employees Govt can employ. An improved economy, in various sectors will provide more job opportunities than reservations for Govt jobs. Time to quit being than Quixotes. Time to quit quibbling at windmills. Time to sit down together to work out what is best for the future of the state and its people. Yours etc., Toki Bhak, Via email

Meghalaya Reservation Policy: Of Debates and Agitations

By Kyrsoibor Pyriuh

This is a historical overview on the debates and agitations over the Reservation Policy. Apart from issues like influx of foreigners, Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 and Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958 which are commonly shared by both the Hynniewtrep and Achiak people, matters like the re-orientation of the headquarters of the Meghalaya Board of School Education and Reservation Policy formula had brought the two tribes into collision.

However, debates and agitations are essential in a democracy. They strengthen the democratic institutions and shape the socio-political landscape of the State as long as they remain within the limits of civility and mutual respect. Discussion is the founding principle of Khasi polity and Khasi political history is replete with debates and disagreements. On the eve of India's Independence and during the period from 1944 to 1947, there were fierce debates and sharp disagreements pertaining to the political future and to which kind of political and administrative set up the Hynniewtrep people should adopt or be adopted into.

On the issue of Reservation which has now resurfaced in the public square and with such gravity, the demand is being made to review the existing policy, which again seems to threaten the peaceful co-existence among diverse communities in the State, as early as 1972 and since the day it was adopted, the Reservation Policy had generated intense disputes in the executive realm. As reflected in the file note, there was an exchange of arguments and it was noted, "On this matter, we are reluctant to say definitely what would be the proper provision to make, and in a broad way, the reservation should be less than 50 per cent but how much less than 50 per cent would depend upon the relative prevailing circumstances in each case". The debate was opened then and the demand to review has been taken up for decades now.

In 1978, the All India Garmu Group submitted the Memorandum to the then Chief Engineer and Secretary to Government of Meghalaya, P.W.D.(R&B) expressing dismay at the indifference of the Government to the plight and grievances of Garmu people in matter of appointments in the concerned department. The memorandum strongly stated that, "Such good provision of 40-40% and 20% formula were made by the Govern-

ment of Meghalaya which is based on the appropriate provisions of the Constitution of India...and on the basis of the Supreme Court of India's ruling in favour of the weaker sections, which ruling is the most important 'Ratio Decidendi' and not merely an 'Obiter Dictum' or 'not yet a 'Stare Decisis'... that the 40% reservation which belonged to the Garmu must not be taken over and the concerned any Department should strictly adhere to Government's policy of 40% in favour of Garmu; otherwise, there shall be no meaning or value of making reservation of posts up to 40%... Unless the Government reconsiders its policy, your offer of appointment to the weaker sections... by indirect means...".

In 1980 the State Legislature passed the Meghalaya Regulation of Employment Bill, 1980 and the Bill sought to regulate employment of people from outside the State in both public and private sectors. The Bill was resisted both inside and outside the House. Inside the House Prof. Marim Barayan Majaw vehemently opposed the Bill and mobilized public opinion against it through the public meeting held in Khasi National Dorbar Hall. Besides, the All India Garmu Group held a special meeting and recorded a strong disapproval of the Bill. There were two major reasons for the opposition against it through the public meeting held in Khasi National Dorbar Hall. Besides, the All India Garmu Group held a special meeting and recorded a strong disapproval of the Bill. There were two major reasons for the opposition against it through the public meeting held in Khasi National Dorbar Hall.

It is important to note that newspapers, editorials, letters and articles also addressed the debates. To note a few, the Editorial of Redpan, published on 25 September 1982, termed it as "Reservation with Reservation". It stated, "While the decision for reservation at the State level appears to be correct, the decision of reservation at District level appears to have its strong political ramifications and belonging. In times of upheaval, individuals seek a sense of community and solidarity. Extremist groups exploit this group identity that resonates with individuals who feel alienated or disenfranchised with mainstream society. This sense of belonging can be a powerful force for those seeking validation and support from like-minded groups. These digital spaces allow individuals with extremist views to reinforce each other's beliefs and amplify their grievances. Online radicalization plays a significant role in the recruitment and organization of extremist groups, enabling them to spread their ideologies more effectively.

Why extremist groups surface in the aftermath of crisis or social unrest

I am writing to shed light on the sociological factors that can contribute to the emergence of extremist groups in the aftermath of crisis or social unrest. While it is fortunate that no such extremist groups have been reported in our society, understanding these factors is crucial for preemptively addressing and mitigating the rise of extremists should it ever occur. During times of crisis, such as a pandemic or instances of injustice, certain segments of the population may feel marginalized, disillusioned, and angry. This social disorientation creates conditions where extremist ideologies can take hold. Sociological research has identified several key factors that contribute to this phenomenon.

Firstly, crises disrupt the social fabric and create a sense of disarray. People yearn for stability and answers during uncertain times. Extremist groups often exploit this vulnerability by providing simplistic explanations and scapegoating specific individuals, groups, or ideologies as the cause of complex problems. They offer a sense of purpose and direction, which can be appealing to those who feel lost or marginalized. Secondly, extremist groups fulfill the need for

Bob's Banter The Two Thousand Rupee Note..!

By Robert Clements

A few weeks after the nation was reeling under the shock of demonetization, like a white flag appearing from a trench, after a pitched battle, the two thousand rupee note appeared. It was like a straggler from the digital payment and cash. Truce, because you thought it was legal tender, still two thousand was too huge an amount to be regularly used.

Another reason was that the rich looked at it with suspicion; after all they had been brutally betrayed by it's filler sister, the thousand rupee note, and all thousand rupees they had stored carefully and hidden in lockers and stashed into mattresses and secret walls were now useless. They wondered whether it was another decoy to trap their black money again, and were rat taking in by its innocent baby pink look.

The paor on the other hand did not know what to do with it because it was absolutely beyond their means. They knew it existed, had seen flashes of it in banks when they had gone to withdraw their life savings and wondered why a note which they could not use, which meant billions of them, had been printed by the government.

The government on its Ah well, there was a lot of pride that the note had and yesterday at the bank, as two Two-Thousand-rupee notes stared at me helplessly from the bank's counter where they had been brought to be exchanged, their eyes bleak and bleary, they screamed, "How could this have happened to us? Yesterday we were the most powerful notes in the country, today we are garbage! Kachra! We remember immediately after demonetization, after the thousand rupee note was withdrawn, suddenly people saw our pink faces and felt that was all was not lost, that cash was back in circulation.

part was happy they had fulfilled their obligation of filling the vacuum left by their drastic ban on the old thousand and five hundred had withdrawn. The shopkeepers were the most confused, as most of the time, they were the pinkies and watched the change of customer fished out with absolute dismay as their shelves did not empty out as people wanted their two thousand rupee notes at them, and they wrung their thin changing hands.

But with all the confusion created by it's introduction, the two thousand rupee note reigned supreme. It was not dirtied like other notes because it wasn't soiled by too many hands, and when it rested in someone's wallet, it continued to nest there for many weeks, more as a feeling of security to the owner, than money to be spent.

"I remember glancing at it's proud look once and saying, 'Maybe like the thousand rupee note you will also go'". "No," it had said to me haughtily, "Because I am not because you cannot afford to keep me, coon't mean you can criticize me!". Ah well, there was a lot of pride that the note had and yesterday at the bank, as two Two-Thousand-rupee notes stared at me helplessly from the bank's counter where they had been brought to be exchanged, their eyes bleak and bleary, they screamed, "How could this have happened to us? Yesterday we were the most powerful notes in the country, today we are garbage! Kachra! We remember immediately after demonetization, after the thousand rupee note was withdrawn, suddenly people saw our pink faces and felt that was all was not lost, that cash was back in circulation. The rich grabbed us, and the poor looked longingly at us, but we were kings!".

I looked at the notes on the bank counter and realized how proud they had looked the day I had got both of them from the bank. "Are you a rich man?" one of the Two Thousand-rupee notes had asked me that day disdainfully. "Because I only belong to the rich!" it had said haughtily. "For people like you, our poorer cousins, the hundred rupees and fifty rupees will do!". "I am not a rich man!" I had whispered. "That I can make out, the note had scoffed. "I can see I am the rich man, because I am the only note that I am used to belonging to rich people who have crates of rupees, all in bundles, generally hidden inside a slit mattress, maybe stored in an air-conditioned loft, or kept in a club locker," it had said with a crispy sniff. "Whereas your wallet is a bit lousy," said the other of the two thousand's. "And smelly! Don't you have a clean wallet to put me in?". "We are not used to being treated so shabbily," said the notes together. "What did we do to deserve this treatment?". "I am sad that day," it did not know you were used to such royal treatment. "I would have asked the cashier for hundreds and fifty rupees." "You can still do that!"

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"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way." — John C. Maxwell

The Shillong Times

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Of Superfluous Posts at Public Expense

THE MDA Government built in its first and second term is profligate. In its first avatar it had a flock of consultants many of whom used local resources on which to build their research findings on and to validate their assumptions about Meghalaya. Based on these findings the consultants would direct each department or what interventions to make and how much resources to allocate. A cold and calculating look at the consultants appointed would make it appear that Meghalaya is a huge corporation with no qualified human resources for crafting out its economic and infrastructural roadmap and hence each department needed the consultants to tell them what and how to do things so that there is impact on the ground. But if the consultants were to live in the villages for a considerable period of time they would find their recommendations meaningless if not faulty. Granted that consultants are needed to prepare state of the art detailed project reports to access funding from Government of India and external funding agencies including banks. But there is no need for consultants to take over the government which was what was actually happening with the Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA) which attempts to bring convergence of development.

Consultants aside, what is unacceptable about the MDA misadventure is that there is not even a fine line between political patronage with an attempt to woo legislators from other parties to the ruling NPP Party and the real needs of the state on its journey of development. An MDC from the Congress who joined the NPP was mollified with a superfluous appointment. Thankfully, the Hymineetrap Youth Council (HYC) has ferreted out information on such redundant appointments which cost the exchequer heavily. Most of the bodies notified by the Government to accommodate the hangers-on of the ruling political parties have not been constituted; much less working on the mandate given to them. This is sheer waste of public money and the people of Meghalaya should call out this profligacy.

While Meghalaya is in penny when it comes to building and repairing roads, providing water supply and above all providing regular electricity to the citizens, the government appears to be spending on individuals because it needs to buy their loyalties so that they can continue to rule Meghalaya. Much has been written about the near defunct State Planning Board which has not published any report of its activities and action taken for years on end. No active planning for better governance of the state is visible in so many years. The Chairman and Vice Chairman enjoy their pay and perks. The same is the case with the Meghalaya Economic Development Council and the Employment Generation Council. Meghalaya cannot afford this wasteful expenditure of paying MLAs for doing nothing. It's time to dismantle these money-guzzling institutions. The public should demand this.

Letters to the Editor

Power scenario in Meghalaya in dire straits

On reading the Shillong Times report of May 17, 2023 it is very disturbing to us residents of Shillong to hear that Umiam Lake has only 1 foot of water left before a shut-down of the turbines. The CM's dream of a 10 billion \$ economy by 2030 will just remain a dream. If for half a day we remain without power. We do not need Shillong International Airport. We can make do with Gwahati and Kolkata Airports. But we need Electricity and Water - the very basic necessities of life. Government claims that JIM has reached 50 % coverage. How true is that? What kind of water supply is this? JIM gives only a pipe to your house with water flowing to the tap only twice a week. Five in Pantlakh where we have to buy water every day. And we get to buy that water because we are regular customers. If you are not a regular customer, if you call the Helios tanker today, he will come and deliver water after two days. The reason is that there is no power to run the water pump to fill up the water tanker. And there is a long queue of these tankers. The normal price is Rs.450 per tanker, now it has gone up to Rs.500. People who are not regular customers offer the tanker Rs.1000 per tanker. Such is the state of

Lessons for BJP from Verdict Karnataka

By Rajdeep Sardesai

BJP advertisement splashed across major newspapers had a large picture of Mr Modi emerging out from a lotus symbol while all other leaders, including chief minister Basavraj Bommai, were almost invisible. It's like a movie board that focuses on a mega star and reduces the rest of the cast to an-



BJP advertisement splashed across major newspapers had a large picture of Mr Modi emerging out from a lotus symbol while all other leaders, including chief minister Basavraj Bommai, were almost invisible.

nytomy: the much-publicised Karnataka "double engine" only had a single driver. Remember Hrand Modi was built around his muscular leadership credentials which he claimed to have zero tolerance for corruption. And yet, in Karnataka, despite copious allegations of "40 per cent commission sarkara", there was no sign of the Centre acting swiftly to end the perception of corruption being "normalised" in a major BJP state. Where enforcement agencies were hyper-active in opposition ruled states, they were missing in action in Karnataka. If a BJP government is seen to be just as corrupt as any previous Congress regime, Hrand Modi loses its sheen and unique selling point.

Secondly, the remarkably accurate prediction shows women voting for Congress in far larger numbers than BJP. Whereas the gap in voting preferences between the two main parties was 5 per cent among men, it was a whopping 11 % among women. A double digit gap amongst women

tics of religious polarization. Right through 2022, the BJP in Karnataka consciously stoked Hindutva majoritarian politics: Muslims were routinely demonised through campaigns over hijab, halal and azaan. From castigating Tipu Sultan to venerating Savarkar, the BJP was hoping to stoke a Hindu-Muslim divide. Even Christians were not spared: anti-conversion laws were targeted at Christian missionaries. Not only did this shrill campaign consolidate minority votes, it also alienated numerous Hindu voters desirous of a more harmonious social climate. Home minister Amit Shah's warning to voters that Karnataka would be "afflicted with riots" if Congress came to power smacked of last minute desperation.

Finally, the Karnataka verdict has highlighted BJP's geographical constraint: "BJP Mukti Dakshin Bharat" is a reality that exposes the narrow "Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan" narrative once again. An all India political power map reveals the BJP now controls a lesser land area and population than non-BJP parties. A one size fits all election strategy that doesn't address regional sentiments and local sensitivities will struggle in states with distinctly robust cultural identities.

What is why, by the BJP leadership may have to course correct in the lead up to 2024. A Modi-led BJP still remains an overwhelming favourite to

Opp fires salvo for 2024: Boycotts new Parl opening

By Shivaji Sarkar

The battle royale begins for the Lok Sabha elections 2024 over the new Parliament building. The combined opposition led by the Congress has decided to boycott the inauguration of the new Parliament building on May 28 and may even consider abandoning the new building.

The inauguration of the new Parliament building has brought virtually the entire opposition on one platform. In a joint manifesto of Parliament Members of Opposition of Lok-Mindol Opposition Parties, Sanjay Raut, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP said, "All opposition parties have decided to boycott the inauguration of the new Parliament building on May 28 and we will also do the same," said Raut. The statement has the name of the Congress and 18 other parties.

This gives the way for most non-BJP parties to come together on a common issue of not maintaining propriety and parliamentary traditions of the protocol of precedence of the President of India. The joint opposition has said the President could not be ignored and the prime minister cannot take precedence in matters of Parliament. It is possible that the entire opposition would meet in Delhi to decide the course of action for the elections to 2024, just a year ahead. The coming together of the Opposition would force the BJP to have new strategies and throw up new challenges to keep the rivals at bay. Indian politics is warming up for an intense year-long electoral battle and polarisation of votes.

If the boycott extends to the new building itself as some parties expressed so, it can lead to almost a direct clash between the ruling party and the opposition emanating from the history of Indian democracy. However it remains to be seen if it smoothen up the internal contradictions of the opposition as also how it would share the seats in each of the states. Though AAP is part of the combine it is not yet clear how it would stand together with the Congress.

At present Lok Sabha has 543 members and Rajya Sabha 250. There is no Central Hall in the new building. Joint sessions would be held in the Lok Sabha chamber. This is likely to happen from 2026 as per a 2020 announcement. This is to allow representation in tune with the growing population. It is being questioned by the opposition whether if this formula is followed then northern India would have more representation while South India would lose many seats, because of population imbalance. Since population has exceeded in the South, it will lose proportional representation.

The North East is likely to have minimum rise. The opposition says Parliament cannot work on hypotheses. Congress is also questioning which census would be the basis for the new representation formula. The last census was in 2011. No census for 2021 could be conducted for the due to Covid-19 lockdown. No arbitrary decision on such sensitive issues should be imposed.

There is a strong concern and an emerging view that the number of Lok Sabha seats should be frozen at the present level and there is little need to increase the numbers as it would be unwieldy, cumbersome and impractical. Apart from the cost of parliamentary operations a rise in number of MPs would disrupt the functioning of the House itself and also other unforeseen problems.

The present Parliament building was completed in 1927, and is now going to be nearly 100 years old. The Lok Sabha and the Rajya

pump can pump 5 billion litres of water per day. The capacity of this largest pump in the world, is 11 times the requirement of water in Umiam Power plant per day. A much smaller pump can be used to recycle water. The website of this pump manufacturer is: actionelectromotorandpump.com.

News etc David S. Jyva Shillong 1

Elections done and dusted: Govt workers unpaid

I am writing to express my concern about the non-payment of honorarium to West Jaintia Hills District government workers who were deployed for election duties in the recently concluded Meghalaya Legislative Assembly elections. It is distressing to learn that, despite the long-standing tradition of conducting such an essential exercise, government workers who labour tirelessly during elections remain unpaid.

Despite working long hours, especially from February 1st to March 2nd, there has been no payment for government personnel deployed on duty for the polls till date. We understand that the election process is critical to our democracy, and the involvement of government employees in guaranteeing fair elections must be recognised and respected through the

payment of the honorarium. During elections, they work round the clock, and their devotion and passion should be recognised.

The Election Commission in collaboration with the office of the Deputy Commissioner, West Jaintia Hills District, is responsible for ensuring the smooth conduct of the elections process, and one of its primary responsibilities is to guarantee that government officials are compensated fairly for their services. This failure of the District Administration to diligently carry out its duties calls into doubt the office's commitment to safeguarding democratic values.

I request the Deputy Commissioner's office to resolve this matter at the earliest and to ensure that government officials receive their just honorarium. It is crucial to express gratitude to the officials who have played critical roles in maintaining the integrity of our democracy. Failure to do so undermines their labour and disenfranchises their contributions.

Yours etc, A concerned Government official. Name withheld on request

Irrelevant Question

Editor, Apropos of news report (ST, May 21st 2023) captioned "VPP posters, Political Agenda, NPP", West Jaintia Hills, NPP State Pres-

ident said that he conveyed to VPP that the Reservation policy was based on Article 16 Clause 4 of the Constitution and asked the VPP "In which part of the Constitution is it said that the reservation policy is based on population?" In this connection, it would be ridiculous and foolish on my part if I ask which part of the Constitution provides 40% quota for the Garo and 40% for the Khasi-Jaintia ST? It is equally irrelevant to ask the legislator, "In which part of the Constitution the said quota of reservation should not be based on population."

It may be noted that the Constitution empowers the State Government/UT to make provisions for reservation in favour of any backward class. It also empowers the state to determine the criteria and the base before awarding the quota to the ST category principally based on population. On the above analogy, the Telangana Government in the recent past has enhanced the quota of the ST category to 10 per cent from the current six per cent in the state without waiting for the bill passed by the legislature based on the increase of ST population after a lapse of 8 years only (news report ST Sept. 2022 captioned Telangana decided to enhance tribal quota to 10 per cent).

Hence the Meghalaya Reservation Policy in the present form is baseless and

illegal. It is neither based on population nor on the size of the area. We should keep in mind that both Garo and Khasi-Jaintia belong to the same category (i.e., ST category) who are equally backward classes. Apart from those Khasi-Jaintia and Garo residing in the towns, majority of them who are residing in the far-flung villages are very poor and backward to the point that they are living half-naked and half-fed and are victims of malnutrition, diseases and premature death. Hence there is no justification to say that Garo is more backward than Khasi-Jaintia and vice versa. Both are equal so far as backwardness is concerned.

Without prejudice to our Garo brethren, the present reservation policy is therefore deterring the entire our generation (Khasi-Jaintia) and is also a complete disadvantage to our community. Worse is the Roster system which if implemented will be a fatal blow to Khasi-Jaintia job-seekers. Its impact will be so alarming that God alone knows what will happen in the days and years to come. It all depends on how our leaders will struggle and fight for justice.

Yours etc, Svetlana Wankar, Via email

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

"Never mistake activity for achievement."  
— John Wooden

**The Shillong Times**

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**Doles, democracy**

A game of one-upmanship can be expected before the 2024 Parliament polls. The tone was set in Karnataka, where the Congress party promised the moon to the people through its manifesto and registered a resounding victory. The first step Siddaramaiah's cabinet took post haste was to implement the five promises the party made in the manifesto — including a payment of Rs 2000 to every housewife every month and dole and similar payments to jobless graduates and diploma holders, etc. The BJP promised to ensure security to women in the streets, but this was "too little." The Congress party, energized by the Karnataka win, is set to make similar offers to the voters in Madhya Pradesh and possibly in the other assembly-poll-bound states too.

For, this is a do-or-die battle for the Congress party at this hour. The party had tasted success on another front too in the polls in Himachal Pradesh, when it promised to restore the Old Pension System for government employees — something that had been revised to a Contributory Pension Scheme in 2003 by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government and which was backed by the Manmohan Singh-led UPA governments too. The Planning Commission then headed by Singh had cautioned that a return to OPS would bankrupt governments. But, the Congress governments in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh etc have already returned to the OPS to please this influential segment. At what cost to the nation, is the big question. Caught in a cleft stick, the Centre has set up a high-level panel to review the OPS-CPS scenario.

In terms of doles, chances are that the BJP would initiate a matching "wooning" exercise in the run-up to the Parliament polls. BJP failed to outwit the Congress in Karnataka as it had already released its manifesto of promises a day before the Congress did it. A recent attempt to effect checks on political parties vis-a-vis making poll-related offers that would jeopardize the economy should have been taken forward with the Supreme Court's involvement. The present scenario would snowball into a huge threat not just to the economy but to democracy and national well-being too. Regional party leaders are masters in playing dirty games. The Congress too has degraded itself to that level. Prime Minister Narendra Modi should have acted in the best interests of the nation and stemmed the rot. The dole raj must end. As a Chinese proverb aptly says, "If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. But if you give him a fishing rod, you feed him for a lifetime." Wisdom is alien to the mindset of our politicians.

Letters to the Editor

**Why communalise crime?**

The recent assault case of one cab driver belonging to one ethnic group reportedly by few fellow taxi drivers of another community is being portrayed as a clash between local and non-local communities. Immediately after the assault case, Meghalaya Police swung into action and arrested the alleged assaulters from Assam. Such swift action by the police resulting in arrest of the assailants point to the fact that Meghalaya Police is competent enough to track down accused persons if they wish to apprehend the culprits. However, from 1979 onwards, numerous cases of assaults, murder, arson and other forms of crime have regularly happened against one particular section of people in Meghalaya, but there is hardly any evidence or result to show that Police had acted in such alacrity in arresting or taking action against the perpetrators of these crimes. The unsolved murder case of Nichil Dey, a taxi driver lost his a glaring testimony to this fact. Street brawls and road rage are common occurrences in every city and town which generally die down without much ado with appropriate action by Police and minimal interference by the civil society. However,

such incidents in Meghalaya are judged on the basis of racial profiling of the perpetrator and victim and the latest case is no exception. In Meghalaya, if the victim happens to be from the dominant community, immediately such attack is branded as an unprovoked racial attack whereas the fact may be completely opposite. One cannot deny the possibility of the victim's role in instigating or provoking the accused but subsequent hullabaloo organised by NGOs and other organisations completely drowns this vital point. It is not yet known whether the victim was assaulted only because he belonged to a particular community or for any other reason but efforts are always being made to depict it as a racial attack by interested parties without any credible evidence. Has the authority tried to find the real reason of the incident? If so, they should share the truth with the citizenry immediately. The attackers are definitely at fault but it never exempts the victim of any crime, who might be none or equally responsible for the incident. Although, it is the responsibility of district administration to quell such situation by taking appropriate measures coupled with fair investigation which however, appears to be a far cry in our State considering the history of post five decades.

Yours etc.,  
N.K. Kchar,  
Shillong - 3

**Governance institutions Need to Converge**

By Patricia Mukhim

Going by the number of institutions in Meghalaya each tasked with governance and hence meant to be people-centric one would assume that governance would have reached the last mile in the last 50 years but such is not the case and socio-economic surveys reveal that we are not quite there and that large sections of our people are still beyond the pale of governance. True, that we are all more connected to our Dorbar Shong which is our first "go to" institution for our problems which include poor water supply, bad roads, power cuts etc. The Dorbar Shong then escalate those problems to the District Councils or to the MLAs or the MDC and sometimes with the departments concerned. It depends on how pro-active the Dorbar Shong and their office bearers are.

Now let us look at the institutions in Meghalaya and see what each one is doing. At the top of the pyramid is the Government (and here I am using the pyramid as a model because the people are farthest from the Government). The government is somehow disconnected from all the district councils. One sees no sharing of responsibilities or engagement of the ADCs in project implementation. The Government is also estranged from the Dorbar Shong and only engages them on and off. There is no connecting link — no umbilical cord that joins the ADC's to the Government and which would have ensured better outreach especially when it comes to environment conservation since the ADC's are supposed to be more closely connected to the Dorbar Shong-Nokmaship Village Development Council etc.

The second institution is the District Council which has a set of duties and responsibilities as mandated by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and which certainly is not reduced to making footpaths and bridges thereby encroaching into the domain of the state government. I am even wondering why the District Councils are engaged in construction work at all. They constructed some buildings right next to the Umiam Lake (accessible through the road next to Marent in Mawlong) several years ago. I last saw those buildings in 2019. They seemed to be meant for tourism purposes but the way they are designed is an architect's nightmare. Instead

of looking out the Umiam Lake the pin of the building facing the Lake is all cemented in. It really only one of those maochub buildings. No creativity, no thought for ambience. It's just a building — that's it. A substantial sum of money has been invested in those buildings. Why are they not put to use? And by the way that is public money that has been used.

The District Councils are custodians of rivers, forests, waterways etc. And now they have one more power source — that of granting building permissions. In the first instance, should the granting of building permissions be under the ambit of the District Councils? Which part of the 6th Schedule says that? What is customary that needs to be conserved about buildings? Are the Councils even seized of the need to protect heritage buildings to protect that has something to do with legacy, tradition and customary practices. Let's face it there is nothing traditional about new buildings. It's all in the domain of modern engineering so how does the District Council come into this domain? It's a question that we need an answer to. From what appears in the press, the District Councils are not focussed on their primary duty as authorities giving trading licenses to non-traders. From the manner in which different pressure groups are going around and checking trade licenses and also closing down shops, it would appear that the District Councils have outsourced this task of granting trade licenses and checking out on violators to pressure groups. If they have not done so then they should not remain silent when someone steps into their domain.

The next institution in the order of hierarchy is the Syiemship. One can collect taxes from markets and oversee forests and community owned (Ri Raij) land and other non-revenue land. The Syiem does not seem to have any authority today. Since the Syiems are not within the purview of the Right to Information (RTI) it is difficult to investigate how they spend public resources because any form of taxation collection from the public should be subject to scrutiny and to public audit. This has never happened and is un-

likely to happen because no one wants to disturb the hierarchy. There is no known evidence that the Syiems they in Garo Hills. The Dollois in Jaintia Hills operate more or less like the Syiems in terms of granting land leases to different industrial units such as cement companies and coke units or alienating land for mining coal etc and they do this in collaboration with the District Council. The Syiems, according to me, are operating in a grey area with each Syiem doing what he knows best.

Fourth and the most widespread and most institution is the Dorbar Shong. Dorbar Shong in the Village Development Council (VDC) area in Municipal areas in Garo Hills. These in short are what can be termed as Meghalaya's hierarchy of needs. These institutions have functioned to the best of their ability. But it takes all kinds of men to make a Rangbah Shong some stand out for being pro-active and adopting modern governance methods; others that are less educated and inefficient tend to make up being noisy. But they all function within the ambit of their mandate. The problem with Rangbah Shong is that they work pro-bono in what can be best called a thankless job. Yet there are so many problems that they resolve within their jurisdiction. It is not fair for any person to work pro-bono and for us as residents to expect them to address our every need. Why can't the Government work on this and ensure that adequate funds are allocated to the Dorbar Shong so that the Syiemship does not need to be tied to the coat-tails and apron strings of politicians. They can assert their rightful authority and also undertake development work within their village localities. This is the grassroots governance that Meghalaya needs and which will address the socio-economic concerns of the people.

The Dorbar Shong have several schools in their respective jurisdictions. They can be empowered to inspect the schools from time

to time to ensure that they function well; that teacher absenteeism is checked; that learning is happening under competent teachers and that students are going back home not with more doubts in their minds but with confidence. It is pointless to expect the Inspectors of Schools to inspect all the schools in Meghalaya. The Dorbar Shong can be a strong supervisory authority. This was tried in Nagaland and met with success. Even the Angwami centres and Health Sub centres can be regularly checked by the Dorbar Shong. But they must receive due remuneration for their time, dedication and effort.

Soon we will be observing World Environment Day. Meghalaya like every other state and nation is passing through uncertain weather conditions. This is likely to cause a downward in agricultural production. Let's again the Dorbar Shong can collaborate with the line Departments of Agriculture, Horticulture, Soil Conservation, Forest Department, Water Resources Department etc. If the Dorbar Shong effectively discharges its duties as the last mile institution we might still see better days ahead. The Dorbar Shong has the wherewithal to check if those building homes and offices within their jurisdictions actually follow the rule in the building permission. For long now the building permissions were granted by the Urban Affairs Department for Municipal areas and there was no check or supervision on whether the buildings were built according to regulations vis-a-vis their septic tanks and drains and whether they have observed the mandatory distance from the main road and from rivers. Everywhere we turn the rivers have become receptacles for latrines and also garbage dumps. It looks as if the Dorbar Shong has abdicated their duties. This can no longer happen. There has to be chain of command and control and accountability at every level.

The Meghalaya High Court has now come down heavily on the dereliction of duties by all the institutions. It's time that each institution, traditional or modern, learns to work together rather than against each other because of bloated political egos. The public needs to hold all the institutions accountable.

**New Shillong but Same Old Mistakes**

By Aibanshem Nongpuong

Traffic congestion in the city of Shillong has practically become part of our daily burden and the future does look bleak. Perhaps the solution to this problem will happen when hell freezes over. No matter how much we complain about it, traffic problems are here to stay. To use the excuse of being stuck in traffic as the reason for being late to school or office has become trite to say the least. But what is disheartening and frustrating is that nothing is being done to avoid repeating the traffic problems and errors in the so-called New Shillong Township.

Traffic woes have become an everyday plight especially along the stretch of road leading towards NEGRIMMS, particularly the Mawpat - Ishyrawai junction. This was not a problem of the past but is of recent origin. As one would expect, it is a by-product (economists would call this a third party effect) or more precisely a negative externality of the developing New Shillong Township. Between 8 to 10 am, bumper to bumper traffic in this junction makes the business of every day life come to a standstill. To make things worse, there is no proper demarcation of lanes. The traffic congestion extends to all sides of the road and right up to Ishyrawai hill. Two wheelers, four wheelers, lorries, army trucks, excavators etc. are all caught in the commotion. During this rush hour everyone wants to take a left or right turn or move straight and in the process things turn from bad to worse. To aggravate things even further, a good number of the vehicles from Assam and other states ply via this narrow junction on route to NEGRIMMS and NFAIH. Safe to say that the traffic congestion is caused by

We could sum with short distance flyovers for that matter. Short distance flyovers at critical junctions is not a big ask especially in areas, in and around New Shillong Township, since there is still available land and space. These flyovers will help mitigate the traffic woes to a large extent. Moreover, prospective business establishments, educational institutions and other establishments in and around this area should be asked to maintain some distance from the main road. Encroachment, as we all know, is another cause of traffic congestion as it limits the traffic and public moving space. Wider roads, more parking spaces, short distance flyovers, proper footpaths and overpass for the pedestrians to walk on can be some of the practical solutions to traffic problems that might arise in the New Shillong Township.

The existing situation in the New Shillong Township, however, looks less promising and the same mistakes of the old Shillong are more likely to be repeated. Roads are still narrow; there is no sight of flyovers; shops and other establishments are being set up too close to the road and there are no proper footpaths or overpass for pedestrians to walk on. It is only a matter of time that traffic problems at the entry (Mawpat-Ishyrawai junction) will spill over into the main parts of the new township and all hell will break loose.

We are already seeing signs of this along the stretch of road outside NEGRIMMS. This is obviously a clear indication of the lack of thinking and foresightedness of those in charge of things in the past and present. Hence, we are seeing problems of the past being repeated too often. I am only referring to the traffic congestion problems here. There is also no indication that the improvements

lack of common sense and improper traffic management, but the latter seems to be the more probable cause at the moment.

Keeping in mind that this junction leads into the so-called New Shillong Township, one might say that it is the entry gate to New Shillong. The term New Shillong has always been a misnomer to many. At times, it feels like the term was coined by estate agents to drive up the price of land in this area. As things stand, this term has not necessarily reflected a shift of development to this new place, although that was the whole idea of designating it as New Shillong. Moving government offices and other institutions to this new site does not make a new version of the city. A proper foundation or infrastructure built around it is imperative. This needs to be different from the one existing in the old city (let's call this old Shillong). In particular, we need new and innovative road infrastructure and proper traffic management. Without them, the whole purpose of having a new township gets defeated.

Construction of wider roads and flyovers at critical junctions is important to ease the traffic congestion. Given the high earthquake vulnerability of the region, the idea of having flyovers has so far been unattractive. But why not take calculated risks and venture into uncharted territories? I am sure there are experienced engineers and skilled technical experts who are qualified and up for the job. Moreover, with new and improved earthquake resistant building technology, the dream of having flyovers could soon become a reality.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request.  
Via email  
aibanshem@shillongtimes.com

**Keeping up with the times**

Editor, Efforts by the Khasi Authors Society for inclusion of the Khasi language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India is commendable. But the poor standard of Khasi literature and Khasi newspapers also proves to be a deterrent in this journey. This is the main reason why the Sahitya Akademi has delayed recognition of the Khasi language.

Khasi literature should mirror contemporary life, by critiquing and highlighting economic problems affecting contemporary Khasi society. It cannot remain stuck in old-world Radhoo Sing Berry proverbialisms of elderly teachings, gringish exhortations, fables and legends blumpkinly uppity saccharine expressions of required, unrequited love or harping on patriotism and past glory.

Flexibility in keeping up with the times is urgently required for Khasi literature to become contemporary, or to achieve contemporary narratives, contemporary localities and novel modes of expression. Language and content should have an authenticity based on how Khasis speak and converse today, removing all archaisms. It should shift perspectives, and reject rigidity forever. Its lenses and dialectics must open

realistically, seeing contemporary socio-economic problems as all-important. Translations and critical studies into English and other foreign languages can hence be met if there's an emphasis on sophisticated high literariness and refinement in comparison to other leading literatures of the world.

Yours etc.,  
Willie Gordon Saing,  
Shillong - 1

**No driving ethics at all!**

Editor, Through your esteemed medium, I would like to draw the attention of readers to an issue that is affecting every citizen of Shillong. For the past few years the driving ethics of drivers and riders of the city has gone from bad to worse. Maintaining lane discipline does not exist here especially by two wheelers, as used to ride a two-wheeler but times have changed. Riders today have no patience to stick to one lane for a few seconds; they will go around and make multiple lanes by weaving to congestion. Yesterday I was walking past Dhanchoi, I witnessed an army ambulance stuck at the entrance to Woodland hospital was blocked by taxis and Rapido riders. The army men had to carry the patient on foot

to reach the hospital. This is so wrong and should not be tolerated by the Department.

During peak hours of the day, cars are seen double park and sometimes even triple park on the Laitumkhrab main road. Then there are those who don't need to wheel parking lot. If you try to reason with the driver-car owners the reply is, "seebol duty." The fact that they think it's a valid reason to park on the road and block the flow of traffic is just so wrong. This goes to show how selfish our society has become. The Shillong Traffic police, does not clamp or take any action against these vehicles, but if you park at that same place in the evening you will without a doubt be fined by the Department. The same is the case with the road next to St. Edmund's School/College. It's strange how it works. The VIP's add to the frustration of the drivers and riders when they zap through the middle with their extra large cars just to clog the traffic even more.

During school hours, these extra large vehicles are seen to be haphazardly parked just to pick up or drop one student. The government had earlier introduced STEMS (Electronic Transport and Efficient Roadway System) to reduce congestion, but it has no takers and not a single bus is seen plying since its inauguration.

Now coming to the menace of cab drivers, the indiscriminate parking of taxis in Keating road has left no

space for other cars to ply and pedestrians to walk. The cluster of cabs in Khyawpang pose the same problems. I have stopped using my car and two-wheeler for two months now, but being a pedestrian in Shillong is a troublesome and difficult. Trying to cross the road at a zebra crossing, you get yelled at by vehicle drivers. Footpaths are small, often with vendors and hawkers occupying them. Then there are broken tiles, and sometimes there's even an electric pole smack in the middle.

If you were to come out after 8:30 pm, the streets of Shillong become Grand Prix or F1 racing circuits. They drive ride at dangerous speeds without a care in the world and there's no one to stop them. Just recently two horrific accidents were reported; if something is not done the numbers will increase.

To sum it up, the chaotic traffic situation is getting out of hand and that day is not far off when a pedestrian will get wounded just for walking. Shillong drivers and riders need to be strictly educated on driving ethics and courtesies. I urge the concerned authorities to take strict action if they have any sense of responsibility.

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request.  
Via email

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



Heavy traffic congestion in Shillong.



# Racism: Does the problem go beyond bad fans?



After suffering months of racial abuse on the field and off, Brazilian soccer star Vinicius Junior had enough.

On May 21, 2023, the Real Madrid forward — commonly seen as one of the best soccer players in the world — brought a halt to a game at Valencia's Mestalla Stadium, pointing to fans who were making blatantly racist remarks and gestures.

He later made it clear that this was not an isolated event: "It was not the first time, nor the second, nor the third. Racism is normal in La Liga," he tweeted in reference to the Spanish top division. "The competition considers it normal, the federation considers it normal and the rivals encourage it."

As a soccer scholar whose latest book includes analysis of how players, fans and the game's governing bodies have responded to the Black Lives Matter movement, I believe the latest incident points to how difficult it is to change fan behavior when racism remains institutionalized in the sport itself. While it is true that teams and leagues have made progress in signaling their lack of tolerance for racist behavior, there remain systemic problems working against real progress — not least the lack of Black representation in management positions.

## DEEP ROOTS OF SOCCER RACISM

Soccer has a long-established racism problem. Black players throughout the decades attest to both abuse by fans — monkey chants are still common during games in parts of Europe — as well as more subtle forms of discrimination, such as being left out of national squads or overlooked for coaching positions.

Black Brazilians such as Vinicius and stretching back to Pelé have been subjected to racism both overseas and at home. Indeed, as soccer writer Frankir Four has pointed out, in the early days of Brazilian soccer Black people were not allowed to play for professional clubs or the national team. Even when finally accepted, some of the star Black players like Arthur Friedenreich



and Joaquim Prado would straighten their hair and attempt to lighten their skin in the hope of gaining popularity.

While there has been great change since such times, the roots of subtle and overt racism facing Black soccer players run deep — be it in their home countries or playing for prestigious European clubs.

## SOCCER'S BLACK LIVES MATTER MOMENT

While one can argue that there have always been minor attempts to address racism in soccer, it has only really been in the last decade that such efforts have gained steam. And it has been geared very much toward changing attitudes among fans.

For example, in England, the Football Association has long partnered with anti-racist group Kick It Out to create programs and punishments for racist fan behavior. Meanwhile, the Royal

Spanish Football Association has codes for applying financial penalties against clubs with racist fans.

Such anti-racist efforts and messaging increased as part of a more general societal reckoning over racism after the killing in the U.S. of George Floyd by a police officer in 2020.

Soccer authorities — usually wary of political statements and quick to punish players who display protest slogans on shirts — by and large allowed players free expression in regard to Floyd's killing and the protests it sparked.

Indeed, after restarting a pandemic-struck season in June 2020, the English Premier League promoted an active Black Lives Matter campaign. This included "Black Lives Matter" patches on uniforms — although patches were later amended to read "No Room for Racism" — and allowing the taping of the knee before games. Three years on, many players and teams still take a knee before games throughout England.

But it hasn't stopped the abuse. In 2020, while players on the pitch were presenting a unified front against anti-Black racism, British Home Office Minister Susan Williams observed that racist incidents had risen for the third year in a row.

Soccer leagues in southern Europe tended to leave it to clubs and individuals to respond to the Black Lives Matter movement, rather than having any blanket policies akin to that of the English Football Association.

But again, it appears to have had little effect on crowd racism.

Italian soccer continues to garner a reputation for racism among its fan base. While examples are numerous, the most recent cases include verbal attacks against Lecce defender Samuel Umtiti and forward Lameck Banda while playing at Lazio, and racist taunts against Inter Milan striker Romelu Lukaku after he scored against Juventus in a Copa Italia semifinal.

In Spain, after the latest Vinicius incident, football federation chief Luis Rubiales acknowledged that racism was a problem in the league.

It would be hard not to: The abuse of May 21 was at least the 10th racist incident against the Brazilian star that Real Madrid has reported to the league this season.

The diplomatic fallout of the Vinicius abuse — Brazil summoned the Spanish ambassador, and Rio's Christ the Redeemer statue was shrouded in darkness in protest — has reignited discussion of what action needs to be taken to stamp out racism in the game.

Spanish police have made several arrests over Vinicius' abuse. Meanwhile, La Liga has fined Valencia — the team Real Madrid was playing — 45,000 euros (US\$48,000) and closed a portion of the stadium for the next five games.

But given how persistent crowd racism has been in the face of numerous attempts to challenge it, I believe it is fair to ask if such disciplinary actions will have any real impact now.

## COUNTER-COSMOPOLITANISM

Continued racism in European soccer comes despite a rise in soccer's "cosmopolitanism" culture. Prior to the 1990s, Black players in the top European leagues were relatively few and far between — especially in countries where nonwhite players would fear being subjected to racist taunts from their own supporters, as well as the opposition's.

But modern-day fans have long become accustomed to supporting a racially diverse team. So why does racism in stadiums persist? Political scientist and sociologist Andrei Markovits and Lars Rensmann point out in "Gaming the World" that the rise in cosmopolitanism on the field is not reflected in the stands — that is, in European leagues, the makeup of fan bases is not as diverse as that of the team they go to cheer on. Markovits and Rensmann argue that what we are witnessing in the stands is a kind of "counter-cosmopolitanism" in which the "other" is treated with anger and suspicion because they are deemed to threaten the stable sense of identity of some fans.

If the racial makeup of teams is not reflective of the fan base, it also isn't reflected in management, or among the people who govern the sport.

Analysis conducted in May 2022 found that of the 98 clubs that played in the five most prestigious European leagues — the English Premier League, La Liga, and Italy's Serie A, along with Germany's Bundesliga and France's Ligue 1 — only two had Black managers. La Liga had none, and still doesn't.

## FAILING THE STERLING STANDARD

As England striker Raheem Sterling noted in 2020 interview: "There's something like 500 players in the Premier League and a third of them are Black, and we have no representation of us in the hierarchy, no representation of us in the coaching staffs."

While there is certainly some merit in the actions being taken in Spain to address behavior in the stands in the aftermath of the latest Vinicius incident, there is an argument that it is too little, too late. Moreover, it does little to address more institutionalized racism in the game. And to date, anti-racism programs and fines have failed to stamp out racism in soccer.

As Sterling noted, "When there's more Black people in positions, when I can have someone from a Black background... (to) be able to go to in the [Football Association] with a problem I have within the club — these will be the times that I know that change is happening."

(The Conversation)

# Wear the colour lime with style!



Call it lime, neon or highlighter green, the summer hue has evolved into a wardrobe staple.

And if you're confused just how to pull off the colour without a faux pas, this style guide from Hollywood A-lister's helps you do the job.

### Kriti Sanon

Kriti's one-shoulder midi in lime teamed with zebra patterned heels checks all the boxes.

### Vicky Kaushal

Vicky Kaushal is a top player in Bollywood when it comes to experimenting with styles and colours. He shows us just how to pull off a lime green look from head to toe with perfection.

Klara Advani  
Klara's co-ord set is a great style for a summer brunch with the girls.

Aditya Roy Kapur  
Aditya Roy Kapur's lime on green has the ladies at hello.

### Ranveer Singh

No fashion listicle is complete without the sartorial leader of style, Ranveer Singh. The trend setter makes a bold statement with this outfit.

### Janhvi Kapoor

We admire Janhvi's commitment to dressing simply but stylishly, and she nailed it with this handkerchief top and lime pants, a great way to embrace summer. (IANSLife)

# Tipu's sword fetches over \$17 mn at London auction

While Mysuru ruler Tipu Sultan's "Bedchamber Sword" had sold for more than 14 million pounds (\$17 million) at an auction in London.

Described as "one of the world's rare artefacts", the sword's sale was conducted by Bonhams — a privately owned international auction house in London — on Tuesday, achieving 14,080,900 pounds against an estimate of 1.5 million to 2 million pounds.

The auction house said the sword was found in Tipu Sultan's private quarters of his palace after he was killed by British forces on May 4, 1799.

Following his death, the sword was presented to British Major General David Baird as a token of his courage, according to Bonhams.

The auction house said that the sword "extremely rare calligraphic hilt is a masterpiece of late-18th century Indian manufacture, intricately inlaid in gold with fine calligraphic invocations to God".

"The English inscription to the blade, presumably added by Baird or a descendant, explains how it was found in Tipu Sultan's bedchamber following the fall of Srirangapatna (now Srirangapatna) and presented to the General as a trophy of his victory."

On the spine of the blade, a gold inlaid inscription reads "Shamshir-e Malik" or "The Sword of the King".

"The sword has an extraordinary history, an astonishing provenance and unrivalled craftsmanship," CNN quoted Nima Sagharchi, group head of Islamic and Indian Art at Bonhams, as saying in the statement.

"It was no surprise it was so hotly contested between two phone bidders and a bidder in the room. We are delighted with the result," he added.

According to Bonhams CEO Bruno Vinciguerra, the "spectacular sword is the greatest of all the weapons linked to Tipu Sultan still in private hands".

"Its close personal association with the Sultan, its impeccable provenance traceable to the very day it was captured, and the outstanding craftsmanship that went into its manufacture, make it unique and highly desirable," Vinciguerra added. (IANS)



# Tips to manage workplace conflicts in a healthy way



Conflicts are bound to arise in every workplace. Whether they stem from differences in opinion, competing priorities, or misunderstandings, unresolved conflicts can lead to decreased productivity, damaged relationships, and a toxic work environment. We need to first define a conflict, it is when emotions run high, opinions are strong, and views are opposing. These three conditions create a cocktail that is like a perfect storm for a bring-out worst in people, when they need to be their best. Typically this leads to release of two stress hormones, namely cortisol and adrenaline to lead us to silence or verbal (and sometimes physical) violence.

According to a study conducted by CPP Global, a leading provider of conflict management solutions, 85 per cent of employees experienced conflict to some degree, with 29 per cent stating that it resulted in decreased productivity. To manage conflicts effectively, it is crucial to emphasise the benefits of conflict resolution. Research has shown that organisations that invest in conflict resolution training and promote open dialogue

experience improved employee engagement and job satisfaction. By addressing conflicts in a healthy manner, teams can foster a more positive and collaborative work environment.

By adopting effective dialogue strategies and crucial conversations, organisations can create a positive work environment that minimises the negative effects of conflicts and maximises productivity, employee well-being, and overall success.

**Crucial Conversations**  
The culture and subsequent results (that the culture produces) are determined by how the opinion vary, emotions are strong and stakes are high. The ability to engage in such conversations with psychological safety and mutual respect is critical to resolving conflicts constructively.

By honing the art of crucial conversations, individuals can create a safe space where difficult perspectives can be shared and understood. It involves fostering mutual respect, actively listening to others, and seeking to understand their viewpoints. This approach promotes a culture

of open dialogue and encourages all parties involved to contribute their ideas and concerns. The goal is not to avoid conflict but rather to address it in a respectful and productive manner.

**Conversational Capacity**  
Conversational capacity refers to an individual's ability to engage in dialogue under pressure or during challenging situations. It involves staying focused, remaining curious, and managing emotions effectively. By developing conversational capacity, individuals can maintain composure, think critically, and communicate constructively, even in a workplace setting. The ability to expand conversational capacity becomes even more crucial. It enables employees to engage in meaningful discussions without feeling overwhelmed or defensive. By acknowledging and managing their own emotions, individuals can create an environment conducive to problem-solving and collaboration. Moreover, an increased conversational capacity encourages the exploration of diverse perspectives, leading to more innovative and effective

### solutions.

#### The Importance of Effective Dialogue

Effective dialogue serves as the backbone of conflict management in the workplace. It allows individuals to express their concerns, clarify misunderstandings, and explore potential resolutions. When dialogue is approached with the intent of understanding rather than winning, conflicts can transform into opportunities for growth and learning.

Consider this situation, a senior manager gets upset with the direct report on the presentation they made to the group of middle managers. The Sr. Manager calls the direct reports and in a gruff and menacing tone start telling him, how inappropriate the presentation was. The Direct report was confused about the topic, as they had reviewed it together before the presentation. He knew that people attack (verbal violence) when they feel unsafe. He listened respectfully and said, "I want you to know that I respect you as the leader and if I have done something that we did not agree to, I would change that". He continued (as the Leader started breathing again) "More important that the presentation itself of the relationship I want with you. I want for us to be able to discuss any misunderstanding or disagreement directly." The leader relaxed a bit as the psychological safety was restored. The Direct report then continued the conversation to explain the context and content of the presentation. Big take away from this story is not that they were able to solve the problem and get on the same page. It was that established a path and precedence to solve issues while managing mutual respect. (ANSIFE)

# Jo jokes Harry Potter turned to crack due to stress of being 'the chosen one'



Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling has joked that Harry Potter turned to crack cocaine following the stresses his schoolboy adventures put on his life.

The 57-year-old author became a self-made billionaire, thanks to the captivating world of witchcraft and wizardry she created through her Harry Potter series, reports Mirror.co.uk.

The novels followed her school life of Harry as he made his way through school while also discovering that he was prophesied to destroy the evil Lord Voldemort - the most dangerous wizard in magical history.

As per Mirror.co.uk, while the books conclude with Harry graduating from school and going on to get married, become a father and enjoy a successful career, author Jo has hinted his life may have taken a dark turn.

Earlier in the week, a Twitter user shared a photograph of an aged man posing for a mugshot after being arrested for drug offences. A caption under the photo of the man revealed he is: "Harry Potter, 52, of Greenville" - and his arrest is listed as being due to: "Crack possession".

The Twitter user was alarmed by the photo and shared it online with a caption of their own, stating: "I have questions."

Coming across the image in question, Jo herself reacted to the image - quote tweeting it and jokingly replying: "Never said it was easy being the chosen one." (IANS)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambani Sunday, MAY 28, 2023

**'Birthday Forecast'**  
Sun sees the Saturn or your solar return chart and it's going to be a fantastic year for you. You will have work related to property get done with ease. Your thinking will be positive and you will move in the right direction. You also need to show lot of patience in business to get the good results. You will have many work load but your efforts will be good. Your opponents will get defeated. You will experience victory in debates and discussions. You will have no shortage of money and your work will also get success in business job. Your life partner will support you fully. You will also get the blessings of your deity. You will not have any disputes with your neighbors. You will spend your time in productive activities. But next activities will be catching a speed. If your financial condition will keep getting better.

**'This week for you'**  
**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)** Your business will progress fast and you will do well. There are chances of promotion in your job also. Some guests will arrive at your house. Married couple will have a better understanding of each other. They will cooperate and help each other. You will spend the week in the best way. You will participate in social activities. You will also discuss your work with lot of enthusiasm and energy. You will be financially strongest. Lovebirds will have a great time. You will be full of hopes and cheerfulness. You will be committed in your relationship. You will be happy with your achievements and it will make you feel secure. Students will get success in examination, competitive tests and interviews.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)** Though you will have some obstacles, still you will complete your work with ease. You will get full cooperation of your colleagues and bosses. Your health will remain okay. There are studies going on in your work. You will have a good company the syllabus. New resources of income will open up. You will have sweetness in your marital relations. You will make progress in your career. There will be favorable conditions for business and job. Plans for something new will be made. You will feel safe at home. There will be more dependence on your life partner. But it will not annoy you much. Your income will rise. You will meet inspiring and motivating persons.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)** Your knowledge will get enhanced. The help of age is favorable for you. You will complete your work in time. You will be successful in love affairs. You will have no shortage of money. As a result, you will plan to buy new clothes, jewelry and other things. Your pace of work will gather momentum and you will make a lot of profit. You will be with the spirit of health and the absence of chronic disease. Your hard work will give you lot of money. Relations with friends and relatives will be friendly. You will feel good in changes in yourself. You will take towards steps and level take you places. You will have a wonderful relationship and understanding with your partner.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)** Before going to start a new project, you will take advice of your seniors and will listen. You will feel satisfied. You will have good presence of mind and you will be sensible about your career. No wonder you will get good results of your work. Although you will not start new work, but you will concentrate on your old job. You will have bonding with your subordinates. You will also plan to go on a trip with your family. You will enrich your knowledge and get happiness from your property. Your morale will be good. You will earn lot of money. You will be happy in your outlook. You will have positive outlook towards life.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)** Keep happy from all angles in this 31 days when you are doing an important work. They can upset your plans. You will work with a purpose in your job and business. As a result, your production will make you aware of its full. You will be a team member. You will respect people and not be in bad behavior. As a result, you will establish an effective dialog with everyone. You will also get lot of satisfaction from your work. Your love affairs will be successful. There will be sweetness in marital relations. Take care of the emotions of your life partner, who may feel neglected. Students will get the best of their internal resources. Someone will say something nasty to you as a result you will take harsh words to your heart. There is absolutely no need to do so.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 23)** This week will yield you a excellent results. You will have a wonderful lot of assistance offered to you to do the job. You will be easily able to complete your work. You will have some developing interest in sports members. You will be clear about the goals in your life. You will have lot of sleep

and wealth going days. Your prestige will also increase. You will get success in your studies. You will complete your work. Your imagination will be at your approach and will fulfill your desires. You will receive a heavy sum of money on signing a contract. You will receive support of your family members. He need not be impatient of other things in life.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)** You will win over people with your strategy and simplicity. You will be busy in your work. You will complete your work. There will be reduction in your work. Family matters and personal matters. You will make best advantage of your contacts and thus expand the scope of your work. A small problem may look big to you but handle it intelligently. You will make maximum use of your knowledge and intelligence. You will have bonding relations with your life partner. There will be peace and stability in your personal life. Someone may ignore you but you need not get a pest and keep on doing your essential work.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 23)** It is a great week. You will be doing hard work and getting the results. You will be able to finish your work on time. You will also get success in establishing relations with his group. Those looking for job for a long time now will get success. Guests will arrive at your home and will keep you busy. You will be able to do some important work for which you will be given credit. You will let your mind wander in the wrong direction and talk glibly while dealing with others. It will serve your purpose well. You will face all your difficulties with determination and energy soon.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 23)** The week will prove to be beneficial for you. Your work will be completed. You will have a meeting with influential persons. This will open up the doors of success for you. As a result, you will make plans and work accordingly. Success will be in your reach. You will get help from all problems with you. You will be able to deal with your respect and prestige will increase. Success in financial sphere will come in and it will be for you. You will see a big contrast for yourself. You will take big steps and careful decisions in business. It will yield great results for you. The main efforts you put in, the better will be the results. Your enemies will have a plan to deal you, but they will not get success.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)** The road leading to success will be bright. You will complete your work with sincerity. Your work will bring you the much needed that you will have very big gains for yourself. People will adore you for your hard work and there will be no dearth of people who are jealous of your progress. You will start plan to go on of dates with your family. Achievements will bring in peace and happiness in your life and will make you feel secure and content. This is your golden time. Your hard and will be very good. A dispute regarding land will be resolved. A meeting with an inspiring person will give you with energy and enthusiasm.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)** This week is indicating an progress in your job/business. Money will keep coming and your income will increase. But you will have to handle expenses too. You will get good results in your business. There will be joy and bliss in family life. Peace and harmony will remain within family. You will fulfill the demands of your family. You will be able to finish your work. You will also get better career opportunities through social networking sites. There will be positive change in your outlook and behaviour. You will also get a big order from abroad. Your time will be spent in fun and frolic with friends and relatives. You will plan to go in a boat for a picnic with your family. You will meet lot of interesting persons.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)** At the beginning of the right direction you will also not leave any thing incomplete from your side. Your enemies and opponents will be unable to overpower you. You will do something new for the better. Some of your long lasting worries will also come to an end. You also come in contact with some influential persons and will get lot of help. You will complete your work with lot of sincerity. You will also add creative name and fame and will have direct conversation with the people. You will have more maturity than before. Financially you will be a much much stronger person. You will have a very progressive job in your work/industry. You will care a lot for your children and will be concerned about their careers. You will be very helpful to others.

# The Diary of West Bengal: Another controversial movie in the offing



Sanjay Mishra, the writer and director of the controversial movie *The Diary of West Bengal* has been served a legal notice by Kolkata Police and has been asked to be present at a city police station on May 30 for the purpose of questioning.

Police sources said that the trailer of the movie was released on YouTube recently, following which, there was a complaint on May 11, alleging that the movie seemed to have been made as a deliberate attempt to malign the image of West Bengal.

Following preliminary investigation, the top brass of the city felt that there is sufficient ground to question the director in the matter and hence, a notice has been served to him asking him to report at Amber Street Police station at 12 noon on May 30, a city police official said.

The notice has been issued under Section 41A of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC).

The legal notice, issued to Mishra, said that "there are reasonable grounds to question the director of the film to ascertain the facts and circumstances of this case."

The notice further read, "Hence, you are directed to appear before Inspector Subhabrata Kar, Additional Officer-in-Charge of Amber Street Police Station on 30.05.2023 at 12:00 hrs, at Amber Street Police Station, 57, Raja Ram Mohan Sarani, Kolkata-9 for the purpose of investigation of the above referred case. Inspector-in-Charge, Oshiwara Police Station, Mumbai to serve the notice and to inform about service through return signal."

Meanwhile, the controversial film is presented

by Wasim Rizvi Films and produced by Jitendra Narayan Singh with Tapas Mukherjee and Achintya Bosh serving as co-producers.

In its trailer, the film claimed that there were "mass murders, rapes and a Hindu exodus" occurring in West Bengal.

It was also said that Bengal is the new Kashmir of India.

Recently, the West Bengal government was in controversy for imposing a ban on the screening of *The Kerala Story*, on grounds that the content of the movie can hamper communal harmony in the state.

The director of the movie Subrata Sen moved the Supreme Court and the ban was finally lifted. The state government faced criticism from the opposition parties, civil society, intellectuals and celebrities for imposing the ban.

Film director Sanjay Mishra said that his movie is based on facts. He said there is an issue with the law and order situation in West Bengal.

Director Sanjay Mishra said, "I have made a movie based on facts. I urge the prime minister, home minister to intervene in the matter. There are a lot of mass murders, rapes and a Hindu exodus happening in West Bengal. I have done a lot of research and the movie is completely based on facts."

"Once I go to West Bengal I will not return. However, I have made all the preparations for the movie and will release it soon. By August we are planning to release the movie. I will make sure the movie gets released," he said.

Mishra added, "I am not against Didi (Mamata Banerjee), I am against the system." (Agencies)

"A warm smile is the universal language of kindness."

—William Arthur Ward

**The Shillong Times**

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**Symbolism, Parliament**

SYMBOLICALLY, a new era dawns in the history of India which has run on democratic lines for three quarters of a century. Despite the eruption of a row over the exclusion of President Droupadi Murmu from the historic event, the solemn inauguration of the new Parliament building on Sunday has significance at multiple levels. For one, the vast increase in the number of seats for both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha meets the first requirement for an increase in the number of people's representatives in both Houses for the future. The way is clear for a constituency delimitation exercise, which could start by 2026 and the seat increases are possible from the time of the 2029 parliament polls. This would, again, be on the basis of the current population strength. While the inaugural event was held on Hindu religious lines, all-religion prayers marked its grand finale, a fitting tribute to the spirit of unity of the nation, which should be preserved and promoted at all costs.

The highlight of the event was another fitting tribute to the cause of good governance. The Sengol that Prime Minister Modi installed prominently in the new Parliament, signifies at one level a transfer of power. Originally from the Chola dynasty, it had been handed over to the first Prime Minister Nehru when the British rulers transferred power to India on August 15, 1947. The name Sengol originates from the Tamil word Sennai that denotes righteousness. Sengol upholds the values of fairness and equality in the conduct of governance in a just manner. The handmade, gold-plated, 5ft tall rod has Nandi, the holy bull of Lord Shiva mounted on its top.

The Chola dynasty had huge military might at one time. It held the entire south India under its rule and carried with it a maritime fleet that went and captured Maldives, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. The Chola navy was the ultimate in ancient India's maritime power between the 9th and 11th centuries. The Cholas excelled in both maritime and trade activities and are credited with linking old China's markets with the rest of the world. They promoted agriculture, trade and cultural activities and built huge temples that are still the main attractions for tourists in Tamil Nadu and even Indonesia. While PM Modi invoked its strength and gave it an appropriate slot, India needs to walk miles and miles before it sees good governance. It's our hope that ministers and parliamentarians would draw inspiration from this great symbol right before their eyes - even as they have turned their back on the Ashok Chakra, another dominant symbol of Independent India.

**Misplaced fears of the Supreme Court**

There seems to be a grave misunderstanding on the Reservation issue and the judgments delivered by the honorable Supreme Court on this sensitive issue. There is also a paranoic about the possibility of the apex court striking down the state's Reservation policy. In this connection, I refer to a news item in your paper published on May 26, 2023 under the heading "Education Minister fears Supreme Court will strike down quota policy." As per this report, the Education Minister while expressing the above fears cited the Supreme Court order directing the Kerala government that any reservation should not exceed 50%.

Here, I would like to state that in the case of the Kerala government versus M. Thomas and others, the apex court while directing the Kerala government to stick to 50% reservation has also provided exemptions under extraordinary situations. An extract from Para. 191 of the judgment will perhaps clarify matters: "Decided cases of this court have no doubt laid down that the percentage of reservation should not exceed 50%. This, however, is a rule of caution and does not exhaust all categories. Suppose for instance, a state has a large number of backward classes which constitute 90% of the population and the government in order to give proper representation reserves 80% of the jobs for them, can it be said that the percentage is bad and violates clause (d) under Article

167? The answer must necessarily be in the negative. The dominant object of this provision is to take steps to make adequate and separate representation Adequate."

The implications of the exemption in the above judgment are clear. Among other things, it implies that the 85% reservation adopted by Meghalaya is legally and constitutionally justified because Meghalaya has a tribal population of 85.9% and this tribal population is yet to be at par with mainstream India on many parameters.

Again, the honorable Education Minister referred to an ordinance by the Maharashtra government giving reservation to certain tribes beyond 50 percent which was struck down by the apex court. In this regard, it may be mentioned that several civil suits were filed in the apex court against the Maharashtra government and a five judge constitutional bench heard and delivered judgment on May 5, 2021. It may be noted that the apex court while directing the Maharashtra government to stick to 50 percent reservation once again provided exemptions after hearing the learned counsel on several occasions. During the hearing, the learned Attorney General of Maharashtra submitted that in our state there is a tribal population of 85.9 percent.

The said Para 810 says the following: "While 50% shall be the

**Reservation Policy progressive when seen from broader perspective**

By H H Mohrmen

Like other major issues such as the inter-state border dispute, the Reservation Policy also has been a subject of intense debate in the state for many decades now. When everything else moves and changes with time, the two issues refuse to die down. Leaders of pressure groups that spearheaded the demand for the Reservation Policy came and go and in the process change their stripes as well. Yet there seems to be no end to the imbroglio. Currently, the move to review the Policy is being led by a political party.

The need to review the Policy. One may ask why there is a demand to review the state reservation policy. The reservation policy was made to address the need of the people of Meghalaya then and it has served the state for more than fifty years now. The piece of legislation was challenged in the Court of law and the Court has found some anomalies in the implementation of the Reservation Policy of the State and has provided some suggestions. The very fact that the Court had to intervene is because there is a lacuna in the policy.

When the Roster System was sought to be implemented, some section of the population raised a hue and cry about the its implementation. The claim that the Roster System is unfair for certain sections of the population in the state. The point is any law adopted has to address the specific objectives that it intended and should be relevant to the time.

If the Policy is not addressing the need of the times it becomes redundant law and hence the need to bring in a new law. The law should not only address the needs of the present generation but it needs to address future needs too. The question arises as whether the current policy is just and fair to every section of the population in the state. Let us start by looking at the population scenario in the country now. We are a country of 1.4 billion people

right now and the population grows with time. India is going to be an old country with a young population and in such a situation the population of youth in the state will also increase making job opportunities for the youths a challenging task. So what is the unemployment scenario in the state now? Climate change is also happening and this will also affect the unemployment scenario as people will seek to move to cooler climes.

The government is responsible to its people. The government must protect the interests of the people of the state. They are supposed to serve the people who elect them to govern. This is the situation that has arisen now. Is that the Roster System will be affecting the youths of the state. Genuine concerns are raised. There are court rulings in the different parts of the country on the issue of job reservation which could have an adverse effect on the present Policy. If it is tinkered with, this is a genuine point, but does that mean that the legislature should stop making laws on the Reservation Policy? Where are the grounds for these apprehensions? What is the legislature supposed to do if not to make laws? So when there is discontent on this one piece of law, it is only natural for the public to expect the law makers to put their heads together to amend or review the Policy. What is expected of time is to come up with a policy that is fair and just.

Apprehensions of judicial intervention. Till today the democratic setup in the country works like a well oiled machine and the three pillars of democracy work in perfect harmony with one another. The success of our democracy largely depends on how the legislature, the executive, the judiciary and of course the fourth estate respect each other. The organs of democracy serve as a check and balance against each other for the smooth functioning of the democratic process in the country. Of the

four pillars of democracy, the legislature is directly responsible to the public, and naturally, the expectations of the citizens of the state from their legislators is to make enlightened laws.

Fears of the court intervention has no grounds if the government's honest intent is to come up with a Reservation Policy that is fair and addresses the need of all sections of the community. Why should we doubt our legislators to come up with a good law which is relevant to the times and addresses the need of all sections of the community? Legislators can come up with a new reservation policy that is in the true spirit of the Constitution, when it is clearly the duty of the court to intervene? The government is now aware of all the court rulings and orders on the subject in the different parts of the country. The only need is to address the reservation the courts had raised and make a good piece of law. Besides, the government has a battery of legal experts at their disposal in the form of the Law Department and the State Law Commission. All that it needs is genuine concern and a noble intention for providing a just and fair policy for every section of the population. The public needs to trust the state's ruling dispensation too and under the leadership of the government, naturally for the public to expect the law makers to put their heads together to amend or review the Policy. What is expected of time is to come up with a policy that is fair and just.

A fair and just reservation policy also requires that it also addresses the need of the deserving members of the society, the differently-abled, the poor, and the weaker sections of the population. The legislature cannot take away from their responsibility; in fact, a review of the Reservation Policy was one of the issues that the regional parties highlighted in their manifesto in the very recent general elections to the state assembly. This will be an opportunity for the regional parties and all the political parties in the state to fulfill their election promise.

The major thrust should be to ensure that there are no legal loopholes in the policy that could create conflict or give room for court intervention and I hope that is not too much to ask from our legislators. A fair and just reservation policy also requires that it also addresses the need of the deserving members of the society, the differently-abled, the poor, and the weaker sections of the population. The legislature cannot take away from their responsibility; in fact, a review of the Reservation Policy was one of the issues that the regional parties highlighted in their manifesto in the very recent general elections to the state assembly. This will be an opportunity for the regional parties and all the political parties in the state to fulfill their election promise.

The legislature cannot take away from their responsibility; in fact, a review of the Reservation Policy was one of the issues that the regional parties highlighted in their manifesto in the very recent general elections to the state assembly. This will be an opportunity for the regional parties and all the political parties in the state to fulfill their election promise.

As employment is going to be a major issue and in the future jobs will be difficult to come by, the new reservation policy ought to have special protection for the youths of the state, irrespective of their ethnicity or the area they belong to. While reviewing the policy, the government

needs to take into consideration factors like the growing population, technological advancement, artificial intelligence in particular, and the effects of climate change. These factors will have some impact on jobs in the future and on the employment scenario in the state.

Indeed, the government is not supposed to be the major employer and in the future, many of the jobs would be in non-government sectors. In this context the question is whether the State Reservation Policy would apply to jobs in the private sectors too. The number of jobs in the private sector even within the state is increasing day by day. The current industry is a case in point. The Reservation Policy should be all-encompassing and it needs to cater to the needs of all the genuine sections of the population. Reservation should be for genuine residents of the state only. Given the extraordinary growth of population in the country, the policy also needs to come clear on the categorization of a 'general category' in the reservation policy. The government should look at things from a larger and broader perspective and more importantly, it needs to be forward-looking.

The major thrust should be to ensure that there are no legal loopholes in the policy that could create conflict or give room for court intervention and I hope that is not too much to ask from our legislators. A fair and just reservation policy also requires that it also addresses the need of the deserving members of the society, the differently-abled, the poor, and the weaker sections of the population. The legislature cannot take away from their responsibility; in fact, a review of the Reservation Policy was one of the issues that the regional parties highlighted in their manifesto in the very recent general elections to the state assembly. This will be an opportunity for the regional parties and all the political parties in the state to fulfill their election promise.

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**Meghalaya Data Portal: Towards an accelerated and inclusive growth**

By Sriidhar Kundu

Meghalaya today is one of the lowest per-capita income states in India. In 2022-23, the per capita income stands at Rs. 98,372 compared to national per-capita income of Rs. 1,20,000 per annum (at 2011-12 current prices).

The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of Meghalaya is about Rs. 42,000 crores in 2022-23 (at 2011-12 current prices). Over the last 10 years, the annual average growth of the state's GDP stands at 7.4 percent compared to the national growth rate of 11 percent per annum at current prices.

The state has adequate potential of physical and human resources to become a 10 billion USD economy (approx. Rs. 1 lakh crore). To achieve this by 2030, the state economy needs to grow at an estimated rate of 12 percent per annum. Besides this aspirational target, it is more important to make growth inclusive and to make the maximum of its benefits available to the poorest of the poor. The NITI Aayog, 2021 report says that about 33 percent of population in Meghalaya are multi-dimensionally poor compared to national average of 25 percent. In the Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index (MPI), Meghalaya score: 0.157 and ranks far ahead of national score of 0.112 in 2021. The state faces the biggest challenge of pulling a million plus of its population out of poverty. Data plays an important role in mapping and redesigning government policies. It gives feedback about the past and present policies of the government. It presents the past trend of the direction of the economy and its various sectors and thus, helps the government to examine the merits and limitations of its various policies. Inter-sectoral relationships are also examined with the help of data.

The Meghalaya Data Portal (MDP) is an effort of the state government to provide a platform for accessing the scattered information available in the public domain in various formats across different sectors of the economy. Activities related to scraping and collation of information and to store them in a readable format and further, use of the data for analysis and reporting platform, as performed by the expert technicians from Bharati Institute of Public Policy at the Indian School of Business. It can be witnessed with the help of the web link: <https://meghalayadatalab.informatica.com>

The MDP at its present stage provides information about 30 datasets. Information about most of these datasets is available at the district and sub-district level. Information for some of the datasets such as Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), Mission Antyodaya etc. is available even at sub-district, village, and panchayat level.

The consumer price index (CPI) based inflation measures the change in price level of the daily consumed commodities of households. The rise in prices impacts the standard of living. The households at the bottom of the income pyramid are largely impacted by rising prices. The MDP provides information about the monthly CPI inflation rate of over 500 commodities grouped in seven categories for the state for the last 10 years. This would help the state machinery to track the price changes of the necessary commodities mostly consumed by the poor households and take necessary actions. Price level in the state is determined by both internal and external demand-supply conditions. On the external front, information about import and export of principal commodities such as cotton, beverage, furniture etc. from the state is available from 2012. The information would be useful in experimenting with the comparative advantages of the state in various tradable commodities.

Food and Agriculture. Agriculture and allied sectors constitute about 19 percent of the state's GSDP in 2021-22. It has a significant contribution to employment and the rural economy. The MDP has a special focus on this sector by capturing and disseminating information about food and agriculture status in the state.

The production trend of over 50 crops and their area coverage and productivity over the last 25 years can be available from the portal. It will help the state to address the growth and productivity of crops mostly produced by the small and marginal land holders. The large-scale information on production at district level would help address the issues of crop intensification, use of fertilizer and technology and create a soil and environment friendly agriculture ecosystem in the state. Better information about MSP of various commodities and price information from various mandis available in the portal would strengthen the agriculture product market and bridge the trust deficit gaps among the producers and the state producer, consumer, and the state.

The MDP can be used as a base point to measure the socio-economic change as it provides district wise household level information regarding access to road connectivity, drinking water, toilet facilities, banks, 33 percent electricity coverage, etc. from the source of socio-economic caste census 2011. Data related to access of school and higher education of school infrastructure can be obtained from the portal. Similarly, information on various health indicators such as maternal and child health status, access to health sub-centres and primary health centres at district and sub-district level is available from the data portal.

Financial Inclusion. A developed network of financial services is important for its service and related infrastructure facilities to access the network, helps access of credit to every section of the population. Credit inclusion is the growth and development of any sector. Similar information of credit by each deserving person needs development of infrastructure. The portal helps in providing detailed information of deposits and credit disbursements by scheduled commercial banks at district level. Similar information about money spent by various companies under the domain of corporate social responsibility by public in a common and other sensitive sectors of the economy is available and easily downloadable from the data portal.

The MDP provides detailed information about important developmental programs run under various government schemes. Information about credit disbursements through various banks under the Pradhan Mantri Employment Generation Program (PMEGP) can help the state to track the development and impact of small-scale enterprises and their impact on employment generation. Again, the updated information in the field of agriculture and rural infrastructure development.

Even with all the information as discussed above, the MDP does not stop here. Going forward, it aims to include both micro and macro level indicators available in the public domain and present them with eye-catching visualisations to benefit the common man understanding of the state economy and government functioning. It stands as a facilitator to bridge the information gap and helps in improving relationships between the people to take the economy forward to achieve sustained growth at higher level of equilibrium and inclusive growth among all citizens of the state.

Dr. Sriidhar Kundu, Senior Lecturer, Bharati Institute of Public Policy, Indian School of Business.

Supreme Court has not been cast in stone. In all the three cases cited above the honorable Supreme Court in its wisdom has allowed special exceptions, exemptions and considerations.

Regarding the March 2021 notice cited in your above news item which has been applied to by our government, I would like to state that on reading the Supreme Court judgment on a case between the Government of Maharashtra versus several petitioners mentioned several times above in which our learned Attorney General also represented, it has become apparent that the above Meghalaya government reply has been taken into account by the Supreme Court and further hearing on this will not be necessary.

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**Reservation Policy Dilemma in the Khasi Hills: Call for Visionary Leadership**

The Reservation Policy in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya has long been a topic of intense debate and controversy. Recently, this issue has gained renewed attention due to the mobilization of the masses by Hab Arden Basistawm, who has resorted to an indefinite hunger strike in an attempt to compel the government to engage in a meaningful dialogue on the Reservation Policy. Basistawm's actions have unleashed a political storm, exposing the lack of vision and leadership displayed by

both Khasi and Garo politicians in addressing this pressing issue.

Basistawm's hunger strike has become a powerful symbol of the deep-rooted dissatisfaction among the people regarding the current Reservation policy. His act serves as a stark reminder that the Reservation policy should be reviewed and revised in order to better address the needs and aspirations of the people.

The ensuing political storm reveals the absence of visionary leadership among the Khasi and Garo politicians. Rather than prioritizing the concerns of the people and seeking common ground, politicians seem more preoccupied with advancing their own interests and perpetuating divisions. This shortsightedness and lack of unity among political leaders further exacerbates the Reservation Policy dilemma, leaving the citizens disillusioned and marginalized.

However, amidst this turmoil, an opportunity arises for the government to demonstrate visionary leadership and unite the people of Meghalaya. It is imperative that the government takes a compelling vision for a unified state, emphasizing the values of cohesion, inclusivity, and equal opportunities for all.

One potential solution to the Reservation Policy dilemma lies in re-evaluating the current allocation of reservations. Rather than dividing the 80% reservation into two equal halves, with 40% for the Garos and 40% for the Khasis and Jaintia people, an alternative approach could be considered. This alternative suggests opening up the entire 80% reservation to all three groups, thereby creating an environment of healthy competition and fair opportunity for excellence. Such an allocation would incentivize politicians to prioritize the development of their constituencies and encourage constituents to strive for excellence in their professions. By adopting this alternative, the government can promote fairness, meritocracy, and unity. This approach would not only address the reservations of marginalized communities but also cultivate a spirit of healthy competition among citizens, motivating them to work hard and reach greater heights. It would encourage politicians to focus on developing their constituencies and promoting the welfare of their constituents, rather than perpetuating divisive politics. But alas! Will the government even open up the avenues for discussion?

The government has a valuable opportunity to unite the three tribes and guide Meghalaya towards a future of inclusivity, growth, and prosperity for all its citizens.

Yours etc., Jonathan W. Langrai, Via email

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

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"If you're a true warrior, competition doesn't scare you. It makes you better."  
— Andrew Whitworth

The Shillong Times

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Lessons from Manipur conflict

VIOLENCE hit Manipur is yet to limp back to normalcy. On the contrary curfew hours have been extended instead of being gradually lessened. The violence that started on May 3 and has officially claimed over a hundred lives (the real numbers are yet unknown and will perhaps never be known) and displaced over 45,000 people of both the Kuki-Zomi communities and the Meiteis. What has happened in Manipur is a total collapse of law and order — a state subject. On May 3, some extremist groups from the valley — the Arambai Tengol and Meitei Leepun unleashed violence in the Imphal valley burning homes of Kuki tribals and looting weapons from no less than the armory of the Manipur Police Training College and 8 other police stations. How could this be allowed to happen if not through collusion?

That 10 MLAs representing the Kuki people have written to the Union Home Minister seeking a separate administrative arrangement. In short they want nothing less than a self-governance model along the lines of the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India which grants to tribals the right to govern themselves and to develop the areas under their control in a nuanced way which might not be possible under a government where a non-tribal majority is in control. A very robust form of the 6th Schedule is seen in the Bodo Territorial Region (BTR) with extensive powers to develop the hitherto neglected human resource of the areas and create institutions that would address the educational and developmental backlog and also ensure that people don't feel the sense of neglect that leads to dystopia and pushes them to take up arms against the state.

The rising unemployment problem in every state of the region and the inability of those elected to govern to think outside the box and create situations where investments can come in and the youth can be gainfully employed outside the government sector, has been plaguing the region. The large youth demographics can be a source of discontent if it works like a misguided missile. And states with multi-ethnic populations need people with statesmanship qualities to be at the helm. Chief Ministers cannot be seen to represent one or other communities. They should represent the entire population of the state and rise above their ethnic biases. To play the ethnic card in governance is a dangerous trend because it creates a crisis of confidence in the governed. This is further aggravated by the easy availability of arms from across the porous borders of this region. There are vested interests that take advantage of this youth power and that makes it a dangerous cocktail. There are lessons to be learnt from the present crisis in Manipur and one lesson is that it is imperative to create platforms for discussions and deliberations on any point of contention.

Letters to the Editor

Is Enforcement Directorate meant for the Opposition only?

Editor,  
Every self-respecting citizen is aghast at the on-going invariable and arbitrary raids and routine summons of the prominent opposition parties by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), CBI, IT, EC and other constitutional bodies for queries for hours on end, thus, unnecessarily harassing them and inflicting

in the indiscreet exercises at the behest of the powers that be by abundantly harassing the political adversaries of the BJP. The unfortunate victims must be spending sleepless nights! No wonder the incumbent Chief of the Enforcement Department Sanjay Kumar Mishra, who was appointed in 2018 for a spell of two years only had the blessing of a third extension and his anybody's guess why he has been reappointed. Either way, the griping has hit the Mishra in an admirer of BJP's ideology.

Paradoxically, many BJP leaders such as the Chief Minister of our nearest state of Assam is accused of water scam, Suvenbu Adhikari in Sarabha scam and many others are all walking free. The ED is turning a blind eye on such gargantuan misdeeds. Hence, these constitutional bodies are making themselves a laughing stock for the law abiding citizens.

Following the High Court Judgment dated 05.04.2022, directing the State Government to implement a Roster System to ensure that the Reservation Policy is adhered to in letter and spirit the Resolution dated 12th January, 1972, the MDA government vide O.M. dated 10th May, 2022 issued guidelines to implement a 100 point Roster in pursuance of the High Court Judgment. The Notification dated May 26, 2023 whereby the Governor of Meghalaya has constituted a committee of all political parties for discussing the implementation of the Reservation Roster System, and to submit a recommendation of the same to the state government within 15 days means that it has become a very pressing concern for the state.

In anticipation of this Committee, and its recommendations, I am writing this article to bring to the attention of all concerned that a comparison has to be made between the mechanisms of a 100 point Roster and a Post based Roster, to see which Roster will most faithfully and efficiently adhere to the Reservation Policy in the spirit and letter of the Resolution dated January 12, 1972. So, for the benefit of all concerned, let us take a glance at the mechanism of the 100 point Roster, and then at the mechanism of a Post based Roster, and then at the provisions of the Reservation Policy.

So how is the 100 point Roster drawn up? A point in the Roster for any category (Khasi, Garo, Other SCs/STs or UR) is determined by dividing 100 by the respective percentage of that category. So, for example, in order to determine the points in the Roster in respect of the Other SCs & STs category, we divide 100 by that category's quota percentage, i.e. 10%, and so, dividing 100 by 10, we get 10. Therefore, every 10th point on the Roster is earmarked for the Other SCs & STs category, i.e. points 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80 and 90. Similarly, for UR category (15% quota), dividing 100 by 15, we get 6.67. Therefore, every 7th point in the Roster is earmarked for the UR category. Similarly, point no. 1 is earmarked for UR, therefore every 7th point from the 1st is earmarked for UR category, i.e. 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, 36, 43, 50, 57, 64, 71, 78, 85, 92, 99. So, after adjusting for the 5 points of the Other SCs & STs category, and the 15 points of the UR category, we have 80 points left, which will be shared between the Khasi & Garo categories (40% each), which will be determined in the same way, by dividing 80 by 40, which is 2. So, every 2nd point in the 100 point Roster, after adjusting for the Other SCs/STs and UR cat-

egories, is earmarked for the Khasi and Garo categories, respectively. Let us take a look at how a Post based Roster is drawn up. In a post based Roster, the number of points is equal to the number of posts in a cadre. Each post is assigned a point. The first post will be point no. 1, the second post will be point no. 2, and so on, according to the strength of the cadre. A point in the Roster for any category (Khasi, Garo, Other SCs/STs or UR) is determined by first multiplying each point with the respective quota of all the categories, to get the fraction of the post for each category. So, for example, for point no. 1, we multiply 1 by each of the categories' percentage of reservation, i.e. 1 x 40/100 for Khasi, 1 x 40/100 for Garo, 1 x 5/100 for Other SCs/STs, 1 x 15/100 for UR. The fraction of post-point no. 1 will be 3.4 for Khasi, 0.4 for Garo, 0.05 for Other SCs/STs and 0.15 for UR. In this way, for each post-point in the Roster, the fraction for each of the category against that post-point is obtained, by multiplying the number of that post-point by the respective percentage of each category. So, in this way, the Roster is drawn up.

Now, how are the points/ posts then earmarked for each of the categories in this Post based Roster? At any point in the Roster, when any of the category's fraction reaches the next whole number mark, say 1, or crosses that whole number, say 1.2, that point post will be earmarked for that category. For example, in such a Roster, the fraction for the UR category will be 0.9 at point no. 6 (46/15=3.06), and it reaches 1.05 at point no. 7 (7/7=1.0). So, at point no. 7, the UR category, by getting a fraction of 1.05, has either reached a whole number or crossed it, from its previous fraction of 0.9 and so that post-point no. 7 will be earmarked for the UR category.

Now, what happens at points no. 1 and 2, where none of the categories have yet reached a whole number or crossed it. The highest fraction at post-point no. 1 is 0.4 (for Khasi & Garo categories) and at point no. 2 is 0.8 (also, for Khasi & Garo categories). The Resolution dated 12th January, 1972, clearly allows for a fraction upto 0.4 to be rounded off to 1, at clause 3(1), and so points no. 1 and 2 will be earmarked for Khasi or Garo category.

Now, what happens at those points where none of the categories reaches a next whole number or crosses it? In such cases, the point/post will be earmarked against the category with the highest fraction (either Khasi or Garo), such as at points no. 11 & 12. But if one of the Reserved categories (Other SCs/STs) obtains a minimum fraction of 0.4, that fraction can be rounded off to 1, and that point earmarked for that category. If that category is yet under-represented in the cadre, such as at point no. 8, in such a Roster, those posts will be available to other categories, and the deficiency in respect of that particular category will be carried over to the next recruitment year, provided that the deficiency will not be carried over for more than one year. The Post based Roster is sufficient to implement this provision without hassle as any excess deficiency will be adjusted over a period of one year. But I am not sure how this will be implemented in a 100 points cycle.

100 Points Roster vs. Post Based Roster  
**Relook at Resolution dated 12th January, 1972**

By Kitor H Blah

This defeats the principle of adequate representation which is outlined at Article 16(4) of the Constitution, as well as the Resolution. Whereas, in a Post based Roster, it allows for the 8th point post to be earmarked to the Other SCs/STs category since it meets the minimum fraction of 0.4, which can be rounded off to 1.

Lastly, the Resolution provided that there are no eligible candidates to fill the Reserved posts for a particular category, in a particular year, those posts will be available to other categories, and the deficiency in respect of that particular category will be carried over to the next recruitment year, provided that the deficiency will not be carried over for more than one year. The Post based Roster is sufficient to implement this provision without hassle as any excess deficiency will be adjusted over a period of one year. But I am not sure how this will be implemented in a 100 points cycle.

Now, mentioning must be made of the case "R. K. Sabharwal vs. State of Punjab" as well as the case "J. C. Mallick vs. Ministry of Railways", where the Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court held that reservation jobs for the backward classes (SC/ST/OBC) should apply to posts and not to vacancies. What this means is that once a post has been filled by Reservation, then that post is to be earmarked for that particular category, even if that particular post becomes vacant due to retirement, resignation, promotion, etc. Such vacancy must be filled by the same category, since the Reservation that was earmarked for that post applies to that post, and not just to the vacancy of that post. The 100 point Roster is deficient to meet this principle held by the Court, since vacancies are filled according to the posts, earmarked for the Roster cycle, and the reservation of the posts that become vacant due to retirement, resignation, promotion, etc. is not accounted for. However, a Post based Roster is not subject to such a 100 points cycle, and is only as long as the strength of the cadre.

At any point, when a post becomes vacant due to retirement, resignation, promotion, etc., that post will be filled up by the respective category that was earmarked against that particular point post in the Post based Roster. All in all, in view of all the above considerations, it seems that the Post based Roster is the system that will most faithfully and efficiently implement the State Reservation Policy in the spirit and letter of the Resolution dated January 12, 1972.

Another deficiency in the 100 point Roster can be seen if we suppose that in a particular cadre, there are yet only 15 posts. If we look at the 100 point cycle, in such a cadre of 15 posts, there will be 3 URs, 6 Khasis and 6 Garos. In such a case, while the representation of the Khasi and Garo categories meet the 40% quota, the UR category is over represented at 20%. If we take a cadre with as yet 10 posts, UR are still over represented at 20%. If we take a cadre of 5 posts, UR are over represented at 25%.

Another deficiency in the 100 point Roster can be seen if we suppose that in a particular cadre, there are yet only 15 posts. If we look at the 100 point cycle, in such a cadre of 15 posts, there will be 3 URs, 6 Khasis and 6 Garos. In such a case, while the representation of the Khasi and Garo categories meet the 40% quota, the UR category is over represented at 20%. If we take a cadre with as yet 10 posts, UR are still over represented at 20%. If we take a cadre of 5 posts, UR are over represented at 25%.

Education system requires complete overhaul

Editor,  
I winced in agonising emotional pain reading the report: "Cry for revamp of education sector after poor results." (ST May 27, 2023). How often have we read headlines to this effect year after year? Shouldn't we have rectified the malaise that plagues the education system now? We are a small state and students taking the school examinations are very small in number. Now should there be any excuse for the neglect of our school education? It's a shame that we cannot get our act together and put our reasons first. And the reasons given by the MLA reflects not just his own inadequacy, but the government's too. I cannot accept the government's lethargic approach and, here again, let one and all exercise their Duty of

Care' to shame and disgrace the government into placing education as top priority. Let's all show our deep, deep anger, because it's the angry person who can bring about a change! If Gandhi wasn't angry and humiliated at being kicked out of the railway compartment, he wouldn't have taken a turn in his life. I believe.

The MLA gives examples of the poor performance of Garo of a post after reading ill-equipped infrastructure, inadequate teacher training and insufficient training institutes. And when he struggles to continue this letter because hysterical laughter has gripped me, so let me end with two suggestions.

1) I have a request to the CM for a streamlined education sector be aggressively pursued. (I'm available to have a no holds barred, even hitting below the belt, preliminary

meeting with the MLA, for his presentation to the CM.)  
2) How wonderful it would be that a student exchange programme be initiated for all school going children/grandchildren of bureaucrats, politicians and implementers of educational policies/plans for at least a period of one month to these far-flung schools that lack all what the MLA mentions. I'd rather it was three months!

There has to be a turning point in our school education where the culture and ethos from the humble teachers to Principals/Heads, from principals to the letter and genuinely work with an unimpaired excitement, enthusiasm, passion and dedication. This student exchange might move the conscience of the educators and accountability will be their watershed.

Yours etc.,  
Kevin Phillips  
Shillong - 19

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**Cooperative or Combative? The Saga of Milk Wars**

By Ajit Ranade

During the recent Kamataka elections, one divisive issue was about the milk brand Anmol from Gujarat versus local brand Nandini. How did this become an electoral issue? That is because Anmol was seen to be muscling into Nandini's territory. The entrant was identified with the incumbent ruling party, and local Nandini's cause was championed by the opposition. It was also framed as a fight to preserve local identity versus a nationally rolled juggernaut with brands of a Gujarat origin. Normally a fight between consumer goods brands (whether food or clothing or even milk) would be welcomed by consumers. That's because it signifies more choice, better quality, and perhaps lower prices. That's how capitalism works. And how companies compete. But Anmol and Nandini are not companies. They are cooperatives, of milk producers. The success of a cooperative is not measured by only sales revenue or profits, but how well it serves its members. Since each member is a farmer, the gain to the farmer comes via fetching a higher price for his milk, which he sells to his cooperative. But high procurement price of milk, means lower profits for the cooperatives, since it is a bulk buyer that is ok, since in the final analysis, the net gain to the farmer, with higher procurement price (as a farmer member) plus lower profit share (as a shareholder) is superior to max profit and lower procurement price. Hence whether it is Anmol in Gujarat or Nandini in Karnataka is an emotive issue, not just for local consumers but also farmer producers. The success of Anmol meant the death of Nandini, and loss to local farmers. That's why it became an emotive issue in the elections. Anmol was able to complete go beyond its state borders thanks to an amendment in the Cooperatives Act nation-

ally, which affect multi-state cooperatives. Nandini cannot retaliate by muscling into Anmol's home territory in Gujarat. The original idea of promoting cooperatives was to protect the interest of small farmers, be they in milk, oilseeds, sugarcane or credit. By pooling their produce, they gain more bargaining power vis-a-vis their customers. It is a voluntary association of producers. As per India's constitution, the cooperatives are in the States' list and are supposed to operate within state boundaries. But in 1984 a Multi-State Cooperatives Societies Act was passed which was later amended in 2002, and most recently in 2022. The most recent amendment makes it easier for cooperatives to expand their national footprint, often to the detriment of local producers of the same commodity. As such, the growth and expansion of cooperatives is inherently constrained because they cannot raise unlimited capital. In a company, one shareholder can bring in large amounts of capital, become the dominant or majority owner, and pursue growth and call the shots, since the voting rights are proportional to shareholding. Not so in a cooperative. Even with a large contribution of capital, a single member can get more than one vote. This causes a disincumbency for inflow of capital, and hence growth. In that sense cooperatives are the opposite of capitalism. But they have been highly successful, especially in Gujarat, thanks to the early, pioneering, and visionary leadership of Verghese Kurien. Since

"This was the bone of contention between Nandini and Anmol. It is also a proxy for the tension between the cooperative model which cannot grow in an unlimited way, and the capitalist model of shareholder owned company."

and other milk federations. Income of dairy farmers who are members of milk cooperatives grow faster and are more stable than those of sugarcane farmers, or oilseeds. Besides, sugarcane is sinking with a huge subsidy burden and unpaid dues to farmers.

So Anmol's growth, i.e. operations in other states, and possibly taking away market share of local dairy cooperatives, was the bone of contention between Nandini and Anmol. It is also a proxy for the tension between the cooperative model which cannot grow in an unlimited way, and the capitalist model of shareholder owned company. Cooperatives are essential when the small producers' income and livelihoods need some protection, be they in milk or groundnut or oilseeds or even sugarcane. That is why the government has been expansion of cooperatives is inherently constrained because they cannot raise unlimited capital. In a company, one shareholder can bring in large amounts of capital, become the dominant or majority owner, and pursue growth and call the shots, since the voting rights are proportional to shareholding. Not so in a cooperative. Even with a large contribution of capital, a single member can get more than one vote. This causes a disincumbency for inflow of capital, and hence growth. In that sense cooperatives are the opposite of capitalism. But they have been highly successful, especially in Gujarat, thanks to the early, pioneering, and visionary leadership of Verghese Kurien. Since

milk is a daily production and consumption item, and Kurien's insistence that the major share of the price of milk flow back to the producer of the milk and not to middlemen or suits running the "company", the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation became a huge success. Naturally after Kurien attracted the attention of politicians, since it became a vehicle to grant political patronage. Anmol, the brand of GCMMF is one of India's most successful brands, with a turnover of 55,000 crore, ahead of giants such as Hindustan Unilever and Nestle. It is called the "Taste of India". Anmol's success has many factors, and this space is too limited to describe the entire strategy. It has become a staple of campuses in business schools. Basically it collects milk from millions of small farmers, who get a decent price. And the value added products like curries, butter, cheese are managed in a more centralized, and often "corporate" style. These are manufactured in state of the art plants via fetching a higher price for the child life of these products is much longer than the plain milk sourced from the farmers. The growth of a super brand such as Anmol sustain profits and income to its members. There is no danger of a hostile takeover, except perhaps by politicians, which is the bone of all successful cooperatives. The ease of sugarcane is interesting. India is the world's largest producer of sugar, with roughly one third coming from Anmol's cooperatives. It is an emotive issue, not just for local consumers but also farmer producers. The success of Anmol meant the death of Nandini, and loss to local farmers. That's why it became an emotive issue in the elections. Anmol was able to complete go beyond its state borders thanks to an amendment in the Cooperatives Act nation-

ally, which affect multi-state cooperatives. Nandini cannot retaliate by muscling into Anmol's home territory in Gujarat. The original idea of promoting cooperatives was to protect the interest of small farmers, be they in milk, oilseeds, sugarcane or credit. By pooling their produce, they gain more bargaining power vis-a-vis their customers. It is a voluntary association of producers. As per India's constitution, the cooperatives are in the States' list and are supposed to operate within state boundaries. But in 1984 a Multi-State Cooperatives Societies Act was passed which was later amended in 2002, and most recently in 2022. The most recent amendment makes it easier for cooperatives to expand their national footprint, often to the detriment of local producers of the same commodity. As such, the growth and expansion of cooperatives is inherently constrained because they cannot raise unlimited capital. In a company, one shareholder can bring in large amounts of capital, become the dominant or majority owner, and pursue growth and call the shots, since the voting rights are proportional to shareholding. Not so in a cooperative. Even with a large contribution of capital, a single member can get more than one vote. This causes a disincumbency for inflow of capital, and hence growth. In that sense cooperatives are the opposite of capitalism. But they have been highly successful, especially in Gujarat, thanks to the early, pioneering, and visionary leadership of Verghese Kurien. Since

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